

# The French Review

## From the Editor's Desk

Pour la France, le début et la fin de l'année 2015 ont été marqués par des attaques terroristes dont l'ampleur et le niveau de brutalité semblaient auparavant inconcevables, mais qui découlent logiquement du totalitarisme théocratique, avatar plus récent des totalitarismes politiques du vingtième siècle. Cette immonde idéologie politique qui instrumentalise une religion a été exposée en détail par le romancier algérien Boualem Sansal dans plusieurs livres, dont *Le village de l'Allemand* (2008) et *Rue Darwin* (2011). Son dernier roman, *2084, la fin du monde*, a été publié à la rentrée littéraire 2015, quelques semaines avant les attentats du 13 novembre. Avec ses résonances orwelliennes, *2084* décortique la vision du monde et de l'histoire qui est à la base de tant de tueries, à Paris comme ailleurs: "Pour que les gens croient et s'accrochent désespérément à leur foi, il faut la guerre, une vraie guerre, qui fait des morts en nombre et qui ne cesse jamais, et un ennemi qu'on ne voit pas ou qu'on voit partout sans le voir nulle part" (105).

Le numéro de décembre 2015 de la *French Review* étant déjà sous presse lors des attentats, nous n'avons pu en faire état. Pour ce premier numéro de l'année 2016, j'ai demandé à William Cloonan (Florida State University, emeritus), qui habite à Paris une partie de l'année, de livrer ses impressions. Je le remercie d'avoir rapidement rédigé le court texte que nous publions dans les pages suivantes. À l'avenir, nous aurons sans doute l'occasion de publier de plus longs articles qui traiteront de ces questions.

Édouard Ousselin, Rédacteur en chef

# The Morning After

by William Cloonan

**I**N PARIS I JOG early in the morning, when it is still dark. I leave my apartment, head up the *Boulevard Blanqui* to the *Place d'Italie*, turn right into the *Rue Bobillot*, then go through the *Butte-aux-Cailles* neighborhood and make a long loop home. Despite the wee hour, it is surprising how busy this area normally is on the weekend. Couples heading home from a long night out, parties ending, parties starting, *clochards* resolving world problems over a few drinks, and on Sunday, produce merchants setting up their stalls for the *marché ouvert*. The mornings of November 14 and 15 were not, however, normal. There was nobody in the streets, no lovers, no workers, no bums. Just a silence that was eerie rather than calm. By the morning after Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, even before most residents of the city had gotten out of bed, Paris had already changed.

Like most people in the city in the days immediately after the killings, I did not know what to do with myself. The normal routine was out of the question, but I had no idea how to replace it. So I walked. Initially the city seemed quite normal. Kids running around as their parents shopped and gossiped. That's how it seemed until I got to the Luxembourg Gardens. Young, heavily-armed soldiers all over the place and the park closed. For want of anything better to do or say, I asked one of the soldiers when the Luxembourg would open again. His "aucune idée" was predictable, but as I was about to walk away, an older woman, about my age, rushed up to him and asked: "Mais qu'est-ce que vous faites ici?" Had I been called upon to answer what seemed to me such a stupid question, the response could not have been printed in the *French Review*.

Yet later that day I realized there was nothing wrong with the question, because it was not really a question. I had gone to a bus station to get a ride home. Public transportation functioned that weekend, but not at the normal pace. The sign at the *abri* indicated a fifteen-minute delay before the next bus. Normally, if this evokes any reaction from Parisians, it is on the order of: "C'est pas possible! La France est pourrie! C'est pas comme avant!" But on this day France was really not "comme avant," and people's talk reflected that. Everyone at the stop was rattling on about the night before, but what made it so striking was that nobody was saying anything new or particularly interesting. Just rehashing what they had seen on television or read in the morning papers. The point, I realized, was not to

communicate ideas, but to relieve pressure by making noises at each other, and thereby establishing a form of solidarity as aggrieved citizens. This is what I did not initially understand about the lady's earlier comment.

The psychological effects of November 13 on the nation were widespread and readily apparent, even if I was a bit slow to grasp them. A friend reports that when she went to her regular *boulangerie*, to the usual "Comment ça va?" the man behind the counter replied: "On fait de notre mieux aujourd'hui." When she left the bakery, she realized that "au revoir" was not really a guarantee.<sup>1</sup> But this was not the only hurt inflicted upon the French. In my neighborhood I would occasionally bump into some of the men who work at the *Place d'Italie* market. They understood that closing markets, as well as other spaces where crowds can gather, was a justifiable security measure, and one of them told me that some wives of colleagues who live outside the city were very nervous about their husbands going to work. Nobody questioned this reaction, yet at the same time, the men I spoke to expressed an equally justified concern about their loss of income, both in terms of sales and of the produce they had to discard. Even among those fortunate enough not to be direct or indirect (family and friends) victims of the shootings, the damage done was not only to the psyche.

In the face of such traumas, the French wanted heroes. There were innumerable stories about people who acted with courage and determination to help the wounded the night before. Some took strangers into their homes; at least one *gardien* unlocked the door leading to his building's courtyard, got as many people inside as possible, then locked it again. My favorite anecdote concerns someone who went fishing. A gentleman from one of the Parisian suburbs liked to fish on Sunday in a part of the Seine near his home. However, on Sunday he came to Paris with his fishing gear, and set up under a *pont*. When asked what he was doing, he said he was there to show solidarity with Parisian fishermen, and to demonstrate that, like them, he was not afraid.

The political reaction was predictably bellicose, but the more striking responses took place in cafés. France had been wounded and its citizens were stunned, angered, and scared. Initially and understandably the government closed schools, museums, train stations and encouraged people to assert caution in any public gathering. For this reason demonstrations of any stripe were forbidden. The motives behind the terrorist attacks are complex and contradictory, and France, if still reeling, was preparing a variety of responses. So, as it turned out, were the citizens of Paris.

In the immediate aftermath of the murders, nobody in the street was particularly interested in the real or imagined grievances which provoked the attacks.

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Ms. Kathryn Haklin for her contribution to this piece.

Instead there was what I interpret as a spontaneous resurgence of a *joie de vivre*, a sense that the essence of French values were love of life, freedom of expression, and indifference to what individuals choose to do in private. All this was threatened by a collection of rifle-toting Puritans with no respect for pleasure, personal choice, or life itself. This was, I think, the instinct which led to the slogan, "Tous au café." Get back to the cafés, sit on the terrace, have a drink, and eye the men, women, dogs, and cats who pass. Even if you are a little afraid, don't let your enemy know it. To those intent upon disseminating death, show them that you stand for life, and that your alleged frivolity carries more weight than their putative seriousness. In such a context, at once defiant and somber, it will come as no surprise that the November 18 edition of *Charlie Hebdo* had the last image, if not the last word. The cover shows a gentleman, *légèrement ivre*, careening down a street with a bottle of champagne in one hand and a glass in the other: <[www.liberation.fr/direct/element/on-les-emmerde-la-couverture-du-prochain-charlie-hebdo\\_23510](http://www.liberation.fr/direct/element/on-les-emmerde-la-couverture-du-prochain-charlie-hebdo_23510)>. He has six bullet holes in his body, but what is gushing out is bubbly, rather than blood. The caption reads: "Ils ont les armes, on les emmerde, on a le champagne!" Nobody will argue that a glass of champagne can stand up to a Kalashnikov, but on a psychological level, it's a start.

November 25, 2015