

REVIEW ESSAY

# Intellectual History as History of Engagement? The French Scholarship

Massimo Asta\*

Faculty of History, University of Cambridge

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [ma888@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ma888@cam.ac.uk)

François Dosse, *La saga des intellectuels français, 1944–1989*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2018)

Gisèle Sapiro, *Les écrivains et la politique: De l'affaire Dreyfus à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2018)

## I

Few intellectual histories of France by non-French authors in recent years have produced the bitter polemic that Tony Judt's *Past Imperfect: French intellectuals (1944–1956)* elicited.<sup>1</sup> Published in French at the same time as the English edition in 1992, the book was held to account for its questionable historiographical legitimacy, alleged inaccuracy in the treatment of sources, and not-so-hidden partisanship, even if it also received some positive reviews from authoritative specialists in the field in important national newspapers.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the general tone and content of the French academic reviews were largely negative, and in many ways this response was unsurprising: how could a study arguing that a certain dominant (and still alive) Jacobin philosophical tradition was characterized by a “marked absence of a concern with public ethics or political morality” be read otherwise? Further, in an often caustic style, Judt accused the postwar French intellectuals of being seduced by totalitarian tendencies. Such charge, not surprisingly, provoked a pointed defence of the intellectual and historiographical national sensibility, which was not above resorting to Continental stereotypes against the “Anglo-Saxon” cultural model. Nor was the negative reception surprising to Judt, who positioned himself explicitly in the text as an outsider, belonging to a different intellectual tradition.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Marc Lazar, ‘Un passé imparfait: Tony Judt et les intellectuels français,’ *Revue française de science politique* 43/4 (1993), 698–702; Christophe Prochasson, “Tony Judt, *Un passé imparfait: Les intellectuels en France, 1944–1956*,” *Annales: Histoire, sciences sociales* 49/1 (1994), 159–62; Daniel Lindenberg, ‘Les intellectuels français vus d’outre-Atlantique: À propos d’un passé imparfait de Tony Judt,’ *Esprit*, May 1993, 167–170.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Jean-François Sirinelli, “Le mystère français,” *Le Monde*, 27 Nov. 1992.

<sup>3</sup>Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford, 1992), 11, 9.

It is useful to remember this uproar today as one considers new books by Gisèle Sapiro and François Dosse, as it illustrates three important issues in a lively academic register: the continuity of a French approach to intellectual history, its difference from Anglo-American traditions, and a possible—although mediated—angle for understanding the nature of this French particularism, through the discussion of the historiographic projection of the idea of intellectual status.

First, in terms of its method, Judt's book proposed a study of the linguistic and conceptual conditions of French attitudes towards totalitarianism. It was nourished by the techniques of discourse analysis. The general unfamiliarity of French historians, if we exclude those steeped in Foucauldian studies, with the analysis of linguistic constructions is well known; and it was likely a source of the distorting interpretations and hostile reception of *Past Imperfect*, which highlighted the differences between French and Anglo-American intellectual historical practices. Philip Minard, introducing a special issue of the *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (Review of Modern and Contemporary History), acknowledged as recently as 2012 the endurance in France of a climate still unfavourable to the recognition of intellectual history as a discipline. But he also took issue with the spurious claim that there simply was no intellectual history in France, a misinterpretation that he traced back to the confusion brought into the field by the success of the linguistic turn abroad, which he blamed "for its mistakes, its aporias, but also for certain misunderstandings or misconceptions, both from its supporters and its opponents."<sup>4</sup> Minard's observations help to explain why so many French reviewers of Judt's work insisted that it was blind to sociology, to the socio-history of intellectuals, to the study of intellectual sociability, and to the institutions that structure and serve as matrices of intellectual life. In short, these reviewers charged, Judt's work was extraneous to the French tradition of the social history of intellectuals, a historiographical trend that had grown prominent in France in the late 1970s and the 1980s, in the wake of seminal works by historians such as Daniel Roche, Christophe Charle, Christophe Prochasson, and Jean François Sirinelli.<sup>5</sup> A well-established and generally dominant subdiscipline in relation to the hegemony of the *Annales* school, *l'histoire des intellectuels* was also buttressed by the influential constructivist sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, which shares a common structuralist sensibility with the work of many French historians.

