

H-France Review Vol. 4 (December 2004), No. 123

**Patrick H. Hutton**, *Philippe Ariès and the Politics of French Cultural History*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. xxv + 244 pp. Notes, index, bibliography, and 20 illustrations. \$80.00 US (cl). ISBN 1-55849-435-9; \$24.95 US (pb). ISBN 1-55849-463-4.

Review by Paul Mazgaj, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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It is only one of the many paradoxes surrounding the career of Philippe Ariès that he managed to find a niche in the French historical establishment only a few years before his death in 1984. Though a pioneer in the history of *mentalités*, for most of his life Ariès remained a self-styled "Sunday historian," continuing his day job for an institute involved in the trade of tropical fruit.<sup>[1]</sup> No less paradoxical is the fact that, while Ariès established a historical reputation as an innovator, he remained a life-long traditionalist, a disposition reflected in his personal life and habits, in his political choices, and, most profoundly, in his cultural preferences. Which leads to a last set of paradoxes. One might assume, given Ariès's traditionalism, that no cultural model could have been more distressing to him than America's, with its focus on the present rather than the past, its preference for the claims of the individual over those of the community, and its unabashed commercialism. Yet, Ariès's first important professional recognition came not from France but from America, where *Centuries of Childhood*, the book that made his reputation, had its initial success.<sup>[2]</sup> And finally, in a related irony, twenty years after his death, it is an American historian, Patrick Hutton, who has produced the first major assessment of Ariès's life and work—an assessment, moreover, which convincingly argues for his importance not only as a historian but as a presence on the French intellectual scene in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

As suggested by his title, Hutton is convinced that Ariès's work as a historian was not politically innocent. In effect, Ariès's early royalism, defeated and discredited in the political arena, was transmuted into a new kind of cultural history that he helped create. Baldly put in this way, Hutton's thesis might seem overly reductionist: a claim that Ariès's work as a historian should be understood as a disguised species of political pleading. Nothing, however, could be further from the spirit of Hutton's study. What stands out, above all, is the subtlety of Hutton's touch in analyzing the interplay between Ariès's politics and his historical achievements. Moreover, subtlety is only one of the strengths of this work. As a biography, it is exemplary in its fine balance between empathy for and critical distance from its subject. As a piece of historical research, it is impressive, utilizing not only Ariès's voluminous writings but a wide array of public and private archives as well as interviews. Finally, and perhaps most impressively, Hutton so deftly contextualizes Ariès's life and work that reading his study becomes a richly textured excursion into twentieth-century French historiography and French intellectual life. In this regard, the reader is a beneficiary of Hutton's long and distinguished career as a leading American intellectual historian of modern France.

Philippe Ariès's early family life and his school years, Hutton argues convincingly, were particularly important in understanding both his unwavering commitment to traditionalist values as well as his later historical interests. He was born in the Gironde region, where his extended family had deep roots. His parents, however, had lived in Martinique, where his mother was born. Perhaps because his parents were transplants from a colonial world they "held fast to an image of old France even more fervently than did their royalist counterparts in the métropole." This was especially true of his mother from whom he inherited "his love of the imagined communities of old France..." (p. 21). The young Philippe

aspired to a career as a professional historian but, after failing his *agrégation* twice (1939 and 1941), resigned himself to pursuing his historical interests outside of academia.

Not surprisingly perhaps, given his family's royalist political leanings, the young Ariès joined the Action française's university organization and was introduced to political journalism through the auspices of its student publication, *L'Étudiant français*. Like many other aspiring intellectuals of the right, Ariès fell under the spell of Charles Maurras, still "an Olympian presence" among an important segment of the student population in the 1930s. Interestingly, it was not the highly-touted political "doctrine" of Maurras that attracted the young Ariès, according to Hutton, but Maurras as the symbol of spirited resistance to the republican establishment and, especially, Maurras, the "man of letters." For Ariès, as for many other conservatively-inclined young students during the interwar years, Maurras epitomized a style of intellectual leadership which he hoped to emulate: that of the old-style *littérateur*, at once cultured, erudite, but, at the same time, engaged in the political debate and a molder of public opinion.[3] In terms of the Action française's ideological program—especially its integral nationalism, authoritarianism, and virulent anti-Semitism—Ariès, Hutton suggests, was never fully a Maurrassian. What the Action française provided was a screen upon which he could project his own nostalgic vision of the ancien régime, a vision populated by extended families, diverse provincial communities, and customs preserved in popular practices and overseen by a distant and benevolent monarch. Though Ariès later moved beyond the political orbit of the Action française, he remained intensely loyal to his royalist friends to the end of his days. For him, Hutton suggests, the friendships formed in his youth represented an example of the kind of sociability that flourished in traditional society but was rapidly disappearing in contemporary mass society.

