H-France Review Vol. 3 (April 2003), No. 37

Antoine Prost, *Republican Identities in War and Peace: Representations of France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2002. xi + 288 pp. Pictures, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $75.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-85973-621-1; $25.00 U.S. (pb). 1-85973-626-2.

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Historians of France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will, at some point in their careers, have run across the work of Antoine Prost, one of the most prolific and perceptive historians of the last third of the twentieth century. From his *thèse* on the veterans of the First World War, through analyses of the language of politics in the Third Republic and studies of urban social structure to an interest in popular commemoration and cultural memory, Prost has contributed in significant ways to virtually all of the varied directions that the last generation of historians of France has pursued.[1]

This volume reprints thirteen of Prost's articles, ranging in time from a quantitative analysis of voting in the Chamber of Deputies in the 1880s, first published in 1971, to one on the impact of the Algerian War on French cultural memory, published in 1999. All have been previously published, but since some are translated into English for the first time, and some were published in anthologies or journals not widely available, this collection should bring them to a wider audience.

The articles in this collection are divided into three different categories and demonstrate the breadth of Prost's interests throughout his career. The first is national identity and considers war memorials and representations of the Great War, the ways the battlefield at Verdun has functioned as a site of memory in twentieth-century France, the Algerian War, and the primary schools created by the Third Republic. The second section, entitled "Identities and Civil Society," includes essays on the occupational composition of the population of the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris in 1936, the celebration in Orléans of the feast of Joan of Arc, and two essays on youth in twentieth-century France. The final section, concerned with the rhetoric of political conflict, includes studies of the vocabularies used in different situations in French political history: the legislature elected in 1881; the late nineteenth-century labor movement; French veterans between the wars,;and the 1936 Popular Front strikes.

Each of these essays, at the time it was written, made both substantive contributions and methodological suggestions about the study of nineteenth-and twentieth-century French history. They contribute to the current emphasis on the study of cultural memory as an aspect of political culture.[2] They reflect the interest in the 1970s and 1980s in the history of the family and in the life cycle.[3] And they show an appreciation of the importance of language as a measure and a dimension of cultural history.[4] It is worth asking, in light of the effort to make these essays more widely available, what they have to say to present-day and future historians and to what extent they remain important influences on the research agendas of current historians of nineteenth- and twentieth-century France.

Prost's style in these essays is to focus on the results of very specific research studies and to eschew grand conclusions. He is also not given, in these essays, to explicit articulation of the place of each individual study in a larger research agenda or of what it contributes to an overall interpretation of modern French history. These essays therefore do not present themselves in a broad framework. The volume as well includes no introduction, conclusion, or other statement by Prost as to the current relevance of these articles, the process by which they were selected, or the general intellectual trajectories he has followed in the course of his research. This is not, therefore, a collection with an overarching thesis by the author against which to judge each of the contributions. Instead, the closest to this is found in an introduction by Jay Winter, the editor of the series on "The Legacy of the Great War" in which the book is published. This introduction, entitled "Antoine Prost and the History of Civil Society," attempts to place Prost's work in the larger framework that Prost himself does not provide.

The volume is clearly intended to be a recognition of what Winter sees as the path-breaking work by Prost on a number of historical topics. "What Prost has managed to do," he says, "is to anticipate and to a degree to help shape a fundamental transformation in the way historical study is conducted" (p. 5). He then lists the "linguistic turn," the notion of "representations," the concern with the life histories of workers in labor history, and the histories of sociability, family life and education, and political vocabularies, both of workers and of bourgeois politicians. "One of the signs of pioneering scholarship is the capacity to chart the direction of a scholarly field before others move that way. Prost has accomplished this conjuring trick," Winter concludes, "not once but several times" (p. 5).

This is a considerable claim, and one that, by and large, Prost's work seems to support. He has been, clearly, one of the most important contributors to our understanding of modern French political and social history, especially that of the early Third Republic of the 1880s, the impact of the Great War, and the period between the wars. The wide range of his work, Prost's caution in drawing conclusions, and Winter's far-reaching claims for it, do not make reviewing this *apéritif* (Winter's word) easy. But it seems to me that two questions in particular need to be addressed in an evaluation of this volume: first, the relevance of Prost's work to the framework Winter suggests, civil society; and second, the continued significance of the methodological forays that, as Winter says, Prost has made over the course of his scholarly career. Are the ways he chose to examine education, youth, language, and sociability still useful avenues to a better understanding of the French past, or have they turned out to be dead ends?

First, civil society. This has been one of the most fashionable buzzwords of social science in the past decade. Prost himself hardly ever uses this phrase, and then only to describe a kind of residue of the public at commemorations who are not civic or religious officials (pp. 164-165). We do not, therefore, have a concerted attempt here by Prost to describe what he means by this important but ambiguous concept. The task is then left to Winter, for whom civil society means what he calls a Scottish Enlightenment version of civil society, "that field of social, cultural and economic life that spans the space between the family and the state" (p. 1). He claims that Prost has moved away from "a fascination with, or even an obsession with, state power [in social and economic history] by showing that there is nothing anemic or fundamentally flawed about civil society in France" (p. 1). Prost's essays on education, on the ways French soldiers discussed the war, on youth, and on cities (Paris and Orléans) are, for Winter, early and significant contributions to the study of civil society.

For historians, concepts such as civil society both organize the disparate evidence we have of the past and suggest aspects of that past that are amenable to the kind of empirical investigation that historians, rummaging through archives, employ. Is civil society, either in the explicit form that Winter uses or the implicit way it informs Prost's work, useful from this point of view? The concept itself has been ambiguous, especially in the way it sets up the relationship between state and society. In the Scottish Enlightenment referred to by Winter, David Hume and Adam Smith did indeed convert the juridical concept of civil society of natural law lawyers and the Glorious Revolution into one that emphasized

more the sphere of commerce and manufacture, an area separate from the state, in which events occurred that affected the well-being of the community.

