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Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France. The Nazi Invasion of 1940*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. xvii + 274 pp. Maps, photos, illustrations, notes, further reading, and index. \$14.95 U.S.(pb). ISBN 0-19-280550-9.

Review by Robert J. Young, University of Winnipeg.

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This volume is the first of a series by Oxford University Press entitled "The Making of the Modern World." The purpose of the series is to provide a "group of narrative histories" which will "explore...the wider significance" of certain "key moments and events" (p. vi). Julian Jackson's opening contribution will certainly whet readers' appetites for future volumes on China, Vietnam, and Algeria.

This book doubtless satisfies the criteria of the series editors. With an important caveat to come, one notes that two-thirds of the text fulfils the narrative expectations of the series. Indeed, part one with its four chapters has as its focus the day-to-day events of May-June 1940, events which preceded the armistice-concluding defeat and death of the Third Republic. Part two, with only chapters five and six, can then rely on the secured narrative to do more interesting things with the matters of causes and consequences of the famous collapse.

Several features strike one in the extended and ostensible narrative of part one. The work proves to be a very able synthesis of the principal historical literature to date. Although Jackson is no stranger to French archives, this volume is based almost exclusively on secondary literature—including his own. Those who already share some of his expertise therefore will find much that is familiar in his account of those six weeks in the spring of 1940. But the forgetful, as well as the tyro, will welcome a new telling of the blood feud between premiers Edouard Daladier and Paul Reynaud, or of Reynaud's flamboyant mistress in red gown and pyjamas directing road traffic in the middle of chaos, or of the polarized behaviour of defeated generals: the puzzling serenity of Maurice Gamelin, the mutinous pyrotechnics of Maxime Weygand.

The book, in short, is an easy read, a quality which owes much to Jackson's admirably clear writing, and some to the convention of constructing chapters with many sub-sections. As a rule, I dislike that convention on the grounds that it excuses writers from having to effect smooth transitions. But in this case, the latter have been seen to, and the myriad section titles are less irritants than momentary pauses. Certainly, people who read books, as distinct as they sometimes are from those who write them, will find the device familiar and helpful. The same may be said for Jackson's lightness of touch when it comes to referencing his data and ideas. Frequently enough, several consecutive pages of text appear without source attribution, including some, usually brief, quotations. Yet, on balance, a practice that may raise eye-brows in some circles, never quite dissolves asset into liability. He knows his published sources very well, is typically generous about colleagues' work, and invokes that work often enough to reassure us without smothering us in too many numbered endnotes.

There will also be mixed reactions to another feature of this book, particularly with respect to the elongated part one. Apart from a few pages of requisite pre-war material, the first chapter provides a lively narrative of military developments from the outset of war in September 1939 to the third week of May 1940. But the second chapter—and here I invoke the promised caveat—is much more of an amalgam of operational events from 21 May to early June 1940, and extended explanation from the 1920s and 1930s of the numerous uncertainties which surrounded the intentions and resources of France's allies.

The third chapter, though focused on French domestic politics, is similarly constructed, moving as we do from 12 to 16 June but with frequent and lengthy interruptions to explain the present in light of its prologue from the 1930s. Thus we have, for a second time, a mix of potential liability and asset, the former being the disturbed chronology between war, pre-war, and war, the latter being the resolve to explain and not simply to narrate. In short, the narrative quality of part one is less pronounced than what appears at first glance, the analytical quality much more. That proportion I find pleasing, while still wondering if some of the explanatory material would not be better applied to the still-to-come and single chapter on the "causes" for the defeat.

Part one's fourth chapter is of a different character from its antecedents, and is in some respects more like a foreword to the cause-dedicated fifth chapter in part two. "The French People at War," does not extend the narrative of events. Rather it concentrates on the national mood right through the 1920s to the collapse of 1940, a mood encompassing civilians and soldiers. Because it is not event-driven, because it is less interested in elites and more interested in the perceptions of ordinary citizens, and because it employs more in the way of literary texts—like those of Sartre—chapter four seems newer, fresher than its predecessors, even when its dependence on published sources remains unchanged.

Fresher still are chapters five and six of part two. The fifth begins with a masterful survey of the historical literature from the days of Marc Bloch in the 1940s to Talbot Imlay's recent book.<sup>[1]</sup> Unless hope has distorted my vision, Jackson seems to situate himself squarely among the so-called "revisionist" historians who have been trying for decades to surpass simple condemnations of the defeat with attempts at explanation. For him, that explanation is neither mono-causal nor definitive. Take away a six week collapse, he notes, and the regime that was the Third Republic "could be depicted as an extraordinary success story," a story exemplified by the "remarkable recovery" in arms and morale during the last year prior to the war (pp. 196-97).

