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Raymond Birn, *Forging Rousseau: Print, Commerce, and Cultural Manipulation in the Late Enlightenment. Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 2001:08. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001. ix + 281 pp. Bibliography and index. £49.00 (pb). ISBN 0-7294-0770-5.

Review by Sheryl Kroen, University of Florida.

Who was Jean-Jacques Rousseau? As historians, how do we begin to understand either the author or his *oeuvre*? How do we define his *oeuvre*? By which writings? Writings intended for publication? Certainly. Drafts of writings? Of course. Piracies of published writings? Correspondence not intended for publication? Notebooks? Notes found inside manuscripts indicating a rendezvous, an address, or a load of laundry to be picked up next Friday? These are the kinds of questions that Michel Foucault posed back in 1969 in his famous lecture, "What is an author?"[1], and they have inspired and frustrated scholars and intellectual historians ever since.[2] Such questions are at the heart of Raymond Birn's new book, and his quest for answers offers a fascinating portrait of the personal relationships and economic, literary, and political circumstances that ultimately "forged" the Rousseau who has come down to us through the ages, particularly through the canonical *Collection Complète* as edited by his "three friends:" Girardin, Du Peyrou, and Mo

The structure of the book communicates Birn's central argument: divided into three parts, only the first part of this study is focused on Rousseau and the role he played in shaping his texts or how they were presented or received in the public sphere. The remaining two parts of the book, which comprise 200 of the 250 pages of text, are devoted to the cast of characters and forces that produced the canonical edition of Rousseau in the late eighteenth century, *the Collection Complète des oeuvres de J.J. Rousseau*. Why this imbalance? First, because Birn makes the general point that, at this particular juncture in the history of publishing, the author had precious little control over the publication of his writing, which (he reminds us) was not yet considered his intellectual property at all. The bustling trade in piracies, combined with the peculiarities of privileges, publishing contracts, and censorship in the international book trade foiled any effort by Rousseau to control the publication of his works in his lifetime. Second, and more specific to Rousseau, was his untimely death in 1778. Rousseau did not live to benefit from changing regimes in publishing, nor was he able to bring to fruition the project he hatched in 1764 with the Neufchâtel millionaire, Pierre-Alexandre Du Peyrou, of overseeing an edition of his collected works. The project of publishing a full and "authorized" edition of his collected works did come to pass, but the editing and "forging" of Rousseau was in the hands of his disciples who took it upon themselves to present the master to his public. It is this complicated story that occupies the lion's share of Birn's analysis.

Part I, entitled "Rousseau and Intellectual Property Rights," includes two chapters in which Rousseau himself appears as an active agent, expressing his attitudes toward his work, intellectual property, and his own role as author in his correspondence with his publishers, his censor in France (Malesherbes), and his wife and friends. Birn relies here and throughout the book on R. A. Leigh's (1998) to offer a wonderful and useful introduction for the uninitiated into the nuts and bolts of publishing in the age of the late Enlightenment. Birn draws particular attention to three points. First, he underscores Rousseau's frustration with piracies, which he simply could not control and which deprived him of royalties and undercut his efforts to avow only "authorized" editions of his work. Second, Birn emphasizes the relationship between censorship and intellectual property, endorsing Foucault's views about the interconnections between property, transgression, and punishment. Until the moment when *Emile*, *Du contrat social*, and *Les Lettres écrites de la montagne* were condemned, no one was willing to

confirm Rousseau's unwavering view concerning intellectual property. "Once Rousseau was recognized as an owner of his transgressive texts, he was subject to appropriate punishment for alleged literary sins. Policy authorities considered Rousseau's publishers to be merely his agents and they emerged relatively unscathed" (p. 43). Third, Birn stresses Rousseau's continuous efforts to make a living as a professional writer and to secure a future for himself and his wife in the uncertain world of international publishing. Here Birn serves up lots of letters with various publishers attesting to Rousseau's endless haggling over details of contracts and, in particular, his interest in securing an annuity for himself and his wife from the publication of the collected works with Du Peyrou.

