
This is an infuriating, wilful, deliberately provocative little book. Historians, amongst others, should read it — but probably will not. Moving on from his last blast on the apocalyptic trumpet of postmodernism (*Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity*, Routledge, 1999) while also glancing back to *Rethinking History* (1995, and now looking much more restrained), Keith Jenkins returns to some of the big questions about ‘doing history’, what it does for us, and why it is impossible.

The slim (and hugely overpriced) volume is divided into an introduction and three chapters. The first sets up the philosophical arguments, the second applies them to the practice of history, and the third presents a different path to the one that we are recommended. The conceptual framework here — on the nature of postmodernity and its implications for doing history — is indebted to various theorists, but particularly to Jacques Derrida. First, what Jenkins is arguing is for historians to embrace the immensity of postmodern aporia (to recognize that postmodern uncertainty goes ‘all the way down’ rather than presaging an epistemological closure). Second, he urges engagement with a postmodern politics that sees each of us as discontinuous entities performing our subjectivity reiteratively within discourse, while power structures (the state, culture, institutions) are viewed as insecurely shoring up their hegemony through discursive tricks. Pre-eminent amongst these tricks is history, as one of the strategies of naturalization deployed by power to fool us into failing to challenge, dissent, ask questions about, or otherwise revolt from, the lives that we are given. However, as Jenkins sees it, history is in fact very easy to challenge: by always claiming the status of an epistemology it can never achieve, it is really no more than the arbitrary and fictional discourse (something much more invented than found) that Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit, Michel de Certeau and others have always asserted. Hence, we should stop doing history as it is ‘normally’ done, because at best this fails to challenge the discursive structures of power, and at worst, colludes in their construction. Instead, we should embrace postmodern histories,
recognizing that ‘epistemological histories ought never to have existed; histories ought never to have been modern’ (70).

Annoyed yet? Or just confused? If the latter, the book is actually quite a help and certainly clearer than my compressed summary. Although vague on some topics — as Jenkins admits (and attempts to claim as a virtue), what a ‘postmodern history’ might look like is difficult to specify — Refiguring History manages to make reasonably accessible some of the more mindbending elements of postmodern theory. Read alongside something like Jonathan Culler’s Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 1997), it should allow at least the beginnings of a grasp on some concepts and implications of Derridean deconstruction, as well as key ideas from theorists such as Ernesto Laclau, Alain Badiou and (implicitly) Judith Butler. It even managed to make me see the point of Jean Baudrillard, something I had previously found elusive. It also makes some important points about things that the discipline of history finds so hard to admit to itself: the philosophical implications of history’s epistemological weakness; the continuing lack of self-reflexive practice, which permits historians to consider themselves ‘postmodern’ when they admit that something could have more than one interpretation (‘nothing could be more ill-informed’ [15]), but without their considering, or engaging with, the larger implications of diversity and aporia; the political element to the writing of history, and the failure of professional historians to engage with the present, within which they are nonetheless necessarily implicated. For all of these things, Refiguring History is a good, hard, useful jab with a sharp stick in our collective backsides.

However, if you do read the book, and consider yourself to be an historian, you will surely be irritated not only by these elements — elements purposely designed to annoy you, and thus to do you some good — but also by the other assumptions and positions that Jenkins adopts. A lot of what the book says has implications for the popular concept and understanding of ‘History’ (history in the sense invoked, for example, by Tony Blair as judge upon current actions regarding the Middle East); but it specifically claims (2) to be concerned with academic, professional history. Here, there are problems. While some may agree with Jenkins’ trenchant criticisms of Evans and Marwick, the work of these historians is not necessarily representative of the practices of all historians. Besides, few (if any) of us would consider ‘historical facts, structures, periods, and meanings’ to be ‘intrinsic’ (10); and a number of historians reflect consciously upon the ‘inventedness’ of our interpretative strategies for grappling with the past. Read Greg Dening, Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, Eric Hobsbawm, Jacques Le Goff, Gareth Stedman Jones, James
Vernon, Ludmilla Jordanova, to mention just a few of the more famous names.

