Alice Y. Kaplan. The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. 308 pp. ISBN: 0-226-42414-6.

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Alice Kaplan's The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach (2000) is an excellent work that contributes greatly to the understanding of Vichy France. Robert Brasillach was a prominent intellectual who collaborated with the Germans through writing during the occupation and was later executed for treason upon the Liberation. Kaplan focuses on his acts of collaboration and trial to demonstrate the complexities of understanding collaborationism during the occupation and the Purge, and also highlights the "violence of his articles" to counter the revisionists who have attempted to canonize him as a martyr of modern right wing politics. Interdisciplinarity is a notable strength of The Collaborator, Kaplan adeptly situates the story of Brasillach within the political and social context of the occupation and weaves in literary and linguistic analyses using a variety of sources ranging from Brasillach's novels to interviews. One minor reservation to this work is Kaplan's explicit moral and political agenda, which readers should be conscious of to make the best use of her work. However, this is a caveat, rather than a critique, and her agenda does not undermine the overall quality of this book. All in all, The Collaborator is a great work that provides an excellent starting point for the study of intellectual collaboration during the occupation.

The Collaborator has a specific raison d'être. Today, Brasillach has transformed into a martyr of the modern right wing politics in France, with the purging of his explicit anti-Semitism and violence from his name in today's public discourse. In this context, Kaplan aims to address "the dangers of revisionist history" surrounding the *myth* of Robert Brasillach. She argues that "Brasillach's texts have been reshaped and misrepresented so that his history can be written for political reasons," and thus she writes with a "sense of urgency," as there are "fewer and fewer readers alive today who still remember the violence of those original Brasillach articles in *Je Suis Partout*." Kaplan follows through the life of Brasillach, emphasizing his literary activities during the occupation, his trial, and the discussion surrounding his execution and exposing his anti-Semitism and "violence" of his words.

The book starts with an overview of Brasillach's life and career prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, with a special emphasis on his fascist political leanings and anti-Semitism presented in his novels and articles in *Je Suis Partout*. Kaplan then tracks Brasillach's service in the French army and imprisonment in German POW camp, followed by his release in 1940 and resumption of his work with Je Suis Partout. Then, Kaplan follows through the liberation of Paris, Brasillach's brief hiding, and subsequent arrest. The second half of the book focuses on the trial of Brasillach, his death, and ensuing controversy. In describing the trial, Kaplan presents the backgrounds of Marcel Reboul, the government prosecutor; Jacques Isorni, Brasillach's lawyer; and the four jurors who ultimately convicted Brasillach of treason and sent him to the firing squad. Kaplan then presents in a detailed manner the proceedings of the trial, which ultimately condemned Brasillach to death. Kaplan proceeds to present Brasillach's friends and relatives' unsuccessful attempt to obtain pardon from de Gaulle and his execution on February 6, 1945. Lastly, Kaplan discusses the immediate reactions following his execution and its repercussions upon the French society; she mentions the attempts of his sympathizers to obliterate his "most damning statements" and promote him to the status of the martyr for the rise of the extreme right in French politics, and warns the readers of the dangers of revisionist history.iii

The Collaborator is overall an excellent work of history that brings together the author's interdisciplinary strengths. Alice Kaplan, a scholar of French literature, employs an engaging, yet accessible style to render a superb narrative. Kaplan also employs a rich variety of sources, ranging from privileged materials from the National Archives to interviews with friends and relatives of those involved in the trial, original Brasillach publications from the 1930s and 1940s, court transcripts, and many more. Waplan also interweaves analyses into the historical context of Vichy France and the Purge. Furthermore, Kaplan situates the biography of a man into the political context of the era, which demonstrates the complexities and moral ambiguities of collaboration and the Purge discussed in Stanley Hoffmann's article. For instance, Kaplan notes that many magistrates and prosecutors, who worked in trials of the collaborators (including Reboul), had served under the Vichy government, rendering questions of moral legitimacy. vi The Collaborator's interdisciplinarity definitely makes it a unique addition to the historiography of both Robert Brasillach and Vichy France. Michel Laval's Brasillach ou la trahison d'un clerc (1992), for instance, is limited to journal articles in terms of sources and thus lacks the interdisciplinarity required to examine the role of a man of literature who lived in a politically and socially complex era. vii Furthermore, past works on Brasillach had become dated with the availability of newer materials in the National Archives. viii Thus, Kaplan presents perhaps the most complete and up-to-date work on Brasillach with The Collaborator.

Furthermore, *The Collaborator* is an excellent starting point for a research on the history of intellectuals during the occupation. Kaplan demonstrates the complexities of the roles that intellectuals played during the occupation and her examination of the Purge. The linguistic and literary analyses are especially helpful in that they provide a unique glimpse into the discourses on nationalism, fascism, and role of intellectuals that had been in conflict immediately succeeding the liberation.

One minor reservation about *The Collaborator* is Kaplan's explicit moral and political agenda: she wants to ensure that Brasillach remains a villain, not a hero. It is difficult for modern readers to maintain an amoral stance towards issues such as anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. At the same time, I believe that it is necessary for readers to be conscious of the tendency to veer towards making vindictive judgments about historical actors and thus caricaturize them. Kaplan succeeds in maintaining that fine balance in that she appreciates and presents the complexities of Brasillach's leanings towards fascism and his acts of collaboration in general, and thus does not let her political and moral agenda to undermine the quality of her work.

All in all, *The Collaborator* is a superb work of history that draws together tools from various disciplines and adds to the historiography of Vichy France and the Purge. It is an interesting work in that there is an explicit political and moral agenda driving it. However, this does not undermine the quality of this book and Alice Kaplan succeeds in presenting a fair representation of a controversial figure. Lastly, its rich bibliography and excellent historical and literature analyses make it an extremely useful work for those interested in further examining the role of intellectuals during this era.

Notes

¹ Alice Y. Kaplan, The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), ix.

ii Kaplan, The Collaborator, xvi.

iii *Ibid*, 231.

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iv Ibid, xiii-xiv.

^v See Stanley Hoffmann, "Collaborationism in France during World War II," The Journal of Modern History (The University of Chicago Press) 40, no. 3 (September 1968): 375-395.

vi Kaplan, The Collaborator, 181.

vii Michel Laval, Brasillach ou la trahison d'un clerc (Paris: Hachette, 1991).

viii Kaplan, The Collaborator, xiii.