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Cary Hollinshead-Strick, *The Fourth Estate at the Fourth Wall: Newspapers on Stage in July Monarchy France*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2019. x + 189 pp. Figures, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8101-4036-3; \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8101-4035-6; \$34.95 (eb). ISBN 978-0-8101-4037-0.

Review by Clare Siviter, University of Bristol.

Cary Hollinshead-Strick's new study, *The Fourth Estate at the Fourth Wall: Newspapers on Stage in July Monarchy France*, opens a window onto a fascinating world of how contemporaries expressed their concerns about the mass press through theatricality during the July Monarchy. With an introduction and five chapters that cross over from the stage to novels and the press, Hollinshead-Strick covers the period from the arrival of the forty-franc press in 1836 to 1848, tracing the development and evolution of arguments about the press's influence over the July Monarchy, showcasing debates around notions such as "fake news" that strike more than one chord with our contemporary world.

The finished volume might appear slim at 112 pages for the main body of the text, but Hollinshead-Strick has scanned over 1,000 plays and studied 144 in depth for this study (helpfully listed in Appendix 1). This allows her to estimate that four to five percent of all new plays during the period 1836-1848 dealt explicitly with the topic of the press (p. 11), and that they particularly focused on the publications *La Presse*, *Le Siècle*, *Le Constitutionnel*, *La Quotidienne*, and *Le Charivari*. Hollinshead-Strick, however, goes further than the volume's title belies, because her study stretches across plays, novels, and the press rather than simply what was "on stage" alone. As Hollinshead-Strick shows, these three formats are not quite so clear cut: plays staged novels and debates in the press, the press published novels in serial and reviewed plays, and novels discussed plays and the press. It is the theme of theatricality rather than being "on stage" that binds this corpus together, offering new insights into the works of unknown and canonical authors (notably Balzac) alike.

Hollinshead-Strick is particularly interested in the fact that many of the plays at the heart of her corpus were vaudevilles, productions that have typically been sidelined by the larger narratives of French theater history. The vaudeville form is important to this study because of its reuse of older material including songs, which were set to new words, and because of their satirical ability. To this end, in her introduction, Hollinshead-Strick develops the concept of the "vaudeville mode" (in the wake of Peter Brooks's "melodramatic mode").<sup>[1]</sup> She explains: "The vaudeville mode works not through sympathetic identification with characters but rather through rowdily theatrical gags and sing-alongs" (p. 17). The primary sources of her study use this "vaudeville

mode” to question “the ways and means of a press increasingly willing to project itself as a fourth estate” and that these articles, plays, and novels “played an essential role in the shaping of what Guillaume Pinson has dubbed *l’imaginaire médiatique* (the media imaginary) of the nineteenth century” (p. 18). The concept of the “vaudeville mode” is potentially a very useful and enlightening one, but although Hollinshead-Strick sets her argument out clearly in the introduction, the main body of the study could have done more to expand upon and analyze this concept. This would have allowed the concept to have a greater breadth and potentially be more “exportable,” as Brooks’s notion of the “melodramatic mode,” developed from the period of the French Revolution to Henry James, has been applied to analyze works in different media and centuries. Likewise, there have been recent studies of the vaudeville by the likes of Johanna Danciu and Stéphanie Fournier, among others, which could have nourished this concept further.[2]

While thinking about newspapers more generally in terms of their role within the public sphere and their role as the “fourth estate,” Hollinshead-Strick focuses particularly on contemporary debate around the cheap and mass-produced forty-franc press, which arrived on the scene in 1836 with *La Presse* and *Le Siècle*, and which would continue to morph and evolve until the end of the July Monarchy in 1848. Journalists and the wider public alike were wary of these papers, whose subscriptions cost only half as much as the usual eighty-franc subscription fee because the other half was paid for by advertising; and the theatre was a key forum to express these concerns and encourage the audience’s critical abilities. Importantly, Hollinshead-Strick also traces the development of these debates: in 1836, the mass press was accused of acting like a prostitute, whereas in 1848 it was the *feuilleton* that drew critical attention (chapter 1); fears of the press being a vehicle for calumny (chapter 2); or the press’s ability to enlighten as well as obscure communication (chapter 4). This study continually underlines how these productions were often more accessible than the daily press itself: a trip to the theatre was still within the reach of a much wider section of society than a newspaper subscription, even one at forty francs; and so these productions played an essential role in disseminating this new cultural form, too (p. 19). This analysis allows Hollinshead-Strick to engage with concepts of publicity as a means of citizens keeping track of their government, an intersection between democracy and the stage that echoes the likes of works for the French Revolution by Susan Maslan and Paul Friedland among others.[3]

With Hollinshead-Strick’s careful guidance, the reader delves into a world of in-jokes and allusions that made these seemingly ephemeral productions quite so piquant for their contemporary audiences. This is genuinely an enjoyable read and Hollinshead-Strick has paid great attention to the staging and presentation of these works as well, be it the prospectus of novels (provided in Appendix 2 for further clarification), the formatting of the newspaper page, or the vibrant characterization and costumes of the theatrical characters—for example, “La Popularité” in *Rothomago* (1839) is literally dressed in newspapers (p. 44). In short, she gets to the heart of why these productions were so popular to contemporary audiences, and thus why we as scholars need to study them more closely. To this end, her argument that literary history needs to look to the stage as well as the press is particularly important. With increasingly easier access to these productions via global digitalizations, Hollinshead-Strick’s notion of the “vaudeville mode” will hopefully allow literary historians to reintegrate the stage as well as the page into literary reception.

## NOTES

[1] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[2] Johanna Danciu, "Le Vaudeville joue et se joue: Allégorie, métathéâtralité et politisation à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue d'histoire du théâtre* 265 (2015): 77–94; and Stéphanie Fournier, *Rire au théâtre à Paris à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016).

[3] Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy, and the French Revolution* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005); and Paul Friedland, *Political Actors, Representative Bodies, and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

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