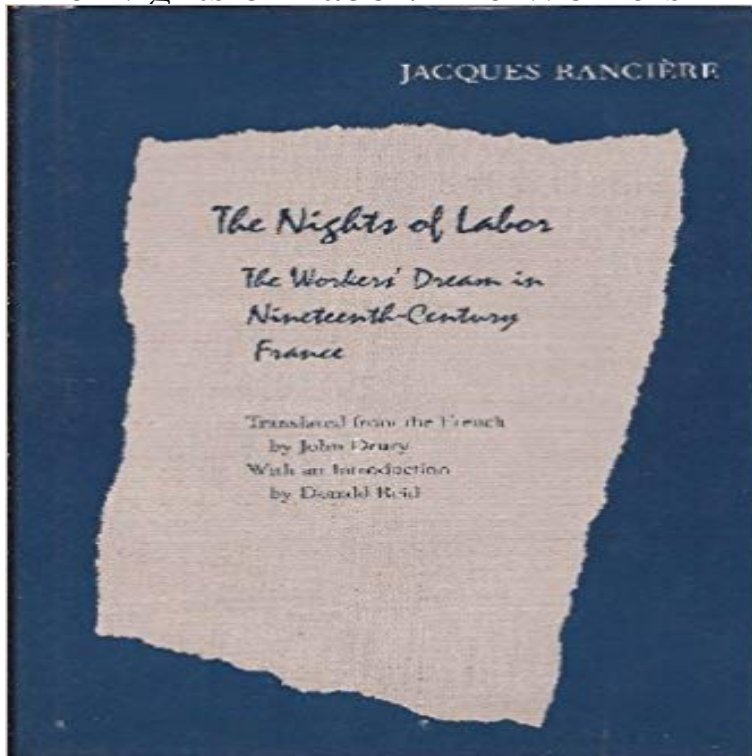


The Nights of Labor: The Workers Dream in Nineteenth-Century France



Originally published in France in 1981, this first English translation of *Les Nuits des Proletaires* dramatically reinterprets the Revolution of 1830, contending that workers were not rebelling against specific hardships and conditions but against the unyielding predetermination of their lives. Through a study of worker-run newspapers, letters, journals, and worker-poetry, Ranciere reveals the contradictory and conflicting stories that challenge the coherence of these statements celebrating labor. Nineteenth-century workers sought out proletarian intellectuals, poets, and artists who were able to articulate their longings. At night, these worker-intellectuals gathered to write journals, poems, music, letters, and to discuss issues. The worker diatribes they composed served the purpose of escape from their daily worker lives. Unwilling to give in to sleep at night to repair the body for more manual labor, these migrants who moved at the borders between classes regarded the night as their real life. They sought to appropriate for themselves the night of those who could stay awake and the language of those who did not have to beg. Once these workers and those whom they represented had glimpsed other lives, they fought for the possibility of living other lives. Thus, Ranciere disregards the majestic masses and concentrates instead on the words and fantasies of a few dozen non representative individuals those who performed the radical act of breaking down the time-honored barrier separating those who carried out useful labor from those who pondered aesthetics. The *Nights of Labor* incorporates the post-structuralist insistence on the production of meaning as a dynamic, conflictual process. Rancieres method shares a common strategy with the deconstructionist technique of locating points in the text that reveal contradictions engendered by the suppression of writing. In choosing to deconstruct the proletariat,

Ranciere exposes its conflicts and strategies of containment. Jacques Ranciere, known as an early disciple of Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, teaches philosophy at the Universite de Paris VIII. He co-authored Lire le Capital and founded the journal, Les Revoltes Logiques.

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