

JULES MICHELET AND ROMANTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

By Lionel Gossman

... a fine book I would like to write: *An Appeal to My Contemporaries*. The idea would be to show the ultras that there is something worthwhile in the ideas of the liberals, and vice versa. ... If it were written ... in a spirit of charity toward both sides and were widely distributed, such a book might well do some good. ... If I had the talent I would like to write inexpensive books for the people.
(Michelet, *Journal*, June 1820, P. Viallanex and C. Digeon, eds.)

In this Chair of Ethics and History ... I had taken up *the* issue of the times: social and moral unity; pacifying to the best of my ability the class war that eats at us with dull persistence, removing the barriers, more apparent than real, that divide and make enemies of each other classes whose interests are not fundamentally opposed.
(Letter to Jean Letronne, Director of the Collège de France, January 1848)

This house is old; it knows a lot, touched up and whitewashed to look new as it may be. Centuries have lived in it and each one has left something of itself. Whether you perceive them or not, the traces are there, never doubt it for a moment. Just as in a human heart! Humans and houses, we all bear the imprint of ages past. As young men, we carry within us innumerable ancient notions and feelings of whose presence we are unaware. These traces of ancient times are mixed up inside us, indistinct, often inopportune. We turn out to know things we never learned, to have memories of things we never witnessed; and we feel the dull reverberations of the emotions of those we never knew.
("Discours d'ouverture à la Faculté des Lettres" [9 January 1834], in Jules Michelet, *Introduction à l'histoire universelle*, 2nd ed. [Paris: Hachette, 1834], pp. 235-36)

FROM THE LATE Middle Ages until the end of the eighteenth century, history was a branch of rhetoric. Most historical narratives had a relatively invariant structure, rather like folktales. They could be added to and brought up to date stylistically, but not revised. The historian's aim in narrating such histories—generally they were dynastic but there were also family histories and histories of corporations—was to reconfirm the continuity of the present with the past and, by reciting the links in the chain of that continuity, to attest the due transmission of authority in language appropriate to each new generation. At times of social and cultural ferment, however, as during the Renaissance and Reformation or the Enlightenment, history assumed a more investigative, questioning character. Traditional narratives, including even lives of saints and Biblical narratives, were scrutinized critically in the light of new, stringent criteria and new documentation. Scholarship, research, and even reflection on the

epistemological foundations and on the literary form of historical narratives became part of historiographical practice among historians who tried either to subvert established narratives or to defend them against well-prepared hostile critics.

Romantic historiography was intimately associated with the moderately liberal and nationalist aspirations of the period immediately following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The political goal of the liberal bourgeoisie was to reestablish the European polities on a new, broader basis, national rather than dynastic or ethnic. Violence was rejected, the essential objectives of the bourgeoisie having been realized. The aim was rather to heal the wounds inflicted by decades of social turmoil and achieve a reconciliation of all parties in support of the new nation state. At the same time, the revolutionary rupture on which the new state rested had to be shown to have been necessary and justified. The role of history in the political programs of the first half of the nineteenth century was crucial. By discovering the hidden, anonymous history of the nation beneath the outmoded histories of its rulers and its narrow ruling class, historians were to provide the foundation of a new political order, a new state, and at the same time to impose the idea of this state on the consciousness of its citizens. Ideologically, the objective of the new history was at once revolutionary (to furnish a new basis for a new political order) and conservative (to found and authorize that order by revealing it to be the culmination of a continuous historical development, long concealed from view); correspondingly, in terms of its own composition, it aimed to reconcile in itself the investigative and disruptive practice of historical criticism and scholarship with the narrative art that establishes connections and asserts continuities.

The French romantic historians achieved this synthesis of scholarship and narrative art more successfully than those of any other nation. Germany produced outstanding romantic scholars (Creuzer, Niebuhr, C.O. Müller, Savigny, the Grimms) and philosophers (Hegel and Schelling), the greatest of romantic theologians (Schleiermacher), and the historian who served as a model for the professional, academic historians of the second half of the nineteenth century (Ranke); but the French historians of the Restoration and the July Monarchy—Barante, the two Thierrys, Guizot, Michelet, Henri Martin—probably stand alone in their combination of scholarship and artistry, attention to the specificity of the past and concern with the issues of the

present. If the Revolution and its aftermath had introduced many new ideas into France and opened men's minds to the variety of the world's peoples and cultures, of whose richness the ancien régime, even in its Enlightenment form, had barely an inkling, traditional neoclassical rhetoric remained a powerful influence in France for generations. It was no more overthrown by the Revolution than was the idea inherited from the absolute monarchs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the strong, unified, and centralized state.

Indeed, rhetorical and political ideals were intimately connected in France. Traditional rhetoric was more and more put in question, especially after 1848, in conjunction with increasing skepticism about the possibility of realizing a genuine, popularly based national state, but it continued to provide a framework for the narrative composition of the romantic generation of French historians. The historian had become the explorer of the hidden, and often forbidden, world of the tomb and the archive, an intrepid Oedipus, as Michelet called him, confronting monsters, deciphering enigmas, journeying on behalf of his fellow citizens to the dangerous and chaotic underground realm of the unknown or the repressed. Yet he always aimed to translate the obscure, ill-formed, barely comprehensible insights he acquired from that journey into luminous prose, to explain their meaning so that the reader would not be overwhelmed by them—to translate them, as Michelet would have said, into French.

The best work of Prosper de Barante and the Thierrys was written consciously as part of the liberal campaign against the reactionary regimes of the 1820's. Augustin Thierry especially never concealed what to him was the essential link between history and politics. Writing history in that literate age was a way of practicing politics. The foundation of Michelet's work also lies in that period of combative optimism and confidence in the possibility of fulfilling the Revolution—as the bourgeois historians understood it—which culminated in the *Trois Glorieuses* (the three revolutionary days of 27, 28, and 29 July 1830) and the establishment of the July Monarchy in 1830. The period that followed the accession of Louis Philippe to the throne, though marked by disillusionment and growing social conflict, was the heyday of romantic historiography. Out of the tension between the yearnings of their youth, in which they still found a source of inspiration, and the harsh realities of a present that constantly led them to

doubt their earlier beliefs, aspirations, and literary practices—and to seek new, more appropriate ones—historians like Michelet wrote their greatest works.

After 1848 it became virtually impossible for many bourgeois historians to sustain their earlier idealism. The tensions of the great age of romantic historiography snapped. In the new world ushered in by the Second Empire, every effort at synthesis and reconciliation, all hope of realizing a genuine totality, was abandoned. The old romantic ideals began to appear more and more exotic, unreal, "literary"—fictional refuges for the bruised spirit. Concurrently, realism became synonymous with an increasingly disenchanted and even cynical acknowledgment of the prevalence of self-interest. As history came to be viewed as the arena of an interminable and meaningless jockeying for power and possessions among races, nations, classes, and individuals, historiography was more and more taken over either by conscious mythmakers (nationalist, imperialist, and racist ideologists or mere entertainers) or by agnostic positivists. Not infrequently these two lines of development came together, the positivism sustaining scholarly research—the institutional business of history—while myth was brought in, in the absence of any other instrument of totalization, to provide a means of ordering the "facts."

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Jules Michelet, the greatest of French romantic historians and one of the great historians of all time, was born in Paris on 21 August 1798, the only child of parents of humble origin. Like many inhabitants of the capital, Jean-François Furcy Michelet and Angélique-Constance Millet were recent immigrants from the provinces—he from Laon in Picardy, she from the Ardennes. Michelet attached great importance to the provincial origins of his family, but he also liked to emphasize his own roots in the working population of France's greatest city. He entered the world, he recalled later, "like a blade of grass, without sun, between two cobblestones of Paris." All his life Michelet identified with the city of his birth: he spent most of his life in it; all his triumphs were associated with it; and he invariably wrote about it with passionate affection. His inaugural lecture series at the Collège de France in 1838 was devoted to the role of Paris in the history of France. "As one is born Spanish, another English, another German," he noted in his journal, "I was born a citizen of the rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis."

Michelet's father, a printer by trade, was a good deal younger than his mother: he was twenty-five, she thirty-four when they married in 1795. Michelet remembered him as light-hearted, easygoing, and affectionate, perhaps a bit improvident. As none of his many attempts to establish himself in business was successful, the family was perpetually on the brink of disaster. Sometimes there was hardly enough to eat. "I was accustomed to such frugality," Michelet later recalled, "that eating a few ... green beans was at times a sensuous pleasure for me." Inevitably, it was Michelet's mother who bore the brunt of her husband's failures and there were apparently many angry scenes between the two. Michelet describes his mother as nagging and irascible, "exasperated by ... sorrow and privation." For some time before her death, in 1815, she had been ailing and was frequently confined to bed. Michelet, who admits he often gave her a hard time, appears to have felt in some way responsible for her suffering. In his memoirs, he recalls imagining on his way home from school one day that the house with his sick, bedridden mother in it was on fire.

To a generation raised on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the importance of childhood and family was axiomatic. Michelet constantly thought and wrote about his childhood, his parents, and his relation to his parents, even long after both were dead. Some of the essential ideas and themes of his work are inextricable from this uninterrupted meditation on his own past. Of his mother, for instance, he observed movingly at the age of forty-seven:

I lost her thirty years ago ... ; nevertheless, still living in me, she follows me from age to age. She knew only my bad times and was not there to profit from my better ones. When I was young I made her unhappy and it will never be my lot to console her. ... I owe her much. ... I feel myself profoundly the son of woman. At every instant, in my ideas, in my words, to say nothing of gestures and traits, I find my mother again in myself. The blood of woman is in the sympathy I feel for bygone ages and my tender remembrance of all who are now no more.

(Du Prêtre, de la femme et de la famille)

Michelet thus recognized his preoccupation with the mother image and with woman in general long before critics pointed it out. Almost invariably he identified woman with the past itself and represented her alternately, in the way he thought of his mother, as overwhelmingly strong—the ruler and provider for her entire family—and as sickly—the victim of the ingratitude

of her menfolk. Resurrecting the maternal body of the past, bleeding and giving birth—"la grande blessée," in Michelet's words; honoring it and easing its pain, in order that the present which it had brought forth might be relieved of the burden of guilt; treating it with tender respect even as it is laid back in earth and left behind was Michelet's acknowledged aim as a writer of history. No later critic knew better than he how much he continued to be haunted by his mother. The startling reflections on the erotic character of mother-son relations in his journal and the obsession with incest that runs through all his work are only the most obvious manifestations of the continued presence of Angélique Millet in the work of her famous son.

Michelet recounts that his parents adored him and would often take him into bed with them in the morning, setting him down between them and singing to him. Weary from the constant struggle to make ends meet and from their own frequent quarrelling, they had placed all their hopes of success and happiness in him: "I was to save all, to redeem all." The immense faith and sacrifice of Michelet's humble provincial parents, their willingness to die in themselves, as their son put it, in order to live in him, the child of the rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, not only is a theme of the historian's personal memoirs, it is one that resonates throughout his work: Paris gathers up, transcends and fulfills the labors of the individual provinces, and France gathers up and fulfills centuries of European and world history. As Michelet became the spokesman for his inarticulate parents, France speaks "le verbe de l'Europe," and the historian himself speaks for France, telling her her "forgotten dream of the night" and bringing her to full self-consciousness; or he speaks for the people, "deaf and dumb"; or for Germany, whose profound, poetic wisdom he communicates to the rest of the world in French, the prosaic language of rational communication, in the same way that Greek, the marvelously fine analytical instrument of Aristotle, once transmitted and interpreted "the logos of the mute Orient" to posterity. Michelet also speaks for the wordless creatures of nature (in *The Bird*, *The Insect*, *The Mountain*, *The Sea*); or for "that other Ocean, woman" (in *The Sorceress*, a study of the long-neglected and willfully misunderstood "witch" of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance); or for his young second wife, Athénaïs Mialaret, whose literary ambitions Michelet apparently believed he had fulfilled when he incorporated fragments of her prose into his own enormously successful works of natural history. Michelet would have subscribed wholeheartedly to his friend Edgar Quinet's definition of man as "neither the master nor the slave of nature, but her interpreter and the

speaker of her living word." It is man, Quinet went on, who "completes the universe and gives voice to a creation that is mute, pro-claiming down the centuries the secret that is hidden in the entrails of the globe."

