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Cheryl K. Snay

book review of

The Diary of J. J. Grandville and the Missouri Album: The Life of an Opposition Caricaturist and Romantic Book Illustrator in Paris under the July Monarchy by Clive F. Getty

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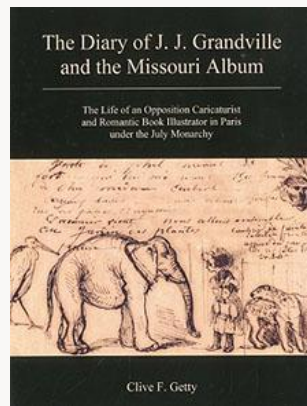
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Clive F. Getty, *The Diary of J. J. Grandville and the Missouri Album: The Life of an Opposition Caricaturist and Romantic Book Illustrator in Paris under the July Monarchy*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010. 354 pp.; 203 b/w illustrations; bibliography; index. \$65 (cloth) ISBN 978-0-838642-00-9

There is little research that offers scholars as much raw data and primary resources as Clive Getty's most recent contribution to the understanding of his life-long intellectual pursuit, J. J. Grandville. The publication of an album, which includes the artist's diaries with sketches from 1830 until 1846 and additional drawings from other sources held by the Special Collections of the University of Missouri in Columbia Libraries, is a treasure trove of information about the day-to-day habits of the artist and his perspective on political and social events during the July Monarchy. This is not a book that will convince readers of Grandville's significance as an artist, his masterful technique nor his contributions to the field of children's book illustration; rather, in the process of contextualizing his subject, Getty provides substantial insights into the rich visual culture of this inter-revolutionary period.

In the first section of the catalogue, Getty reviews the artist's biography, which he attempts to reclaim from the Surrealists and Marxists whom he perceives to have appropriated it (73). He divides the chronology into four parts. "The Early Years, 1803–1825" recounts Grandville's family origins in the theatre and as miniaturists, and the budding artist's life in his native Nancy. The next chapter of his life unfolded between 1825, when he arrived in Paris and began his apprenticeships in various studios, and 1830, the year of the July Revolution. His family's connections to the theatre served him well. He rented a room near one of his relatives who worked as a stage manager at the Théâtre Royal de l'Opéra-Comique and introduced the young hopeful into the art world. There, he met Hippolyte Lecomte, a lithographer with whom he collaborated on several projects, none of them altogether successful. It was, however, a fortunate circumstance as it gave him entry into the field of lithography, a new technology that would prove lucrative for the artist and help establish his career. Getty points out that the medium not only was good for reproducing caricatures, but also generated a new type of popular art, the lithographic album, at which Grandville excelled. His *Metamorphoses du jour* (1829) is noted as a pivotal point in his career, earning him critical attention and a fair amount

of income. After surveying Grandville's networking skills in "The Latin Quarter and Early Friendships," Getty returns to a chronological narrative addressing the period from the July Revolution in 1830 to 1835. Grandville is probably best known for the political caricature that resulted from his relationship with the editor Philipon and his journal, *La Caricature*, and its successor, *Le Charivari*. Grandville is cast as a "main combatant in Philipon's war against Louis-Philippe, the betrayer of the republican ideals of the Revolution of 1830" (52). According to Getty and supported by diary entries, it was a role Grandville did not especially want and was eager to dispatch in 1835 when censorship laws put an end to the political caricature that had become such a staple of the romantic era.

Grandville's late (post-censorship) career—1835 until his death in 1847—is defined by his new interest in book illustration. Notably, Getty never argues that Grandville initiated any of these movements (either lithographic albums or romantic book illustrations). Instead, we see these trends through the lens of an artist whom Getty reports did not have such an easy time of it. Grandville, for example, did not take to wood engraving, which was used for book illustrations. Accustomed to the spontaneity inherent in the lithographic process, Grandville had difficulties carving his designs into wood and was frequently dissatisfied with the result. We come to a greater understanding of, if not appreciation for, these developments when we see the drawbacks and failures they wrought rather than the highlights and masterpieces. In the last section of the biography, "Uncertain Legacy: Grandville Myth," Getty addresses the artist's decline in reputation as well as his posthumous critical reception, and states his intention to provide a "more balanced judgment of his life and work" (73).

