

Response by Paul M. Cohen to James A. Winder's [review](#) of *Freedom's Moment*.

I would like to thank Professor Winder for what is on balance a gracious and evenhanded review of my book, *Freedom's Moment*. It is always a pleasure to have one's work treated seriously by a good and serious scholar. Moreover, I find several of his critical remarks more than fair. I do arrive at the issue of gender late in the book and could--perhaps will--explore it much more deeply. I could also have attended more closely to the problem of reader response, which would surely have revealed multifaceted and often hostile responses to what are now deemed canonical texts by the likes of Rousseau, Sartre, and Foucault. I certainly agree as well that my chosen "heretical fraternity" should scarcely be confined to the eight figures I treat. Indeed, albeit in a footnote perhaps too far removed from the body of the text, I myself suggest Zola and Hugo as possible members, and the list could doubtless be multiplied much further.

Yet that is my point. The extensive cultural influence (capital?) of the French heretical tradition is pivotal to my argument, and on that basis I might quibble a bit with Professor Winder's reading. My book was meant neither as a meditation on "the author as 'consecrated heretic' in modern France" nor as a rounded treatment of any single heretical figure, but rather--so the title suggests--as an analysis of how FREEDOM has been defined and portrayed in modern French discourse. For that reason, I chose consciously and explicitly to emphasize the "official" legends of my eight representative figures: the public stories--indeed, the collective story--constructed about them both autobiographically and by their biographers. I cite Miller's work on Foucault, for example, not as a fair or "accurate" account to be taken at face value, but as a striking, if perhaps unwitting, mirror of Foucault's (obviously "controversial") public legend and of the broader cultural narrative underlying it. I chose equally to treat only the canonical texts of my subjects so as to reveal, again, the common story of liberty that has been told and retold before the French public since Rousseau. Accordingly, I fail to offer "other sides" of Michelet, which are certainly to be found in his "less canonical texts", because I am interested not in Michelet per se, or even his oeuvre, so much as those aspects of his life and works--his heretical bestsellers on the Catholic Church and the French Revolution, his storied opposition to the July Monarchy--which reveal the mythos most prized within the political culture of modern France. My book seeks, in short, to underscore the heretical narrative itself and what it has valorized over time: its plot, themes, and moral, as it were, more than its particular protagonists; its music, complete with recurrent songs and motifs, more than its solo performers. I hope, that is, (and perhaps somewhat tiresomely) to call the reader's attention to a repeated narrative archetype about liberty--its meaning, loss, and all-too-fleeting redemption--in modern France. For it is only by attending to the relatively fixed narrative architecture of a culture, as opposed

to lionizing or condemning its self-selected heroes, that we can begin to understand that culture on its own ground.

As Professor Winders generously allows, however, I hardly seek to represent my own understanding of modern France as the last word, and could hope for nothing more than to see *Freedom's Moment* stimulate further discussion and reflection.

Paul M. Cohen
Department of History
Lawrence University

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