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Reading, Writing, and Publishing in Eighteenth-Century France: A Case Study in the Sociology of Literature

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ROBERT DARNTON

Reading, Writing, and Publishing in Eighteenth-Century
France: A Case Study in the Sociology of Literature

Non numerantur sed ponderantur.
—Marc Bloch¹

HISTORIANS HAVE always taken what a society writes, publishes, and reads as a guide to its culture, but they have never taken all its books as guidebooks. Instead, they select a few works as representative of the whole and settle down to write intellectual history. Of course those select few may not deserve to serve as cultural attachés. If chosen without proportional representation, they may give a distorted view of reading habits in the past. Nowhere is the culturopomorphic distortion produced by miscast classics more at issue than in the study of the French Enlightenment, a subject located at the crossroads between the traditional history of ideas and more recent trends of social history.

Social historians tend to see the Enlightenment as a social phenomenon—one of the forces of “innovation” opposing “inertia” in the Old Regime (to use the vocabulary of the *Annales* school). They attempt to situate the Enlightenment within a general cultural context rather than to explicate its texts. And they study culture quantitatively, often working from statistics of authorship or book production. This essay will survey their work in order to see what conclusions can be drawn concerning writing and reading in eighteenth-century France and will then attempt to show how that work might be supplemented by an investigation of eighteenth-century publishing. Publishing was an activity where social, economic, and cultural forces naturally converged. But it cannot be understood, in the eighteenth century, without reference to political factors. So a final section will deal with politics and publishing as an aspect of the prerevolutionary crisis.

I

The quantitative study of eighteenth-century culture goes back to an article published sixty years ago by Daniel Mornet. Mornet tried to measure literary taste under the Old Regime by tallying up titles in five hundred catalogues of private libraries, which had mostly been printed for auctions in the Paris area between 1750 and 1780. He found one lonely copy of Rousseau's *Contrat social*. Eighteenth-century libraries contained a surprisingly small percentage of the other Enlightenment classics, he discovered. Instead their shelves bulged with the works of history's forgotten men and women: Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe, Mme. de Graffigny, and Mme. Riccoboni. Eighteenth-century booklovers divided French literature into "before" and "after" Clément Marot. When they read the philosophes, it was the Voltaire of *La Henriade* and the Rousseau of *La nouvelle Héloïse*.²

Coinciding ironically with the "great books" approach to the study of civilization, Mornet's research seemed to knock out some of the pillars of the Enlightenment. He made a gap, at least, in the view that the *Social Contract* prepared the way for Robespierre, and his followers have been trying to widen the breach ever since.³ Meanwhile, the Rousseauists have repaired some of the damage in a counterattack on Mornet's evidence.⁴ Why should private libraries important enough to have printed catalogues be taken as an indication of a book's appeal to ordinary and impecunious readers? they ask. They point out that the message of the *Social Contract* could have reached the general reading public through the version of it in book five of Rousseau's highly popular *Emile*, through numerous editions of his collected works, or through editions that came out during the momentous last decade of the Ancien Régime, which Mornet's study did not cover.⁵ So Mornet's case remains unproved, either right or wrong.

Nonetheless, Mornet raised some fundamental problems that have only begun to be faced: What was the character of literary culture under the Old Regime? Who produced books in the eighteenth century, who read them, and what were they? It will be impossible to locate the Enlightenment in any cultural and social context until those questions are answered, and they cannot be answered by traditional methods of research.

The most influential attempt to formulate a new methodology has been Robert Escarpit's *Sociologie de la littérature* (Paris, 1958).⁶

As his title suggests, Escarpit, now director of the Centre de sociologie des faits littéraires at Bordeaux, wanted to define the objects and methods of a new branch of sociology. He treated books as agents in a psychological process, the communication of writer and reader, and also as commodities, circulating through a system of production, distribution, and consumption. Since the author plays a crucial role in both the psychological and the economic circuits of exchange, Escarpit concentrated on the study of writers. They constitute a distinct segment of the population subject to normal demographic laws, he argued, and on this assumption he produced a demographic history of authorship.

