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William Hanley, *A biographical dictionary of French censors 1742-1789*, vol. 2. Ferney-Voltaire: Centre International d'Étude du XVIIIe siècle, 2016. xi + 632 pp. Notes, bibliography, illustrations, table of contents. €225.00. (pb) ISBN 978-2-84559-120-2.

Review by Thomas Munck, University of Glasgow.

Over the last decades, and in particular since the seminal works of Elizabeth Eisenstein and Robert Darnton, a huge amount of research has been done on the French book trade under the *ancien régime*. Scholars have investigated the complex and mutually dependent trades related to printing, the increasingly wide-ranging trading networks that allowed readers all over Europe and further afield to obtain French books, the illegal publishing industry within France, the import of forbidden French-language books from neighbouring areas, the increasingly complicated and unpredictable mechanisms of state control and censorship, and many other questions of diffusion and reception of particular texts. We still have a long way to go, before we have a comprehensive short-title catalogue that can do bibliographical justice to the vast quantity of French-language print during the Enlightenment, or help identify printing and distribution networks where only sparse archival material has been found. But in other respects, exciting progress has been made in understanding the complex relationships between author, printer, market, various authorities, and readers.

One critical component was the French state censorship system itself. By the eighteenth century this was organised by a *Directeur de la librairie*, who managed more than one hundred unpaid royal censors, many of them also themselves authors and publishers. In France, as everywhere else in Europe, censorship regulations were complicated, imprecise, subject to recurrent revision, and impossible to enforce with any degree of consistency or predictability. Erratic enforcement, however, did not at all mean that censorship was ineffective: on the contrary, the deterrent effect was perhaps even greater because of the unpredictability of the system. Many authors, printers, publishers and traders suffered police raids, arrest and imprisonment, confiscation of stock and tools, fines, and other forms of harassment. At the same time, the many forms of tacit permissions and understandings that came into use for marginal books (partly in response to the seemingly insatiable demands of readers) ensured that taking risks could be highly lucrative.

Getting a book through the formal censorship system was a lottery, and trying to 'fix' which censor would read your book manuscript was high on the agenda for those authors who wanted to push at the boundaries of what they thought they could publish legally. The censors themselves, because they did not work to clear rules, exercised considerable discretion, but they also ran the risk of subsequently having their decisions challenged in law or by other authorities. The real extent of underground, semi-illegal or fully illegal publishing in France is still not clear, but the number of 'scandals' and prosecutions indicate that the system was becoming unsustainable. We should also remember the efforts of Directors such as a Malesherbes, in the 1750s, trying (not altogether successfully) to reform and liberalise the whole censorship system sensibly.

William Hanley is compiling a wonderful resource to help us understand the conflicting interests and varied personalities of those who held the office of royal censor during the half-century before the Revolution. The first volume of his biographical dictionary (covering surnames starting with A or B) was published in 2005, and we now have the second volume (letter C), of a set that is expected eventually to run to six large tomes. Volume one covered seventy-one censors, and this second volume adds another thirty-eight. In the short preface to volume one (not reprinted in this volume), Hanley explained his method. Using the lists of royal censors published from 1742 in the *Almanach royal*, he has worked through a wide range of archival and secondary material from institutions all over France and abroad. The result is a rich compendium of information: each censor is listed under the name by which he was commonly known at the time, and each biography has systematic sections on birth, parentage and family, civil state (and details of any spouses), career (including education and professional appointments), death (including where possible post-mortem inventories of their library), posterity, and—last but not least—full details and citations from the surviving reports that he compiled on the books he was asked to read in his official role. Each article is followed by a reproduction of the censor's signature (an extremely useful guide, when working with manuscript material of any kind), and concludes with a list of further references and full notes. In short, this is a thorough and surely definitive reference work that will provide a thorough prosopography of the group of volunteers who operated the official censorship system in late *ancien régime* France.

Most readers will no doubt be particularly interested in the detail Hanley provides regarding the formal reports on publications processed by each censor. As we would expect in the rather loose organisation of the royal censorship system, not all of the reports survive (it is impossible to say how much has been lost), and for some censors an intellectual biography can be constructed only on the basis of a range of incidental material. By contrast, censors from whom a significant number of reports survive often reveal a great deal about both themselves and the cultural and political climate in which they worked.

The longest entry in this volume is for Cadet de Sainville (1730-1814), a commoner whose family helped him rise to the high-status position of *avocat au Parlement*. He became censor in 1761, and as such acquired a certain notoriety, involved as he was in a number of politically sensitive cases until the end of royal censorship in July 1789. His specialities appear to have been politics, political economy and fiscal policy, but he was also involved with the *Journal de Paris*, and almost inevitably had conflicts with a number of distinguished names in the late Enlightenment, including Voltaire, Linguet, Morellet, and Beaumarchais, as well as dealings with senior officials such as Miromesnil. In addition, a total of 108 of his official censor's reports survive, from 1769 to 1789. Cadet was thorough, and his reports, while routinely providing outline summaries of the text, also offer detailed criticisms and explanations which Hanley reports, with extensive quotations. We thus get crucial information on what Cadet thought of the style and intended readership of the book under review, the reliability and acceptability of the ideas expressed in it, and its location in current debates and controversies. Amongst the many authors whose works Cadet was asked to read are a number of earnest reformers, as well as a good number of consensus writers who thought they might have a chance of getting formal approval.

Cadet even reviewed books that had already been published without the necessary prior censor's approval, but had belatedly come into the spotlight—in which case Cadet sometimes commented on the possible author or printer (where these were in doubt), and the previous history of the work. As we would expect from a royal censor, Cadet was quite conservative in his opinions, authorising for example a tract on education by Mercier de la Rivière (1775), Linguet's tract on poor relief, translations of American books by Benjamin Franklin and John Lind, but censoring Mably, a number of individual articles for the new *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1786), and (as late as December 1788) a tract on financial reform by Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, and other texts right up until July 1789.

Some censors appear to have been particularly strict. A.-F. Cotterel (1710-76), for example, refused permission for most of the books he is known to have reported on, and he was also one of the censors

involved in the confused processing of the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie*. In general, most of the reported books seem to have been passed (if necessary with corrections), no doubt because only innocuous books were submitted in the first place. It is disappointing, if understandable, that this volume does not have an index of the books or authors going through the system: no doubt the final volume will have a full index, but perhaps the publishers could meantime be persuaded to make an interim index available online, so we can use the volumes fully, as they appear.

Only a few of the censors are household names, but for all of them we get a rich and detailed personal and intellectual biography—even for those censors whose reports have not survived. One such is Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, friend of many of the great writers of the later French Enlightenment (including Rousseau and Diderot), and of course a well-known thinker in his own right. Although none of his actual reports have been found, Hanley gives an extremely detailed 30-page overview of his career, his contacts and his own reading and writings. We learn that Condillac was asked to serve as censor for Rousseau's *Discourse on inequality*, and suggested some changes, and we see that he commented informally on a wide array of other books. Although he was under religious orders, the many books he himself authored were too daring to be submitted for approval, and so were all published illegally.

In short, Hanley has once again provided us with a wonderful array of specific evidence on the careers of these interesting late *ancien régime* unpaid officeholders, showing how they managed to work in nominal compliance with the complex system of regulatory mechanisms, while at the same time often maintaining their own considerable independence of judgment and intellectual non-conformism. We can look forward to the next volumes with great expectations.

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