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Bette W. Oliver, *From Royal to National: The Louvre Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2006). ix + 110pp. Bibliography and index. \$45.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN-10: 0-7391-1422-0 and ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-1422-3; and \$18.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN-10: 0-7391-1861-7 and ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-1861-0.

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Bette Oliver's accessible study of the history of the the Louvre Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale from 1789 to 1815 focuses on the transformation of royal collections, formerly accessible to an elite few, into public institutions, theoretically open to all. The book traces this fraught trajectory of nationalization by providing an overview of the changes in collecting, conservation, and display practices within each institution, and examining their shifting priorities in light of the differing political goals of successive regimes. Oliver emphasizes that despite the political and social instability of the Revolutionary period, the symbolic value attached to the Louvre and the Bibliothèque Nationale remained constant. Both Republican and Imperial governments believed these cultural monuments served as sites that publicly embodied the power, wealth and ideals of the French nation.

Oliver's study juxtaposes the historical development of the Louvre with that of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Her emphasis on their common trajectories is noteworthy for it opens a broader perspective on the nature of high culture implicated in the Revolutionary and Imperial projects than is traditionally offered in art history and museum studies. Her account is divided into five chapters and organized chronologically. The first section opens with a short pre-history of private aristocratic collections in France under the Old Regime, and then examines the drive to nationalize both the royal museum and library at the start of the Revolution. Chapter two focuses on the legacy of the Interior Minister, Jean Roland, who strove to place the *Muséum Français* (as it was then known) and the national library under the direct legal protection of the French government in order to preserve their valuable holdings for future generations.

Roland's legislation ensured the survival of both institutions during the Terror, and chapter three examines both the growing menace posed by ardent Jacobins to collections confiscated from the royal family, émigrés, and monasteries, and the efforts expended by museum and library administrators to save them. Problems of display, classification, and storage move to the foreground in the chapter on the Directory. Following victories in military campaigns in Belgium, Italy and Austria, a steady flow of works of art, books and manuscripts were sent back to Paris. The government enthusiastically supported this practice of confiscating and expatriating valuable objects—for example in 1797, one-fifth of the Committee of Public Instruction's budget went to museums, libraries, and library depots—for it felt that these new acquisitions served to bolster the reputation of the French republic both nationally and internationally.

Oliver's study closes with an examination of the Musée Napoléon and the Bibliothèque Impériale during the Empire, when Paris, bursting with the spoils of Revolutionary wars and of Napoleon's conquests in Germany and Spain, truly became the cultural capital of the Western world. Napoleon strove not only to enrich each collection but was also interested in renovating and expanding the buildings that housed national treasures. His most ambitious plan, which was never carried out, was to attach the Bibliothèque Impériale to the Musée Napoléon. This decision demonstrates his desire to increase the prestige of both

institutions and to remake the city of Paris in his image. It lends support, moreover, to Oliver's main point that the museum and the national library were conceptually linked in the Revolutionary and Imperial projects of cultural reform and national glorification. Napoleon's aspirations for both institutions suffered as a result of his second defeat in 1815; previously vanquished countries, now the victors, demanded the repatriation of lost works of art and valuable manuscripts, and this ultimately led to the dismembering of the collections of national museum and library which been built up over the last two decades. The final section of the book provides a quick overview of enduring problems and more recent challenges faced by the Louvre and the Bibliothèque Nationale, such as the difficulties posed by growing collections, increasing space constraints, and modern tourism.

Throughout the text, Oliver moves fluidly between providing a detailed—at times even too detailed—historical overview of major political events and a discussion of the corresponding policy changes that occurred at the national museum and library. She demonstrates that the creation of nationalized public institutions was a fraught project, one in which even seemingly unquestionable good fortune, such as the confiscation of artistic and literary treasures from abroad, led to complex bureaucratic, structural, and financial problems that were not easily fixed. These included difficulties of properly transporting and preserving plundered objects, the lack of space for displaying and storing expanded collections, and an insufficient number of staff members to accommodate new visitors. More significantly, Oliver's joint discussion of historical and cultural developments demonstrates that the two are interrelated. Regime change from 1789 to 1815 necessarily brought about changes in cultural institutions designed to embody both the nation and its ideals.

