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Maggie Allison and Yvette Rocheron, eds. *The Resilient Female Body. Health and Malaise in Twentieth-Century France*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007. 230 pp. Select bibliography, index. \$73.95 (hb). ISBN 3-03910-521-3.

Review by Mary Lynn Stewart, Simon Fraser University.

This collection of twelve essays on women's bodies in twentieth century France, most of them focusing on birthing and assumptions about ill-health, originated as papers presented to the Biennial Women in French Conference held in Leeds, U.K., in 2004. Most of the authors teach French in British universities, though one of them is a Professor of Business, and three of the contributors are French scholars, one of whom is a sociologist. Six of these essays treat historical subjects. From the perspective of adding to historical knowledge or incorporating recent historical scholarship, the best of these essays are Edith Taïed's on Hubertine Auclair's advocacy of women's political rights in order to improve the health of women, children and the nation in the Belle Epoque; Joanna Shearer's on Frenchwomen's journalism about women raped by the enemy and the offspring of these rapes during the First World War, and Alison Martin's and Florence Potot's pieces on different aspects of the commodification of the female body since the Second World War. Most of the overtly historical essays cite relevant historical scholarship in English as well as in French; others seem either derivative of historical scholarly work and/or do not acknowledge historical, anthropological and other works germane to their subjects, especially if those works do not focus on France or England.

Framing the collection's purview as the representation of the female body in a century of war and socio-medical change, the co-editors identify three themes: depictions of the maternal body figure that range from victims of rape and societal indifference in the Great War to the subjectification of the birthing mother in hospitals and birthing clinics since the Second World War; the meanings attached to women's health in discourses varying from discussion about nurses' capacities during the First World War to their under-representation on the boards of corporations today, and the perverse as well as positive implications of the medicalization of birthing and women's health since World War II. The editors discern a trajectory from the early twentieth century notion of women's bodies as resilient to a late twentieth century belief, shared by many women, that their bodies need management by medical professionals. While their perception of the starting point is hardly established by historical standards, their contention about recent developments might be productive of revisionist history. This reader finished the book feeling uneasy about how present-day assumptions about women's bodies and rights structure histories of women's bodies.

Other essays may engage historians of women, gender, health and health care because they situate the representations of women's bodies in novels in their historical contexts or because their analyses of fiction and nonfiction offer useful models of how to use literary methods to analyze textual evidence. Some of the literary essays may persuade historians to read or reread novelists such as Marguerite Duras (examined in light of her alcoholism and her representations of women who drink) or Aragon (considered in terms of his use of the female prostitute as victim, but also as rebels and heroines). Two separate pieces introduce Jeanne Hyvard, whose novels critique the medicalization of birthing and cancer care and more provocatively, feminists for promoting pain-free birth and separating heterosexual

intercourse from its intended outcome, conception and birth. Finally, one essay may persuade more people to read the marvelous contemporary novelist Nancy Huston.

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