

Sara E. Melzer & Kathryn Norberg (eds.), *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. vii + 267 pp. Illustrations, index. \$18.00 US (pb). ISBN# 0-520-20806-4.

Review by Jay M. Smith, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for H-France, April 1999.

This collection of essays, which grew out of a series of conferences held at UCLA in 1992-3 on the theme "Constructing the Body," explores various aspects of the history of "body politics" in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France (p. 8). The ten contributors represent several disciplines--music, art history/French, dance, theater studies, musicology, and history--and they all seek to extend or revise the perspectives of such pioneers in the study of body politics as Norbert Elias, Ernst Kantorowicz, and especially, Michel Foucault, whose work is cited in half of the essays. The title of the volume evokes the transition from an absolutist political culture, in which "courtiers' bodies [were] symbolic surfaces upon which Bourbon rule was inscribed", toward a more liberal and egalitarian political culture that ultimately, in the Revolution, inscribed bodies "with the marks of republican virtue" (p. 4). The essays, all but three of which are previously unpublished, are bound by the book's overriding thesis that "the incomplete and inconsistent inscription of Bourbon power on bodies permitted the emergence of a new kind of body in the late eighteenth century" (p. 5). The wording of that claim may prompt sceptics to sneer (When did "bodies" replace "persons" and their "minds" as the central objects of historical study?), but this group of consistently stimulating essays certainly makes the point that political changes are invariably embodied by the agents who experience them.

Jeffrey Merrick provides a helpful overview in his opening essay, "The Body Politics of French Absolutism." Through an analysis of three apologists of absolutism (Jean Bodin in the sixteenth century, Jacques-Benigne Bossuet in the seventeenth, and Jacob-Nicolas Moreau in the eighteenth), Merrick shows that conceptions of monarchical power in the early-modern period always incorporated patriarchal assumptions. The founding assumption was that bodies must be subordinated to reasoning minds, an idea that supported masculine authority both in the realm and in private households. "Husbands, fathers, and kings... were supposed to rule wives, children, and subjects, all of whom were ruled by their instincts and therefore incapable of ruling themselves" (p. 20). Merrick illustrates the force of these assumptions by analyzing the rhetoric employed by critics of royal policies. Drawing on his research into the sexual language of the Mazarinades, Merrick argues that seventeenth-century critics of crown policy "linked personal disorder in the feminized and animalized self with public disorder in the lawless state, which was reduced to slavery or even savagery." The "disruptive passions" of Anne of Austria and the animalistic appetites of the Italian Cardinal Mazarin, who appeared in the texts as both

a sodomite and a snarling monster, had upset the divine and natural order in the cosmos and poisoned the body politic. Merrick reports, without really demonstrating, that in the wake of the Fronde, writers, jurists, artists, and clerics all sought to distance Louis XIV from the "sexual and political irregularities" of the ministerial regime, and that they did so by "repossessing the rhetoric of cosmological, familial, and corporeal order" (p. 29).

Two of the best essays in the volume, those by Abby Zanger and Thomas Kaiser, explore the implications of the monarchy's management of the king's image in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Zanger's essay, "Lim(b)inal Images: 'Betwixt and Between' Louis XIV's Martial and Marital Bodies," picks up precisely where Merrick's essay leaves off. She shows, through a close and ingenious reading of almanac images of the king in the late 1650s, that the "representational apparatus" of the monarchy sought to "reestablish the fundamental oppositions and hierarchies on which the performance of sovereign power rested" (p. 35). In allegorical representations of Louis XIV's military triumphs, as well as in images that forecast the king's marriage to Marie-Therese of Spain, artists simultaneously celebrated the young king's self-mastery and showed him circumscribing, taming, or otherwise controlling various threats to public order--female influences, dangerous passions, and armed enemies of the state. Zanger argues persuasively that the almanac images provide proof of the continued importance of the king's mortal body in the French political imagination. State building proceeded not only on the basis of the "political fiction of 'the king's two bodies'", she writes, but also through the reassuring display of the healthy and virile body of the living king (p. 62). This implicit obligation to the people also entailed real political risks for French kings, as both Zanger and Kaiser point out.

