

Laberge on Bertin (2013)

Bertin, Éric. *Chronologie des livres de Victor Hugo imprimés en France entre 1819 et 1851*. Alfortville: Librairie Jérôme Doucet, 2013. Pp. 250. ISBN: 978-2-9540247-1-4

Yves Laberge, Université d'Ottawa

Almost anything related to Victor Hugo (1802–1885) is necessarily gigantic and sometimes infinite, as proven in this hard-to-find chronology of Victor Hugo's books printed in France between 1819 and 1851. Presented as a "limited edition" of only 500 copies, this unique catalog (available only in French) repertories the original editions and countless versions of Victor Hugo's books published during the first half of his life, until his exile in Belgium and later in the Jersey and Guernsey islands. Even within this relatively short focus of about thirty-three years, many important and lesser-known works are identified. No excerpts, no quotes, no literary comments, no historical critiques, no foreign editions are included: just the material details about every publication so that we better understand how each version of a single work—for example the addendum of a new preface by the author, or the inclusion of newly added poems in a second or third edition—contributes to the whole corpus.

Because we are dealing with Victor Hugo, the variety of literary works catalogued is unequalled and extensive: poetry, plays, novels, essays, odes, chronicles, speeches, and even transcripts of public debates by the giant of French literature (35–37). Obviously, the *Chronologie* contains bibliographic references about famous plays such as *Hernani ou l'honneur castillan* (1830), his magnificent volume of poetry, *Les Orientales*, and the universal novel, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, along with lesser-known writings.

Even with his early works and numerous theatrical successes from the 1830s, Victor Hugo's works were often counterfeited, as proven by the many clandestine versions of his novels and poetry listed in these pages (40). Éric Bertin accurately acknowledges all these publications including the most obscure ones. Incidentally, many collections of what was coined then as "The Complete Works of Victor Hugo" appeared nearly every year during the 1840s and on. In fact, what can be seen as the truly "complete works of Victor Hugo" only appeared decades after the author's death, as many posthumous writings (such as diaries, notebooks, travel writings, correspondence, and many unfinished works) of Victor Hugo were published during the twentieth century, for example his intimate writings published posthumously under the title *Choses vues*. Furthermore, in his praise of this book in its preface, Jean-Marc Hovasse adds that Bertin's knowledge of Hugo's works and editions remains unparalleled. Erroneous facts from many older bibliographic guides are now identified and corrected for the first time (15).

A reference book for the exclusive use of specialized librarians and book collectors seeking to identify authentic and fake versions, Bertin's *Chronologie des livres* is not the kind of book the average person reads from cover to cover. Most of these texts and Bertin's meticulous remarks are, in fact, in the form of detailed descriptions of these vintage editions with their respective format, color, year of publication, publisher, number of pages, and more importantly, the contents of each volume. Some entries are just a few lines; others can be 2–3 pages long. As a complement, about seventeen rare illustrations showing authentic nineteenth-century book covers of Victor Hugo's early works are reproduced in color (4, 42–43, and 202–03).

Although, as Hovasse explains, Hugo unlike many of his contemporaries was not himself a bibliophile (7), book collectors today will cherish this work of scholarship. In 2014, Éric Bertin's *Chronologie des livres de Victor Hugo imprimés en France entre 1819 et 1851* was awarded the "Prix de bibliographie du SLAM 2014" given by of the bookseller and librarian members of the French association of booksellers, the Syndicat National de la Librairie Ancienne et Moderne (SLAM). Hugo scholars as well as experts in the history of French books and publishing will benefit from this precise award winning resource.

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