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Philip Daileader and Philip Whalen, eds., *French Historians, 1900–2000: New Historical Writing in Twentieth-Century France*. Malden, Mass., and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. viii + 610 pp. \$199.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-4051-9867-7.

Review by Torbjörn Wandel, Truman State University.

This book on French historians in the twentieth century with contributions by mostly Anglophone scholars is a delightful and substantial resource. Anyone interested in French history and historiography, expert and non-expert alike, will read it with relish, and any university library worth its salt will want to have it on its shelves. It truly is a lovely, *sui generis* project. Ten years in the making and clocking in at over 600 pages, it is the achievement of two editors, Philip Daileader and Philip Whalen. While it has been crafted for a broad audience, the volume is sure to please and provoke interesting discussion among specialists.

Reflecting perhaps a return to biography in both France and the United States, the book consists of extensive portraits of forty-two prominent French historians, all of whom wrote in the twentieth century, penned by thirty-five mostly Anglophone scholars in the respective fields in which historians work or worked. The book is not quite an encyclopedia because the essays are comprehensive without cross references, nor is it a collection of articles by specialists, since there is no scholarly apparatus, and the contributors are for the most part junior colleagues of their subjects. The only similar publication that comes to mind is the collection *Essays in Modern European Historiography* edited by Samuel Halperin that was part of Leonard Krieger's *Classic European Historians* series put out in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the University of Chicago Press.

The volume's multiple strengths spring from the apparent decision by the editors to recruit the person in the field most familiar with the subject's work and give each contributor the freedom and space necessary to write a substantial essay, accessible to a broad audience, without a rigid page limit. The result is almost invariably excellent and quite varied. The essays range in length from four to more than twenty pages. A very small number of weaker entries are nothing more than long curriculum vitae, one or two make awkward attempts to commune with their subject, and a few too many are so adoring as to cloud the analyses, even when the adulation is warranted. But the vast majority of the entries betray copious work—including archival research, analyses of correspondence, and personal interviews with their subjects, colleagues and family members—and intimate familiarity with each subject's output, which in almost every case is nothing short of daunting.

The best essays are those that balance personality, a range of contexts from family, upbringing, schooling, class, region, institutional affiliation, and mentorship with an assessment of historiographical innovation, influence, and contribution. Among the strongest entries are Patrick Hutton's definitive entry on Philippe Ariès, Francine Michaud's magisterial treatment of Marc Bloch, Laura Mason's intellectually penetrating analysis of Roger Chartier, Kevin Callahan's authoritative account of Marc Ferro, James Winders' superb essay on Michel Foucault, and James Collins' delightful portrait of Pierre de Saint Jacob. Peter McPhee's four

contributions (on Maurice Agulhon, Alain Corbin, Albert Soboul, and Michel Vovelle) are all masterful. On the whole, the more substantial and interesting the subjects, the more compelling the entries, and this is not only because it must have been easier to recruit stronger scholars to write those, but also because the subjects are simply richer and more fascinating. An exception to this rule is John Harvey's essay on Bernard Faÿ, a little gem of sparkling intellectual history that is perhaps the finest entry in the whole book. There are some inevitable typos and a few errors. For example, Yugoslavian is not a language, *conjoncture* and *Natur* are not spelled in French and German like they are spelled in English, and the novelist of peasant life is Émile, not Georges, Guillaumin. On the whole, however, the volume is luxuriously and carefully put together by the publisher Wiley-Blackwell and the editors Daileader and Whalen.

While it will be almost universally welcomed, the volume is likely to generate significant discussion among historians of France, each of whom will have a particular stake in it. That discussion is likely to turn on three types of questions.

The first set of questions will revolve around who is not included in the book. One is immediately struck that of the forty-two entries, only two are on women. Anyone with the most fleeting familiarity with mid-twentieth-century French history will not be surprised by this, and anyone with the most passing knowledge of French historians will not be surprised that they are Mona Ozouf and Michelle Perrot. The editors, who are not obligated to correct this flaw in French society, acknowledge and lament in their introduction the dearth of more prominent female French historians. There are, of course, many historians, male or female, who deserve to have been included. To their credit, the editors readily acknowledge this as well and mention many of the names of historians who come to mind, describing their difficulties in finding contributors for them. This may also explain why only seven of the thirty-five contributors are women. There is indeed much to debate here, and each reader will find a personal favorite missing and probably a dozen more. In the end, it speaks to the strength of the project that one would be hard pressed to argue that any of the forty-two in the work at hand should *not* be included, and it underscores the fecundity of twentieth-century French historical writing that the number of entries could easily have been doubled. It is a good, not a bad, sign when readers want more of what a book provides.

