

## Did Historians Make History?

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In the fall of 2004, Perry Anderson offered a diagnosis of the latest *mal français* in two articles published in the *London Review*.<sup>1</sup> Anderson's articles were remarkable for the breadth and intelligence of their portrait of the French psyche as well as for the sheer verve of their style. They were remarkable, too, for attributing extraordinary influence, occult as well as overt, institutional more than intellectual, to a diumvirate of historians, François Furet and Pierre Nora, and it is primarily that aspect of his critique that will occupy me here.

It is a pardonable *déformation professionnelle* in a historian and journal editor to imagine that historians and editors quite like himself<sup>2</sup> can aspire to legislate for all mankind, laboring "to dispatch the wrong past and recover the right one" and thus bring France into "the safe harbor of a modern democracy." Still, we know that men do not make history under conditions of their own choosing. To assess their actual influence, we need to explore the context in which they worked.

### The Revolutionary Mentality

Characterizing Furet's approach to history, Anderson writes that "there was a virtually seamless unity between his work on the past and his interventions in the present."<sup>3</sup> With the concept of totalitarianism, we are told, Furet sutured past to present, portraying the history of the French Revolution as a pregnant intertext, a set of Russian dolls in which one revolution swallows another, the Bolshevik mirroring the French and in turn casting upon it a harsh light, revealing its true essence.

More fundamental, however, was the evolving critique of the concept of revolution itself as a totalizing phenomenon, which emerged more than a decade later as the leitmotif of the *Dictionnaire critique*. Now doubt centered not on the *means* employed by revolutionaries but on their very *hopes*, on the passions that drive them. It was the concept of revolution that was called into question, the idea that the past is a slate that can be wiped clean. The attack aimed at the hubris associated with the *tabula rasa*, the assumption that a society can be rebuilt from the ground up, "regenerated" through and through, and rendered rational and transparent from its inception and in its very structure. Implicit in this dream is the notion that society can be so ordered that politics becomes unnecessary, because its basic principles have the force of logic or are seen as inherent in nature and technology. This dream has its Marxist version, based on the destruction of private property in the means of production and the advent of a universal class; it also has its liberal version, based on a theory of justice which holds that if only the right criteria of social choice can be agreed behind a veil of ignorance, radical political

discord, that is, struggles over the fundamental structure and purpose of society, will cease.

Why does Furet loom so large in Anderson's view of this period? Because what Furet attacked was not so much an idea of the French Revolution as this eschatological psychology of the political, which Anderson cherishes despite its having tied the French left to a hobbling combination of verbal-theoretical extravagance and practical timidity. The old historiography, obedient willy-nilly to Marx's potent imagery, had in one guise or another accredited the notion that what characterizes revolutionary periods is an upwelling of social passions too powerful for existing superstructures to contain. This view of *social* revolution is paradoxically *anti-political*. The problem with the French left on this reading lay not with its politics but with its detestation of politics. Practical politics is hateful to the revolutionary psychology because it is mundane rather than spiritual, plodding rather than quick, ponderous rather than soaring. *Mieux vaut avoir tort avec Sartre que raison avec Aron.*

## The Rehabilitation of the Political

Furet rehabilitated the political. I see him not as the scourge of French postmodernism but as its domesticator. His doubts about total revolution exhibit a clear affinity with, for example, Foucault's reworking of the concept of power, his insistence, derived from Nietzsche, that the will to power is inherent in the species and will neither wither away with the end of private property nor be made redundant by a theory of justice. Rather than a reaction against the rhetorical efflorescence of the Sixties and Seventies, Furet's "urbane war machine" (as Anderson calls it) was in its way a continuation of postmodern politics by other means. To seize the summit of the state was, in the Furetian catechism, only to set a new pair of eyes at the pinnacle of the panopticon. If revolutions leave disciplinary structures intact, if the power diffused throughout a society charges its very nervous tissue and impresses itself on the social genes, then no simple surgical excision can root it out. Politics—and by this I mean politics in its most radical sense, struggle over collective purpose—is always with us, hence we must learn to work with what we cannot hope to banish, because the political, the negotiation of the relation between dominator and dominated, is the inescapable human condition.