The image that Hutton presents of the prewar Ariès—that of a nostalgic traditionalist caught up in a nationalist movement whose negative aspects he either ignored or failed to fully perceive—is more difficult to sustain as it concerns the Vichy and postwar periods. Hutton, to his credit, does not conceal the strain; nor, despite his generally empathetic treatment of Ariès, does he cross the line separating empathy from apologetics. Though holding to his claim that Ariès's traditionalism never had the malevolent undertones of many of those with whom he associated politically, Hutton raises a number of disconcerting questions concerning Ariès's political choices between 1940 and the mid 1960s.

It is not surprising that Ariès, as a young royalist following his mentor Maurras, became a supporter of Pétain and the Vichy régime. Less predictable perhaps, is the fact that he assumed a teaching post at one of the most notorious of Vichy's youth training schools, the Ecole nationale des Cadres Supérieurs at La Chapelle-en-Serval. The school's notoriety stemmed from the pro-Nazi and antisemitic leanings of its director, Jacques Bousquet, and many of his close associates. After looking carefully at Ariès's syllabus, Hutton concludes that there was "no evidence to suggest that he shared the pro-German sentiments of Bousquet and others on his staff" (p.44). Yet, Hutton rightly emphasizes that this lack of evidence should not be interpreted as an exoneration: given the fact that La Chapelle was "the leading wedge of collaborationist indoctrination in Vichy France," the question of "what he was doing there," Hutton insists, must be asked (p. 44). Similarly disturbing questions can be raised concerning Ariès's postwar return to political journalism. For two decades after the war, Ariès collaborated with several journals staffed by refugees from the prewar Action française, most notably Pierre Boutang's *La Nation française*. Though Ariès's articles represented an attempt to adapt traditionalism to the new environment of postwar France, Boutang, the dominant presence, was still mired in the Maurrassian universe of hate-filled polemics, including antisemitism. Once more, Hutton faces the issue candidly: "Why was Ariès a silent witness to this embarrassing discourse? To his credit," Hutton admits, "he never participated publicly in it. On the other hand, he did nothing to condemn it or for that matter to distance himself from its spokesmen"(p. 71).

If one part of Hutton's book traces Ariès's political *engagement* from his student days to the mid-1960s when he finally withdrew from political journalism, the more significant part is an attempt to

understand and evaluate his work as a historian. However, given Hutton's argument that Ariès's royalism was in many respects transposed from politics to cultural history, the transition from the first to the second part of the book is well prepared. The story of this transposition begins during Ariès's teaching stint at La Chapelle, when he became fascinated by students' stories about dark "family secrets," many of which involved abortions and attempts to shield the family from the associated public shame (p. 77). In listening to these stories, what impressed Ariès was how much about families, particularly the sexual aspects of their lives, remained uncharted territory for historians. This was Ariès's first attempt at penetrating the murky recesses of the popular imagination, to experiment with an approach that would later be labeled the "history of mentalities." Not only was this a terrain largely unexplored by historians in either the Marxist or liberal tradition, each looking for evidence in support of their own version of historical progress, but, as Ariès would soon discover, it was a terrain suitable for unearthing the historical traces of traditional society. In other words, the history of mentalities offered a way to reconnect with attitudes and social practices that had largely disappeared under the relentless advance of the modern state and modern culture.