Second, aside from its methodological foreignness, the underlying problem of *Past Imperfect* for French reviewers resided in its central thesis, stubbornly reiterated in the text, about the preponderance of an antiliberal or illiberal culture in France, which Judt presented as a distinct characteristic of French intellectual life. For Judt, the fascination of postwar intellectuals with communism was none other than a conjunctural manifestation, and its strength was proven by its

<sup>4</sup>Philip Minard, "Une nouvelle histoire intellectuelle? Brève introduction," *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 59/Abis (2012), 5–8, at 6.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel Roche, *Le siècle des lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680–1789* (Paris and The Hague, 1978); Christophe Charle, "Intellectuels et élites en France, 1880–1900" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Lille 3, 1986); Christophe Prochasson, "Place et rôle des intellectuels dans le mouvement socialiste français (1900–1920)" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1989); Jean François Sirinelli, "Khâgneux et normaliens des années vingt. Histoire politique d'une génération d'intellectuels (1919–1945)" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Paris X, 1986).

endurance and resistance to the upheavals of history. Moreover, he characterized French culture at the time of the book's publication as tainted by a fragile post-totalitarian conviction, which shows to what extent he was resistant to sympathy, or even jealousy, with respect to French intellectuals in a way that is sometimes found among foreigners. Stefan Collini, without at all denying the specificities of national culture with regard to intellectuals, suggests that the English reading of French exceptionalism, coming from British intellectuals themselves, touches on ideas inscribed in the Whig interpretation of nineteenth-century history and its subsequent reactualizations. A "Dreyfus envy" perpetuates itself in different forms to this day, he argues, founded in British disappointment about the lack of historical revolutionary ruptures that could have raised British intellectuals to a greater public relevance, comparable to the one enjoyed by their French counterparts.<sup>6</sup>

Judt's book belonged to a different school of thought. It reconnected with Raymond Aron's *L'opium des intellectuels* (The Opium of the Intellectuals). Although the two books' approaches and conclusions differ, their initial question is the same. As Aron put it, he sought "to explain the attitude of intellectuals, who are merciless before the failings of democracies and indulgent to the greatest crimes, provided they are committed in the name of good doctrines."<sup>7</sup> Judt's work seemed also to share the sensibility of Albert Camus with respect to the contradictions, the tragedy, and the absurdity of life. Camus (alongside Léon Blum and Aron), is in fact one of the French intellectuals Judt would write about in his next work, *The Burden of Responsibility*, as an example of courage and autonomy from the ideological and political constraints of the time.<sup>8</sup> In the broader debate between the advocates of pure art and the advocates of engaged art, Judt seemed to agree with Theodor Adorno's categorical stance in favour of art's primacy and autonomy, which regarded politically committed works as illegitimate and, insofar as they are products of their authors' arbitrary authority, politically untrue.<sup>9</sup>

Those familiar with the historiography of communism and its reception in the two countries that hosted the largest mass communist parties in the West—France and Italy—will be able to insert Judt's book, produced in the heat of the moment following the fall of the Berlin Wall, into the particular intellectual conjuncture of the early 1990s. *Le passé d'une illusion* by François Furet is probably its most striking example. But it would be misleading to assume that the French debate on Judt's book is out of date. Certainly, some historiographical elements no longer have the same resonance. But Sapiro's and Dosse's works, in different ways, provide examples of how this debate has been updated.

Indeed, the differences that separate the methodological traditions and the historiographical interests of France from those in use across the Channel and the Atlantic remain. That finding might appear, on the surface, to be a truism or, conversely, a misleading and reductionist claim. But it takes on more substance when

<sup>6</sup>Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2016).

<sup>7</sup>Raymond Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels* (Paris, 1955), 7.

<sup>8</sup>Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1998).

