



Julian Jackson. *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics, and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. xiii + 321 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-38925-7.

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Reconsidering Arcadie: French Homophiles and Gay Liberation

Julian Jackson's *Living in Arcadia* provides a valuable revisionist study of the French homophile organization, Arcadie, and its associated revue, which were active from 1954 until 1982. The book is divided into three parts. The first part provides historical background on attitudes toward homosexuality in France from the French Revolution until the early 1950s. The second traces Arcadie's development from its origins up through the 1960s, the organization's heyday. The third section follows Arcadie's evolution from the student revolts of May 1968 up to 1982, the year when both the organization and its associated revue ceased to exist.

Arcadie strove for what its founder, André Baudry, labeled "dignity," which in his words meant that it was necessary "to distinguish homosexuality from excess, scandal, and vice" (p. 125). Jackson explains that "Dignity" was the key Arcadian word; it sought to distinguish homosexuality from prostitution or the corruption of children, and also to combat the association of homosexuality with effeminacy. This was one of Arcadie's most insistent themes: homosexuals did not, wrote Baudry, wish to be confused with "these caricatures, the ... exhibitionists, these boys who no longer have anything of boys about them" (p. 125).

From the late 1950s until the early 70s, Arcadie was the sole gay political organization in France and it was not until after the events of May '68 that its position of dominance was challenged. The early 70s was a time

when French homosexuals began to alter their strategies in fundamental ways, from a policy of Arcadie-style respectability to a new kind of in-your-face radicalism. As opposed to trying to present homosexuals as socially acceptable to bourgeois society, the new political voices focused on asserting difference and working toward changing society rather than changing oneself.

In most histories of homosexuality in France, the appraisal of Arcadie's strategy as ineffective, apolitical, closeted, and conformist has gone unquestioned. Indeed, the "prevailing image of Arcadie continues to be that constructed by gay radicals in the 1970s" (p. 6) rather than by historians. As Jackson points out, negative descriptions of the organization are routinely reproduced without corroboration. In *Le rose et le noir: les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (1996), for example, Frédéric Martel claimed that Arcadie advocated "the interiorization of desire and encouraged people to struggle against their sexual selves—to ascetically sublimate their sexual and sentimental orientation" (p. 9). Another article on the history of Arcadie claimed that the club was "obsessed by the duty of homosexuals to be discreet" (p. 9).

Jackson's book takes another look at the organization and attempts to rectify the historical record by reexamining the extent to which the dominant interpretation of Arcadie represents more of a caricature than historical truth. His argument is fivefold: (1) though André

Baudry certainly left his mark on Arcadie, other members also played important roles and there was more room for dissent than is commonly assumed; (2) any evaluation of Arcadie must take into consideration the repressive social context of the 1950s and 60s; (3) Arcadie was more than just the words of Andr   Baudry or the words of the revue; consequently, we need to look at what Arcadie *did* for its members as much as what it *said*.... Offering many practical services to its members, it was about sociability as much as ideology or politics (p. 12); (4) we need to be wary of a teleological reading of homosexual history ... we must not naturalize the discourse of coming out.... Living a double life seemed to some in the 1950s to be an exhilarating, exciting and even empowering condition, not a shameful one (p. 24); and (5) finally, the homophile movements of the 50s and 60s were less different from the movements of the 70s than is usually imagined. Jackson's aim is to challenge the idea that one kind of homosexual politics is quintessentially conservative and another quintessentially radical (p. 58).

Jackson recognizes the potential pitfalls associated with correcting historical error: "The danger for a historian confronting a caricature is to end up adopting an apologetic posture where a black legend is replaced with a no less simplistic rose-tinted one" (p. 57). He successfully avoids this danger, presenting evidence fairly and at times, skillfully pulling back and allowing readers to form their own opinions when evidence is inconclusive. In the end, his call for a fresh look at the role of Arcadie in French gay liberation is not only intriguing, but also compelling, stirring a much-needed polemic that I hope will encourage others to devote more attention and research to the lives of homosexuals from this rich historical period. *Living in Arcadia* is a solid, clearly written piece of scholarship, built on sound, extensive research combined with just the right amount of personal perspective (while conducting research for his PhD in Paris in 1978, Jackson attended Arcadie's meetings). This book is a must-read for anyone interested in either gay history or post-1945 French history.

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