

Rice-DeFosse on Hautbout, ed. (2016)

Hautbout, Isabelle, editor. *Alfred de Vigny et le romantisme*. Classiques Garnier, 2016, pp. 287, ISBN 978-2-8124-3560-7

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This volume of essays originated in a daylong conference at the Musée de la Vie Romantique in September 2013, organized to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Alfred de Vigny's death in 1863. It includes an introduction by Isabelle Hautbout and a series of ten analyses of various aspects of the writer's work and its influence. This is a significant collection because it places one of the acknowledged leaders of the Romantic movement in the context of the nineteenth century while also underscoring his literary legacy. As Hautbout herself remarks, Vigny is a key figure of the Romantic movement precisely because of his distance from it, his singularity. Hautbout's presentation of the volume as a whole outlines its four parts: the thought that underpins and defines the writer's creative work; his literary and philosophical sources; links among poetry, music, and the visual arts; and finally, his work in comparison to that of other writers. This introduction also provides an excellent review of Vigny criticism.

The essays in this volume are somewhat uneven. They range from a powerful, comprehensive overview of the philosopher-poet's evolution over time by the late Vigny scholar André Jarry to shorter analyses of particular works and themes, essays that echo and amplify the introductory pieces. Among the topics are the writer's social mysticism in which the sacred, no longer linked to religious dogma, is secularized and the poet's contemplation of the human condition leads to doubt (Daniel S. Larangé); Vigny's creation of a space of stoic social and political neutrality (Étienne Beaulieu); and the ways in which French classical thought informs Vigny's writing and is renewed within it (Lise Sabourin). Esther Pinon studies how the writer, influenced by John Milton, Conrad Gessner, and Lord Byron, transforms the tradition of the medieval mystery play into modern epic poetry, notably in *Éloa* and *Le Déluge*, creating a new genre later adopted by Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, and others. In an analysis of Vigny as the poet of symbols, Jean-Philippe Saint-Gérard convincingly argues that Vigny is a prescient forerunner of semiotics in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and thus accounts for his critical influence on the Symbolist poets, Charles Baudelaire in particular. Throughout the volume, the use of carefully chosen citations from Vigny's works serve as striking reminders of his originality and his modernity.

Vigny's works are also situated in relation to the other arts. Benjamin Pintiaux, in "Autour de *Cinq-Mars*: Vigny et le romantisme lyrique français," details the writer's collaboration with Hector Berlioz, considers Vigny's historical novel as an *opéra fantasmé* in theme and structure, and then examines Gounod's loose adaptation of the work for the *Opéra-Comique*. In a fascinating piece, art historian Bruno Chenique demonstrates that the poet's suicidal impulse as foregrounded in *Chatterton* finds resonance in paintings by Théodore Géricault and Édouard Manet as well as in a series of connected, historical artist suicides. Daniel Arango offers a comparative analysis of Vigny and his Italian contemporary, Giacomo Leopardi. While the two poets take up similar themes in their poetry, such as nature's indifference to human destiny, Leopardi's extremely fluid, telegraphic style is the opposite of Vigny's measured neo-classical verses that are seen as prefiguring the poetry of the Parnasse. Thanh-Vân Ton-That traces the influence of Vigny's prose on Marcel Proust, whose characters make reference to him as a literary figure. Anna de Noailles, on the other hand, uses textual reinscription to pay homage to the poet especially in her "Éva" from *Le Cœur innombrable* with its clear reference to "La Maison du Berger." An appendix of illustrations accompanies Chenique's essay on the visual arts, while appendices of selected poems by Noailles and Leopardi, the latter in Italian and in French translation, support the last two analyses. The volume also includes a useful bibliography, an index of proper names, and abstracts of each essay in French and in English.

Gustave Flaubert, in an 1854 letter to Louise Colet, calls Vigny "une des rares honnêtes plumes de l'époque." *Alfred de Vigny et le romantisme* provides ample evidence of the singularity that Flaubert perceived and for which he felt a certain affinity. The writer who emerges from this collection plays a pivotal role in a transitional period. In his writing, Romantic exaltation is tempered by contemplation, stoicism, doubt, irony, and silence. On issues such as military service, religion, the status of women or the death penalty, his thought reflects the ambiguities and limitations of his own period. Vigny's ethical stance emphasizes honor, sacrifice, and what Jarry terms a "horizontal" transcendence grounded in the potential for human exchange and progress. It reaches its highest expression in art, where the creative process makes visible the invisible. The volume as a whole suggests the complexities and tensions within the philosopher-poet's thought as well as the appeal his work has held for later generations. It should serve as a valuable resource not only for Vigny specialists, but also for scholars in other fields who might reconsider Vigny's significance.

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