<sup>9</sup>Theodor Adorno, "Commitment", in Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York, 2019; first published 1962), 348–63.

one considers it carefully. Antoine Lilti, for example, has recently underlined the specific contours and even the dynamism of French work in intellectual history, as well as the originality of its topics of investigation, while at the same time questioning whether the discipline in France can even be said to exist. But interesting work abounds. Some of the more intriguing recent approaches include the history of the material conditions of intellectual work (such as material bibliography and the history of reading); the history of knowledge and organization of scientific networks; studies focusing on cognitive tools and ways of abstraction which derive from the modes of thinking in specific disciplines, or which migrate from one discipline or field to another; the history of social sciences and of regimes of historicity; the socio-history of concepts; and renewed approaches to the biography of intellectuals.<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that some of these studies have modelled themselves on the social history of intellectuals, and often employ interpretive apparatus that is not inconsistent with it. It is easy to recognize in fact how the traditional history of intellectuals, focused on institutions rather than hermeneutics, is still solidly present in the panorama of French historiography. This approach continues to be more popular than a contrasting current focused more explicitly on the history of ideas and the study of authors, as represented by the work of such figures as Pierre Rosanvallon, Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Manent, and the late François Furet. And although a debate of the Anglo-American kind on the current role and importance of the discipline of intellectual history is almost completely absent in France, nonetheless, the identity of a specific French type of socio-intellectual history is taken for granted as historiographical common sense.

The French *sonderweg* also continues to be apparent when considered in connection to questions of the political “engagement” (*engagement*) of intellectuals. The recent abandonment of romantic and nostalgic readings of the intellectual shows that this remains true, albeit in modified terms.<sup>11</sup> Historians and sociologists continue their search in particular for instances when intellectuals appear in the political sphere, examining their repertoire of collective or individual action, their partisan commitments, as well as their autonomy from and polarization with respect to the state and government power. Although different in many respects, the two books under review here help to illustrate these continuities, amply reflecting the French scholarly tradition of the social history of intellectuals and ideas. Seeing them against the contretemps of Judt’s *Past Imperfect* is an effective way to highlight the epistemological and methodological differences of intellectual history as practiced in France. It also reveals the particular ethos of French intellectuals, which has influenced in turn how they are studied. That connection between object of investigation and methodology of approach, I suggest, helps us to further understand the specificities of the French disciplinary approach to intellectual history, while also making clear why Judt’s book continues to matter. For despite its hostile reception, *Past Imperfect* left an echo in the debate on the history

<sup>10</sup> Antoine Lilti, “Does Intellectual History Exist in France? The Chronicle of a Renaissance Foretold,” trans. Will Slauter, in Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2013), 56–73.

<sup>11</sup> One such example is Gerard Noiriel, *Les fils maudits de la république: L’avenir des intellectuels en France* (Paris, 2005).

of French intellectuals. Three decades after its publication, François Dosse feels the need to quote him in the introduction, in order to criticize the book's lack of historical contextualization and its refusal to consider the "situation of Liberation to understand behaviours and practices" (1: 18–19). This ongoing dispute is proof that a dialogue has been established despite the differences that remain. And while those differences are important, they nevertheless enrich the scientific panorama of the discipline of intellectual history as a whole.

## II

The aim of Dosse's two-volume book is to offer a historical synthesis of the upsurge and the effacement of the prophetic intellectual in France, from the Liberation to 1989. The author views this process as overlapping, and almost coinciding, with the apogee and decline of the capacity to elaborate grand societal projects, as well as unified global visions and theories. According to Dosse, this ends with the emergence of the media intellectual, a new figure, who is a product of a standardized and mediatized audience, and who belongs to the "realm of the ephemeral and often the insignificant" (1: 17). Here, the history of intellectuals intertwines with the history of ideas and cultural history. But it is on the first of these two dimensions that Dosse tends to build his narrative frame. The evolution of the French intellectual landscape is marked by the succession of four intellectual moments, which catalyse different systems of thought and paradigms, characterized by an unstable equilibrium, yet capable of dictating, or at least interpreting, the epistemological tone and the spirit of the time: (1) the existentialist phase with Sartre; (2) the structuralist one, based on the triad Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud; (3) the liberal one, with Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Aron; and finally (4) the phase devoted to reflection on evil typified by Benjamin, Levinas, and Ricoeur. A prolific author, Dosse draws this important synthesis from his previous work in the history of social sciences and from his numerous biographical studies of leading intellectuals, such as Pierre Nora, Paul Ricoeur, Cornelius Castoriadis, Michel de Certeau, Félix Guattari, and Gilles Deleuze.

