

MICHELET IN ENGLISH

ONE OF THE GREATEST FRENCH WRITERS of the nineteenth century, Jules Michelet (1798-1874), published a huge range of works of history, philosophy, social criticism and natural history. Inspired by a Romantic idealism, and expressed in an intensely emotional and rich style, these books contain a coherent and passionate view of the world, aimed at 'the regeneration of the human race.' In his lifetime Michelet was regarded as one of France's leading intellectuals and social critics. The highest point of his career came in the 1840s, when, as a professor at the Collège de France, he was closely involved in the ferment which resulted in the revolution of 1848. By 1852, however, Michelet had been driven into retirement by Napoleon III and spent the rest of his life travelling and writing. His liberal views, poetic style and Romantic imagination invite comparison with Victor Hugo, and indeed Michelet was generally judged by his contemporaries to be worthy of such a comparison.

Michelet's important and influential position in nineteenth-century France evaporated rapidly in the twentieth century. He was increasingly looked on as an anachronism, an example of outmoded ways of thought and expression, especially in the writing of history. The French bade 'a long goodbye to Michelet' in the twentieth century, according to Pierre Nora.¹ After the publication of his *Oeuvres complètes* in forty-six volumes between 1898 and 1903 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy), interest in Michelet declined to a low level, though some academic study of his work continued. A revival of Michelet only came about with the emergence of the so-called *Annales* school of historians in the 1930s and 1940s. Their influence has spread, until they now form the orthodoxy in French historical circles, as well as being much read and imitated in English-speaking countries.² Originally inspired by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, and then by Fernand Braudel, their ranks also include such important historians as Georges Duby, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Jacques Le Goff, Philippe Ariès, Pierre Chaunu, François Furet, Marc Ferro and Maurice Agulhon. Many of the distinctive features of the *Annales* style of history can be found in Michelet's work: the interest in the details of daily life (such as food and drink, clothing and housing), the awareness of the inseparability of history and geography, the use of a wide range of sources (folklore, poetry, law, etymology and so on), the fascination with manuscripts and documents, and the interest in sexuality as an historical force. Above all, the *Annales* historians share Michelet's devotion to the ordinary people and his goal of reconstructing 'mentalités' — the shared mental outlook and emotions of a whole people. In the 'histoire globale' of the *Annales* historians, in their concern with the totality of society, Michelet's influence is evident.

The leading figures of the *Annales* school claimed Michelet as their precursor, the historian from whom they had learnt the most. Lucien Febvre described Michelet as 'the very embodiment of history' and 'a great historian, a creator of genius.'³ Fernand Braudel, in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1950, referred several times to his debt to Michelet and thanked Febvre for 'making Michelet's voice heard again, though it had seemed silenced forever.'⁴ More recently, the medievalist Jacques Le Goff described Michelet as his 'model of an historian.' 'Did I not choose to follow in the footsteps of Michelet?', he asks.⁵ In parallel with this rehabilitation of Michelet as a seminal historian there have also been new definitive editions of his works, by Paul Viallaneix: firstly of the *Journal* (published 1959-1962 by Gallimard), and more recently

the *Oeuvres complètes*, published by Flammarion from 1971, to be completed in twenty-one volumes.

Given the current view of Michelet as one of the more important writers of the nineteenth century, and in the light of these drastic fluctuations in French attitudes to him, it is instructive to compare the way in which his books have been received in the English-speaking world. At first, Michelet's works were slow to appear in English. By 1843, when Alonzo Potter's translation of the *Précis de l'Histoire Moderne* was published, Michelet had already published five volumes of his *History of France* as well as ten other books. Potter's *Modern History* was followed, however, by a rush of translations in the later 1840s. The reason for this sudden quickening of interest would seem to have been Michelet's emergence as a major social and religious controversialist.

Des Jésuites, containing lectures which he and his friend Edgar Quinet gave at the Collège de France, was published in 1843, followed by *Du Prêtre, de la Femme, de la Famille* in 1845. Both these anti-clerical and anti-Catholic polemics appeared soon afterwards in English. *The Jesuits* was published in 1845 and by the next year three different translations were available — by C. Edwards Lester, Charles Cocks and G.H. Smith. The Cocks translation had reached a fourth edition by 1848.

Priests, Women and Families was even more successful. An anonymous translation appeared in Philadelphia in 1845, published by James M. Campbell, with a strongly anti-Catholic introduction by the translator.⁶ Charles Cocks' translation for Longmans was issued in 1845 too and had reached its eleventh edition by the following year. Another translation, by Joseph Crookes for the London publisher Charles Edmonds, went through at least seventeen editions in 1846, while a fourth translation, by G.H. Smith, also appeared that year, published by Whittaker and Co.

Michelet's social manifesto, *The People*, first published in 1846, was issued in two different translations in the same year: one by Charles Cocks for Longmans, which quickly went to a third, 'cheap' edition, and one by G.H. Smith for Whittaker and Co. in London and Appleton in New York. When the first two volumes of the *History of the French Revolution* then appeared in 1847, they were promptly translated into English by Cocks and published, in two parts, by H.G. Bohn during 1847-1848.