Anderson, in *The Origins of Postmodernity*, prefers to describe this ineluctable fate as defeat: "The universal triumph of capital," he writes, "signifies a defeat for all those forces once arrayed against it ... Its deeper sense lies in the cancellation of political alternatives." In this dramaturgy of abstractions, he finds reason to set Foucault among the forces once arrayed against capital, Furet among the defenders. I've proposed a less *chiaroscuro* alternative. *Furet et Foucault, même combat?* The suggestion is not entirely serious, yet it's useful as a way of blurring boundaries that Anderson draws rather too neatly. He describes the high water mark of the Fifth Republic, *circa* 1967, as a veritable golden age, a "flowering of ... intellectual energies that set France apart." It is good to remember, though, that the fields were full of weeds as well as flowers, and that it wasn't always easy to tell them apart amid the agitated profusion. Jean Daniel, whom Anderson portrays as little more than a

Furetian lackey, opened the pages of his *Nouvel Observateur* widely to Foucault and helped to establish his reputation with the general public, and it was Foucault whose lavish praise of André Glucksmann in those same pages helped to launch the *nouveaux philosophes* on their anti-totalitarian crusade.

This Foucauldian ascent from the streets contrasts sharply with Sartre's celebrated *bain de foule* at Billancourt and as such is emblematic of the post-revolutionary cast of mind. If revolution, as Sartre believed, is a kind of transubstantiation of inert routine into active will, the intellectual serves as its midwife by demonstrating the evanescence of what is. Critical thought saps the solidity of oppressive structures. Foucault and Furet saw things differently. Because oppressive structures persist, as Tocqueville and Nietzsche in their very different genealogies had demonstrated, the point of critical thought is to teach ways to attack them with finesse. The role of the intellectual is to complicate the past, which is eternal discord, domination *toujours recommencée*, and hence admits of no moment of absolute inception. Neither Foucault nor Furet believed that power was so simple a thing that it could be *seized*. Anderson implicitly recognizes the force of this critique of the revolutionary tradition in his sharply etched account of the work of the Italian social democratic theorist Norberto Bobbio. "What matters is not which class dominates," Anderson writes lucidly of Bobbio's position, "but the way it dominates. ... Of the two critiques of representative democracy in [Bobbio's] writings, it is the conservative and not the socialist that has final weight ... [and] even tends to become a perverse apology."<sup>4</sup> But the critique can be turned back against Anderson. Was it unreasonable to suppose that a reversal of the *direction* of domination in French society without due attention to the *manner* of rule would *not* by itself end scarcity, establish equity, restore meaning to work, animate the culture, or unbind Prometheus?

In fact, the question had been raised well before either man wrote. Sartre naturally looms even larger in this longer *durée*, not least because, as the philosopher of the *groupe en fusion*, he is the modern apostle of the social over the political, the spokesman for the amorphous anarchism, the political as *chahut*, that is such a deep-seated component of French radicalism of both left and right. Yet it was not Foucault's debate with Sartre or even the more fundamental polemic between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss that posed the first challenge to the status of the Revolution as the cornerstone of the Republic, the *bloc* on which everything achieved since 1789 must stand or fall. The first challenge was raised by Albert Camus.

## The Aborted Postwar Turn

Before getting to Camus, however, let me recap my argument to this point. I believe that Anderson mischaracterizes Furet's role. Furet's anti-totalitarian revisionism was not an artillery barrage intended to soften French defenses for a subsequent invasion by Anglo-American neo-liberalism but a contribution to the reconsideration of the revolutionary psychology that had long mesmerized the French left. Even here, however, it is a mistake to overestimate Furet's role, or indeed the role of intellectuals in general. Practical politics is the great teacher.

