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Jean Guéhenno, *Diary of the Dark Years, 1940-1944: Collaboration, Resistance, and Daily Life in Occupied Paris*. Trans. David Ball. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014 (French edition, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1947 and 2002). xxxii + 304 pp. Photographs, biographical dictionary, appendix, and index. \$29.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-997086-5.

Review by Lynne Taylor, University of Waterloo.

A diary is a fascinating thing to read, but always a challenge to review. Due to its very nature, it has no overarching theme or argument, but instead rambles through the reality of the diarist's daily life and thoughts, no matter how much that diarist might want it to be something more. In that ramble, however, much is revealed—both about the diarist himself (in this instance), and about the times in which the diarist lived. This holds true for *Diary of the Dark Years*. As succinctly explained on the book's dust jacket, Jean Guéhenno was “a well-known political and cultural critic, left-wing but not communist, and uncompromisingly anti-fascist.” He refused to publish during the period of the Nazi occupation and control of French publishing, but kept this diary instead. As the translator, David Ball, explains in his “Translator's Introduction,” this “has been the book French readers have turned to most readily for an account of life under German occupation” (p. xi). For that reason alone, it is a significant book, now made accessible to an anglophone audience in what is a powerful translation.

Much has been made in other discussions of Guéhenno's decision not to publish and his derision of those who decided to continue to do so, in spite of Nazi control of the industry. It is worth acknowledging his disdain for these fellow authors (dismissed as the “posturing of a slave” [p. 137]), while shifting focus to other themes that arise from the diary. One such theme that permeates the first half of the book is the ongoing dialogue with the diary (and therefore himself) about the consequences of this decision. If a writer forbids himself to publish, what is he supposed to do? How can a writer not write? Part of the solution was this diary, an attempt perhaps to bring structure to his life and his thoughts, the one place where he felt free to voice what he felt he could not voice publicly. At one level, he found it an unsatisfying exercise, explaining it this way: “The self one relates in a diary is most often only a loose, anecdotal, and chancy self. The only self worth anything is one that is constructed and desired” (p. 87). Too often, he observed, “the enormity of events makes this diary seem silly” (p. 95). It was “too external..., [not used enough] for inner prayer, to construct [himself]” (p. 160). Later, in October 1943, when it was clear the war had turned against Germany, Guéhenno flipped through his notebooks and was appalled by what he found: “So many contradictions! How events and circumstances bowl up over and drive us this way or that! How our kingdom is this world, whether we like it or not! And how much we are subjected to the confusion of this kingdom!” (p. 218). Nonetheless, from these contradictions and that confusion, one can learn a great deal.

The diary was one of the few places where he could articulate the shame and disdain he felt for the Vichy regime (although even there, he states, he was circumspect about what he would commit to paper, for fear of the diary being discovered by the occupiers or the regime), and explore the despairing intellectual and moral state of his fellow French citizens. His preoccupations, as evidenced in the diary, then were less the reasons for France's defeat, but her reaction to defeat and occupation; the miseries of daily life and the losses of freedom; and the impact of the regime and the occupation on the young men

in his classroom (he taught in Parisian lycées, and until the late Occupation, only the prestigious *khâgnes*, post-graduate secondary school classes which prepared students for the entrance examination of the École Normale).

Guéhenno was deeply affected by the defeat and occupation, and deeply ashamed by France's collaboration. While he had sworn not to publish, it did not mean he would cease writing—an impossibility for a writer such as he. His solution was to escape his self-imposed shackles, as well as those imposed by the regime, both by throwing himself into a grand project of re-reading the classical texts and by launching a second writing project, a life of Rousseau—intended to be a major opus (as well as keeping this diary). The life of Rousseau would fill the days without requiring him to seek its publication for years, thus allowing him to continue to write without facing the dilemma of dealing with a Nazi-controlled press. And it would mean he would continue to be intellectually engaged, as one of Guéhenno's biggest fears was to lose the intellectual engagement and stimulation that was the foundation of his life prior to the Occupation. Finally, it would be a way “to lose oneself in someone else” and escape the desolation that was daily life under the Nazis and Vichy (p. 82).

