
H-France Review Vol. 14 (September 2014), No. 140

Charles Walton, ed., *Into Print: Limits and Legacies of the Enlightenment. Essays in Honor of Robert Darnton*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011. xviii + 244 pp. Notes, appendix, list of contributors, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-271-05012-6. \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-271-05072-0.

Review by Kenneth Loiselle, Trinity University.

Along with Daniel Roche, Robert Darnton has been the most influential historian of eighteenth-century France during the last four decades. From his early work on Mesmerism to his most recent study of communication networks in Enlightenment Paris, Darnton has written about an impressively broad array of topics, from peasant folk tales to the publishing business. The great significance of Darnton's work is well known, and has already been the subject of an earlier volume coordinated by Haydn Mason. The essays in this first collection ranged from sympathetic engagement to strong objection with Darnton's scholarship, and Mason clarified at the outset that these papers constituted a robust scholarly discussion and were "in no sense intended as a Festschrift. The time for that will doubtless come." [1]

That time has arrived with Charles Walton's impressive collection under review. These essays grew out of a conference Darnton's former doctoral students held at Princeton in 2006 to honor their mentor. Thanks to Walton's careful editorial work and overall excellent quality of the individual chapters, this volume offers an important contribution to eighteenth-century studies and other fields, and generally avoids the heterogeneity that can detract from Festschriften. In his preface, Walton identifies the interplay of Enlightenment ideas with their wider social worlds as one of the central interests running through Darnton's *oeuvre*. Inspired by this approach, the authors in this book explore a diverse set of texts and contexts in Parisian and provincial France, England, Prussia, Tuscany, and North Africa from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. These chapters vary from a sustained engagement with Darntonian objects of inquiry (such as David Bell's splendid essay on Grub Street hack and military man, Charles-Philippe Ronsin) to case studies that draw inspiration from Darnton's general historical approach.

The volume begins with Roger Chartier's friendly and informal encomium that takes the form of an unfinished primer that ends with G for "Gutenberg," a reference to Darnton's founding of the electronic book platform, the Gutenberg-e project. In a conversational tone, Chartier highlights Darnton's major achievements as a pioneer in the history of the book and his points of contention with past and present trends in cultural history, notably the Annalist *histoire des mentalités* that held sway until the early 1980s. Although Chartier is correct to note Darnton's disagreement with this "third level" of serial history for its overreliance on quantification, he unfairly implies (p. 9) that Darnton was a latecomer to recognizing the value of counting in cultural history; even the most casual reader of the classic, *The Business of Enlightenment* (1979), will recall the substantial statistical apparatus undergirding Darnton's analysis.

The first two essays resonate with Darnton's long-standing interest in how political news was produced, circulated and read in the Old Regime. Will Slauter's piece expands on Jürgen Habermas' identification of the publication of parliamentary sessions as one of the hallmarks of the vibrant public sphere in Hanoverian Britain. Slauter specifically is interested in publicity's international dimension, and

follows the complex and fascinating process of how the French-language *Courier de l'Europe* translated columns from London newspapers that reported on the debates within the British Parliament. Based out of London and reprinted just on the other side of the Channel at Boulogne-sur-Mer, the *Courier* could cause political ripples, especially during the American War of Independence and rising tensions with France in the 1770s and 1780s. Ministers and members of Parliament alike loudly complained that exposing the inner workings of Parliament compromised government secrecy, and also undermined diplomatic efforts to reduce international tensions. This publicity could be especially corrosive because the French versions of the parliamentary speeches were not reprinted verbatim. French readers—including Louis XVI and his Foreign Minister, Vergennes—of the *Courier* were looking at Westminster through a glass darkly because of the nature of eighteenth-century political journalism, notably the official prohibition to take notes in the Parliament's press gallery and the tendency of London papers (from which the *Courier* drew) to follow their political convictions when selecting which sections of speeches to print and which ones to omit.

