

Humphreys on Berthier (2014)

Berthier, Philippe. *Barbey d'Aurevilly et les humeurs de la Bibliothèque*. Champion, Romantisme et Modernité 157, 2014, pp. 288, ISBN 9782745328045

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In this volume Philippe Berthier assembles fifteen studies that were previously published in various journals and *actes de colloques* from 1970–2011. The strongest feature of this collection is Berthier's choice of literary criticism as the arena of interaction between Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly and several of his contemporaries. Although Barbey is generally known for his fiction, he made his livelihood as a critic and wrote over a thousand articles, many of which were later published in book form as *Les Œuvres et les Hommes*. The studies are arranged according to themes in relation to other authors both contemporary and posthumous. As Berthier points out in the opening pages, the order of the articles shifts from analysis of Barbey's harshest criticism to his most adulatory—"de la nuit à la lumière" (7)—and finally to later writers who kept a prominent place for Barbey in their own libraries.

The chapter titled *Aversion* discusses Barbey's acerbic reaction to George Sand's *Lélia* and Émile Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris*. Berthier shows that in spite of Barbey's exasperated vitriol against the former, "c'est à l'ombre de cette même *Lélia* fortement condamnée que les années suivantes, Barbey va penser et écrire" (12); and that paradoxically, Sand's text is a source of fascination and inspiration. In "Le Coprologue," Berthier depicts Barbey, who was already disparaging of Realism as a literary and aesthetic movement, as a "violent pourfendeur de la scatologie zolienne" (56). The section *Rivalité* chronicles Barbey's fall out with Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve and the fundamental differences in their approaches to literary criticism. In short Sainte-Beuve was an "articlier" (69) who was too pedantic and simply not rigorous enough according to Barbey.

Chapter three, *Rachat*, includes Berthier's analyses of Barbey's admiration for Henri de Saint-Simon, Madame de Staël, François-René de Chateaubriand, Stendhal, and Jules Michelet. In the section entitled *Élection*, the most esteemed writers influencing Barbey's thought and the Romantic facets of his aesthetic are identified as Lord Byron and Maurice de Guérin. Immortalized as the character Somegod in Barbey's *Amaléc* (1835) Guérin had a profound impact on Barbey throughout his life: "Cet homme s'enfonce en moi de plus en plus et s'y incruste jusqu'au cœur" (184). The concluding section, *Préférence*, features articles that detail specific elements and motifs in Barbey's work that influenced J.-K. Huysmans, Marcel Proust, and Julien Gracq.

Some might interpret the republication of a body of critical work as a personal homage to Barbey or even poetic whimsy (Barbey also republished his literary criticism in separate tomes). However, in light of renewed interest in Aurevillian criticism by numerous scholars, this collection highlights not only one author's exegesis of Barbey's layered interactions with a dozen authors from Saint Simon to Gracq. It also discusses the various tenors of the critical dialogues in which Barbey engaged over a fifty-year span. Scholars of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French literature will discover polemics on topics ranging from gender studies, women writers, Catholic mysticism, genius, Romanticism, *l'ailleurs et le néant*, and representations of time and memory. In the context of literary history it reveals the depth and breadth of Barbey's critical exchange and the profound influence he had on the writers and readers who came after him.

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