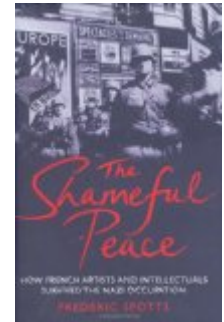


Frederic Spotts. *The Shameful Peace: How French Artists and Intellectuals Survived the Nazi Occupation.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 283 pp. Illustrations. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-13290-8.



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"Culture," Frederic Spotts announces with characteristic boldness in his introduction, "makes academic historians nervous. They like to deal with documents and quantifiable data. They think of the arts as entertainment, not as a quintessential part of the fabric of the nation" (p. 2). This tendency, he continues, alongside a preference for the "seemingly more macho topics of politics and economics" (p. 2), has resulted in the study of cultural and artistic life being a "gaping omission" (p. 3) in the historiography of occupied France. Reading such claims, countless academic historians will feel, to say the least, rather hard-done-by.

First among those to refute such statements would be those academic historians upon whose work Spotts has drawn extensively. Just a brief glance at the bibliographic essay at the end of Spotts's account reveals that his introductory comments are greatly overstated. Among the general overviews of the period, Philippe Burrin's *La France à l'heure allemande* (1995), Spotts concedes, has "several valuable chapters on cultural

affairs" (p. 265). He acknowledges his debt to, among others, Stéphanie Corcy's *La vie culturelle sous l'Occupation* (2005); Jean-Pierre Rioux's edited volume, *La vie culturelle sous Vichy* (1990); Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh's collection of essays, *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation* (1989); and Gilles and Jean Robert Ragache's *La Vie quotidienne des écrivains et des artistes sous l'Occupation* (1988); as well as to several works on single cultural figures and art forms. "But," Spotts insists, "amid all the vast bibliography of those years, there is no single book offering some idea of what daily life was like for individuals across the range of arts and letters" (p. 2). This claim, at least as far works in English are concerned, is perhaps more justified. And it is this gap in the market that Spotts seeks to fill, promising the reader "a glimpse into the life of a number of artistic and intellectual figures--villains, heroes and *attentistes*--who lived through those dark times" (p. 4).

Spotts's account of artistic and intellectual life in occupied France charts the course of a wide va-

riety of individuals involved in the visual arts, literature, publishing, music, dance, theatre, and cinema. It is, for the most part, a series of miniatures. One character sketch follows another at a steady pace, each rich in human detail and amply illustrated with anecdotes garnered from diaries, memoirs, and biographies. His subjects range from Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse to Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Robert Brasillach, from Sacha Guitry and Jean Gu  henno to art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and ballet dancer Serge Lifar. In his introduction, Spotts preempts criticism of his selection criteria and the lack of an overarching thesis: "It might be objected that such a limited selection of examples gives a limited and disjointed picture of those years. Indeed it does, for the good reason that the Occupation was a disjointed affair, allowing few reliable generalizations. There were forty million French at the time and forty million stories of living through those years" (pp. 4-5).

Of these forty million stories, Spotts has selected roughly twenty main characters, at least as many supporting roles, and the usual cast of "cultured" German occupiers (notably the prolific diarists and memoirists Ernst J  nger, Otto Abetz, Gerhard Heller, and Karl and Alice Epting). Some figures are chosen for the fame of their artistic achievements, others for the infamy of their collaboration. Though Spotts's selection criteria are open to debate, merit can be found in the sheer breadth of his coverage. In his biographical sketches he treats art dealers and collectors as well as artists; publishers, censors, and booksellers as well as writers; and composers and performers as well as their managers (and their audiences). From the fragments a complex picture emerges of the constraints and possibilities of artistic production and performance in the cultural, political, social, and economic climate of the occupation years.

Spotts highlights the predicament facing cultural figures after the defeat of France and the ex-

pansive grey area between the black and white concepts of collaboration and resistance: "in the case of cultural figures what was collaboration? Was it accepting German hospitality to visit or perform in Germany, attending a reception hosted by a German official or even just seeking German approval to publish a book, perform a play or exhibit a painting? And what was resistance--fleeing the country, refusing to publish, to exhibit or to perform? Or was it just the opposite--staying to fling French culture into the face of the Occupier" (p. 4)? In Spotts's character sketches, the motivations of cultural figures in negotiating this dilemma appear as diverse as their actions and their prewar biographies. Those who welcomed the opportunities offered by collaboration were motivated by varying combinations of greed, ambition, pacifism, anticommunism, antisemitism, admiration for German culture, financial hardship, and genuine political conviction. Not having to make difficult choices, however, was a luxury few could afford. It was available either to those who had the financial means to emigrate or work in isolation, or to those who enjoyed a high enough reputation to shun further self-advancement, to be offered help from others, or, as in the case of a figure of such symbolic import as Picasso, to be left in relative peace by an occupier keen to avoid international outcry.