The collapse of the revolutionary psychology began much earlier, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and with the *frère ennemi* whose agonistic confrontation with Sartre defined the era. Reading the editorials that Camus wrote at *Combat* from 1944 to 1946, one can trace rather clearly the path that led from a naïve and sentimental *prêchi-prêcha* faith in the regenerative potential of revolution to a bitter appreciation of the persistence of political division and the opacity of power. The motto printed beneath the masthead of *Combat* was “from resistance to revolution.” This was Camus’s starting point, a token of the revolutionary mentality he never entirely abandoned. Underlying it was a revulsion from the political, which he, like many other observers of the scandal-ridden Third Republic, associated with the *corrupt*. That one prewar consequence of this adverse judgment of the political was the pervasive anti-parliamentarism of both left and right—an anti-parliamentarism to which fascism owed so much—did not trouble him initially at war’s end, because he believed that the defeat of the Third Reich and its collaborators would sweep into power a regenerative coalition of the pure of all confessions and parties. Because unanimity would reign, parliamentary pettifoggery would have no purchase.

This hope soon proved illusory, however. Camus’s awakening to the persistence of the political—that is, of domination, discord, and opacity—came in three stages. First, he recognized, in virtue of his commitment as editorialist to a critical *politesse* eschewing rhetorical *effets de manches*, that wielding power is a very different thing from voicing opposition, because power, by forcing choices between competing goods, introduces discord even where a will to harmony exists. *Gouverner, c’est choisir*—and Mendès France, the author of those words, embodied the ethics of responsibility in politics for Furet’s generation. Second, Camus learned that a discourse of virtue in general—a discourse more theological than political because what it honored was *resistance to evil*, not *choice between better and worse*—was inadequate to the task of introducing an element of rationality into the act of choosing, which is at least in part a technical question requiring specific forms of knowledge. Third, he found that the techniques of power, like all specialized forms of knowledge, were not amenable to the proprieties of literary language. Camus is palpably embarrassed when obliged to descend from moralizing about retributive justice to discussing budgets, yet he properly yields to necessity, while admonishing his readers to stifle their yawns and pay close attention to critical parliamentary debates. Diderot had faced the same difficulty in the eighteenth century and made sure that the pages of the *Encyclopedia* were filled with the concrete language of the trades. This tethered the progressive discourse of the era to the material and rescued it from the temptation to aestheticize the political. The fragmentation of language, by multiplying disparate facts and incommensurable values, is problematic for any democracy, but particularly so for the *laïc* French Republic, for which the ideal of a universal language and a shared cultural tradition embodied in literature broadly understood serve as a substitute for the excluded religious element or sanctified constitutional text.

The lessons that Camus learned early in the Cold War were not widely absorbed or generalized, however, because the left was soon excluded from power and Camus from the *marxisant* left, which can be particularly hard on the once-

committed who come to harbor doubts about what commitment entails. Anderson, in a moving passage on John Stuart Mill that introduces his essay on Bobbio, pays tribute to the “newly opened mind” that had been led to socialism by the love of a woman who had “sympathized with the risings of the urban poor.”<sup>5</sup> A similar roiling of the emotions in a time of turmoil moved Camus’s politics as well, but away from rather than toward the biblical dream of a great flood rising to erase an imperfect past. His scruples no more deserve to be stigmatized as apostasy from socialism than do Mill’s sympathies as apostasy from liberalism. Let me emphasize again, lest there be any misunderstanding on this point, that the Camus I am taking here as a symbol is not the Camus who questioned whether justice can be achieved through violence but the Camus who asked what justice means when brought down to earth and embedded in the quotidian, where the common man lives as a stranger beneath the gaze of philosophies that compete so verbosely to reinvent him before the bar of History. On this view, the still-born revolution that cast a pall over French politics in the latter half of the twentieth century occurred, or, rather, failed to occur, in 1945, not 1968. History’s failure to turn made it possible for the French left to continue to fantasize about power rather than be compelled to grapple with it. When power came at last in 1981, the problems Camus had discerned returned with a vengeance. Political competence was lacking; rhetoric was misaligned with reality; hidden discord surfaced.

## Political Competence

Of these three themes, I shall concentrate on one: political competence. The question was raised forcefully in the period of Furet’s greatest prominence by a complex of events now all but forgotten, the *Affaire LIP*, whose eruption in 1973 brought the shop floor to the attention of the literary salons of the left.