The role of mediating between his mother and his father that Michelet later ascribed to himself as a child thus epitomizes the mediating roles he took upon himself in his maturity. As a historian Michelet believed it was his task to act as a bridge not only between the ancient provinces and the modern centralized national state (a role he also ascribed to the city he identified with), or between past and future, but between the different classes of French society; and he believed he was particularly suited to perform that task. Though he became a celebrated and successful writer, teacher, and public figure; a professor at the prestigious Collège de France; and a royal tutor (first to Princess Louise, the daughter of the duchesse de Berry and grandchild of Charles X, and after the July Revolution to the daughters of Louis Philippe), he was himself, as he constantly reiterated, a son of the people. While ardently defending property and the family as the foundation of all human culture and the condition of progress, he always reaffirmed his "sympathy with the property-less." It was, he declared, "natural in one who had been so poor and had worked with his hands."

By "the people," Michelet did not mean, on the whole, the modern urban proletariat, the development of which in his own lifetime he observed with apprehension and dismay, but the solid peasantry and above all the artisans of preindustrial France, together with the bourgeoisie that had emerged out of them, as distinct from the aristocracy. (Occasionally, he used the term to refer rather generally to the masses of the poor and downtrodden—the preindustrial proletariat that was not conscious of itself as a class.) Notwithstanding the hardships of his childhood and his father's repeated failures, his own background was by no means that of the bottom rungs of society. His mother's family were fairly well-to-do land-holding peasants, and there were times, by his own account, when it was "money from Renwez"—that is, from his mother's three unmarried maternal aunts in the Ardennes—that kept starvation from the Michelets' door. His father, being not only a printer but his own master, belonged to a literate élite among "the people."

Michelet's parents' dream of improving their circumstances through the success of their son led them, after a period of neglect, to provide him with as good an education as could be had. In 1810 he was sent to a private teacher to learn Latin. Five years later he entered the Collège Charlemagne. Awkward, ill at ease, and obviously underprivileged, the butt of his classmates' jokes and pranks, he compensated for many humiliations by studying hard. After a shaky start, he graduated in 1816 at the top of his class, and was admitted to the Sorbonne. By 1819 he had successfully defended his doctoral dissertation—then a rather skimpy affair consisting of two short papers of fifteen to thirty pages each, one in Latin on a philosophical subject (Michelet wrote what he described a few years later as a "wretched hodgepodge of passages from Locke"), the other in French on a literary subject (he chose Plutarch's *Lives*). In 1821 he placed third in the *agrégation* (a national competition for those intending to pursue a career in higher education) and was immediately offered a position as professor of rhetoric in Toulouse. In order to be able to stay in Paris, however, he accepted instead a temporary post at the Collège Charlemagne. A year later he was able to get a permanent appointment in history at the very conservative Collège Sainte-Barbe.

Michelet's journal indicates that he had already adopted many liberal views by this time, as well he might, since he had not been raised in a religious or right-wing atmosphere. He appears to have kept them to himself, however, for nothing in his teaching seems to have given his superiors cause for alarm. Rising in the world and promoting himself from the artisan to the professional class had not been easy, and Michelet clearly did not intend to jeopardize his incipient career by ill-considered expressions of liberal opinion.

In 1824 Michelet married Pauline Rousseau, a young woman who had been born out of wedlock and had been given the name of her mother's lover—a tenor at the Paris Opera—at the time of her birth. Seven years previously Pauline had gone to work at the sanatorium where Michelet's father had found employment in 1815, and a few years later, when the sanatorium closed, she and the Michelets, father and son, were taken in by its administrator, Anne Fourcy, to help her run the boarding house she had set up. During this time Anne Fourcy, a devout Christian, became a surrogate mother to Michelet, and Pauline, with whom he was in close contact since they all lived in the same house, seems to have become his mistress. Pauline was

six years older than Michelet. The age relation of Michelet's parents was thus repeated in their son's first important encounter with the opposite sex. "I have always loved women older than myself, in memory of my mother," Michelet noted years later in 1857. "My first attachment was of this kind. The young woman seemed lovable and desirable to me, though she was quite old, because she resembled my mother."

Michelet claimed to see advantages in the marriage. His wife, he wrote to the aunts in Renwez, was "an excellent housekeeper"; she was in good health; she would keep him in clean linen—for he was now a young professor—more economically than he could do on his own; and she would give him a status he needed if he was to advance in his career. "One must be either a priest or married in order to be considered for certain places in the university." (Quoted in Stephen A. Kippur, *Jules Michelet*, p. 22) In fact, Pauline was in an advanced stage of pregnancy when Michelet married her, and gave birth to their daughter, Adèle, three months later. The following year the couple had a son, Charles.

Though he loved his children and worried about them, Michelet was never much of a family man. His life, as he himself often remarked, was in his writing and his teaching. His daughter was the apple of his eye, but if he remained close to Adèle it was partly because of her marriage to his favorite pupil, Alfred Dumesnil, whom he later called "my adopted son, my son-in-law, myself," and who was the son of a woman Michelet appears to have loved deeply. His own son, despite Michelet's solicitude, never amounted to anything and gave his father little satisfaction. Moreover, Michelet's relationship with Adèle deteriorated rapidly after his second marriage, in 1849, to a woman twenty-eight years younger than he.

As his career progressed and prospered, Michelet became increasingly neglectful of Pauline. By the time she died, in 1839, she had grown fat and drunk too much. For a while Michelet was filled with remorse. He consoled himself by reflecting that it had been a mistake to attach himself "to someone of inferior education" from whom he had always been "divided in spirit."

Perhaps the trouble was that he did not and could not educate Pauline. The destiny of woman, in Michelet's view, was to be reborn as the creature of man, to be transformed from the original all-powerful mother, holding her menfolk dependent, into a dutiful and educated daughter, dependent in turn on her menfolk. Indeed the emancipation of the son from thralldom to his mother, of the male from the female, was nothing less, for Michelet, than the progress of civilization itself; and in Michelet's work it is usually presented as equivalent to man's advance from matter to spirit, from geography to history, from necessity to liberty. That is why, no doubt, the son's mission, once he had escaped from bondage to his mother (that is, woman), was to rescue her in turn from her own imprisonment in the world of the flesh and from the fatal cycle of birth and death by elevating her above her own material nature (that is, her femininity). Civilization, in short, as Michelet sees it, is the progressive penetration of "nature" (the female) by "spirit" (the male). Man owes the original gift of material life to woman, to nature, but woman and nature are dependent on man—and notably on men like Michelet, on teachers and thinkers—for rebirth into the life of the spirit. Woman's evolution is from mother to daughter, from mistress to ward. In the same way, the bourgeoisie that is born of the people must in its turn take the people under its tutelage in order to educate it, release the spiritual energy embedded in its materiality, and thus lead it to freedom. According to Quinet, Michelet's colleague, collaborator, and close friend:

If the bourgeoisie had a mission in the world, it was without doubt to become the guide, the teacher, or rather the head of the people; that was the sacred mission for the sake of which it came into possession of the intelligence, the knowledge, and the experience of past ages.
(*Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 10, p. 35)

An analogous role, in Michelet's view, falls to Paris, in relation to France, and to France in relation to the indecisive "shifting populations" that surround her.

Because the original emancipation of man from his mother—nature—or that of modern bourgeois France from the ancien régime through the Revolution does not occur without violence, and is therefore accompanied by guilt, much of Michelet's writing can be read as an attempt to placate and reconcile the mother—the defeated of history—and by so doing to ward off the danger of a "return of the repressed." The ultimate purpose of remembering is to be able

to forget; the ultimate object of historiography, to clear the decks for the future by identifying, defining, and naming the past—“that bad dream”—and so making it possible to set it aside.

In 1849, when he was fifty-one, Michelet married Athénaïs Mialaret, then a young woman of twenty-three. She had come to Paris from Vienna, where she had been employed as a governess, to meet the eminent writer whose works she revered. The marriage lasted until Michelet's death in 1874, and this time, in contrast to his marriage to Pauline, Michelet was totally absorbed in his wife. He observed and noted every detail, even the most intimate, of her physical and mental existence. She was truly his possession, his creature, an aspect of himself, a daughter-wife who fully accepted his tutelage and aspired only to emulate him. Through her, Michelet appears to have felt that he had mitigated the dangerous difference between past and present, nature and culture, female and male, the other and the self, victim and victor, which was the central theme of his work. He often remarked admiringly of his young wife that she looked like a boy. And like Joan of Arc, one of his favorite heroines, Athénaïs—as represented in his journal and in the biography he wrote of her—seemed by nature not fully a woman: she menstruated irregularly and with difficulty; sexual relations were often painful or impossible for her; and she appears to have had trouble conceiving and carrying a child. The little son to whom she did give birth and to whom Michelet with characteristically defiant optimism gave the name Yves-Jean-Lazare survived less than two months. According to Michelet, Athénaïs's Viennese employer, the Romanian princess Cantacuzène, also noted how boyish she looked and used to call her playfully "my little Rousseau" (“mon petit Rousseau”). Michelet's personal life thus led from the ancien régime of a mother-wife to the new order of a daughter-wife, from the thoroughly feminine Pauline Rousseau, who apparently never aspired to be anything other than mistress, housekeeper, and mother of his children, to a masculinized, invented Rousseau, who saw herself as her husband's pupil, helper, and creature, and whose primary aim was to learn, like him, to wield the pen. That at least was Michelet's view of Athénaïs. In reality, Athénaïs's submissiveness was accompanied by resentment at Michelet's paternalistic treatment of her; and after his death she finally succeeded in turning the tables on him by altering the manuscripts she edited and published in his name.

Michelet was as much drawn to the kind of relationship he had with Athénaïs as to relationships with older, maternal women, since it approached most closely that condition of brotherhood and identity which he believed to be the proper yet never-to-be-realized goal of the entire historical adventure—"the impossible ideal of identification." Indeed, it was preferable to the realization of the ideal, inasmuch as the residual difference in the relation between a man and a virginal, boylike woman postponed the stasis of perfect unity and identity while permitting a considerable degree of community. Time and difference, in other words, were at once overcome and preserved. The dialectic of life continued, but no longer depended on violence and conflict. Thus for Michelet the ideal woman was almost a man, as conversely the ideal man included in himself an element of femininity. It cannot be coincidental that Michelet entertained nostalgic memories of early friendships, notably his passionate friendship with Paul Poinson, who died in 1821. In friendship, law and emotion, "justice" and "grace" (to use the theological terms that Michelet himself favoured), the bourgeoisie and the working people, the masculine and the feminine aspects of human existence, culture and nature, seemed to him to be reconciled. Friendship is at once an incomparably sweet, private, individual relation and the foundation of any genuine public, political order, he declared, *le vrai noeud de la cité* (the true bond of the city). In the original relation of male and female, difference is radical, unresolvable, characterized by conflict and violence; but in friendship difference is underlaid by an essential identity, toward the realization of which the parties strive in a progressive upward movement.

The Greeks understood how friendship, much more than love, is an engine of progress. For in love there is no emulation, in the real sense. The less advanced, being separated by the difference of sex, would have to change her nature in order to resemble the more advanced.

(Journal, vol. 1)

In 1826 Michelet applied for a post at the Ecole Normale, which had just been cautiously reopened as the Ecole Préparatoire after having been shut down for political reasons in 1822. Again, in his eagerness to advance his career, he took care to conceal from the Minister of Education, Monseigneur Freyssinous, Bishop of Hermopolis and almoner of the King, whatever ideas he had that the Minister might not have approved. His opinions, he implied, were thoroughly orthodox and conservative. "I am presently seeing through the press a translation of the work of Vico," he wrote, "in which the study of history is illuminated by a philosophy that is

in complete conformity with religion." The Minister could check on the soundness of his opinions, he added, by consulting the members of the royal council, "ecclesiastics as well as laymen."

It is a sign of the relative lack of specialization that then obtained in teaching and scholarship that Michelet declared himself a candidate for any available chair at the newly reopened school—in the classical languages, in philosophy, or in history. As it turns out, he was offered a chair in philosophy *and* history, the previously separate chairs in these two disciplines, which were considered dangerous and potentially subversive, having been consolidated in order to advertise their diminished importance in the new curriculum.

The combination of history and philosophy was one that suited Michelet well. Like nearly all historians of his time and generation, he had a keen interest in philosophical issues and in literature as well as in history. His journal shows that in the early 1820's his reading ranged widely over the Bible, ancient and modern history, classical and contemporary philosophy, and the literatures of Greece, Rome, France, and England. By 1824, when he established contact with Victor Cousin, then the most influential philosopher in France, the range of Michelet's reading had been expanded to include political economy, the history and theory of law, modern German philosophy, and German and Italian literature. Above all, he had discovered the work of Giovanni Battista Vico and the contemporary German mythologist Friedrich Creuzer, both of whom were to prove vitally important to his own work; Friedrich von Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (*On the Language and Wisdom of India*, 1808); as well as the collections of folksongs and folk poetry of Walter Scott, Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, and F. H. von der Hagen. And all the while he continued to read the Greek and Latin classics as well as those in his own language and the modern European languages, innumerable works of history, old and new, and the accounts of travelers to all parts of the globe.