A resolution not to publish also did not mean disengagement from the intellectual debates of the time, although engagement had to be done carefully. In defiance, he continued to attend talks (even if the objective going in was simply to heckle the speaker, as was the case of a lecture given by François Mauriac), read newly published works by fellow intellectuals less principled than he, and meet with friends and intellectual colleagues. These exercises simply fed his disdain for the intellectual sycophants, even those who pretended to be courageous by criticizing the Germans, but who then whitewashed the criticism with fawning compliments; “every criticism turns into a bow that degrades them still more” (p. 132). It was a depressing exercise, ultimately, as Guéhenno found the work was generally too “stupid” and fawning to invite rigorous intellectual engagement (p. 94).

Of greater concern and preoccupation were his prospective *Normaliens*, the students he taught. As the war dragged on, Guéhenno felt himself increasingly out of step with the rest of France, referring to himself as “a guitar that is out of tune” (pp. 30 and 36) and his diary explores the deep division in France between those who refused to accept the defeat and those who embraced the new order. He was appalled by how this was manifested in his classes, by the number of his students who appeared to have been won over by the new order and collaboration, and the growing presence of informers among the student population. In the first years of Vichy, he wrote that he had never seen such “flabbiness and inertia” and “terrifying indifference” to current events among his students (p. 188). It made teaching the classic texts a challenge, but inspired him to fight back by using those texts to challenge the students' inertia, indifference, and drift to Vichy. After all, he wrote, the purpose of teaching was “to train teachers who will make men. [Teachers] should awaken a great sense of curiosity in students, a sense of what is universal and human, so that later, when those students will themselves become teachers, the fever of knowledge and a kind of human fervor become the driving force even in the smallest schools...” (p. 143). The best revenge was “to have some soul, to say no” (p. 143), with whatever gesture was available. So his goal became to present them with “the great choices they could make in their lives, which would galvanize them, ennoble them,” the options that they no longer realized were theirs because Vichy only required obedience and submission (p. 189). And he used the classic texts that he taught in his courses on the history of ideas (especially those of the Enlightenment) to instill in his students a dream of freedom, honour and nobility of spirit, and to expose them to the ideals of the revolutionaries and of the great thinkers of republican France.

As the war progressed and ultimately turned against Germany, and especially when the STO (*Service du Travail Obligatoire*) began to reach into the ranks of his *Normaliens*, Guéhenno detected what he considered a shift in his students' attitudes, perhaps better described as a hardening of positions. His exploration of the students' perspectives on the future of France and their place in it—what will France look like after the war is over (now that it is obvious that the Germans are ultimately going to lose the

war)—is a fascinating, albeit second-hand, insight at the individual and personal level into a segment of the population important not only for the shaping of the remainder of the occupation, but the postwar period as well. Interestingly, this became the chief preoccupation of the latter half of the diary (or at least of what Guéhenno decided to have published), rather than the intellectual sterility of those who continued to publish (although several acerbic asides do dot the last half). He despaired of a young Egyptologist's arrogant scorn for those Frenchmen working an assembly line upon which he had been required to work in order to avoid being sent to Germany and who he dismissed as "idiots" (p. 225), as well as his failure to feel any sympathy for these men.

This young man represented, in Guéhenno's mind, all that was ugly about his *Normaliens*. On the other hand, he gloried in the valour and honour, as he saw it, of the young men who made up the maquis, who condemned their fathers for having abandoned France and accepting defeat, and who were determined to regain France's lost honour, even at the cost of their own lives. In this way, Guéhenno argued, these young men had rediscovered the true idea of freedom, that "it can only exist when one is ready to die for it" (p. 234). He also sympathized with their despair that the general population of France was not following them, but instead, was swayed by Vichy's propaganda which painted them as outlaws and bandits. In each case, the conversation touched on France's future and the place of both communism and de Gaulle in it. In his long discussions of his students, their weaknesses, their beauty of spirit and thought, their innocence, and even his frustrations with their sometimes vacuous thinking, one senses the deep dedication of a true teacher, one devoted to his students and to his craft, and who genuinely cared about what happened to them—both physically (especially as recruitment for the STO became more and more aggressive) and intellectually.

