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Geoffrey Turnovsky, *The Literary Market: Authorship and Modernity in the Old Regime*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 286 pages. \$59.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8122-4195-2.

Review by Ourida Mostefai, Boston College.

This book is a study of the evolution of the literary field that seeks to promote a new understanding of the relationship of writers to the literary market and to the commercialization of their works. Examining how writers became “modern” through the process of publication, it shows how this act of making oneself “public” was integrated by writers into rhetorical and often highly polemical self-presentations. In so doing, the book examines and debunks a number of clichés, including the enduring myths of writers “living by the pen” and of authorial poverty, and unveils the paradoxes and complexities of writers’ negotiations with institutions of ancien regime France.

In his re-evaluation of the birth of the modern author and reconsideration of the market, Turnovsky rejects the notion of an abrupt break from the past and posits instead a basic continuity with the values and behaviors of the early modern period. His book shows that the system of patronage, although in decline, continued to have a profound impact on writers’ behaviors and practices. It also demonstrates that there was nothing natural or self-evident about writers’ preference for the market over aristocratic patronage. Turnovsky contests the conventional historical account of the emergence of the modern writer predicated on the assumption that the passage from patronage to market was made possible by the growing opportunities offered to writers by the availability of income received from publishers, and by the strengthening of copyright laws and literary property. Instead this study uncovers a more complex and more ambivalent struggle for independence that leads to a better understanding of the changes in literary practices in early modern France and of the ways in which modernity took root and developed within early modern culture.

Studying the evolution of the objective conditions that shaped authorial practices (the expansion of the book trade, the changes to the theories and practices of censorship), Turnovsky argues that, even though the changing conditions in the public sphere had a significant influence, they did not directly produce the changes to the status of the writer. In order to better understand the process of modernization as a move away from the traditional system of patronage and an entry into the realm of the modern market, the book proposes to “denaturalize” the desire for independence from patronage so as to explore its meaning and significance as well as its contradictions.

In examining the transition from patronage to market, this book considers not only objective factors, such as the expansion of the print trade, but also the very subjective and polemical claims made by writers in the fierce and constant debates waged about the status of men of letters and their authority and influence in society. Contesting the overreliance on the part of most historians on the so-called objective circumstances in the lives of authors, Turnovsky carefully analyzes their use of economic language to convey a sense of the writers’ authority and

legitimacy and show how this fails to correspond to the “objective” reality of the writers’ commercial dealings with patrons and publishers.

The book is concerned not only with the changes in the public sphere, but more importantly with the shifting mentalities of writers, and with the ways in which cultural conventions and standards are the object of constant debates and polemics. Turnovksy uncovers many ambiguities, contradictions, and complexities in the writer’s engagement with money and commerce. He also shows how the contradictory dimension of the market must be seen as simultaneously liberating and oppressive. Warning against “bipolar” accounts of the literary market—divided between a positive view of the market as deliverance from subservience to the system of patronage and a negative vision of the writer subject to the inequities of crass commercialism—the book proposes instead to consider these two conflicting and competing images of the writer’s dependence and emancipation as “two sides of the same coin” (p. 5).

Through a number of cases studies devoted to major authors such as Corneille, Diderot, Helvétius, D’Alembert, Voltaire, and Rousseau, along with “minor” ones such as Jacques-Pierre Brissot, Fenouillot de Falbaire, and Luneau de Boisjermain, Turnovsky explores the aspirations and expectations of those writers who seek to establish literary identities in the literary market and emphasizes the ways in which these identities are the product of writers’ investments, but also of their anxieties. Through a careful examination of the strategic responses of writers to the dilemmas facing them in the market, this book allows us to move away from an anachronistic, post-romantic, vision of the writer, torn between the impossible choice of embracing or resisting the market.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one explores the question of “When and how did writers become modern.” This section challenges the assumption that the birth of the author is predicated on writers’ growing independence from political, cultural, and social institutions made possible by the increased opportunities offered by an expanding book trade. Chapter one is devoted to the exploration of the case of Corneille, in particular the criticism leveled against the playwright for paying too much attention to the commercialization of his plays and for showing too much interest in monetary profits. Situating the anti-Corneille stance in its rhetorical and polemical context, Turnovsky argues against the conventional image of Corneille as a commercially-oriented writer. Instead of a professional looking to make a living by his pen, Turnovsky points to Corneille’s immodesty in attributing the play’s success to his sole talent (“Je ne dois qu’à moi seul toute ma Renommée”) and shows that the audacity of this claim to possess a self-sufficient talent is what fueled the controversy surrounding the *Querelle du Cid*. Corneille’s uncouth arrogance is, in this context, contrasted to his adversaries’ civility and skill for *mondanité*.