In the following chapter, Sarah Maza displays a similar engagement with Habermas, but finds some of the sociologist's core arguments dubious. She specifically questions the historical accuracy of the Habermasian narrative that framed the twentieth century as a period in which commercial forces had transformed the once critical public of the eighteenth century into passive consumers of mass-market media. Through a rich case study of the 1930s crime magazine, *Détective*, Maza shows that this publication's lower-middle-class readership was by no means content with its social position.[2] Maza faces a problem familiar to historians of reader response in that no evidence apparently exists that documents readers' reactions to this publication. Nevertheless, she deftly draws from the magazine's correspondence lists and advertisements of tattoo-removal services, dieting products, and self-improvement books as evidence that *Détective's* subscribers undoubtedly read actively and instrumentally as they made the transition from manual labor to the white-collar service sector. In addition, she suggests that this publication played a significant role in creating a sense of shared identity among these *nouvelles couches sociales* by reporting on spectacular *faits divers* that clearly threw into relief their urban life with other, more violent, social worlds such as the *zone non aedificandi* around Paris.

The next group of essays in this volume explores the commercial, legal and political forces that shaped the production and diffusion of texts in the eighteenth century. First, Thierry Rigogne follows in Darnton's footsteps by adding to the history of the business of the Enlightenment. This essay functions well as a pithy summary of some of Rigogne's important points made in his earlier monograph on the book trade.[3] Like his book, this essay relies primarily on two royal surveys of the printers and booksellers in France, one in 1700 and a much more comprehensive one in 1764. The overall picture of the book trade over the course of the century is one of consolidation and diversification. Government regulations such as quotas and merit-based competitions for printer vacancies made operating a printing shop more costly, and as a result the number of provincial printers fell from 372 at the beginning of the eighteenth century to 247 in 1764. The surviving establishments possessed more presses and a larger workforce than ever before, and also branched out into the selling of books. To avoid the administrative headaches and upfront costs of printing, entrepreneurs also began to open retail bookstores with no presses. Although the margins here were much tighter than printing, the selling of books represented an accessible, albeit economically unstable, path to the book trade by the second half of the century.

In the following piece, Leonard Rosenband shows how a similar *débrouillard* spirit was on display across the Channel as English papermakers tried to avoid the excise tax on their products. Manufacturers devised many strategies to avoid paying the excise, such as hiding valuable paper within reams of lower-quality product, reusing previously stamped ream wrapping, or by bribing officials. The British state, meanwhile, was well aware of this "dishonest trade," and combated it by augmenting the number of functionaries in the excise department—already 1 in 3 British government officials worked in this sector by 1725—by rotating these bureaucrats to minimize the opportunity for bribery, and by forbidding paper

mills from operating stationers' shops on their premises or from selling paper to any retailer within a two-mile radius.

Where Rosenband is interested in the production of the raw materials of print and Rigogne in the diffusion of texts, Renato Pasta's focus lies in the third area of book acquisition. His final contribution to this section asks what strands of the Enlightenment interested political leaders, specifically analyzing the 1771 book catalogue of the private library at the Florentine court of Peter Leopold, the Grand Duke of Tuscany and future Holy Roman Emperor. Most of the 1500 or so titles were in French, which suggests rehabilitating, at least in some limited contexts and with heavy qualification, the now unfashionable idea of a *Europe française* in the eighteenth century.^[4] Like Rigogne who finds booksellers to have been motivated by practical concerns rather than any particular ideology, Pasta identifies a similar utilitarian streak in the Duke's choice of titles that constituted a "domesticated version of the Lumières" (p. 86). The library's holdings show, for instance, a sustained interest in political economy as well as political history in a prescriptive bent, such as Montesquieu's *Considérations sur la grandeur et la décadence de l'empire romain* (1734).

The following two essays of Tabatha Ewing and Thomas Luckett comprise a third section devoted to the policing of public opinion from the War of the Austrian Succession to the outbreak of the French Revolution. In early October 1746, a British fleet invaded the Brittany port of Lorient where the Compagnie des Indes maintained ships and other valuable assets. Lorient quickly capitulated, but the British ships retreated for fear of adverse weather. News of this event soon reached Paris, and Ewing demonstrates how the public lampooned Lorient's military and government officials—in prose, poetry and song—for their perceived incompetence and cowardice. Ewing's conclusions follow those of Robert Darnton and Arlette Farge in that the public of her case study did not resemble the rational one found in the Habermasian model, but rather was anchored in rumor and unfounded speculation. Ewing stresses that this public opinion, though critical of how events unfolded in Lorient, always remained royalist and patriotic. This leads her to fault unnamed scholars for having too often conceived public opinion as in opposition to the monarchy, but historians have understood for a long time now that the Enlightened public sphere was not inherently subversive.^[5] Thomas Luckett takes us four decades later into the pre-revolutionary era, where he investigates the 130 seizures or attempted seizures of illegal books in Paris from 1787 to 1789. Luckett draws from the reports of the *commissaires de police* in the Y series of the Archives nationales to persuasively refute scholars like Jacques Godechot who have framed the prerevolutionary period as one in which censorship ceased under Brienne. The targeted books varied according to ministerial tastes and political developments, and included works devoted to the formation of the Estates General, tracts calling for a constitutional monarchy, and personal attacks against statesmen like Necker.

