

Forgotten Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France

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When I set out over a decade ago to create a database of the trade of an eighteenth-century Swiss enlightenment publishing house called the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), it was largely because I accepted the key assumptions of previous authorities.¹ In particular, I did not sufficiently question assertions concerning the ‘representative’ value of an archive which, the literature assured me, was the best of all possible archives on the French enlightenment book trade.² As a Swiss pirate publisher secure in a Prussian-ruled principality in the heart of Europe, the STN could and did trade almost anything, from almost anywhere, to everywhere in Europe.³ I was more sceptical, however, of claims that the STN might even have dared to trade sexual-political *libelles* about France’s Austrian-born Queen Marie-Antoinette, whose marriage to Louise XVI united the two most powerful families in Europe.⁴ For if such works were traded before the Revolution, my research had already revealed that they certainly

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¹ See Burrows and Curran, *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe Database, 1769-1794* (fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/). Henceforth this source will be referred to as FBTEE-1.0, thus distinguishing it from further FBTEE resources now in preparation.

² Major monograph studies of the STN include Schlup, *L’Édition Neuchâteloise*; Darnton and Schlup, *Le Rayonnement d’une Maison d’Édition*; Darnton, *Forbidden Best-sellers*; Freedman, *Books Without Borders*; and Darnton, *The Literary Underground*. Two further studies, Mark Curran’s study of the STN’s publishing business, *Selling Enlightenment* and my dissemination study, *Enlightenment Best-Sellers*, are due to appear within the next eighteen months.

³ This case is best articulated in Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 52-59, ‘The Problem of Representativeness’.

⁴ Studies of scandalous literature against Marie-Antoinette and its impact are so common that Vivian Gruder suggests that they comprise a veritable “pornographic interpretation” of the French Revolution: Gruder, “The Question of Marie-Antoinette”. For a refutation of this “interpretation”, see Burrows, *Blackmail, Scandal and Revolution*, esp. chap. 5.

did not circulate in the volume previous work had suggested, and this called into question widely-accepted claims that they helped to desacralize the French monarchy and began the revolutionary “political education” of a people too ill-educated to “assimilate” Rousseau in the original.⁵ The importance of the illegal trade, which Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton have both claimed embraced half of all books in circulation, clearly lay elsewhere.⁶ The STN archive would, I hoped, reveal where.

By “daring to know” this “representative” archive, then, I was convinced I could discover the *philosophe*’s stone, the key to understanding the enlightenment and the cultural origins of the Revolution. Sadly *hubris* soon followed. For the database soon revealed that the STN had distinctively Swiss and Protestant biases, and traded mainly Swiss and Protestant books.⁷ Its representative value was thus open to question.⁸ However, the database also revealed that the French succeeded in closing their borders to both piracy and *libertine* books by acts of 1777 and 1783.⁹ So there were, as I had surmised, no scandalous libelles against Marie-Antoinette recorded in the archive prior to the Revolution of 1789.¹⁰ Thus a key plank of the desacralization myth evaporated, along with my confidence in the broader significance of the STN. It is thus time to strike out in a new direction, so in the remainder of this paper I wish to propose a new route to understanding the book history of late *ancien régime* France.

This will involve turning many of assumptions of recent literature on their heads. What if we assume that the STN’s trade was regionally specific, and so try to triangulate it against other sources?¹¹ What if we accept that the French book market was progressively closed off to pornographers and foreign pirates from 1777?¹² What happens, moreover, if we interrogate the illegal sector in more detail, and ask of what books it was generally comprised?¹³ Can we actually quantify the pirated works that most commentators agree formed the bulk of this sector?¹⁴ What if we examine the French market in its entirety—without putting aside the extensive legal sector—to establish what were the true forgotten bestsellers of pre-revolutionary France?¹⁵ Might not such an industrial scale overview give us a richer view of the reading and print culture of late enlightenment France? Perhaps it might even provide new insights into the cultural origins of the French Revolution – and perhaps the counter-revolution,

⁵ The argument originates in Darnton, “The High Enlightenment and the Low-life of Literature” (quotes at 115, 110) and is further expounded in Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*. The “desacralisation fallacy” enjoys such currency that William Doyle entitled a recent refutation “Desacralising Desacralisation.” This was a revised version of an earlier essay in French: see Doyle, “Une Désacralisation à désacraliser?”

⁶ On the scale of the illegal sector, see Chartier, “Book Markets and Reading”; Darnton, “Booksellers/ Demand” in “A Literary Tour of France”, at robertdarnton.org/literarytour/booksellers, on Mar. 8, 2016, 1.

⁷ See Burrows and Curran, “How Swiss was the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel?”

⁸ See *ibid.*, and Burrows, “In Search of Enlightenment”; Curran, “Beyond the Forbidden Bestsellers”.

⁹ See Burrows, “30 August 1777 and 12 June 1783 – A Digital Impact Assessment of Two Censorship Measures”, a paper presented to the “Around the World On-line Digital Humanities Symposium”, May 22, 2014, at youtu.be/aC5eP0yKiDo. See also Burrows, “French Censorship on the Eve of the Revolution”, at 20-21, figs. 1.1-1.3

¹⁰ According to the STN’s surviving accounts, the first anti-Marie-Antoinette *libelle* the company traded was a single two-volume set of the *Mémoires Justificatifs de la Comtesse de Valois de La Motte*, a work first published in London in early Feb. 1789, which the STN bought from Fauche-Borel in May 1790. The first appearance of such a *libelle* in the French customs confiscation registers (MS Fr. 21,934) is a consignment of the same work seized on July 7, 1789. Further consignments were confiscated on Sept. 1 and 22, 1789.

¹¹ This approach is discussed in Burrows et al., “Mapping Print, Connecting Cultures”.

¹² My clearest treatment of this hypothesis appears in Burrows, “French Banned Books”.

¹³ See *ibid.*, and the chapter on “The Anatomy of the Illegal Sector” in Burrows, *Enlightenment Best-Sellers* (forthcoming).