Nor are the historical practices that Jenkins describes quite as arbitrary as he makes them appear. They may not add up to a secure epistemology, but neither are they purely voluntary and indiscriminate procedures. We do not choose to prefer one historian over another simply through personal whim, nor are our interpretations of history as changeable and butterfly-like as the experience of taking a trip through the National Gallery (this is an example the book uses), first alone, and second, with someone you love. I may enjoy, thanks to the resonance of political ideas, reading Christopher Hill’s account of seventeenth-century radicals; but I may also recognize, however grudgingly, that there is some validity to Colin Davis’ counter-argument that the Ranters were an invented sect. I may wish to claim (because it would have supported a wider argument in my current research) that the presentation of thirteenth-century English priests to a diocese’s parishes was often a fraught and disputed affair, but, upon reading the bishop’s registers more carefully and totting up the evidence, I discover that problems occurred in about only 5 per cent of cases — and hence do not make the claim. I may walk around the National Gallery and although in love and although bored by too many landscapes, for some reason — a reason of discipline and professionalism, perhaps — choose to make myself inspect all the pictures by, say, Turner in order to further my studies. To pick up on another example from the book: as Jenkins argues, pictures of horses by different artists will not, and are not, expected to look identical (and hence pictures of history by different historians will not look identical, nor should we expect them to; we should instead engage with their aesthetic elements). However, I would venture to suggest, if Damien Hirst sneaks a dead shark into the line-up, one is able to say, ‘hang on, that doesn’t have any legs. Or a tail. And where are the stirrups?’ There may be an infinite number of ways in which one can depict a horse; but this is still a subset within the infinite number of ways in which one can paint anything at all, and is thus an infinity limited by its adherence to equine quadrupeds. Similarly, there are myriad ways of interpreting historical events; but there are also limits, however self-imposed, that disallow certain kinds of claims about those events, if one wishes still to be making a claim to doing history (or, more broadly, if one wishes to continue to communicate with a wider community of people). Nor is there any obvious reason (other than habit) why these kinds of practices — producing ‘substantiated, empirically detailed and well-researched accounts’ — should necessarily be enslaved to a ‘modernist’ epistemology and politics (5). One could pin them to another political flag.
— and one’s enemies would then have a harder time in dismissing the argument by pointing out that one was trying to pass off sharks as horses.

Moreover, if our political project is to embrace a future that will ‘not be a reproduction of the same’, to be open to ‘strange, wonderful, disrespectful and disobedient workings’, I would argue that the encounter with the alterity of the past, which the practice of history provides can be a very useful tool. What better way of dissenting from a prefigured future than by pointing to the differences of the past, and the changes wrought by time? It worked for Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau — both heroes of Refiguring History. Negotiating the unwieldy heterogeneity of the past, attempting to engage with the recalcitrantly complex traces left by now-dead people, might provide a useful site of ethical practice for the present, particularly in our relationships with living, subaltern subjects. For all these reasons, Refiguring History’s more enlivening aspects were leavened with disappointment for this reader.

And yet, and yet . . . the curious experience of reading in a recent national newspaper one right-wing historian’s review of another right-wing’s historian’s book, wherein both seemed to agree that things such as ‘Englishness’ and ‘nationhood’ were not constructions of culture and politics, but somehow essentially real, reminds one that certain historians truly are as old-fashioned, recalcitrant and infuriatingly unwilling to think as Jenkins suggests. But even this stick, alas, may be insufficiently sharp to poke them as they deserve. However, you, who have stuck to the end of this review, should still read it; as the epigram from Nabokov says, ‘it might be fun’.

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Helmut Puff, Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland 1400–1600, Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 2003; 311 pp.; 0226685063, $24 (pbk), 0226685055, $60 (hbk)

Nowadays, the history of sodomy attracts considerable interest. There are many books on the topic dealing with England, some on the Dutch Republic, France and Italy, and a number of edited collections that cover several countries. The German-speaking world has so far received little attention, partly thanks to the fact that gay and lesbian history made a comparatively late start there. At the same time, the existing German-language literature still continues to
concentrate on the gay rights movement or the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, with the result that earlier periods have been rather neglected.

The main inspiration for Helmut Puff’s research on sodomy in Germany and Switzerland is the work of Michel Foucault and his many followers, whose work has been subsumed under the labels ‘social constructionism’, and more recently, ‘queer theory’. In line with such an approach, Puff stresses strongly that sodomy is not equivalent to homosexuality, and that different periods and cultures each have their own ‘sexual system’ of practices and pleasures. However, he opposes the idea that sodomy was a vague and unstable category in the early modern period, as Foucauldians often claim. Puff’s material makes it quite clear that sodomy stands for anal sex, mainly between males; that it is different from bestiality and masturbation; and that it is closely linked to other concepts such as heresy, treason, blasphemy, impurity and inversion of the divine order. The author is also critical of the ‘literary’ turn that sodomy studies have taken, on the grounds that scholars not only have to deal with representation (as they all now do, by and large), but with social reality as well — and an often lethal one at that. Well-versed in recent approaches to the subject in cultural studies, Puff thus returns to social history for good reasons. He emphasizes once more that sodomy may well have been a pastime for some, but it was one that involved possibly deadly outcomes.

Puff makes an important contribution in two main respects. First, he goes back to the records of sodomy trials and analyses an array of proceedings from courts in Switzerland and Southern Germany. He comes up with a list of about ninety cases from the period 1277–1658. The clergy saw sodomy as a major aberration and did so in increasingly stronger terms after the appearance of Peter Damian’s Liber Gomorrihianus (c.1050). Later theologians, such as Peter Cantor, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas, singled out sodomy as the worst of all sins, bestiality excepted. Yet, it was only in the late fourteenth century that German cities and states began to execute sodomites. In doing so, they based their judgements on Roman law, because the Holy Roman Empire only drew up its sodomy laws very late on, in 1532. Although the definition of sodomy as a crime followed the Christian belief that it was a most abominable sin, the church itself was not very cooperative with the secular authorities in prosecuting the crime. Clerics who were suspected of sodomy were tried in ecclesiastical courts until 1500. Thereafter, secular tribunals took precedence in such cases. Although many more men were convicted for sodomy, the few women who were put on trial receive Puff’s full attention. The men who were convicted for sodomy did
not fit any particular stereotype of the effeminate male or pederast. Puff sees homosexual activity as the accidental result of ‘homosocial arrangements’ in and across classes, and also in and across agegroups. There is little sense of fixed roles existing, such as those of penetrator or penetrated, active or passive.

