Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

Richard D. E. Burton — *Blood in the City: Violence and Revolution in Paris, 1789–1945*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001. Pp. xv, 395.

Richard D. E. Burton, a British scholar of French literature, has published widely on Baudelaire and French Caribbean topics. In *Blood in the City* he puts forth a sweeping literary-inspired reinterpretation of French history between 1789 and 1945 which suggests that political change in the French capital city — and in France itself — was concomitant with violence, scapegoating, martyrdom, and blood-letting. This in turn, he leads us to believe, was derived from a tradition of revolutionary executions or from morbid, extremist Catholicism and its sacrificial paradigm. His study is based upon historical secondary sources and literary texts and is informed by literary and selective historical theory. It purports to provide a thematic nexus connecting and explaining French history from the Revolution to the end of the Occupation. Unfortunately, it falls far short of its objectives.

Burton chooses to organize his book in a topographical, thematic fashion rather than chronologically. Thus his narrative jumps from one Parisian political or symbolical *haut-lieu* to another, offering in the process an interesting geographical view of Parisian-centred French history, before ending with an 80-page conclusion intended to draw his points together. After providing a quick overview of the French past — which concentrates on the Revolution of 1789–1794, the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871, and the Liberation in 1944–1945 — in chapter 2 the author seeks the origins of violence that he believes marked these momentous instances of political change. He concentrates on the executions that accompanied the fall of the Bastille in 1789, which, he claims, established blood-shedding as "the sacrament of the new revolutionary community" (p. 36). Chapter 3 then builds upon this topos by turning to the Place de la Concorde in 1791 (then Place de la Révolution) and interpreting the execution of Louis XVI as that of a scapegoat charged with conspiracies, whose sacrificial death, likened to that of Christ by his supporters, inspired the royalist, right-wing Catholic cause for the next century. Having established an expiatory tradition on both the French right and left, Burton covers Bonapartism in chapter 4 on the Place Vendôme, a mere aside that hardly follows a theme; chapter 5 reverts once again to blood-letting by focusing

somewhat inexplicably on the executions carried out until 1832 on the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville (then Place de Grève). The next chapter shifts to the rue du Bac to describe the visions of Catherine Labouré in the early 1830s and to introduce the theme of nineteenth-century French Catholicism, confronted by an increasingly secular France, reviving itself by stressing sacrificial, redemptive suffering. Then, chapters 8 and 9 take the reader to Notre Dame Cathedral and other Parisian churches for a discussion of the late-nineteenth-century conversions of Paul Claudel and Joris-Karl Huysmans to a morbidly tinged Catholicism. In chapter 10 we are transported to the Eiffel Tower and Sacré Coeur basilica for a juxtaposition of the rational modernity of iron with the stone of the post-1870 Ultramontane Catholic revival. Chapter 7 on Père Lachaise Cemetery, along with chapters 11 and 12 on the Vel d'Hiv-Drancy dragnet of Parisian Jews (July-August 1942) and the purges after the Liberation (1944–1945), return to the ideas of *lieu de mort*, with more examples of violence, scapegoating, martyrdom, executions, and sacrifice. These arguments are reinforced by a discussion of the Dreyfus Affair in the conclusion. Also in the conclusion the author finally attempts to draw together this disparate and disjointed material by citing René Girard's theory that all societies find their origins and sustenance in seeking out sacrificial scapegoats to satiate and channel their primeval violence. Nevertheless, in leading the reader on this eclectic whirlwind *tour de Paris*, Burton weaves a story that by and large will fail to convince or satisfy most historians, be they political, social, or cultural.

First, Burton bases his research entirely upon literary and theoretical citations and on an extremely limited selection of largely dated secondary historical sources. Indeed, the lack of historical depth and understanding is blatant throughout most of this work. As a result, the author sees the major events of French history in an oversimplified, spectacular, distorted, or exaggerated fashion, failing to consider the forces or circumstances behind them or the nuances that differentiate them. To conclude that different degrees of violence marked certain important events in French history between 1789 and 1945 is a truism that no historian would dispute. But to fail to acknowledge that political violence in Paris and France had important antecedents throughout the Early Modern period, and that 1789 was in no sense a starting point, is a serious misconception. Similarly, even the author is begrudgingly obliged to admit at the very end of his book (p. 344) that Spain, Germany, and Italy — not to mention Russia — probably experienced as much or more violence as France during the period that he examines, though he attempts to justify his approach by arguing that only in France did that violence espouse a specific repetitive pattern.

Secondly, Burton concentrates upon telling a story rather than analysing events historically. Much of his narrative tends to stress in a sensationalist manner disparate macabre, morbid, gruesome, or bloody anecdotes, rather than building upon a central theme. Indeed, the book itself comes across as a series of vignettes or independent chapters rather than a unified whole. Moreover, Burton sorely deviates from historical analytical method in treating and criticizing his sources, for he often employs them in a highly selective manner or out of context. Far too frequently he cites certain specific literary references, like the works of de Sade, the obsession with blood and suffering of the masochistic Catholic authors Huysmans and Léon Bloy, or the violent novel *Salammbô* by Flaubert (while overlooking his much more

famous and less gory *Madame Bovary* or *L'éducation sentimentale*), to reach such misleading general conclusions as "blood obsessed the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French imagination as did no other substance" (p. 310), or "blood ... sluices in torrents through the literature of the nineteenth century" (p. 317).

Furthermore, the author fails to support with systematic evidence such sweeping historical assertions as "French history from the Revolution to the Liberation is indeed a headless history" (p. 62), or "the history of France since July 1789 appears as an alternating sequence of killings and counterkillings, expulsions and counterexpulsions" with "only blood" sanctifying "the passage from one regime to another" (p. 290). Besides such gratuitous, inexact assumptions, which smack of cultural condescension, the text is also riddled with numerous factual errors. Contrary to the author's belief, there was massive resistance to the coup of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in 1851 (p. 15); the Second Empire was established in 1852, not 1851 (p. 83); the Hôtel Meurice, not the Majestic, served as German headquarters during the Occupation (p. 71); and the great late-nineteenth-century French republican historian was Ernest Lavisse, not Labisse (p. 268).

In many ways, then, this work proves to be disappointing in its methodology and conclusions, when it is not disturbing because of its fixation on morbidity. It might provide interesting reading at times on famous Parisian sites, and it is written with an engaging, felicitous style. However, it falls far short of constituting an important reinterpretation of French history, or even a credible historical study.

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Robert Campbell — *Sit Down and Drink Your Beer: Regulating Vancouver's Beer Parlours, 1925–1954*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. Pp. x, 185.

Despite its promise as a political, social, and legal issue, the history of regulation of beverage alcohol in Canada has been relatively ignored. The work of Robert Campbell, who in 1991 published a monograph on alcohol policy in twentieth-century British Columbia, is an important exception. Most importantly, Campbell is not a sociologist, criminologist, or alcohol studies expert, but an academic historian who knows his way around an archive and is familiar with the social and political history of his jurisdiction. This study of beer parlours in Vancouver, part of a gender and history series, reinforces his standing as Canada's leading regional historian of alcohol regulation. Some of the material has already appeared in *BC Studies* and *Labour/Le Travail*. The first full historical treatment of public drinking in twentieth-century Canada, this monograph will be of interest to the international research community.

Canadians of a certain age will recall the classic beer parlour or tavern: a drab, smoky, utilitarian environment for the consumption of draught and bottled beer. In the early decades there were no food, games, live music, or other entertainment, and no bar (hence the book's title). Male waiters served customers who sat at small tables, and regulations limited the size of draught glasses and the number of drinks that could be served to a table at any one time. The clientele was male and usually