¹⁴ For my calculations concerning the extent and nature of the illegal sector see the aforementioned chapter in Burrows, *Enlightenment Best-Sellers*, and appendix two to the same work.

¹⁵ As noted below, this is the main ambition for FBTEE’s current Australian Research Council-funded “Mapping Print, Charting Enlightenment” project.

too? Such a survey is now underway, thanks to continuing work in the French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe (FBTEE) database and by our various partner projects, most notably the MEDIANE project developed by Alicia Montoya, and described elsewhere in this edition of *French History and Civilization*.¹⁶ This paper reports on some of the patterns emerging from this new digital work.

Of course, the FBTEE team is not the first to attempt to discover the *philosophe's* stone of enlightenment studies through bibliometric methods. Cultural historians have been trying for more than a century to answer Daniel Mornet's classic question, "What did the French read before the Revolution?" and its implicit riders "How did they read it?" and "How did this shape enlightenment and revolutionary culture?"¹⁷ Their efforts have supplemented Mornet's large scale surveys of the holdings of private libraries with quantitative studies of publishing licenses, book reviews and will inventories to locate the books owned by individuals, produced by publishers or most discussed in the public sphere.¹⁸ Several surveys also classify books according to the Parisian booksellers system of categorization, developed in the eighteenth-century, a schema also used in the FBTEE database.¹⁹ Yet when these efforts are compared, such surveys have tended to produce wildly differing results.

In the five hundred private libraries surveyed by Mornet, half of all classifiable works came under the rubric "Histoire" (which includes geography and travel literature), but the same was true of less than 28% of books traded by the supposedly "representative" STN, according to the FBTEE database. *Histoire* accounted for 31% of works reviewed in the *Journal des Savants*, but less than 16% of titles granted publishing *permissions* by the French government and under 14% of 3,500 editions listed in the 1775 trade catalogue of the London-based bookseller David Boissière.²⁰ Similar discrepancies apply with *Belles-Lettres* and the other categories of the Parisian booksellers' classification system. These include religious books (*Théologie*)—whose supposed decline is often seen as an indicator of declining religiosity, secularization and even desacralization.²¹ They account for 28% of publishing *permissions* and 22% of books in the libraries of Breton *parlementaires*, but only 13% of Parisian *parlementaires'* holdings or works reviewed in the *Mémoires de Trévoux*. In Mornet's survey and the STN data, they account for 9-10% of books held or traded; in Boissière's catalogue significantly less.

Comparison of the statistics for *Permissions* with reviews in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* and library holdings might suggest that lots of religious titles were published but many were

¹⁶ Montoya, "Middlebrow Literature and the European Enlightenment".

¹⁷ See Mornet, "Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées".

¹⁸ For an earlier comparative analysis of some of these approaches, see Darnton, "Reading, Writing and Publishing". On will inventories see esp. Roche, *The People of Paris*, 212; Chartier, *Lecture et Lecteurs*, esp. chap. 5. The material below on Boissière's catalogue is based on my own research.

¹⁹ On the evolution of the Parisian system, see Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries*, II: 759-82.

²⁰ On the pre-FBTEE surveys discussed here, see Darnton, "Reading, Writing and Publishing". Darnton's discussion drew heavily on key contributions to Furet et al, *Livre et Société*, several of which treated the *estampillage* evidence and *permission simple* registers discussed below. Nevertheless, while noting their prevalence, Furet and his collaborators generally devoted little space to discussing religious works. For Boissière's stock, see *Catalogue Général des Livres qui se trouvent Chez la Société Typographique à Londres* (undated, c. 1775). The catalogue is in ECCO, but is misdated to c. 1785. For more on the Boissière catalogue see Burrows, "БИБЛИОМЕТРИЯ, ПОПУЛЯРНОЕ ЧТЕНИЕ И ЛИТЕРАТУРНОЕ ПОЛЕ ИЗДАТЕЛЯ ЭПОХИ ПРОСВЕЩЕНИЯ", ("Bibliometrics, Popular Reading, and the Literary Field of an Enlightenment Publisher"), and Burrows, "Enlightenment Best-Sellers", chap. 7.

²¹ The classic study of the (supposed) decline of religious reading in the eighteenth century is Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public*, which found (see esp. 30-58) that between 1740 and 1800 theological works fell from 40% to 14% of editions advertised at the twice-yearly Leipzig book fairs, while Latin titles fell from 27% to 4%. However, as Munck, *The Enlightenment*, has noted (79), the fairs tended to deal in quite specialized works.

not the sorts of books to be reviewed (e.g. devotional works, liturgies, etc.) and that sales per edition were low in comparison with other genres. Indeed, if religious books only accounted for 10%-15% of the trade by the late eighteenth century, as implied, for example, by Mornet's census and studies of the Leipzig book fairs, there appears to have been a massive decline in religious devotion by the later eighteenth century.²²

Yet surveys of will inventories tell a very different story. The work of Daniel Roche has emphasized that literacy was widespread across social scale. In his survey of Parisian inventories dating from between 1750-1790, some 22.6% mentioned books, and by 1780 these included around 35% of laborer's and 40% of domestic servants' wills.²³ By the same measure, Roger Chartier has shown that book ownership in Nancy, Angers, Caen, Nantes, Rennes and Rouen was running at around 33-36%. Nor was book ownership an entirely urban phenomenon, even among the lower orders.²⁴ In the Franche-Comté will inventory surveys suggest around 6% of peasants were leaving books, and 80% of peasant "libraries", which rarely comprised more than a handful of books, contained religious reading matter, frequently to the exclusion of all else.²⁵ Hence the will inventory evidence implies that urban reading was predominantly secular and rural reading religious—although other recent work stresses the continuing importance of religious reading in Parisian private libraries also.²⁶

