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Pascal Bastien and Daniel Roche, eds., *Siméon-Prosper Hardy: Mes Loisirs, ou Journal d'événements tels qu'ils parviennent à ma connoissance (1753-1789)*, Vol. 1 (1753-1770). Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008. 852 pp. Preface, chronology, bibliography and appendices. CDN \$65.00 (pb). ISBN: 978-2-7637-8543-1.

Review by Kenneth Loiselle, Trinity University.

On many an evening from the mid-1760s to the first year of the French Revolution, one would have found bookseller Siméon-Prosper Hardy (1729-1806) dutifully at his desk in his apartment on the left bank. It was likely here that he composed the majority of his rich chronicle of eighteenth-century Paris, *Mes loisirs, ou Journal d'événements tels qu'ils parviennent à ma connoissance*. The current volume under review reproduces his entries from 1753 to 1770 and represents the first installment of an ambitious project to publish Hardy's work over twelve volumes. This is a timely enterprise as the manuscript of *Mes loisirs* at the Bibliothèque Nationale has become eroded due to heavy consultation. A collective, transatlantic effort involving French and Canadian entities, this edition is the fruit of historians associated with the Institut d'histoire moderne et contemporaine (CNRS-ENS) and those working with Pascal Bastien at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). [1]

Like his contemporary Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Hardy is a well-known point of reference for those working on the pre-Revolutionary period and portions of *Mes loisirs* already have been reprinted elsewhere. But this current effort far surpasses earlier attempts in both scope and content. In the first instance, it intends to offer a complete picture of Hardy's work, making available the entirety of *Mes loisirs* rather than selections. But it is above all in the presentation of material that this edition offers a real contribution to scholars. Pascal Bastien and Daniel Roche's succinct introduction offers a biographical sketch of the little-known Hardy and places him in the early modern tradition of citizens writing and reflecting about their emerging cities. Many of Hardy's pages bristle with helpful footnotes offering biographical, bibliographical, geographical and lexical information. The volume concludes with a general chronology, Hardy's book inventories, as well as a selective bibliography of work on eighteenth-century Paris that draws evenly from both French and English-language scholarship. Beyond the text itself, there is a companion website that offers a helpful index searchable by name or place.[2] At some point in the future, perhaps this website will serve as a platform where the complete text will be made available to consult. An electronic version has obvious benefits and such a task has precedence, such as the journal of late eighteenth-century diplomat, Marie-Daniel-Bourrée de Corberon. [3]

This first volume draws from three main sources: Hardy's reading of the government's *Gazette de France*, news reports generated from his extended correspondence network in Paris and the provinces as well as his own observations or experiences during his wanderings about the city; he was indeed somewhat of a *flâneur avant la lettre*. Immediately striking is the ever increasing energy he devoted to his work, especially from the second half of the 1760s onwards. From 1753 to 1763, Hardy dashed off a mere six entries, while in 1770 alone we find nearly 230. His failure as a bookseller—catalogues of his shop have yet to be found beyond 1760—probably goes much of the way in explaining this trend. While *Mes loisirs* cannot be considered a particularly rich ego-document as it reveals little about his private life

or daily routine, it nevertheless has much to say about the stress zones of the Old Regime in its final decades. In this first volume, the reader traces the growing political tension between the parlements and the monarchy, notably the Brittany affair. And if Hardy represents the man in the street of Enlightenment France, it is clear that Louis XV initially was badly losing the public-relations war with the parlements. By early 1765, documents outlining the position of the Parlements of Paris and Rennes flooded the public sphere: *Mes loisirs* reproduces parliamentary minutes, letters to the king and remonstrances, the latter he approved of as “très belles” (p. 369) on at least one occasion. Meanwhile, the king and his ministers responded with brief, antagonistic statements of disapproval such as “You have ruined my province of Brittany” (p. 80). However, as historians have noted, the monarchy soon recognized that print could be mobilized to further its own position and subsequently put into action its own propaganda machine that later would churn out pamphlet after pamphlet during the attempted Maupeou reforms. [4] Hardy also charts the birth, marriage, convalescence, illness and death of figures of the royal family and administration and covers the Jesuit expulsion from the kingdom in detail and with satisfaction—a likely result of his Jansenist proclivities and friendships.

Beyond the world of high politics, Hardy also devotes considerable attention to daily life in the capital. The Paris of Richard Cobb and Arlette Farge are well represented in his pages, where murder, theft, abduction, suicide, fire, trampling crowds, collapsing buildings and periodic flooding of the Seine all contribute to a violent and unstable urban ecology. At times, Hardy’s entries prefigure the *faits divers* of the following century and can be shockingly macabre in their detail. One striking example was the botched execution of the comte de Lally in 1766 (p. 155) where his beheading became a gruesome family affair of father and son *bourreaux*—a vivid reminder that the justice the Old Regime meted out could be as equally brutal as the crimes it persecuted. Much of the unrest in this period was related to bread shortages that Hardy began to report consistently from 1766 onward, but he is careful to point out that the poor did not merely turn to crime and vagabondage. They also creatively made use of the public sphere in their own distinctive way. When bread prices continued to rise over the course of 1767 and 1768, individuals took to plastering notices on buildings critical not only of ministers for their ineffectiveness but also of the king himself. And as the subsistence crisis worsened, rhetoric against the government escalated: “We will set fire to the four corners of Paris,” declared one visibly desperate author in mid-November 1768, “and we will start with the lieutenant de police’s residence” (p. 365). Reflective of his social position, Hardy disapproved of these forms of popular protest, labeling them time and again as “abominable” and “seditious.”

Conspicuously absent from this volume is any sustained coverage of the ideas or institutions of the Enlightenment during a time when the authors of the High Enlightenment were well-known, the folio edition of the *Encyclopédie* was coming to completion, and Masonic lodges and academies could be found throughout the kingdom. Such an omission is not entirely surprising as the *philosophes* were afforded little place in the *Gazette de France* from which this volume of *Mes loisirs* drew much of its material. Furthermore, a cursory glance at Hardy’s book catalogues in the appendix suggests that he had a penchant towards the conventional, primarily selling works of secular and religious history, apologetic treatises, as well as books of devotion. And when Hardy does offer his own critical reading of the Enlightenment, his view is entirely negative; Voltaire and d’Holbach are dismissed as “perverted” and their writings as “poison in society” (pp. 727-28).

For scholars interested in eighteenth-century politics, society and culture, Hardy’s journal offers multiple points of entry. We are indebted to him and especially to the team of historians who have breathed new life into *Mes loisirs*. Essential for any specialist of the period, this new edition is a major achievement and will be mined for years to come.

## NOTES

[1] Bastien has shown what can be done with Hardy's text in "Fête populaire ou cérémonial d'État? Le rituel de l'exécution publique selon deux bourgeois de Paris (1718-1789)," *French Historical Studies*, 24 (2001): 501-526.

[2] See <http://www.mesloisirs.uqam.ca/page/intro.php>.

[3] Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire (Université de Nice) and Dominique Taurisson (CNRS-Montpellier) co-edited Corberon's travel journal. On the potential of such electronic versions, see their thoughtful essay collection, *Les Ego-documents à l'heure de l'électronique: Nouvelles approches des espaces et des réseaux relationnels* (Montpellier: Presses universitaires de Montpellier, 2003).

[4] David Hudson, "In Defense of Reform: French Government Propaganda during the Maupeou Crisis," *French Historical Studies*, 8 (1973): 51-76.

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