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Sandy Petrey, *In the Court of the Pear King: French Culture and the Rise of Realism*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2005. xi + 178 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 U.S., 16.50 U.K. (cl). ISBN 0-8014-4341-5.

Review by James Smith Allen, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Sandy Petrey has written a provocative book on the definition and origins of modern prose realism. By a specialist in comparative literature, this study evinces many controversial hallmarks of cultural studies as a scholarly field, especially the social construction of reality and the analogous relationship between literature and its contexts (pp. 1-36). At the same time, the author seeks to challenge other features of cultural studies, namely, the autonomy of language and culture and the epistemological and ethical bases of representation in literature (pp. 144-56). Although these matters may not exercise many historians, they do frame the argument that Petrey makes about the depiction of a certain type of reality in the French novel, one largely created by Honoré de Balzac, George Sand, and Stendhal, in Paris soon after the 1830 Revolution. Petrey argues that these authors' time and place were critical to the dualism of modern realism which, like the new Orleanist regime, assumed the "power to make and unmake reality" (p. 36).

This book regards realism as a creator's self-conscious interplay of illusion and reality, beginning with Charles Philippon's famous caricature of the bourgeois citizen-king, Louis-Philippe, as a pear in 1831. During his trial—for drawing the monarch as a mason plastering over a wall full of revolutionary slogans from July 1830—Philippon provided the court a sketch of Louis-Philippe's head resembling a pear. The ostensible purpose of the second drawing, he argued, was to demonstrate that caricatures require fuller explanation to ensure that the object of derision is in fact someone in particular. According to the artist, the mason was no more the king than the king himself was a pear. Writes Petrey, "The argument that two objects were incommensurate led directly and immediately to a national conviction that they were one and the same" (p. 14). The result was the widespread identification of Louis-Philippe with the fruit shaped like his head, however arbitrary the signifier for this specific referent. Evidently everyone understood that like a pear-head the king was no more real than his regime, a monarchy very improbably created by a revolution.

The caricature would have mattered little had not the regime attempted to gain political legitimacy by hiding its revolutionary origins. Soon after the August 1830 transfer of power to Louis-Philippe, the king and his supporters did everything they could to make him a divine-right monarch. He moved from the Palais Royal into the Tuileries, and he began suggesting that there had been no revolution making him a king. The regime fabricated its majesty, just as Philippon's pear unmade it, by a deliberate deception, "a common demonstration that identity is not constrained by the logical categories through which we normally conceive it" (p. 36). The same logic holds for the realist fiction by Balzac, Sand, and Stendhal, whose literary innovations occurred in the same years as the early years of the new regime. The rest of Petrey's book is thus an elaboration of his central insight.

This dual reality—"something real constructed from nothing" (p. 51)—appears in the foundational works in Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* (1830-50) about the same time as Philippon's pear. "The year 1831," Petrey states, "marked the first time the French saw Louis-Philippe in a piece of fruit drawn so as to be absolutely unlike Louis-Philippe.... It was also the year Balzac wrote a text in which two painters of genius see on a canvas something radically unlike what [Frenhofer] a painter of genius sees" in *Le Chef-*

d'oeuvre inconnu (p. 38). Like the regime itself, the coincidence of Frenhofer's ideas about art and Balzac's ideas about literature actually reverse our common-sense notions of the real. This is also true, Petrey believes, for Balzac's *Sarrasine*, published in 1830, which depicts the deception of a lover enamored of an Italian castrato whom he mistakes for a woman. Petrey's argument is that under the same temporal circumstances "fiction and history both define serviceable identity as perceptual rather than inherent" (p. 48).

And so it is for Balzac's other works published in the same period: *Le Colonel Chabert* (the story of a Napoleonic officer who returns home to regain his identity twenty years after he had been presumed dead) and *La Peau de chagrin* (the tale of an ambitious young man whose life is shortened by a magic goatskin which shrinks as it grants his every wish). After a close analysis of these masterpieces of prose realism in their historical context, Petrey concludes, "History was culture in the early July Monarchy because the period's most important and durable innovation, realist fiction, explores the same forms of socially constructed identity as its most significant political conflicts" (pp. 68-69).