In "Louis *le Bien-Aimé* and the Rhetoric of the Royal Body", Thomas Kaiser examines both the language used to craft Louis XV's image in the 1740s and the impact of that language on public opinion. Kaiser outlines two mythologies in terms of which royal power was typically described in old regime France. One of these mythologies, based on the "cult of heroic kingship" linked to the pursuit of military glory, had been exploited systematically by Louis XIV. But in part because of the early eighteenth-century backlash against the aggressive policies of Louis XIV, Louis XV's image-makers recovered and developed another important Bourbon mythology, one rooted in a "pastoral image of monarchy based on love, harmony, and peace" (p. 134). The sobriquet "*Louis le Bien-Aimé*", created after the king's recovery from a serious illness in August 1744, drew from and reinforced an image of kingship that emphasized the sovereign's wisdom, prudence, modesty, and paternal love for his people--an image that suited the psychological needs and political desires of most French subjects. Unfortunately for the crown, Louis XV, whose reputation for selfish

and obsessive philandering continued to grow after 1744, "could not sustain" the vision of kingship projected by the creators of the pastoral myth (p. 132). The disparity between myth and reality only brought new charges that the crown had failed to uphold its own stated standards. "By making popular acclaim such an important pillar of royal authority, the monarchy had opened itself up to moral blackmail and put the king under a continual obligation to satisfy public demands" (p. 159). Kaiser suggests that the boomerang effect of royal rhetoric after 1744 contributed to the mobilization of "public opinion" against the crown in the 1770s and 1780s (pp. 159-161). On this point Kaiser may be overreaching. If failure to live up to an official image was sufficient to arouse opposition in the old regime, why were "publics" not also mobilized in earlier periods of military calamity? However, Kaiser's analysis of the public's curiosity about the king's body in the eighteenth century adds new insight into the connections between constitutional arguments and the personal reputations and comportment of kings.(1)

Three essays on dance and dancers by Mark Franko, Susan McClary, and Susan Leigh Foster focus on the wider matrix of bodies within which the king's authority found physical expression. The essays by Franko, on the first half of the seventeenth century, and Foster, on changes occurring after 1734, are neatly symmetrical, for they both highlight periods in which the freedom and expressiveness of individual bodies on stage presented challenges to the discipline and harmonious spatial order that characterized court dance under Louis XIV. Franko's "The King Cross-Dressed: Power and Force in Royal Ballets" demands patience from historians--his evidence is thin, he admits, and he has a fondness for off-putting theoretical jargon--but it presents an intriguing argument about representational strategy in the period of emerging absolutism. The 1620s had been a time of innovation and risk-taking in court dance, when "burlesque figures danced unpredictable gestures, their bodies writhing and twisting downward or propelled precipitously into the air" (p. 69). The advent of Louis XIV brought the gradual elimination of burlesque performance and the closer regulation of dance pedagogy. Royal cross-dressing, as an isolated burlesque feature, nevertheless survived into the 1660s. Franko argues that Louis XIV chose to display "sexual ambiguity" in cross-dressed roles in order to manifest "the invisible presence of a missing (male) sex" and thereby to "reassert agency as a personal trait" (pp. 81, 72). Like Zanger, then, Franko suggests that the young Louis XIV sought consciously to remind his audience of his own real, and necessary, virile presence.

Susan McClary's "Unruly Passions and Courtly Dances: Technologies of the Body in Baroque Music" highlights the attention paid to other dancing bodies at the court of Louis XIV. In studying French baroque music, writes McClary, "we cannot avoid the body's centrality without making nonsense of the music," a mistake that has led many

musicologists simply to dismiss French baroque style as an inferior antecedent to the work of J. S. Bach. Through a highly technical discussion of the music of Jean-Baptiste Lully and others--a discussion which shows the limits as well as the promise of interdisciplinary discourse--McClary demonstrates that French baroque enacted "the aural equivalent of a geometric pattern or a theorem in the physics of motion" (p. 96). The second half of her essay, in which she argues that French authorities "exerted considerable effort" to insulate France from Italianate musical images deemed too passionate for French tastes, is less convincing (p. 97). In her exposition of the Italian musical vocabulary, the interpretation of musical scores is no less authoritative than in the pages devoted to Lully, but the context she provides is insufficient to sustain her broader argument about the connections between musical style, the control of bodies, and the political agenda of the monarchy. Readers learn how Bach's dancing bodies were different from those of Lully, but the political import of this changing choreography is left unclear.

