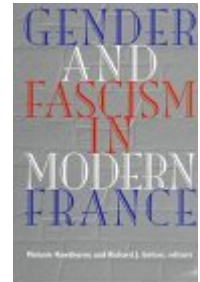


Melanie Hawthorne, Richard J. Golsan, eds.. *Gender and Fascism in Modern France*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997. ix + 229 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-87451-814-6.



Reviewed by Mona L. Siegel

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In their co-authored introduction to the essays presented in *Gender and Fascism in Modern France*, Melanie Hawthorne and Richard Golsan point out that the rich and growing historiography on Vichy and fascism in France has been remarkably silent when it comes to addressing issues of women and gender. They contrast this gap in French scholarship to the far more developed historiography on fascist Italy and Germany. Pointing to Claudia Koonz's study of women in Nazi Germany, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (New York, 1987), and to Victoria de Grazia's work on Italy under Mussolini, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley, 1992), as possible models, Hawthorne and Golsan insist the time has now come for an historical account of "comparable quality" to be published on the French context (p. 4).

This book is not that account. The essays in it, with one exception, are written by literary scholars. They are concerned strictly with texts: novels, essays, journalistic articles, memoirs, and films. Anyone wondering how French women felt about Petain's National Revolution; or if Vichy's social policies changed family strategies; or if collaboration meant the same thing for men and women,

will not find the answers in this book. Historical context is not absent from the collective research presented here, but it is secondary to the detailed textual analyses, which are the authors' primary concern. With these reservations in mind, *Gender and Fascism in Modern France* does have its own insights to offer, insights which help to fill out our understanding of the cultural history of French fascism.

The collection contains nine topical chapters plus a general introduction and a short but thorough bibliographic essay at the end. The chapters are arranged chronologically, beginning with female anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth-century and ending with gendered representations of fascism and collaboration in post-1945 historical memory. In between, the book is filled out by two chapters on the 1900s to 1930s and four which deal with the Vichy period itself. The editors contend that the linkage between fascism and gender, as it is drawn in these articles, "significantly alters traditional perspectives on French culture in this century" (p. 11). This overarching claim seems overstated, though some of the es-

says present new material which will be of interest to historians.

The book opens by tracing the origins of French fascism back to the nationalistic atmosphere at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Willa Silverman investigates the interplay of gender and anti-Semitism in the writings of the notoriously controversial female author Gyp (*nom de plume* of Sibylle-Gabrielle Marie-Antoinette de Riquetti de Mirabeau). Silverman argues persuasively that Gyp's anti-Semitism was rooted in misogyny. Anxious about her own sexuality and angry at her own powerlessness as a woman, Gyp expressed her frustration through voraciously sexual Jewish characters who personified the author's own self-hatred. Silverman's essay is lively and interesting, but it is difficult to see what broader lessons about women, gender, or nationalism that we might draw from it. In her conclusion, Silverman states that "Gyp's case does not imply...that nationalism and anti-Semitism...divided along gender lines, nor that anti-Semitism and misogyny were inextricably linked" (p. 26). In the end, this essay stands alone as an insightful case study, but probably cannot lead us to a fundamental rethinking of French anti-Semitism or nationalism.

The essay by Melanie Hawthorne's which follows Silverman's is quite the opposite, insisting that studies of fascism to date have been fundamentally flawed, or, at the very least, constrained by their assumptions. Hawthorne argues that women are commonly absent in studies of French fascism because the psychoanalytic theories used to understand nationalism and fascism are gender-biased, producing male subjects and a masculine ideology. In fact, Hawthorne insists, fascism has only appeared to be a masculine doctrine because nationalism has historically been constructed along gender lines with women serving as the glue that holds the nation together, but excluded from active citizenship (here she is drawing on anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss). "We must wait for the full impact of women's assimilation

into the nation to take effect," Hawthorne states, "before we conclude that fascism manifests itself only as hypermasculinity" (p. 47). Hawthorne's arguments are challenging, but not persuasive. First, it is not clear that the body of scholarly inquiry into fascism is permeated by and fundamentally limited by psychoanalytic theory, as Hawthorne claims. Hawthorne focuses on Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis, 1986) to demonstrate that scholars have relied upon "psychoanalytic revisions of Freudian theory" (p. 29) in order to conclude that fascism as an ideology appeals primarily to men. But are the historical works of Robert Paxton, John Sweets, and Robert Soucy, which also portray French fascism as a masculinized affair, equally indebted to Freudian analysis? Second, Hawthorne believes that "fascism" is a phenomenon which exists outside of any specific historical context and thus can assume radically different forms and beliefs in different times. She accuses scholars of turning the hypermasculinity of fascism at the turn-of-the-century into a more general statement of principle, falsely assuming that as an ideology, fascism will inevitably continue to reproduce itself along similar lines. But fascism did not look any different in the 1920s, 1930s, or 1940s, the only years in Europe when it became a mass movement. Many historians will have trouble accepting Hawthorne's thesis and will have difficulty seeing how her essay poses a fundamental challenge to previous scholarly literature.