In order to survey the literary population, he began with the back pages of the *Petit Larousse*, moved on to bibliographies and biographical dictionaries, and emerged with a list of 937 writers born between 1490 and 1900. He then worked this material into a two-page graph, where the "fait littéraire" appeared in terms of the rise and fall of writers under the age of forty. Escarpit observed that the proportion of young writers rose after the deaths of Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Napoleon. The Edict of Nantes also coincided with an upsurge of youth, which was cut short first after the triumph of Richelieu and then following the collapse of the Fronde. To Escarpit the conclusion was clear: political events determine literary demography. He confirmed this interpretation by reference to England, where the Armada produced a "vieillessement" among writers that was only overcome by the death of James I.

It is a stirring spectacle, this adjustment of the literary population to battles, edicts, revolutions, and the birth of sovereigns. But it leaves the reader confused. Is he to believe that a kind of intellectual contraception took hold of the republic of letters? Did writers limit their population out of loyalty to Good Queen Bess (and Victoria, too), or was *vieillessement* their curse on the queens? Did young men start writing in England in order to make life more difficult for Charles I, or did they stop in France in order to show disaffection for Louis XIV? If one should discount any conscious motivation, why did young writers decrease in numbers after the accession of Louis XIV and increase after the accession of Louis XV and Louis XVI? And why should the birth and death of rulers have such demographic importance—or so much more than the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, which do not disturb the undulations of Escarpit's graph, although 1830 appears as a great turning point?

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The answers to these questions might be found among the deficiencies of Escarpit's statistics. To take 937 writers over 410 years is to spread the sampling pretty thin—an average of 2.3 writers a year. Adding or subtracting a single man could shift the graph by 5 per cent or more, yet Escarpit hung some weighty conclusions on such shifts—his distinction, for example, between a youthful romantic movement and the middle-aged character of literary life under the Empire. More important, Escarpit had no idea of how many writers went uncounted. He evidently believed that a few dozen men (Lamartine and twenty-three others in the case of the early romantics) could represent, demographically, an entire literary generation. A few individuals could, to be sure, represent a new stylistic trend or cultural movement but not the phenomena that can be analyzed demographically, like generational conflict and the adjustment of population to resources.

Escarpit attributed the sociological differences between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing to two other factors: "provincialization" and professionalization. He detected a rhythmic "alternance Paris-province" by tracing the geographical origins of his preselected authors. But the geographical argument suffers from the same statistical fallacies as the demographical, and so Escarpit fails to prove that the Paris of Balzac dominated French literature any more than the Paris of Diderot. In the case of professionalization, Escarpit's conclusions seem sounder. He produced two statistical tables to show that there were more middle-class professionals, or writers who lived entirely from their pens, in the nineteenth than in the eighteenth century. But his argument is not helped by the fact that the percentages in the table of eighteenth-century writers add up to 166 per cent.⁷

In this instance, Escarpit drew his statistics from *The French Book Trade in the Ancien Régime* by David Pottinger, another example of the quantitative study of authorship. Pottinger proceeded by combing biographical dictionaries for information about six hundred "writers" who lived between 1500 and 1800. He then sorted his men into five social categories—the clergy, nobility of the sword, high bourgeoisie, middle bourgeoisie, and petty bourgeoisie—and apparently concluded that the authors of the Old Regime belonged predominantly to the nobility of the sword and the high bourgeoisie. Again, the conclusion is more convincing than the statistics, because Pottinger destroyed the representativeness of his sample by eliminating 48.5 per cent of the writers on

the grounds that he could not identify their social background. That stroke of statistical surgery left an average of one author a year to support a social analysis spread out over three centuries. Moreover, Pottinger apparently misfiled many individuals like Restif de la Bretonne, who went into the category of the First Estate because he had a brother who went into the church. Most of the sixteen others in that category either had relatives or protectors who were clergymen. But who in the Old Regime, excepting peasants, did not? Pottinger's other categories are not much more solid. He placed all writers who served in the army or navy with the nobility of the sword and placed teachers, apothecaries, architects, and anyone "whom we can identify with the law or with semilegal positions in the State"⁸ in the high bourgeoisie. That kind of admissions policy would put at the top of society many lowly writers who lived like the Neveu de Rameau but called themselves lawyers and even registered with the Paris bar. In any case, it is almost impossible to delimit strata of high, middle, and low bourgeois, because social historians have struggled vainly for years to reach agreement on a meaningful definition of the "bourgeoisie"; and definitions of social stratification in the sixteenth century may not be applicable to the eighteenth.