Church and state may have defined sodomy as a most horrible sin and crime, yet the number of executed sodomites was low compared to the total number of capital punishments. The court in Zurich, a town of 5,000 inhabitants that turned Protestant, convicted the amazing number of 572 people to death in the period 1501–1600, of which eleven were for sodomy and fifty-six for bestiality. The Catholic town of Lucerne, with 4,000 inhabitants saw much fewer executions in the same period (181, of which seven were for sodomy and twenty for bestiality). However, it is, not clear from Puff’s figures whether the regions around the cities are included in these totals.

Puff’s second important contribution concerns the use of sodomy for the purposes of defamation. One chapter is devoted to concrete sodomy accusations on the local level, but most attention goes to the general practice of defamation at the time of the Reformation. Protestants eagerly employed the familiar trope of Italy as a place of sexual transgression, in order to accuse the Catholic clergy of being pederasts and sodomites. The city of Florence was famous for its homoeroticism in the Middle Ages, and Germans used the verb ‘florenzen’ as a synonym for sodomy. In fact, Italians or foreigners from Romance-language countries were over-represented in the sodomy cases studied by Puff. Clearly, Protestants used an existing idea current among Northern Europeans that Italians were more prone to sodomy, in order to vilify the Catholic Church. Puff cites dozens of pamphlets that made the connection between sodomy, heresy, Italy and the clergy. The most infamous among them is Martin Luther’s Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil (1545) where he describes the Curia as an assembly of ‘hermaphrodites, androgyines, catamites, butt-fuckers, and similar monsters of nature’. The author has interesting comments to make on this flood of anti-papal and anti-sodomitical pamphlets, which had little to do with the clerics’ actual sexual practices, but were useful in the contemporary religious wars. Interestingly, even Luther’s companions found he had gone too far astray with the aforementioned pamphlet. Once the Protestant churches had taken root in Germany, defamation of this kind disappeared. Catholics never responded in kind, because they had no need to establish themselves. Eventually, Protestant and Catholic states punished sodomy with similar harshness, as illustrated by the examples of Zurich and Lucerne.
Other revealing insights concern the ambivalence of sodomy being both an ‘unspeakable’ and a ‘crying’ sin. Authorities might not have wanted to do so, but they had to speak about it, which led to both euphemisms and misunderstandings. Thus, sodomy was both a secret sin and a public scandal. These complexities paved the way for denunciations of political enemies, but the silence could again promote the secret pleasures of sodomites.

Puff tries to explain why sodomy was so central to religious conflicts and Christian beliefs. He suggests that sodomy was viewed as a major sin and heresy because it placed the divine order on its head. Instead of chastity, matrimony and reproduction, sodomy stood for lust, anti-social behaviour and barrenness. It was a major aberration in terms of both cultural representation and daily behaviour. Given that this book compiles for the first time concrete data on sodomy persecutions in the late medieval and early modern German-speaking world, it is a valuable achievement on those grounds alone. Even more significant though, is the central role that Puff identifies for anti-sodomitical rhetoric in the religious wars accompanying the Reformation. In this respect, he has produced an intelligent and innovative combination of sexual and political history. His study of Lutheran and Catholic discourse on sodomy makes the reader curious to learn more about how the battles were fought between Humanists or Calvinists and Catholics. Puff has opened up one of the many untrodden paths in the history of sexuality.

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In 1961, the scholar of Islam Bernard Lewis published a book which established him as an expert in Turkish history. Today, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, a classic work in the field, is in its third edition. The enormous academic influence that this study has had across the world, and the very fact that a few modifications were made by Lewis in the present edition, invite us to re-examine it. Alongside textual examination, it is necessary to perform a contextual one, which will situate the book in current developments and debates in the field.

Bernard Lewis attained a BA at the School of Oriental and African
Studies, University of London, where he subsequently completed his PhD in the History of Islam. He taught at the University of London till 1974, and then at Princeton till his retirement in 1986. He worked on Islamic religious movements, Middle Eastern history and the history of the Ottoman Empire, and he produced a book on Arab history (The Arabs in History) which has been translated into many languages. Undoubtedly, he is nowadays one of the well established scholars in the field of Arabology and Turkology.

*The Emergence of Modern Turkey* covers over two centuries of Turkish developments and is divided into two parts. Part I is an overview of Turkish history from the seventeenth century to the rise of the Democrat Party of Menderes in the early 1850s. Part II arranges thematically cultural, political and economic changes, which contributed to the modernization of Turkey. Because the book is structured clearly and discusses important issues concerning the birth of the modern Turkish nation, it often serves as a starting point for the student of Turkish history. Despite its virtues, however, Lewis’ methodological approach is politically coloured. It is therefore necessary to highlight a number of controversial points in his historical discourse, which have become central to more recent debates on his work and the practice of history writing in general.