The social context is filled out more effectively in Susan Leigh Foster's "Dancing the Body Politic: Manner and Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Ballet". Foster focuses on the choreographic innovations carried out by the acclaimed French dancer Marie Salle in the 1730s. Reputed to be the *première danseuse* at the Paris Opera, Salle stunned audiences in London in 1734 with her bold interpretation of Galathea in Ovid's *Pygmalion*. Unlike typical opera-ballet performances, in which dancers sought to symbolize a range of emotional *responses* to staged circumstances, Salle's performance communicated the emotions of the individual character. Dancing without a wig or mask, and using the medium of pantomime then associated with the popular fair theaters, Salle placed the feelings of the individual subject at center stage. In taking this risk, she "forecast the dissolution of the opera-ballet and with it the demise of courtly codes of comportment that had informed aristocratic conduct and identity for generations" (p. 164). Foster relates Salle's innovations and the public debates they caused to a series of other eighteenth-century developments and contexts. She discusses or alludes to shifts in painting style from Antoine Watteau to Jean-Baptiste Greuze, new philosophic conceptions of individuality, the separation of dance from opera, and the emergence of the *ballet d'action*. Foster makes a compelling case that Salle's novel choreography represented and contributed to a new "theorization of the relationship between the individual and the state" in the second half of the eighteenth century (p. 164).

Joseph Roach considers the relationship between personal identity and categories prescribed by the state in "Body of Law: The Sun King and the *Code Noir*". Roach maintains that Louis XIV, in the *Code Noir* of 1685 (adopted in Louisiana in 1724), "worked to create a new society... in which the races would eventually be subsumed into the genius of a single superior 'race'- -the Gallic one" (p. 116). Enfranchised

slaves, for example, were to be considered as natural French subjects, as fully functioning members of the unified "body politic" that Louis sought to personify. The code "provided for the manumission of slaves (articles 55-58), the emergence of a free black population (article 59), and intermarriage between slaves and slaveholders (article 9)" (p. 119). Roach's provocative argument is that Louis XIV's quest to create a unified and indivisible sovereign power ("One Faith, One King, One Law"), also led the French crown to envision "one blood" for all French subjects. His discussion of this assumption's implications is not likely to satisfy historians, however, because he links the ideology of the *Code Noir* to a series of historically distinct problems: the ambiguous racial identities of nineteenth-century Louisianans, the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896, which established the legal principle of "separate but equal" public services for blacks and whites, and contemporary American debates about affirmative action. He treats these issues all within four pages. Roach justifies these chronological and conceptual leaps by invoking what he calls the "performative" aspect of French law, but the overlay of theory does not quite conceal the evidential gaps in his broad historical argument.

Roach's key premise--that race was not a powerful category in early-modern French thought--is confirmed but also complicated by Elizabeth Colwill's subtly argued essay, "Sex, Savagery, and Slavery in the Shaping of the French Body Politic". Colwill notes that, before the age of Revolution, slave traders, planters, and *philosophes* could "define the 'negre' as peculiarly suited for enslavement without resorting to biological explanations for the subject status of the enslaved" (p. 204). Cultural inequality seemed to be the natural result of climatic variation or historical evolution, processes that produced both savage and civilized societies, rather than racial difference. With the Revolution, however, arguments about the nature of slavery changed. In a context in which the ideological foundations of social hierarchy were under assault, in Saint-Domingue as well as in France, pro-slavery writers found in the category of race new support for the formal inequality that they hoped to sustain. Meanwhile, critics of slavery reformulated the opposition between civilization and savagery in order to condemn slaveholders for their own barbarity and to idealize the vision of order found in the slave family, an institution recognized as a building block for the new republican civilization then under construction. Louis- Pierre Dufay, for example, "refashioned slave women as republican mothers and slave men as masters of households endowed with paternal rights-rights entirely at odds with the planters' 'right' to property in persons" (p. 213). The great merit of this essay is that it illustrates the plasticity of mental categories and the ways in which they overlap and become superimposed at moments of ideological creativity. Colwill shows, in particular, that the oppositions between male/female and civilized/savage, with all of the implicit hierarchies contained therein, continued to shape the thinking of anti-

slavery writers down to the time of Napoleon and the reinstatement of the slave regime.