A second, more legitimate and productive set of questions bears on the criteria for selecting historians and the fields that end up represented, in other words on who *is* included and why. Here, the editors are frustratingly terse. They do not explain why they limit or extend their range to the twentieth century. This problem is compounded by the idiosyncratic self-imposed rule that to make it into the book, a subject must have been alive more in the twentieth than in the nineteenth century or somehow predicted by the editors to stay alive longer in twenty-first century. The founders of the modern discipline of history in France did not make it into the book not because they were unimportant to the profession they created but because they were born or died too early. This exclusion of nineteenth-century historians, some of whom lived well into the twentieth century, is made all the more puzzling by the editors' introduction, which rightly stresses professionalization as a defining aspect of modern historical practice. Perhaps even more consequentially, almost no historian working today is included either. In fact, more than half (twenty-eight) of those included are dead, more than a quarter (eleven) were dead already by 1970, and only one was born after 1950. Only two or three remain active in any meaningful way. The actual scope of the book is therefore somewhere around 1920-1970, not "1900-2000," as the book's title claims, and the writing is not really at all "new," as the book's subtitle promises.

A quixotic and actuarial preoccupation with century marks, not the texture of the subject matter, is therefore what shapes the content of the book. The topics that the included historians

treat will strike the contemporary reader as very traditional. As many as thirty-eight of the forty-two historians have the hexagon as their main or auxiliary area of expertise, and with rare but notable exceptions, the rest of the world hardly seems to exist. With the majority of subjects specializing in the medieval, early modern and Revolutionary periods, it is a very traditional France to boot, one of peasants, kings, priests, and artisans; regions and vineyards; wars and religion. It is generally a France of simple villages and a Paris without immigrants or racial tension, a world without women, with few Protestants and no Muslims or Jews. It is not what France looked like or what “New Historical Writing” looks like. Again, it is not the editors’ obligation to correct the practices of French historians, nor is it their responsibility to alter the histories they write and have written. It should be noted nonetheless that this peculiar, one might say twisted, image of French history and historiography, where exciting work by French historians (many of them women) in the last several decades is glaringly absent, is a direct consequence of the editors’ peculiar criteria for inclusion.

The decision generally to approach specialists in the fields of their subjects to write most entries also has significant consequences. For example, if the subject of an essay is a medievalist writing in the 1930s, the entry will as a rule have been written by a medievalist, not by a specialist in the intellectual milieu of the 1930s. It is thanks to this decision that most contributors exhibit an impressive familiarity with the texts their subjects have produced and assess so judiciously those texts’ influence on the field. But the flipside is a lack of historicization of the historians themselves and a lack of analysis of the theoretical implications of the texts they wrote. It is rather jarring to be reminded repeatedly of the many brilliant historical innovations, most of which turn on social forces, *histoire immobile*, *mentalités*, and *la longue durée*, by these historians, only to have the historians’ own context play only a small part. This is a book about great history men whose greatness is attributed to their dismantling of great-man history. Raising this set of questions should not be construed as being ungenerous but as an attempt to spell out the momentous consequences of editorial decisions about which the editors are silent and perhaps unaware.

The third set of questions likely to be generated by the book is more pressing, and will speak to the very core of the practice of French history, who reads and writes it, and why. The sharpest way to formulate this issue is to interrogate how relevant a book about French historians is today. The book is admirably directed at the broadest possible audience, and there is nary an event that is not introduced, an institution or degree that is unexplained, or an indistinguishable cognate that goes untranslated. This accounts for a lot of repetition. While that repetition will be less noticeable to a typical reader who will flip around between entries than to the reviewer, it significantly expands the length and thus the price of the book. At a time when the fate of the printed book is being debated, one cannot help but notice that a huge project like this is almost tailor made for electronic dissemination. On the Internet, institutions like the *agrégation*, the Collège de France, and the École Pratique des hautes études or facts such as Algeria being a French colony or the basic history of the Dreyfus Affair could be accessible in an embedded link for those who need to have them explained. In addition, having a short history of the *Annales* school from almost every contributor to explain why a given historian was or was not affiliated expands a text that could have been shortened by having such a summary accessible by a click in one place. Likewise, having a massive project like this on the Internet would broaden the audience and make the work even more readable for experts.

What is more, with the French economy becoming smaller and smaller in relative terms, its international prestige at a nadir with *mondialisation* and concomitant world history on the rise, its language no longer a *lingua franca*, and clinging desperately to its *patrimoine*, there are signs that France itself may be going the way of the book. If that time has not already come, it will not be long before French historians no longer occupy the historiographical center stage and

when France and its history will no longer be of global importance. Whatever the case, all historians of France, including this reviewer, will be grateful that the editors and contributors offered us the gift of this marvelous volume before it was too late.

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Torbjörn Wandel
Truman State University
twandel@truman.edu

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