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Gisèle Sapiro, *Les écrivains et la politique en France: De l'Affaire Dreyfus à la guerre d'Algérie*. Paris: Seuil, 2018. 394 pp. €25.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-02-107295-2.

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Gisèle Sapiro's latest book gathers a diverse range of studies to address a single problem: how has the relationship between literature and politics in France evolved between the nineteenth century and the present? Her originality in responding to this familiar question is to apply the sociology of literature that she has developed in her recent work, building on the approach that Pierre Bourdieu outlined in *Les Règles de l'art*.[1] This means that Sapiro is interested less in subjecting literary texts to ideological analysis and more in the structural transformations that drove changes in the relationship between writers and politics--or, in Bourdieusian terms, between the literary and political fields. While Sapiro tackles familiar concepts such as the intellectual, *engagement*, and the polarisation of left and right, she is thus more concerned with exploring the constraints and opportunities that have made particular sorts of political position-taking possible at different moments. In short, any satisfying sociological answer to why writers have taken specific literary, intellectual, and political stances must recognise that such stances are not simply products of a writer's habitus, but also respond to the changing structure of the field in which they act: "Ce sont les ajustements de la trajectoire individuelle à l'évolution de l'espace social et à celle de l'espace des possibles et des pensables constitutif du champ littéraire à un moment donné qui donnent leur sens aux prises de position successives" (p. 215). The key implication for Sapiro's historical analysis is that she recognises writers are just that: writers. In general, in Sapiro's view, political histories of intellectuals "les coupe de leur source de légitimité principale," which is to be "producteurs culturels" (p. 21). This is short-sighted, because writers' shifting strategies might well be rooted less in high-minded philosophies of intellectual commitment or aesthetics or individual psychodramas than in what it means--for example, in terms of economics, social status, institutional constraints or relative autonomy--to be a professional writer at a given point in modern French history.

While the book is largely a collection of case studies, Sapiro structures it into two generally coherent parts, each of which progresses roughly chronologically. The first part tracks the "politisation du champ littéraire" (p. 22) from the nineteenth century, across the threshold of the two world wars, and into the Cold War. Sapiro's analysis starts by building on Bourdieu's diagnosis that an identifiable literary field emerged only in the late nineteenth century. At this moment, the emancipation resulting from the 1881 relaxation of censorship (a key watershed in Sapiro's narrative) combined with a comparatively weak professional development – with a looser institutional and credential structure than, say, academics – to give writers something of a crisis of legitimacy. As scholarship and journalism became increasingly professionalised domains, *écrivains* needed to distinguish themselves from the *savants* on the one hand and the *journalistes* on the other. With the past and present conquered by these other professions, writers turned to the future: they adopted the social position of Max Weber's "prophets," deriving their authority from direct emotional relations with their audiences rather than bureaucratic institutions. Through prophetism, they were able to "redéfini[r] la fonction sociale de l'écrivain" at a moment when "les nouveaux experts professionnels" were staking claim to other domains, and thus writers could "pallier [leur] faible professionnalisation" (p. 28). In so far as it involved making claims about the direction of French society, prophetism was also a mode of political engagement, one that was particularly well-suited, on Sapiro's account, to the age of rupture and crisis in France that stretched from the Commune to the Algerian War.

The rest of the first part seeks to map different elements of this politicised literary field in development. Chapter one provides a wide-ranging exploration of the conceptual history of left and right, conceived as identities among French writers, and the sociological determinants of ideological affiliation in the interwar period. Sapiro's problematic centres on the question of speed: since left and right only became available as primary identifiers at the end of the nineteenth century, how did they become so dominant in French letters by the interwar period, supplanting identities such as aesthetic schools? One of Sapiro's more suggestive claims is that the literary field shares with the political a propensity to polarisation, since it is an "espace où la lutte pour la conservation ou la transformation des rapports de force prend une forme ouverte" (p. 47). At the same time, the left/right distinction had an ability to "greffer sur des occupations préexistantes" such as "arrière-garde *vs* avant-garde," or "rive droite/rive gauche" (p. 47). But while left/right clearly emerged as an important dividing line, the sociological theory of the literary field at the core of chapters two and three plots writers against two different axes: "dominant" / "dominés"--according to the orthodoxy of their conception of literature--and "autonomie" / "hétérodoxie"--according to literary production that is centred more on content or on form and style (table on p. 88).