This criticism of Corneille’s publishing practice and his refusal of commerce are signs of the desire on the part of writers in this period for integration into an aristocratic society and their allegiance to its values. Emphasizing continuity with Corneille’s age, rather than rupture with it, chapter two argues that publication during the Enlightenment grew out of this seventeenth-century tradition. The new philosophes, it is argued, embodied intellectual conventions heavily indebted to aristocratic patterns shaped in seventeenth-century literary polemics such as the *Querelle du Cid*. Philosophy as it was practiced by the philosophes continued to be rooted in the traditional values and practices of ancien regime France. Autonomy for the philosophes did not signify a rejection of the norms of sociability of the seventeenth-century *homme de lettres*. Positing autonomy as “ambiguous notion” (p. 69), Turnovsky provides examples of how intellectual outsiders could also simultaneously be considered ancien regime insiders, as the

cases of Helvétius and D'Alembert demonstrate. Both Claude-Adrien Helvétius, who published *De l'Esprit* with a royal privilege and was condemned for it, and d'Alembert, the co-director of the *Encyclopédie*, are seen as awkwardly negotiating autonomy and social integration: "ultimately, being esteemed in polite society remained an imperative for the writer aspiring to be a *philosophe*" (author's italics, pp. 90-91). Turnovsky's reading here confirms Antoine Lilti's analysis of the process of *mondanité* and its centrality in Enlightenment culture. [1]

Part II is comprised of three chapters. Chapter three shows that the concept of "living by the pen"—omnipresent in the polemics of the philosophes against their enemies—does not, as generally viewed, signify the liberation of writers from patronage or the ascendancy of writing as real profession. This phrase, Turnovsky suggests, ought to remain in quotation marks. The definition of the anti-philosophe as "sans bien, sans métier, sans gloire," in the words of Voltaire's 1760 *Pauvre diable*, is juxtaposed against Diderot's use of the same trope in the *Neveu de Rameau*. This projection of the same polemical move underlying Voltaire's *Pauvre diable*—using the depiction of the struggle to make a living to delegitimize their enemies—thereby defines the adversaries negatively on the basis of their participation in the literary commerce of the period (as in the cases of Catherine-Elie Fréron, or Lefranc de Pompignan, arguably Voltaire's most notorious enemies). Chapter four further explores Enlightenment writers' ambiguous relationship to the book trade, showing how a self-described authorial poverty is used as evidence of symbolic success. The eighteenth-century witnesses a gradual devaluing of publishers, henceforth caricatured as commercial tyrants with no interest in the cultural value of books or in their authors.

Chapter five concludes with an examination of the case of Jean-Jacques Rousseau as offering "one of the most compelling performances of sacrifice and victimhood" (p. 183). Turnovsky argues that the emergence of a new authorial anxiety about publishing is a prefiguration and anticipation of the modern behavior of the artist. Examining both Rousseau's correspondence with his publishers (Marc-Michel Rey in Amsterdam, and Nicolas-Bonaventure Duchesne in Paris) as well as his *Dialogues*, Turnovsky uncovers the demands made by the writer for a new kind of relationship with his publisher. In sharp contrast to Voltaire, who exhibits cool composure and irony when dealing his publishers, Rousseau's dealings with his publishers are intense, personal, and fraught with tension, and his feverish anxiety reflects his concerns that publication risks altering the meaning of his words and their interpretation and in this way significantly affecting the shaping of the moral figure of the author in the eyes of the public.

This book offers a major revision of the history of authorship. It is well researched, original, and clearly and convincingly argued. Grounded in a thorough and exhaustive knowledge of the history of authorship, copyright, and publishing, it challenges received ideas and proposes new answers to old questions. It also offers a new and illuminating interpretation of the relationship of leading writers to the literary market and to their own works. This is, in other words, an important book that will have repercussions beyond the field of early modern French studies.

NOTES

[1] Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).

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