Oliver, moreover, does not treat the evolution of policy and practice at the national library and museum as abstract bureaucratic responses to altered historical circumstance. She attempts to rescue from oblivion many of the administrators responsible for key decisions made at each institution; indeed, this would seem one of the primary contributions of her study. The work of Jean Roland, who had the foresight to put both sites under the protection of the government in 1792, and of Sebastien Roch Nicolas Chamfort and Jean-Louis Carra, who struggled to safeguard and even hide the royal collections within the newly formed national library shortly before the start of the Terror, are especially emphasized. Oliver also attempts to flesh out the character of these men rather than simply reducing them to the changes they enacted. The inclusion of background information about the three heightens the reader's sense of the efforts they expended and the sacrifices they made to ensure the survival of these institutions. Roland, Chamfort and Carra all lost their lives during the Terror when their patriotism was called into question, and their deaths serve to reinforce Oliver's assertion of the interconnectedness of politics and high culture in the Revolutionary project. Even institutions created to protect and promote the national heritage, goals that might seem to be beyond reproach, were as vulnerable to attack and upheaval as any other segment of French society.

The concluding chapter provides a thoughtful coda to the narrative of the historical development the national library and museum. This section, which briefly sketches out central moments in the evolution of the Louvre and the Bibliothèque Nationale since 1815, demonstrates that key issues both institutions confront in the present are legacies of their nationalization in the eighteenth century. Lack of funds to protect, preserve and display collections remains a central concern, as does the problem of adequate space for exhibition and storage as both institutions expand. The provenance of objects continues to be a pressing issue, especially after World War Two when items belonging to private citizens that had been seized by the Nazis were returned to public collections for safekeeping. Once again the enrichment of these institutions is seen to be the result of loss, plunder and war.

Oliver's study thus offers a survey of the historical stages of the Louvre's and the Bibliothèque Nationale's development. But the wealth of compelling facts included in the text about the nationalization of these two cultural institutions raise several fundamental questions about the intersection of politics and culture which are not sufficiently addressed. One concerns the relationship

between the creation of the national library and museum and Revolutionary ideology. Did their very existence incarnate Revolutionary values or did their collections, and the expansion of their collections, also play a role? If the latter is true, and the extent to which their changing inventory is detailed suggests this is so, what ideals were these collections supposed to represent? Moreover if, as Oliver suggests, these institutions served an educational function, what attitudes were they designed to shape and who was the intended audience? Was it scholars and artists, who continued to have the greatest access to the collections, or the general public as well? How important a role were the national museum and library seen to play in reshaping social beliefs and mores more generally? Although these questions may seem straightforward, I do not believe that the answers are. A more sustained attempt to unravel or to account for the complex relationship between these sites and the Revolutionary program needs to be made in order for the reader to appreciate Oliver's claims about the significance of these institutions during this era.

Oliver might also have discussed more directly what nationalization actually meant during the Revolution and Empire. Was it simply a matter of accessibility, that is, private collections becoming open to the public? Or did it also entail concrete changes in the process of acquiring works, exhibition strategies, and inventory practices? If so, how do these concerns intersect with the project of social reform and renewal? For example, Oliver points out that after the royal art collection was nationalized, a debate ensued between the Museum Commission created to oversee this transformation and the private art dealer Jean-Baptiste Pierre Lebrun who objected to its decision to hang works in an aesthetic arrangement rather than divided into national schools and chronology. This argument was not just couched in terms of outmoded versus modern museological practices but also as a conflict between anti-republicanism and enlightened thinking. But what makes a hanging program Republican? It is simply a matter of rejecting the taste of the Old Regime or were specific cultural values, such as order, egalitarianism, rationality, believed to symbolize the new republic, also invoked? [1]

Definitions of nationalization are further called into question at a key moment in the development of the national museum described by Oliver: the decision in 1797 to create a museum specializing in French art at Versailles, while keeping the best French paintings for the Musée Central in Paris. How does the separation of the French school of painting serve to strengthen the Musée Central's role as a national cultural institution? Were decisions about which works to jettison based simply on quality and aesthetics or were the subject matter and themes illustrated by these paintings significant factors as well? Another issue raised but unanswered here is whether the definition of what constituted a national cultural monument shifted along with changes in Revolutionary regimes—let alone between the Republic and the Empire.

