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Robert T. Gannett Jr., *Tocqueville Unveiled. The Historian and His Sources for The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. xiii + 246 pp. Tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-226-28108-6.

Review by Helena Rosenblatt, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Robert Gannett's beautifully written book allows us to get inside the mind of Alexis de Tocqueville as he was researching and writing what eventually would become his mature masterpiece, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. This rare window into the thought process of a great thinker was made possible by Gannett's having been granted nothing less than a scholar's dream: unprecedented access to a treasure trove of archival material never before available to scholars. In particular, he was permitted to consult Tocqueville's own reading notes and writing plans, precious documents that are still in the private possession of the Tocqueville family and to which, it seems, access remains restricted. Gannett has certainly made the most of this exceptional opportunity, producing a book that is both informative and enjoyable to read.

Gannett's reconstruction of Tocqueville's intellectual evolution during these critical years contributes fruitfully to recent trends in Tocqueville scholarship that highlight the developmental aspects of his thought. In the process, we are given precious insights into a very private and human side of a great thinker. The picture Gannett paints is at times somewhat deflating. We are introduced to a Tocqueville who suffered not only from health problems but from recurring conceptual "blocks" and writing difficulties. We learn about a man who struggled through painful periods of self-doubt and uncertainty. We discover that Tocqueville was unsure even of the actual topic of this book until quite late in the whole process and that his intellectual journey was never smooth or easy. Rather, it was marked by numerous starts and stops, hesitations, and even some surprising reversals. Along the way, he worried about everything from the focus of his work to his rhetorical strategies and writing style. Gannett's book gives us a real sense of the labor, both physical and intellectual, that went into writing this classic of political theory.

But despite the many problems that Tocqueville encountered, what Gannett's book recounts is of course, in the end, a remarkable success story. Thus we also learn about Tocqueville's extraordinary optimism, resilience, and intellectual agility when faced with conceptual difficulties. Each time he encountered a conceptual "block," he was able to rethink his problem and change direction, ultimately arriving at a higher level of understanding. Gannett masterfully guides us through Tocqueville's thinking process, allowing us to experience its highs as well as its lows.

Not surprisingly, Tocqueville emerges as a fiercely independent thinker with an extraordinary capacity for critical and analytical thinking. Particularly illuminating and even amusing sections of the book deal with what Gannett calls Tocqueville's "interactive" reading of others (p. 108). While taking notes on Burke, for example, Tocqueville sometimes suddenly broke out into the second person, as if addressing and reprimanding Burke directly: "You see this destruction of all individual influence and you seek the causes of the Revolution in accidents! You who see a great aristocracy live before your eyes, do not perceive that the aristocracy here is not just sick but dead before one touches it!!!" (p. 64). After venting his anger like this, Tocqueville usually returned to his more habitual, detached perspective, in the end reaching remarkably balanced conclusions. Rarely, it seems, would he agree entirely with whomever it was he was reading. He was always probing and questioning, selectively adopting and then reworking the "facts" and ideas he encountered in books.

Scholars of liberalism have long wondered whether Tocqueville read Benjamin Constant and, if so, what he might have taken from him. Gannett here offers important proof not only that Tocqueville read Constant, but that he probably drew significant lessons from him, too. Tocqueville's notes indicate that he was impressed by Constant's warnings in *De la force du gouvernement actuel* (1796) that France should abide by constitutional forms and avoid arbitrary rule. But more importantly, Tocqueville admired Constant's analysis of the Revolution's harmful psychological repercussions in *Des effets de la terreur* (1797). Constant worried about the effect the Revolution had had on the character of Frenchmen, its encouragement of unhealthy, materialistic impulses, and political apathy. Once again, however, Tocqueville retained his characteristically critical posture, interjecting personal comments about Constant as he read him. For example, he reprimanded Constant for betraying his own principles by defending the coup d'état of 18 Fructidor.

In the end, Tocqueville's appraisal of any individual thinker would depend upon what Gannett refers to as his "liberty test". Passing this test meant agreeing with Tocqueville on the crucial importance of citizen participation in the public affairs of a free and civilized society. Many authors failed Tocqueville's "liberty test," among them several "liberals" of his own time. One notable example is François Guizot, whose influence on Tocqueville is at present the topic of some disagreement among scholars. At the last annual meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 3-5 April, 2003), this very subject was debated by three experts on the topic: Aurelian Craiutu, Melvin Richter, and Cheryl Welch. Their papers will be published in a forthcoming issue of the journal *History of European Ideas*.

Gannett agrees with those, such as Cheryl Welch, who would argue for Tocqueville's unwavering independence of mind and uniqueness. In Gannett's words, "we should resist the temptation to situate Tocqueville too neatly as a protégé or disciple within any larger tradition of liberal or Doctrinaire thought" (p. 131). Gannett acknowledges that Tocqueville admired and in fact adopted Guizot's historical method. Like Guizot, Tocqueville believed that history should be interpretive and analytical. However, while he agreed with Guizot on the need for a "philosophical history," Tocqueville resolutely rejected the political conclusions Guizot drew from it. Gannett's research convincingly proves that what Tocqueville, in the end, really wished to do was to "[T]urn G[uizot] against himself" (Tocqueville's notes, quoted on p. 2).

This brings us to an important point made throughout Gannett's book. Tocqueville wrote history for essentially political reasons. The real purpose of *The Old Regime and the Revolution* was to explain to the French people the reasons for their current servitude. As Gannett puts it, the book was intended to be a dose of "instructive medicine" (p. 149). Tocqueville wanted to inculcate in the French people the virtues needed to support liberty and combat political apathy. This artful weaving together of Tocqueville the person, the politician and the theorist is one of the most exciting aspects of Gannett's book.

Tocqueville scholars will no doubt dispute some of the finer points of Gannett's overall argument. Some will disagree with him about the relative importance of certain key moments in Tocqueville's intellectual development. Gannett argues, for example, that Tocqueville's archival researches led to a fundamental reorientation in his thinking. What exactly triggered his conceptual breakthroughs and the actual nature and significance of Tocqueville's borrowings from other scholars will also continue to be debated. But that is at it should be. This is a wonderful book. It should be required reading for anyone interested in Tocqueville. And because of its clear, economical, and engaging style, it can be highly recommended to a larger, more general, audience as well.

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