This new approach to history, Hutton admits, was facilitated by Ariès's discovery of the work of the Annalists, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, during the early 1940s.[4] It allowed him to expand his historical horizons beyond the polemics of his youthful mentors, Bainville and Maurras, who remained trapped in the sterile debate over the Revolution and, in many ways, offered only a mirror image of the political histories of their liberal and socialist opponents. But the fact that Ariès remained outside of the institutional habitat of the Annalists allowed him, if not by choice, to preserve a larger measure of intellectual independence from the sometimes restrictive conformities of Annalist history. For example, as Hutton emphasizes, his perspective on the history of mentalities was different from that of the leading practitioners like Robert Mandrou.[5] For Mandrou, as for most of the other Annalists, the history of mentalities in the early modern era was primarily a study of the pre-Enlightenment popular mindset, one that placed emphasis "on resistance to innovation—inveterate customs, deep-seated fears, the inertial power of time-worn ideas" (p. 82). Ariès, on the other hand, was sensitive to the shift in popular attitudes that attended the rise of the modern child-parent relationship, with its new emphasis on the welfare and education of each child and the family as a "unit of affection." Here Hutton relishes the "wonderful irony" by which "the traditionalist, royalist, and former Vichy instructor...had become the historian of the rise of the modern mentality"—at least in regard to the rise of "progressive attitudes about preparing children for adulthood" (p. 84). To be sure, Ariès was not so much a defender of modernity as someone who appreciated how certain aspects of modernity, such as the nuclear family, compensated for what had been forever lost with the decline of the traditional society of the Middle Ages.

In two middle chapters of his study Hutton tackles the work for which Ariès is most noted—his studies of family and childhood and of death and mourning. Here the reader is not only guided through the nuances of Ariès's arguments but is also provided with an overview of the on-going scholarly debates provoked by this "Sunday historian." For example, Hutton acknowledges that the book that first brought Ariès fame, *Centuries of Childhood*, has become the target of increasing criticism; his emphasis on dramatic change in the conception of children since the medieval period has been replaced among many of the most recent historians of family by a greater stress on continuity. In fact, Hutton observes, Ariès has become something of a whipping boy among contemporary historians of family, one historian even claiming that recent scholarship has, as its point of departure, a refutation of the "'Arièsian myth' of childhood" (p. 100). More generally, Ariès has been criticized for his tendency to universalize from largely French sources and to underestimate the importance of regional, class, and gender differences.[6]

Yet, despite all of this, Hutton raises several salient points in defense of Ariès's accomplishments. He reminds us, first of all, that *Centuries of Childhood* was a pioneering effort, one that had much to do not only with launching family and childhood studies as an area of research but with paving "the royal road

into the broader field of the history of private life" (p. 103). Second, most of Ariès's critics, focusing on *Centuries*, have failed to appreciate his larger historical contribution. In this regard, Hutton's study is more than a useful corrective. It demonstrates how widely Ariès's historical interest ranged and how varied his contributions were: from his early work on conceptions of historical time, through his studies of childhood and death, to his later interest in the history of private life and popular piety. Finally, *Centuries of Childhood*, as attested by its wide readership beyond experts on family history, represents more than a work of specialized historical scholarship; it was and continues to be, in Hutton's apt phrase, a "book to think with" (p. 110). In fact, much of Ariès's intellectual production could be characterized in this way, justifying Hutton's claim that he will be remembered not just for his historical studies "but also for the depth of his insight into the human predicament in his times" (p. 112).

This leads to a fuller appreciation of Hutton's claim that Ariès transposed many of the concerns that led him from the narrow royalist politics of his youth to the open vistas of cultural history. As Hutton makes clear, this was not a simple matter of disguising an essentially Maurrassian political program under the more respectable cloak of the historian of mentalities. Ariès came to realize that his attachment to royalism had little to do with the political gloss that Maurras imposed upon it, but with recovering and appreciating the various components that constituted traditional society—from diverse regional customs, through extended family networks, to the emphasis on antique virtues like loyalty, friendship, and marital fidelity. Further, unlike earlier traditionalists like Barrès and Maurras, Ariès had no illusions that premodern life could be resurrected after the political defeat of the current ruling elites; at best, the recovered traditions of the past could be creatively adapted to the needs and possibilities of the present. Yet, this much admitted, Ariès was deeply distressed with the tenor of contemporary society. Clearly, for him the "human predicament in his times" was to be found in a set of converging trends: a state that is increasingly intrusive and centralized; a society that imposes a larger and larger network of impersonal social disciplines; and, especially, a media-created culture that is at once materialistic, conformist, and tawdry. Thus, for Ariès, history was never simply a professional exercise. It was, however implicitly, a critique of contemporary society and culture through a recovery of the collective memory of traditional life before all traces of it had disappeared.

