

Seamus Deane. *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789-1832*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988. Pp. 212. Cloth, \$25.00.

Patrice Higonnet. *Sister Republics: The Origins of French and American Republicanism*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988. Pp. 317. Cloth, \$25.00.

The bicentennial of the French Revolution has prompted an outpouring of new books, scholarly and popular, but these two from Harvard clearly aim at an academic audience. Each may prove useful in certain courses, but teachers should be aware of their disadvantages.

Deane's title will mislead any history teachers and students who expect the book to discuss the politics of Fox and Pitt or the strategies of Nelson and Wellington. "The central emphasis here is on literary figures," Deane writes, because "the reception of the French Enlightenment and Revolution in England is essentially a literary and cultural story." Deane—poet, critic, and professor of literature at University College, Dublin describes his book as "the impact of the Revolution and the French Enlightenment on English thought and letters during that first hectic period of reaction and response."

For those interested in that topic, this volume does have much to offer. It aims to demonstrate how "the French Revolution profoundly affected the reception and interpretation of the French Enlightenment in England" by developing two main narratives. The first examines intellectual relationships between English and French writers, such as Godwin's debts to Holbach and Helvétius, Shelly's to La Mettrie and Cabanis, and Coleridge's to Rousseau. The second narrative explores the reactions of English intellectuals, especially Burke and Hazlitt, to events in France. Admittedly selective, the author omits Blake, Byron, and Bentham. Deane bases his study on the published formal writings of English authors but also refers to their letters, some unpublished manuscripts, and secondary works. Sermons, pamphlets, and novels receive brief attention.

Deane convincingly concludes that the French Enlightenment and Revolution were widely understood in England as the first two parts of a historical crisis that might engulf England next. In self-defense, English thinkers, rejecting the universal claims made by the French, attacked those movements as specifically French and thus alien and invalid in England. In the process, they began to define English national consciousness in terms of opposition to all things French, whether fascination with abstract thought, relaxed sexual morality, lack of respect for the established church, egoism, or a tendency to despotism.

This is not a book for beginners. It assumes readers with a sophisticated vocabulary and literary background, and its exposition is sometimes tedious and confusing. Deane's lengthy discussions of "sympathetic imagination" and "secret crime" are soporific. Moreover, lists of writers and undefined concepts sometimes clog his prose. This book is more likely to be used in literature than history courses, but it could prove useful for advanced undergraduates or graduate students in interdisciplinary courses touching on reactions to the French Revolution in English literature. Otherwise, I can only recommend it as an outside assignment for a capable student with substantial interest and background in the subject.

History teachers and students will find Higonnet's book far more interesting and useful, it not always easier to read. Inspired by the work of Bernard Bailyn and François Furet, Higonnet, who is Goelet Professor of French History at Harvard, believes that both the American and French revolutions were ideological at root and not economically determined. In this interpretive essay he seeks to show why they developed so differently. Analyzing the secondary literature of the last twenty years, he rejects the neo-Marxist portion for its inability to explain the ideological differences between the revolutions, such as the sharp contrast in the number of executions. Both revolutions, he concludes, were "the birth throes of new political systems designed to express the importance of individualism in social life," which Higonnet terms "republicanism." And their "varying political developments were in no small part implied by the antecedent social histories of the two nations."

In alternating chapters on France and America, though with striking comparisons throughout, Higonnet examines the influences of political theory and events, religion, family, economic developments, and corporate structures like guilds and village communes on the shifting balance between individualism and its opposite, communitarianism. In America he finds that some of the early communitarianism transcended the general triumph of individualism. Lacking a tradition of popular or corporate action and having internalized the preconditions of capitalism, the Americans avoided the emergence of class as a determining factor in politics. Their inherited Radical Whig ideology led them to revolution, and then they successfully built "a new political consciousness that resolved the tensions of their historical experience and resolved their inherited ideological, religious, or communitarian nostalgias with the practical realities of American social life." But in France the

traditional political and social hierarchies declined while a negativist, nationalist, and possessive individualism rose. The contradiction between these two currents caused the revolution, which occurred when a united front of bourgeois and nobles abandoned the monarchy. Then Jacobin leaders from 1791 to 1799 all faced the same basic question: "How far should the propertied revolutionaries, incited by universalist rhetoric . . . and in desperate need of allies, agree to travel in tandem with the people" who had never forgotten their own communitarian traditions? Thus the American and French Revolutions developed differently because of the different qualities of individualism in the two countries.

Higonnet's analysis, which glows with erudition in both fields, is penetrating, subtle, convincing, and humane. One only wishes that it were written more clearly. Like Deane, Higonnet reduces complex concepts to single words, rarely defined straightforwardly, and then packs them into sentences that are so heavily freighted that his train of thought derails. Sometimes his style is eloquent: "In the administrative and social void caused by the collapse of the ancien régime, the Feuillants mistook the echo of their own words for the voice of the assembled nation." But more common are passages like these: "maieutic nationalism furthered yet another new politics, pluralistic but still messianic and exemplary;" or "many of the problems that brought down the elitist, individualist-universalist program of enlightened reform were not of the meritocrats' own making." If the author had taken the time and trouble to explain his ideas more thoroughly and express them more clearly, this book would be longer but much more useful in the classroom and even attract readers outside academe.

Nevertheless, *Sister Republics* is now the best comparative study of these two revolutions. With careful interpretation by an instructor (or better, two instructors, one for each revolution), this book could become the heart of an excellent course comparing these revolutions. Its arguments are bold enough for all students to see, and it navigates through the crowded waters of contemporary revolutionary studies in a way that will raise their historiographical awareness. Add a couple of volumes of primary sources and good films like *The Adams Chronicles*, *La Nuit de Varennes*, and *Danton*, and you have the makings of a fine course.

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**Maurice Larkin. *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People, 1936-1986.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. xxix, 435. Cloth, \$64.00; paper \$19.95.**

This is a competent, informed book about recent French history, but it is a book that serves no clear function. As a work of scholarship, it has no glaring faults; its interpretations are balanced and judicious. The problem is that there are already enough general texts that deal with this period. To be sure, most deal with either the pre or post-war, but that's not a sufficient justification for a new book.

This is all the more true because the author does not follow up his suggestion in the preface that there is a logic in examining a period in French history bounded by two major experiences of socialist government, that of the Popular Front and Mitterrand. Had he organized the book in a more thematic or interpretative way, the result might have been more original.

Larkin's book is not well suited for students. It is more erudite than structured, more apt to allude than to explain. Because it assumes a high level of prior knowledge, the reader who can fully understand the author's ironies and nuances really doesn't need this kind of book at all, whereas the student will most likely be confused. In particular, the author's frequent use of French expressions and arcane allusions may amuse the specialist but not the undergraduate.

This is essentially old fashioned political history with some additional materials on economics and some passing comments about society. There is a three-page appendix on the arts, but that only calls attention to the book's narrow scope. The Mitterrand regime receives 25 pages and deserves more. The book contains no conclusion. Despite its author's command of the material, this work will not serve to introduce students to the complex realities of modern France.

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