Sapiro's book consists of a sequence of thematic chapters, many of which are revised versions of published articles, presenting theoretical and analytical frameworks, as well as case studies, to understand from a historical–sociological perspective the manifold relationships between writers, literature, and politics. It focuses on the years from the Dreyfus affair up to the Algerian War, the period in which "the figure par excellence of the intellectual who engages in society in the name of his (or her) symbolic power" (21) is incarnated in the French writer. In comparison to Sapiro's earlier *La guerre des écrivains, 1940–1953* (1999), this work covers an extended time frame. Two chapters go beyond the chronology announced in the subtitle, one looking into the politics of texts in the nineteenth century and the question of the fictionalization of politics, and the other offering an account of the condition of writers in the present, which questions the effectiveness of their contemporary depoliticization. The conceptual—even if necessarily nonnarrative—unity of a book that might appear fragmentary on the basis of its internal structure, is ensured by a theoretically well-articulated framework covering the relation between literature and politics. The first part focuses on the analysis of the

historically possible forms and dynamics of the politicization of writers, based on a prosopographical method and the study of cases of individual and collective trajectories. The second part deals with writers' visions of the world and the ethics of writing. Sapiro makes use of close reading, and delves into the analysis of textual forms, styles, and language, analyzing the axiological dimension of works and the production of stories outside the mainstream. However, she essentially investigates the contexts of production, neglecting an analysis of reception.

Consequently, Dosse's and Sapiro's books employ distinct methods and contrasting theoretical assumptions. Dosse advocates an "epistemological indeterminacy" in intellectual history, considering the endogenous analysis of texts and systems of thought on one side, and the political and social contextualization of intellectual activity on the other. This allows him to draw open-ended, heterogeneous, and hypothetical correlations between these two distinct realms, which are interpreted as irreducible. He describes his role as one of providing "schemas of reductive explanation" (2: 15). In contrast to Dosse's perception of the relative impossibility of finding external frameworks to explain the nature and the evolution of ideas—other than in the manner of Paul Ricoeur, through a bridge of signification between the past and the present (*mise en intrigue*)—Sapiro uses a Bourdiesian constructivist and relational–structural approach. This allows her to retrace the relations of interdependence and structural homology between the literary field and the political field, and the alliances, transfers, and borrowings among them. Her book, revealingly, is dedicated to Bourdieu himself.

In both cases, methodology contributes to the definition of the historical subject analyzed and has some affinity with its normative projection. If Sapiro's four ideal types of writer-intellectual (the aesthete, the notable, the avant-garde, and the polemicist) represent a differentiated spectrum, her focus on the generative dynamics of the dominant and the dominated in Bourdiesian terms offers quite a different conception of the intellectual from that of Dosse. For Sapiro, competition for symbolic goods inside the professional field is the primary concern, along with the study of the conditions for the transposition of right and left within the literary field between the 1920s and the 1950s (Chapter 2). Sapiro links the left–right commitments of writers, revolutionaries, and the politically conformist only secondarily to the process of mass politicization of the nineteenth century, and vaguely to the ideological split established by the French Revolution. She tells us about distinctions homologous to the political field, but which turn out to belong primarily to the literary one: breaks between the playhouses and theaters of the Parisian *rive gauche* and *rive droite*, wide and narrow circuits of production and distribution, and the rearguard and avant-garde. She writes about the dominant and the dominated within the literary field, because, first of all, it is as writers that they engage.

To understand the rise and fall of France's "overhanging intellectuality" and its struggle for universal values, Dosse deals with ideas and the alteration of systems of thought for writers, philosophers, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, and linguists. He studies their biographical paths, and the events and accidents that attend them, without trying to find common social patterns in their trajectories. He gives equal attention to the internal sociability of the intellectual milieu, to friendships, quarrels, and the informal and codified relations that animate cultural institutions, along with those of the academic and extra-academic communities of intellectuals

that surround them. These dynamics end up providing the book's narrative and contextual frameworks. But in Dosse's case, the explanation of the engagement of intellectuals refers directly to the partisan and political, without the mediations between fields analyzed by Sapiro. There is a tension between this point of analysis and the equally decisive, creative one of the debate of ideas and of the peer play that animates intellectual life. These two strands sometimes intertwine. But the methodological indeterminacy can lend itself to accusations of empiricism. Dosse's use of quotations to close his paragraphs often acts as epanorthosis, highlighting the intrinsic contradictions in the engagements of the intellectuals he examines, as if wanting to leave the reader suspended in judgment.