This is, however, a residual and passive version of civil society, and we should set next to it another version of civil society elaborated at the same time in the work of Adam Ferguson, in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), which placed the concept more firmly in the framework of a theory of active citizenship, emphasizing the importance of self-government by independent, moral, and active men.[5] Ferguson's work tended to disappear from the Scottish tradition, but ironically it is the ability of his theory to link society and state--concepts separated in much nineteenth-century theorizing--that makes it more powerful today. The concept of civil society emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a way of understanding developments in the Peoples' Democracies of Eastern Europe, describing an area of public activity independent of the state from which dissident groups--Solidarity in Poland, New Forum in East Germany, Charter 77 and Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia--could launch attacks on the authoritarian governments of those countries. The growth of non-governmental organizations and, especially as the world economy became increasingly globalized in the 1990s, the encouragement of laissez-faire policies aimed at removing state intervention in the economy and eliminating national constraints on international trade became cornerstones of the policies of the United States, the World Trade Organization, and many other groups.[6]

Prost never directly addresses the implications of his individual studies for an understanding of the history of civil society in modern France, and so any conclusion about the importance of his work for our understanding of this history must be drawn by the reader. Clearly the French state is an important actor in virtually all of these essays, which, therefore, show the weakness of a version of civil society that postulates it as separate from the state. Prost shows, over and over, that civil society has been intimately associated with the state in France in the last two centuries.

But Prost does not elaborate on the organization of civil society, the form of its relationship to the state, or the history of that relationship over time. Especially in light of the theoretical importance of civil society in recent theories of democracy, and the importance in modern French historiography of questions about the French ability to construct a workable democratic political system, it is noteworthy that Prost only rarely makes civil society an active participant in the process by which France has moved, albeit haltingly, towards a democratic society and polity since the Revolution. His essay on veterans' disdain for politics between the world wars is the only one of these essays that directly confronts the relationship between the associational life he describes and the political processes of the French Republic. But this essay is primarily concerned with political language, and even here he does not reflect on the larger implications of the difficulties veterans had in participating in republican political life. Instead, the principal conclusion he draws is the failure of veterans' language to conform to the "reality" of the period. While Prost has elaborated some of the groups and processes that make up French civil society--most notably, of course, the veterans' groups after the Great War--his work in and of itself does not necessarily point historians in that direction. A history of civil society can only be read retrospectively in these essays.

While one cannot in fairness critique Prost for his unwillingness to go beyond the immediate evidence and subject that each of these essays examines (caution that is normally considered a virtue in an historian), there are two further difficulties that suggest that his work, as important as it is in some respects, nonetheless is limited in its current relevance. First, his emphasis on language, while interesting and of some use for students of Third Republican politics, employs a methodology that counts the frequencies of words in texts but removes these individual words from their contexts. The essays here that employ this methodology therefore do not examine the narratives within which the words are used. While his results are certainly of interest, they provide only a partial insight into the use of language by these groups, and need to be complemented and completed by closer attention to the ways in which the words acquire their meanings in a narrative context, as has been done by other

historians.[7] These essays therefore may be read as a kind of "linguistic turn" but are not likely to resonate with historians influenced by the approaches associated with the 1980s' emphasis on language or what is now called cultural studies. The quantitative approach that Prost takes hides the subtleties of meaning that contemporary cultural historians find so important in the language of the past.

Secondly, these essays almost completely ignore the subject of gender. His essay on the population of the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris in 1936 pays almost no attention to a possible (and probable) sexual division of labor in that neighborhood. The central focus of his research over the years--veterans--of course consists of males and so is not easily related to the social history of women practiced in the 1970s and 1980s. But Prost also shows no concern for the cultural aspects of gender, especially the ways in which gender identities are constructed. That veterans groups were masculine is not viewed by Prost as anything other than an unproblematic characteristic, although it would certainly be interesting to know in what way the experience of the war affected the construction of masculinity by the generations of Frenchmen who fought the Great War and the Algerian War. And, as Mary Louise Roberts has shown, gender was a site in which other concerns were played out in post-World War I France.[8] Prost's apparent blindness to this subject, therefore, limits the continued relevance of his work.

Since historians build to a great extent on the work of their predecessors, the wider availability of these articles, especially to an English-reading audience, is a positive aspect of the book. Yet it does seem to me that they are, at best, uneven as examples of the kind of methodologies that historians of the twenty-first century will use. Finally, these essays also underscore the need for historians to search for the larger implications of their work even in the most focused research project.

NOTES

[1] Antoine Prost, *Les Anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939*, 3 vols. (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977). [2] Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoires*, 7 vols. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1986-1992), in which Prost's essay on Verdun first appeared, is the seminal work; see also Avner Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789-1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999) for more recent contributions.

[3] Philippe Ariès, *Centures of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).

[4] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

[5] Winter has discussed civil society in somewhat more detail in an essay co-authored with Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework," in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 6-39. For a discussion of Ferguson, see Fania Oz-Salzberger, "Civil Society in the Scottish Enlightenment," in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilani (eds.), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 58-83.

[6] Robert Putnam, "Bowling Alone," *The Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995): 65-78; Charles Taylor, "Modes of Civil Society," *Public Culture* 3 (1990): 102-119; Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.), *The Consolidation of Democracy in East-Central Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On France, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Knopf,

1994): 513-524; Carol E. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[7] Two examples of this kind of analysis by historians, which demonstrate the different adaptations of the "linguistic turn" to historical writing, are François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); and William H. Sewell, Jr., *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sieyès and What is the Third Estate?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

[8] Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

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