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James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. ix + 284 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$54.95 US (cl). ISBN 0-521-46573-7; \$19.95 US (pb). ISBN 0-521-46969-4.

Review by Michael R. Lynn, Agnes Scott College.

In the last twenty years a veritable deluge of research has appeared on the nature of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe. Jürgen Habermas' influential thesis on the rise of the bourgeois public sphere has inspired numerous scholars to reconceptualize everything from politics to social relations to the development of consumerism. Historians have rewritten the cultural history of Enlightenment Europe and broadened the very notion of Enlightenment beyond either an intellectual history or a social history of ideas. While Habermas cannot be credited (or blamed, depending on your point of view) for all of this new scholarship, undoubtedly the notion of the public sphere has come to hold a significant place within studies of the old regime. Consequently, it was only a matter of time before someone produced a synthetic treatment of this topic, and James Van Horn Melton has done just that. His book, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*, succinctly and cogently analyzes the place of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe. This book, a part of the very useful series of texts published by Cambridge University Press called "New Approaches to European History," offers a clear and comprehensive account of the rise of the public set at the level of advanced undergraduates and graduate students.

Melton begins with a useful introduction outlining various ways to think about the concept of the public, a summary of Habermas's thesis, and a discussion of the ways in which he appropriates and alters Habermas for the purposes of this book. Melton first jettisons Habermas's chronology, where the public sphere of the eighteenth century develops initially in the literary realm and afterwards is politicized. More crucially, he eliminates the Marxist framework used by Habermas, in particular the emphasis on the rise of the bourgeoisie. Melton instead prefers the term "Enlightened public sphere." At the same time that Melton de-emphasizes certain aspects of Habermas' public sphere, he also chooses to incorporate various ideas that Habermas had not considered, especially the concept of gender.

Melton divides the rest of the book into three parts, the first of which devotes two chapters to politics and the rise of public opinion in England and France. The first chapter, focused on what Melton calls "the peculiarities of the English," examines England's unique political culture, the creation of British political journalism, and radical, extraparliamentary politics, focusing on John Wilkes. He ends with an analysis of how the public sphere developed amid the changing political environment. Importantly, the rise of the public was by no means obvious, Melton tells us. A rise in censorship and state control, for example, mirrored the rise of the press. A second chapter looks at the development of French political culture. Melton starts with a brief look at the structure of politics in France, especially the role of the king and parlements, before turning in the next section to examine Jansenism and the creation of oppositional politics. Melton notes that Habermas generally ignored the role played by religion in the development of the public sphere. In addition to being opponents to the crown, which feared the kind of religious schism that had crippled sixteenth-century France, Jansenists also had their own periodical, the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, that also played a role in the formation of public opinion on theological

matters. The resulting growth of public opinion from both parliamentary and religious debates led to something of a love-hate relationship between the crown and the public sphere. While the state leaders wanted to eradicate the voice of the opposition, they also came to rely on public opinion as a power unto itself. Once public opinion had been unleashed, so to speak, governments sought to appropriate it for their own purposes; they wanted to use it, for example, to eliminate factionalism and garner popular support for wars and new taxes; however, these states, and especially the French state, also espoused a policy of secrecy that ran counter to the very notion of public opinion. Thus, every time opinions appeared that were in opposition to the crown, monarchs inwardly cringed even though they also worked diligently to push their own public views within the same forum.

The second part of Melton's book examines print culture, broadly conceived to include the practices of reading, writing, and viewing. Increasing literacy, the enormous growth in the number of available printed works, and changing reading practices reflected the rapid development of print culture. Important innovations came with the development of both the periodical press and the novel, but the general public had greater access to all printed materials through the development of certain institutions, such as the lending libraries, *musées*, and subscription societies. Melton notes, however, that the profusion of reading led to serious issues for proponents of the public sphere. While the Enlightened public sphere almost required the expansion of the literary marketplace, the problem remained that readers devoured a considerable amount of unenlightened materials, especially novels. The Enlightened public was not just anyone and everyone who chose to read and offer their opinions, but a select group of people who read the rights books in the correct manner. Melton clearly describes the paradox facing the Enlightenment at this juncture. Public opinion rested on the existence of an expanding literary marketplace that essentially lay outside the control of the enlightened members of society. A survey of this size, however, did not allow Melton to delve very deeply into the actual content of the books people were reading. Similarly, he does not have the opportunity either to offer a comparative analysis of the different kinds of works people were reading in France, England and German-speaking lands or to discuss the battles between proponents and detractors of the Enlightenment itself.

Just as reading changed in the eighteenth century, so too did writing. Melton discusses both the rapid increase in the quantity of writers during this period as well as the development of the idea of the author. Authors, of course, held a different status depending on what they wrote and where they lived, with England being the model for light censorship and authorial rights. Throughout Europe, however, authors proliferated and female authors in particular came to occupy their own category. While women still had difficulties publishing on their own behalf and while their status was still shaky (to be a "public girl" was to be a prostitute), the number of women authors grew rapidly. Melton also examines the world of the theater, a venue that provided an oral and visual exposition of written works for the benefit of a fairly wide audience. The physical space of the theaters underwent a transformation during the eighteenth century, becoming bigger, better lit, and enjoying heightened social status. Part of this stemmed from the patronage of various monarchs, although commercial theaters also grew during this period.