Petrey then applies the same analysis to George Sand's first novel, *Indiana*, published in 1830-31. The principal theme here is the representational realism of Sand's cross-dressing identities, as both man and woman, in life and in narration. The story recounts the subjugation of a Don Juan figure by his long-suffering wife who after 1830 comes into her own both politically and personally. While the novel transforms the sexist predator, Raymon de Ramière, into the plaything of a now more powerful figure, Laura de Nangy, Sand the feminist author becomes the shockingly sexist narrator in the epilogue. How can this be? Petrey explains that the novel's disconcerting features are just more manifestations of realism's literary and historical duality: "G. Sand's misogyny, Don Juan's feminization, Louis-Philippe's majesty, Charles Philipon's national joke—all emerge from the same intersection between a historical moment and a certain concept of identity" (p. 93).

Petrey turns his attention to realism of another sort altogether: Eugène Delacroix's painting *Liberty Leading the People* and Giacomo Meyerbeer's comic opera *Robert le diable*, both of which were also produced in the wake of the July Revolution. At first the painting, bought by the state, represented what the new regime wished to see in itself, that is, as the embodiment of liberty. But very soon the work was hidden away as an embarrassing reminder of precisely what contradicted the king's claim to traditional, royal legitimacy. The painting's duality had grown politically inconvenient. Similarly, Meyerbeer's opera, whose libretto was written by Eugène Scribe and Casimir Delavigne, portrayed the divided identity of the medieval figure, Robert, the son of the devil and an angel. Notes Petrey, "The entire audience is moved because the opera solves a problem experienced throughout its society, how to live duality without uncertainty, doubt, or anguish. The soul triumphs over matter, good over evil, heaven over hell, meaning over materiality, unity over duality, monarchy over revolution" (p. 115). In short, Meyerbeer's work, like Philipon's pear, was reality turned on its head.

Finally, Petrey examines two key realist texts by Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir* and *Lucien Leuwen*. As most historians know, the tale of Julien Sorel's remarkable rise from the son of a hard-bitten provincial peasant to the future son-in-law of a powerful Parisian aristocrat was "the first great realist novel in world literature" (p. 120). "Within the realist vision of the world inaugurated in *Le Rouge et le noir*," writes Petrey, "what made the monarch real was exactly what denatured the revolution, society's power to make and unmake everything within it" (p. 122), including, it would seem, Julien's transformation from a conscious hypocrite before 1830 to a self-duping aristocrat afterward. Similarly, in Stendhal's other novel *Lucien* takes for granted the antithetical world of the July Monarchy, a regime he supported publicly first as a military officer and then as a government emissary, even at the expense of his love for Madame de Chasteller. Instead of inquiring into the veracity of what others told him about her, *Lucien* flees. Like everyone else in the July Monarchy, he took apparent reality at face value.

After such dazzling literary insights, Petrey's book finishes with an assessment of representational realism. His view of the relationship between the empirical and the literary, the author contends, is controversial because it refuses to accept the post-structuralist assumption that there is nothing outside the text and that all efforts to depict the non-textual are ethically suspect. Rather, Petrey maintains, "realism is representational because it shows representation producing reality" (p. 146), just as one sees in Philipon's caricatures, Delacroix's painting, Meyerbeer's opera, and the fiction by Balzac, Sand, and Stendhal. Their dualism mirrored but also exposed the efforts of the July Monarchy to make itself legitimate. "The overweening interest of the July Monarchy's early years," Petrey posits, "is that a new form of fiction came together with a new world outside fiction in a common display that realism must be representational because reality is" (p. 156).

Well, maybe. As a cultural historian of the period, I find myself unconvinced by much of what Petrey argues. The reason, I think, lies in his adherence to cultural studies as a field. His almost exclusive use of cultural artifacts, like literary texts, undermines much of the documentary value of his evidence and thus much of the persuasiveness of his thesis. He is a victim of the few texts he studies. For example, Petrey makes much of prose realism's duality suddenly appearing in 1830-31, largely because of favorable historical circumstances, when, in fact, the interplay of illusion and reality is a very old theme in Western literature. One might also take issue with Erich Auerbach about Homer's *Odyssey* the moment the wandering hero is recognized by his nurse thanks to the telltale scar above his knee.[1] Odysseus's effort to test the faithfulness of his wife Penelope actually reflects the social turmoil of Iron Age Greece, when the stability of reality was as troubled as it was during the July Monarchy. The same is true of Chrétien de Troyes's romances in twelfth-century France, Shakespearean comedies in Elizabethan England, and Miguel de Cervantes's picaresque stories in Golden Age Spain. This dualism is a literary truism not an historical fact.

