

## De Vries on Castleton and Touboul, eds. (2015)

Castleton, Edward, et Hervé Touboul, éditeurs. *Regards sur 1848*. PU de Franche-Comté, 2015, Cahiers de la MSHE Ledoux 23, pp. 416, ISBN 978-2-84867-539-8

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*Regards sur 1848* is an engrossing study of nineteenth-century accounts of the events surrounding the rise and fall of the Second Republic. In their introduction Castleton and Touboul detail the book's project, a literary analysis of the texts that is less concerned with their empirical truth than with an exploration of key figures' attempts to understand and to write their experiences. They situate this undertaking by tracing the development of historical studies of the period, from an early emphasis on firsthand accounts by notable observers to the more recent use of comprehensive archival research to unravel Karl Marx's analysis. They propose in this book a return to those firsthand accounts, but now inscribed in a larger context that takes into consideration multiple factors made possible by greater historical distance and recent scholarship.

The appendices that follow this thorough contextualization consist of four primary source documents exemplifying the multiple perspectives encountered when reading firsthand accounts; they allow readers to enter into the theater of 1848 France, taking them from the privileged position and somewhat distant memoirs of Charles de Rémusat down to the street-level, experiential account of an anonymous worker. The first two texts, the excerpt from Rémusat's *Mémoires de ma vie* and A.-J. Delaage's brochure, are largely favorable to the government's repression of the uprising. The second two side with the workers. Gabriel Mortillet's account, appearing in a series of articles in *Le Représentant du peuple* beginning in August 1848, seeks to understand the causes of the Revolution, and focuses on the injustices of government behavior, especially in the mass killings of workers. The anonymous worker's account is a previously unpublished letter to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, written with the express purpose of serving as documentation of the events for socialist historians writing about the June insurrection. The wide range of social status and political leanings represented in these four texts continues to be explored in the rest of the book.

The thirteen chapters that follow examine the accounts of many key figures of the mid-nineteenth century, including Auguste Comte, Victor Cousin, Alexander Herzen, Lorenz von Stein, Karl Marx, Gustave Flaubert, and Victor Hugo, often lending surprising insights into familiar players' perspectives on this tumultuous period. Several chapters are of particular note. Pierre Laforgue's chapter demonstrates how Honoré de Balzac, the consummate observer of Restoration France, failed to understand the major shift in politics and economics that was unfolding and that the arguments in his "Lettre sur le travail" demonstrate his fundamental misunderstanding of the changing landscape. Thomas C. Jones contributes an engaging analysis of Louis Blanc's motivation for publishing *Historical Revelations* in Great Britain and the degree to which his adaptation to British culture influenced the work. Dominique Dupart's study of the impact of Alphonse de Lamartine's "24 February speech" works to separate legend from fact, highlighting the reactions of contemporaries and noting Lamartine's own efforts to justify himself for posterity.

Aurélien Aramini's chapter on Jules Michelet investigates how the 1848 revolution forced him to question his philosophy of history as a chronicling of steady progress toward perfection, replacing reliance on patience and steady evolution with a recognition of the need for engagement and rupture. Jonathan Barbier presents a nuanced view of François-Vincent Raspail's role in 1848, demonstrating that his positions and aims were much more practical and moderate than the members of the provisional government made them out to be. The last chapter of the book brings the reader to the other end of the spectrum from its start with Balzac. Balzac proved unable to look beyond his own concerns, whereas Daniel Stern (Marie d'Agoult), with no role to defend for posterity, set about to paint an accurate portrait of the Second Republic. Charles F. Dupêchez details the genesis of Stern's *Histoire de la République de 1848*, from her aristocratic upbringing through her Republican conversion. He shows how her own political engagement, her multiple connections, and her determination to get to the truth of events made her into one of the first female investigative journalists, producing a history that was admired by contemporaries of both the left and the right.

Each of the chapters is strong in its own right, but taken together *Regards sur 1848* succeeds admirably in meeting its editors' stated goal of improving our understanding of the 1848 revolution. These chapters provide a nuanced and multi-faceted portrait of the players and events, shedding light on how contemporaries tried to make sense of this critical episode of French history. Readers with an interest in the Second Republic and the writers, theorists, and political figures associated with it will find this book a valuable addition to their shelves.

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