The reader proceeds into the revolutionary era proper in part 4, which contains some of the most stimulating research of the volume. David Bell first explores the life of Charles-Philippe Ronsin, an unsuccessful playwright in the twilight of the Old Regime whose thwarted literary aspirations later found expression in political libels. Thanks to the work of Richard Cobb and others, Ronsin is probably best known for his political and military activity in the Revolution. He was a member of the radical Hébertist faction—an affiliation that would ultimately cost him his life—a commander of the *armée révolutionnaire* of Paris, and an active collaborator with fellow playwright, Collot d'Herbois, in the brutal repression of Lyon in 1793. Historians have long been aware of Ronsin's pre-revolutionary literary frustrations and military career during the Revolution, but Bell is the first to try to connect these two seemingly disparate moments in his life. He does so with the aid of the Darntonian figure of the "Grub Street hack," finding Ronsin to be the "Platonic ideal" (p. 133) of the down-and-out *homme de lettres* who metamorphosed into an extreme revolutionary. But Bell also moves beyond Darnton's framework by using the Ronsin case study to strike out into the mostly uncharted territory of the history of male ambition in eighteenth-century France. Although Bell acknowledges that one would be hard pressed to unearth a period in which talking about and experiencing ambition was absent, he rightly contends that

it is the task of the historian to understand how the expressions of ambition changed over time. In this sense, the Revolution represented a watershed moment in this history because it offered three new channels to satisfy ambition beyond the traditional literary route Voltaire and other less fortunate Old Regime scribblers took: political journalism, politics *proprement dit*, and the army. Ronsin's life shows us that, though rare today, military and literary ambitions could overlap and reinforce one another.

The legacy of the Enlightenment in the Revolution is the analytical thread connecting the following two contributions of Carla Hesse and Charles Walton. At first glance, Hesse's interest in Rousseau's place in the Revolution seems like familiar ground, but her specific focus is innovative because rather than wanting to know from what Rousseauian ideas revolutionaries drew, she asks *how* they read the citizen of Geneva. Hesse identifies the emergence of an "epigraphic" Rousseau after 1789, as he was often read through easily digestible snippets that appeared on slogans and banners in political clubs and civic festivals. By showing that reading Rousseau was to be performed in public, Hesse has made an important intervention in the history of reading by casting further doubt on the contentious hypothesis that the eighteenth century underwent a profound shift where reading increasingly became an act of solitude.^[6] Just as Hesse reminds us that there were many possible uses of Rousseau—both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary—so too has Charles Walton found Rousseauian language on both sides of the revolutionary debate over whether the new regime should embrace free markets or favor tighter government regulation. On the liberal side of this debate stood Lyonnais Girondin, Jean-Marie Roland, who served as minister of the interior in 1792. Within his ministry, Roland founded the Bureau of Public Spirit which promoted policies such as grain market deregulation and absolute submission to the rule of law. The Darntonian dynamic between the High Enlightenment and libels can be seen at work in the Bureau's publications that were comprised of both rational arguments that echoed physiocratic thinking and slanderous attacks against opponents of economic liberalism like Marat and Robespierre. Unsurprisingly, response to the Bureau's propaganda was mixed across the kingdom, finding few adherents in working-class areas like the faubourg Saint-Antoine, but a more favorable reception in some provincial towns.

