

Ludovic Frobert and George Sheridan, *Le Solitaire du ravin: Pierre Charnier (1795-1857) canut lyonnais et prud'homme tisseur* (Lyon: ENS Editions, 2014), 382 pages, 24 euros

Le Solitaire du ravin is a study of the life and career of a master silk weaver of Lyon, France, Pierre Charnier (1795-1857), and of the industrial and political world of Lyon's weavers in which Charnier emerged as a prominent artisan leader and intellectual. Charnier was founder of the organization that would eventually spearhead the weavers' social movement of the early July Monarchy (1831-1834), *mutuellisme*; he served, from 1832 until his death in 1857, as an elected judge and weaver representative on the tribunal that investigated and resolved industrial conflicts involving silk workers and their employers (*conseil des prud'hommes*); and he was an active participant in a variety of civic, political, and religious organizations in his city, consulted by national government officials and elites on burning social issues of the day. While offering a biographical portrait of Charnier as an individual, *Le Solitaire du ravin* addresses certain political, industrial, and cultural themes pertaining more broadly to French artisans and to the social and political economy of early nineteenth-century artisan manufacture. These themes converge around a core idea that Charnier himself articulated from his own practical experience and that recurs throughout the documentary record that constitutes the foundation of the book. This is the idea of "intermediary bodies" (*corps intermédiaires*) as key institutions fostering economic prosperity along with social and political harmony; such bodies would assimilate the best features of the institutional order of the pre-revolutionary era with modern legal principles and participatory government. As elaborated by Charnier, such an idea represented a fusion, unorthodox for the period, of Christian moral ideals with democratic politics. The approach differed from that of both contemporary liberals and socialists, while enabling a political assimilation of legitimist royalism to republicanism.

Thanks to the availability of some 3000 largely manuscript items authored and assembled by Charnier himself and deposited in Lyon's municipal library, the book combines biography with close thematic analysis. The largest share of the collection consists of personal letters, official correspondence, and extensive reports written by Charnier in the exercise of his responsibilities as a weaver *prud'homme*, many of these in draft form. Also included is material on his civic, religious, and political activity, as well as material pertaining to his cultural and scientific interests, including his attempts to dabble in art criticism and to study botany. A collection of this size is exceptional for an artisan. Besides providing an extensive record of the contexts, the events, and the personalities that marked Charnier's encounters with his times, the collection gives abundant first-hand testimony of his self-understanding and self-representation as an individual and artisan. The book draws on these semi-autobiographical texts to represent Charnier's personal approach to people and situations in his own words.

The book addresses its subject in terms of three main headings: Charnier's life story, his fashioning of an original industrial model through his involvement in *mutuellisme* and in the industrial tribunal *conseil des prud'hommes*, and his civic, religious and political activity leading to a hybrid of ideological orientations normally presented as opposites. His life story relies on a series of notes he provided a Parisian writer who authored a short biography of the weaver intended for publication in a national magazine. Charnier's own words are used to sketch the main contours of his origins, background, and career. Under the second heading, titled "democracy of workshops," a familiar historical moment in the

annals of Lyon's weavers is re-interpreted, namely, the organization and militant actions of *mutuellisme*, a precursor of unionism, in the period 1831-1834. Here *mutuellisme* is presented as incubator of an original formula for industrial relations tailored to the circumstances of the type of industry described by economic historians as "dispersed" or "collective manufacture" (in contrast to concentrated factory production). Charnier was especially articulate in elaborating the features of this industrial model that combined notions of participation with regulation through non-governmental, intermediate bodies. The book traces his experiences with weavers' *mutuellisme* as inspiration for ideas of industrial organization and relations that challenged the prevailing liberal political economy of the period. The model is then elaborated through an account of Charnier's service as a weaver judge on the *conseil des prud'hommes*. Here his experiences as a *prud'homme* investigator and conciliator bring to life the largely hidden underworld of exchanges and human encounters in the manufacturing economy of silk weaving. These are presented in a way that echoes Charnier's own experience of such encounters and the expertise, common sense, and acute human sensitivity he brought to the task of resolving the conflicts they occasioned. Charnier's preoccupation with the nature of the tribunal itself, including both its procedures and its principles, and his relations with other members in addressing specific issues, elicit his reflections on the *prud'hommes* as the other leg of his industrial model, along with *mutuellisme*.

The third section of the book, titled "workshops and democracy," interprets Charnier's involvement in civic, religious, and political activity as leading to an extension of the principles of his industrial model to the political arena. The section focuses on three different contexts in which the relevance of such application became apparent. One was popular insurrection, which occurred in Lyon in 1831, 1834, and 1849. Each of these insurrections revealed, according to Charnier, the pathology of the existing social and political order and the necessity of an approach to social and political relations inspired by principles akin to those of his industrial model. His focus was on the causes and the meaning of violence, which he analyzed in terms of the rhetoric of backwardness and barbarism with which the elites tried to explain popular uprisings. Charnier reversed the causality of insurrection by situating its sources in the retrograde character of the dominant political economy and in the instinctively repressive behavior of the current monarchist regime and its liberal supporters. Charnier's involvement in religious associations and causes, and his participation in legitimist politics supporting the pro-Catholic Bourbon dynasty, was the second context of envisioning the application of his model to politics. Here the model took the form of popular participation in government combined with social institutions informed by moral values nurtured by Catholic Christianity. Catholicism and legitimist monarchism, in alliance with democratic republicanism, provided Charnier an alternative to the politics of liberal monarchism and revolution, one that would avoid the path towards violent confrontation to which the latter were prone. The third context brings into focus Charnier's encounter and exchange of views with elites. Here a theme of witness is highlighted that pervades the entire book. In his one-on-one exchanges with upper-class individuals, Charnier emerges as an authoritative voice representing his city, his manufacture, and his fellow silk weavers, while affirming his own sense of identity as an artisan proud of his origins, qualities, and achievements. These individuals solicited Charnier for his deep knowledge of Lyon's weavers and their industry, and for what they regarded as a privileged source for understanding the causes of weavers' insurrections. Carried out largely in the form of written "inquiries," these exchanges

enabled Charnier to demonstrate to educated contemporaries his articulate command of a range of topics as well as to counter stereotypes of artisans conveyed by his correspondents.

Two features of the book are of particular interest for specialized audiences. One is the inclusion of complete texts authored by Charnier himself, interspersed between chapters. Together these texts represent a corpus of writing of interest for their linguistic and ethnographic qualities. The other feature concerns the exceptionally rich documentation of cases and inner workings of the *conseil des prud'hommes*. This tribunal, unique in France, exercised a special type of jurisprudence that relied on the expert knowledge and judgment of practitioners in the industrial affairs it adjudicated rather than on that of legal experts trained in the law. Originally set up to handle issues that emerged in Lyon's silk manufacture, this institution is, for most of its early history, bereft of an archival record that would enable close study of its deliberative process. The collection of source materials on which the book is based includes the single largest documentary record for the early history of the *conseil des prud'hommes* of Lyon and is therefore something of a treasure for the legal history of this institution. The documents pertaining to individual cases also shed light on some of the more obscure practices in the silk-weaving trade that involved contractual and financial matters as well as the technical intricacies of materials, tools, and work relations. Historians of jurisprudence and historians of pre-industrial work processes will find these features of the book of special interest. The book includes a glossary of technical terms pertaining to silk manufacture encountered throughout the book as well as an overview of the history of the Lyon silk industry and its weavers, presented in a format akin to a timeline.