In addition to this extensive literary culture, Michelet had a lively interest in painting and architecture. On his journeys to Belgium and Holland, to Germany and Italy, to Switzerland and England, as well as through the French provinces, he never failed to seek out and comment on buildings and works of art in both private and public collections. His work as a historian bears

witness to this lifelong interest in the visual arts: interpretations of art and architecture are an essential part of Michelet's reconstructions of the culture and outlook of past ages. In addition he relied extensively on painting for his portraits of historical figures.

Michelet's approach to history was not and could not be that of the modern professional. The social and institutional basis of the discipline of history as we know it today—large numbers of students and immense universities, tens of thousands of professionally trained specialists, innumerable scholarly journals—did not yet exist, and the writer of history was still, as Michelet's reading and formation indicate, a man of letters in the old eighteenth-century sense of the term. In addition, as noted, Michelet was keenly interested in art, as well as in folklore and popular culture. His social circle was neither restricted to nor dominated by other historians, but included classical scholars, Egyptologists, poets, novelists, natural scientists, doctors, economists, statesmen, and businessmen.

In Michelet's day, such a varied and rich literary culture was the norm among historians. Indeed few generations have been as widely curious or as diversely cultivated as the remarkable first generation of European romantics and neohumanists. In those days it was not uncommon for a classical scholar like August Böckh to quote Laurence Sterne. Not surprisingly, Michelet was thoroughly unsympathetic to the idea of specialist histories. "No more classifications, no more specialized histories," he notes in his journal in 1842. He conceived of history in the same way the German neohumanist and romantic philologists conceived of philology: not as a specialized technique, not as textual criticism, but as *Altertumswissenschaft* (the study of ancient society and culture in its entirety). Michelet himself defined philology somewhat more narrowly as "observation of the real, the science of facts and of languages," but he saw it as completed and fulfilled in historiography.

It may have been the early classical training of Michelet and many of his contemporaries that kept them from the narrower view of history that became common among their professionally oriented and trained successors. Michelet's contemporary, the German historian Johann Droysen, believed that the school of Leopold von Ranke lacked a broad historical vision

because it had had little intercourse with the ancient world. "Without Isaiah and Aeschylus, Aristotle and Augustine" you do not get this wider vision, Droysen wrote:

Ranke's students see in history only what concerns the State. Sybel does not pause to reflect that this is only part of history, that social and cultural relations are just as essential to it, that all these spheres are simply many expressions of the One [*des Einen*] that moves them, and that our scholarship has to be concentric with our deepest inner and ethical life.

Unlike many later historians, Michelet had a keen sense of what Droysen called the One. History, for him, was always one; it was always total history; and nothing could be torn out of its context and understood in isolation from the whole of which, in his view, it was a part. In this respect Michelet was a true romantic. Everything to him was both itself and a symbol of something else; understanding always involved interpretation; and the supreme mode of interpretation was metaphoric. "Mechanical" explanation in the Enlightenment manner—that is, in terms of cause and effect—was never enough. Only the "organic" part-whole paradigm was capable of producing full insight into reality. Michelet was thus as opposed to the idea of a positivist history that would be purely factual and free of all philosophizing as Böckh, his contemporary at the University of Berlin, was opposed to the idea of a philology that claimed to be able to do without philosophy.

As early as the 1820's Michelet proposed to study many areas of history, including religion, customs, law, language, style, taste, politics, industry and commerce, philosophy, and the sciences, as well as "the mutual relations of these different areas ... their reciprocal influence on each other" and the "relations of the relations." The ultimate goal was a total synthetic history—"systematization of everything." The historian who later claimed that a whole chapter of social history was inscribed in the evolution of the bed was from the beginning thoroughly convinced that every product of human culture, humble or grand, is historically significant if the historian knows how to interpret it. Interpretation is thus from the outset, along with "facts," at the heart of the historian's activity. His task is not merely to relate the facts of the past but also to discover their interconnectedness and to interpret them for the present and the future. In short, the historian is neither a pure antiquarian nor a pure rhetorician; his work cannot be limited either to discovering fragments of the past or to retelling a traditional story in updated form, or even to critically evaluating such stories. For Michelet, the historian is more than a scholar, more than a

narrative artist, more than a *philosophe*: he is, in Schlegel's words, a "backward-looking prophet."

Michelet was thus likely to have been pleased by his appointment to a chair of "history and philosophy," as later, in 1838, he was happy to have been invited to take up the chair of history and ethics ("histoire et morale") at the Collège de France. From 1827 until 1829 he successfully taught several philosophy courses at the Ecole Préparatoire—on German idealism from Johann Fichte to Friedrich von Schelling and on the Scottish "commonsense" school of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, then at the zenith of its influence in France. Indeed, when two separate chairs of philosophy and history were reinstated in 1829—possibly in order to entrust philosophy to a teacher more securely orthodox than Michelet—Michelet requested the chair of philosophy as "the more important and the higher of the two." (Quoted in Gabriel Monod, *La Vie et la pensée de Jules Michelet*, vol. 1, p. 139). Later still, in January 1848, when the government of Louis Philippe, alarmed at growing political agitation in the country, ordered an indefinite suspension of the course Michelet was teaching at the Collège de France, Michelet vigorously defended his right to broach general questions of public morality and social policy in his classes.

A similar dispute had already led to the resignation of his friend Quinet from the chair of southern European literature, to which he had been appointed in 1842. As was customary at that time, Quinet had interpreted the term "literature" very broadly as signifying the whole of culture, and he had taught courses on the revolutions in Italy in the Middle Ages, on the religious institutions of southern Europe, and on Christianity and the French Revolution. In 1845 he announced a course entitled "Comparative Literature and Institutions of Southern Europe." The Minister of Education, under pressure from powerful conservative groups, including the King, demanded that the term "institutions" be dropped from the title and that Quinet confine his instruction to literature in the narrow sense. Quinet refused to comply and resigned.

Quinet's resignation, the cancelling of Michelet's course in the last days of the July Monarchy, and finally, in March 1851, at the beginning of the Second Empire, the formal suspension of Michelet from all teaching responsibilities and his expulsion, along with Quinet and the Polish poet and patriot Adam Mickiewicz, from the Collège de France are among the most visible

episodes in an important process by which the teaching of history was transformed in the course of the nineteenth century. The great French historians of the first half of the century—Chateaubriand, Sismondi, the brilliant liberal school of which Barante, the two Thierry brothers, and Guizot were the leading lights, later on Michelet himself, Henri Marti, Louis Blanc, Lamartine, Quinet, Thiers—were all deeply involved and active in public affairs, as statesmen, as polemicists, or as both. For all of them, writing history was an integral part of their total activity as concerned and informed citizens and public figures. It could be separated neither from the general philosophical, moral, and even religious understanding of the universe that they were all seeking, nor from their immediate political ideals and programs. Moreover, for all of them their own involvement in present history, far from being an obstacle to understanding the past, was a condition of genuine historical insight. When George Sand declared that "with cold impartiality the historian can divine nothing of the past," she was expressing a commonly held view. As history was part of their own world view and contributed to the formulation of their own political opinions, the romantic historians wanted it to inspire the entire nation. Their words were therefore addressed to as large and general an audience as possible. The historian, as they conceived him, was not only a passionate participant in the political debates of the day but also, in the fullest sense of the word, a teacher—the educator of his people. Michelet's rival as a historian of the French Revolution, the early socialist leader Louis Blanc, insisted—in a notice to his readers intended as a criticism of Michelet's scholarly procedure—that the historian cite all his authorities and discuss and compare their testimonies before the reader, who must in the end judge them. It was not enough, he declared, just to add another narrative of events to those that already existed: sources must be noted and difficult points candidly discussed. At the same time, Blanc emphasized that the historian's dedication to "the party that must outlive all other parties, the party of truth," need not and should not make him neutral. "I am not a man who hides his sentiments," he wrote to a friend.

Whoever peruses my book will find out who I am. Yes, I wrote with a definite goal in mind; yes, I took up the pen to exert as strong an influence as possible on the minds of my readers; ... yes, the historian in me is a man with a cause; I not only avow it, I am proud of it. I consider the cold impartiality which leaves the reader undecided between glory and shame, between oppressor and oppressed, to be a violation of the eternal laws of justice and of the most sacred duties of the historian, (quoted in Leo A. Loubere, *Louis Blanc*, p. 168)

It is hard to think of any of Blanc's contemporaries who would have disavowed this profession of the historian's faith. Michelet was certainly not one.

On the contrary, Michelet, as we shall see, was haunted by the idea of the *livre populaire* (books for the people) and he understood his own mission as a prophetic one: that of bringing the French people to a full awareness of itself, teaching it what it indeed already knew but could not, without his help, know clearly and consciously. The people, in sum, was inarticulate: it needed leaders to interpret it to itself, to point it in the direction it unconsciously wanted to go, and to lead it on that way. Those leaders, for Michelet, had to be themselves from the people. This requirement was interpreted idealistically to mean that they must not have been artificially removed by social convention from the maternal totality to which all men in principle belong. In other words, the new leaders of the people were to be recruited from Michelet's overwhelmingly youthful audience at the Collège de France. His students were to serve as the guides of the masses. The historian, Michelet liked to point out, is himself, like his students, an innocent, a Parsifal-like figure, in whom the original connection to nature, the mothers, the people—to beginnings in general—has not been complicated and distorted by official education and social conventions. It was thus an audience of younger brothers—children of the bourgeoisie who had been preserved by the natural idealism of youth from the corruption their teacher had also escaped, thanks to his humble background, his moral integrity, and his unflagging youthfulness of spirit—that Michelet addressed in his lectures at the Collège de France on the eve of the 1848 Revolution. "Are we not all part of the people?" he cried. Yet,

there is an abyss between you and the people. ... I mean by this word the thirty million ... who know nothing of your books, your newspapers, your theaters, nothing even of the laws they have to obey. ... Gentlemen, there are more than thirty million whose way of thinking has almost nothing in common with yours. That must be our point of departure.

(L'Etudiant, p. 65)

In inviting his young "messieurs" to turn away from the usual objectives of their class and to dedicate themselves, with him, to "saving" the people, Michelet appealed to what he believed was the common humanity in them, the common origin they shared with the oppressed and downtrodden. The religious, charismatic character of this teaching is obvious. Michelet's aim

was to shape his students into a new brotherhood of disciples prepared to go out and work for the redemption of society and the reconciliation of its warring elements.

As the child is the mediator in the family, the young man should be the mediator in the City. In family quarrels, when mother and father are at opposite ends of the table, it is the child who takes the hand of one and places it in that of the other. ... Likewise in the City. That is ... what you will do, for it is you [who must serve as the chief agent of an immense movement of all toward all].

(L'Etudiant , p. 63)

Varying the Saint-Simonian theme of a new church of artists, technicians, moralists, and entrepreneurs leading humanity toward the millennium, Michelet envisaged his professorship as a prophetic mission and the Collège de France as the pulpit from which he could preach the new gospel of "association" and organize the missionary work of a new clerisy. The University, he declared (and the term in French includes the entire secondary education system) "must be the ministry of the future." Had not "the true France, that of the Revolution," proclaimed that "teaching was a holy office and that the schoolmaster was equal to the priest?" The vehemence of Michelet's campaign, in the 1840's, against the church, the Jesuits, and the nefarious influence exercised by Catholic priests on women and simple folk underscores the context of rivalry in which he saw himself placed in relation to the church. His high idea of the Collège de France and his passionate devotion to it—he always considered it the apex of French intellectual culture and a beacon of the modern spirit—are inseparable from his conception of it as a kind of modern secular cathedral. That, at least, was the role Michelet, together with his friends and colleagues Quinet and Mickiewicz, believed it should play if it was to live up to the ideals that had presided over its foundation. As the Collège had in reality a quite different complexion, and included, along with many accomplished but cautious, and by no means revolutionary, scholars, a number who were neither distinguished nor inspired, the efforts of Michelet and his friends to get it to conform to their idea of it led them into conflict with their colleagues and ultimately, as the political climate soured, to their own expulsion. In the end, the narrowly positivist spirit that Michelet and his friends had hoped to overcome triumphed over them.

After 1848 historians gradually ceased to view themselves as Michelet, Thierry, Quinet, and Blanc had viewed themselves. They turned away from the tribune, which they now thought of as dangerous and compromising, renounced the social and philosophical ambitions of their predecessors (including August Comte himself), and devoted themselves to problems of

historical scholarship and to the training of future historians. Philosophical speculation in history, it seemed, produced only illusions—and romantic revolutions. The new historians intended to be sober and factual scholars, to keep out of mischief themselves, and to refrain from leading others into it. For romantic idealism, inspired insights, and literary imagination, they substituted an astringent, skeptical, austere dedication to "facts," and an ascetic refusal to write anything that was not demonstrable. This strategy produced some remarkable and enduring achievements. More and more, however, as the new approach was routinized, history was obliged to forfeit its earlier claim to be of central moral, political, and philosophical importance.