In the first place, the very concept of ‘emergence’ is problematic. Lewis presents the process of emergence as an inevitable historical event, which was triggered by an ‘invasion’ of western ideas in the country. Although he does not pronounce it as obviously as in the previous editions of his book, he merely juxtaposes an old, ‘decaying,’ Turkey to a new one, purified of the despotic and anti-liberal elements of the old. This simplistic argument is simultaneously characterized by nationalist and Orientalist undertones. It is nationalist because it assumes that the Turkish nation is a primordial, already existing entity; thus, the history of the Ottoman empire is turned by Lewis into ‘a pre-history of the republic’.1 By presenting nineteenth-century Ottoman history as the threshold of modern Turkish history, he dismisses the multicultural character of the empire and the contribution of other ethnicities (Armenian, Greek, Kurdish, Albanian, Bosnian) to the formation of its economy, culture and politics. At the same time, Lewis identifies in the developments that gave shape to the Young Turk movement2 in the early twentieth century a rupture from the old. Lewis’ nationalist and teleological argument, combined with the idea that in the Young Turks we encounter a historical discontinuity, can be found in the work of other Turkish scholars, such as the political theorist Tarik Zafer Tunaya. Interestingly, Lewis’ ideas reflect the post-Second World War generation of Turkish and Orientalist academia; in fact,
he himself admits in the Preface to the second edition that his actual engagement with Turkish sources, as well as his acquaintance with the country, dates back to the 1950s.  

More dangerous is the Orientalist ideology that permeates the book through and through. Without further reflection, Lewis equates liberal ideas, state secularization and progress with benevolent western interference or a massive influx of western ideas in Turkey, especially after the rise of Kemal Atatürk. This politically charged statement has been criticized by the renowned theorist Edward Said, but deserves reinforcement, since it comprises the pillar of Orientalist ideology. In fact, the Preface to the Emergence is a declaration of Lewis’ political loyalties. After the end of the Second World War, he claims, ‘the Turks made a free and conscious choice of their own for democracy and fashioned their own representative institutions. The process of domestic Westernisation found its natural counterpart in a foreign policy of Western alignment.’ So, not only is ‘westernization’ good, but it also falls within the natural course of Turkish history: NATO membership sealed this natural course of events. Of course, a number of events are suppressed in Lewis’ analysis: no attention is paid to the annihilation of the Armenians before and under Atatürk, or to the large-scale massacres of the Greeks of northern Turkey and Asia Minor. Moreover, the PKK movement is either brushed away, or depicted as a terrorist movement; its historical implications and the very reality of past and on-going oppression of the Kurds are dismissed. This politically correct version of history, no doubt, finds unprecedented popularity in Turkish and American political circles. Its siblings are produced in Balkan states — each of them with different nationalist agendas and with their own version of history. In short, whereas Lewis manages to make the westernization debate central to his thesis, he marginalizes a number of important factors that truly fostered modern Turkish identity. The irrevocable loss of all the Arab provinces in the twentieth century was certainly a watershed in this respect, because it strengthened the Turkish element within the crumbling empire. The Asia Minor War (1919–22), an outcome of the long-term nationalist ‘Great Idea’ of the Greeks, provided Atatürk with an easily identifiable ‘national enemy.’ In fact, it is in this episode that we detect an actual turning-point in modern Turkish history. These developments certainly deserved more space in a book which is re-issued for the third time.

Even if one dismisses Lewis’ implicit equation of secularism and westernization with civilization, one cannot but notice a rehearsal of the typical American view of Islam: it is the evil and anomalous nature of the Oriental ‘other,’ which has to be obliterated at all costs.
It is not a coincidence that recently the American Atatürk Association presented Bernard Lewis with an Atatürk Award at a ceremony in the Turkish Embassy in Washington. The symbolic nature of the ceremony itself borders on irony: the award was handed to Lewis by the former US Deputy Defence Secretary and Pentagon advisor, Richard Perle. 'Democracy is one of the most difficult systems,' Lewis declared in his acceptance speech. 'It is a very strong medicine, and it might kill you, if you do not adjust the dosage well. Democracy, just like Atatürk’s reforms, should develop gradually,’ he said, adding that the Turks ‘were making progress’ in this respect.6 There is little need to add anything to this telling statement.

Notes

1. Erik-Jan Zürcher, 'The Rise and Fall of Modern Turkey', in The Turkology Update Leiden Project (TULP)’s Working Papers Archive, Leiden University’s Department of Turkish Languages and Cultures (May 2002).
3. Ibid., vii, ix.
5. Ibid., x.