Unfortunately, surveys of libraries, will inventories, book reviews and legal permissions cannot uncover the sector of the literary market that many historians assume was the most radically culturally transformative. This was the highly illegal sector comprised of what Robert Darnton labels "Libertine [or free-thinking] books", or, to capture the parlance of the clandestine trade, *livres philosophiques* (philosophical books). Darnton's path-breaking work on these *Forbidden Best-Sellers* sought to create tables of bestselling titles, authors and genres by counting the orders that a sample of French book dealers placed with the STN. In the process he offered a picture of the illegal sector richer and more diverse than anything previous scholars had imagined. It highlights the unsuspected importance of muck-raking journalists such as Charles Théveneau de Morande and Mathieu Pidansat de Mairobert; the Rousseauist essayist-cum-novelist-cum-playwright Louis-Sébastien Mercier; and, among the *philosophes*, the understudied baron d'Holbach and abbé Raynal.²⁷ In their different ways, Darnton posits that all these authors contributed to the desacralization of the French monarchy, whether by undermining the alliance of throne and altar, or by deluging the monarchy in a tidal wave of smut.²⁸ And while we now know that pornographic *libelles* against the Austrian-born French

²² For the German data, see Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public*.

²³ Roche, *The People of Paris*, 212.

²⁴ Chartier, *Lecture et Lecteurs*, esp. chap. 5.

²⁵ See Vernus, "A Provincial Perspective", 125, 127.

²⁶ Marion, *Les Bibliothèques Privées à Paris*.

²⁷ Darnton's STN best-seller tables (see Darnton, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature*, 194-200) include Mercier's *L'An 2440* at no. 1 and his *Tableau de Paris* at no. 4; d'Holbach's *Système de la Nature* at no. 3, Mairobert's *Anecdotes sur Mme du Barry* at no. 2 and Raynal's *Histoire Philosophique des Deux-Indes* at no. 5. His author table lists d'Holbach in second (behind Voltaire), Mairobert in third, Mercier in fourth, Morande in fifth, and Raynal in eighth. However, Morande's position in the table is misleading: he appears there only because he has been double-counted (wrongly) with Mairobert as a possible author of the *Anecdotes sur Mme Du Barry*. Morande did produce a biography of Du Barry, but it was suppressed (see Burrows, *A King's Ransom: A Life of Charles Théveneau de Morande*, chap. 3).

²⁸ Morande provides the classic case study of a muck-raking *libelliste* in Darnton "The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature". For his treatment of Mairobert, see Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, chap. 5, which also contends (chap. 3) that d'Holbachian materialism was largely communicated through philosophic pornography such as *Thérèse Philosophe*, an anonymous novel usually attributed to the Marquis d'Argens, which was loosely based on a contemporary sex scandal. Darnton's references to Raynal's radical impact are more muted, but see *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 73, 404 n. 95. Recently, Jonathan Israel has argued that the *Histoire Philosophique des Deux-Indes* was the book that made a global revolution: Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 413-42.

princess Marie-Antoinette played little or no part in this process before 1789, we can only assess more general claims about literary-transmitted desacralization once we can contextualize this wider illegal literature within the contours of the wider book trade.

Now before taking issue with Darnton's conclusions, we should first recognize an important debt. For his work on the STN's *Forbidden Best-Sellers* was foundational to my own. It both indicated the potential of the STN archives for historical bibliometric work, and inspired my search for a more general list of best-sellers and internationally comparative contextual insights. But Darnton's work also has methodological and conceptual drawbacks, and these are largely replicated in the online resources and essays he recently published as "A Literary Tour of France".²⁹ The first drawback is that it is limited to one country, and thus lacks the comparative dimensions necessary to evaluate his claims about the illegal book trade and its political impact inside France. Equally, his statistics present twenty-five years of bestseller data in a single, static table. This tells us nothing about trends over time.

But more fundamentally, Darnton's work is based on the premise that cultural supply approximated to cultural demand – or to put it another way, it assumes that the STN could supply whatever booksellers ordered. This assumption is inappropriate to eighteenth-century Europe.³⁰ The resources and logistical efforts involved in trying to source unfamiliar books; the time lags involved; the credit-worthiness of clients; the impact of policing decisions; all impacted on the STN's ability or willingness to supply books. Knowing this to be the case, savvy dealers generally ordered works listed in the STN's catalogues. Only a naïve or inexperienced few were likely to be suckered in by the STN's sales patter about their ability to source anything from anywhere.³¹ Sadly historians—including this author—have tended to be more gullible. I continued to believe in the representative value of the STN data long after I proved that the STN archives contain orders for works that were never published.³²

Fortunately, my gullibility proved a bonus. Without it I might never have dreamed of creating the FBTEE database, which is now widely regarded as a transformative project.³³ Its data structures, regarded as a model for this sort of work, link information about the STN's trading partners and private clients, including professions and places of residence, to data about sales and the precise books and editions traded.³⁴ This data has been enriched with taxonomic

²⁹ Darnton, "A Literary Tour de France," at robertdarnton.org/, on May 11, 2016.

³⁰ For debate on this point see Darnton, review of Burrows et al., *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe* and my author's reply.

³¹ Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 56, records the STN boasted in 1773 that "There is no book of any importance that appears in France that we are not capable of supplying". On the importance of catalogues, see Curran, "Beyond the Forbidden Best-Sellers". The only book-seller in the STN data who appears to have believed the STN's claims was Bruzard de Mauvelain, a fly-by-night specialist in taboo literature who was frequently disappointed by what the STN could supply. Darnton used him as a case study, but I have found no similar dealers on the STN's books. He was, for example, the only dealer who ordered the anti-Marie-Antoinette pamphlets listed in the next footnote.

³² First and foremost among these—as I showed in *Blackmail, Scandal and Revolution*—were sexual-political libelles against Marie-Antoinette, including the *Amours du visir de Vergennes* and the *Passe-Temps d'Antoinette*, both of which were ordered from the STN but never actually written let alone published, and the *Essai Historique sur la Vie de Marie-Antoinette d'Autriche, reine de France*, which, as I predicted it would, first appears in the STN accounts only after the fall of the Bastille.

