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Estelle Berthereau, *La fabrique politique du journal. Pierre-Sébastien Laurentie (1793 – 1876), un antimoderne au temps de Balzac*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2021. 476 pp. €69.00. (pb). ISBN 9782745355331.

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In contrast to his contemporary, the religious thinker Félicité de Lamennais, who appears as a thinker apart, Pierre-Sébastien Laurentie emerges in this study as one deeply immersed in multiple currents of his time and widely connected, as reflected in his extensive correspondence. Also in contrast to Lamennais, who has been the subject of a number of *colloques* and recent scholarly studies, Laurentie has been less celebrated and little studied. Yet his forays into multiple genres—history, art criticism, literature, philosophy, theology and spirituality, sacred music, and above all journalism, expressed in dozens of works and thousands of articles both signed and unsigned, augmented by an extensive correspondence, much of which he took care to preserve—argue for greater attention to this figure. Laurentie played a pivotal role in the press and bridged two worlds, royalist and Catholic, often studied separately in scholarly publications. An observation by René Rémond, made more than half a century ago, suggests something of the further utility of the present study. He noted that general studies of struggles between the Ultraroyalists and their adversaries often glossed over the internal tensions within the former party. Yet these internal relations “have at least an equal interest, for we can watch the gradual development of points of view, and thereby the formation of the interpretations of Ultraroyalism which were to survive the circumstances of their appearance, survive the regime and the Ultra party, interpretations whose extensions have been inscribed ever since in the history of the Right.” [1]

Laurentie’s royalist commitments were not a given. His social origins augured more in favor of the Revolution and modernity. The early death of his father and his education being confided to the church oriented him toward royalist ideas and eventual partisanship of the Bourbons. He thus represents something of the complexity of a bourgeoisie in part liberal, Voltairian and anticlerical, in part opposed to those currents and for whom king and church constituted a rampart against the Revolution and its legacy. Catholic and royalist out of conviction (rather than from possible advantage), this combination created opportunity for the young Laurentie. It enabled his transition from province to Paris in the year 1816.

With the Second Restoration and the return of Louis XVIII to France went the Charter of 1814. Granted by the king, it established a constitutional monarchy in France. This was acceptable to those who professed a conciliatory and reasonable liberalism, but it placed the Ultraroyalists in

a paradoxical position. In their view, the Charter introduced a portion of the revolutionary heritage into the institutions of the restored monarchy. Prominent among the Charter's objectionable features was its provision for religious toleration. Despite their professed fidelity to the king, many held that the latter could not alienate his historical rights or saw, in the doctrines of the Revolution, defiance of the laws of Nature or of divine Order. The Ultras soon passed into opposition, an integral Right allied with an integral Catholicism rejecting all spirit of accommodation. This is the party that Laurentie became aligned with, his contact facilitated by his membership in the *Congrégation de la Foi*, which undertook the reconquest of the monarchy in the name of religion. In Paris his royalism became radicalized, and the way opened for him to be a "professor-journalist" at a time of journalistic effervescence. Association with the younger contingent of writers for the *Quotidienne* (an Ultraroyalist publication) confronted Laurentie with literary, philosophical, political, and social events of the moment. "[II] se forge une réputation de journaliste ultra. Usant d'une liberté de la presse qu'il défend et qui l'inscrit dans une certaine modernité, il développe néanmoins ses idées traditionalistes" (p. 54).

Catholicism shaped Laurentie's royalism, and royalism gave his work a strongly political focus. Much of Berthereau's study follows the changing ministries that governed France and the initiatives taken by the Ultra party in relation to those. With the Restoration came the election in 1815 of a new Chamber of Deputies, overwhelmingly royalist. However, the conversion of the Ultras to parliamentary government was short-lived. The Chamber was dissolved less than a year after its election and the general election of 1816 drastically diminished their parliamentary presence, leading to expression of their opposition through the press. Such were where matters stood when Laurentie came on the scene in 1816 and began to forge a career in journalism.

The coalescence of the Ultras into a party coincided with the birth of Romanticism, which drew from a monarchical and Christian Middle Ages. This resonated with the Ultras, whose idealization of the monarchy bypassed that of the Sun King to privilege Saint Louis. The later development of Romanticism, with its conversion to liberalism, can obscure its Catholic and royalist aspects. Hence the relations between Ultraroyalism and Romanticism are complex. Laurentie's engagement with Romanticism in the pages of the *Quotidienne* and through literary societies connected with the *Congrégation* provides a lens through which to view several phases of this interaction, reflecting a literary side of his interests.

Relations between the followers of Lamennais (the Mennasians), and the Ultras are also complicated. Here again Laurentie provides an optic through which to view their interaction through his personal contacts with Lamennais. Their initial contacts likely go back to Laurentie's early days in Paris, through connection with the *Congrégation de la Foi*. Berthereau credits Lamennais with a shift in Laurentie's writing, from literature to spirituality, and the latter's alignment with Mennasian thought is evident in his published reactions to the volumes of the *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* and in his *Introduction à la philosophie ou traité de l'origine et de la certitude des connaissances humaines* (1826). Laurentie became grouped with Lamennais and Abbé Olympe-Philippe Gerbet--an admirer of Lamennais who later parted from him after Roman censure of the latter's ideas--as "contributeurs d'une methode de 'philosophie nouvelle' dont le sens commun inspiré par Dieu est la règle de certitude" (p. 168), and which stood opposed to the method of sensible experience or to idealism.