These differences in approach lead to distinct conclusions regarding the same subject. A good example is the case of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sapiro preliminarily explains the general left-wing orientation of the French literary field as a response to its domination by the holders of economic and political power, and through the autonomy of the literary field itself. The success of the literary left and of Sartre in particular after the Liberation is conjuncturely interpreted as an outcome of overcoming the antinomy between responsibility and liberty. These two categories structured the debate within the literary field between conservatives and nonconformists up until the war, and demonstrated with the Occupation, and the legal purges that followed, how empty the discourses of the theorists of pure art were. For Sapiro, Sartre recovered the theme of responsibility and, in the process, dissociated himself from the national moralism implicit in the literature of the French Resistance and socialist realism. Redefining the right-left split from a position of autonomy, he contributed to the formulation of the political left's values. In contrast, Dosse views Sartre's success, as well as the post-Liberation prophetism not specific to the left, as attributable to "the Nazi earthquake" and to the need to "think otherwise" after the trauma (1: 23). For him, the existentialist moment is explained by Sartre's ability to express the experience of a generation: the feeling of the strangeness of history as it unfolded during the Second World War, the feeling of powerlessness and, during the Liberation, the belief in the possibility of reopening horizons of expectation, the exaltation of existence and of the subject, and the engagement and liberty of speech as action.

### III

From the point of view of Anglo-American scholarship, both works, despite their fundamental divergences, might appear to be in line with the traditional French social history of intellectuals and ideas. And from this view, they might be questioned about their apparent lack of interest in the meaning and evolution of ideas as derived through a methodical analysis of texts. Yet that statement deserves to be qualified. Dosse criticizes the sociological-Bourdiesian approach, identifying it with a reductionism that deprives the human subject of individuality and human action of guiding intelligence. For him, that approach employs the individual subject primarily as a point of observation to validate the functioning of causal laws of social dynamics. He develops his criticism of it in order to justify his own interest in the history of ideas. The second part of Sapiro's book, moreover, deals with the study of literary works as sources in themselves.

Both authors devote significant parts of their studies to the way in which intellectuals have interpreted and debated the issue of engagement. Dosse analyzes pamphlets and correspondence which are typical topics of interest for French intellectual historians and which Sapiro has also investigated extensively in her past work. Dosse tells us about biographical facts. These could seem at a first reading anecdotal if he did not employ them with the aim of understanding the historically manifold nature of politically engaged lives, which are for him difficult to measure and classify. The aim is also to describe the colour of political stances in the face of historical events, the intensity of the passions and furores of the time, such as the “war of writing” during the Algerian war (1: Ch. 10), the “ideological war of communists” (1: Ch. 5), and the affections, infighting, tears, and ruptures that accompanied the “fractures of sartrism” and other developments (1: Ch. 3).

The evolution and concrete practices of intellectual engagement are central topics for both Dosse and Sapiro. They are also tools which function as a contextualizing plot: of unstable entanglements for Dosse, and of strict correlations for Sapiro. Dosse’s epistemological indeterminacy, which is not unlike Richard Rorty’s pragmatist relativism, leads him to focus on the comparison between different currents of thought. The understanding of the meaning of texts is entrusted to a horizontal, synchronic contextualization, determined by a discontinuous vision of history, and organized by the succession of intellectual paradigms. These paradigms influence the different disciplines, but they are limited in their effectiveness by the brevity of historical–intellectual conjuncture or “moments.” The reasons behind the transition from one intellectual moment to the next are difficult to decipher unless we follow the trends of the chaotic processes and events of French political, intellectual, and cultural history. Despite Dosse’s masterful analysis of single sequences, we tend to lose view of the continuity of ideas and, consequently, of the specificities of the French intellectual field. Having discussed structuralism, for example, as a specific tool for the emancipation of the humanities in France, he moves on without exploring to a great extent what remains of this French particularism after the structuralist moment and beyond its leading intellectuals. Dosse’s approach highlights the contingency of intellectual moments, stressing turning points and reversals in the history of ideas at the expense of recognizing continuities.

