Again, France provides the example, for of course by the nineteenth century the traditional Whig gratitude for deliverance from despotism, Popery, and wooden shoes, was supplemented, notably in 1848, by self-satisfaction at an escape from the obviously related fate of revolution.

(John W. Burrow)

Fifty years ago there was only one nation which could even try to form a free government, and that one – France – tried and failed. We now see how great her difficulties were. ... But though we may explain the failure of France, it was not the less a momentous and disastrous failure. It has created and diffused a sort of belief that free governments are much more difficult than they in truth are, and has led English-speaking persons, both here and in America, to pity other nations, and bless themselves that they have better political abilities than all foreigners, and especially than those ‘poor French’.

(Walter Bagehot)

The above statements are indicative of what was at stake. Victorian smugness was thriving on the difficulties of France, for France was the first country that came to mind every time the Victorians saw themselves in a comparative light. This examination of responses to French politics among British political thinkers is divided into three parts. First, I shall focus particularly on giving the gist of the verdict on the malaise of French politics presented to the British public in the 1830s by the British thinker who followed political developments in France and wrote about them more than any other at that time. The thinker in question was
J.S. Mill and his views on the significance and results of the revolution of July 1830, and on French politics in the years that followed (both in his innumerable articles in the *Examiner* between 1830 and 1834 and in his overall assessment of the politics of France in those years, in the significant article ‘Armand Carrel’ of 1837), are worth looking at in some detail. Also, a brief assessment will be offered of Mill’s attitude towards Armand Carrel (the personality in whom he was most interested), as well as of his overall attitude towards the parties and factions active in French politics during the July Monarchy (1830–48). The Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath brought French politics to the centre of Victorian political concerns. The reason for the immediate interest was clearly articulated by Arnold: ‘If the new state of things succeeds in France, social changes are inevitable here and elsewhere – for no one looks on seeing his neighbour mending without asking himself if he cannot mend in the same way.’ And Carlyle’s first comment was that ‘the Event is indeed great, and ought to be affecting to all of us, – and didactic to the race of conscious and unconscious Humbugs on this side of the water too’. Several thinkers, therefore, took an interest and started writing about the politics of France in 1848. Part II will discuss their responses to the Revolution of 1848 and the Second Republic. British views and attitudes were even more affected by the failure of the revolutionary and republican experiments in France and the success of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in abolishing the republic and establishing his authoritarian Second Empire. The quotation from Bagehot cited in the epigraph of this chapter refers to these developments. In Part III we shall be dealing with the pronouncements of a number of British thinkers on French politics from the *coup d’état* of 2 December 1851 through the Second Empire (authoritarian, and then, in the 1860s, liberalised) to the political developments and constitutional debates of the first years of the French Third Republic in the 1870s and 1880s.

I The revolution of 1830 and the July monarchy

As Macaulay’s nephew and biographer has commented, 1830 had a peculiarity among French revolutions, at least as far as British reactions were concerned: ‘What was passing among our neighbours for once created sympathy, and not repulsion, on this side [of] the Channel. One French Revolution had condemned English Liberalism to forty years of subjection, and another was to be the signal which launched it on as long a career of supremacy. Most men said, and all felt, that Wellington must follow Polignac’. Lord Macaulay himself, while arguing that the revolutions of