³³ The main reviews of the FBTEE database are Darnton's aforementioned piece for *Reviews in History*; Caradonna's review for *French History* at www.jeremycaradonna.com/resources/Link+to+Burrows+review.pdf; Sean Takat's review for the *Journal of Digital Humanities* vol. I, no. 3, at journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-3/review-of-french-book-trade-in-enlightenment-europe-project-by-sean-takats/; Jeremy Popkin's review at www.bssecs.org.uk/Reviews/ReviewDetails.aspx?id=60&type=4; and content aggregator C18Connect's review at www.18thconnect.org/news/?p=338. In Jan. 2017 the FBTEE project was awarded the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Annual Digital Resource Prize.

³⁴ Gathering and recording data about clients, their professions and their places of residence was greatly facilitated by John Jeanprêtre's typescript list of STN clients entitled "Société Typographique, Correspondants, Répertoire

data concerning the subject, genre and legal status of books and contextual data about places and occupations. As events captured in the database are calibrated down to the day, it is possible to graph sales trends or map the dissemination of titles, subjects and authors; to compare reading tastes of the STN's clients across Europe; or explore the STN's business transactions with towns, clients and professional groups. And queries can be filtered by trade sector, client gender, relative illegality of books and several other criteria.³⁵

The rich potential of the database, which has now been visited more than 20,300 times by some 14,900 visitors, has brought a range of positive accolades, and its structures and approaches are being adopted by other projects, most notably the MEDiate project, which is discussed elsewhere in this volume.³⁶ But gratifying though peer feedback may be, the original FBTEE-1.0 database had several significant limitations. Above all, it was limited to one source, the STN accounts, and, as noted above, that source turns out to be less "representative" than previously thought. So although our filters ("options menus") may allow us for some purposes to construct more credibly representative subsets of data, we need to contextualize STN evidence within the wider book trade. This remains slow and painstaking work wherever we lack pre-curated data, for each new edition or work entered in the database needs to be researched. New works also need to be classified by subject and genre. This can be time-consuming.³⁷

As a result, the next phase of FBTEE (FBTEE-2.0) is taking a three-pronged approach to discovering what the French read before the Revolution. Besides seeking out well-curated data sets, we aim to triangulate STN data against other publishers' archives, though the most ambitious of this work—on the Luchtmans' archive in Amsterdam and the Desaint archives in Paris—will, due to its scale, require external grant income.³⁸ We are also in the process of ingesting data on French novels from the unpublished database prepared by emeritus Professor Angus Martin of Sydney University and his late collaborators Richard Frautschi and Vivienne Mylne with data gathered across a period of over fifty years: it covers every known French "novelesque" work produced prior to 1800.³⁹ As this data is being extracted from 1980s' software, this task presents particular challenges, as outlined in a series of recent conference papers by Dr Jason Ensor, who is leading on this part of the project.⁴⁰

Géographique" (MS 1000A in the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire de Neuchâtel). This resource is available on-line at bpun.unine.ch/pdf/BPUN_typo_correspondants_repertoire_geo.pdf. Supplementary information can be found in the library's card index of clients and occasionally the manuscript records themselves.

³⁵ On the structures of the FBTEE database and user tools, see Burrows, "Designer Notes" at fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/dsgnotes.php and the brief "User Guide" prepared by Amyas Merivale at fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/help.php.

³⁶ For reviews of the database, see above note 36; on FBTEE's alliance with MEDiate, see Montoya, "Middlebrow Literature and the European Enlightenment". Usage statistics are from Google Analytics on Jan. 30, 2017.

³⁷ Monitoring our research assistants Dr Louise Seaward and Dr Juliette Reboul revealed that data entry speeds for FBTEE-2.0 are ten to twenty times faster wherever we already have curated bibliographic data on a particular edition and title.

³⁸ Pilot work and digitisation of the Desaint archives, held in the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, have already been completed, and permissions to publish the database are in place. A pilot project on the Luchtmans' archive involving a team from Western Sydney and Amsterdam Universities was held in Nov. 2016. It involved, besides myself, Jason Ensor and, on the Amsterdam side, Professor Lisa Kuitert, Professor Paul Djistelberge, Mr Erik Jacobs and Mr Rindert Jagersma. Following our initial approach in Sept. 2015, the University of Amsterdam Library Special Collections have digitized the Luchtmans archive for online publication at luchtmansarchive.com/ with funding from Western Sydney University and a Metamorfoze grant. We hope to announce further funding for the Luchtmans project very shortly.

³⁹ The foundational data for the database was drawn from Martin et al., *Bibliographie du Genre Romanesque*. However, for the earlier part of the century, the starting point was Jones, *A List of French Prose Fiction*.

⁴⁰ The technical, digital and practical challenges of this process and the workflows involved will be described in Ensor's chapter in Burrows and Roe, *Digitizing Enlightenment* (forthcoming).

Meanwhile, I have identified sources that might best illuminate other sectors of the trade. In particular, we are ingesting the records of the pirate trade left by the amnesty and *estampillage* (book-stamping) exercise of 1777-1780, in which book trade inspectors stamped and hence legalized counterfeit books; the records of licensed print runs under the *permission simple*; and the surviving stock sales records of dead or bankrupt Parisian booksellers from 1769 to 1789.⁴¹ Data entry for the first two datasets has been completed, while work on the third is now underway.⁴² Between them these sources are expected to yield data on around 5,000,000 copies of an estimated 10,000 titles, that is to say perhaps 8-10% of all copies of French books printed in the period 1769-1789.⁴³ The new sources are particularly valuable because they are all geared towards bestselling texts. For a publisher to wish to pirate a book or pay to reproduce it under the *permission simple* legislation, it needed to be a sure-fire seller. Moreover, the pirated books were mainly protected by *privilèges*, and the most lucrative *privilèges* were held by Parisian booksellers or the institutional masters, such as the Sorbonne, for whom some of them worked. Hence the Parisian stock sale records contain many significant works.