The final section of this volume is the least directly connected to Darnton's interests, but this does not detract from its overall quality. In 1798, a group of Jewish reformers in Breslau founded a burial society that demanded that actual decomposition of a corpse occur in order to proceed with interment. Such a tenet conflicted with traditional religious norms that required immediate burial, and these reformers ran into trouble with the rabbinate when they tried to secure a burial for an infant whose body was held until decay was observed; eventually Prussian authorities had to force the Jewish cemetery to accept the body. For Jeffrey Freedman eighteenth-century burial controversy carries a double historical significance, because not only did it prefigure the nineteenth-century conflicts between Jewish modernizers and traditionalists, but it was also indicative of the limits of the Enlightenment. Reformers could not combat traditional burial practices with rational arguments alone, but also played on irrational fears of being buried alive, and, as the Breslau case demonstrated, resorted to state-sponsored force to erode the power of rabbinical authority. In the final essay of the volume, Shanti Singham's *bête noire* is those postmodernists of the 1980s and 1990s (Edward Said in particular) who have attacked the Enlightenment for its supposed inability to perceive cultural difference. As an antidote to this accusation, she juxtaposes Charles-Étienne Savary's *Lettres sur l'Égypte* (Singham incorrectly records its first publication date as 1787 rather than 1786), and the work of comte de Volney with the reflections of Alexis de Tocqueville on Algeria in the middle of the next century. Both Enlightenment authors exhibited a degree of sympathy towards Egyptian society, with Savary more interested in Egypt's iconic past and Volney in its tumultuous present. Whereas Volney in particular thought French expansion into Egypt would have negative consequences both for colonizer and colonized, Tocqueville already inhabited a political world where demonstrating national vigor meant becoming a colonial power. This helps explain why he was much harsher towards non-Europeans than his Enlightenment counterparts, conceding that the destruction of Algerian homes and harvests were "unfortunate necessities" (p. 207) of French conquest.

The comprehensive appendix of Robert Darnton's publications in multiple languages at the end of the volume reminds us of the impressive sweep and extensive reach of his scholarship beyond the American academy. Charles Walton's volume will be of great interest to a wide audience because the chapters are skillfully compressed, providing the advanced undergraduate and graduate student accessible entry points into the historical debates and trends that Darnton has shaped. Because this volume contains contributions from leading historians who, like their mentor, are opening new vistas of French and European history, this collection is both a celebration of a pathbreaking past and an adumbration of a promising future.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Roger Chartier, "*Un garçon plein d'esprit mais extrêmement dangereux: The Darntonian Subversion*"

Part 1: Making News

Will Slauter, "A Trojan Horse in Parliament: International Publicity in the Age of the American Revolution"

Sarah Maza, "'The Bastard Child of a Noble House': *Détective* and Middle-Class Culture in Interwar France"

Part 2: Print, Paper, Markets, and States

Thierry Rigogne, "Who Were the Booksellers and Printers of Eighteenth-Century France?"

Leonard N. Rosenband, "Making the Fair Trader: Papermaking, the Excise, and the English State, 1700-1815"

Renato Pasta, "Commerce with Books: Reading Practices and Book Diffusion at the Habsburg Court in Florence (1765-1790)"

Part 3: Police and Opinion

Tabetha Ewing, "Invasion of Lorient: Rumor, Public Opinion, and Foreign Politics in 1740s Paris"

Thomas M. Luckett, "Book Seizures and the Politics of Repression in Paris, 1787-1789"

Part 4: Enlightenment in Revolution

David A. Bell, "A Grub Street Hack Goes to War"

Carla Hesse, "Reading *in extremis*: Revolutionaries Respond to Rousseau"

Charles Walton, "*Les graines de la discorde*: Print, Public Spirit, and Free Market Politics in the French Revolution"

Part 5: Enlightenment Universalism and Cultural Difference

Jeffrey Freedman, "The Limits of Tolerance: Jews, the Enlightenment, and the Fear of Premature Burial"

Shanti Singham, "From Cosmopolitan Anticolonialism to Liberal Imperialism: French Intellectuals and Muslim North Africa in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries"

NOTES

[1] Haydn Mason, ed., *The Darnton Debate: Books and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), vii.

[2] Maza has also devoted attention to this magazine in *Violette Nozière: A Story of Murder in 1930s Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), chapter seven.

[3] Thierry Rigogne, *Between State and Market: Printing and Bookselling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2007).

[4] The classic historiographical statement is Louis Réau, *L'Europe française au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1938).

[5] For a general statement, see James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 11-12.

[6] Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), pp. 24-26.

Kenneth Loiselle
Trinity University
kloisell@trinity.edu

Copyright © 2014 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172