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Kenneth Loiselle, *Freemasonry and Male Friendship in Enlightenment France*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 2014. xiii + 261 pp. Acknowledgments and index. \$59.95 (hb). ISBN: 978 0 8014 5243 7.

Review by Marisa Linton, Kingston University.

Eighteenth-century Freemasonry has always attracted historical interest. A perennial question for historians is how far Freemasonry may have served as a link between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The subject has also stirred the attention of the wider public, attracted by Freemasonry's aura as a mysterious society that shrouds its arcane rituals in secrecy.[1] The great originality of Loiselle's contribution is that he has combined his close-grained study of Freemasonry with the burgeoning interest in both the study of gender relations and the emotional history of friendship to give us a fresh perspective on a seemingly well-worn topic.[2] Loiselle combines this new interpretive approach with a thorough grounding in much unfamiliar source material, making this a very welcome and opportune study.

Loiselle begins with an exploration of the early years of French Freemasonry from its origins in the 1720s and its growing significance as a form of male sociability. This formative period coincided with the beginnings of a change in how people thought about friendship. Before the eighteenth century, the term "friend" was often used to describe a polite but utilitarian relationship that involved patronage, clientage, service, and the granting of reciprocal favors. During the eighteenth century, however, friendship became much more imbued with notions of sensibility and authentic emotion: "by the closing decades of the Old Regime a highly significant shift was underway in which the language of friendship increasingly referred to a benevolent, voluntary bond of solidarity, distinct from love and prized for its emotional and moral qualities" (p. 3). Freemasonry was in part a reaction against the "utilitarian form of friendship" (p. 74). This new language of friendship came to permeate the ways in which Freemasons spoke of their mutual relationships: "Men—through the conviviality of lodge activities, letter writing, or personal visits—created a set of private spaces where an egalitarian and affective ethos reigned. There they professed a deep love for one another in a language that many men today would find uncomfortably romantic" (p. 7).

Loiselle uses a wide range of source material that he divides methodologically into three types that together will, he intends, reconstruct "the multi-stranded world of masonic friendship" (p. 8). The first category, which includes anti-masonic exposures and pro-masonic apologias, conveys what masonic lodges *appeared* to be; the second makes use of lodge speeches, ritual procedures and statutes, and similar documents that together deal with what was *supposed* to be happening in lodges; and the third category, containing meeting registers and—most revealing of all—personal and administrative correspondence, relates more to reality, to what was *likely* happening in the lodges (pp. 8-9). A major bonus is that Loiselle has been able to access a previously neglected archival source: 27,000 dossiers that were previously held in Russia and only returned to France in 2000, and which reveal much about provincial Freemasonry. This new material is particularly rich for the revolutionary period (p. 204).

Chapter two addresses the growing desire to form people into virtuous citizens who would be concerned with the public good rather than their own self-interest.^[3] Loiselles explores how this concern translated into forms of initiation for new Masons through the “apprentice ritual,” whereby neophytes were brought into lodges. Loiselles uses anthropological approaches to explore how the apprentice ritual set out to forge bonds of friendship between men who were previously unknown to one another. There was a process of liminality in which the apprentice was symbolically stripped of his existing identity in order to refashion him as a member of the Masonic brotherhood. This was realised through initiation rites where the neophytes were abused by a senior brother, the “Dreadful Brother” (*frère terrible*), who employed ritual symbols such as a book, a blood-stained dagger, and a coffin, and used the familiar *tu* form to castigate the neophyte, calling him “profane” and a “parasite” (pp. 55-7). Here the *tu* form expressed hostility and lack of respect, with the intention of enjoining the neophytes to give up self-interest and think of themselves as bonded by friendship, virtue, and a common moral outlook. The ceremony would customarily end with the lodge master reminding the newly received Mason that “the conformity of morals is the source of friendship” (p. 73).

