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Shadows of Revolution: Reflections on France, Past and Present. By David Bell. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2016. x + 444 pp. £20.00. ISBN: 978 0 1902 6268 6.

Clergymen, at the twilight of their ministry, would often collect and publish their best sermons in elegant volumes. One wonders if David Bell's most recent publication, *Shadows of Revolution*, follows this venerable tradition. This volume collects thirty-five reviews, six essays and an orphaned chapter from an edited collection. Most of these items have been published over the past three decades in magazines, and some newspapers, catering to a public starving to know what academics think about everything under the sun. According to the author, the long shadow cast by the French Revolution is the overarching theme which connects all these essays and is the golden thread which runs through the hexagon's recent history. This is undeniable, but may beg as many questions as it answers.

Several reviews, like those on relatively recent books by Jacob Soll, Lawrence Brockliss and Carla Hesse are truly excellent and incisive. Others, for example, those on Graham Robb, Dominic Lieven and Jonathan Israel are harsh and demolish interesting alternative interpretations of French and European History. In general, David Bell is unsympathetic to the tradition of empiricism and academic industry that we have inherited from nineteenth-century 'scientific history.' He is certainly a man who knows which way the wind is blowing, and like any good navigator turns his sails in the direction of the future. The linguistic, cultural and emotive turns are singled out for effusive praise and engagement, whereas archival and methodological issues seem to have little interest for the essayist. This may be understandable, given that he is writing for a 'lay' audience, but it is certainly striking.

It is difficult to see what keeps all of these essays together. The immediate answer would seem to be the brilliantly acrobatic paragraphs written to connect one review to the other. This may be unkind, as this is a collection of essays that will be relished by Bell's many academic admirers and readers of his previous excellent books and articles. Yet one wonders how those less familiar with the work of this essayist will react. Indeed, they might be perplexed and disorientated by the self-congratulatory tone of many of these reviews. Even more so by the insertion of a solitary chapter, first published in Swann and Felix's *Crisis of the Absolute Monarchy*, defending the authors' views on masculinity, noble culture and the rise of modern militarism, which apparently fall under the all-encompassing category of 'Total War.' This orphaned piece of writing is likely to confuse even the most sympathetic of readers. Collections of essays often feel like journeys. Bell takes us on a trip that is exceedingly bumpy, filled with detours, and interrupted by cul-de-sacs. For a novice seeking to learn something about French History I am reminded of the legendary Irish quip to motorists seeking directions: 'well I certainly wouldn't start here.'

Ultimately this volume has set itself an impossible task. The thirty or more books considered in these reviews cover over four centuries of French and European history. They include topics as diverse as nation-building, salon culture, the Napoleonic wars, apparitions in Lourdes, American visitors to Paris, Vichy France, and Mitterrand's presidency. All of these subjects are fascinating in their own right, but the attempt to draw them together is cacophonous to say the least. The final section—'parallels'—contains six descriptive essays that confront contemporary issues and events. After the age of *Perestroika*, David Bell's crystal ball, as he admits himself, has become increasingly misty and peopled with shadows. The Arab spring, and more recent Terrorist attacks,

are treated in a somewhat inert manner and we are told that the very analytical category of 'Revolution' may have outlived its usefulness. The Cumaean Sibyl seems to be alive and well and living in New Jersey.

In many ways this collection speaks to the dilemmas and challenges which confront academics and public intellectuals in our world. There is a constant call on historians to have 'impact,' to direct public debates and to make prognostications. David Bell has certainly heard the trumpet blast and has positioned himself to do battle. Ultimately he tries to do too much and his coherence suffers. There is no doubt of his learning and wide breadth of reading, indeed his book reviews are testament to his voracious appetite for academic debate. It would have been better if he had written a real book of reflections, like Richard Cobb, whom he admires, often did, rather than simply getting out the glue and pasting forty random items together. At the end of the day all reviews must answer the basic question: is this a good or a bad book. 'Shadows of Revolution' is not a book. This is disappointing from the author of ground-breaking studies like 'Lawyers and Citizens,' and 'Cult of the Nation.'

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Becoming Bourgeois. Love, Kinship & Power in Provincial France, 1680-1880. By Christopher H. Johnson. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 2015. 344 pp. £32.50. ISBN 978 0 8014 5398 4.

In this book, Christopher H. Johnson makes use of a corpus of letters written between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a family group who mostly lived in Vannes in Brittany, as well as in Paris. It is one of the largest surviving collections of letters not derived from an aristocratic, bourgeois or professional setting. This domestic, intimate correspondence sheds light on a family of craftspeople who managed to rise into the bourgeoisie through marriage and trade deals. The book therefore tells the story of a process which the author intends to reconstruct; one that includes a double movement covering both the ascent of a particular family, and an account of the society which made this ascent possible and gave it an unprecedented social meaning—namely, the entry into *modernity*. The family relationships that formed between the Galles, the Jollivets and the Le Ridants through this period make up the very essence of this exposition. It was through a closely blood-linked intrafamilial sociability and inward-facingness that this elite established its values outside of the aristocracy and proclaimed a world of provincial public figures during the First Empire and the Restoration. An evolution is evident throughout these letters: the evolution of a family breaking away from patriarchal practices based on property rights, and the evolution of an urban world breaking away from the classifications of the *ancien régime*.

These two aspects are clearly one and the same to Christopher H. Johnson. For him, the principal phenomenon is the emergence of interpersonal and emotional ties as the building blocks of a new group that is no longer centred on economic interests but on a *habitus* - a set of behavioural and cultural reflexes which, little by little, became exemplary markers of *class*. As such, this history spanning many generations allows us to see how the different family lines of booksellers, notaries, servicemen and local civil servants embraced warmth, emotion, conjugal love, paternal kindness and femininity.