The main characters in the drama that shaped the *Collection Complète* were the three aforementioned men, alternately called "disciples" and "friends," and Rousseau's widow, Thérèse Lavasseur. They are the focus of Part II, aptly entitled, "The *trois amis* and the Widow Rousseau." This section is a bit complicated, mirroring the shifting relations and infighting that characterized the principles engaged in the battle to publish Rousseau after his death. When Rousseau died at Ermenonville in July 1778, his last host, Marquis René-Louis de Girardin, simply expropriated those manuscripts that the writer had brought with him and so created his own leading role in the forging of Rousseau. Publicizing the myth of Rousseau's death (that he died in Girardin's arms), turning Ermenonville into a shrine, and putting himself forward as the guardian of Thérèse Lavasseur, Girardin considered it a sacred duty to revive the aborted project of 1764/65 to create an edition of Rousseau's collected works. But to carry out that project, Girardin needed the manuscripts in the hands of Du Peyrou, with whom Rousseau had inaugurated it. For years Rousseau sent Du Peyrou manuscripts, and the latter in turn acted as a sort of literary executor for the author. But in 1767 the men had a falling out at a country house at Trye after an illness-inspired delirium led Du Peyrou to accuse Rousseau of trying to poison him. The very next day Rousseau backed out of his contract, offered to pay back an advance he had received, and transformed Du Peyrou from his literary executor into a mere guardian of his manuscripts. During the intervening years from 1776 to 1778, the Genevan Paul-Claude Moutou was the official literary executor for Rousseau. So when Girardin set out to resurrect the project of publishing Rousseau's collected works, he had to work with two other men who possessed critically important manuscripts, who had their own vexed relationships with the author and his work, and who differed sharply in their ideas about why they were publishing Rousseau's works and how it ought to be done.

More than the other editors, Girardin was devoted to representing Rousseau as a prophet in the wilderness, as a political and literary martyr. For Girardin, assuring this vision of the master was much more important than textual fidelity. Hence he tried to prevent the publication of significant correspondence; he pretended not to possess the second volume of Rousseau's *Confessions*; and, more astonishing still, he "completed and 'improved upon' Rousseau's unfinished writings, particularly the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*..." (p. 118). In Du Peyrou Rousseau had a more faithful disciple and literary advocate. According to Birn, "a need for self-redemption" explains the intensity of emotion with which Du Peyrou approached his task. Du Peyrou sought redemption for his own personal wealth, which came from being an absentee plantation owner in his native Surinam, and for the events at Trye that "haunted him, and compelled [him] to show that he had remained worth of discipleship" (p. 114).

Carefully laying out the conflicting views of these disciples as well as the effects that these views had on what actually appeared in the *Collection Complète*, Birn adds to Robert Darnton's more materialist approach to publishing in the Enlightenment. Birn writes: "While indebted to Robert Darnton's *The Business of the Enlightenment*...I am less inclined than Darnton to ascribe overwhelmingly material motivations to publishers in editing. Those behind the *Collection Complète* believed themselves to be disseminating Rousseau's moral vision. Their conflicts had more to do with competing interpretations of that vision than with ways of stimulating profits" (p. 2).^[3] Yet the material and financial dimensions of publishing are hardly absent from Birn's analysis. Indeed in chapter nine, "Europe's Booksellers and the Fate of the *Collection Complète*," Birn demonstrates how the disputes between the disciples delayed

publication and allowed piracies to multiply, ultimately turning their great literary enterprise into a financial disaster.

But the real benefit of Birn's careful analysis of the moral as opposed to material motivations of the three disciples comes in chapter eight, "What Readers Found in the *Collection Complète*." While the 1779 draft of the edition's prospectus boasted that "following the author's wishes, the work could be considered as 'prepared...by Mr. Rousseau himself...[H]is friends are but witnesses and guarantors of the fidelity of its execution'" (p. 127), Birn's meticulous, volume by volume analysis of the *Collection Complète* demonstrates how carefully scholars must consider editorial practices when assessing an author's *oeuvre*, even when using what appears to be a canonical edition. Indeed, by placing at the center of his study the collected works that have been presumed to be the authoritative edition of Rousseau and destabilizing it in this way, Birn shows us how much we have to learn by exploring Foucault's questions about the author's function.

Birn's analysis--and particularly his brief final chapter, "From Print to Pantheon," which sketches out the "re-forging" of Rousseau in the context of the French Revolution--also points to the kind of work that still remains to be done. For while the canonical edition of Rousseau is what captivated Birn's attention, the story of Rousseau's influence and the constitution of his *oeuvre* hardly ended with the appearance of the *Collection Complète*. Imitations of this edition and piracies, excerpts, and adaptations of individual works proliferated throughout the revolutionary decade and, after a brief lull in the Napoleonic period, enjoyed a resurgence in the counterrevolutionary Restoration. These aspects of the "forging" of Rousseau await their historians. Birn's work, inspired by the questions of Foucault, offers important insights that will help to guide them.

NOTES

[1] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988, Vol. I: 1954-1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 789-821. On p. 794 Foucault addresses the question of the *oeuvre*, and it is his discussion of Nietzsche from which I drew my examples.

[2] Roger Chartier discusses the challenges Foucault's questions pose for historians. See "The Chimera of the Origin: Archeology, Cultural History, and the French Revolution," in Jan Goldstein, ed., *Foucault and the Writing of History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 167-186.

[3] Robert Darnton, *The Business of the Enlightenment: a Publishing History of the 'Encyclopédie', 1775-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

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