At the same time as these polemical works were attracting such interest, some of Michelet's earlier writings appeared in English for the first time. William Hazlitt translated the *Life of Luther*, published in 1846 by D. Bogue in his 'European library' series, while G.H. Smith's translation was issued in the same year by Whittaker and Co. in London and Appleton in New York. The French original, *Mémoires de Luther*, had appeared in 1835. Another work translated by Hazlitt was *The History of the Roman Republic*, first published in French in 1831. Hazlitt's translation was issued in 1847 by Bogue in London and Appleton in New York. The earliest English translations of the *History of France* also appeared around this time, and covered volumes one and two, originally published in 1833. Walter K. Kelly's version was issued by Chapman and Hall between 1844 and 1846, and G.H. Smith's by Whittaker in London and Appleton in New York between 1845 and 1847.

By 1848 — a crucial year for Michelet because of his connection with the revolution which restored the French Republic — most of his writings had been published in English translation, and several had been immediate successes, with rival translations in multiple editions. The major untranslated works were volumes three to six of the *History of France* and his historical manifesto, *Introduction to World History*, first published in 1831. Other writings which remained untranslated were either school-books, like the *Chronological Tables of Modern History* (1825), or academic treatises with a narrowly French focus — such as *The Origins of French Law* (1837).

The pattern of publication in English of Michelet's later works was similar, with his controversial books on women and love, and on political issues, appearing almost immediately. *Women of the Revolution*, which consisted of excerpts from the *History of the French Revolution*, appeared in English in 1855, a year after its publication in French; it was translated by Meta Roberts Pennington and published by Henry Carey Baird in Philadelphia. *Love* was published in English in 1859, again only a year after its first French publication, while *Woman* was issued in 1860, having appeared in French in November 1859. In both cases, the translation was by J.W. Palmer, published in New York by Rudd and Carleton; no British editions have been recorded. *The Sorceress*, Michelet's study of medieval witchcraft, was published in an English translation by L.J. Trotter in 1863, under the imprint of Simpkin, Marshall and Co. in London. The French original appeared in 1862. One of his last works was *France Before Europe*, inspired by the tumultuous events of the Parisian Commune of 1871, and this appeared in translation in London and Boston in the same year.

The series of books which Michelet wrote in this period on nature and natural history was usually much slower to appear in English. The exception was *The Sea*, published in 1861, both in French and in an English translation by Rudd and Carleton of New York. But *The Bird*, which was published in 1856, was not translated until 1868; the translator was W.H. Davenport Adams and the publisher Thomas Nelson and Sons, with illustrations by Hector Giacomelli. The same team also produced *The Insect* in 1875, though the French original had appeared eighteen years before. *The Mountain*, with the same translator and publisher but with Percival Skelton as illustrator, was published in 1872, four years after its French publication. The other major work of this later period to appear in English was the *Bible of Humanity*, published in French in 1864. The translation, by Vincenzo Calfa, was published in 1877, three years after Michelet's death, by Quaritch in London and J.W. Boulton in New York.

Another work to appear in this period was *Joan of Arc*. This had originally been part of volume 5 of the *History of France* (published in 1841), and had been issued separately in 1853. An English translation, by O.W. Wight, was published in 1858 by Houghton Mifflin in Boston, and Stanford and Delisser in New York. A second translation, by Henry Ketcham, appeared two years later, published by Sheldon and Co. of New York.

The remaining parts of the *History of the French Revolution* (volumes three to five, published 1849-1851) remained untranslated. So did volumes seven to seventeen of the *History of France*, which appeared between 1855 and 1867, and Michelet's last work, the *History of the Nineteenth Century*, published in three volumes between 1872 and 1875.

Of the various posthumous books published (and sometimes edited) by his widow, Athénais, only the travel writings *On the Highways of Europe* appeared in English, translated by Mary J. Serrano and published in New York by Cassell, in 1893 – the same year as its French publication. Most of the nineteenth-century English translations continued to be reprinted or republished for some years. G.H. Smith's translation of volumes one and two of the *History of France* was issued at least fifteen times between 1847 and 1900 by Appleton of New York. Hazlitt's translation of the *Life of Luther* appeared in a second edition in 1862, which was republished at least six times to 1911. The original translations were usually simply reissued, with two exceptions. A new version of the *Précis de l'Histoire Moderne*, by Mrs M. Simpson, appeared in 1875 under the title *A Summary of Modern History*, published by Macmillan. A revised edition appeared in 1899 and 1900. A.R. Allinson's new translation of *The Sorceress*, was first published in 1904 by Carrington in Paris, under the striking but rather misleading title *Satanism and Witchcraft*. It was reissued the next year by the Imperial Press in London.

The frequency with which the existing translations continued to be reissued gradually declined in the late nineteenth century. By the time of the First World War, new printings had stopped almost completely. For the next fifty years, there was very little interest in Michelet in the English-speaking world. By the 1960s, his works were available only in the larger and older libraries, in the nineteenth-century translations.

