financial crisis, much less the unprecedented contagion to the real economy. And what is true of his discussion of LTCM and subprime is also true of the book as a whole.

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British envoys to Germany, 1816–1866, III: *1848–1850*. Edited by Markus Mösslang, Torsten Riotte, and Hagen Schulze. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 (Camden Fifth Series, vol. 28). Pp. viii + 511. ISBN 0-521-87252-9. £48.00.

Les Britanniques face à la révolution française de 1848. Fabrice Bensimon. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000. Pp. 451. ISBN 9782-7384-9787-1. €38.15.

In recent years, there have been numerous studies of British images of the foreign in Victorian times. These have contributed to a fuller picture of how Victorians believed that they had mastered the challenging social and political transformations of the period much more successfully than their continental neighbours. Such self-perceptions are particularly clear for the 1848 revolutions and their reception in Britain. While long-term studies have already demonstrated changing national images over the nineteenth century, these two volumes address the perceptions of the revolutionary years in France and the German lands.

Fabrice Bensimon's study offers a systematic analysis of the British reactions to the revolutionary events in France in the first half of 1848 when most Britons congratulated themselves that the continental revolutions had not reached the British Isles. He examines the perceptions at different levels of society, taking into account diplomacy and high politics, intellectual debates, and press publications, as well as the illustrated press. The British government was eager to use contacts with the French government to try to keep opposition movements in Britain from drawing inspiration from France. Its greatest fear was that the 1848 revolution in France might have lasting effects both on the recently revived Chartism, with its campaigns for political democracy, and on the Young Irish movement, pressing for self-government in Ireland. Yet while both movements were hugely encouraged by the events in France in February, neither gained revolutionary momentum. Among the leading personnel of the parliamentary parties, the image prevailed that Britain had avoided the revolution because of their excellent institutions, the moderation of the people, and the English traditions of liberty. As *Punch* observed in late 1848, the British self-consciously congratulated themselves on the recipe of their own 'constitutional plum-pudding' (*Punch*, 23 Dec. 1848, p. 267).

The most important section of the book deals with the various public comments and discussions. The intellectual debates as well as the press survey confirm the recourse to old negative stereotypes of the French character. Contemporaries commented much less on what happened in France, than with what they perceived as the natural, doomed, course of the French. One characteristic since 1792 was the deposition of kings by popular revolt, nurturing in Britain general fears of mob and turmoil, fears that grew with the immediate challenge posed by Chartism and Irish opposition. Bensimon aptly describes that by delineating the French 'otherness'; the British confirmed their national character as being

non-revolutionary, virtuous, guided by Protestantism, earnest and eager, and moderate in social and political aspirations.

While Bensimon stresses the importance of images of French since the 1792 terror on British perceptions of the 1848 revolution, the envoy reports from Germany take a slightly different point of view. The need for effective liberal reforms and the fear of revolution and unbound democracy set the tone of many reports that the British envoys to the German states and at the National Assembly sent to Palmerston as foreign secretary from 1848 to 1850. The third volume in the series *British envoys to Germany, 1816–1866* provides the reader with a well-chosen selection of diplomatic reports from the different states of the German Confederation which mirrors the federal diversity of Germany. The editors have done a marvellous job in selecting from the voluminous and wordy contributions as well as in introducing the sources to the reader, and in providing reports from Frankfurt, Prussia, the Hanse towns, Hanover, Saxony, Württemberg, Bavaria, and Austria.

Among many interesting perspectives which both the introduction and the sources suggest, revolutionary fear, British interests, and the politics of reform are but the most striking. In mid-August 1848, Lord Cowley, semi-official envoy in Frankfurt-on-Main, commented on the 'disorganisation' and 'demoralization' of Germany, arguing that political reform was needed at both national and federal levels so as not to fuel currents of radicalism and further revolution. 'The fire of democracy is smouldering beneath [the conflicting interests]. Let Princes and Senators look to it, as it may yet destroy them all!' (p. 35). The earl of Westmorland in Berlin and Francis Forbes in Dresden showed even less sympathy for the revolution and for democratic movements when commenting on congresses as well as constitutional and electoral reforms. The Saxon suffrage reform especially appeared as 'a forced concession to the Democratick Party, and which ought to be very much altered before it is passed' (p. 278). Although the reports on the German Confederation concentrate more on political events than those written before the revolutionary years, they also provide evidence for those interested in politics, processes of perceptions and cultural transfer, the history of ideas, or the cultural history of diplomacy in the nineteenth century.

Both of these works are useful and valuable contributions to the experiences of the continental revolutions of 1848 and their perception through British eyes. Bensimon highlights the reaffirming use of British discussions of French 'otherness' in coming to terms with social changes and challenges at home. His book, although relying more on French than on British historiography, deserves to be engaged with widely. The benefit of the edition of British envoy reports to the German lands lies in providing considerable and subtle evidence of the diplomatic elite's views of liberalism and democracy, constitutional reform, and the nation state in Germany. The envoys' reports provide substantial evidence that British Victorian elites were far less open to continental liberal-democratic reforms than a German *Sonderweg* view might still suggest. In this respect, the view from abroad might serve to widen horizons and interpretations of the historical place of the connections and images evoked by the revolutions of 1848 as a European phenomenon.

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