When Tocqueville contemplated the revolutionary spirit in France, he distinguished sharply between “inveterate and general facts” about revolution on the one hand and “facts peculiar to France” on the other. Foremost among the latter was the propensity of men of letters to speculate on political matters without “daily involvement in affairs” of state. Hence to one degree or another an “abstract and literary politics” infused all the works of the age “from the weighty treatise to the song.” Of course this did not mean that the great political problems of the day had been subjected to detailed or intensive study. “Most of these works,” Tocqueville felt, “touched [on the great issues] only in passing and as if toying with them.” (AR, III.1, 169-70).

To be sure, Tocqueville’s dismissal of theoretical praxis as an infantile disorder is excessive. Literary France has never been as alienated from practical affairs as Tocqueville implies, not even in the high rhetorical era of “French theory.” In the period between the abortive uprising of May 1968 and Mitterrand’s accession to power in 1981, the very practical business of *autogestion*, of self-management by workers of their own workplaces, seized the literary imagination. The *Affaire LIP* became a national *cause célèbre* from 1973 into the 1980s. Indeed, the vagaries of that evolving experiment in workplace democracy proved more widely instructive than Camus’s editorials of 1945 and 1946, and more problematic for the revolutionary

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psychology to dismiss. It became clear once again that a commitment to virtue cannot guarantee unanimity, that democratic self-managers are not equipped by honesty or decency alone with the means to cope with technological change and foreign competition, and that governance, whether corporate or social, requires a technical and, more than that, a comprehensive political competence that neither *A Critique of Political Economy* nor a map of the epistemic affinities among the various *sciences humaines* can provide.

The LIP Affair was only one of many signs of the left's unpreparedness in the face of global economic integration. Though Mitterrand himself disdained economic policy in proportion to his love of lucre, his lieutenants and future prime ministers were often *énarques* well aware that few choices could be illuminated by ritual denunciations of the "hegemony of international capital." The variegation of the map of western capitalism suggested that welfare states falling short of the ideal workers' paradise might nevertheless be appealing to actually existing workers, and, in the soft Mediterranean underbelly, Eurocommunists spoke of channeling social consumption rather than controlling the means of production. Indeed, the Programme Commun itself was an unmistakable sign that even in the homeland of revolution, the revolutionary psychology had spent itself without help from historians. Confronting the capitalism of the *cadre* called for a different strategy from confronting the capitalism of the *patron*. If there was panic in some quarters of the right, in others there was relief that Mitterrand's historic wager had brought the PCF definitively inside the ambit of legality. If there was guilt about the new national wealth, as was inevitable in a country forever unsure of where it stood in relation to the material, renunciation had ceased to be part of the moral vocabulary, notwithstanding effusive expressions of sympathy for, and occasional quixotic gestures of solidarity with, the *laissés-pour-compte* of the Third World. Again and again the issue that Camus had identified—the need for political competence in service of redistributive generosity—loomed large.

Some on the left recognized this need and acted on it. Although Foucault had shown that instruments of knowledge are also instruments of power, his synoptic understanding of *epistemes* had a paradoxically depoliticizing effect. The epistemological skein was so tightly wound, in his view, that it could never be unraveled by pulling on one strand. Hence his concrete interventions tended to be micropolitical when they were not, as in the case of Iran, simply *loufoque*. More global change would have to await a tectonic shift in the epistemic plates.

The archæologist of knowledge works on a geological time scale; humbler thinkers, peasants of the intellect, must till the earth as they find it between upheavals. To some the ground seemed ready for cultivation. Take economics. In 1968 the teaching of economics in France languished in a woeful state. The discipline had official status only within the faculties of law and therefore had little in common with economics as studied elsewhere. The two French giants of the field, Maurice Allais and Gérard Debreu, were better known abroad than at home. A student at a business school such as HEC would have been preoccupied mainly with the ideological busywork of pointing out the deficiencies of Marxian surplus-value theory—largely wasted effort, since, in a shift of emphasis of which Perry Anderson himself is the best explicator, "Western Marxism" had in effect abandoned the

materialist netherlands for the Alpine heights of philosophical history and cultural criticism, where vistas were vast and competitors sparse.

