

Amoss on Saint-Beuve ed. Labarthe and Élie (2017)

Sainte-Beuve, Charles-Augustin. *Le Cahier brun (1847–1868): augmenté de notes intercalées dans le deuxième cahier (1867–1868), troisième cahier (1869)*. Edited by Patrick Labarthe with Bénédicte Élie, Histoire des idées et critique littéraire 490, Droz, 2017, pp. 534, ISBN 978-2-600-04741-8

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With this volume, Patrick Labarthe completes an exemplary scholarly endeavor initiated by Raphaël Molho with the 1973 publication of Sainte-Beuve's *Cahier vert*, the first of the notebooks he called the critic's "secret journal." Labarthe, who characterizes the *cahiers* as the writer's "mental laboratory," offers here the *Cahier brun*, or *deuxième cahier*, along with a *troisième cahier* of only a few pages from the last months of Sainte-Beuve's life.

The editor's insightful preface provides a frame for this volume, which includes an index containing entries on 116 loose leaves Sainte-Beuve inserted among the pages of the notebook. The exact placement intended for each of the notes on these leaves is uncertain. A second appendix comprises the thirteen pages of the *troisième cahier* from 1869. This edition also reproduces Sainte-Beuve's insertions, strike-throughs, and emphases, as well as the marginal notes he appended to his entries, which nuance or alter his judgments or simply note when material is "à mettre" or "employé." The editor provides his own extensive and meticulous notes on Sainte-Beuve's literary references and historical allusions, which display the critic's vast learning and his unceasing focus on literary culture past and present. Completing the volume are illustrations of several pages from the manuscripts (preserved in the library of the Institut de France), as well as indexes of names, works, and publications.

Entries vary in length and frequency, from none for periods of up to three years to many pages in a single month. Labarthe points out that Sainte-Beuve follows an "internal temporality": "Sans doute suit-on le fil d'une vie, mais la scansion secrète est plutôt celle des blessures narcissiques (son cours entravé au Collège de France), des deuils qui transforment ce cahier en un véritable obituaire, des aversions durables (Balzac), des affections retournées (Hugo), des frictions amères (Cousin), lesquelles enveloppent toujours des esthétiques fondamentaux" (xi-xii).

The fact that these notebook entries constituted an important element of the writer's process of composition—"un meuble du dedans" according to Sainte-Beuve—is seen both in the table of contents Sainte-Beuve provided for himself on the inside cover and on the notebook's last page and in cross-references he made to previous or subsequent entries. The notebook entries often served as fodder for the writer's published work. The editor diligently identifies passages that appear in works published during the years covered in the notebook pages. Among the works Sainte-Beuve published from 1847 to 1869—"ces campagnes et expéditions littéraires," he calls them (340)—are the later volumes of *Port-Royal* (1840–59), the Monday articles published in *Le Constitutionnel* and *Le Moniteur* and collected in *Causeries du lundi* (1856–62), *Étude sur Virgile* (1857), *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire sous l'Empire* (1860), and articles in *Le Constitutionnel*, *Le Moniteur*, and *Le Temps* subsequently published as *Nouveaux Lundis* (1864–70).

Sainte-Beuve here turns a cynical eye on his past as a member of Hugo's *cénacle* and a fervent proponent of Romanticism and quotes from letters he sends. He views with skepticism the political events of his present, concluding in 1868 that he is living through "a time of recasting [*refonte*]," when traditional molds have been shattered: "D'autres temps plus littéraires reviendront-ils? l'avenir le sait. J'en doute" (392). He comments on what he is reading and responds to criticism of his own writings. He rehearses discussions that take place during meetings of the Académie française and bemoans the ineptitude and incivility of his students at the Collège de France, where he was named chair of Latin poetry by Napoléon III in 1854. He attempts translations of Greek writers whom he finds prescient in their analysis of the character of French life in the turbulent nineteenth century, a reminder of the studies that brought him to the capital. We follow his steps on the path to formulating his critical method, the famous "méthode littéraire naturelle" (63), targeted by Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, which consists in portraying the group that forms a talented writer and analyzing his or her art from the moment of its inception to its inevitable corruption.

A recurring subject of Sainte-Beuve's reflections in the pages of the *Cahier brun* is the contrast between on the one hand what he calls "charlatanism," a certain populist touch or appeal to the common man among writers and political figures, and on the other a more elitist bent or refined esthetic. At various points he applies the former epithet to Chateaubriand, Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, Pierre-Jean de Béranger, Jules Michelet, Edgar Quinet, Eugène Sue, George Sand, and Pierre Leroux, whereas he glosses approvingly Prosper Mérimée's confession: "Dans le peu que je fais, je rougirais de ne pas m'adresser à ceux qui valent mieux que moi, de ne pas chercher à les satisfaire." Là en effet est le cachet de tout noble et sincère artiste. On peut se

tromper, mais il faut viser à satisfaire ses égaux (*pares*) ou ses supérieurs, et non pas écrire pour ceux qui ont moins de goût et d'esprit que nous, comme il faut viser en haut et non en bas" (34–35). In the careful scholarship this edition makes available to future specialists of nineteenth-century letters and culture Patrick Labarthe has indeed fulfilled Sainte-Beuve's admonition to "aim high."

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