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## NOTES

[1] The history of mentalities, though often associated with French historians, was an international trend in historical scholarship that focused on the attitudes of ordinary people and on the mental and linguistic structures of everyday life. This approach is reflected in works as diverse and influential as Robert Mandrou, *Introduction à la France moderne, 1500-1640: essai de psychologie historique* (Paris: Michel, 1961); trans. R.E. Hallmark, *Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640: An Essay in Historical Psychology* (London: Arnold, 1975); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1978); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[2] Translated by Robert Baldick as *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Random House, 1962); originally published as *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960).

[3] Maurras's attempt to define the mission of the nationalist intellectual was first put forward in his *L'Avenir de l'intelligence* (Paris: Nouvelle librairie nationale, 1905).

[4] For an appreciation of the importance of Bloch and Febvre in the "new history," see François Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of the Annales*, trans. Peter V. Conroy, Jr. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp. 42-76.

[5] Especially Mandrou's influential *Introduction à la France moderne* (cited in n. 1).

[6] See the judgment of Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 67-69; though Burke admits Ariès's limitations, he, like Hutton, is more impressed with his originality and the groundbreaking nature of his insights.

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*H-France Review* Vol. 4 (December 2004), No. 123

ISSN 1553-9172



H-France Review Vol. 4 (January 2004), No. 8

**Robert T. Gannett Jr.**, *Tocqueville Unveiled. The Historian and His Sources for The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. xiii + 246 pp. Tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-226-28108-6.

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Robert Gannett's beautifully written book allows us to get inside the mind of Alexis de Tocqueville as he was researching and writing what eventually would become his mature masterpiece, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. This rare window into the thought process of a great thinker was made possible by Gannett's having been granted nothing less than a scholar's dream: unprecedented access to a treasure trove of archival material never before available to scholars. In particular, he was permitted to consult Tocqueville's own reading notes and writing plans, precious documents that are still in the private possession of the Tocqueville family and to which, it seems, access remains restricted. Gannett has certainly made the most of this exceptional opportunity, producing a book that is both informative and enjoyable to read.

Gannett's reconstruction of Tocqueville's intellectual evolution during these critical years contributes fruitfully to recent trends in Tocqueville scholarship that highlight the developmental aspects of his thought. In the process, we are given precious insights into a very private and human side of a great thinker. The picture Gannett paints is at times somewhat deflating. We are introduced to a Tocqueville who suffered not only from health problems but from recurring conceptual "blocks" and writing difficulties. We learn about a man who struggled through painful periods of self-doubt and uncertainty. We discover that Tocqueville was unsure even of the actual topic of this book until quite late in the whole process and that his intellectual journey was never smooth or easy. Rather, it was marked by numerous starts and stops, hesitations, and even some surprising reversals. Along the way, he worried about everything from the focus of his work to his rhetorical strategies and writing style. Gannett's book gives us a real sense of the labor, both physical and intellectual, that went into writing this classic of political theory.

But despite the many problems that Tocqueville encountered, what Gannett's book recounts is of course, in the end, a remarkable success story. Thus we also learn about Tocqueville's extraordinary optimism, resilience, and intellectual agility when faced with conceptual difficulties. Each time he encountered a conceptual "block," he was able to rethink his problem and change direction, ultimately arriving at a higher level of understanding. Gannett masterfully guides us through Tocqueville's thinking process, allowing us to experience its highs as well as its lows.

