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Lise Andries, *Bandits, pirates et hors-la-loi au temps des Lumières*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021. 248 pp. €68 (hb) 00978-2-406-10990-7, €29.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-406-10989-1.

Review by Micah Alpaugh, University of Central Missouri.

The Age of Reason, despite or perhaps due to its obsession with order, became fascinated with bandits, pirates, and other outlaws. Lise Andries compellingly surveys the proliferating literature on such figures during the eighteenth century, examining the many ways outlaws became objects of attention during the Enlightenment era.

Before the Age of Revolutions, outlaws already fascinated Enlightenment Europe. Pirates (of both land and sea) became compelling anti-heroes. In France, salt-smuggler Louis Mandrin and the *Cours des Miracles* crime-boss Cartouche grew more famous than any ocean buccaneer, spiking a proliferation of pulp “*biographies criminelles*,” including in the famous Bibliothèque Bleue series of relatively cheap, widely distributed paperbacks (p. 7). While stretching the line between fact and fiction, this literature increasingly turned outlaws into “*personnages romanesques*” over the century’s course, portraying such figures more positively as the Enlightenment era progressed (p. 11).

Amidst the French state’s centralizing pretensions, *Cours de Miracles* (Dens of Thieves) persisted as places of “*non-droits*,” sometimes even appearing delineated as such on the era’s maps (p. 22). The literary public became fascinated by how such areas functioned by their own rules, outside the purview of king or church, composed by whim or custom by the underworld’s inhabitants—showing the fragility of laws, conventions, and morality. Carrying out many of their deeds at night, whilst normal inhabitants slept, outlaws seemed to lead inverse lives a world apart from the *mœurs* of the law-abiding.

Rather than a rarity, this counter-society touched the lives of much of the kingdom’s population, whether the approximately thirteen percent of Parisians (and untold plurality of provincials) working as prostitutes, the vast numbers willingly participating in the informal economy, or the many who bought contraband untaxed salt, tobacco or other illicit goods. Whereas the Caribbean’s “Golden Age of Piracy” ended amidst worsening state repression in the 1720s, the French state made little progress against crime on land. Though both land and sea pirates were often dead before age thirty, violent deaths in battle or via the hangman’s noose seemed only to heighten their appeal. The “last dying speeches” (p. 46) of smugglers on the gallows and real or fictionalized confessions remained popular literary devices, speaking truth to power in ways denied to the living.

Whereas English literature looked back upon a lost age of piracy at sea, French crime literature focused on their continued reality on land. The coming-of-age novels that marked the era (Andries focuses on Alain-René Lesage, the Abbé Prévost, Denis Diderot and the Marquis de Sade--though also could easily have incorporated Voltaire, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, and just about every author of picaresque novels as well) often had their protagonists cheated, seduced, or assaulted by underworld figures as a way of showing the world's nature. While the *pícaro* began as a figure of comedy, picaresque literature across the eighteenth century increasingly delivered powerful social critiques--though with their sharpest bite reserved for those operating under the protection of ruling regimes.

Andries briefly crosses from the Old Regime into 1789 to examine the Great Fear, the series of rolling panics coinciding with the anti-feudal uprisings of July-August 1789. Despite the breadth of preceding outlaw literature, she posits that the hordes of brigands conjured were a revolutionary creation, with “*assassin*” and “*voleur*” the normal juridical terms instead (p. 137). Despite the folk-hero status that some criminals had come to enjoy across the preceding decades, potential assault by real outlaws drove much of France to panic over the weeks following the Bastille's fall. It would have been fascinating, however, for Andries to have looked at wider manifestations of outlaw culture in the early Revolution, as common French citizens took the outlaw culture's lessons to heart to seize foodstuffs, burn customs barriers, refuse internal tariffs, and help abolish feudalism. Not unlike glorified outlaws, early revolutionary insurgents reconstituted the social order by force.

Finally, Andries's book looks ahead to the outlaw culture in the Romantic era, as violence captivated the attention of those fascinated by Edmund Burke's notion of the beautiful and the sublime, as well as the German *Sturm und Drang* movement. Romantic outlaws could embody the struggle against tyranny and a “*désir de revanche sociale*” that became common tropes among many youthful writers (p. 172). At the same time, such outlaws came to appear archaic and primitive, glorious in their ultimate futility.

An engaging thematic survey of outlaw literature, Andries builds on now-classics like Michael Kwass's *Contraband* [1] to show the animating power of deviancy during the Enlightenment era. For understanding the French Revolution's origins, *Bandits, pirates, et hors-la-loi* evinces the growing willingness of French writers to think outside of law and custom to consider alternative social constructs--and indeed portray deviancy in increasingly positive terms as the Old Regime drifted to its final *dénouement*.

NOTE

[1] Michael Kwass, *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Micah Alpaugh
University of Central Missouri
alpaugh@ucmo.edu

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