These datasets also allow us to measure the relative scale of the French market and its various sub-sectors. For example, samplings in Worldcat suggest that between 1777 and 1789, only one in three surviving editions of the 660 works covered by the *permission simple* legislation was actually licensed. Presumably publishers remained reluctant to pay fees to the *privilège* holders.⁴⁴ Equally, documents from the *estampillage* exercise in the archives of the Parisian booksellers guild (*Chambre syndicale*), reveal that for the forty towns across eight of the twenty *Chambre syndicale* jurisdictions for which records survive, the inspectors stamped and hence legalized just over 416,000 pirated books.⁴⁵ From this data it is possible to extrapolate that the booksellers of France held around 2,000,000 copies of pirated books around the time of the amnesty and further estimate that perhaps 12,000,000 pirate copies of *permission simple* titles were printed between 1769 and 1789.⁴⁶

By considering what proportion of books in the *estampillage* survey were *permission simple* titles, we can also derive the approximate scale of the rest of the pirate sector (i.e. piracies of works not covered by the *permission simple*). To these totals we can add quasi-legal works published under *permission tacites*, which authorized the circulation of a work, but only if it was published under a false (usually foreign) imprint. Using the standard multiplier of 1,000 copies for each of the 3,663 *permission tacite* editions recorded by Robert Estivals, we can estimate that 3,663,000 copies of these works were also in circulation.⁴⁷ Finally, we can

⁴¹ The three datasets currently being added to FBTEE-1.0 to create FBTEE-2.0 are found in BNF, MS Fr 22,018-19 (*permission simple* registers); BNF, MS Fr. 21,831-4 (*estampillage* records) and BNF, MS 21,823-4 and 22,037 (stock sales). Further datasets on the illegal trade, other publishers' archives, and the French novel, will be added at a later stage (FBTEE-3.0).

⁴² I wish here to thank the research assistants charged with data interpretation and entry for these data sets: Dr Catherine Bishop, Dr Louise Seaward and Dr Juliette Reboul.

⁴³ Estimate after Buringh and van Zanden, "Charting the 'Rise of the West'". Figures for hitherto undetected religious titles in the current article suggest that their global production figures may be a significant underestimate.

⁴⁴ On how the *Permission simple* worked, see Dawson, *The French Book Trade*.

⁴⁵ For documents relating to the *estampillage* exercise for pirate books, see BNF, MS Fr 21,831-4; the most significant statistical study is Veyrin-Forrer, "Livres arrêtés, livres estampillés", however Veyrin-Forrer's totals fall well short of those given by the FBTEE-2.0 database. On the *estampillage* see also Boës and Dawson, "The Legitimation of Piracies"; Mellot and Queval, "Pour un Repérage des Contrefaçons".

⁴⁶ Burrows, *Enlightenment Best-Sellers*, chap. 7, 'The Anatomy of the Illegal Sector'.

⁴⁷ Estivals, *La Statistique Bibliographique de la France*, 288. NB. Estivals gives two figures for annual totals of "Autorisations" or "Permissions Tacites enregistrées à la Chambre Syndicale". I have used the (marginally) higher of the two. Discrepancies between the two figures usually arise from supplementary authorisations. The 1,000

compare Robert Darnton's list of *livres philosophiques* to titles found in the Bastille's secret *dépôt* in order to arrive at estimates of the trade in libertine books.⁴⁸ After a series of calculations described in an appendix to my forthcoming book *Enlightenment Best-Sellers*, my best estimate is that just short of 3,000,000 "libertine books" entered circulation in France in the twenty years before the Revolution.⁴⁹

This outline of the illegal sector is very different to previous accounts. It was indeed "enormous," as Darnton suggested, accounting for a substantial portion of 50-60,000,000 books that the "Global Historical Bibliometrics" project in the Netherlands and various other estimates concur were produced in French across Europe in the final twenty years of the *ancien régime*.⁵⁰ Indeed, my figures imply that Darnton and Chartier's suggestions that one in two books sold in the period in France were in some way illegal seems justified.⁵¹ But relatively few of them were libertine books. Well over 75% were piracies, and a significant proportion of piracies were works for which *permissions simples* became available from August 30, 1777.⁵²

Thus if we want to chart the forgotten best-sellers, illegal market or lost reading culture of pre-revolutionary France, we must scrutinize the *permission simple* registers and *estampillage* records. And we must be prepared for some surprises. Let us examine, for example, the thousands of volumes the book trade inspectors found stacked and awaiting stamping in the shop of Jean-Félix Charmet in Besançon, as outlined in my last paper in this journal.⁵³ But before we do so, I would like to offer some contextual evidence concerning trade volumes in Besançon. That evidence comes from the business of Charmet's elder brother, Charles-Antoine, who supplies one of Darnton's key case studies in *Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (1996) and was a supposed specialist in the clandestine market. He was also reputedly, along with his some-time business associate and long-time arch-rival Dominique Lépagnez, the largest book-dealer in town.⁵⁴ Darnton's website suggests, moreover, that Charles-Antoine Charmet's trade with the STN is representative of the wider book trade in Besançon.⁵⁵

The Charmet brothers appear to have worked closely—so closely in fact that Darnton for over twenty years confused the two, and thereby led me also to some erroneous conclusions concerning Jean-Félix.⁵⁶ For several years in the late 1760s and early 1770s they worked in

figure for average print-runs is widely cited: Gaskell's *New Introduction to Bibliography*, 161, claims technical and economic constraints usually limited print runs to 500-2,000 copies.

⁴⁸ Darnton's full list is found in Darnton, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature*, 11-188; Poinçot's inventory of surviving books from the Bastille's secret *dépôt* is in Dawson, *Confiscations at Customs*, 243-76.

⁴⁹ Burrows, *Enlightenment Best-Sellers*, appendix 2.