He repeatedly asserted that the diary would not focus on the daily miseries of the occupation, nor on the events of the war, but these were unavoidable and both were constant threads. Food shortages, the cold, the dreary silence of the city, "the monotony and the resigned stupidity of life in Paris" (p. 144) could not be ignored—it was too relentless. The daily reports of random hostages executed as punishment for acts of sabotage by the resistance, maquisards hanged, round-ups in Paris, mass deportations, farmers shot for feeding the maquis, the persecution of the Jews—he wrote about them all with a kind of horrified fascination. The progress of the war was followed closely (despite a pledge to not discuss it), its major defeats recorded in anguish; its victories, in agonizing anticipation.

It is ironic, then, that throughout the diary, he also wrestled with the apathy and indifference of the general population. "They are stunningly stupid," he wrote in April 1941. "Few men deserve freedom. Perhaps that is why it is dying" (p. 80). By 1943 and 1944, he had become a bit more sympathetic. During the summer of 1943, he finally was able to cross the demarcation line to return to his home village of Montolieu. Home village perhaps, but not home. In spite of its being his grandfather's village and his deceased wife's resting place, he was a "foreigner" (p. 211), and did not interact to any great degree with the villagers. At the same time, he was astonished to discover that, in the few conversations he did have with locals, these "economical ants," as he called them, who lived like a Brueghel painting, still had at least a vague understanding of France, freedom and honour, even if they did not have "enough vital force inside them" to act upon it (pp. 213, 214). To his credit, he occasionally recognized this irony, that he himself had failed to truly act upon his cries to defend France's honour, as the maquisards had, and condemned himself for it. But in the end, he describes himself as having sunk into "that cesspool" (p. 154), listening to the news on the radio of hostages shot, lives lost, bombings and, in the next minute, savouring the taste of a glass of wine and admiring a new iris in the garden. When, towards the end, he and his friends justifiably fear arrest, they chose not to go into hiding, not as an act of defiance, but rather simply out of a wish not to abandon their classes, their lycées. As he wrote, "everyone follows the facile path of little duties" (p. 252). It is a particularly self-deprecating comment, perhaps reflecting a frustration with what he seemed to consider his own lacklustre contribution to the fight for France (no matter what contribution to the resistance he made and was not able to record in

the diary). It is a contradiction that Guéhenno never resolved, leaving it to the reader to draw whatever conclusions she can.

In his preface, Guéhenno declares that, “since we were in prison, we had to live like prisoners and at least hold on to a prisoner’s honor: fully appreciate our servitude, the better to find an intense, living freedom inside ourselves” (p. xxviii). In this diary, we see one man’s attempt to do that, to recognize the servitude to which he and his fellow citizens were subjected every day, both the horror and the mundane, and his drive to understand that servitude and, most importantly, to explore the reactions to that servitude, no matter how unflattering the observations that might result from that exploration. In his refusal to publish, Guéhenno declared himself to be taking “refuge in my real country. My country, my France, is a France that cannot be invaded” (p. 3). While this inner France could not be physically invaded, what the diary makes clear is that the country’s physical invasion still shook Guéhenno’s understanding what France was—in his deep plumbing of the ordinary people of France and of his students at the lycée, Guéhenno was faced with a much more complex and divided France than he had, perhaps, realized existed, one with which he often felt greatly out of step. “Twenty or thirty years ago, I thought I knew who I was and what I had to do in this world,” he wrote, “Now I have trouble finding my way” (p. 160). His retreat into that inner France did not allow him to ignore the fissures in French society that the occupation brought to the surface—intellectual, class, generational, rural/urban. Instead, he was forced to confront the juxtaposition of what he believed to be the true France with the France in which he found himself living. For this reader at least, Guéhenno’s worrying at the holes in the fabric of French society was one of the most revealing aspects of the diary. It is a rewarding work worth savouring slowly, as you dip into the life and mind of Jean Guéhenno.

Lynne Taylor
University of Waterloo
ltaylor@uwaterloo.ca

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