Petrey's argumentation relies too often on the logic of analogy. He never fully probes the complex relationship between literary text and its historical context, perhaps because he knows the literature of the period so much better than he does its moment. He makes much of the contradiction between revolution and monarchy in 1830 (pp. 20-21), when the historical precedent of a revolution ushering in a constitutional monarchy was well known at the time. In his special pleading for the regime, François Guizot, for instance, likened 1830 in France to 1688 in England.[2] Revolution also created the unstable constitutional monarchy in France from 1791 to 1792 and the much more stable regime in Belgium after 1830. Moreover, Petrey exaggerates the revolutionary unity of the Parisian crowd that made the July Monarchy possible. As David Pinkney and Ned Newman pointed out more than thirty years ago, the revolutionaries did not seek to re-establish the republic. They had employment and wages on their minds.[3]

At times Petrey strains hard to sustain his argument about the arbitrariness of reality. He states, for instance, that he sees no clear resemblance between Louis-Philippe and Charles Philipon's pear (p. 7). Drawing on Philipon's disingenuous argument in court, Petrey states, "It was not that the king and the pear were alike. It was that no two things are so unlike as to be unassimilable" (p. 14). Like the judges in Philipon's case, and many of their contemporaries, I find this evasion hard to accept. The loose link between sign and signifier remains a fundamental tenet in cultural studies, but it is not one in other fields of inquiry endeavoring to understand the past in its own terms as well as in our own. The notion of realism was much clearer to novelists in the period, and it was much more akin to common sense than Petrey's.

Other problems with Petrey's reading of texts arise as well. For one, I find problematic his view of Julien Sorel's complete transformation at the end of *Le Rouge et le noir*. Julien may have been somewhat less of a hypocrite when he shot Mme de Rênal, but he was also much less of an aristocrat than a revolutionary during his subsequent trial. On Julien's ultimate return to his political roots, I find Peter

Brooks's argument far more congenial.[4] Although this point is not critical to Petrey's thesis, it makes the evidence he uses less persuasive, especially when he seems to have the novel's chronology wrong. Michel Crouzet has established that Julien was executed on July 25, 1831, long after the revolution, an important detail that casts doubt on Petrey's contention that the July Monarchy's origins and the rise of realism are so closely tied.[5] The sudden appearance of realism right after the July Revolution simply defies the evidence of comparable developments elsewhere, such as Henry Fielding's "comic epic-poem in prose," *Joseph Andrews* (1742), where "everything is copied from the book of nature." [6] Petrey's assertions to the contrary, realism was much longer in the making than the first two years of the July Monarchy.

That said, Petrey's book is insightful and engagingly written. As an exercise in cultural studies, it makes telling points well. For that it deserves a large audience of historians interested in the origins of the French realist novel. It is a welcome corrective to the exclusively literary approach in Harry Levin's *The Gates of Horn* (1963). And it is a worthy companion to Maurice Samuel's *The Spectacular Past* (2004) and Margaret Cohen's *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (1999), recent works also focused on French prose realism in the period.[7] Petrey's book has the merit of making the historical context more rather than less important in literary studies, and for that his book has as much to teach his colleagues in cultural studies as it does those in cultural history. But it is just not as deeply historical in its approach to comparable issues as Sheryl Kroen's *Politics and Theater* (2000) or Marie-Claude Chaudonneret's *L'Etat et les artistes* (1999), both of which address the historiography of the constitutional monarchies much more familiar to the regular readers of the H-France listserv.[8]

NOTES

[1] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, tr. Willard Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), 1-20.

[2] E.g., François Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1858), II: 37.

[3] David Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 252; and Edgar Leon Newman, "What the Crowd Wanted in the French Revolution of 1830," *1830 in France*, ed. John M. Merriman (New York and London: New Viewpoints, 1975), 17-40.

[4] Peter Brooks, "Secret Notes and Pistol Shots," *Approaches to Teaching Stendhal's The Red and the Black*, eds. Dean de la Motte and Stirling Haig (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999), 32-38.

[5] Michel Crouzet, *Le Rouge et le noir. Essai sur le romanesque stendhalien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 12-13.

[6] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Martin C. Battersin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), 7, 12.

[7] See Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Maurice Samuels, *The Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century*

France (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[8] See Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000); and Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *L'Etat et les artistes. De la Restauration à la Monarchie de Juillet, 1815-1833* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

James Smith Allen
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
jsallen@siu.edu

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