

# Author-Aviators of World War II: From Myth to Ambivalence.

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## Notions of Self and Nation in French Aviators of World War II: From Myth to Ambivalence

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### Date of Completion

6-27-2016

### Embargo Period

6-27-2016

### Keywords

myth, aviator, Saint-Exupéry, Roy, Gary, nation, heroism, mas  
ambivalence

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### Field of Study

**Degree**

Doctor of Philosophy

**Open Access**

Open Access

**Abstract**

The traditional image of wartime aviators in French culture is a notion that is inextricably linked with an equally idealized and nationalized notion of nationhood. The literary works of three French author-aviators: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Jules Roy, and Romain Gary – reveal the writer that operates in a zone between reality and imagination. The purpose of this study is to delineate the elements that make up what I propose is an and even ambivalent image of both individual and nation. Through *Pilote de guerre (Flight to Arras)*, *La Vallée heureuse (The Happy Valley)*, and *Promesse de l'aube (Promise at Dawn)* – this dissertation proposes to analyze the figures of individual narratives, but also the figures of “a collective identity” during a critical period of that country’s history. The relationship between the intersecting narratives – the individual’s and the nation’s - is a complex one. The images based on a cultural past as they are viewed in the present are shaped by notions of masculinity, heroism, and nationhood, each of which is rooted in heritage and an imagined self derived from that heritage.

**Recommended Citation**

Kean, Christopher, "Notions of Self and Nation in French Author-Aviators: From Myth to Ambivalence" (2016). *Doctoral Dissertations*. 1161. <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/dissertations/1161>



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