⁵⁰ Buringh and van Zanden, "Charting the 'Rise of the West'".

⁵¹ On these estimates, see above, note 14.

⁵² Final figures are not yet available through the FBTEE-2.0 database, and remain subject to data editing.

⁵³ Burrows, "Charmet and the Book Police".

⁵⁴ See Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 32-39. This case study should be supplemented by Darnton's 2014 essay on 'Charmet' at www.robertdarnton.org/literarytour/booksellers/charmet. However, as of Spring 2016, the website has been amended to make the subject of the essay Charles-Antoine Charmet, in place of his brother Jean-Félix, who was the star of *Forbidden Best-Sellers* and the original version of the essay. On this confusion, see below, note 56. At time of writing, Darnton has yet to correct cross-references on the website: his article on "Lépagnez", for example, still refers to Jean-Félix.

⁵⁵ Darnton, "Charmet".

⁵⁶ In *Forbidden Best-Sellers* and again when he published an article on "Charmet" on his website in 2014, Darnton explicitly identified the Charmet brother who purchased several thousand books from the STN in the 1770s and 1780s as Jean-Félix Charmet. I followed this identification in my article, "Charmet and the Book Police", although I noted that Charmet's dossier in the STN archive contains letters from two Charmet brothers. Furthermore, I tried to verify Darnton's identification, since both brothers were in the book trade and they only ever signed their names as "Charmet", "Charmet *l'aîné*" or "Charmet *cadet*". Following publication of my article, Darnton realised his mistake and, sometime between March and June 2016, amended his article, having read my essay and succeeded

partnership with their siblings, trading under the name Charmet *frères et soeurs*.⁵⁷ Once they went their own separate ways, the brothers each sought to corner a separate part of the Besançon book market. In total, the STN dispatched some 7,064 books to Charles-Antoine Charmet and his widow over a period of almost twenty years. Their business was the STN's longest-standing trading partner in France. Of the books the STN sent them, 1,661 were libertine works, but less than 10% of these were the sexually salacious political pamphlets that Darnton has implicated in desacralization.⁵⁸ The scale of Charles-Antoine's clandestine operations in libertine and pirated works is open to question, however. At the time of his *estampillage* inspection on August 11, 1778, he declared just thirty-two pirate copies of a mere seven titles, including the abbé Roger's *La Pratique du Jardinage*; Baume's *Chymie Expérimentale et Raisonnée*, Mignot's *Histoire de l'Empire Ottomane*; the duc de Noailles, *Mémoires Politiques et Militaires pour servir à l'Histoire de Louis XIV et de Louis XV*; and the STN's edition of Patrick Brydone's *Voyage en Sicile et à Malthe*.⁵⁹ Across the previous year, Charles-Antoine had received only three works from the STN: twenty-five copies of Robertson's *Histoire de l'Amérique*; twenty-five copies of Adam Smith's *Fragment sur les Colonies* (an opusculé lifted from *The Wealth of Nations*); and twenty copies of the first volume of the *Journal et Anecdotes Intéressantes du Voyage de Monsieur le comte de Falckenstein*, which told of Joseph II's trip to Versailles under an assumed name.⁶⁰ His business thus seems to have revolved around relatively low sales volumes of histories, travels, scientific works, military memoirs, practical manuals, and miscellaneous pirated and libertine works.

In stark contrast, Jean-Félix Charmet's *estampillage* file reveals that he had, on one particular day in August 1778, some 5,275 copies of two editions of a single pirated text—Jacques Coret's classic counter-reformation devotional manual, *L'Ange Conducteur*, which was first published in 1681 and continued to sell well until the mid-nineteenth century.⁶¹ Since Jean-Félix Charmet printed both editions, we might reasonably assume that the work was over-represented in his shop. Such an impression dissipates when we examine the *estampillage* records for other Besançon booksellers. They carried, on average, over one thousand copies of the *Ange Conducteur* in multiple editions. In total, on the days of the inspection, Besançon booksellers held 18,730 copies in a town of 32,000.⁶² Moreover, the *permission simple* registers and two surviving records for weekly book inspections at the *Chambre syndicale* show at least as many more passed through the town in the next decade.⁶³ As a regional center, we might suspect that such production was for the entire Franche-Comté, but that too is incorrect. There is solid evidence of other local booksellers handling the work in bulk: Poirson in Vesoul

in tracing the brothers' birth records. Clearly this tale of two Charmets calls for a revision of my interpretation of Jean-Félix Charmet in my 2014 article. However, it in no way impacts my more general conclusions about the book trade in that essay or the current article. On this point, see also Burrows, "Omissions and Revisions".

⁵⁷ The earliest letters in Charmet's STN's dossier, dating from 1769 to 1772, are mostly signed "Charmet frères et soeurs" and clarify that they are *Imprimeur-libraires*. See Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire de Neuchâtel, MS 1134, fols. 3-48. The appendix to Burrows, "Charmet and the Book Police" lists three editions published by the sibling partnership.

⁵⁸ Statistical data from FBTEE-1.0 database; for a more detailed breakdown, see Burrows, "Charmet and the Book Police", 37-8.

⁵⁹ Charles-Antoine's inspection is recorded at BNF, MS Fr. 21,834, fols. 118 r-119 v.

⁶⁰ See the data on Charles-Antoine Charmet's purchases in the FBTEE-1.0 database.

⁶¹ BNF, MS Fr. 21,834, fols. 168 r-v. The longevity of the *Ange Conducteur* as a best-seller is noted by Martin, *Une Religion des Livres*, 122, 279; Carel, "La Dévotion à l'Ange Gardien", 25.

⁶² The *estampillage* records for Besançon are at MS Fr. 21,834 fols. 118-93; for a breakdown by bookseller see Burrows, "Charmet and the Book Police", 45-46, table 3.