This aspect of Dosse’s work, which is also present in another form and intensity in Sapiro’s, distinguishes it from the tradition of the history of ideas initiated by Arthur Lovejoy, which traces the life of ideas diachronically, interrogating canonical topics and the content of traditions of thinking within vast temporal horizons, thereby revealing the active intellectual permanence which shapes the identity of a society. The methods of Dosse and Sapiro are also to a great extent incompatible with the contextualism of the Cambridge school. True, both authors are aware of the importance of the performative effects of discourse, and of understanding authorial motives and intentionality, albeit without subscribing to analytical philosophy as a theoretical approach or sharing the assertion according to which linguistic practice creates ideological context. However, neither Dosse nor Sapiro are primarily interested in the analysis of innovations, of theoretical and ideological alterations, or of the sudden conceptual shifts within broad discursive contexts that take into account the conventions, and in some way the *longue durée*, in ideas. Nor are they interested in providing a global and exhaustive theory of meaning, or in



analysing how an idea belongs to a sphere of meaning. Their approaches remain essentially non-philological. Dosse, like the so-called Sussex school in the UK, which seeks to combine the study of the internal development of concepts and that of the social environment, is more eclectic, but he is not interested in the depth of verbal textures or genealogy. Nor is he interested in the explanation of the different uses of specific words, or of the migration and mutation of ideology and values associated with clusters of words and concepts. He would probably only partially subscribe to Collini's exhortation to interpret the profession of intellectual historians as eavesdroppers on the conversations of the past.<sup>12</sup>

Although a parallel could perhaps be drawn between Skinner's research of linguistic conventions and that of Sapiro's aesthetic conventions, her Bourdiesian approach hardly allows us to find true connections. Sapiro's goal is to define correlations between the space of representations and social discourses, which encompass structured and historically determined possibility (genre, narrative technique, and thematic and rhetorical forms), as well as the choices of individuals and groups, which in turn refer to the habitus and to how personal trajectories interact with the literary field. This field also evolves, and is subjected to the repercussions of "moments of crisis,"<sup>13</sup> and to the dynamics of relationships between dominant and dominated writers. She thus links the cultural relativism preached by André Malraux in *La tentation de l'Occident* (The Temptation of the Occident) (1926) to the political conjuncture of the war with Germany, and to the intellectual conjuncture of the condemnation by Catholic and nationalist right-wing writers of romanticism in favour of classicism; but she also ties these developments to the atypical personal experience and family background of the author (an autodidact and son of a broker). She reads the Resistance poems (namely those of the communist Louis Aragon) from a functionalist perspective, which disproves Sartre's assertion about the impossibility of poetry signifying and representing the world, or expressing passion, anger, indignation, or social or political hatred. And she interprets the autobiographical novel *La bourgeoisie rêveuse* (The Dreaming Bourgeoisie) (1937) by the Nazi collaborator Pierre Drieu La Rochelle—a work that crosses multiple genres and combines various narrative techniques—as an aesthetic rendering of the complex and indeterminate familial and social identity of the author, who committed suicide in 1945.

#### IV

The two books by Sapiro and Dosse are thus indicative of the internal plurality of French intellectual history as a history of intellectuals and intellectual life, as well as of the centrality of the Bourdiesian approach, and of their dynamism in continuity. An initial renewal in the field began towards the end of the 1990s with comparative studies looking at continental Europe and Britain, and then—albeit timidly—with the exploration of new issues emerging from transnational and global history.<sup>14</sup> An

<sup>12</sup>Cesare Cuttica, "The Intellectual Historian as Critic: Reflections on the Work of Stefan Collini," *Modern Intellectual History* 16/1 (2019), 251–80.

<sup>13</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Paris, 1984), p. 210.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Christophe Charle, *Les intellectuels en Europe au XIXe siècle: Essai d'histoire comparée* (Paris, 1996); Gisèle Sapiro, ed., *L'espace intellectuel en Europe: De la formation des*

openness to the history of ideas and the study of texts is now becoming increasingly important. The recent collective work *La vie intellectuelle en France* (Intellectual Life in France) (2016), edited by Christophe Charle and Laurent Jeanpierre, includes large sections on the history of ideas.