The representational attributes of bodies are also at the center of Sarah Maza's essay, "The Theater of Punishment: Melodrama and Judicial Reform in Prerevolutionary France". Because the essay is adapted from Maza's highly acclaimed book *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, the themes will be familiar to many historians, but this abbreviated account of one of the longer and more complex chapters in that book simplifies an important and compelling argument.(2) Through analysis of the case of Victoire Salmon, a servant accused of poisoning her masters in 1785, Maza illustrates the shift from an absolutist conception of justice--in which judges representing the person of the king presided over secret deliberations and rendered arbitrary verdicts--toward a public justice which invited an audience of readers to render moral decisions on points of law. The key agents of change in this process were lawyers and the *mémoires judiciaires*, or trial briefs, which they wrote to publicize their cases. To sway public opinion in their clients' favor, the authors of these briefs wrote touching narratives in melodramatic tones. The rhetorical style of these briefs seems to have been borrowed, in fact, from a new form of theater known as the *genre sérieux*, or *drame bourgeois*. The purpose of this innovative melodramatic form, according to Diderot, was to convey "a moral lesson that would impress upon spectators 'the love of virtue and the horror of vice'" (p. 189). The lawyers' accounts incorporated theatrical gestures and assimilated their clients to stock dramatic characters--all in order to translate the legal issues into recognizable moral terms and to invite readers' judgment on the case. The result, Maza argues, was a new relationship between justice and bodies. The printed *mémoire judiciaire* challenged the notion that the king's justice could be embodied in the person of the magistrate, but "the print medium in turn relied, for greater impact, on the stage melodrama's new 'aesthetics of embodiment'" (p. 196).

In the book's closing essay, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," Lynn Hunt turns from the aesthetics of embodiment to bodily aesthetics. More specifically, she examines debates about men and women's attire in the Revolutionary decade. On the one hand, notes Hunt, the revolutionaries wished to make what one wore "yet another arena for free choice" (p. 224). But on the other hand, their own destabilizing assault on the traditional order meant that "each individual body now carried within itself all the social and political meanings of the new political order" (p. 231). The uncertainty inevitably produced new regulatory pressures. Specific debates about dress are too numerous and complicated to summarize here, but Hunt emphasizes two developments that were coded by gender. First, conflicts over women's fashions in 1793 led to the "simultaneous declaration of freedom of dress and the suppression of women's political organizations". Because disputes about women's dress "signaled

their intrusion into a public sphere seen as masculine", the Convention responded by reaffirming the principle of freedom of dress, but only if women's choices "remained confined to the private sphere" (pp. 227-28). Over the course of the Revolution, and into the nineteenth century, men experienced a similar bifurcation of freedoms, though with very different effects. Precisely because men's dress could be perceived as more politically symbolic than that of women, male fashions became more homogeneous over the long term. The Revolutionary government envisioned, without ever enforcing, uniforms for all republican citizens. But official mandates were not really necessary. English-inspired tailored costumes "in dark colors with few adornments" became standard attire; middle-class men wore trousers and kept their hair in a natural style. "Whereas women wore clothes to show their sex... men began to dress to look alike" (p. 242). The Revolutionaries had begun by denouncing the old regime custom of identifying status with costume; ironically, they finally defeated traditional practice by separating sartorial and political freedoms--and allowing one only at the expense of the other.

From the Royal to the Republican Body holds together surprisingly well, given the diversity of subjects treated. Each of the authors dutifully cites other essays in the volume, and thematic linkages appear in unexpected places (e.g., the ways in which "savagery" informs the gender oppositions so important to the essays of Merrick and Colwill). In the end, however, the sheer diversity of themes threatens to undermine the coherence of the volume's organizing concept: the body. If the history of the body can really be approached in so many different ways--through clothing, dance steps, attitudes about race, the reality and representation of sexual functions, the performance of legal principles, conceptions of justice--one has to wonder whether the study of "body politics" only serves to fragment knowledge of the political. Does preoccupation with the body inhibit the development of more satisfying explanatory schemes--schemes in which changes to the body acquire meaning only through their involvement in a larger process? The changes traced by Roach, Foster, and Maza, for example, could also be interpreted as evidence for the discovery of the individual, comprising body, mind, and spirit, in the new political space created by eighteenth-century institutions. The essays in this volume prove that the body can be a valuable interpretive tool, but their cumulative impact makes it difficult to see in "the body" the basis of a new interpretive paradigm.

Notes

1. For other important explorations of this connection see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1992); Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, (Stanford, 1997); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French*

Revolution, trans. Lydia Cochrane, (Durham, N. C., 1991), chap. 6. See also Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class, and Political Culture* (New Haven, 1989).

2. Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Celebres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 212-262.

Jay M. Smith
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
jaysmith@email.unc.edu

Copyright © 1997-2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. Maintained by H-France.