Chapter 3 turns to the admission of women to Freemasonry. Masonry had originally been an exclusively male preserve, yet some time in the late 1730s, adoption lodges began to be established. These institutions, which operated alongside and slightly separate from the regular lodges, were open to women as well as men. By the time of the Revolution, at least sixty mixed-gender adoption lodges had been founded, involving well over 3,000 women. Most of the women admitted were of noble status, while the remainder were wives of the financial and military elite. It was acknowledged that women Masons could aspire to virtue, and many of them took on the charitable roles and poor relief that were particularly associated with feminine virtue in the second half of the eighteenth century (pp. 84-7). It seems that, like their male counterparts, such women found personal fulfilment in Masonry, forming “friendships beyond the lodge, either through correspondence, Masonic banquets, or meals at private homes” (p. 87). While the activity of women Masons was much less well documented than that of their male counterparts, Loiselles contends that by the pre-revolutionary period, women were playing “a major role” in French Freemasonry (p. 88).

What had changed to facilitate the admission of women to Masonry? The key to Loiselles’s answer lies in the title of the chapter, “Confronting the Specter of Sodomy.” In the first part of the eighteenth century, Freemasonry was an all-male institution, on the grounds that if women were admitted, their presence could lead to sexual rivalries for their favors that would disrupt the brotherhood, putting male friendships under strain. The reasons that Masons themselves posited for the change of attitude were principally boredom, gallantry, and feminine curiosity about the Masonic activities of their spouses. In Loiselles’s view, historians have previously been too prepared to accept these reasons at face value. He points instead to a growing anxiety felt by Masons over allegations that the lodges were sites for homosexual activity. Early Masonic exposures frequently accused Masons of sodomy (p. 91). The secrecy and rituals surrounding Masonic activities and lodge meetings, together with the all-male environment and the fact that Masons often met after dark, and in *cabarets* and other venues where alcohol flowed freely, lent color to the allegations. Loiselles links this to wider anxieties about homosexual activity during the first part of the eighteenth century, fears that took the form of hostile accounts in contemporary literature, together with policing and arrests of suspected sodomites in the public gardens of Paris and along the banks of the Seine. It is estimated that up to 40,000 sodomites lived in the city (p. 92). The term *sodomie* was rarely used: instead a series of euphemisms were commonly employed to describe homosexual activities, such as “*amour socratique, crime infâme, vice odieux, crime abominable, crime contre les bonnes moeurs,*” all of which Loiselles points out were used in hostile accounts of Freemasonry (p. 94). The decision to include women in Masonry via adoption lodges was taken in large part “to publicly represent the private bonds of male friendship as unambiguously non-sexual” (p. 108). This policy was so successful that during the second half of the eighteenth century, hostile accounts of Freemasonry “were no longer preoccupied with sodomy and moral depravity, but

rather shifted ground to focus on the political dangers that the Craft's growing membership posed to the strict hierarchy of Old Regime society" (p. 98).

Loiselle then turns his attention to a deeper exploration of Masonic friendships. Chapter 4 focuses on the friendship network of Philippe-Valentin Bertin du Rocheret, from Épernay in Champagne, and fellow Masons living in Avignon, Paris and Lunéville with whom he corresponded over the course of over twenty years during the mid-century. Loiselle's close reading of this correspondence enables him to explore what these men understood by friendship and the part it played in their lives, and "to capture the personal dimension of the Masonic experience" (p. 155). In contrast to the language used in the initiation ritual, Freemasons almost always used the respectful *vous* form to one another, which may have maintained "a certain social distance" between them (pp. 128-9). This practice was in line with eighteenth-century social norms that confined *tutoiement* to close kin. Despite this rhetorical formality, the letters provide much evidence of strong friendships, which provided mutual support, companionship, and a sense of authentic connectedness that militated against loneliness. Not all friendships that began in the lodges flourished in this personal way: Loiselle distinguishes between the formal ritualised friendships and more personal unritualised friendships that sometimes sprang up between Masons. In some ways the latter could undermine the former, as individual Masons sometimes splintered off from idealised collective friendships to form more exclusive friendships with men whom they found personally convivial. There were increasing complaints that exclusive friendships, or friendship cliques, were posing a threat to the solidarity of collective Masonic friendships (pp. 194-5). A chapter on "Friendship in the Age of Sensibility" goes further into the personal experience of friendship. The ways in which Masons spoke about their friendships, using phrases such as a "communication of hearts" or a "society of hearts," were strongly influenced by the growing vogue for virtuous sensibility (p. 188).