The picture today is quite different. Economics now occupies a central place in the curriculum. Access to its study at higher levels requires a mathematically oriented *bac* and additional preparatory work. Its rigors are such that it has inspired student protest in the form of the Post-Autistic Economics Movement. The most widely read textbook of macroeconomics in France is the work of Olivier Blanchard. In the Mitterrand years and beyond, Blanchard served as an advisor to the Socialist Party. In his student days he frequented Trotskyite circles, where he may have known the party's future secretary general, prime minister, and standard-bearer Lionel Jospin. Later he departed for MIT, where he took his Ph. D. and now teaches while remaining active in French political life. Among the many party- and government-sponsored white papers on the French economy in which he has had a hand, the most recent is the Camdessus Report, which Nicolas Sarkozy—whom Anderson memorably dubs “the latest d’Artagnan of the right”—has pledged to make his “bedtime reading.” Still more recently, the current prime minister, Dominique de Villepin, announced an initiative to create a new Paris School of Economics under the direction of another erstwhile MIT economist, Thomas Piketty, with an initial funding of 10 million euros.<sup>6</sup>

It is no doubt too much to claim that Marx’s “old mole” has burrowed its way into the textbooks of bourgeois economics. To say this would be to discount the epistemic resistance. In forging intellectual tools with which to combat the status quo, the artisan is undoubtedly constrained by the state of his art. Yet it would be unreasonable to deny that he can impose a shape on the materials with which he works, recalcitrant though they may be. If we believed that, would any of us write? Hence it would be highly tendentious to infer that the versatile appeal of an economic theorist and his growing cohort of colleagues connotes the ascendancy of *une pensée unique* that has homogenized right and left and reduced French politics to a *blanc bonnet, bonnet blanc* whose bitterness to the Gallic palate was signaled by the vomiting up of Le Pen votes on April 21, 2002.

Anderson is characteristically adroit in finessing the difficulty. He writes: “The phrase *la pensée unique* ... - though like all such terms, involving an element of exaggeration - was not inaccurate as a gauge of its general dominance.” The suave litotes conceals the precise scope of the concession and the precise nature of the alternative or alternatives. Economics, dismal science though it may be, is all we have if we agree that the market, suitably regulated, has a role to play in reconciling the incommensurable values of generosity and efficiency, equality and liberty. I recognize, of course, that Anderson would deny that the market deserves such a role. In his essay on Bobbio he writes: “The reconceptualization of socialism as essentially economic democracy ... serves to avoid the central ideological obstacle to the implementation of such change: namely, the institution of private property.”<sup>7</sup>

In France, however, it was not private property but the pretension of the *dirigiste* state to embody the general will that stood as the main impediment to change. Ultimately, *dirigisme* was rejected not for ideological reasons but on pragmatic grounds. Having served well enough through *les trente glorieuses*, the

command economy was judged ill-suited to the changed environment after 1973. Too much capital had been squandered on industries singled out as “national champions” and sent into the lists to vie for French prestige, only to return as *canards boiteux*. That this technical judgment transcended partisan divisions is no proof of surrender to whatever specter the term “neo-liberalism” is supposed to conjure up: even governments that seek to change the rules of the international game are obliged to play it as deftly as they can; that is their duty to their people, the implicit or explicit promise they make in seeking election. Nor is “the rising tide of disgust with neo-liberal doctrines” proof that the views of Pierre Bourdieu, Viviane Forrester, ATTAC, and *Le Monde diplomatique* are sound or even coherent. Hence Anderson’s charge that “the drive to clamp a standard neo-liberal straitjacket onto economy and society has slowed, but not slackened—Maastricht alone ensuring that” is one that I am not at all sure how to read. Are we meant to take it as expressing a preference for a *souverainiste* straitjacket, a stiff-necked neo-autarky whose economic consequences need no scrutiny because obviously opposed to the “neo-liberal?” Is the Front Villiers-Pasqua-Chevènement meant to be the Popular Front of 2005, the last best hope of halting the Great Power of the hour? Or is it too late for that, so that we must now honor the brave resistance in which the spirit of Bourdieu figures as de Gaulle and ATTAC as the Franc-Tireurs et Partisans?

