

allow', and arguing that state intervention was 'largely a nineteenth-century innovation'. The monograph also includes a useful appendix timeline of creations and renovations of dedicated public theatres in France and its colonies from 1671 to 1789. Lauren R. Clay's study is an engaging and necessary one, providing scholars and students alike with a new perspective from which to understand cultural production in the eighteenth century.

Warwick University

CLAIRE TREVIEN

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*Les Gauches Françaises 1762–2012: Histoire, politique et imaginaire.* By Jacques Julliard. Paris: Flammarion. 2012. 944 pp. €25.00. ISBN: 978 2 0812 2317 2.

This is not the first recent history of the French left. Jean Touchard published his *La Gauche en France depuis 1900* in the late 1970s and Michel Winock followed with his *La gauche en France* in the mid-2000s. But neither of these two earlier volumes had the same ambitions as Jacques Julliard, who has painted his subject matter on a vast canvas, stretching back deep into the Enlightenment. The problem is, of course, that there was no such thing as the 'left' before the French Revolution, but Julliard bravely dismisses this issue in the first few pages of the book. Whatever the political 'orientations' of the Enlightenment, the main point is that the left continuously claimed its legacy. Any history of the left must, therefore, examine its imagined roots in an eighteenth-century philosophy of rational progress, as well as its individual and institutional manifestations from the early nineteenth-century onwards. The left, in Julliard's analysis, is a culture, a practice, a history and a way of life.

Over the course of more than 900 pages, Julliard tries to stay true to his commendably broad definition of the left. He does this by moving deftly between a narrative of great events—1789, 1815, 1830, 1848, 1870–1, 1914, 1936, 1945, 1968, 1981 and 2012—and a conceptual framework based around 'les quatres gauches'. Ever since René Rémond identified 'les trois droites' in his seminal work on the right, scholars of both left and right have felt obliged to come up with parallel or competing frameworks. Julliard is no exception, and his four-part definition is broken down into a 'gauche libérale', a 'gauche jacobine', a 'gauche collectiviste' and a 'gauche libertaire'. It would be easy to identify exceptions but the classification seems broadly convincing, especially given Julliard's repeated reminders that these do not automatically correspond to fixed political identities. More peculiar is the decision to present this framework, not at the beginning of the book, but three-quarters of the way through. Having negotiated two centuries in the history of the left—from the mid-eighteenth century to 1940—the reader is suddenly presented with a 150-page conceptual discussion. The narrative then picks up again in 1945 and continues through to the present day. This aspect of the book's structure is never fully explained. Are we supposed to infer that Julliard's four-part classification does not apply in the same way to the postwar period? Nothing about the last quarter of the book suggests this to be the case. Or is it that Julliard wants us to have a sense of the narrative before he imposes an analytical framework? But, if so, why not place his definition at the very end of the book?

This confusion is exacerbated by the fact that numerous other kinds of left appear scattered throughout the text. Thus, in the opening pages, Julliard gives a definition of the left that emphasises its roots in 'l'idée de progrès', 'l'idée de justice' and 'l'idée de la démocratie', but it is never quite clear how these relate to the dominant four-part classification that appears towards the end of the book. Things get more complicated still when we come across, first, a 'gauche jésuite' and a 'gauche janséniste'; then a 'gauche Voltaire' and a 'gauche Rousseau'; and, further on, a 'gauche Robespierre' and a 'gauche Danton'. Even in the section devoted to the four-part classification of the left, Julliard introduces a fifth 'gauche'—a 'gauche tranquille'. Not to mention a 'gauche Mendès' and a 'gauche Mitterrand', which seems to be broadly similar to Michel Rocard's famous contrast between a 'deuxième gauche, décentralisatrice, régionaliste, héritière de la tradition autogestionnaire' and a 'première gauche, jacobine, centralisatrice et étatique'. It is not that any of these classificatory systems is inaccurate; they fit their respective contexts well and it is to Julliard's credit that he has such a capacious definition of the left. However, it does make it very hard to anchor the narrative. Clearly, Julliard believes that the term 'left' has had—and continues to have—a recognisable meaning or he would not have written a book about it. But, equally, his laudable concern to juxtapose every available definition of the left through multiple classifications and helpful schematic diagrams leaves even the informed reader perplexed.

It is telling, perhaps, that Julliard is at his best when talking about individuals. Approximately every 70 pages, there are 'portraits croisés'—short twenty-page portraits of two contrasting contemporary political figures of the left. There are too many to list here, but two in particular stand out. The first is the discussion of Adolphe Thiers and Auguste Blanqui, in which the chameleon-like qualities of the statesman are contrasted with the misguided passion of the insurgent. The second is the wonderful comparison between Pierre Mendès-France and François Mitterrand, where Julliard is able to draw on his own personal experiences to paint a complex picture of the Socialist Party in the 1970s and 80s. Indeed, Julliard's journalistic writing style, which elsewhere can make for rather leaden prose, works exceptionally well when he talks about individuals: their inner hopes and dreams—or, in the case of Mitterrand—their impenetrable personas are brought vividly to life.

Nevertheless, the rewarding final chapters, in which Julliard discusses the transformation and future of the left without succumbing to the usual nostalgia about a lost 'golden age' of engagement, cannot conceal the fact that this is a book that simply tries to do too much. Its descriptions of events such as the French Revolution or 1848 are not original enough to supplant existing literature (Julliard draws heavily on historians like Pierre Rosanvallon, François Furet or Lucien Jaume). Its over-arching analytical framework is chaotic, even if certain concepts in isolation make perfect sense. And, most importantly, Julliard cannot really decide whether the French left is about texts and ideas, or people and places. Had he chosen to focus on one or the other, he could have used this as a guiding thread and master narrative. Instead, we are left with a book that bears a striking resemblance to its subject: brilliant, with flashes of genius, but never quite sure of its identity.

*University of Edinburgh*

EMILE CHABAL

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