In 1827, the year in which Michelet took up his appointment at the Ecole Normale, he published a translation of Vico's *Scienza nuova* (*New Science*, 1726, 1730, 1744). There is little doubt that Michelet himself saw this work as a contribution to the philosophy of history. If it should prove impossible to make a complete translation, he had told Victor Cousin in 1824 when he began work on it, he would make a substantial résumé of it that he would then incorporate "into my treatise on the philosophy of history." As it turned out, Michelet's translation provided a smooth and somewhat simplified version of Vico's often dense and difficult original, together with a lengthy introduction. It thus constituted, along with Quinet's translation of Johann von Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (*Toward a Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, 1784-1789), which appeared the same year and which had also been encouraged by Cousin, a major contribution to the romantic philosophy of history. The object of Vico's new science, Michelet explained, was

to separate regular phenomena from accidental ones and to determine the general laws governing the former; to trace the course of that eternal and universal history that is produced in each epoch in the form of particular histories; and to describe the ideal circle in which the real world turns.

("Discours sur Vico," in *Oeuvres complètes*, P. Viallanix ed., vol. 1, p. 288)

Thus the *Scienza nuova* is "at one and the same time the philosophy and the history of humanity."

What Michelet retained from Vico was the idea that history is the record of man's self-creation. Man, as Michelet put it, is his own Prometheus, and history unfolds in an orderly

pattern from a world of Gods, through one of Heroes, to one of Men. Michelet followed Vico in explaining this movement in political terms as an evolution from theocracy, through aristocracy, to democracy. In terms of rhetoric and language, he described it as a passage from a dense, symbolic, and poetical language, which is still close to its divine origin and in which, since the sign and the thing it signifies are related to each other in a real or natural way (as part to whole, for instance), meanings are stable and immediately intelligible, to a purely human language of rational and analytical prose in which, the original real connection of sign and thing signified having been severed and the relation between them reestablished on the basis of an arbitrary and conventional code, meanings are dependent on the interpreter's knowledge of the code. The passage from nature to convention or law, in short, leads toward both greater clarity and definition and freedom of interpretation. To Michelet, Vico's evolution from the divine to the human outlined, in addition, a movement of emancipation from the closed world of fatality and repetition (the physical world of geography) to an open world of freedom and self-determination (the spiritual world of history). But whereas Vico presented his pattern of development as a continuously repeated cycle—*corsi, ricorsi* (flux, reflux)—Michelet invested his mentor's idea of history with the optimistic progressivism of his own time. For Vico's circles he substituted the characteristically romantic image of the spiral, in which repetition and innovation, the real presence of the past and the absolute distinctness of the present, are combined and reconciled.

In the great 1869 preface to the Lacroix edition of his *Histoire de France* (*History of France*), Michelet declared, "Vico was my only master"; and two years before his death, "Vico gave me birth." These remarks are not rhetorical flourishes. Throughout his life Michelet's historical writing continued to be informed by the ideas and patterns he had discovered in Vico. The first work to show Vico's influence appeared in 1831, in the warm afterglow of the successful July Revolution. Indeed, Vico and July were often associated in Michelet's mind with this high point of his own life—a marvelous time out of time when he himself was coming into full possession of his powers as a writer and when France too seemed on the verge of rebirth. "I began to exist, that is to say, to write, at the end of 1830," he recalled in May 1871, three years before his death. His *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (*Introduction to World History*), which appeared in April 1831, was written, he declared later, in the preface to the *Histoire de la Révolution française* (*History of the French Revolution*, 1847-1853), "on the burning

cobblestones" of Paris in those heady days. It represented universal history as an "eternal July," a constantly renewed victory of freedom over necessity. In the *Histoire romaine* (*History of the Roman Republic*, 1831), which appeared almost simultaneously, Vico's system was projected onto the history of the Roman republic. As Michelet himself wrote later in a new preface he prepared for a second edition of this work in 1866: "Roman history appeared clearly to me between two crepuscular ages: the primitive age of rude, unpolished myths, and the bastard age of contrived myths calculated to foster Caesarism"—between the dusk of origins and the dusk of decline."

The *Introduction to World History* is a remarkable work that can be read as a piece of forensic rhetoric aimed at rehabilitating France and showing how the future of humanity is in the hands of the Christ-nation that has been treated by the others as a pariah. It presents the movement of history as passing from totality to individuality, from sacred to profane, from the dominance of the female to that of the male, from East to West, from divine origins in India through the heroic worlds of the Persians and the Jews to the humane, civilized order of the Greeks and the Romans. The cycle begins again, in modern Europe, in Germany—"India in the midst of Europe." To this ill-defined, watery land, where no boundary is sure and no river course fixed, where all philosophy veers toward pantheism and men retain the childlike candor and openness of earlier times, Michelet opposes Italy, the land of innumerable city-states, of measurers and mathematicians, whose goal is to domesticate and civilize nature, and England, the land of egotistical Byronic heroes, whose goal is self-deification and dominance over everything that is not themselves. In this latest turn of the historical wheel, France is to play the role of Rome, as Italy has played that of Greece. France's task, in other words, is to harmonize, humanize, and universalize all that in Italy or England remains local, particular, and self-centered, to mediate between extreme generality (Germany) and extreme particularity (Italy, England), and to lead humanity forward to the fulfillment of the present historical cycle and the edge of the next. "France," Michelet had already declared in his course at the Ecole Normale in 1828-1829, "is the true center of Europe." Correspondingly, Michelet, the disciple of Vico and of Creuzer, as later of Jakob Grimm, the son of Italy and of Germany, was the proper interpreter of both peoples, not only to his countrymen but to the world.

Though Michelet himself appears not to have played an active role in the July days, he welcomed the Revolution enthusiastically. On a practical and mundane level, it provided a golden opportunity for him and others like him to acquire or to enhance already acquired positions in the government or the educational establishment. The professionals of the bourgeoisie all sensed that their time had come and that the new regime was their own. Augustin Thierry expected to be rewarded with a good post for years spent supporting the liberal cause. Michelet wrote to Quinet urging him to come quickly to Paris: "You must come immediately, my friend. New things are materializing. New positions are being grabbed quickly. You'll find one easily if you arrive soon. Your friends are in power." (Quoted in Kippur, p. 42). In April 1830 Michelet himself was appointed head of the historical section of the national archives, a post he held for twenty-two years until he was forced out by Napoleon III in 1852; and in 1838 he achieved what he saw as the culmination of his professional career when he was appointed to the chair of history and ethics at the Collège de France.

On a more exalted level, the July days raised expectations of a new social order, a complete revolution, not to say transcendence of history, and a rebirth of the fraternal spirit that had already manifested itself as a promise and intimation of future fulfillment in the Fête de la Fédération of July 1790 (a massive popular demonstration of national unity and support for the Revolution)—always in Michelet a point of reference and a kind of secular revelation. The image of a new July, a new Eden, in which all will stand naked and innocent in the eyes of all, and all differences, obscurities, and secrets will be abolished in the full, even light of the noonday sun, recurs again and again in Michelet's writing and distinguishes history's high points from its low points, its heroes from its villains, its end and fulfillment from its murky travails. In his *History of France* and again in his *History of the French Revolution* Michelet recounts a pivotal moment in history, a moment of revolution, as a dissipation of darkness and shadow, a revelation and illumination—in one case the revelation of France as a nation to herself (the famous "Tableau de la France," a province-by-province description of France culminating in a tribute to Paris, at the beginning of vol. 2 of the *History of France*), in the other, of the people to itself as a people. The *Trois Glorieuses* of the 1830 Revolution were likewise represented by him as a moment of revelation and illumination "beneath the brilliant July sun," as the dawn of a new day, a "brilliant July morning."

It quickly became apparent, however, that the July days were not yet the fulfillment of history, but another epiphany or prophetic revelation, a reminder of 1790 and an intimation of things still to come. In his *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (*History of the 1848 Revolution*, 1870), Louis Blanc depicts Louis Philippe, the "bourgeois" monarch of 1830, as a thoroughly prosaic character whose already mediocre qualities degenerated after his accession to the throne. The entire period of the July monarchy is presented by Blanc as governed by greed: "The doctrine of self-interest was preached openly and officially, and industrialism appeared seated on the throne. Everything was up for sale—reputation, glory, honor, and virtue." As Blanc put it, France ceased to be herself—the daughter of Rome—and began to resemble some sordid and brutal Carthage. A more factual history would record the strikes, the revolts, the Luddite riots among the workers—beginning as early as August 1830—all of which were mercilessly put down; the difficulties of the peasants; the shortage of credit that drove many artisans and small businessmen to the wall; the epidemics; and at all times, the hardship, the ill health, the poverty, and finally the hunger that were the lot of the least favored—that is, of the vast majority.

Michelet felt as keenly as anyone the "moral cholera that followed so soon after July, the disillusionment, the loss of high hopes." His position as head of the historical section of the archives required him to travel throughout France, and both his journal and his published writings bear witness to the close attention he paid to the conditions of life—economic and social as well as cultural—in the cities and provinces he visited. He was especially moved by the plight of the silk workers of Lyons, whose massive uprising in 1831 had been ruthlessly repressed and whose miserable living conditions he observed at first hand on a visit to the city in March and April 1839. On other journeys he undertook in these years, to Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, and England, there is the same intense curiosity about the present as well as the past, about contemporary conditions as well as monuments, archives, and works of art; the same eagerness to establish contact with good informants—businessmen and ordinary citizens as well as officials. Michelet's account of his journey to England, for instance, provides a fascinating glimpse of a country bursting with energy and industrial activity but already scarred by the social consequences of rapid industrialization. Less detailed than the work of Friedrich Engels or even the earlier observations of Simonde de Sismondi, it is comparable in certain respects with Alexis

de Tocqueville's and deserves to be better known among students of nineteenth-century England than it is.

In these years, moreover, no one could ignore the "social problem," as it was called. On the one hand, there were the pioneering empirical studies of Vicomte de Villeneuve-Bargemont, a prefect under the Restoration; of Antoine Frégier; of Eugène Buret; of Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet; and above all the massive inquiry into the conditions of the workers of Lille, Rouen, and other textile manufacturing cities by Dr. Louis-René Villermé. On the other hand, there were the economic, political, and social analyses, and the programs of reform put forward by the so-called Utopian socialists—the Saint-Simonians, Etienne Cabet, Charles Fourier and his disciple Victor Considérant, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, and Constantin Pecqueur. Michelet was familiar with most of these authors and their works. In addition, he was personally friendly with many current and former Saint-Simonians as well as with Proudhon, who attended his Collège de France lectures faithfully from 1838 until 1842 and was a regular recipient of complimentary copies of his books. A long, laudatory letter Proudhon wrote about the *History of the French Revolution* was proudly reproduced by Michelet as part of a new preface to that work in 1868. Though he was certainly not a socialist, as we shall see, Michelet read the works of the socialists attentively and tried at various times to answer them. He even planned to write a book on socialism, and believed he had gone some way toward doing so in the last volumes of his *History of the French Revolution*. As late as May 1871, physically sick, morally disheartened by the debacle of the Franco-Prussian War, and anguished by news of the Commune, the great uprising in which the workers of Paris seized control of the capital in the spring of 1871, he noted that he was "completely preoccupied with the International" (the International Workingmen's Association, or First International, organized by Karl Marx in London in 1864).

Quickly, then, Michelet became disenchanted with the regime that had been installed by the glorious July Revolution. The prudent foreign policy of the government, its refusal to intervene on behalf of the Polish patriots or to defend French national interests in the Near East in 1840, aggravated the sense of disillusionment among headstrong and ardent patriotic and nationalist intellectuals such as Michelet, Quinet, and Blanc. France, Michelet announced, had fallen far from the heights of July: "There is no other case of such a rapid decline." According to

Quinet, the bourgeoisie had betrayed its mission. Instead of educating the people, "it had no sooner acquired authority than it became infatuated with it like all the regimes that preceded it; ... the bourgeoisie repeats in turn, through a thousand mouths: 'L'Etat, c'est moi.'"