What then can one conclude from quantitative history's attempts to analyze authorship? Nothing at all. Neither Escarpit nor Pottinger produced evidence to prove that the handful of men they chose to represent the entire literary population of a given period was in fact representative—and neither could possibly do so, because it would first be necessary to have a census of all the writers of the Old Regime. No such census can be contrived, for what, after all, is a writer? Someone who has written a book, someone who depends on writing for a living, someone who claims the title, or someone on whom posterity has bestowed it? Conceptual confusion and deficient data blighted this branch of sociocultural history before it bore its first fruit. But the sociology of literature need not stand or fall on the first attempts to put it in practice. And statistics on reading should be more fruitful than those on writers—if Mornet can be modernized.

II

Mornet showed that a primary obstacle to understanding the culture of the Old Regime is our inability to answer the fundamental

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question: What did eighteenth-century Frenchmen read? The answer eludes us because we have no best-seller lists or statistics on book "consumption" for the early modern period. Quantitative historians therefore have taken soundings in a variety of sources, hoping to tap enough information to reconstruct the general outline of eighteenth-century reading habits. Their predilection for statistics does not imply any belief that they can reduce the reader's internal experience to numbers, or measure quality quantitatively, or produce a numerical standard of literary influence. (Newton's *Principia* would score low on any crude statistical survey.) The quantifiers merely hope to get an over-all view of reading in general and by genre. An enormous amount of data has already been compiled in monographic articles and books by François Furet, Jean Ehrard, Jacques Roger, Daniel Roche, François Bluche (using the work of Régine Petit), and Jean Meyer.⁹ Each drew on one of three kinds of sources: catalogues of private libraries, book reviews, and application to the state for authorization to publish. So the reading problem has been heavily attacked on three sides. If it has been cornered, if those long hours in the archives and those laborious calculations have extracted a common pattern from the data, then one can hope to watch the general contours of eighteenth-century literary culture come slowly into focus. Before seeing whether all of the monographs can be synthesized, it is necessary to explain the character of each, because each has special strengths and weaknesses.

François Furet surveyed the Bibliothèque Nationale's registers of requests for permission to publish books. The requests fell into two categories: *permissions publiques* (both *privilèges* and *permissions de Sceau*) for books processed formally through the state's censoring and bureaucratic machinery, and *permissions tacites* for books that censors would not openly certify as inoffensive to morals, religion, or the state. Furet expected that a traditional cultural pattern would show up in the first category and an innovative pattern in the second, because, thanks to Malesherbes' liberal directorship of the book trade, the *permissions tacites* became a paralegal loophole through which many Enlightenment works reached the market during the last half of the century. But what works? How many of them? And in what proportion to the total number of books that can be identified with innovation? Furet could not say. He acknowledged that an unrecorded mass of books circulated with *permissions simples*, *permissions de police*, and mere *tolér-*

ances according to the Old Regime's carefully graduated scale of quasilegality. Furthermore, the French stuffed unknown quantities of completely illegal "mauvais livres" into their breeches, the false-bottoms of their trunks, and even the coach of the Parisian lieutenant-general of police. So the official list of *permissions tacites* may not take one very far in identifying innovation.

The identification problems thicken when it comes to classifying the titles entered in the registers. Furet adopted the classification scheme of eighteenth-century catalogues: five standard headings—theology, jurisprudence, history, "sciences et arts," and "belles-lettres"—and a profusion of subcategories that would produce bedlam in any modern library. To rococo readers, travel books belonged under history, and "économie politique" rightly came after chemistry and medicine and before agriculture and agronomy, all happy neighbors in "sciences et arts." But the modern reader is bewildered upon learning that early works on politics (of the *permissions publiques* variety) were "presque tous des manuels de technique commerciale."¹⁰ How can statistics on "économie politique" satisfy his desire to know whether French reading became increasingly political as the eighteenth century progressed? Framing twentieth-century questions within the confines of eighteenth-century categories can be misleading, especially for the researcher trying to fit the Enlightenment into the over-all picture of reading in the Old Regime.

