

Susan K. Foley, Republican Passions. Family, Friendship and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France, Manchester (Manchester University Press) 2023, 321 p. (Studies in Modern French and Francophone History), ISBN 978-1-5261-6153-6, GBP 85,00.

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This book explores the life and career of Léon Laurent-Pichat (1823–1886), an influential writer and politician who participated in republican circles during the Second Empire and helped lay the foundations for the Third Republic. The illegitimate son of a wealthy man who later recognized him and made him his sole heir, Laurent-Pichat became a prolific author and journalist and later served as a deputy and senator for life during the Third Republic. Echoing his own childhood, Laurent-Pichat never married but fathered a daughter, Geneviève, whom he raised and legitimized. The girl's mother, whose identity was never publicly acknowledged, was an aristocrat named Ludmille Komar, Princesse de Beauvau, with whom Laurent-Pichat remained close throughout his life. One of the interesting findings of this book is that Laurent-Pichat's less-than-reputable origins and unusual family arrangements did not keep him from launching a successful political career. He also succeeded at marrying his daughter into a prominent and wealthy family.

Laurent-Pichat was in many ways a fascinating figure, whose life touches on many major nineteenth-century events and transformations. In addition to the valuable historical analysis provided by Foley as she works through the broader significance of his life's path, the details of Laurent-Pichat's story are illuminating, including the way he constructed a bourgeois family with his widowed mother and half-siblings. The effort he devoted to creating this family illustrates the importance of family connections: a stable, welcoming home was essential for him to find both personal satisfaction and love, and for him to build his career. Another example is his role in the publication of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. It was the journal Laurent-Pichat jointly owned and edited, *La Revue de Paris*, that first published the novel in serial form. Laurent-Pichat was found guilty of »affronting public and religious morality and offending moral standards« (71) and received a jail sentence of several months. Finally, his story underlines the importance of marriage as a tool for forging connections among republicans before and after the founding of the Third Republic. Laurent-Pichat made sure that both his daughter and niece married into staunchly republican families and then supported their husbands as they built their own political careers.



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Thanks to its rich source base, which includes Laurent-Pichat's private journal and letters he sent and received, the book successfully explores the deep links between family and friendships and political life, particularly among republicans. The bulk of the author's source material is held at the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris' fonds Claretie, but other materials, including the letters of Laurent-Pichat's family and friends and notarial documents such as marriage contracts, are at the Archives nationales as well as in various provincial archives. The book represents an impressive accomplishment in terms of research, and the author's ability to use those rich materials to draw broader conclusions about cultural and intellectual life, male friendship, familial affection, and politics in the mid-nineteenth century is equally impressive.

The book's structure is largely chronological, tracing Laurent-Pichat's birth and childhood, his early career as a poet and then a journalist, the bourgeois family that he managed to construct despite his background, and his political career as a republican activist and later deputy and senator. This structure makes the book's narrative easy to follow, while the analysis presented in each chapter makes a clear contribution to the book's overall argument. The book also includes some useful supplementary material including a family tree and an appendix with biographical information on the people who comprised Laurent-Pichat's social and political network. With so many individuals discussed throughout the book, the appendix and family tree proved useful as a way to see how particular people were connected to the person at the center of the story.

One of the throughlines of the book is its focus on male friendship, which builds on recent work on the history of emotions. »In examining male friendship and the depth of men's attachment to each other, this book demonstrates the emotional bonds that united them and argues that those bonds provided a vital resource to republicanism« (7). As a young man, Laurent-Pichat devoted himself to writing poetry that reflected the romantic sensibilities of the period and immersed himself in intense male friendships, sending emotionally charged letters and poems to some of those friends. Another of the book's contributions is its attention to the prison as a space for the republican opposition to forge and reinforce connections during the Second Empire as friends and family could visit with prisoners very frequently, sharing meals and creating a homelike atmosphere.

The book does an excellent job of revealing the connections between political alignments and careers on the one hand and family and friendship on the other as well as how wealth allowed people to break social norms and still be accepted in polite society. One point that comes across is the porousness of the separation between the public and private spheres. The women in Laurent-Pichat's family were deeply engaged in politics, discussing political developments in their letters, attending legislative sessions, and hosting gatherings in their homes where



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political allies could reinforce their connections and strategize. The book also treats questions related to class. It was Laurent-Pichat's wealth that permitted him to circumvent the social stigma attached to illegitimacy and to manage to do the same thing for his own daughter. He also used his wealth for political purposes, subsidizing the journal he edited and contributed to various political causes. Someone without the financial resources available to him would never have been able to play the roles that Laurent-Pichat took on or to access the social spheres that he entered.

This book thoroughly succeeds in its stated goal: »to provide an innovative perspective on political activism and to illuminate the cultural mode of being – the habitus – of mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois republicans [...] [while] enriching our understanding of nineteenth-century political culture, in the period before the institutions of electoral democracy were fully established« (11). It will be required reading for historians of modern France, particularly for those who work on the Second Empire and the early Third Republic.



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