The fruit of this plotting of the field is Sapiro's division of writers into four types: "notables," "esthètes," "avant-gardes," and "polémistes" (p. 88). Each type had typical form of sociability, values, and forms of expression. For example, the "notables" like Paul Bourget socialise around official institutions, such as the Académie, value "bon goût" (p. 89), and tend to be drawn from the literary elite. The "esthétes," such as André Gide, value "originalité" (p. 90), socialise around private dinners, and publish in journals like the *Nouvelle revue française* (NRF). The "avant-gardes," like the surrealists, socialise in public cafes, and are drawn to political radicalism, but privilege the aesthetic. The "polémistes," meanwhile, including Lucien Rebatet, lacked social capital, often wrote to pay the bills, and specialised in denunciation and sensation. In the following chapters, Sapiro analyses mid-twentieth-century writers through the lens of this model. In chapter three, she draws on a survey of 44 writers who were on the far right between 1934-45. The model reveals certain patterns: "notables" from upper-bourgeois origins, often professors, publishing with Plon or Flammarion, and seeing fascism through the lens of the defence of order rather than revolutionary upheaval; "esthètes," whose academic underachievement drove them towards a certain anti-intellectualism, and were attracted more by the synthesis of political contradictions that was inherent in Vichy's idea of the National Revolution; "polémistes," more racist than moralising, and prone to "styliser la violence" (p. 135). In Sapiro's assessment, which depends on classing Céline as a "polémiste" by this point in his career, there was no fascist avant-garde in France, unlike in Italy or elsewhere--a suggestive observation, albeit not fully accounted for. What Sapiro's sociological analysis shows clearly is that the same ideological attractions--"une vision organiciste de l'ordre social et une conception autoritaire du pouvoir" (p. 152)--grew on different foundations and provoked different modes of literary engagement depending on writers' social positions. Overall, Sapiro's ideal types have a certain attraction, and reveal suggestive patterns that fuse the political and literary. But, while we are given no reason to distrust Sapiro's classification of writers, it is a shame that she never shows us the full list--even though Sapiro's own treatment of Céline shows that the labelling of an individual writer can provoke lengthy debate.

Chapter four moves left, and takes Louis Aragon as a case study for exploring the role of institutions--in Aragon's case, the Parti communiste français (PCF)--in constraining the space of possibilities for literary politicisation. Aragon, who was elected to the PCF's central committee in 1950, became known as "le grand écrivain du PCF" (p. 184) during the Cold War. As with so many of Sapiro's chapters, the story is instructive in its finitude: socialist realism was officially abandoned in 1966, at around the same time that the *nouveaux romanciers*, new-right Hussards and the intellectual generation of Foucault and Lévi-Strauss challenged humanist certainties. Most interesting in Aragon's story for Sapiro is what she calls the clandestine professionalisation of literature during the Occupation: the PCF would henceforth recognise writers as professional agents of the party, rather than symbolic agents at the service of the workers. A curious paradox was that the highly constrained form of political engagement offered to Communist writers went in tandem with "la reconnaissance implicite, dans les structures, d'une relative autonomie des professions intellectuels" (p. 199).

The second part of Sapiro's book, "Visions du monde et éthique de l'écriture," is broadly concerned with subjecting more literary and aesthetic questions to sociological analysis, by exploring the politics of different forms of engagement, such as fiction or poetry. Chapter five, "Politique de la fiction et fictionnalisation de la politique," offers an impressively concise and insightful tour of the political implications and uses of fiction from the Restoration to the Nouveau Roman. As Sapiro shows, what it means for fiction to be political has changed in response to shifting contexts: from ambiguity in response to early-nineteenth-century censorship to destabilising essentialisms in recent decades. Crucial to Sapiro's point is that these shifts have responded to structural changes, and resulted in shifting conceptions of the relationship between fiction and truth, among both authors and their audiences. For example, she sees novelists as gravitating towards the study of the atypical as a response to the hegemonic status of science and journalism under the Third Republic, since these claimed authority over the typical. The succeeding chapters address Drieu La Rochelle's autobiographical texts (broadly conceived), the revival of poetry in the Resistance, and André Malraux's anticolonialism. In each case, Sapiro's aim is to show the contextually specific means by which writers sought to exert their symbolic power. For Drieu, the autobiographical novel became a means of translating his dissatisfactory family life into "la réalisation des prophéties de malheur proférées par ses maîtres à penser" (p. 297). For writers under Occupation, mythologising and testimonial poetry allowed writers to contribute to "le (re)cadrage de la perception de la réalité sociale et politique et de son interprétation" (p. 319). And for Malraux--"le seul écrivain français du XX^{e} siècle à être devenu ministre" (p. 323)--the assertion of an ethnographic conception of culture legitimated his interventions in debates over the alleged superiority of western civilisation before and after the war.