Similar questions are raised by Oliver's discussion of the national library, which one senses is her true passion. She claims that Joseph Van Praet, who presided the longest of all directors during the Revolutionary period, made decisive contributions to the transformation of the royal collection into a national institution. She ascribes this successful metamorphosis to his continuing acquisition of books and his re-organization of the Department of Printed Books. But what makes this re-organization a nationalizing gesture?

The complex and triangulated relationship between politics, high culture and the public might have been engaged more productively through a sustained analysis of primary documents, such as political speeches, newspaper articles, pamphlets, and private correspondence produced during the Revolution and Empire. As Oliver notes, politicians and administrators of the newly created national museum and library repeatedly discussed both plans for daily operation and the long term goals of each institution. There were, moreover, moments of serious contention and debate about the role and function of these sites. A crucial example in this regard is the struggle Roland had to undertake simply to create a national museum that would stand for the values of the French Republic. In 1793, the art dealer LeBrun, the harshest critic of the Interior Minister's decisions about hanging and personnel, took his objections

public in a twenty page pamphlet entitled *Réflexions sur le muséum national*. LeBrun's complaints are briefly glossed but Roland's response, an open letter sent to newspapers two days after the publication of LeBrun's diatribe, is only mentioned in passing. Yet Roland's public explanation of the government's cultural program would likely offer important insight into the symbolic and social role attributed to the arts by the Revolutionary regime. Overall, the sparse presence of eighteenth-century voices limits Oliver's text. Without the words of both partisans and critics, a sense of the urgency and the stakes in the debates about the nationalization of the library and the museum are lost.[2]

Also lacking here is any discussion of the reaction of French citizens for whom these institutions were created. Oliver mentions once in passing and only in reference to the museum, that "the opening of the Muséum Français was generally appreciated by the public" (p. 35). This statement, however, reveals little about the response to what she contends was a major cultural and institutional shift. Moreover, it seems to indicate that there existed a unified public whose reaction could be summed up so swiftly. Such a proposition has been contested by Thomas Crow who has persuasively argued that the second half of the eighteenth century was marked by intense debate and uncertainty about just who and what defined the public for the visual arts, and by Richard Wrigley who pointed out that consensus in the public sphere was a subject of nostalgic regret by 1850s.[3] Given these cautionary observations, and the fact that differing accounts of public opinion (or manifestations of the opinion of various publics) were published in newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets that are accessible for scholarly investigation, Oliver's reductive categorization of public response is problematic. Since both the library and the museum were nationalized for the purpose of public instruction, study of their educational mission—or even their evolution—calls for engagement with the opinion of those for whom they were created, or the critics who presumed to speak for them. Did they serve as sites that functioned to unify the French by providing a sense of shared heritage and ideals or were they contested spaces, where the meaning of national values and identity was shifting and uncertain?

Oliver's short study of the history of the Louvre and the Bibliothèque Nationale serves to remind us of the importance held by the arts and letters in the construction of French national identity during the Revolution and Empire, as well as suggesting their continued relevance to current debates about the distinctiveness of French culture in the twenty-first century. Yet in the end, such a complex and timely subject may require a more nuanced and in-depth analysis than this work provides.

NOTES

[1] Questions such as these are engaged in Andrew McCellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1999).

[2] This kind of primary material informs analyses of the interaction between high culture and politics during the Revolutionary period and the Empire in works such as Philippe Bordes and Régis Michel, eds., *Aux armes et aux arts!: les arts de la Révolution 1789-1799* (Paris: Adam Biro, 1988); Régis Michel, *Le beau idéal ou l'art du concept* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989); Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995); Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David After the Terror* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999); McCellan, *Inventing the Louvre*; Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002); Philippe Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David: Empire to Exile* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005); David O'Brien, *After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting and Propaganda under Napoleon* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

[3] Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 1-22; Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 10.

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