Michelet's vision of French history had been that of a movement toward identity and unity, not physically or racially, at the level of blood, flesh, and soil (it was left to a later generation to dream that wild dream, which Michelet would have considered regressive), but morally and intellectually, through the spiritualized *mère patrie* (mother-fatherland), the mother reborn and redeemed by her sons. "I love [the provinces]," he wrote in 1842, "and I thank them for restoring to us the adored mother, such as she was to another age, when, younger, she was not yet herself. They are, for me, the steps, the stations, on the way to supreme maternal beauty." But the barriers that July had seemed to throw down were rising again, higher than ever, less now as barriers between provinces or regions—though these continued to exist, as Michelet discovered on his travels through France, especially in the contrast between northern and southern France—than as barriers between the classes. In his role as teacher and spokesman of the people, Michelet felt called upon to react.

If public life, as Michelet saw it, was in decline, his own private life was also in disarray. Pauline had died in 1839; Madame Françoise-Adèle Dumesnil, the mother of his son-in-law and pupil Alfred Dumesnil, to whom he had formed a close attachment, died in 1842. In the fall of 1842 he came near to a breakdown. "The feeling of the harmony of the world diminishes in me with each passing day," he wrote to Alfred. The fear, never far from the surface of Michelet's thought, that his optimism might be an illusion, that nature might still be an unreconciled, unreformed enemy, a careless, devouring primitive mother rather than a loving and nourishing mother, now overwhelmed him. Existence still seemed to be dominated by discontinuity, absurdity, incessant and meaningless change, with nothing lawful or rational about it.

My children gathered flowers, made them into posies, and then discarded them. I am afraid that is how nature is too. She entertains herself making vital compositions, arranging harmonies of existences. Then she discards them by the wayside. But first she snaps the stems and tears the blooms apart.

(*Journal* 1.329)

Meaning, order, intelligibility are not in the existent: men must invent them and impose them on an irrational and unjust nature. "We draw out from ourselves, from our will, the means of rebinding the bleeding strands."

Michelet worked his way out of his private and public despair by adopting a more activist, critical, and interventionist attitude toward the existing order. His strategy was no longer to celebrate it and seek in it an achieved reconciliation of opposites, such as tradition and progress or Christianity and revolution, but to point to its contradictions and combat its injustices. In the course of the 1840's Michelet renounced the dreams of harmony and reconciliation that Jacob Burckhardt referred to bitterly, around the same time, as the "illusions of the spirit of 1830" and prepared to do battle to ensure the future triumph of the principles incarnated in the French Revolution. "I once thought monarchy was possible," he noted in July 1847. "But it makes itself impossible by associating its fortunes with those who ... thrust their hands into the pockets of the people. ... The son swindled by his own father! One's ideas about paternalist government are wonderfully altered by that." (*Journal* 1.674)

Michelet associated his sympathetic portrayal of the Middle Ages as "high harmony" in the first books of his *History of France* with the conciliatory optimism of the immediate post-July days, and he now renounced this view angrily: "What a dream the Middle Ages are, what a world of illusion, fantasy, indifference to the real!" The only thing that can redeem his account of that time, he writes, is the sincerity of the mistaken idealism that inspired it: "My regret ... is to have given an ideal picture of those terrible Middle Ages. The ideal is true, because of its poetry and its aspirations, but totally unrelated to the historical reality I projected it onto."

To some extent too, Michelet appears to have associated the pleasures of art and illusion with this time of optimistic fantasies, and he became increasingly severe towards what he called "the artist" in himself, the spinner of gratifying but deluding fancies. In the same passage of his journal in which he renounces his belief in the viability of the monarchy and the possibility of reconciling Christianity with the new social and moral order born of the French Revolution, he criticizes the artistic impulse in himself and his friend Quinet. Both of them, he notes, were "kept back by the artist's love of curves and detours, by what I would call the sensuousness of art"—that is, the facile harmonies and satisfactions the artist creates to compensate for the discordances

of reality. In sum, as he turned his back on the easy optimism of the 1830's, Michelet also repudiated a certain artistic practice. This break in his work, which critics have always noted, and which is above all a break with a certain mellifluous, oratorical rhetoric and a certain repertory of poetic images, was often emphasized by Michelet himself. "History," he declares in the preface to the volume of the *History of France* dedicated to the regency of the Duke of Orleans,

is not a professor of rhetoric working to ensure smooth transitions. If a passage from one point to another is sudden and the movement convulsive and rocky, so much the better; that is only another characteristic of truth. But I have to pay the price. The more I am true [*vrai*] the less I am probable [*vraisemblable*]. What a marvelous point for the critics to latch onto. ... What can I do about it? And what can I do about the facts? ... I am the serf of time. And I cannot do anything except follow after it through all the diverse forms these figures get from it.

(*Histoire de France* [Paris, 1898-1899], vol. 17, p. 12)

According to Michelet's own account, therefore, he broke in the 1840's at one and the same time with the conciliatory political position he had held until then, with the Restoration cult of the past and the dead, with a desire for and belief in enduring personal happiness—mostly through women—and with an artistic practice and writing style that had remained essentially idealist and neoclassical, oriented toward the *vraisemblable* rather than the *vrai*. His leavetaking itself was still somewhat rhetorical, but its significance is clear.

Farewell my past ... farewell Church, farewell my mother and my daughter. ... All that I have known and loved I now turn my back on in order to go out toward the infinite unknown, toward the obscure depths, whence I sense, though I do not yet know it, the coming of the new God of the future.

(*Journal* 1. 516-517)

The movement outlined here—advancing from mother to father, past to future, the affective to the intellectual, "grace" to "law"—is a familiar one in Michelet. It arises out of his reading of Vico and it informs his early works—the *Introduction to World History*, the *Roman History*, the *Life of Luther*—as well as his later ones. In the early writings, however, the emphasis is on the struggles of the *past*, and the narrative ends on a note of achievement and synthesis: in the *Introduction*, the July Days; in the *Roman History*, the coming of Caesar. Later, the movement is seen as one that is endlessly repeated in the life of the individual, in that of nations, and in that of humanity, and from which no release can be expected. There is no moment of achievement and reconciliation, and the law of life is unremitting struggle.

In 1843 Michelet's break with the past was expressed concretely by a temporary interruption of work on the *History of France*. The final volume on the Middle Ages appeared in 1844, but the volume on the Renaissance did not appear until 1855, although Michelet had in fact lectured on the Renaissance at the Collège de France in 1839-1840 and 1840-1841. Instead, Michelet turned to the French Revolution and began to write its history, as though to revive and reactivate the revolutionary spirit of the French people. Michelet expected his readers to read all his works in the same spirit that Christians read the Gospels or he himself, as a young man, had read Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. To none of his works, however, was this expectation more crucial than to the *History of the French Revolution*, which appeared in seven volumes between 1847 and 1853. As George Sand had written in a commentary on the rival *History of the French Revolution* (1847-1864) of Louis Blanc, the French Revolution "is truly the Book of Destiny of modern times. In it one can study the law of man's life."

At the same time, Michelet began to address the issues of the day directly. His publicistic and polemical works were in fact far more widely read than his histories. The first of these, *Des Jésuites* (*The Jesuits*, 1843), was written in collaboration with Quinet and was composed of lectures that the two friends had given at the Collège de France in 1843. Both Michelet and Quinet had been responding to what they perceived as a concerted attempt by the Right, notably by the Church, to undermine the achievement of the Revolution, and in particular the monopoly of secondary education that the Revolution had entrusted to the state and its professors. The elementary school reform introduced by François Guizot in 1833 and the passing of another law in 1836 containing provision for "freedom of teaching" in secondary schools were, in the eyes of Michelet and his fellow radicals, the thin edge of the reactionary wedge. Behind this liberal legislation they discerned an extensive campaign mounted by the Jesuits, who had returned to Paris in 1833, in favor of a "pluralist" and "free" educational system, from which the Church alone stood to gain. By 1841 a major assault on the University's monopoly of secondary education was in fact being conducted in the Catholic press, notably in Louis Veuillot's *L'Univers*, as well as in countless books and pamphlets. *Monopole universitaire*, a Jesuit production that appeared in 1843, denounced the subversive, immoral influence of many professors on the young, and singled out Michelet as a particularly "impure blasphemer."

Michelet and Quinet counterattacked in two independently devised series of lectures at the Collège in the spring of 1843. When *The Jesuits* was published later the same year it became an instant best-seller. Five thousand copies were sold in ten days, and the book went through five editions averaging two thousand copies each before the end of the year. In addition, *The Jesuits* provoked a vast outpouring of books and articles both supportive and critical of Michelet and Quinet. At issue for Michelet was the moral and spiritual leadership—and in the end, the control—of the nation.

Despite his later indictment of Robespierre and the Jacobins and his sympathetic portrayal of the Girondins in the *History of the French Revolution*, Michelet always subscribed to the essentially Jacobin ideal of the nation, one and undivided. The Girondins had made a mistake, he acknowledged, when they allowed themselves to be drawn into supporting federalism. As he saw it, the full realization of France as a nation must necessarily lead to a highly centralized state in which there would be neither disaffection nor dissent nor even significant difference, one in which all Frenchmen would be united as brothers. (French women, as we saw, would realize their humanity by becoming more and more like French men.) Michelet's criticism of the Jacobins mostly concerned their exclusiveness, their secretiveness, and their attempt to *impose* an identity of views instead of encouraging one to unfold. In Michelet's eyes, such an attempt could only aggravate dissension, not resolve it. Genuine identity of views was always achieved through the free discovery and realization by each single individual of his true self, and the leader's task was to assist the individual to make that discovery, not to impose an alien personality on him. Michelet thus diverged from the Jacobins not so much on the question of ends as on the question of means, and on the relation between means and ends.

In fact, Michelet portrays the Jacobins very much as he portrays the Jesuits or, for that matter, the modern European Jews. All three groups appear in his work in the form of a secret army of parasites infiltrating and undermining the healthy body of the nation. This vision seems inseparable from the general conviction shared by many nineteenth-century idealists that difference and diversity are the consequences of a fall from being into history, so that the goal of humanity must be to work forward through the dialectical resolution of successive oppositions to

a restoration of unity and identity on a new, higher, spiritual plane. “Ah! if only I were one,' says the world”—if we are to believe Michelet:

“If only I could at long last reunite my dispersed members, bring all my nations together.” . . . “Ah! if only I were one,” says man, “if only I could cease to be the multiple being that I am, gather in all my diversified energies, realize harmony and concord in myself.”

(*Histoire de la Revolution française*, ed. G. Walter, vol. 1, p. 416)

The ways of error, according to the old adage, are many, while that of truth is one. Though unity and identity, whether of the nation or of humanity itself, may never be fully realizable—their realization would mark the end of history—they must always be pursued as a goal. Anything that deliberately obstructs them is evil; any promoting or reanimating of old divisions that were destined to be historically overcome is Satan's work. Michelet's response to the reappearance of "outdated" singularities and defeated differences is typically paranoid: he can see them only as attempts to drag mankind back into the dark cave from which it has struggled to emerge, only as a plot by the forces of Night to cheat the forces of Light of their legitimate victory. Thus Michelet's Jesuits—like Jews or Gypsies in many European folk traditions— lure children from their parents, wives from their husbands. It is not surprising that the anticlericalism of the Third French Republic, which had its roots in the polemics of the 1840's, went hand in hand with a uniform vision of France and, above all, of French education, that owes much to Michelet.

In 1845 Michelet fired a second salvo against the Church. *Du Prêtre, de la femme et de la famille* (*Priests, Women and Families*) sold fourteen thousand copies in eight months and went through nine English editions in a year. This time the government began to be concerned, and the minister of the interior, the minister of justice, and the prosecuting attorney for Paris entered into discussion of possible legal sanctions against Michelet. Meanwhile, in 1846, Michelet published *Le Peuple* (*The People*), the third of his popular writings of the 1840's.

If the theme of *The Jesuits* and *Priests* had been the defense of French nationality against the divisive influence of the Church, *The People* warned of dangers and divisions no less serious stemming from the "social problem." The ideal unity of the French "people," which had been manifested for Michelet above all in the Fête de la Fédération of 1790, had been disastrously

undermined not only by the struggles of political factions during the Revolution itself and then by the political order of the Restoration, but also by the development of commerce and industry under the July Monarchy. By devoting itself to the selfish pursuit of wealth, the bourgeoisie had cut itself off from the rest of the people. Well-to-do bourgeois, petit bourgeois, artisans, proletarian workers, and peasants were now all divided from each other and suspicious of each other. To Michelet this was an unmitigated disaster. Whereas for Karl Marx, and even for a non-Marxist socialist such as Blanc, class division and class conflict were a given reality and the point of departure for any serious reflection about society, Michelet the mediator reaffirmed desperately the "essential" underlying unity of the French people, even as he acknowledged present divisions. Blanc and Honoré de Balzac, he protested, wanted to aggravate the split between the "two nations." His own aim was to heal it, restore the people to its true nature, and find the way back to the popular tradition of the Revolution.