One exception to this obscurity and neglect was Albert Guérard's new translation of *Joan of Arc*, published by the University of Michigan Press in 1957. Another was the rather complicated publishing history of Allinson's *Satanism and Witchcraft*. Advertised as a 'new translation' of Michelet's 'classic study of medieval superstition', it appeared under five different imprints between 1939 and 1969: Walden Publications, Citadel Press, Arco Publishers, Tandem Books, and Lyle Stuart. The Citadel imprint had reached its tenth edition by 1970. Interest in witchcraft, rather than the reputation of Michelet, presumably inspired this success which otherwise went against the prevailing tide.

Since the late 1960s, interest in Michelet the historian and Romantic thinker has begun to revive gradually, especially in the United States. Charles Cocks' translation of volumes one and two of the *History of the French Revolution* was reissued in 1967, in a new edition by Gordon Wright for the series 'Classic European historians', published by the University of Chicago Press. A new translation of *The People*, by John P. McKay, was published in 1973 by the University of Illinois Press, and the nineteenth-century illustrated translation of *The Bird* (from the revised edition of 1870) was reissued by Wildwood House of London in 1981.

A few of Michelet's works have also been translated for the first time. In 1972 the Livingston Publishing Company of Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, began to issue a translation by Keith Botsford of the entire *History of the French Revolution*. Over the next eleven years, three volumes were published, covering books 7-8, and 11-17 of the French original. In 1977 the first English translation of Michelet's lengthy and important 1869 preface to the *History of France* appeared, as an appendix to Edward K. Kaplan's book *Michelet's Poetic Vision*.⁷ Kaplan was also responsible for a trans-

lation of selections from Michelet's journals for 1815-1850, published in 1984 under the title *Mother Death* (University of Massachusetts Press).

Another work which recently appeared in English was the book of selections from Michelet made by Roland Barthes, originally published as *Michelet par lui-même* in 1954, with several later reissues. The English translation, by Richard Howard, was published by Basil Blackwell, and Hill and Wang, in 1987. Perhaps one can be forgiven for assuming that it was Barthes, rather than Michelet, who was the reason for this translation. The selections from Michelet are only very short pieces, arranged thematically by Barthes with a lengthy and idiosyncratic commentary. Outside the framework imposed by Barthes the selections have no depth and little meaning.

As well as the translations published in the 1970s and 1980s, interest in Michelet has also been demonstrated by the publication of monographs in English about him. The only earlier book devoted to Michelet seems to have been Anne R. Pugh's *Michelet and His Ideas on Social Reform*, published by Cornell University Press in 1923. But from the mid-1970s the picture has changed completely. Linda Orr's *Jules Michelet: Nature, History and Language*, published by Cornell University Press in 1976, was closely followed by Edward K. Kaplan's book *Michelet's Poetic Vision: a Romantic Philosophy of Nature, Man and Woman* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1977). The 'first full-length biography of Jules Michelet in the English language' then appeared in 1981: Stephen A. Kippur's *Jules Michelet: a Study of Mind and Sensibility* (State University of New York Press). Oscar A. Haac contributed a volume on Michelet to Twayne's 'World authors series' in 1982, and John R. Williams produced a short study entitled *Jules Michelet: Historian as Critic of French Literature* (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1987). Then in 1990 there appeared Arthur Mitzman's large 'psychobiographical' study: *Michelet, Historian: Rebirth and Romanticism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Yale University Press). Scholarship in English on Michelet is clearly beginning to accelerate.

The history of Michelet in English, then, provides an interesting example of the relationship between French and English culture. In the English-speaking countries, and especially in the United States, interest in Michelet has waxed and waned in a way broadly similar to that of his native country. But it has been much more muted, and slow to react to changing perceptions and assessments of Michelet in France. After the many English editions and translations of the 1840s and 1850s, Michelet's popularity slowly declined, during the later nineteenth century and in the twentieth century. By the 1960s Michelet was all but unread in English, except as the author of *Satanism and Witchcraft*. His works were, for the most part, available only in nineteenth-century editions.

Over the last twenty years, interest in him has begun to revive, largely as a result of the growing influence of the *Annales* school of historians. Several new translations have appeared and a few others have been reissued. But several of Michelet's more important writings remain untranslated, and many are still available only in nineteenth-century translations. The voluminous scale of Michelet's work creates an

additional obstacle, and there is no representative selection in English which would make him more accessible. At present, despite the activities of the last twenty years, Michelet still remains comparatively, and unjustifiably, neglected in the English-speaking world.

Toby Burrows,
University of Western Australia.

NOTES

1. Pierre Nora, 'Michelet (Jules)' in: *La Nouvelle Histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Paris: CEPL, 1978), p.424-425.
2. Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: the Annales School 1929-89* (Cambridge : Polity Press, 1990).
3. Lucien Febvre, *A New Kind of History*, ed. Peter Burke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.28, 267.
4. Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.8, 22.
5. Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.viii.
6. This translation had the title *Spiritual Direction and Auricular Confession*.
7. Edward K. Kaplan, *Michelet's Poetic Vision* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p.147-168.

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