Not surprisingly, Tocqueville emerges as a fiercely independent thinker with an extraordinary capacity for critical and analytical thinking. Particularly illuminating and even amusing sections of the book deal with what Gannett calls Tocqueville's "interactive" reading of others (p. 108). While taking notes on Burke, for example, Tocqueville sometimes suddenly broke out into the second person, as if addressing and reprimanding Burke directly: "You see this destruction of all individual influence and you seek the causes of the Revolution in accidents! You who see a great aristocracy live before your eyes, do not perceive that the aristocracy here is not just sick but dead before one touches it!!!" (p. 64). After venting his anger like this, Tocqueville usually returned to his more habitual, detached perspective, in the end reaching remarkably balanced conclusions. Rarely, it seems, would he agree entirely with whomever it was he was reading. He was always probing and questioning, selectively adopting and then reworking the "facts" and ideas he encountered in books.

Scholars of liberalism have long wondered whether Tocqueville read Benjamin Constant and, if so, what he might have taken from him. Gannett here offers important proof not only that Tocqueville read Constant, but that he probably drew significant lessons from him, too. Tocqueville's notes indicate that he was impressed by Constant's warnings in *De la force du gouvernement actuel* (1796) that France should abide by constitutional forms and avoid arbitrary rule. But more importantly, Tocqueville admired Constant's analysis of the Revolution's harmful psychological repercussions in *Des effets de la terreur* (1797). Constant worried about the effect the Revolution had had on the character of Frenchmen, its encouragement of unhealthy, materialistic impulses, and political apathy. Once again, however, Tocqueville retained his characteristically critical posture, interjecting personal comments about Constant as he read him. For example, he reprimanded Constant for betraying his own principles by defending the coup d'état of 18 Fructidor.

In the end, Tocqueville's appraisal of any individual thinker would depend upon what Gannett refers to as his "liberty test". Passing this test meant agreeing with Tocqueville on the crucial importance of citizen participation in the public affairs of a free and civilized society. Many authors failed Tocqueville's "liberty test," among them several "liberals" of his own time. One notable example is François Guizot, whose influence on Tocqueville is at present the topic of some disagreement among scholars. At the last annual meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 3-5 April, 2003), this very subject was debated by three experts on the topic: Aurelian Craiutu, Melvin Richter, and Cheryl Welch. Their papers will be published in a forthcoming issue of the journal *History of European Ideas*.

Gannett agrees with those, such as Cheryl Welch, who would argue for Tocqueville's unwavering independence of mind and uniqueness. In Gannett's words, "we should resist the temptation to situate Tocqueville too neatly as a protégé or disciple within any larger tradition of liberal or Doctrinaire thought" (p. 131). Gannett acknowledges that Tocqueville admired and in fact adopted Guizot's historical method. Like Guizot, Tocqueville believed that history should be interpretive and analytical. However, while he agreed with Guizot on the need for a "philosophical history," Tocqueville resolutely rejected the political conclusions Guizot drew from it. Gannett's research convincingly proves that what Tocqueville, in the end, really wished to do was to "[T]urn G[uizot] against himself" (Tocqueville's notes, quoted on p. 2).

This brings us to an important point made throughout Gannett's book. Tocqueville wrote history for essentially political reasons. The real purpose of *The Old Regime and the Revolution* was to explain to the French people the reasons for their current servitude. As Gannett puts it, the book was intended to be a dose of "instructive medicine" (p. 149). Tocqueville wanted to inculcate in the French people the virtues needed to support liberty and combat political apathy. This artful weaving together of Tocqueville the person, the politician and the theorist is one of the most exciting aspects of Gannett's book.

Tocqueville scholars will no doubt dispute some of the finer points of Gannett's overall argument. Some will disagree with him about the relative importance of certain key moments in Tocqueville's intellectual development. Gannett argues, for example, that Tocqueville's archival researches led to a fundamental reorientation in his thinking. What exactly triggered his conceptual breakthroughs and the actual nature and significance of Tocqueville's borrowings from other scholars will also continue to be debated. But that is at it should be. This is a wonderful book. It should be required reading for anyone interested in Tocqueville. And because of its clear, economical, and engaging style, it can be highly recommended to a larger, more general, audience as well.

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H-France Review Vol. 4 (January 2004), No. 8

ISSN 1553-9172