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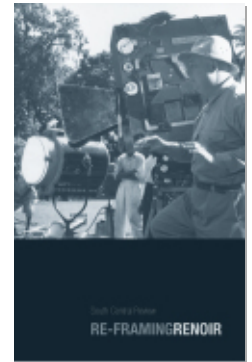
*Napoleonic Friendship: Military Fraternity, Intimacy &
Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France* (review)

Eduardo Febles

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Reviews

Brian Joseph Martin, *Napoleonic Friendship: Military Fraternity, Intimacy & Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France*. Durham, N.H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011. xvii + 380 pp. \$39.95 (paper).

The title of Brian Joseph Martin's book refers to his main thesis which argues that through its emphasis on *fraternité*, the French Revolution inaugurated not only a new political chapter in the history of France, but also a new way of relating among soldiers through intimate emotional bonds, a phenomenon he refers to as Napoleonic friendship. Inscribed within a long-standing tradition of "combat companions and warrior lovers" (2) celebrated in ancient and medieval epics, which Martin succinctly traces in his introduction, Napoleonic friendships nonetheless emerge at the end of the eighteenth century in reaction to the practices of the defunct Royal Army of the Ancien Régime: "Founded on the principle of *fraternité*, the transformation of the military during the French Revolution—from the socially segregated Royal Army of the Ancien Régime to the more integrated and egalitarian armies of the Revolution—created the conditions for more intimate relationships between soldiers" (19). By shifting the debate on gay sexuality from the erotic to the emotional, Martin follows in the footsteps of Michel Foucault who defined "gay relationships as a radical form of camaraderie and companionship, fidelity and friendship" (10). Filling in the gaps of Foucault's unaccomplished project of writing a history of the French military (10), Martin finds these relationships actualized in the newly Revolutionary Army and beyond in Napoleon's *Grande Armée*. Though he acknowledges at several points in his study that these emotional ties could be exploited for dubious gains, especially through his readings of works on military theory by Bonaparte, du Picq, and Lyautey, he focuses on their subjective power rather than on their institutional perniciousness.

Martin's analysis is divided into three parts. In the first, entitled "Revolution to Empire: 1789–1815," Martin draws on rich historical documents including memoirs and eye-witness accounts to establish the relationship between *fraternité* as celebrated in the *Fête de la Fédération* of 1790 and the advent of Napoleonic friendships as enacted by the Emperor himself—most notably with Marshal Lannes and General Duroc. Napoleon's example trickles down the ranks, as Martin demonstrates through a close reading of three military memoirs penned by General Marcellin de Marbot, Captain Jean-Roch Coignet, and Sergeant François Bourgoigne. Through military reform, the institutional mechanisms of recruitment, integration, promotion, and training, allow these relationships to be forged while taking on different forms: "the nighttime *camarade de lit* (bedfellow), the trusted *intime ami* (buddy), the comforting *pays* (hometown friend), and the admired *mentor* (mentor)" (71).

The second part entitled “Waterloo: 1815” focuses on literary works by Stendhal, Victor Hugo, and Honoré de Balzac, and shows how the persistence of the friendship model endures after Napoleon’s defeat in a nostalgic mode or through new incarnations. Both Julien Sorel and Fabrice del Dongo, for instance, the main characters of *Le rouge et le noir* and *La chartreuse de Parme*, have missed the Napoleonic boat by being born too late, yet they desperately long to form the kind of close-knit relationships characteristic of soldiers in the *Grande Armée*. By contrast, in Hugo’s *Les misérables*, the new generation of revolutionaries imitates the example of veteran fathers: “Despite radical regime change and gross veteran abuse, Napoleonic friendship survives amid the persistent fraternal loyalty of imperial veterans and the neo-revolutionary solidarity of their republican children” (147).

Three chapters are dedicated to the works of Balzac, distributed in the “Waterloo” section and the third part, entitled “Restoration to Second Empire: 1815–70.” After a concise and clear overview of Balzac’s ambiguous relationship to the Emperor and the importance of the military theme in his vision, Martin offers a reading of various works (*Les Chouans*, *Le colonel Chabert*, *Le médecin de campagne*, *La rabouilleuse*) by focusing on the role of disaffected veterans after Napoleon’s downfall. These former soldiers either survive by sustaining their Napoleonic friendships through quasi-marital bonds (Benassis and Genestas in *Le médecin de campagne*) or betray their brothers to gain legitimacy in the social circles of the Restoration (Philippe Bridau in *La rabouilleuse*). The last chapter focuses on the War of 1870 and Neo-Napoleonic friendships, whereby the emotional bonds give way to erotic performance. Though Martin alludes to many texts in this section—including works by Arthur Rimbaud, Hugo, Paul Déroulède, and Guy de Maupassant—his argument culminates with an analysis of Emile Zola’s *La débâcle* and the intense relationship between Jean and Maurice forged during the Franco-Prussian War. Martin explains: “their physical and emotional passion. . . could be thought of as an inaugural military model, in French military literature, for the newly coined concept in 1869 called ‘homosexual’ love” (254). Zola’s novel thus paves the way for Marcel Proust’s magisterial treatment of this particular subject in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, especially through the characters of the Baron de Charlus and Saint-Loup, and the depiction of Jupien’s brothel.

Martin’s *Napoleonic Friendship* stands to become a seminal text in understanding the cultural production of masculinity and homosocial relations. His study moves seamlessly between historical and literary sources, displaying an impressive erudition. Furthermore, Martin’s ease of expression beautifully conveys his argument, at times mobilizing metaphors and campy puns, at others exposing his points methodically and rigorously, making the work at once highly educational and enjoyable. *Napoleonic Friendship* also joins criticism and political activism: Martin’s book stands in the trenches of memories, a banner of war waged against intolerance, a continuation of the author’s own protestatory gesture against the silencing of gays in the military during his own undergraduate

commencement ceremony at Harvard, in which, in his own words, “I stood up on my chair to turn my back to Colin Powell” (xiv), the then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I cannot think of a better conclusion to Martin’s book than the impending date of September 20, 2011, the moment in which the nefarious “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy will finally come to an end.

Eduardo Febles
Simmons College