In pursuit of this conclusion Jackson undertakes a triplet of counter-factual assertions, starting with the alleged but misleading contrasts between the France of 1914 and that of 1939-1940. In fact, we have for too long commented on the resigned but dutiful mood of French soldiers and civilians in 1939 because we for too long exaggerated the enthusiasms of their parents in 1914. The Daladier-Reynaud combination of 1939 does not fare badly against the lack-lustre leadership of René Viviani in 1914; neither do the high command's strategic plans of 1939, against the misplaced confidence in the offensive plans of 1914; neither do the measures taken for inter-allied planning in 1939, compared to the belated and incomplete arrangements for joint defence in 1914.

And if the divide has narrowed between aggressive France in 1914 and defensive France in 1939, so too it seems to narrow between a supine France in 1940 and a combative Britain. In the months leading up to the doubtless heroic Battle of Britain, morale in that country was deeply troubled. Many public figures, including members of the Chamberlain and Churchill cabinets, had little stomach for this war, little confidence in victory, little sympathy for France, and none for a Soviet Union which, with luck, might become Hitler's next target in the vast expanses of Eastern Europe. Even at the end of May 1940, Jackson notes, well beyond the German breakthrough on the Meuse river and with the Dunkirk evacuation underway, elements in the British government were seriously "exploring the possibility of peace"(p.208).

Even the divide between the French and the Germans has to be re-measured, starting with a recent claim that the doctrine of blitzkrieg was not the product of methodical genius.<sup>[2]</sup> Rather, it grew haphazardly from the Meuse crossings in May 1940, and to the surprise and relief of the field commanders. But there is more. If the German air force were so superior in May-June, something has to explain why they lost 28 percent of their aircraft, why their army was more dependent on horse-drawn

vehicles than the French, why their best tanks were not the equal of the best French models, why their production rates by 1940 were less than that of France, why the morale of the German populace was as resigned as that of the French to the prospect of war in August 1939. In sum, the divides between one France and another, between Britain and France, and finally between Germany and France have unfortunately assumed mythic proportions at the expense of our understanding.

In short, Jackson rejects explanations for the defeat which suggest the French had it coming to them—if not for deep-seated character flaws, for incompetence—or because they were hopelessly outclassed by either their German enemy or their British ally. He sees it as a battlefield defeat, the product of both strategic and tactical decisions in 1939-1940, and one that was in no sense foreordained.<sup>[3]</sup> Except, one observes as we shift to the closing chapter on "Consequences," in the sense that it was long since apparent that France was no longer in the first rank of the great powers. Perhaps we should ask, he suggests, not why France lost in 1940, but why France won in 1918 (p. 213). The answer, of course, is that it did so with the help of allies: principally the British, the Russians, the Italians and the Americans. By war's outbreak in 1939 the French were down to one.

That condition was one cause of the defeat. But one consequence of the defeat was a post-war Gaullist denial of France's dependence on others, and the concomitant necessity of blaming the Third Republic for having failed to perform as a great power (p. 248). That attribution of blame, Jackson reports, and much more, emerged from the events of 1940. In this, the most novel of the six chapters, he reflects on the wider and more enduring implications of what, temporally, was an epiphenomenon. The suddenness and completeness of the defeat left a legacy of embarrassment that long outlasted the discredited Vichy regime and the early post-war trials. On a personal level, General de Gaulle let recollections of the war years erode any respect he may once have had for one of his eventual successors, François Mitterand, just as he let them feed his suspicions of "les Anglo-Saxons." And from those suspicions, which were hardly his alone, came a renewed interest in promoting a European community and a related resolve to use a modernized French state to conduct a sustained campaign of national regeneration.

So much for highlighting some of the key features of this finely executed book and for isolating some of its principal arguments. Julian Jackson has become a leading historian of the Third French Republic, and for reasons that are all to be found in this his latest book. An excerpt from one review proclaims on the book's cover that this is "history as it should be written," and I concur. He is a reader-sensitive writer who has an eye for pithy and revealing quotations, who tells a story cleanly, but who is determined to explicate as well as narrate. Therein is the desired intersection between what is often called "popular" history and what is often called "academic" history.

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## NOTES

[1] Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War: strategy, politics, and economics in Britain and France, 1938-1940* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[2] See p.215. The claim is advanced by Karl-Heinz Frieser, "La Légende de la Blitzkrieg," in M. Vaisse ed. *Mai-juin 1940. Défaite française, victoire allemande, sous l'oeil des historiens étrangers* (Paris: Ed. Autrement, 2000), pp. 75-86.

[3] This conclusion is consistent with Ernest May's recent *Strange Victory. Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); and with the preliminary findings of Martin S. Alexander's current study, provisionally entitled "The Republic at War: France's Fight against Hitler's Reich, 1939-1940."

Robert J. Young  
University of Winnipeg  
r.young@uwinnipeg.ca

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