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David Garrioch, The Making of Revolutionary Paris, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, University of California Press, 2002; xiv + 382 pp.; 0520232534, $34.95

Across the centuries Paris has had many faces. It was a political capital, with all the pageantry of monarchy and the intrigue of international diplomacy, apart from the century or so after Louis XIV built his palace and his counter-capital in neighbouring Versailles. It was a literary capital, the home of humanism and enlightenment and a place of pilgrimage for men of letters the world over. And, in a wider cultural context, it epitomized a whole gamut of qualities from good taste and sensibility to bohemianism and pleasure. But behind the façade of urbane sophistication, the city also had a darker, more disturbing side which, as Patrice Higonnet has recently shown,
simply added to its fascination. By the mid-eighteenth century, Paris had acquired a reputation for violence and political disorder which it has never lost. Its populace now seemed hot-headed and turbulent, already acquiring something of the character of what Louis Chevalier termed ‘dangerous classes’, so that a city that had once enjoyed a reputation for order and serenity was regarded across Europe as the capital of revolution.

In this book, David Garrioch attempts to explain this transformation in the image and the supposed character of Paris across the eighteenth century, the period when, he suggests, a law-abiding and self-regulating community was transformed into the lynch-mobs of 1789. It is a question that has long puzzled historians, and it is one which he is uniquely qualified to tackle, since he has devoted much of his academic energy to analysing the city’s population, defining its élites, and discussing the day-to-day comings and goings of its people within their discrete neighbourhoods. Was there, he asks, any real change, as opposed to merely a change in perception? Had Paris ever really been a law-abiding, religious, orderly city where people knew their place and were respectful of the sacrality of Church and King? Garrioch argues unambiguously that the eighteenth century saw a change in the mentality of the city that can loosely be defined as a process of secularization, dating from around 1750 and reflected in a greater sense of individual responsibility. This he sees as a significant change in popular culture, something that cannot be explained simply by the growth in the city’s population or by a huge influx of outsiders, irresistibly drawn to Paris by the promise of work or charity. The population explosion may have helped to expedite change, contributing to the decline of old city neighbourhoods and giving social relationships a more impersonal character. Yet the change itself was already happening. It was generated within Paris itself.

Paris in the early eighteenth century was largely left to order its own affairs, the royal officials who collected taxes or provided administration being dependent on the support of intermediaries from among the city’s élite. Everyday matters were managed by local people, whether through the trade guilds and other corporate bodies which ordered collective life, or through the network of parishes, and the all-important neighbourhoods that are the subject of one of the author’s previous books. They were, in the main, managed effectively, often with sensitivity and some awareness of economic realities, always with a degree of consent from those who lived locally. That, he believes, is the crucial ingredient that lies at the heart of Parisian stability: the existence of an urban community in which the vast majority of the citizenry held a stake. By the end of
the century, however, the corporate institutions which underpinned that stability had either disappeared completely, or seemed condemned to a lingering decline. Holy days and religious festivals no longer ceased to be days of popular rejoicing and revelry. Trade corporations and religious confraternities were abolished, while increasing religious scepticism led to the decline of the parish as a unit of communal life. The sense of neighbourhood was further diminished by decisions taken in the interests of urban planning and public health, while the growth of traffic, with the possibility of rapid travel for some at least among the population from one quarter to another, again threatened any remnants of local identity. This had the effect of reducing bonds of belonging, and with them ties of responsibility. Policing ceased to be the preserve of local communities within the city and was increasingly imposed from the centre by the lieutenant de police, with or without the consent of local people. In the process, Garrioch argues that the networks which had done most to provide the cement for any sense of community were eroded, and that the cohesion of early-modern Paris was largely destroyed. Paris was reborn as a new kind of city, one where individualism flourished and where much of the traditional social harmony was lost. The author obviously feels a certain empathy with the traditional ordering of urban life — he writes of the people of the capital with obvious sympathy and warmth — and argues that it was the loss of these community practices that did most to pave the way for the violent excesses of popular revolution in the last decade of the century.

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Puffed by Norman Stone as a ‘masterpiece’, Nicholas Farrell’s ‘new’ biography of Mussolini has caused a certain stir since its publication. The claim on its dustjacket that Mussolini may have had ‘better vision than Marx’, since, ‘whereas Communism appears terminally ill, Fascism’s Third way between Capitalism and Communism lives on, championed by standard bearers of the modern left such as New Labour’, raised some momentary waves. John Charmley in the *Spectator* hailed the work; David Aaronovitch in the *Guardian*
excoriated it. But the storm is best confined to a teacup. Farrell’s book is neither particularly new nor particularly interesting. If the wording of the title hints at an ambition to resurrect the Duce, it is a hope scarcely met in the detail of Farrell’s pages. Rather, Mussolini: A New Life is a Rightwards-leaning English journalist’s readable — but at times, hurried, superficial and confused — re-telling of a familiar tale.

Farrell hints that his decision in 1998, after leaving the staff of The Sunday Telegraph, to take up residence in Mussolini’s birthplace of Predappio, gives him special insight into the Duce. As an historian, it is implied, he may not have the blood, but he does have the soil. Certainly, the book begins with a touristic evocation of the Romagna where, we are told, wine is made from ‘very small, bitter-sweet, black Sangiovese’ grapes (1), wild boars rampage in the hills, superstitions about the full moon eddy through the popular mind, anti-clericalism is expressed in the local pasta called strozzapreti and pilgrims, full of faith and expectation, throng the Mussolini tomb. However, neither the raciness nor the warmth towards neo-fascism is consistently sustained.

