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John Hellman. *The Knight-Monks of Vichy France: Uriage, 1940-1945.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. xxii + 326 pp. $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-1690-8; $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-0973-3.

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Although it lasted just four years, the Vichy regime has proven to be, as the title of a recent book by Henry Rousso and Eric Conan reminds us, "*un passe qui ne passe pas*." The current trial of Maurice Papon, accused of complicity in crimes against humanity while serving as secretary general of the prefecture of the Gironde, is the latest reminder of the enduring impact of this period. The issue of justice, already terribly complex due to the nature of the crime and the half century that has since passed, has competed with the tattered, yet resilient, myths of Vichy. When the secretary of the *Academie francaise*, Maurice Druon, condemns the trial as benefiting only Germany; when the leader of the Gaullist party, Philippe Seguin, erupts that it is Gaullism and its eponymous founder who are the actual targets of the trial; when the current president of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, finds himself assailed by the political left and right for insisting upon the responsibility of the French state in the deportation of Jews from French soil to Auschwitz, the non-specialist is understandably perplexed.

Coincidentally, the Vichy specialist's equivalent to the *Guide for the Perplexed* has just celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Robert Paxton's *Vichy France* remains the standard work in the field of Vichy historiography: an enduring authority reflected in Paxton's role as expert witness at the Papon trial, as well as a symposium held this September at Columbia University to celebrate the work and the man. One of the book's many merits is its emphasis upon certain ideological, institutional, and administrative continuities which tied Vichy to both pre- and postwar France. This was a theme pursued by a number of the symposium's participants, including John Hellman, professor of history at McGill University. Hellman's topic was "communitarian non-conformism"–an interwar movement with roots in the resurgence of Catholic thought and activity which tried to tack a "third way" between the shoals of communism and capitalism. The nonconformists privileged non-conformist ideals such as anti-individualism, elitism, Europeanism, and expressed a certain disdain for democratic and republican practices and institutions.

The paper was engaging, combative, shrewd, and provocative (and occasionally a bit rambling)–the same qualities to be found in Hellman's *The Knight-Monks of Vichy France: Uriage, 1940-1945.* The second edition of the book has just been reissued by McGill-Queen's University Press (the first edition was published in 1993) and includes a new preface and a new final chapter which reveals the ties that bind Francois Mitterand, Paul Touvier, and Jean Moulin–a trio seeming to have little in common–to what Rousso, in another book, has called "the Vichy syndrome": namely, the ways in which the French have mythicized, denied, politicized, and only recently analyzed this chapter in their nation's history. Before discussing the contents and issues raised by this chapter, it is first necessary to recapitulate the argument of the earlier work.

Hellman contends that an important number of interwar French intellectuals–a number far greater than most historians have assumed–cultivated and disseminated an anti-liberal and anti-democratic agenda. This agenda was nourished, in large measure, by the Catholic intellectual renaissance of the early twentieth century, embodied in writers like Charles Peguy, Georges Bernanos, Leon Bloy, and Emmanuel Mounier. Very simply, these thinkers were fundamentally sceptical about the powers of reason, the benefits of industrial capitalism, the viability of individualism, and the desirability of modern democracy. A generation of young and mostly Catholic men–women rarely played significant roles in this male-dominated world, and Protestants and Jews were, of course, equally rarissime–fell under the spell of this communitarian, mystical, and almost inevitably reactionary and authoritarian world view. They, in turn, both reflected and helped influence the ideological underpinnings of the so-called National Revolution–the name given by the men of Vichy to their political enterprise. The "best and the brightest" of this generation–a group that includes such postwar intellectuals like

Hubert Beuve-Mery, Jean-Marie Domenach, and Jean Lacroix–were formed in the Ecole nationale de cadres. It is the story of this singular experiment which Hellman so ably recounts and analyzes.