⁶³ BNF, MS Fr. 22,019 fols. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8; MS Fr. 21,927, fol. 20, "Etat des Balles, Ballots, Caisses et Malles qui ont passé à la Chambre Syndicale de Besançon pendant la Semaine Dernière [i.e. week of Aug. 24, 1779]."

declared over 6,500 copies to the *estampillage* inspectors, while P.-F. Tonnet in Dôle left 7,000 more when he died in 1781.⁶⁴

So my survey, though far from comprehensive, spotted 50,000 copies of the *Ange Conducteur* circulating in the Franche-Comté (population 800,000) in the pre-revolutionary decade. Clearly this work of personal devotions alone was reaching significantly more than the 5% of the rural population who had religious works in their will inventories.⁶⁵ These statistics suggest that it was either in universal use in towns like Besançon or reaching perhaps one in two peasant households. There is much evidence to suggest that although the *Ange Conducteur* sold mostly only where approved at diocesan level, its market was individual readers rather than ecclesiastical institutions. It was popular with hawkers (*colporteurs*), appears in peasant will inventories, and its most distinctive feature—prayers to the believer’s guardian angel to intercede for the success of every devotion—links it to acts of individual piety.⁶⁶ Hence its sales figures—if replicated elsewhere and for other key texts—require us to rethink the history of popular devotional practice in the French enlightenment and indeed the chronology and social penetration of reading in pre-revolutionary France.

But was the *Ange Conducteur* an anomaly, a regionalized forgotten counter-reformation religious bestseller surviving into an enlightened, secularizing age? The answer to this must be an unqualified no. For we are now in a position to draw up and compare bestseller lists from both the *permission simple* and *estampillage* records on piracy (Table One). The results are striking. The same two religious works head both lists—the *Ange Conducteur* and the *Journée d’un Chrétien sanctifiée par la Prière*. A work of religious instruction, the *Instructions Chrétiennes pour les Jeunes Gens* also appears on the upper reaches of both lists.

Besides these works, the “top ten” lists for the *estampillage* exercise and production under the *permission simple* contain books of hours, Christian thoughts, psalms, collections of epistle and gospel readings, catechisms and that truly perennial bestseller, *The Imitation of Christ*, which has probably sold more copies than any Christian work other than the *Bible*. Among this cacophony of Christian reading and devotional manuals are but two secular works. One was a Latin primer, Laurent Tricot’s *Rudiments de la Langue Latine, à l’Usage des Collèges de l’Université de Paris*, 5,547 copies of which were stamped at Metz and Nantes. The other was an accounting text book, François-Bertrand de Barrême’s *Comptes-faits*. This was a work which was clearly one of the secular best-sellers of the French eighteenth century, and perhaps outstripped all others in terms of sales.⁶⁷ A compilation of mathematical tables for use in accounting, it was probably as essential and ubiquitous in its day as pocket calculators were in the businesses and classrooms of the 1970s and 1980s.

The success of Barrême’s calculating tables was little short of phenomenal. In the dozen years from 1778 to 1789, *permissions simples* were granted for no less than thirty-two editions, though only five seem to survive (mostly in single copies) in library collections listed in Worldcat.⁶⁸ Similar proportions of French and Avignon editions of the work survive in Worldcat for the 1750s, 1760s and the rest of the 1770s, suggesting this level of production

⁶⁴ BNF, MS Fr. 21.834 fols. 194v-195r.; Martin, *Une Religion des Livres*, 132.

⁶⁵ See above, after Vernus, “A Provincial Perspective”.

⁶⁶ See Burrows, “Charmet and the Book Police”, 47-48

⁶⁷ The *estampillage* data has been compiled using the beta version of the FBTEE-2.0 database. We hope to publish the first datasets from the database in 2017.

⁶⁸ These five editions were published by Pierre Chirac in Tulle in 1780; Antoine Ferrand in Rouen in 1782 and 1783; veuve Leclerc in Nancy in 1781 (under the title *Tarif, par lequel on peut, avec un Grande Facilité, faire toutes Sortes de Comptes, & tous faits*); and Martial Barbou in Limoges in 1783. A further licence requested by Guillot in Paris in 1788 may relate to the “Paris: Libraires associés” edition of 1789 (an earlier such edition, dating from 1787, was clearly a piracy).

was fairly constant.⁶⁹ Barrême's *Comptes-faits* were an essential part of any general or large book dealer's stock. Hence on March 18 and 19, 1778, at a stock sale at the Paris *Chambre syndicale* following the death of the widow Musier, 454 copies of the *Comptes-faits* in multiple formats were divided up and sold off in nineteen separate lots. They were snapped up eagerly by a dozen different dealers, among them Edmé Le Jay, Louis Delalain, Claude-Marin Saugrain and François-Gabriel Mérigot.⁷⁰ Likewise, in the *estampillage* exercise of 1777-1780, inspectors encountered pirate copies of *Comptes-faits* in twenty-three out of the one hundred and nineteen premises for which inspection records survive. By way of contrast, pirated copies of the *Ange Conducteur* were only found in twenty dealerships, though generally in larger concentrations. In total, the inspectors stamped at least 2,572 pirated copies of the *Comptes-faits*, including 162 *chez* Blouet in Rennes and 380 *chez* Jean Bertrand in Besançon. There were also 1,320 copies at the premises of Matthieu in Nancy, a bookseller who provides another of Darnton's case study figures in *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, though he ordered a mere 207 copies of clandestine books from the STN.⁷¹ His trade in Barrême's book alone was thus many times more extensive.

