

# Nineteenth-Century French Studies

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Constantin, Abraham and Stendhal. *Idées italiennes sur quelques tableaux célèbres*. Eds. Sandra Teroni and Hélène de Jacquelot. Paris: Beaux-Arts de Paris, 2013. Pp. 465. ISBN: 978-2-84056-381-5

Wendelin Guentner, University of Iowa

Who wrote *Idées italiennes sur quelques tableaux célèbres*, signed A. Constantin, and published by Jean-Pierre Vieussieux (Florence, 1840)? From the time Stendhal's executor, Roland Colomb, addressed the question in 1844, until the present, this question has remained unanswered. When the Cabinet Vieussieux revealed that it possessed proofs of *Idées italiennes*, Teroni and Jacquelot accepted the challenge of setting the historical record straight. The dispersal, and in some cases, disappearance, of letters, manuscript drafts, and proofs in various stages of correction, made the editors' task arduous indeed. However, Teroni and Jacquelot acquitted themselves admirably, determining Stendhal's central role in transforming Constantin's brief and stylistically dry manuscript of 1835 into the more substantial, engaging form that was published in 1840.

In an introductory chapter Teroni traces the history of the text's uncertain attribution. While Colomb did not include *Idées italiennes* in his 1854 complete works of Stendhal, Henri Martineau did so in his own *Oeuvres* (1931). Several years earlier, in 1923, Paul Arbetet had claimed that Stendhal was indeed the author, the conservator of the Bibliothèque de Grenoble contending the same year that Constantin was nothing less than one of Stendhal's pseudonyms. In 1951, however, Martineau stated that Constantin existed, and that both he and Stendhal had conceived the book. By 1972, Ernest Abravanel not only included *Idées italiennes* in his *Oeuvres complètes* of Stendhal, but removed the name Constantin from the title page altogether.

Teroni and Jacquelot bring an end to this uncertainty, identifying three actors in the work's production. The first is Abraham Constantin, a decorative painter who was particularly successful in copying figural paintings on both enamel and porcelain. The years that he spent copying masterpieces in Florence (1820-25), and Rome (1829-36), enabled him to expand his decorative repertoire, inspiring new porcelain collections. Teroni establishes that Stendhal met Constantin at an 1826 Parisian exhibit of the latter's new porcelains, and that their friendship deepened in Rome during the 1830s. In a second introductory chapter, Jacquelot discusses Stendhal's admiration for the unique understanding of Italian art that Constantin had gained by his intense, close-up study of the paintings and frescoes he would copy, thanks to his use both of scaffolding and a magnifying glass. Their shared appreciation for Raphaël, and Stendhal's conviction that through his copying Constantin was saving from oblivion art works that would no longer exist by the year 2000, were additional factors in cementing their friendship and inspiring their literary collaboration. The editors establish a further link between Stendhal and Jean-Pierre Vieussieux, whose reading room in Florence served during the 1820s as a meeting place for the cultural elite of Europe. Stendhal was a subscriber and frequent visitor to the Cabinet Vieussieux, and it is through this relationship that Vieussieux came to edit Constantin's *Idées italiennes*.

Teroni and Jacquelot's volume is almost exactly divided between the 1840 published version of *Idées italiennes*, and their edition's critical apparatus. This includes a preface, the two introductory chapters just mentioned, a section identifying manuscript sources and the criteria employed for the edition, copious notes arranged by chapter, a reproduction of Constantin's original essay with Stendhal's first revisions, a bibliography, and a chronological table.

This table is extraordinarily useful for the reader as it summarizes the participants' travels and correspondence, the drafting of the manuscript's chapters, and the often-obscure trajectory these texts took in various stages of revision as they circulated among the parties. Each set of notes, philological and explanatory in nature, is preceded by a brief summary of the manuscript sources for that chapter. The notes contain numerous facsimiles, allowing the reader to grasp the extent of Stendhal's involvement in *Idées italiennes*, including the many additions in content, and changes in organization, rhetoric, and style, to both Constantin's handwritten manuscript and various typescript versions. The editors determine that Stendhal signed a chapter's proof with the pseudonym "Charlet" when he wanted to signal it was ready for printing.

Teroni and Jacquelot make a primary contribution to Stendhal studies with their fine edition. They reveal the extent to which the author remained passionately interested in Italian art and questions of aesthetics at a time when he is thought to have been principally preoccupied with writing fiction and autobiography. The editors also identify Stendhal's hand in transforming a book of aesthetic reflections into one whose purpose was to initiate the reader into the pleasures of Italian art. In short, *Idées italiennes* prolongs Stendhal's project in his *Promenades dans Rome* (1829), whose narrator argues that an aesthetic response should not be determined by social expectations, but rather by the enjoyment an individual genuinely derives from viewing works of art.

The edition is lavishly illustrated with over forty color reproductions of the art works discussed. Color illustrations have become increasingly cost-prohibitive for most publishers, and the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication deserves credit for having authorized such an expenditure. In this context, the copious plates are a huge benefit, for they afford contemporary readers not in Italy an opportunity denied their nineteenth-century counterparts: relating intimately with the Italian art works that inspired *Idées italiennes*. This personal interaction with the works opens the door to discovering individual taste, while facilitating a richer encounter with the perspectives presented in the text. The edition's bibliography is narrowly construed, however, and many relevant studies of Stendhal's other works on Italy and its art, as well as of his rhetoric and style, are missing. The editors thus lose the opportunity here, as in their notes, to orient readers curious to further explore Stendhal's oeuvre, and the "Italian ideas" with which he was so often engaged.