The experiment was, in a narrow sense, aborted: the school was established in late 1940 and was effectively shut down by the Vichy authorities two years later. But despite its short life, the school's story is not quickly told–in part because it is steeped in several currents of French intellectual history, in part because the characters involved are so colorful and complex, and in part because the events tend to swing from the tragic to *opera bouffe*. The central figure, around whom these individuals and events swirled, was Pierre Dunoyer de Segonzac. Born into a traditionalist Catholic family, Dunoyer de Segonzac was raised in a milieu which scorned material and worldly success and cultivated the values of authority, loyalty and discipline. He eventually became an army officer (taking a particular interest in tank warfare), frequented a number of lay and religious Catholic circles, and was a great admirer of Marshal Louis Hubert Lyautey. In many of these respects, his career–as Hellman points out–resembles Charles de Gaulle's.

In the wake of France's defeat, Dunoyer de Segonzac aligned himself to the new regime led by Marshal Philippe Petain, to whom he would lend unwavering loyalty for the next three years. He developed the idea of an *ecole des chefs* (leadership school), largely inspired by the model of social service proposed by Lyautey, and was named to create and administer such an establishment. Although its original charter was quite modest–to train the leaders for the youth work-sites being created by Vichy, and whose purpose was to both form and control the young French men who could no longer serve in a reduced army–the school's ambitions were much greater. By the end of 1940, the school's purpose was to train an elite of leaders for a France transformed according to the criteria of the National Revolution. As Hellman writes, by late 1940 "the school began to self-consciously take on the role of avant-garde laboratory for the National Revolution" (p. 32).

Dunoyer de Segonzac succeeded in housing the school at the Chateau Bayard, a massive medieval pile overlooking the Alpine village of Uriage. As Hellman emphasizes, the setting was ideal for a community steeped in a mystical world view harkening to an idealized medieval past–where men were knights, women were women and all children were above average (if born into the right community and properly educated). One of the favorite teachers at Bayard, the professor of law Jean-Jacques Chevallier, asserted that the purpose of Uriage was to form a new kind of man, one that right-thinking women would welcome, because "if she is not spoiled by false ideas, conventions, or snobbishness, what she wants of a man, first of all, is to be a man. And the more and the better she is a woman, the more she harbors contempt for the womanish man. In that she is more than correct" (p. 49).

Though Hellman cannot resist arching his eyebrows from time to time, he takes all of this talk quite seriously–and this is one of the book's most important and controversial qualities. As he argues, Dunoyer de Segonzac and his disciples created and reflected a Vichy which "might have been"–one firmly constructed on an authoritarian, hierarchical, Catholic, and traditionalist foundation. United in a common hatred of all the ills associated with modernity, these men were soon referred to as the "moines chevaliers" (knight-monks). They energetically assumed the role, secure in the belief that they constituted an elite which would save France. But save the country from what and who? Although no love was lost for the German occupiers, the men of Uriage gave the impression that France was as much threatened by the evils of modern liberalism, capitalism, and individualism as it was by those of the Nazi occupation and totalitarianism.

It was only with the radicalization of Vichy, marked by the return of Pierre Laval to power and the occupation of southern France by the Germans in late 1942, that Uriage turns against the regime. But they would not yet question the person of Petain: convinced that the Marshal had become the effective prisoner of the collaborationist wing, the men of Uriage resisted on his behalf (this was far from unique among the early resisters; the best known example is probably Henri Frenay, the founder of the movement *Combat*, who was both an ardent Petainism and a resistant). But as Hellman observes, this was a "spiritual tightrope act that could not go on forever" (p. 170). Ultimately, the school was shut down in December 1942 and was turned over to the *Milice*, the collaborationist and paramilitary organization commanded by Joseph Darnand.