Section II of the catalogue describes the Missouri Album and narrates the history of how it came to rest in the Midwest. Comprised of excerpts from a sketchbook, letters and diaries dating from the years 1830 to 1847, the album is 25 pages long and was likely compiled by a descendant of Grandville. The album's provenance can be traced back only to Paris in 1966. Potentially because all the other albums of his drawings are in French public collections, it's a little suspicious that this one ended up in the United States. Getty explains it in detail, to the extent that anyone knows, but there were some questionable transactions in the 1960s and 70s. Also, it could theoretically raise questions about Nazi-era provenance, although this is generally not the kind of material that people are (were) interested in. Finally, it would be ideal to trace it back to whoever compiled it. Again, theoretically, we don't know what additional changes may have been made subsequent to the initial binding. Getty gives a synopsis of the subjects Grandville depicted, the types of drawings he created (sketches from life, sketches from memory, and copies of other works), the page design (to the extent that one can be discerned given the fact that the album is compiled of relatively small clippings), and Grandville's graphic techniques or processes.

With all of that as prelude, the reader finally arrives at the catalog entries, which are rich in detail. Getty's analysis of each sheet is invaluable. He provides illustrations for virtually everything, save the most mundane or indecipherable of versos. He transcribes and translates the diaries with acuity and sensitivity; and goes to extraordinary lengths to piece together enigmatic references and random facts to ascertain specific dates and events. Most importantly, he brings in significant comparisons to make sense of what would otherwise appear to border on the nonsensical. Catalog entry number 2, for example, continues for twelve pages and includes nine comparative or supporting illustrations. The author juxtaposes

the sketch in the diary to one in a sketchbook at the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, among others, and concludes, "Sketches, presumably from life, were first done in the sketchbook. They were then either elaborated upon in larger-scale compositions produced with an eye toward eventual publication and then documented in miniature in the diary, or they were elaborated upon directly in the diary where they served as visual records of the day's events and, one suspects, probably as artistic aide-mémoire as well" (108). These are not catalogue entries in the traditional sense, but rather mini-essays.

Despite the wealth of never-before-published information, there are drawbacks to this book. The layout and design are lacking in inspiration and clarity. It is difficult to sort out where the different parts of what we refer to as the "tombstone" data (the transcription, the translation, the date, the size, and the medium) begins and ends. This is exacerbated by the decision to transcribe the text in the same format, line for line, rather than using the convention of "/" to indicate the sequence of lines. This would be understandable if there were no illustrations at all, but because each image is reproduced, it makes this format redundant and the entry difficult to read.

Unfortunately, while all of the various bits are reproduced, many in their original scale, quality is sorely lacking. Further, no one thought it useful to reproduce an album page in its entirety. To be sure, this could possibly only tell us something about the compiler rather than the artist, but it would be easier to decipher the transcriptions if the reader had access to what the album page looked like without any scholarly mediation, rather than trying to indicate placement on the page by "5/9 recto," for example, which indicates page 5 of the album with the image located in the ninth position starting at upper left and moving from left to right, top to bottom (reading order). This format does not necessarily indicate register, however. If nothing else, one or two reproductions of a complete album page would give us a better appreciation for the task at hand. At best, it reminds us of what Arjun Appadurai called "the social life of things" implying a function for an object—whether it's a sketch or a diary entry—beyond the one intended by the artist and extends its intellectual implications. It is regrettable that the author and/or editor succumbed to the argument that these are monochromatic drawings and, even worse, words on a page that do not require high quality or color images. Getty does a brilliant job of "contextualizing" the artist. It is disappointing that the same level of care was not afforded to the drawings themselves. Much is lost when color, texture and placement are poorly conveyed in sub-par reproductions.

Despite these deficiencies, the content is well worth the effort needed to sift through the poor design. Getty's passion for his subject translates into an abundance of research about the theatre, shadow plays, printmaking culture and conventions, consumerism, and not least of all, the politics of the July Monarchy. *The Diary of J. J. Grandville and the Missouri Album* is more than a biography of an artist. It is a portrait of the romantic era in France.

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