The final chapter, "Friendship Under Fire," deals with what happened to Masonic lodges at the outbreak of Revolution. Considering that Loiselle has been able to access so much new material on the revolutionary period, it is not surprising that this chapter is especially rich and revealing. Here Loiselle throws new light on the long-standing question: In what ways did the Enlightenment impact the political culture of the French Revolution? He follows other historians, including Jacob (see note 1 below), in showing that there were affinities between the Masonic idealised concept of egalitarian friendship and the revolutionary concept of fraternity. Loiselle differs, however, in pointing to an increasing divergence between revolutionary fraternity (which became, after the outbreak of war in April 1792, a more militarist and nationalist concept, a sentiment shared between French patriots) and Masonic friendship, which retained its cosmopolitan perspective (pp. 204-11). Moreover, Loiselle contends, rightly in my view, that there was a clear link between Masonic idealised views of friendship and the revolutionary idea of political virtue, both of which drew on the discourse of classical republicanism. According to the tenets of classical republicanism, self-interest was a morally and politically corrupting force, and the best way to mediate against it was by forming "civically minded male citizens who were bound in a friendship anchored in shared virtue" (p. 251). Pre-revolutionary Masonic lodges proved forerunners of revolutionary political culture in that they linked private virtue and public life through the medium of friendship. Thus, "lodges provided tens of thousands of men a social microcosm of classical republicanism in practice" (p. 253).

Loiselle points out some fascinating antecedents of revolutionary ideas as conceived through the paradigm of Masonic friendships. For example, he cites a Mason whose exalted notions of the political importance of friendship pre-figured Saint-Just's ideas that friendship could form the basis of civil society: "Ah! May he perish who refuses to flatter and render homage to friendship" (p. 217). It is a tantalising subject, though perhaps a little rushed, possibly a consequence of the fact that Loiselle had so much to fit in here. In particular it would have been interesting to hear more from Loiselle on how his work connects with recent studies of political friendships during the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods [4]. It would appear that there is much still to be said on the interconnections between Freemasonry, friendship, and the Revolution. Some of the most poignant passages of the book

cover the experiences of Masons in revolutionary politics. One example is that of a Third Estate deputy to the National Assembly, Périsset Dulac, who found that the notional equality and solidarity of Masonic friendship melted away in the face of the revolutionary politics. He himself had previously maintained close links with a number of noble Masons and had thought of them as his friends, despite their differences in status. But that friendship soon corroded in the context of revolutionary politics, as the noble Masons bitterly resented their loss of actual privileges and status. The flight of the King to Varennes in June 1791 proved the definitive breaking point between himself and his aristocratic fellow Masons (p. 228).

Overall this is an insightful, refreshing and original study. Loiselle shows an admirable attention to the sources, enabling him to give a convincing—and often touching—picture of what Masonic friendships meant to the men who experienced them. Loiselle states that his primary aim in this book is to use the Masonic movement as a “prism to understand more clearly how ordinary men conceived of and lived friendship in eighteenth-century France” (p. 8). He has admirably succeeded in his purpose, giving us a historically sensitive account of the lived experience of male friendship, and what it meant to be a man, a friend, and a Mason.

NOTES

[1] Key works on French and European Freemasonry include: Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ran Halévi, *Les loges maçonniques dans la France d’Ancien Régime: Aux origines de la sociabilité démocratique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1984); and Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *L’espace des Francs-maçons: Une sociabilité européenne au XVIIIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003).

[2] The literature on friendship in France before the Revolution has grown exponentially in recent years. It includes: Anne Vincent-Buffault, *L’Exercice de l’amitié: Pour une histoire des pratiques amicales aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1995); Jeffrey Merrick, “Male Friendship in Prerevolutionary France,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, 3 (2004): 407-32; and David Garrioch, “From Christian Friendship to Secular Sentimentality: Enlightenment Re-evaluations,” in Barbara Caine, ed., *Friendship: A History* (London: Equinox, 2009), pp. 163-212.

[3] Freemasonry was thus an aspect of a much broader eighteenth-century project to fashion people into virtuous citizens, a desire informed by the twin concepts of classical republican virtue and natural virtue. On the development of both forms of virtue, see Marisa Linton, *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

[4] There are a number of parallels between Loiselle’s work on pre-revolutionary friendship, and two very recent studies of the emotional dynamics of political friendships in the revolutionary period and early nineteenth century: that of Sarah Horowitz, *Friendship and Politics in Post-Revolutionary France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013); and my own, Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

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