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Robert J. Young, *An American by Degrees: The Extraordinary Lives of French Ambassador Jules Jusserand*. Montreal; McGill-Queens University Press, 2009. xxv-327, pp. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN-10: 0773535721.

Review by Irwin Wall, University of California, Riverside.

Jules Jusserand took up his post as French Ambassador to the United States in 1903 and kept it until 1925, unusually long service in one post for any diplomat, much less an Ambassador. Yet consciousness of him among historians of the period is dim, and Young makes no bones about his aims of rescuing Jusserand from obscurity while demonstrating the utility of biography as auxiliary to the study of history. Readers will judge whether Young has succeeded in these tasks. "Extraordinary" as Young finds the career of Jusserand to have been, it remains curious that his imprint upon the turbulent events of the period and even Franco-American relations appears faint; most historical works dealing with the period seem oblivious to his presence in Washington at all, perhaps testimony to the fact that although Ambassadors implement policy, they have marginal roles in the making of it. And I am not sure that after reading this biography, which is in its own way nevertheless impressive, I am aware of any specific aspect of French-American relations that bore the Ambassador's specific imprint. On the other hand his influence to some degree might have been present everywhere even if unperceived, exercised subtly, as was the man.

"An American by Degrees" refers not to the extent to which Jusserand "went native", which was minimal, but rather to his accumulation of honorary degrees in America in recognition of his scholarship. Thus the further curious aspect of Young's title, "lives," rather than "life," which refers to Jusserand's dual career as historian and literary critic as well as diplomat. During his lifetime Jusserand, who earned his doctorate in Old English, and remained an authority on Chaucer, branched out into English and then American literature of the earlier and more contemporary periods, while writing academic histories as well. Jusserand had a distinct sense of how history must be written, Young eagerly points out: he believed that the historian's prose must be aesthetically pleasant to read, the sources must be presented with scrupulous objectivity, and that history must be mined for the invaluable "lessons" that are to be gleaned from it. The first two of these maxims might still be held up with pride, but the only "lesson" that appears ubiquitous in history is the extent to which its supposed teaching is abused for partisan purposes. And Jusserand might himself be guilty of such abuse; his job as Ambassador, of which he never lost sight, was to present his country favorably to American opinion, a task that too frequently ran counter to American perceptions of France, which were frequently negative, and for many Americans deservedly so.

Jusserand's entire career was spent in the diplomatic service. He began in Tunisia where he was present at the establishment of the protectorate; his contribution then extended to directly authoring the defining texts of the new French-Tunisian relations of hegemon and client state. Young credits him with endowing the protectorate with its "soul." I am not sure what that is, but I take it as faint praise. Young went on to spend a long time as Ambassador in London, followed by a stint in Denmark, before he finally took up residence in Washington, remaining there for twenty-two years before retiring. Early in his career he befriended Theodore Roosevelt; their relationship became a lifetime one, and it was of great value in countering the President's otherwise anti-French prejudice. TR might have well brought

this to bear during the Russo-Japanese war, but according to Young, Jusserand helped awaken him to the future Japanese danger to American interests, and TR worked actively with Jusserand in pressuring the Russians to sign a peace treaty with Japan at Portsmouth in 1906. Jusserand was helpful to the President as arbiter and TR must have appreciated the Ambassador's help in attaining the Nobel Prize for his efforts. One may assume that cemented the relationship between them.

Still, one gets little sense before the war that the relationship with the United States was regarded to be of much importance in Paris. The Embassy was under-funded and the Ambassador frequently ignored, and crucial policy decisions that bore directly on French-American relations were made without his knowledge or input, and often were discovered by him only well after the fact. Jusserand found himself at a considerable disadvantage with the coming of the war. His hallmark was to conduct his embassy with tact and discretion, shunning direct propaganda in America, while allowing the "facts," which he was certain demonstrated to any objective mind the justice of the French cause, to make the case. To be sure, there was considerable prejudice in favor of the Allies in the United States, and Jusserand could find many outspoken Francophiles to plead the French case among the American population. If the popular Hearst press was too often pro-German, the more elite publications, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, tended to be pro-French.