In later years, Michelet's disputes with Blanc over their respective histories of the Revolution were only apparently of a scholarly nature. The real issue was to discover which of the two had the authority to speak in the name of the Revolutionary tradition and thus which of the two histories was authoritative. Full and clear references to sources, the quality of the original materials consulted, and similar seemingly technical points of scholarship were important above all because they served to legitimate the rival narratives in which each claimed that the authentic Revolutionary tradition had been embodied.

To Blanc, the Revolutionary tradition was one of class struggle; fidelity to the Revolution meant continuing the class struggle, even if he was relatively moderate and circumspect in the way he proposed going about this. To Michelet, the Revolutionary tradition was enshrined in the Fête de la Fédération of 1790, and fidelity to it meant restoring and securing for all time the unity of which that moment had been the revelation. He refused to accept Blanc's proposition that the bourgeoisie, which Blanc defined in economic terms as the possessor of capital and of the instruments of labor, was outside the people, defined as "those citizens who, possessing no capital, depend completely on others" and "are free in name only." The bourgeoisie, according to Michelet, was virtually indefinable, since it ranged from wealthy industrialists to modest, even poor, people. Michelet appears to have thought of the bourgeoisie as a moral entity, identifiable

by its values, its codes of conduct, its own self-perception, and the perceptions of others, rather than as an economic one. For this reason, it could not, "thank God, ... be opposed to the people, as some would have it." The Revolutionary tradition was not, in sum, Michelet argued, identical with socialism, and continuity, not conflict, was the law of historical development in the nineteenth century.

Michelet was keenly critical of the social order of his time, but he was not a socialist. He claimed to have "refuted" Proudhon's attack on property by showing how access to property had marked the emancipation of the peasant; and in 1844, on a visit to Lyons, where he was dismayed to find the workers inspired by the "Christian communism" of Etienne Cabet, he tried to counter the Utopian socialist ideal of a "grande communauté" with proposals of his own for small-scale cooperative ventures in home heating and cooking. Not surprisingly, he discovered that the men who dreamed of "total reorganization" were not much impressed by his "modest ideas for improvement." These little communist cells, he noted testily, "would obstruct the great movement of reunification." Like the Jacobins during the revolution, the socialists of the 1840's were a divisive force impeding the union of the nation.

Michelet never changed his position. He never accepted either the Left's critique of property or its critique of the family, and he never wanted a socialist revolution. His own description of himself as "a child of the rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis"—a busy street of small shopkeepers, as distinct from the rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the main street of Paris's working-class East End—defines him socially. His aim was to reestablish continuity with the tradition of the great Revolution, not to make a new revolution. "Desired two things," he wrote in his journal on 15 April 1869:

- 1) to reestablish the tradition of France, of the *Patrie*, rejected by our Utopian Socialists, who speak of an absolute difference, a new start. . .
- 2) to strengthen the family and the home, and make them the keystone of the temple of the City, the firm support of the *Patrie*, and all this in opposition to the literature of the day. The Utopians—Saint-Simon, Fourier—on the one hand, the novelists—Sand, Balzac, etc., on the other—have this much in common: they both despise marriage.

(*Journal* 1.418-419)

Michelet's reflection on social questions, in the end, is strongly marked by what Marxists would at one time have described as a "petit-bourgeois" refusal of both reactionary restoration and revolutionary socialism. It is dominated by political idealism, fear of modern economic developments, rejection of the primacy of the economic, longing for peace and reconciliation, and hatred of violence and crude authoritarianism, seen as fatally divisive.

The social groups Michelet most identified with and sought to promote were not the rural proletariat, but the modest property-holding peasantry; not the developing urban proletariat of factory workers, but independent artisans possessing a skill and the tools of their trade. The progressive replacement of such artisans by anonymous factory hands (often female) in the textile industries of Reims and Elbeuf filled him with apprehension and dismay. Whereas for Marx social progress passed by way of the industrial organization of labor, for Michelet the mill hand represented not an advance, but an absolute regression from the laboriously acquired individuality and autonomy of the artisan to a more primitive, communal, and dependent condition. Michelet looked on the factory worker with compassion, but also with fear; for the monotony of the labor and servitude to the machine, he argued, made it virtually impossible for him (or her) to learn responsibility and self-reliance. "Incapable of settling permanently, always inclining toward change," the proletarian masses, Michelet seems to have feared, offered easy material for manipulation by future tyrants.

Nor, somewhat surprisingly, was there much to inspire respect or confidence in the new class of shopkeepers. Michelet regarded them as a shifty, deceitful lot, "always waging a war on two fronts: a war of cheating and cunning against the ... customer, and a war of vexations and outrageous demands against the manufacturer." Unlike the peasant, the artisan, and even the manufacturer, the shopkeeper has no roots, and he does not produce anything. He is simply an agent of exchange, a parasite living off the labor of others.

Equally characteristic of Michelet's social thought is his consistent propensity to interpret social phenomena idealistically in political, moral, and even metaphysical terms; he either avoids economic categories or translates them into noneconomic ones. Thus social relations and social classes are not definable economically or even, in the end, only in political terms. Michelet's

categories of analysis form part of a system that draws their specific content into a whirl of metaphors in which all categorical hierarchies are destroyed. The economic is seen as a mirror image of the psychological, which may in turn re-emerge as a mirror image of the metaphysical. This mobility of meanings is part of the great attraction and interest of Michelet's text, for it suggests relations, which are indeed worth exploring, between aspects of reality that are kept strictly isolated from each other in positivist historiography and social science. Michelet avoids analyzing these relations, however. Indeed, the analogical structure of his historical texts foils every attempt at critical and factual analysis so effectively that it is, in the end, as potentially mystifying and delusive as it is stimulating and productive.

Finally, Michelet ascribes a crucial role in all his historical writing to the mediator and conciliator. In the all-embracing philosophy of history that he shared with many other writers of the romantic period, woman, the people, nature, the Orient, beginnings, and the primitive incestuous community (as the romantics believed), together with a battery of attributes such as humidity, heat, fecundity, passivity, vegetativeness, submission to fate, belong to a single semantic field. They are set in an undefined relation to each other, as are the equivalent contrary terms: dryness, striving, liberation from fate, man, the nation, culture, the West, ends, property and family, and so on. The dynamic element in Michelet's texts, as we have seen, is the movement from the first set of terms to the second. This passage requires a good captain to negotiate it, someone who knows both the beginning and the end, both the sea and the land, both the poetry of the past and the prose of the future. Mediating figures play a privileged role in all of Michelet's writing. The historian himself is one, especially the historian who, like Michelet, claims to have been born of the people; so is the poet (Vergil above all); so is the great historical agent, such as Caesar, half-man, half-woman in Michelet's portrait of him, standing at the crossroads of the ancient, local world of city-states and the modern world of universal empires; and so, in their more humble station, are the pilots of the Gironde who negotiate the dangerous passage from the wild open sea to the domesticated river.

The truly successful mediator, as Michelet presents him, always knows how to avoid exclusiveness and violence. Thus the writer who would write for the nation, rather than for a small group within it, must "follow the popular tendency, while at the same time cultivating what

is best in it." He must, in short, be passive and active at the same time, combining and reconciling both roles. Michelet is distrustful of every movement that is forced, always fearful that the new will attempt to dominate or even to destroy the old. Violence and tyranny, whether exercised by the overbearing nobleman, the great landlord or industrialist in the English manner, or a small band of moral fanatics, such as the Jacobins, always produces rupture instead of continuity, forced conformity instead of unity, conflict and repression or opposition, followed inevitably by revolt or the "return of the repressed," instead of harmony. The difficulty, Michelet noted in 1847, is this:

1) If it is left as a matter of feeling ... fraternity is not effective, or it is so only in the hour of enthusiasm (as at the time of the early Christians). 2) If it is formulated as law and made imperative, it is no longer fraternal. It is unfraternal fraternity. ... An enforced community will have the barbarizing consequences of war—it will be big on destruction, but weak on production. 3) If you want fraternity to spread, it must be voluntary. ... So instead of forcing men, train the children, give them a fraternal education that will make them want fraternity.

(*Journal* 1.662)

Michelet's new, more pugnacious attitude was thus significantly mitigated by its goal, which remained that of unity. Not any revolt was justifiable, only that which, like his own or like that of his heroine Joan of Arc, is sanctified by selfless dedication to the restoration of unity. And as violence may not be exercised against those within, against the other who has to be seen as a brother, an aspect of the self, the blame for division can be placed only on the foreigner or the parasite, the outsider or the alien or traitor within. Englishmen, Jews, Jesuits, Jacobins, and Catholic priests, seen as obstacles to the realization of complete national unity and identity, become legitimate objects of hatred in a potentially paranoid vision of history. War against the foreign enemy, the Other, is permitted—and Michelet's imagination is aroused by the idea of the young men of France going off to holy war in defense of the *patrie*, "with quivering bayonets"—but war within, class war, civil war, is sacrilege.

For Michelet who, as he himself remarked, had lived with his father for forty-eight years and been separated from him only by death, who had considered his father more alive in him than he was in himself, and to whom his father had always represented "the true France of Voltaire and Rousseau," conflict between father and son is unthinkable. Though in fact it

happens all the time, it is always an aberration. To account for it, Michelet provides his good fathers and good sons with a dark double, an Other. His histories are filled with evil father-kings (often dominated by castrating phallic mother-queens) and evil sons. Conflict always involves an evil father or an evil son; it is always satanic, a deviation from the norm. Thus England, France's Other, riven by intractable social conflict, is from the very beginning the land of Cain, its king "a wicked son who beats his father." In France, on the other hand, law and love are reconciled and mutually enhanced in the figure of the good father-king, who combines in his person both male and female characteristics; both the analytic, boundary-setting, individualizing faculty and the faculty of synthesis, comprehension, and inclusion; both modern property, together with its counterpart the modern family (culture), and primitive communism, the original sharing of goods and women (nature). It is this capacity to achieve differentiation without conflict or loss of community that, according to Michelet, makes France exemplary. For in France *la patrie* is or should be "like a woman (mother, wet nurse, etc.)," and man feels or should feel that "the law [the father—L.G.] is like a mother, and that he lives in her warmth. Such is at least the ideal we must always pursue."

As Michelet's aim—the resolution of all conflict—is predicated, like that of the Enlightenment *philosophes* he loved, on the free recognition by all men of their common humanity (and Michelet's *peuple*, far from being a genuine *social* category, is, in the end, nothing other than this common humanity), education inevitably plays a crucial role in his social and political thinking. In this important respect, the romantic historian is truly the child and the loyal champion of Enlightenment. Indeed, as we saw earlier, the educator, and above all the historian, is for Michelet the supreme architect of the City, the true politician. Michelet believed the great conflicts of his time should be and were being played out in university lecture rooms. Stephen Kippur rightly draws attention to Michelet's unflagging belief in the power and centrality of words, and consequently in his own importance as a writer and orator. There seems to be little doubt that he experienced the pleasures of power as he swayed and seduced the large audiences at his lectures, and he was disappointed if the electric charge failed to ignite, or if the number of his auditors dwindled, as it often did during the exciting early months of 1848, when "the people's heart," as he himself put it somewhat forlornly, was "elsewhere."

Any shift of the locus of action from the classroom to the street and the Chamber threatened not only Michelet's personal status and public role, but the kind of solution he proposed to bring to the social and political conflicts of the day. Reflecting in 1847 on the fear that "communism" inspired in some and the equally immense hope it inspired in others, he wondered if the disagreement might not one day explode in armed conflict: "Will this land one day be the scene of a terrible and futile experiment?" Instead of such terrible, futile, and irrevocable experiments, Michelet advocated words, teaching, argument, and persuasion. Conflict, he held, had first to be removed from men's hearts and-minds. The rest would follow. In the midst of the 1848 Revolution, on 23 February, he noted in his journal that looking back over his lecture course for the year he found in it much that reflected an era now on the verge of being overtaken, an era when history had advanced at walking pace and had not yet taken wing. What he had had to say remained valid, however: "I established the rational order in which, in normal times, things should occur. Events may invert that order; it is nevertheless the order of reason. That order requires that fraternity precede legislation and that improved laws be the result and expression of it." (*Journal* 1:684).