As though a little uneasy with being a journalistic recounter of the past, Farrell does arm his findings with ‘Source Notes’. They chart a curious, but predictable, reading. Top of the list is Renzo De Felice’s ‘monumental biography’, although Farrell deems it ‘labyrinthine and impossible going for all but the very committed’ and ‘just over 7,000 pages’ long (my own tally is 6409). Whatever the total, Farrell alleges that the De Felice study contains ‘what far too many books on Mussolini in any language lack: facts — thousands of them’ (478). Farrell also notes his dependence on the eighteen-volume version of Mussolini’s Scritti e discorsi. Curiously, he seems to have preferred to use that edition rather than the more standard forty-four volumes of Mussolini’s Opera omnia, although there are some brief footnote references to them, too. Beyond that research, Farrell acknowledges his debt to a slew of published books, especially memoirs or accounts by other journalists. A self-styled enemy of the ‘chattering classes’ (as he tells his readers on numerous occasions), he dislikes academic histories and does not seem to have read many. The plain, blunt journalist he is, Farrell rejects the ‘baffling language’ of the ‘palin genetic definition’ (217) of Roger Griffin and he is rude about Stanley Payne’s complex theorizing. Farrell has not worked archivally.

As might be expected of a journalist, he can write serviceably, although wit is not his forte and too often he tells his favourite anecdotes, deploying his best lines more than once. Generally, his book could have done with a more rigorous sub-edit. The story is, nonethe-
less, a good one. Mussolini’s life is full of ‘colour’ (and Farrell can scarcely be expected to resist the chance to repeat vivid tales of sexual performance and to nourish the ‘romance’ which can readily enough be inscribed onto the Duce). It would be churlish to deny that Farrell can sometimes be an able chronicler — how nice to be reminded that the Duce was enough of an Italian male of his class and generation to expostulate in the dismal times of June 1943 that the current bad harvest could be overcome with a campaign of extermination against those birds who flew into Italian skies.

Hitler would never have dreamed of such an order, of course. And Farrell’s biography is emphatic that any comparison between Führer and Duce is mistaken and, very likely, driven by malign politics. Here, then, lies the major explanation as to why the biography made a certain initial splash in the press. Farrell’s aim, he says, is ‘to set the record straight’, a purpose made possible by the fact that ‘we live in post-Communist times and there are signs that we are moving into post-democratic times as well’ (xvii). In Farrell’s mind, the world, and especially the historiographical world, is divided between a hypocritical, or worse, ‘Left’, endlessly seduced by evil communism, and a virtuous other — not always well defined, but a cause which he and all honest men favour. In regard to the proper understanding of Mussolini, Farrell claims, their champion was, above all, De Felice.

And so Farrell treats us to a restatement of some classic De Felicean conclusions. Mussolini never ceased to be ‘really’ a socialist. D’Annunzio at Fiume ‘set the tone for all that followed’ (85). But Mussolini indeed ruled Italy; his life was ‘evidence that the great or bad man theory of history rather than the Marxist, determinist one is correct’ (113). Mussolini ‘achieved dictatorship by means of the force of law, not the force of violence. There was violence, though few deaths between 1925 and 1927. But he did not order it. For he knew that violence placed Fascism in great jeopardy’ (161). Fascism was a faith-inspiring religion, but ‘Italians never gave their consent to Fascism; they gave it to Mussolini’ (167).

Nor did the Duce possess a black record internationally. ‘Mussolini’s policy towards Germany was driven by fear of Germany, not a feeling that Fascism and National Socialism should work together to take over the world’ (242). British foreign policy was in any case responsible for throwing Duce and Führer together — Farrell politely cites ‘Professor Norman Stone’ for earlier reaching this conclusion in his brief biography of Hitler (255). ‘Mussolini allied with Hitler to control him. He did it not to hasten war, but to avoid it’ (313). The Italians may have used gas in their imperial campaigns, but so did others; and anyway, the Ethiopians, whose death toll cannot be estimated reliably, fired dumdum bullets and mutilated Italian soldiers.
Furthermore, 'the use of gas had little effect on the outcome of the war' (275). Mussolini was never antisemitic, even if on occasion he was anti-Jewish. In practice, he and his regime saved more Jews than did Schindler (xviii). Hitler’s evil was expressed first, and even exclusively, in the Holocaust but Mussolini, like other Italians, tried to save 'his' Jews. At Salò, Mussolini aimed to defend Italy as best he could but, in the end, he was again 'betrayed' by the Germans. The partisans were militarily useless. Controlled by the communists, in the Spring and Summer of 1945 they demonstrated themselves to be murderers. Neither international nor civil conflict was Mussolini’s fault. 'Hitler would lose his war in the end because it was the wrong war, Mussolini’s the right war' (369). As this last sentence shows, somewhere beneath the lapidary phrases and the either/or choices, with their evident ambition to deal with historical problems in much the same way that a ten-second soundbite for the six o’clock news resolves everyday political dilemmas, Farrell’s arguments are frequently confused or contradictory. Which of Mussolini’s set of wars was ‘right’, and when and how did they become so? After all, the De Feliceans themselves divide on quite a few issues and so there is not really a ‘line’ to follow — Farrell is too much an advocate of Mussolini altogether to adopt Emilio Gentile’s culturalist case about a real Italian totalitarianism. And, when Farrell himself strays into applauding D.H. Lawrence for detecting that Mussolini was ‘really’ the phallus, worshipped by all Italian women (227), or otherwise argues that Italians were and are colourful, lively, passionate, rhetorical and machiavellian, and that Mussolini was always an Italian, it can be assumed that retirement to Predappio has not taken all the Englishness (of a certain kind) out of the author.