Turning to the alleged depoliticization of contemporary French literature in her epilogue, Sapiro's answer again hinges on structural changes to the literary and political fields, rather than a simple narrative of intellectual disillusionment and fracture: we need to recognise "la transformation des enjeux politiques, intellectuels et littéraires" since the 1970s: "montée du pouvoir technocratique, division du travail d'expertise, clôture du champ politique sur lui-même, emprise croissante des médias audiovisuels" (p. 359). She nonetheless sees the same ideal-types from the mid-century recurring, particularly on the literary right: "notables" (Michel Déon), "polémistes" (Éric Zemmour), and "esthètes" (Michel Houellebecq). While Sapiro is under no illusions about the challenge posed by the literary far right, and ends the book with a consideration of the debates over republishing work by writers like Céline and Maurras, she maintains that in the responses to such figures, as well as in the efforts of contemporary left-wing writers, French literature remains "un lieu de critique sociale et politique, de déconstruction des essentialismes…ainsi qu'un espace de production de visions et de récits alternatifs du monde social" (p. 387).

The idea of a sociological analysis of the figure of the French intellectual is not a new one--Christophe Charle's work on the fin-de-siècle birth of the figure is a classic in the field--but Sapiro's approach repeatedly prompts the reader to look at well-known episodes in the longer history of French literary political engagement through a fresh lens.[2] Sapiro packs into her book insights on more subjects than could possibly fit in a review, from the nature of pamphlet rhetoric to the dilemmas of *ouvriérisme*. A particular asset of her work is the equal weight that she gives to the political right, literally from the first to the last page of the book, despite the "sinistrisme" of the literary field for which she also tries to account (p. 65). The book's subtitle, *De l'Affaire Dreyfus à la guerre d'Algérie*, is slightly misleading, since Sapiro ranges both earlier than the Dreyfus Affair and later than the Algerian War, and while both events feature, neither are especially prominent. One limitation of Sapiro's study is nonetheless that its boundaries are predominantly national. Of course, the French literary field clearly had a specific institutional and social structure (the Académie, PCF, etc.), took a distinctive path through the long twentieth century (Dreyfus, Occupation, decolonisation), and witnessed a peculiarly self-conscious and influential debate over the modes of intellectual engagement (Zola, Sartre, Foucault…). Nonetheless, some of the structural changes operated at a transnational level, and the French literary and political fields in this period were also undergoing various forms of internationalisation. How far did the transformations in France reflect broader trends, and to what extent might, for example, the same ideal-types--notables, aesthetes, polemicists, avant-gardes--be found in other national contexts? On its own terms, however, Sapiro's study is impressively wide-ranging and persuasive. The chapters which take a long view--such as on fictionalisation--are as suggestive as those which drill into specific authors such as Aragon or Drieu. A persistent and persuasive theme in Sapiro's analysis is the strictly context-bound character of literary political strategies: what works in one period does not in the next. Despite the narrative arc of politicisation that underpins Sapiro's account of the literary field, the key merit of this sharply discontinuous vision is to turn us away from drawing lines of easy continuity across French history, whether in the literary or political fields, or at the points where they intersect.

NOTES

[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); available in English as *The Rules of Art*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity, 1996); Gisèle Sapiro, *La sociologie de la littérature* (Paris: La Découverte, 2014).

[2] Christophe Charle, *Naissance des « intellectuels », 1880-1900* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990); available in English as *Birth of the Intellectuals: 1880-1900*, trans. David Fernbach and G. M. Goshgarian (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2015).

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