The third part of Melton's book covers arenas of sociability, namely salons, drinking establishments, and Freemasonry. He examines the rise of salons, from their seventeenth-century origins through their decline at the end of the eighteenth century. The dominance of women in these venues—whether looking at the classic French salon, the English Bluestockings, or the variants that appeared in Berlin and Vienna—provides the focus here. Different classes and genders mixed together in salons through a set of common goals and within a matrix of politeness controlled by the (largely) female facilitators. Key differences did exist, however, between different regions. English salons, for example, tended to be largely female affairs with men seen as unnecessary components. Interestingly, Jewish women frequently led salons in Berlin where they established a venue in which Jews and non-Jews could meet in relative equality.

The next chapter examines taverns and coffeehouses, enormously public places that drew a wide clientele addicted to alcohol, caffeine, conversation, and news. Here, Melton discusses a larger segment of society since, undoubtedly, drinking establishments drew men and women from almost all social classes, economic circumstances, and educational levels. As the consumption of items such as coffee, tea, and alcohol grew, so too did the cultural importance of the locations where these beverages were available. Taverns became an important part of the political culture of England, for example, where candidates bought the voters alcohol to ensure their support. Cafés developed as centers of public, political discussions as well as locations where the interested individual could find access to newspapers and other periodicals. Coffeehouses also doubled as commercial spaces where business transactions might occur; in London some of the most famous coffeehouses were located near the London Stock Exchange.

Melton ends his book with a discussion of Freemasonry. After first tracing the rise of Masonic lodges, he goes on to examine their social and gender make-up. Although ostensibly enlightened, the substantial initiation fee and monthly dues, as well as the common prerequisite of literacy, excluded a fair number of people. Some lodges accepted women (and women also had a few of their own) where, in general, they could participate as fully as their male counterparts. Paradoxically, freemasonry defended egalitarianism while remaining essentially elitist; at the same time, lodges were enlightened but were also quasi-religious in their outlook. These paradoxes affected their political outlook as well as the manner in which historians have treated them. Freemasonry, Melton suggests, ultimately spanned the political spectrum, and individual lodges might lean either towards absolutist or democratic government. This has made them somewhat difficult to characterize since some lodges were blatantly royalist in spite of their growth within the enlightened public sphere.

Such difficulties lead Melton to conclude that the multitudinous institutions of the public sphere were highly ambiguous. While both monarchs and citizens invoked public opinion as a crucial element of politics, the openness and transparency that they called for was rarely met in full. Women, for example, faced enormous difficulties achieving any sort of status as authors and having their political views taken seriously in spite of the emphasis on egalitarianism. The Enlightenment helped create the public sphere even as various aspects of that sphere embraced religion or spoke out against the Enlightenment. It is precisely in the areas of gender and religion that Melton puts forward his most interesting arguments. Religion, in particular, is typically left out of such discussions since the Enlightenment generally disparaged organized religion as superstition; however, Melton suggests that the political nature of religious debates actually helped propel the creation of the public sphere.

A synthetic work such as this is bound to draw criticism from specialists who will look for work in their field and find it absent or overly generalized. Melton anticipates much of this criticism right from the start. He limits himself geographically to England, France and German-speaking lands. He does not imply, however, that the public did not rise in the rest of Europe. Certainly support for his arguments could have been drawn from the Italian peninsula, for example. Melton also limits his institutional examples. He knows that other public fora developed in this period; he briefly mentions some of them such as artistic and musical associations, musées, and academies. Melton leaves science entirely out of the picture in spite of numerous associations, journals, books, and public debates (such as that over Mesmerism).

More debatable, however, is his decision to limit himself socially by looking only at the middle class and elites. Although he wants to avoid bringing up the complex historiography of popular protest, he inevitably finds it necessary to work in some discussions of the lower classes. However, Melton does not offer much discussion of how different social groups might have experienced the rise of the public differently. Although he notes that spatial divisions in taverns, for example, served to reinforce social divisions, he does not compare the internal behavior of these different groups. Melton does not, of course, suggest that the public is static in either size or in its constitution, but he necessarily is forced to

treat the public largely as a unit. Points of comparison tend to focus on geographic and gender differences rather than those of social status. In addition, while Melton clearly outlines the creation of the public sphere and the people who participated in the development of public opinion, he rarely suggests why these people and these institutions are enlightened. It would have been helpful to see more explicitly just what kinds of Enlightenment appeared in these different venues and how the form and structure of the Enlightenment changed as a function of institution, geography, and gender.

All quibbles aside, Melton has written an elegant and thoughtful account of the public and the public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe. Students and scholars alike will find this book eminently useful as an introduction to the topic and a vast resource for future study thanks to the comprehensive bibliographies found at the end of each chapter. Melton has succeeded in encapsulating a vast wealth of scholarship into an engaging and important book.

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