Julian Jackson has commented perceptively that "the post-war reputations of those [artists and intellectuals] who stayed in France have often been based more on rumour and innuendo than a balanced assessment of their conduct during the Occupation."^[1] To a certain degree, Spotts's detailed biographical sketches contribute to a more balanced assessment. He captures the sheer variety of experience and scope of possible action and successfully conveys a postwar atmosphere of finger-pointing, rumor, and denial, in which a single comment or gesture could be reinterpreted as an act of brave resistance or of treacherous collaboration. Though he is severely critical of some postwar attempts at self-justification, such as those of

Lifar, the head of the Paris Opera ballet, whom he brands "a scoundrel, a backstabber and cheat" (p. 208), he takes care otherwise not to pass judgment or to condemn particular individuals and acts. Aware of the "soggy legal terrain" (p. 256) on which postwar purges and trials were based, he instead seeks only to illustrate the problematic "inequity of treatment" (p. 258) when it comes to the severity of sentencing, the harshness of public condemnation, or the speed of postwar rehabilitation.

Spotts highlights, for example, the unequal postwar treatment of pianist Alfred Cortot and opera singer Germaine Lubin, whose behavior during the occupation, we learn, was more or less comparable. Cortot, he complains, received "the merest tap on the wrist" while Lubin was "arrested five times, spent months in appalling prisons while awaiting various trials, saw her Paris apartment and her country château confiscated, was sacked for life from the Paris Opera, accused of treason and imprisoned for three years and banished from France" (p. 198). Spotts acknowledges the difficulty in judging figures from different branches of the arts by the same standards, but also seeks through frequent comparison to find a common basis on which degrees of cultural collaboration can be assessed. Here, Cortot again comes out rather badly: "If more than a dozen writers deserved to be found guilty of treason and sentenced to death or life imprisonment for supporting the Germans in their writings then Cortot merited a similar sentence for volunteering to perform fifteen times as a guest of the government of the Third Reich, for celebrating the propagandistic Breker exhibition, for being pals with prominent Nazi bigwigs such as Speer, [and] for writing a German-friendly article in a German-sponsored publication" (p. 197). Though he is clearly harsher on some figures than others, the diverse range of Spotts's subjects, along with his tendency to draw such comparisons, allows for something approaching a sense of balance. The wartime activities and the postwar treatment of

each character are assessed, but only in relation to the actions and experiences of others.

On numerous occasions, however, it appears that Spotts has not been able to heed Jackson's warning about the dangers of "rumor and innuendo." The predominance of anecdotal evidence and lack of systematic citation and referencing will certainly be a major concern to those historians who, as Spotts condescendingly asserts in his introduction, "like to deal with documents and quantifiable data" (p. 2). This is not to suggest that Spotts is uncritical of his sources: he warns readers of the pitfalls of the most fanciful memoirs and hagiographic appraisals. But a danger is always lurking in Spotts's anecdotal evidence which (more, dare I say, than "culture") will make historians nervous. To take just one example, Guitry's claim in his memoirs never to have had a German seated at his table is rejected by Spotts as an outright lie (and quite rightly so, as any number of other accounts will attest). In refuting Guitry's claim, however, Spotts assures his reader that Guitry was dining with Germans within just a few days of their arrival in Paris. He bases this assertion on an anecdote in Paul Léautaud's diary, not drawn from Léautaud's own experience, but an account of what "a friend" had in turn been told by the maître d'hôtel at Maxim's. True or not, this claim is characteristic of Spotts's enthusiasm for anecdotal evidence. On other occasions, moreover, Spotts is less precise about the source of his anecdotes.

Though some of his anecdotal evidence may need to be treated with caution, no doubt remains that Spotts's book provides a colorful account of the extraordinary opportunities for self-advancement offered by the occupation and a believable, and critical, portrayal of the cultural boom of the war years. In terms of cultural output, Spotts reminds us, the occupation years were exceptionally productive. Picasso alone is credited with producing 1,473 works between the outbreak of war and the liberation. 220 feature films were pro-

duced in France, of which all but 35 were made in the occupied zone. Across France, more than 400 plays were performed. Spotts is right, of course, to point out that the "sheer number of works" may be one thing, though "quality was something else" (p. 24), but such evidence is nonetheless important in counterbalancing the stereotypical image of the war years as a period of nothing but cold, hunger, and suffering. Yet, perhaps surprisingly given recent attempts to nuance the monolithic interpretation of the occupation as "les années noires," most notably Robert Gildea's *Marianne in Chains* (2002), Spotts never strays far from the notion that the occupation years were, for all involved, "dark times." "A history of the Occupation," he concludes with typical melodrama, "is the story of how forty million French along with a million or so Germans lived together as prisoners in a nightmare world created by one man—an evil genius headquartered in Berlin.... The artists and intellectuals among them behaved as all human beings behave in dark times. In ways honourable and dishonourable they sought to survive" (p. 254). Notwithstanding its intermittent clichés and oversimplified portrayals of National Socialist rule in Europe, as evidenced in the last quotation, Spotts's account is rich in human detail and successfully captures the sheer diversity of artists' and intellectuals' experiences in occupied France.

Note

[1]. Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-44* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 301.

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