But Jusserand was not helped by his distant relations with Woodrow Wilson in contrast to his friendship with Roosevelt, and he could do little to counter the President's studied neutrality in the conflict, resentment over French and British stubborn rejection of any mediation efforts early on, and concern over excessive American private loans to France, which placed copious orders in the U.S. for war-related products while Germany remained isolated under the allied blockade. Nor did the Ambassador's policy of "discretion" reflect any consensus in Paris about what needed to be done across the Atlantic. The Germans carried on extensive propaganda in America; the Ambassador may have thought it crude and counter-productive, but there was considerable concern over it in Paris, and when the decision was made to counter it, the Ambassador was by-passed, and a separate French Office of Information opened in New York, impervious to the Ambassador's control. When the war broke out, and Franco-American relations swung into high gear, the conduct of relations with the American ally was further removed from the Ambassador's grasp. The powerful André Tardieu was appointed to conduct relations with the United States as High Commissioner, and all the crucial affairs related to the war effort, in particular shipping and propaganda, passed through his office.

With the war's end there was considerable chafing in Paris over the Ambassador's continued presence in Washington, yet he seemed to remain through inertia until Herriot decided to purge the diplomatic service in 1924, bringing Jusserand's career to an end. Dissatisfaction over his propaganda record was by that time of little import, because there was not much of a case to be made for the French in Washington. President Wilson angered the French by promising and renegeing on a postwar treaty of alliance, with painful results in France, which had agreed to abandon its demand for annexation of the Rhineland in exchange for the promised security guarantee. American pro-German prejudice returned after the war; Washington worried over French vindictiveness and German alleged inability to pay reparations, but was deaf to French entreaties to forgive or at least reduce the French war debt. France faced heavy reconstruction costs; the war after all was largely fought on its soil, and it had taken a beating on its investment in Russian debt, all of which was repudiated by the Bolsheviks. The franc was at 40% of its prewar value and American tariffs blocked French exports to Washington that might have earned needed dollars. It was French blood and American money expended in a common cause after all; did France not deserve some recognition for its sacrifice? But the Americans forgave the Germans everything, the French nothing, it seemed: "they (the French) hired the money, didn't they?" Nothing could have effectively been done in Washington to stem the negative outcry when French troops marched into the Ruhr in January 1923.

Meanwhile the Ambassador continued to call for discretion. He was personally an attractive symbol of French culture and “genius.” It was highly unusual for a foreign Ambassador, after all, to be chosen as President of the American Historical Association, but Jusserand served in that capacity in 1921, an extraordinary recognition of his scholarship and demonstration of his uniqueness in exemplifying a certain image of France. The Ambassador had other strengths. Madame Jusserand, who was of American birth, worked as a translator and educator, collaborated with him on his scholarship and his mission, and was greatly valued herself in America as a feminine symbol of elegance and accomplishment. Longevity in office had long since made the Ambassador Dean of the Ambassadorial corps in Washington, a post he often used to advantage. The Ambassador had extensive ties among American intellectuals, and he did not hesitate to admonish his longtime hosts before leaving the capitol. In a speech to the Art and Archeological League of Washington he pleaded for loyalty to the heritage of the city of L’Enfant, and did not hesitate to denounce the “ugliness” of much of the city’s new development. Former Secretary of State Lansing saluted him on his departure in the pages of the New York Times, while a thousand persons attended a farewell dinner in his honor.

The Ambassador did not return again to Washington during his long retirement, during which he continued to author works of historical scholarship. It is not clear to this reader that his otherwise admirable exercise of dignified restraint and discretion in the service of his country was exactly what was needed, and it appears from Young’s account that while he was valued in Paris as a symbol for Americans he was often ignored or by-passed in the making of crucial policy decisions and even in the conduct of relations.

Young has indeed accomplished his task of rescuing a life that might otherwise have remained consigned to oblivion, and he affords a valuable summary and glimpse of Franco-American relations through a time of great turbulence and technological change. But I wonder if Young has not missed a dimension of his narrative. He says nothing of the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair with which Jusserand must have had to contend at the outset of his mission, and one can only guess that he was not a Dreyfusard from his dislike of Zola. Was the chaffing at him at home during his embassy a demonstration of friction over his conservative politics? Was he regarded as a right-wing target of Herriot’s leftward slant in 1924, a specific example of the “enemy” during the time of the *cartel des gauches*? The Left demanded a purge of the right-wing Ambassadorial corps when Blum came to power in 1936, but the demand had long been a staple of Left-wing politics. Did the Ambassador’s life of discretion leave no place for his personal politics? Every inch the Ambassador and servant of his country, one misses in this book Jusserand the flawed and prejudiced human being, as after all are we all.

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