In sum, Farrell’s book does not really amount to dangerously or excitingly slanted, revisionist history-writing, though perhaps its author entertained ambitions in that direction. His product is less bang and more whimper. Despite its occasional amusing moments, Mussolini: A New Life is at base a trite journalistic foray into the seemingly infinite market about Hitler and his friends.

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The subject of this book is not the military operations in defence of the Republic, but rather the political, social, and economic history of the republican zone. The military revolt of 18 July 1936 and the popular resistance to that revolt, left about one-third of Spain in the hands of the insurgent generals and two-thirds in the hands of the Republic. Neither side was prepared for a long war, but the generals had the great advantages of military discipline and large-scale material aid from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The un-warlike republican government had to re-establish the authority of civilian institutions, build an army, control the rivalries of a broad political spectrum from centrist democrats to communists and revolutionary anarchists, and seek the necessary foreign diplomatic and military aid to counterbalance the organizational and material superiority of the forces under General Franco.

The English scholar Helen Graham, already well known for her book on the socialist party during the civil war, and for numerous essays on key aspects of republican history, has produced a carefully documented, clearly written analysis of the enormous, and ultimately unsolvable, problems of the Republic. The first wartime government, that of the Left Republican José Giral, began to re-establish civilian authority and press its international claims as a legitimate government facing a military uprising. But the republican parties represented only the small, and not politically very active, professional and business middle classes. The government of Largo Caballero, from September 1936 to May 1937, engaged the loyalties of the working classes of both the socialist UGT and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, and brought into the government the rapidly growing Communist Party, and gradually restored the civilian court system and working relationships with the autonomous Basque and Catalan governments. But Largo lacked the knowledge of international affairs, and the personal energy necessary to supervise military operations, negotiate with the Soviet Union as the only power willing to sell arms to the Republic, and work to convince Britain and France that it would clearly be in their own interest not to let the Republic be replaced by a military dictatorship allied to the Rome–Berlin Axis.

From May 1937 until March 1939, the government of Dr Juan Negrín worked to strengthen centralized, civilian institutions; encourage open, if discreet, Catholic worship; make the necessary political concessions to Stalin to keep Soviet arms arriving; demon-
strate the fighting capacity of the Republican army at Teruel and in the Battle of the Ebro; and use his international scientific prestige and personal contacts to end the British-led policy of ‘Non-Intervention’, which was in fact strangling the Republic while ignoring the massive intervention of the fascist powers on behalf of General Franco.

In dealing with these successive governments, Graham shows how rivalries within the socialist and communist parties, material shortages, Catalan and Basque resentment of increasing wartime centralism, doubts on the part of French diplomats, war weariness among the general population, and — especially after the Munich pact — loss of faith among the best Republican military leaders, led to the inevitable collapse of Republican resistance in March 1939.

The author develops a number of interpretive ideas which will surely be of great interest to all serious students of the Republic. She illustrates in considerable detail the historic weaknesses of the Spanish state apparatus, the relative inefficacy of the several small republican parties in both Castilian Spain and Catalonia, the factionalism and ideological uncertainty within the Socialist Party, and the centrifugal influences — in a newly founded democratic polity — of anarchist, Catalan and Basque Nationalist doctrines. When that society was attacked by authoritarian military leaders backed by the confident and aggressive fascist powers, its greatest immediate political need was for a leadership, and minimal programme, that would unite the very heterogeneous elements of the Popular Front.

Graham shows in detail, without engaging in a propaganda battle, that in the specific circumstances of Europe in the years 1936–39, the Communist Party came closest to fulfilling that role. Both domestically and internationally, it took the position that the democratic capitalist state must be defended against fascism. It attracted to its ranks a high proportion of the most intelligent and ardent younger members of both the middle and working classes; and the many persons of all ages who felt gratitude to the Soviet Union as the only power defending the Republic in international diplomacy, selling arms in contrast to the Anglo-French appeasement policy, and contributing food and medical supplies without demanding payment.

The spirit of interclass solidarity and of anti-fascist unity without the requirements of Marxist dogma was on many specific occasions violated by Stalin’s obsession with Trotskyites, but real and imagined. But the party did not seek to destroy the many existing socialist cooperative and collectivized farms and industries. However, it insisted that winning the war must precede any further revolutionary projects, and that the war could only be won if Britain and France were convinced of the good faith of the democratic capitalist regime.
In broad terms, there was loyal cooperation between communist and non-communist defenders of the Republic from late 1936 to late 1938, during the premierships of Largo Caballero and Juan Negrín. No one who compares the day-to-day actions and policy decisions of the communists and of the British government in that period will accept the legend that Stalin ‘betrayed’ the Spanish Republic.

