

Finally, a discussion of TV serves well as a summary of the main points as well as a convincing example of the continuities of discourses on the popular. The advent of this new form, says Shiach, oddly has not produced much new in terms of thinking about culture, but, instead, reinforces the dynamics hitherto outlined. Especially prominent is the insistence upon literary models, and this, along with the focus on TV as a technology, emphasis on its domestic role and fears of its effects, has dominated TV criticism, according to Shiach. Like penny fiction, TV is suspect, due to its very popularity and accessibility and, thus, seen as evidence of cultural decline. Like folk songs and arts and crafts, there is already a search for the “authentic” in TV, however ill-defined, and an attending myth of a recent Golden Age. Like all forms examined, control of TV and its discourse represents social and political control, and this, in turn, is partly characterized by the absence or trivializing of women. As a review of the literature, this chapter is excellent, but for the same reason, it is a bit disappointing as an analysis, particularly in light of the expectations created by the rest of the book and by this reader’s own special interests.

Discourse on Popular Culture is a must for anyone seriously interested in the subject. It is not a quick read, wordy in places, but the occasional over-explanation is forgivable, in light of the complexity of the topic and the sophistication of the treatment. It promises much and delivers on it, with the possible exception that this reader would have liked to see the feminist analysis more central than its place here as an occasional, albeit recurring, framework. Lastly, despite its attention to British culture only, the theme of power relations in cultural discourse is easily, and necessarily, transferable to not only other capitalist societies, but to broader discussions about the ongoing creation and recreation of history itself to suit the needs of those who control it.

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Marc and Muriel Vigié — *L’herbe à Nicot : Amateurs de tabac, fermiers généraux et contrebandiers sous l’Ancien Régime*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989. Pp. 586.

Tobacco arrived in Europe in the mid-sixteenth century and quickly became an important popular, fiscal and economic resource. In *L’herbe à Nicot*, Marc and Muriel Vigié have taken an unusual and interesting approach by using this product as a case study to illuminate many aspects of Ancien Régime society, instead of the more predictable choice of a geographic location, social group or institution. Their study corroborates from this different angle many existing theses about pre-revolutionary society, as they follow tobacco from its introduction to the execution of twenty-eight tax *fermiers* in the Terror, an action which confirmed the popular hostility expressed in the National Assembly’s 1791 decision to abolish the tobacco monopoly.

The authors have divided their study into four parts, each examining a different aspect of tobacco’s impact on France. The first part examines the period before the establishment of the tobacco monopoly, in 1674. Tobacco was introduced to France in the reign of Henry II. Shortly after, Jean Nicot brought this novelty to the attention of

the royal court and assured himself of a certain immortality as a derivative of his name became a popular synonym for the plant. Tobacco usage quickly became popular among all social classes, and it was widely regarded as a universal panacea for all manner of ailments.

Domestic cultivation was fairly widespread in this period, mainly for personal or medicinal use. Efforts at commercial production were concentrated in the French West Indies and received considerable support from the French government. For a variety of reasons, notably the traditional reluctance of the French population to emigrate to new lands and the greater profit potential other crops seemed to offer, colonial cultivation of tobacco failed to supply domestic demand. England, as the *conduit* of the Virginian tobacco favored in France, became the main supplier to French consumers, early in the eighteenth century. The authors view the persistence of this trade through the repeated diplomatic crises of the succeeding decades as an illustration of “la réalité économique des conflits européens sous l’Ancien Régime” (155). Nevertheless, the mercantilist impulse which underlay the colonial efforts was not to be defeated entirely.

In 1674, Colbert’s establishment of the tobacco monopoly marked a new phase in the history of tobacco in France. A meticulous account of the history of the tobacco leases from their inception to the dissolution of the system under the Constituent Assembly is the subject of the second section. The convoluted negotiations which preceded renewals and the administrative structure of the *ferme* are amply elucidated. Revenues constantly increased, as did the restrictions on domestic cultivation. Interestingly, from the earliest days, this tax on consumption was justified in terms of protecting the health of the population. In this section and the remainder of the book, the Vigiés use the issues raised in relation to tobacco to illuminate larger paradoxes of Ancien Régime society. Colbert’s resort to leases of indirect taxes, for example, contradicted a simultaneous drive towards greater centralization in fiscal and other aspects of government and, hence, illustrated “l’inachèvement de l’état” (183).

The third section deals with the extensive popular opposition to the tobacco tax as well as to the tax *fermiers* and their administration. The authors are not entirely successful in their effort to link the tax revolts of 1675 in Burgundy and Brittany with enmity towards the tobacco monopoly. The prevalence of smuggling, on the other hand, in which all social groups were involved, is a far more certain manifestation of popular hostility. An aura of what might be called a moral economy seems to have surrounded this activity. The Dauphiné smuggler, Mandrin, became a legendary hero after being put to death, entering the pantheon of popular saviors also occupied by figures like Robin Hood. This sympathy for resistance to the tax was not confined to the lower orders. Judges frequently refused to take advantage of the increasingly severe penalties available to them (capped by the introduction of galley sentences for *faux-tabatiers* in 1707). This animosity together with the privileges enjoyed in regard to exemption and cultivation by the *pays étrangers* combined to frustrate the assiduous efforts of the lease holders to prevent the importation of contraband tobacco.

From an early stage, an intellectual and political debate also surrounded the tobacco monopoly. This discussion is the subject of the book’s final section. In the late seventeenth century, Vauban initiated a critical tradition which various *philosophes* and *physiocrates* took up in the next century. All pointed to the inefficiency and inequity of a fiscal base which relied on leases of indirect taxes on consumption, although little agreement on alternatives emerged. Acceptance of the flaws of such a system became widespread, and advocates of changing towards a unified national

market and a more rational fiscal structure, like Turgot, achieved high office. However, the practical difficulties involved in the challenge to entrenched social and geographical privileges, which any revamping of the tax system would require, stymied reform initiatives before 1789.

The use of a particular product as a case study through which to approach the complexities of Ancien Régime and the treatment of popular reactions to the tobacco monopoly are the most innovative aspects of *L'herbe à Nicot*. The section dealing with cultural attitudes could in fact have been expanded. Beyond these attributes, the Vigiés strive for the difficult task of producing a monograph which is satisfactory to the academic community and still accessible to a wider audience. Although the extensive bibliography does not quite compensate for the sacrifice of footnotes in pursuit of this goal, their aim is nevertheless worthwhile. This book provides a mass of information specific to the history of tobacco in France before the Revolution which will be useful for the specialist. It also treats its subject in the context of a wide range of the most important issues of the period, illuminating them through this specific example in a way that the reading public should appreciate.

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