As one might expect, those who have to carry out the "work of fraternity," those who must bring about the transformation of men's minds, are the teachers and their students, the sons of the bourgeoisie. They are the evangelists of the new revolutionary and nationalist faith, and they must write its gospels. "If my heart is opened up at my death," Michelet wrote later, "the question that has haunted me all my life will be found inscribed in it: How shall the books of the people be produced?" The *livre populaire* was indeed an obsession of Michelet's. It is a typical romantic oxymoron, a dream of reconciliation similar to the key concept of the *mère patrie*, in which love and law, the "feminine" and the "masculine" principles, are yoked together. Through the *livre populaire* the two parts of the "people" (that is, of humanity), the illiterate or uneducated and the literate or educated, the mother and the son (who has detached himself from her in order to realize his masculinity) were to be reunited.

By presenting the social antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the working classes as a cultural division between two aspects of the people—an educated leadership that was unproductive without the instinctual energies of the mass and an uneducated mass that was blind

and helpless without the intellectual guidance of the leadership—Michelet and other ideologists of the period shifted attention from the economic causes of social conflict and made it seem that educators, not revolutionaries, held the key to the solution of the "social problem." The *livre populaire* was both a means of achieving social unity and a Utopian image of unity achieved. Michelet himself always hoped that his histories would be popular, and it was with regret and some self-recrimination that he acknowledged they never reached the masses. Likewise, he at first placed great faith in the new power of the press, only to confess later that the newspapers to which his liberal and radical friends contributed did not reach the people either. The latter thus remained vulnerable to the blandishments of rivals—the priests of the old religion in the first instance, but also a new tyrant, the "Napoleoncule" who was already waiting in the wings.

Michelet, it should be emphasized, never doubted that the people had to be led or that its books had to be written for it. Like nature, or women, or the past, the people is inarticulate, *infans*, and can attain self-awareness and self-expression only through the mediation of one who is both of it and beyond it, like Michelet himself. The poet Pierre de Béranger mildly scolded Michelet for his lack of confidence in the people, but Michelet never shared his friend's optimism. "After the dark and terrible affair of 24 June 1848," he writes in *Nos Fils (Our Sons, 1869)* – that is, after the army of the Republic itself violently crushed a popular uprising to protest the closing of the "national workshops," which had been set up in response to the Second Republic's proclaimed "droit au travail":

bowed down and overwhelmed by pain and sorrow, I said to Béranger: "Who will speak to the people? write its new gospel? Without that there is no life for us." That strong, cool spirit replied: "Patience! The people will write its own books." Eighteen years have passed. And where are those books?

(5.2)

In the end, it is not easy to forgive the patronizing sentimentality of Michelet's proposed solutions to the social problems of his time. His compassion for the despised and humiliated, the hungry and the homeless of his society, is not in doubt; nor is his commitment to a somewhat idealized peasantry and artisan class. But did he really believe that mutual affection, even if it could be instilled by education, would eliminate suffering and injustice? Or did he simply soothe his ruffled sensibility with pious hopes and pleasant dreams? What is one to make of a passage like the following?

If these two children who had sat on the benches of the same school could continue to see each other every evening after one had become an apprentice, the other a college student, they would achieve more between them than all the moral lessons and political doctrines in the world: they would preserve the true bond of the City. How keenly the rich man would feel the misery of the poor one and suffer because of his own wealth; how unbearable he would find the burden of inequality. How eagerly the poor man would take part in the advancement of the rich one: *Be you great. That is sufficient for me!* The rich man would be poor in heart and voluntarily egalitarian. Does that mean he would cast away his goods and share them with others, as the Gospel would have it? No, he would keep them. Without wealth, there is no respite from manual labor, and without this respite, there is no work of the spirit. The rich man is the repository of wealth; he owes, in return, the work of the spirit and the dispensation of spiritual riches.

(*Journal* 1.627)

The impatience of Albert Mathiez, the radically left-wing historian of the Revolution, is excessive, but understandable. Michelet, he wrote,

was undoubtedly concerned about the miseries of the people, but his response was only a series of protests and pleas that sometimes bordered on the ridiculous. At the time Marx was writing the *Communist Manifesto*, he was bleating for the union of the classes. Far from having nourished the democratic opposition, he probably exhausted it and certainly led it astray. Because he had lived his first years in the midst of his father's printing business, he boasted of being from the people. An unbearable pretension. . . . He was in reality one of those beautiful fruits of the classical education that the sons of the bourgeoisie received in the private schools; fruits of dazzling colors, but frequently hollow inside. I am struck by the incoherence and by the frequent banality of his thought.

(Quoted by Kippur, p. 226)

Michelet continued "bleating" for the union of the classes and for better understanding between men and women in a series of works that appeared in the 1850's and 1860's: *L'Amour* (*Love*, 1858)—"a great success ... a revolting book," Charles Baudelaire wrote to his mother—*La Femme* (*Woman*, 1860), and *Nos Fils*. In none of them did he challenge the existing social and economic order. His aim, one must conclude, was not to change it but to "harmonize" it and make it humane. Neither the privileges of the bourgeoisie nor those of the male were threatened—any more than the preeminence of France and of Europe in general in human history. The masters were simply urged to exercise their civilizing mission with compassion and to bear the white man's burden honorably.

The ideal of the *mère patrie*—the state as a benevolent parent of all its children—was the cornerstone of Michelet's social thought. "Let them love this house of France as much as and more than their father's house," he wrote. "If your mother cannot feed you, if your father treats you badly, if you are unclothed, if you are hungry, come, my son, the door is open wide and France is there on the threshold to embrace you and take you in." Michelet was above all concerned that Frenchmen should think of their state in this way. Though they might in fact be quite unequally treated, he wanted all Frenchmen to feel that they shared in France the same loving and providing, just and equitable parent, at once mother and father. To construct and win acceptance for this image of the *mère patrie*, not only through books and newspapers, but popular songs, popular theater, public concerts, and other means of expression more likely to be effective with the masses, was the special task, in Michelet's view, of the writer and the artist. Daumier's *La République*, exhibited in 1848, is a fine pictorial rendering of the historian's vision of the *mère patrie* as nourishing mother and protective father.

Michelet's solutions have the fragility of all constructed myths. The cosmetic covering may at any time come unstuck or be peeled off in anger and resentment by those who feel they have been manipulated and deceived. Michelet wanted to engrave in the hearts of his countrymen an image of the *mère patrie* as loving and just, organically connected to the entire past and tradition of the people and at the same time progressing infinitely toward an ideal that would both fulfill and cancel tradition. Subjected to stress, however, this image may crack and revert to the shifting, uncertain, frightening image of the arbitrary "natural" mother it was designed to supplant, the mother who dispenses death as well as life, and passes capriciously from indulgence to deprivation. The possibility of illusion—a persistent nightmare in all Michelet's writing from the *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* to the natural history books of the 1860's—has not, after all, been dispelled.

"As the social war grows more bitter," the historian noted shortly after the death of the infant son Athénaïs had borne him, "it becomes dangerous to entrust oneself to a wet nurse. To do so is to entrust oneself to the enemy. Wet nurses, like servants, have become impossible." A decade later, in *La Mer (The Sea, 1861)*, he evoked the image of "a terrifying mob, a horrible populace," lacking any recognizable human traits and resembling "howling, wild, or rather mad

dogs. . . . Not even dogs. They weren't even that. They were hideous, unidentified apparitions, beasts without eyes or ears, nothing but great foaming jaws." The harmonies and meanings attributed to history are swallowed up in a dreadful whirlpool of inescapable and cruel contradictions. The Other—nature, women, the people, our own unconscious—for a moment seemingly transparent, recognizable as our Self, suddenly becomes opaque again, irreconcilably different, illegible. In *The Sea* the historian describes how the watery medium, the origin of all life, in whose ample maternal interior her trusting offspring feel "as happy as a fish in water," suddenly becomes dark and menacing ("ugly, of terrifying aspect"), a watery grave filled with victims ("bones and debris"). The sea now "loses its reassuring transparency, becomes opaque and heavy."

Barely two years after the publication of *The People* and in the midst of his work on the *History of the French Revolution*, which consistently argues for the unity of the French people in the 1789 Revolution, the events of May and June 1848 had already revealed the depths of the divisions in Michelet's "people." The historian was shattered by the people's invasion of the National Assembly in May, depressed and disillusioned by the brutal repression of June. These events "bled the heart of M. Michelet," according to his son-in-law, Alfred Dumesnil, "and stopped all his work, which is something no public event has ever done to him before." Another young friend observed that "M. Michelet has been wounded in his love for France. ... A frightful breath of reality has exploded his fantasy." (Quoted by Kippur, p. 128)

Not surprisingly, in view of these disconcerting events, Michelet was haunted by the fear that he who claimed to speak for the people had never been able to understand or capture its language and had never truly communicated with it. At such moments he was brought face to face with the imaginary, almost oneiric character of all his activity, and was struck by the enormity of having devoted his entire existence to the writing of books, the spinning out of dreams. He had, he once confessed, been so obsessed by writing that he had omitted to live. Life, he insisted then, is not "a sheet of paper." The artist cannot create out of nothing. He must live in order to create. By removing himself from the people, losing touch with nature and experience, the artist or intellectual becomes sterile and impotent. "Need to be, rather than appear. To immerse oneself in being," he had noted as early as 1847.

Absent for so long from the realities of life, exiled in a world of paper, return oh my soul, my child, return to your origins. ... Place yourself next to the poor and beg for life. You will become a man, less of a book, less of a scribe, less of a legless cripple. ... And perhaps you will be cured of that yielding softness of the artist to which Dante pointed with scorn. You will be less subject to dreams and to woman, the living dream.

(*Journal* 1.679)

For his part, the historian must have the courage to recognize and forgo the effects of rhetoric, to renounce the pleasing and harmonizing models of art, for these, according to Michelet, are only fanciful dreams that will inevitably be dissipated on contact with reality. Harmony, whether of the modern world or of the modern historical narrative, is not simply given, "natural"; it is a rational ideal that must be painfully constructed out of the often disconcertingly disparate pieces and fragments discovered in empirical reality. Michelet now underlines the distinction between the "artist" and the "historian." The suave graces of the one, he argues, should not be permitted to gloss over the other's hard-won perception of "differences, ... the originality of each trait." At the same time, the ideal of an original harmony—the "natural" harmony of childhood and nature—is not to be disregarded or scornfully rejected. Even as he recognizes its inadequacy and works to transcend it, the historian is guided, inspired, and sustained by it. Michelet's romantic view of history, at once paradigmatic (symbolic, legendary, figural) and syntagmatic (causal, sequential), was intended to resolve the oppositions of nature and reason, female and male, poetry and prose, by placing the powers of the former in the service of the latter in a synthetic construction that transcended the one-sidedness of both.

Like the *mère patrie* of the historian's radical-nationalist ideology, however, this synthesis was always in danger of collapsing back into the elements composing it. "Art" and "history," legend and fact, illusion and reality constantly recur as absolute, impermeable categories, like Self and Other, male and female, culture and nature, writing or literature and "life." The possibility that the dialectic through which Michelet kept trying to bring them together might itself be an illusion, a pure construction of the human mind, and that history, despite the historian's efforts, might not be compatible with and understandable by our human intelligence, but a "mauvais songe" (a bad dream), a meaningless chaos that drives those who get a glimpse of

it mad, is the specter that haunts Michelet's work, his nemesis both as a historian-artist and as a social thinker and reformer.

Among his successors the fragile synthesis Michelet himself struggled hard to sustain fell apart into a popular novelistic practice of historiography and a more or less agnostic and academic positivism. Whereas Michelet was increasingly suspicious of "art" and the well-rounded narrative, Ernest Renan, for instance, conflated the aesthetically smooth and satisfying with the historically valid, making the *vraisemblable* (that which has the appearance of truth) into a touchstone of truth, and producing a historical text in which, as he put it himself, the sources have been "interpreted with taste" and "the data are all harmoniously fused." At the same time, however, Renan's agnosticism—Michelet himself declared, "Renan's vice is doubt"—brought him close to the antiaesthetic, "scientific" historiography that became entrenched in the universities and presided over the founding of the great professional historical journals.

Dedicated to the empirically verifiable fragment, this positivist historiography was often concerned with minutiae or with the collecting and editing of documents, and at best subscribed to a pious hope that the fragments of knowledge it unearthed might one day be fitted together to form a total view. But because the positivist scholar had no rationale for fitting the pieces together, no way of conceiving totality except as an aggregate of parts—as indeed he had a considerable and not wholly unhealthy skepticism about totalities altogether—such a total view inevitably had for him something of the character that God has for an agnostic. Positivist historical scholarship tended to eschew philosophical speculation as unprofitable and irrelevant to historical research and to history in general, considered as the science of facts. It thus refused to become aware of or to problematize its own philosophical assumptions or methodological principles. Totalities might be looked on with disdainful skepticism, but there was dogmatic certainty about the fragments the historian investigated or discovered, about individual "facts," and unthinking acceptance of the narrative schemata according to which these were arranged. Scornful as they were of "art" and proud of being hardheaded "scientists," the positivist historians were often unaware of the principles guiding their own work. The collapse of Michelet's historiographical synthesis, which coincides with the collapse of romantic poetics and politics, thus led to a resigned acceptance of the unknowableness of the historical world as a

whole and a complacent dogmatism about the knowableness of fragments of it and of individual facts.