While the exposition of Laurentie's literary and philosophical interests serve to round out the scope of his activities, the main thread is political, and here his journalistic contributions and

personal relations with political figures enable appreciation of Ultras' responses to successive ministries. Two are of particular import: that of Villèle (December 1821-January 1828) and Polignac (August 1829-July 1830), as on both of these occasions Ultras held power. Consideration of these ministries provide further insight into internal tensions within Ultra ranks. Under Villèle, tension arose between those who desired the Catholic reconquest of society (prominently the Mennasians) and those more pragmatic who accommodated themselves to the policies followed by Louis XVIII. Another fault line appeared over the issue of French intervention in Spain, with the Villèle government opposed and François René de Chateaubriand and Laurentie in favor, with the intent of obliging the royalists to unite behind military intervention. Another source of division within Ultra ranks directly engaged Laurentie and the *Quotidienne*, as a result of the government's decision to exercise its option to purchase opposition newspapers. Laurentie emerges as a defender of the freedom of the press, aligned against his own camp. From these examples it becomes clear that, as the end of Louis XVIII's reign approached, tensions between Ultras escalated.

The accession of Charles X to the throne rekindled Ultras' hopes that their political and religious doctrines would emerge triumphant, only once more to experience disillusionment. The Polignac ministry brought to the fore tensions within the direction of the *Quotidienne* itself, with the latter as die-hard supporter of the government and Laurentie excluded from its direction.

The Revolution of 1830 introduced a change of regime and incited a notable change in royalism, which Berthereau brings into focus by tracing its effects on Laurentie. He became convinced that tradition must adapt itself to modernity in order to better defend legitimacy. This conviction modified his view of the French Revolution, no longer interpreting it as a discontinuity but as a rupture whose effects were ongoing and undeniable. Ultraism gave way to Legitimism. After 1830, Laurentie subscribes to Neo-legitimism, called legalist or parliamentary, which was set in opposition to Legitimists of action, abstentionists, or absolutists, and thus was open to a form of political and social modernity. Acceptance of the Charter and acknowledgement of the will of the people found expression in journalistic realignments, new collaborations on Laurentie's part. Multiple initiatives undertaken by him to realize unity among royalists and between royalists and Mennasians proved ultimately unsuccessful. Despite a loss of support from former members of the Congrégation, Laurentie's Catholicism remained pre-eminent, to the point that "l'écrivain catholique prédomine' alors sur le défenseur de la royauté"--Lamennais's influence being detectable here (p. 253).

Laurentie's conviction that the July Monarchy could not durably implant itself enabled his hopes for the eventual return of the elder branch of the Bourbons. However, the lack of success in achieving unity among royalists and in constituting a Catholic party after 1835 served as a realistic check. As early as 1830 Laurentie thought the return of the emperor in France a stronger possibility. Legitimists of Laurentie's orientation remained in opposition to Orléanism, with its secular image of monarchy. With Orléanism and Legitimism, two traditions, two conceptions of society, and two interpretations of history confronted one another.

Two other facets of Legitimism bear mention: its social involvement and its educational agenda. The success of the 1830 Revolution convinced Legitimists like Laurentie that their perception of public support for the monarchy was largely illusory, and that it was necessary to reconcile the monarchy with the people. Legitimists became interested in the social question quite early, from the angle of charity. As an influential journalist, Laurentie defended freedom of worship, freedom

of the press, and freedom of education. The last of these was a priority for him, rare among Legitimists. However, it was consistent with his Catholicism and with an agenda of “royalizing” and “Catholicizing” liberalism thanks to freedom of education.

Berthereau devotes less attention to the later parts of Laurentie’s career. The Revolution of 1848 was assimilated by Laurentie to his providential view of history as just revenge for 1830. The Second Empire he considered the most dangerous of the regimes that he opposed, given its potential to rival the monarchy and mobilize the crowds. The end of the Empire and the advent of the Third Republic presented an unanticipated occasion for a monarchical restoration, revitalizing hopes in a legitimist movement that had been considered moribund. However, the intransigence of the Count de Chambord (Henry V) rendered that a dead end.

While the “*antimoderne*” in this study’s title does indicate the dominant orientation of Laurentie’s convictions, the unfolding of his life shows an ambiguity in that stance. Berthereau succeeds in showing Laurentie as one who manifested a nostalgia for the ancien regime but did so as a man of the nineteenth century. Political commitments to monarchy had their counterpart in a hierarchical vision of society, but not one of a return to a closed nobility, rather one open to advancement by merit. Political commitments to monarchy also were shaped by religious conviction. A moderate monarchy he judged incapable of resisting both the heritage of 1789 and society’s indifference toward religion. On the religious front, subject to divisions between Gallicans and Ultramontanes, Laurentie’s relations with Lamennais are indicative of Laurentie’s ambivalent Catholicism, oscillating between tradition and modernity. Laurentie’s eventual acceptance of the Charter, willingness to form political alliances with republicans, advocacy of freedom of religion, of the press, of association, of education, the attempt to promulgate a popular royalism—all set him in tension with loyalty to *la vieille France*. At the conclusion of her study, Berthereau aptly characterizes Laurentie as “ce Don Quixote du royalisme,” an ideological and religious incarnation of “*la vieille France*,” who “par son origine et sa fonction sociales [est] en contradiction avec la cause qu’il défend” (p. 425). The journalistic focus of his life that often tied his writing to the immediate and thus has marginalized him in scholarly interest provides multiple openings to multiple aspects of his times. The complexity of the intellectual, political, social, cultural, and religious currents and alignments of the portion of the long nineteenth century spanned by Laurentie’s life make serious demands on the reader who would follow that life’s itinerary. Nonetheless, following that life trajectory helps bring into focus interactions among those varied facets, verifying, but also clarifying Rémond’s observation that “the more one tries to define the Right the more its outline changes, its features blur, its aspect decomposes.” [2]

NOTES

[1] René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France: From 1815 to de Gaulle*, [French orig. 1963], trans. James M. Laux, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), pp. 63-64.

[2] Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, p. 21.

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