The engagement of French intellectuals—the question which fascinated and obsessed Judt in his work on the postwar period, and the interpretation of which created the clash with his French reviewers—nevertheless continues to constitute an unavoidable *topos*. In Dosse, after the irruption of the engaged prophetic intellectual in the aftermath of the Second World War, the moments of crisis that punctuated the process of delegitimization, thus leading to “social anomie” and “intellectual aphasia,” are determined by the national repercussions of the disruptions affecting international communism: 1956, 1968, 1974, and 1989. It is as if the way we look at the particular status of the French intellectual can only be seen through the lens of the age of extremes.<sup>15</sup> Sapiro takes into consideration a completely different definition, adopting both Bourdieu’s intellectual prophet as “the man of crisis situations” and Max Weber’s theory of religion concerning the opposition between priest and prophet.<sup>16</sup> For her the writer begins to acquire prophetic characteristics in the nineteenth century, in parallel with the process of the autonomization and politicization of the literary field. “The Commune, the Dreyfus affair, World War I, the rise of communism and fascism in the interwar period, the defeat of 1940, the wars of decolonization in the 1950s, along with the instability of the parliamentary regime and the crises elicited by modernization together create a demand for understanding conducive to the reception of prophetic speeches” (25–6).

Despite persistent appeals to overcome mourning for the intellectual-prophet, and to deconstruct its mythology, it is worth asking to what extent the fate of this central figure of French cultural and political life continues to haunt—and even to inspire—historical interpretations. The two authors offer different readings for the present moment, although they are likely generated by a common urgency and civil concern. In his conclusion, Dosse asks us to consider his book as a tombstone for the prophetic intellectual, erected without nostalgia and melancholy as Jean François Lyotard once proposed.<sup>17</sup> In the face of a twenty-first century still immersed in the transition phase that began in the 1980s, Dosse describes the emergence of a new kind of democratic intellectual, both post-Sartrean and post-Foucauldian: a mediator between specific knowledge and public opinion, and a dispenser of ideas in a middle ground between episteme and doxa. This mediator is capable of formulating new horizons of expectation within a middle ground between the prophetic exuberance of 1945 and the sentiment of the end of history of 1989. He argues that we need this kind of intellectual today. Sapiro is also aware of the importance of the transformations that have taken place in the literary field since the 1980s, but she highlights the cyclical nature of the

*État-nations à la mondialisation XIXe–XXIe siècle* (Paris, 2009); Gisèle Sapiro, Marco Santoro, and Patrick Baert, eds., *Ideas on the Move in the Social Sciences and Humanities: The International Circulation of Paradigms and Theorists* (London, 2020).

<sup>15</sup>Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London, 1994).

<sup>16</sup>Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 2 (New York, 1968).

<sup>17</sup>Jean-François Lyotard, *Tombeau de l’intellectuel et autres papiers* (Paris, 1984).

politicization and depoliticization of intellectuals. The author tells us about the recent polarization between the literary right of authors such as Eric Zemmour, Michel Houellebecq, and Patrick Chamoiseau, engaged in attacking antiracism, multiculturalism, and the heritage of May 1968, and the literary left, which rediscovered the opportunity and the need for an engaged aesthetics.

Any scholar interested in writing a genealogy of the French approach to intellectual history today would want to take into account not only the impact of epistemological traditions, the relevance of the *Annales* school, and the influences arising from interdisciplinary alliances and methods, but also developments in the decade from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, the period immediately preceding Judt's *Past Imperfect*. Such a study would need to understand to what extent, at that very moment, the rapid loss in the credibility of the prophetic, often partisan, and to varying degrees revolutionary, intellectual precipitated the revival of the Dreyfusard intellectual model as a category of the past and as a cultural matrix inspiring the interpretations of the present along with new attempts to invent alternatives to it. The "specific intellectual" of Michel Foucault and later the "collective intellectual" of Pierre Bourdieu are two normative proposals put forth as quasi substitutes for the Sartrean "total intellectual." This new kind of intellectual, who is still characterized by taking political stances in the public sphere, and is engaged in the name of justice and truth, is nonetheless eager to highlight his/her independence from political power and the partisan sphere alike, and finally is less confident in the universalistic potentiality of individual thought and action, their own not least. That is a model that is by no means dead in France's contemporary intellectual sensibility, as the books by Dosse and Sapiro confirm. They also make clear that the figure of the French intellectual is very much alive in France's past, and still plays a role in shaping it.

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