Marx would have appreciated the irony. The demonstrations that established Bourdieu as the champion of the dispossessed were spearheaded by the beneficiaries of a highly inegalitarian pension system whose origins can be traced to Otto von Bismarck. The radical intellectual of the hour defended the centerpiece of corporatist capitalism’s stabilization mechanism, as if saving the stabilizer mattered more than figuring out why the system had gone into a nosedive. Of course if the answer to that is only ever that “capitalism is inherently unstable,” then there is nothing to be done but await its ultimate demise.

## Craftsmanship, not Theology

Shortly after Mitterrand took power, *Le Monde* published an article entitled “Le Silence des Intellectuels.” In part this silence—to the extent that it was not a figment of the polemicist’s imagination—reflected incompetence to pronounce on the concrete issues faced by a party obliged to make history under conditions not of its own choosing. In part, however, it was more closely related to the third of Camus’s dilemmas: the loss of a “general culture,” the growing distance between the practices of citizenship and the techniques of governance that afflicts democracies everywhere. Into the vacuum left by the absence of public conversation, the irrational intrudes, cunningly manipulated by political puppeteers. It was still possible for Tocqueville to imagine that participation in local government could educate the citizenry and increase both its aptitude and its appetite for public affairs. This increasingly seems a forlorn hope, so that the representation of social interests in the technical discourse of governance assumes increasing importance as a site for practical politics. If elites are to represent as well as dominate, access to education must be broad, and the art of politics must be reshaped from within, through participation and association, to use the old Tocquevillean terminology



though in a new spirit, whose content it should be the purpose of today's social democratic politics to define. To be sure, France has taken a first step by broadening access to higher education. The percentage of each age cohort taking the baccalaureate has increased from under twenty in 1968 to over sixty today. This has not come without cost, however, especially in regard to style. The old elite, a relatively *petit comité* of intimate enemies, could achieve a concentration and intensity not possible today. At present the marketplace of ideas resembles the Amsterdam flower market more than the orchid house at the Jardin des Plantes. Bear in mind, however, that the old style had costs of its own. It was a graft of German idealism and its offshoots onto a stock of Latinate eloquence, a graft that Barrès long ago denounced as a *déracinement*, in much the same spirit as Anderson today laments the supplanting of regional vividness by a flat international style.

Of course today's *déracinement* is not without compensations. Anderson deplores the failure to "maintain the standards of the narrower system" without examining the penalties imposed by those standards, among them a self-referential hermeticism, severing of elite institutions from universities, closed-shop mentality fostered by *mandarins* lording it over their *chapelles*, and proliferation of parallel institutions to circumvent the resulting *blocages*—deformations whose sequelæ continue to mar French intellectual life today. The loss of idiosyncratic distinctiveness in the French intellectual voice may owe something to the abolition of the *doctorat d'État*, that hothouse of great cerebral ambitions, in 1983. With the diversification of baccalaureates and the introduction of new criteria of selection, mathematics now plays a more important, and verbal skill a somewhat diminished, role in creaming off the elite of students in a system that, for all its obvious democratization since 1968, remains extraordinarily selective in its upper echelons and debilitatingly indiscriminate elsewhere.

If the cumulative result of these changes is that the system produces less that is superbly unique and distinctively "made in France," it has to be granted that it also produces less that is frankly bizarre or outré. This consequence of democratic leveling is one that Tocqueville anticipated long ago, and it is odd to see Anderson taking up the defense of the vanished aristocracy of letters against the relative humdrum of the republic. But does the muting of oppositional rhetoric in the most widely accessible registers of public expression mean that opposition and resistance have vanished altogether?

Consider a different possibility. I believe that the lesson for the left of the past sixty years is that the vocation of its intellectuals is artisanal, not theological. It is to craft instruments for critical engagement, not rhetoric for salvation. A resistance that survives underground, that burrows into the technical languages of the specialties and there sharpens its teeth on hard practical matters, may gain in toughness some of what it loses in visibility. If there is to be no general rising, if progress must be piecemeal, the martial metaphors of victory and defeat become inappropriate. Perhaps the unflattering Marxian image of the mole deserves a *lieu de mémoire* as pregnant as Delacroix's Liberty bare-breasted at the barricades.