The suspension of Michelet's course at the Collège de France in January 1848 was almost immediately lifted by the provisional government that assumed power and proclaimed the Republic on 24 February. But as the Republic veered increasingly to the right after the climactic June of 1848, Michelet again found himself in conflict with the administration of the Collège. The government of Louis Napoleon, who had been elected president in December 1848, considered Michelet's lectures dangerous and was afraid of the large throngs of students they attracted. Michelet was accused of encouraging disturbances and political protests. When he entered his classroom, he was greeted, it was said, with cries of "Long live the social and democratic republic!" His lectures, copied down by spies posted in his classroom, were allegedly full of atheist and revolutionary propaganda. Finally, on 11 March 1851, on the basis of a garbled transcript, the director of the Collège was able to have Michelet's teaching censured by his colleagues. On 13 March he was formally suspended, and on 12 April 1852, by a special decree of Bonaparte, now Napoleon III, he was expelled, along with Quinet and Mickiewicz, from the Collège de France. In June of the same year, having refused to take the oath of allegiance to the new imperial regime, he lost his position at the archives, and that same month left Paris with Athénaïs for Nantes and self-imposed exile.

The Michelets spent a dismal year at Nantes. Michelet was depressed by the political situation, by the turn of his own fortunes, by the narrowness and mediocrity of provincial life in what had once been a thriving commercial city. "Every literary voice had been silenced," he wrote. "All life seemed to have been interrupted." In addition he was almost continuously in poor health. In 1853 the couple moved to Italy—"my nurse," as Michelet liked to say—to spend a year at Nervi on the Ligurian coast, not far from Genoa. In July 1854 they returned to Paris and in August moved into the apartment at 44 rue de l'Ouest (now rue d'Assas) that was to be their home for the rest of their lives.

Michelet lived to see the disastrous end of the Second Empire, but he never again held an official position. His new situation as a private scholar had two consequences. If he had always

wanted to write popular books, he now had to, as he and Athénaïs were dependent financially on income from the sale of his works. In the years between 1852 and his death, the character of his literary production altered noticeably. To these years belong, in particular, the natural history writings;—*L'Oiseau* (The Bird, 1856), *L'Insecte* (*The Insect*, 1858), *La Mer* (*The Sea*, 1861), and *La Montagne* (*The Mountain*, 1868)—and the popular books *Love* (1858) and *Woman* (1859). Second, as a private scholar he no longer had ready access to the archival materials that had immeasurably enriched his earlier histories, especially the *History of the French Revolution*. According to most critics, the historical work undertaken by Michelet after 1852 was far less scholarly and more subjective, more affected by the historian's personal obsessions than anything he had done before.

Both these changes in the character of Michelet's writing almost certainly owe a great deal also to the shattering experiences of May and June 1848. He himself declared that

the awful night of June 24, after the great light and hope of February, struck me the most terrible blow I have ever received. I tried to write a popular book, but couldn't do it. I returned humiliated, sad, and somber to the impersonal work of my historical research.
(*Journal* 2.23)

It was then that he found consolation in the generous self-sacrifice of the women of the Revolution and realized that "if I was going to find a solution, it would be found in woman, in love." The program of the books on women, on love, and on nature was thus announced by Michelet himself as early as February 1849. The fact that in the winter of 1848-1849 he met and married Athénaïs, who appeared to him as a kind of savior, another virginal Joan of Arc, in a time of terrible need and despair, and that Athénaïs was deeply interested in natural history, gave a further impetus to a tendency that was already formed.

Michelet's natural history books were an immense commercial success. *The Bird* went through seven editions in four years and by 1867 had sold thirty-three thousand copies. The first printing of *The Sea* called for twenty-four thousand copies. There were seven editions of *The Mountain* in the year it first appeared. *Love*, written for the same public and in the same vein, though not strictly a natural history book, sold thirty thousand copies in two months. These

works were thus far more popular than any Michelet had written before, but not in the sense of the *livre populaire* that had haunted him in the 1840's. They were bought and read by the bourgeoisie and by the vast new petit-bourgeois reading public created by universal education and increasing prosperity, and they were in no way comparable with the polemical writings of the 1840's. The lessons they taught were on the whole compatible with current bourgeois views about progress, science, and the role of women.

The relation of history and historiography to nature and natural history resembles, for Michelet, the relation of man to woman. As the love of woman is the "cordial" that refreshes the weary man of action, his consolation in times of distress or flagging spirits, the writing of natural history is the cordial that restores the strength of the historian worn out by delving into the secrets of the archives or discouraged by history's failures and apparent retrogressions. At a certain point in the French Revolution, Pierre Vergniaud and Georges Danton "shut themselves up at home and took refuge" from the pressure of public affairs "at their fireside, in love and nature"; and in the same way Michelet withdraws from the strenuous labor of writing history and from the disappointments of his own time to seek recreation in collaborating with Athénaïs on nature books. Even within the natural history writings, however, two possible ways of studying natural history are represented. On the one hand, there is the passive, affective naturalist, still hardly disengaged himself from the object of his study, which he pursues more as a passionate and intimate observation than as a scientific inquiry (Michelet's model here is Alexander Wilson, the humble Scots weaver who, being poor, propertyless, and unmarried, has not yet broken out of the original community of nature and who still lives in peace with all her creatures, "the friend of the buffalo and the guest of the bear, feeding on wild fruits"); on the other hand, there is the modern race of intrepid explorers—"ardent lovers"—penetrating and conquering untamed jungles and bringing back specimens to be analyzed, classified, and exhibited in the Museum of Natural History.

The consistent lesson of the natural history writings is one that has already been discovered in Michelet's historical and political writings: that nature and history, female and male, empirical observation of particulars and rational, scientific systematization of the data provided by observation, working class and bourgeoisie, provinces and centralized state are not

to be thought of as being in a relation of mutual antagonism. On the contrary, the second term in all these pairs depends for support and sustenance on the first, but equally the first term is dependent on the second to develop its latent potential and bring it to self-awareness and self-expression.

It is certainly true that the political climate of the Second Empire was unfavorable to the kind of romantic historiography practiced by Michelet and that natural history was both more lucrative and safer. Michelet himself admitted he had resorted to natural history as a refuge or "alibi" from "the troubled history of humanity, so harsh in the past and still so harsh in the present." It seems not quite correct, however, to present Michelet's natural history writings as proposing a world view diametrically opposed to that of his histories—"a timeless and historyless Utopia," as Stephen Kippur describes it. Not only had Michelet been interested in natural history all his life, there are many passages, even in his most polemical works, that anticipate the natural history writings. Few readers of *The People*, for instance, can forget the fine poetic evocation of the bird at the end of part 1, chapter 3, or the astonishing sixth chapter of part 2. In fact, nature in Michelet turns out to be a mirror of history as well as an escape from it. The same themes, the same obsessions, the same fears that dominate Michelet's national history recur in his natural history: above all the overriding desire to find that the Other is transparent to the Self; that nature, like history, is amenable to reason and intelligible, even in her apparent cruelties and caprices; that the universe is informed by law; and, at the same time, the terrible fear, never completely conjured, that it is not so, that order is a fiction and that the last word is chaos. "Daylight is fading and darkness is falling all over Europe," Michelet noted in 1853. He turned to nature to restore his faith at a bleak moment in history. But in nature he merely encountered once again the aspirations and anxieties that motivated him as a historian.

The subjectivism and the personal obsessions, notably with sex, that professional historians, beginning with contemporaries or near-contemporaries like Burckhardt, deplore in Michelet's later work, notably in the volumes of the *History of France* devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were also no doubt exaggerated by his enforced retirement from public life, his political disappointment, and his ever-increasing involvement with Athénaïs, an attachment that also estranged him from his son-in-law, Alfred Dumesnil, and from his old friend

and companion-in-arms Edgar Quinet. It was not simply, it seems, that Michelet no longer had access to archival materials; he did not even trouble, it is alleged, to read the printed works that were readily available to him and that he himself refers to, preferring instead to write history out of his own imagination.

The criticism of Michelet's later works is by no means without foundation. Yet the vice, if it is one, was there from the beginning. A reviewer was already complaining in 1842 of Michelet's "abuse of synthesis . . . and symbol." Only in the earlier works, the organizing patterns, images, and analogies were supplemented and richly filled out with the results of intense scholarly and, wherever possible, archival research. At the core of Michelet's powerful historical imagination there is a romantic world picture in which, as each part of the universe is held to be informed by and to mirror the structure of the whole, everything is a metaphor of everything else. The system of correspondences not only links different "areas" of human and natural activity, it also links different time periods. Successive ages are related to each other not only causally but figurally, earlier series of events being repeated in a new guise by later ones, as the higher coils on a spiral, to borrow Michelet's own image, repeat and at the same time continue the lower ones.

From the beginning, then, the life of nature, the life of individual man, and the life of society are analogically related for Michelet. The struggles of the natural, external world (the jellyfish, for instance, striving to transcend its limited and closed existence) correspond to those of the political world (the primitive community striving to become an articulated society) and those of the individual, internal world (the son striving to detach himself from the mother). In all three cases there is the same danger -- and the same attraction -- of regression: higher forms risk abandoning themselves to or being attacked and destroyed by lower forms. Every term in Michelet's narratives thus evokes a corresponding term in a parallel series and analogy informs the historian's writing from beginning to end. He had always characterized the English, the chief rivals of the French, the victors of Agincourt and Waterloo, as cruel, lawless transgressors, "red-faced" men, voracious meat eaters; the French as a race of vegetarians, living in harmony with nature and feeding modestly on milk and cereals. At the end of his life when, in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, he began to see in the new Germany the greatest danger France had ever

had to face and to place his hopes for the future on a rapprochement of France with her age-old enemy, he did not forget to find a confirming alimentary analogue for the political rapprochement he wanted. The English, he noted in his *Histoire du XIXème siècle (History of the Nineteenth Century, 1872-1875)*, now have more cereal in their diet, while the French consume more meat than they did.

Its pervasive metaphoricity is in the end the enormous attraction—and seduction—of Michelet's writing. Because of it, that writing itself enacts one of the processes it so often describes. The apparent reconciliation of art and science, of synthesis and analysis, generality and particularity that Michelet hoped to achieve in his writing and that was the historiographical analogue of the *mère patrie* on the political level may suddenly and disconcertingly be experienced by the reader as, after all, another disguise of the original, dangerous Circe-text. The reader is sucked into it as helplessly as the two hundred passengers on board the *Amphitrite*, evoked in Michelet's journal, were swallowed up by the treacherous waters of the English Channel, which had yet seemed "so blue."

It is this incurably "literary" quality of Michelet's work, its capacity to draw the reader into it and to stimulate the play of his imagination, that ensures not only its unity—it is the oeuvre of a powerful writer, and all the individual works in it are drawn centripetally toward each other far more than they are drawn centrifugally to other scholarly studies of the same topic—but its continued life.

Michelet can still excite the ordinary reader, whereas Louis Blanc, for instance, cannot. As for the purely technical historian, his work rarely survives as a text; it is almost always taken up and adsorbed in the general knowledge historians have of the past. In addition, it is this very literary quality that has made Michelet one of the most productive and stimulating of modern historians. His study of *La Sorcière (The Witch, 1862)* enrolls and reorders once more the major themes and images of all his work, and it can easily be shown to be a mirror of his own erotic obsessions. Yet this highly imaginative and unorthodox text is still, without question, one of the most illuminating studies of the history of woman that has ever been written. Michelet's own obsessions and those of his age and his class are eminently present in all his work. His

ideological thrust is insistent and unmistakable. Yet because he allowed his imagination far more freedom than almost any historian before or since, because he was such a "bad" historian by certain standards, he helped to transform historiography and continues to inspire the most innovative historians, from Lucien Febvre to Fernand Braudel.

It was the historian of the witch, the man obsessed and terrified by the opacity of the Other, by all that is hidden from view, by the material foundation that masculine pride and philosophical idealism try to deny—the secrets of nature, the secrets of woman, the secrets of the unconscious—who began to unveil the secrets of history and to give a voice, as he said, to its enforced silences. Thanks to him and to his unconstrained imagination, we now know that alongside or beneath political history, diplomatic history, military history, the history of kings and states and assemblies, there is also an alimentary history and a demographic history, a history of sexual practices, a history of the family, a history of cultural representations, or *mentalités*.

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