Also outstanding in terms of interpretation are the last two chapters, ‘Negrín’s War on Three Fronts’ (the effort to end the Non-Intervention policy, the effort to maintain an active military front, and the effort to maintain civilian production and morale) and ‘The Collapse of the Republican Home Front’. Negrín was the Republican leader who best understood the international situation. After Munich, he knew that the Republic could not win the war but he hoped, until March 1939, that by maintaining an army in the field he could somehow obtain international mediation that would force Franco to give minimal guarantees of life and liberty to the defeated Republicans. It was an impossible hope, due to the still dominant appeasement policy of Britain and France.

Gabriel Jackson


With the publication of *Charlotte Gray* by Sebastian Faulkes and the film of the same name, as well as recent television documentaries, the Special Operations Executive has been restored to the public consciousness at a level not seen since the 1950s. The journalist Russell Miller’s contribution to this burgeoning field is certainly timely, capitalizing on this interest.

*Behind the Lines* is a compilation of first hand accounts from veterans of the SOE and its American counterpart, the Office of Strategic Services. Miller interviewed sixteen people himself, some of whom were agents who operated in France and Norway, as well as members of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry and Headquarters staff. In addition to citing excerpts from interviews that he conducted himself, he also quotes from a number of other sources, including interviews found at the Imperial War Museum’s Sound Archive and transcripts for both the Channel 4 documentary *Churchill’s Secret Army* and the BBC2 series *Secret Agent*. Miller’s sources are not purely oral history interviews, however, despite the subtitle of the book, since he also uses diary entries, letters and memoranda now
housed in the Public Records Office in Kew and the National Archives in Washington. His purpose for publishing this work is to ensure that veterans ‘are able to tell their stories in their own words’ (xii) and this is certainly achieved. Miller’s editorial comments, which are italicized to enable the reader to differentiate between his remarks and the personal accounts, amount to a mere nine thousand words, comprising a page-and-a-half Foreword, a Postscript of four pages, a half-page introduction to begin each chapter and a cursory sentence prefiguring each veteran’s statement such as ‘Private Albert Adlington, technician at Station XV in Hertfordshire,’ (126).

Despite the concise nature of Miller’s editorial comments, he nevertheless manages to mislead the reader several times. For example, in a chapter entitled ‘First Forays’, he invokes an excerpt from Oliver Brown’s interview with the Imperial War Museum. Most readers would assume that Brown was an SOE agent who operated clandestinely in France, whereas in actual fact he was a Jedburgh (uniformed combatants who were parachuted into France after D-Day to liaise with local resistance groups and to organize arms drops). Brown’s testimony recalling his landing in France in mid-1944 can hardly be described as an initial incursion into resistance. One veteran who is the subject of a number of inaccuracies is SOE agent Yvonne Baseden. Miller asserts that she was arrested after four weeks, whereas she was actually operational for three months. He also alleges that she was repatriated from Ravensbrück Concentration Camp at the end of the war. However, Baseden was in fact on the last convoy administered by the Swedish Red Cross in April 1945 (a result of an agreement between Count Bernadotte and Himmler, allowing certain nations to leave the camp), and thus left Ravensbrück a couple of weeks before 8 May. A more grave error occurs in his editorial comment inserted in the middle of a statement by the SOE recruiter, Selwyn Jepson: ‘I recruited Odette, [SOE agent Yvonne Baseden], who subsequently got the George Cross . . . she had a husband and a couple of children’. Miller’s explanation, intended to clarify for the reader the identity of ‘Odette’, is highly misleading. Baseden, whose cover name was indeed Odette, neither received the George Cross nor was married. The Odette to whom Jepson is referring is Odette Sansom, who is often known simply by her forename as a consequence of the biography and film of that name. I find it particularly aggravating that Miller does not know who ‘Odette’ was, a lapse which rather confirms my initial feeling that this book, Miller’s twelfth, has been hastily produced for purely pecuniary reasons to coincide with the renewal of interest in SOE.

On a more positive note, Miller’s strength is in the rich material he selects for inclusion. For example, Miller incorporates a fascinating
memoir from Jean Holley, a SOE wireless operator who was based in Lyons before being arrested: ‘The mad thing was that when they beat me, I screamed with the pain, and eventually, one of the Germans asked me not to scream so loudly, because the hotel guests on the lower floors would be disturbed. And so I did scream less loudly!’ Miller selects interesting material on recruitment, training, imprisonment and preparations for D-Day, and there are chapters on the different theatres of war, including the Western European theatre (France and Norway), the Balkans, and the Far East. However, the inclusion of reports or letters at the end of each chapter, which have nothing to do with its content, is somewhat confusing. For example, the chapter on operations in France is concluded with a report discussing a rumour-spreading organization to be set up in Turkey. This is fascinating material, but Miller’s editorial incursions are clumsy and awkward.

Miller’s collection of oral history interviews and written reports elicits extraordinarily rich material and is a useful resource for those interested in reading the personal testimonies of veterans of two special operations organizations unmediated by the collator.

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