To be sure, my attempt to "define victory down" may be dismissed as "patently ideological," which is Anderson's characterization of the collective compendium of

French history entitled *Les Lieux de mémoire*, a work that we are told marked “the abandonment of visions of the future as a controlling horizon for interpretation of the past, in favor of a consensual support for institutions of the present.” Yet the *maître d’ouvrage* himself was rather less single-minded in his statement of the work’s purpose, which shifted vertiginously from volume to volume, and certainly many of the contributors were not aware that they were working toward any such consensus, since they interpreted their brief as an exhortation to deconstruct the illusory unanimity surrounding many present institutions, to unearth their contentious past, and thus to justify history by demonstrating its power to disrupt the complacency of memory – a useful artisanal function.

Of course a great deal was left out, not least, as Anderson rightly remarks, France’s imperial adventures. *Où sont les neiges d’antan?* But then a great deal is also left out of his own account of *la dégringolade*. The European Union, for instance, is scarcely mentioned, though the vogue of memory-history may point not to the success of a liberal ideological project but to the failure of the much more ambitious project to foster a European in lieu of a national or Atlanticist identity. Anderson admires de Gaulle for having created “the only truly independent power in Europe,” but he fails to see that it was once the French ambition to pursue the Gaullist project of independence and national grandeur by creating a Europe it could dominate. Justifiable resistance to this misconceived super-nationalist ambition is the source of many current discontents, whose resolution will require not the eloquence of old but mastery of the art of politics in the concrete. If there is indeed such a thing as a neo-liberal program for Europe, it will need an affective basis for solidarity less tenuous than a central bank flanked by legions of regulatory bureaucrats and a comic-opera parliament. In this respect the promotion of national nostalgia might be seen in today’s liberal camp as counter-productive, a blunder rather than a master stroke. On the other hand, the collective work that Nora inspired was in a fundamental sense true to the very republican ideal of state, nation, and polity as human constructs, not organic entities. Even in favoring the monocultural ideal of the Third Republic over the multicultural France that some would prefer today, Nora’s opus conceded in advance the crucial point that the old unity no longer *va de soi* and that the hexagon can no longer be squared by requiring every *lycéen* to read Bruno’s *Tour de France* and recite *nos ancêtres les Gaulois*. Europe is quite as much a project for the *longue durée* as the Republic, and defining and consolidating France’s place within it may require not so much a new Barthes and Lacan as a new Bruno and Lavissee.

To conclude on a personal note, I think I was first drawn to France many years ago by the hint of something savage beneath the surface of her refinement. Hence I can appreciate Anderson’s ultimate expression of hope that *ce peuple est encore dangereux*, but I can’t fully share it because my sense today is that the danger lurking in the French people, like that lurking in the American, is above all one of atavistic nationalism sparked by fear of the alien, diminished prestige, economic vulnerability, and overweening pride. The very different danger to which I was drawn in my youth—that of defiance of convention, propriety, and discipline in service of a simultaneous emancipation of heart and mind—was probably an

illusion born of infatuation. Like Swann, I was probably happier knowing my mistress less well. But such is life.

[end]

<sup>1</sup> Perry Anderson's two articles on France, entitled "La Dégringolade" and "L'Union Sucrée," appeared in the *London Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 17 (September 2, 2004) and vol. 26, no. 18 (September 23, 2004). A French translation has been published as *La pensée tiède : Un regard critique sur la culture française* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2005); this edition includes a reply to Anderson's charges by Pierre Nora. On April 22, 2005, a colloquium to discuss Anderson's articles was held at New York University's Institute of French Studies. An earlier version of this paper was one of several presented on that occasion, and Prof. Anderson responded to his critics. I wish to thank David Bell, Herrick Chapman, Peter Hall, and Patrice Higonnet, Harry Marks, and James Miller for comments on earlier drafts, and above all I want to thank Perry Anderson for both the stimulus to write this article and the extremely courteous way in which he responded to my remarks.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson was of course for many years the editor of the *New Left Review*.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from the two articles of Anderson's cited above.

<sup>4</sup> Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> *Libération*, October 1, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.