As for the men of Uriage, they regrouped, baptized themselves as an Order, and prepared for the Resistance. But the preparation did not require a knowledge of explosives or machine guns: "Rather than fighting for liberal or democratic values in an oppressive situation, the men of Segonzac's circle were preoccupied with promoting spiritual values in tightly disciplined, hierarchical communities such as their Order" (p. 195). Hellman here

shows some irritation with his subjects, who were less concerned with booting the Germans out of France than dilating on the world according to the right-wing intellectuals Mounier, Teilhard de Chardin, and Peguy. Not surprisingly, this impatience was shared by a number of resistance fighters, who, in the words of one representative, would have "infinitely preferred sweaters or pants" to the personalist and elitist discourses offered by these squads. While others welcomed the Order, Hellman insists upon the narrow basis for their engagement in the Resistance: these groups "served as a center for preserving, and further advancing, an anti-liberal and anti-republican, an all-transforming, French personalist and spiritual community that had been sketched out under the gigantic portrait of the Marshal in the lecture hall of the Chateau Bayard" (p. 205).

Hellman takes the story through the Allied landing in 1944, the eventual incorporation of the knight-monks into the ranks of the Resistance and the Forces francaises de l'interieur (despite de Gaulle's dislike for Dunoyer de Segonzac), and the many instances of courage and heroism shown by these men. Especially striking is the episode in which Segonzac confronts the commander of a German armored detachment and offers him terms of surrender as if he were a character from a medieval romance or the French officer in Renoir's *La Grande illusion*. The reader–and, one suspects, Hellman himself–is torn between admiration and exasperation (so well summed up by Beuve-Mery's remark: *Quelle connerie!*) at Segonzac's obstinate attachment to an outmoded code of chivalry.

In the end, however, Hellman refuses to ignore or relativize the intellectual sources of their engagement. Little wonder that his work has caused the gnashing of teeth among the survivors and their descendants (he himself notes the run-ins he has had with these individuals at various conferences). This stubborn emphasis upon the nature of the Uriage ethos is salutary. Not only does it remind us that a number of ideological paths could and did lead to the Resistance (a movement itself which made for strange bedfellows), but that such resistance could be, and was, no less motivated by the perceived menace from the west and American civilization than the threat posed by the totalitarianisms to the east. Moreover, Hellman traces the postwar itinerary of those intellectuals and institutions (from *Esprit* to *Editions du Seuil* to the *Ecole normale d'administration* to *Le Monde*) issuing from the Uriage mould, thus deepening our appreciation for the long-standing diffidence felt by the non-communist French left toward the United States.

Finally, as the newly-added final chapter on Mitterand suggests, the Uriage experience helps make sense of a political career which has long puzzled observers–namely, an itinerary that began on the extreme right during the interwar period, passed through Vichy before entering the Resistance, and concluded with the leadership of a recreated socialist party and an entire nation. If, as Hellman argues, one focuses upon Mitterand's early engagement in Catholic activism–which privileged the same bundle of values identified with Uriage–the logic of his political career becomes clearer. His membership in the extreme right wing movement *Croix de feu*, the attachment to Petain and his work for prisoners of war on behalf of Vichy (which notoriously earned him the Vichy award of the *francisque*), the obstinate postwar friendship with the former prefect of the police in Paris, Rene Bousquet (only revealed at the end of Mitterand's life), all follow, Hellman argues, in a direct line from his youthful attraction to Catholic traditionalism. As he asserts, "Mitterand did not change friends or ideas, much less dramatically 'break' with his past, as did resisters such as de Gaulle" (p. 244).

One might reply that Hellman commits a common sin of historians of ideas–namely, attributing intellectual motivation to actions which can be explained in other and less creditable ways. Is it possible that he gives too much credit to a man who, at least in the eyes of de Gaulle, was an *arsouille* (a thug) who had no ideals and was driven uniquely by the desire for power?-Alain Peyrefitte's just-published second volume of memoirs concerning his relationship with the General, *C'etait de Gaulle*, is very revealing on this topic. Or is it conceivable that, as befits an individual who named his natural daughter Mazarine, Mitterand simply enjoyed the Byzantine play of politics? The questions concerning the motivations of this complex individual will be debated for a long time. But thanks to this work of careful and passionate scholarship, the intensity and quality of the debate have been heightened.

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