Mary Jean Green picks up the thread of analysis in the 1930s by studying the creation of a fictional fascist woman in the popular Boubole novels by T. Trilby (*nom de plume* for Therese Delhayde de Marnyhac). Green's essay is firmly grounded in the historiography of French fascism in the 1930s--particularly that of Soucy--and of women and fascism more broadly. Though she states at the outset that little is known about the author of the seven Boubole books, Green effectively uses the main character of these novels in order to bring us closer to the motivations and

frustrations of women on the far right in interwar France. Green traces the development of the fictional Bouboule as she becomes increasingly politicized, renounces her identity as a mother, and eventually joins the *Croix de feu*. Bouboule tries to become the ideal fascist woman, devoted to her role as wife and mother, but eventually rejects maternalism as an adequate demonstration of citizenship. In the last two novels, as she begins to engage actively in the politics of the *Croix de feu*, Bouboule reverts to her maiden name and metaphorically reclaims her identity as a single woman. Green argues that this woman's fictional journey mirrors that faced by French women in real life. Colonel Francois de la Rocque's *Croix de feu* exalted domesticity and marginalized its female members. Ultimately, the few women who were able to take on leadership roles in the *Croix de feu* were single women, like de la Rocque's own daughter Nadine. By closely relating the fictional character of Bouboule to historical accounts of the *Croix de feu*, Green effectively demonstrates the dilemma of women who sympathized with the ideology of the far-right and tried to live up to its ideals, but who ultimately found themselves stifled by its marginalization of women. "Caught between the urgent need to act on her political beliefs and the limitations those same beliefs placed on women's freedom of action, Bouboule unwittingly enacts in fiction the contradictions at the heart of the fascist female ideal" (p. 68).

Two essays examine the self-reflective writings of female collaborators under Vichy. Martine Guyot-Bender analyzes the journalistic articles and postwar memoirs of Corinne Luchaire, actress and daughter of journalist/politician Jean Luchaire. She argues that Corinne's "fairy-tale-like" articles written during the Occupation were designed to provide a comforting message to women in a time of upheaval. Elizabeth Houlding studies the autobiographical work of Violette Leduc, a woman who embodied the opposite of the Vichy ideal and who revelled in the tumult of war and Occupation in order to pursue personal

opportunity and gain. Both articles reiterate that Vichy's National Revolution was hardly revolutionary when it came to conceptions of male and female spheres. Neither, however, suggests that the experiences of these particular women were shared by French women more generally.

Andrea Loselle and Anthony Hewitt both explore the functioning of gender in the writings of male collaborators. Loselle studies the life and writing of Paul Morand and asks why he—unlike Louis-Fernand Celine, Robert Brasillach and others—managed to evade prosecution after 1945 and eventually to gain admittance to the *Academie francaise* in 1968. Morand, Loselle argues, escaped censure because his politics tended to be coded in gendered terms, casting the disorders of modernity as feminine. His emphasis on feminine concerns, like fashion, was easily dismissed as superficial, while his focus on the dangers of effeminacy and degeneracy of the Third Republic was far from controversial. Hewitt looks at Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of Jean Genet as a means of "understanding and undoing the conflation of homosexuality and fascism" (p. 120). His analysis is seeped in post-structuralist theory and is rather impenetrable to those not fully initiated in the jargon.

The final two essays both analyze the interplay of gender, history, and memory through film. Miranda Pollard analyzes Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* while Leah Hewitt examines Claude Chabrol's *Story of Women*. Both are well-written essays which could be usefully employed in the classroom. Pollard argues that despite initial appearances, women are not absent from *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Instead they help create a very traditional metanarrative of "normal" French women fulfilling recognizable "traditional" female roles which makes the plot recognizable and even comfortable. According to Hewitt, the main character in *Story of Women* (Marie) effectively stands for both collaboration and resistance in daily life under Vichy rule. In doing so,

Marie becomes "the icon of France's ambivalence to its own past" (p. 174).

In lieu of a conclusion, Hawthorne and Golsan close the book with a bibliographic essay. It is thus left for the reader to address the question put at the beginning of this review: how and if the combined work of these authors "significantly alters traditional perspectives on French culture in this century" (p. 11). Several of the essays here in fact help confirm a picture of twentieth-century French culture that insisted upon gender difference as an essential truth and a foundational element of "Frenchness" more broadly. Fascists were far from the only French men and women to make use of this belief. Historians of French fascism have not ignored the importance of gender, particularly under Vichy. Some of the essays in *Gender and Fascism in Modern France* point to new sources and subjects in helping to understand the workings of gender in fascist ideology, but they do not undermine the historical literature on the subject.

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