Barrême's *Comptes-faits* deserves to be compared to the *Ange Conducteur* in another way, too. For both works date from the late seventeenth century, and both were similarly long-lived. First published and sold in Paris from the author's home ("chez l'auteur"), as part of his *Les Tarifs et Comptes faits du Grand Commerce* in 1670, Barrême's work was still in production, suitably revised, two centuries later.⁷² The latest edition listed in Worldcat was published by Garnier frères in 1877.⁷³ For more than two centuries, spanning the reign of Louis XIV, the European enlightenment, the tumultuous age of Revolutions and the romantic era, Coret's *Ange Conducteur*, Barrême's *Comptes-faits*, and other books like them sold steadily and in healthy numbers year after year, decade after decade. Yet comparatively few copies survive in libraries, since the humdrum business of elementary education, business management and the glorification of God, the stuff of life, the classroom, small businesses and death, has seldom held the attention of the librarians and scholars who built our research collections. Hence an author/title search for Voltaire's enlightenment classic *Candide* returns 165 hits in Worldcat when limited to the years of publication 1759-1789. In contrast, a search of the same years for Coret and *Ange conducteur* returns just eleven results and for Barrême and *Comptes-faits*, eighteen.⁷⁴

Thus for all the ubiquity these works once enjoyed, for all their humdrum familiarity, cultural resonance and practical importance to the daily challenges of business life and preparation for the hereafter, Coret and Barrême have been swept aside and overlooked. This was a process that began, perhaps, even in the eighteenth century, as the compilers of private

⁶⁹ In all, at least twelve editions in Worldcat date from between 1750 and 1777. French editions were produced in Paris by Nyon in 1755; veuve Gandouin in 1755; Didot in 1755; Savoye in 1766; Despilly in 1773; and Libraires associés in 1771 and 1777. A further French edition was produced at Neufchâteau by Monnoyer in 1766. Avignon imprints were published in 1757 for veuve Girard; in 1760 for Libraires associés; in 1762 for veuve Niel et fils; and in 1775 for Charles Giroud. Although Avignon was papal territory, the books produced there circulated across much of Southern France.

⁷⁰ Data from FBTEE-2.0 database, sourced from MS Fr. 21,824, fols. 119 v., 123 v., and 124 r.

⁷¹ Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 24-28.

⁷² Worldcat gives the full title of the first datable edition as *Les Tarifs et Comptes faits du Grand Commerce: ou l'on y fait les Changes d'Angleterre, d'Hollande, de Flandres, d'Allemagne, de Suisse & c. pour qu'on sache l'Addition et en quel Etat que le Change soit, les Mesures et les Poids des Principales Villes de l'Europe sont réduits aux Mesures et Poids des Principales Villes de France, le Pair des Monnoyes y est les Escontes y sont tous faits les Instructions pour faire par Règle les susdits Changes y sont expliquées brièvement* (Paris: chez l'auteur, 1670).

⁷³ This final known edition appeared under the title *Le Livre de Barême, ou Comptes faits. Comptes faits depuis 0,02 jusqu'à 100 fr... Revu et collationné avec soin par M. F. P. Pons.*

⁷⁴ All searches in Worldcat were conducted Sept. 21, 2016.

library catalogues and will inventories ignored tatty accounting textbooks lying on counting house benches or dog-eared devotional manuals passed from hand to hand within the family, or left out for use on bedroom tables or in household shrines. Nor can traditional historical methods account for the volume of such books that perished, spines broken and pages torn or soiled from pious or practical overuse. It is doubtful, then, that even the vastest survey of private library holdings could uncover the full commercial or cultural significance of such throwaway yet beloved texts. That can only be accomplished by an industrial scale “big data” digital study of the trade, one that brings together the full range of available sources on the various sectors of the publishing and book-selling business and the library holdings of private consumers. When we do that, a very different understanding of the print culture of the late eighteenth century will most likely emerge.

Of course, scholars tell an almost infinite number of stories about print culture. Among them are tales of radical enlightenment, of political contestation, of powerful secular discourses, of anti-clericalism, scandal and *philosophie*. Such stories are underpinned by the heroic self-narratives of the *philosophes* themselves; the beguiling mythology of the desacralization school; and the self-serving sales patter of long-dead booksellers. Such traders boasted of acquiring, and sought out, the latest enlightenment and libertine works to attract a small but valuable clientele of “high net worth individuals” to their shops. However, booksellers’ talk of the importance of highly illegal works to their businesses in no way reflects sales volumes, but rather their hopes that an aristocratic elite on whom they depended would make lucrative repeat purchases from their most expensive stock.⁷⁵ One copy of the thirty-nine-volume folio edition of the *Encyclopédie* or a complete set of Raynal’s *Histoire Philosophique* was, in cash terms, worth many hundreds of cheap, popular devotional manuals or mathematical tables. Tales of a heroic enlightenment in print certainly merit reflection and exploration, and may take us some way towards explaining the turbulent social, cultural and political transformations of the enlightenment era. However, such narratives generally exclude the routine daily encounters and interactions of ordinary flesh-and-blood men, women and school children of the *ancien régime* with the printed word. The transformative powers of print were experienced more often in the school room, the counting house or the pew than the coffee house or the *salon*. Mostly they shaped and guided French subjects in their studies, their business dealings and their prayers rather than their political ruminations or speculative philosophizing. And the culture shaped in those spaces and activities was often insular, traditional, task-orientated, conservative and pious. Historians of the enlightenment and revolutionary era would do well to remember that.

Rank	Permission Simple titles	Copies licensed	Titles from <i>Estampillage</i> data	Copies stamped
1	<i>Journée du Chrétien</i>	160,650	<i>Ange Conducteur</i>	25,686
2	<i>Ange Conducteur</i>	125,400	<i>Journée du Chrétien</i>	17,509
3	<i>Comptes faits</i>	78,300	<i>Instructions Chrétiennes pour les Jeunes Gens</i>	12,993
4	<i>Imitation de Christ</i>	66,300	<i>Instructions Chrétiennes de la Jeunesse</i>	9,874
5	<i>Instructions Chrétiennes pour les Jeunes Gens</i>	48,800	<i>Pensées sur les plus Importantes Vérités de la Religion</i>	9,399

Table One Best-selling works according to the *estampillage* visitation records and *permission simple* registers (data from FBTEE-2.0 database).

⁷⁵ For multiple examples of this sort of sales patter, see Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 8-13.

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