Finally, Furet faced the problem of incomplete data. The requests to print books do not indicate how many copies were printed or the number of volumes, dates, places, and social groups involved in sales. Except in the case of privilege renewals, they give best-sellers the same numerical value as failures—the value of one. They do not even indicate whether a request resulted in an actual publication. And of course they tell nothing about the connection between buying and reading books.

To compensate for these deficiencies, Furet made a broad statistical sweep of the 30,000 titles registered between 1723 and 1789. His analysis of six samplings from the data was thorough enough for him to map out some general trends without professing a detailed knowledge of the eighteenth century's literary topography. He reduced his findings to bar graphs divided into the eighteenth-century categories. The graphs reveal a decline in theological and an increase in scientific writing, which is enough to carry Furet's main conclusion about the "désacralisation" of the world. They also

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reinforce Mornet's belief that the traditional, classical culture inherited from the seventeenth century outweighed the enlightened elements of the eighteenth. But those elements are scattered too haphazardly throughout the graphs to provide any quantitative profile of the Enlightenment.

By quantifying book reviews, Jean Ehrard and Jacques Roger tried to measure eighteenth-century reading by a standard that could not be applied to Furet's data. They attempted to show which kinds of writing had most vogue, as indicated by the number of books reviewed and the length of the reviews in two serious, "quality" periodicals, the *Journal des savants* and the *Mémoires de Trévoux*. They gathered their statistics from approximately the same periods and fit them into the same categories as Furet did, and they came up with complementary conclusions about the rise of interest in science (they locate it earlier in the eighteenth century), the decline of theology, and the "persistance des formes traditionnelles de la littérature."¹¹ Unfortunately, they made no similar effort to measure their results against Mornet's. Mornet himself had made a careful study of reviews in the *Mercur* and concluded that they bore no relation whatsoever to the real popularity of novels.¹² His findings might be corroborated by more consultation of literary evidence, because eighteenth-century journalism frequently reflected the interests of journalists rather than those of their readers. The journalists of the Old Regime scratched and clawed their way through a world of *cabales*, *combines*, and *pistons* (to use terms that necessity was obliged to invent in the rough-and-tumble French Republic of Letters), and their copy bore the marks of their struggle for survival. Thus the *Journal des savants* featured medical articles very heavily in the early eighteenth century, not because of any great interest among its readers—who actually ceased buying "ce triste répertoire de maladies"—but because the government in effect had taken it over and then surrendered it to a *cabale* of doctors, who used it to propagate their own views on medicine.¹³

Ehrard and Roger tried to cushion their statistics against the shock of such incidents by analyzing a large number of reviews—reviews of 1,800 books in the case of the *Journal des savants*. But it is difficult to winnow conclusions from such data and to coordinate them with other studies. What, for example, can be made of the fact that the *Journal des savants*, a predominantly scientific periodical, reduced its scientific reviewing by almost a third in

the late eighteenth century? Its reviews showed a decline in the whole category “sciences et arts,” while the category “belles-lettres” rose spectacularly. It would be rash to conclude that the public lost interest in science, because the *permissions tacites* showed precisely the opposite trend, according to François Furet. Moreover, a recent study of three other journals by Jean-Louis and Maria Flandrin produced results that contradict both those of Furet and those of Ehrard and Roger.¹⁴ Periodicals do not seem to be a good source for quarrying statistics about the tastes of the reading public.

The catalogues of private libraries, as Mornet originally indicated, might serve quantitative history better. But they present difficulties of their own. Few persons read all the books they own, and many, especially in the eighteenth century, read books they never purchased. Libraries were usually built up over several generations: far from representing reading tastes at any given time, they were automatically archaic. And eighteenth-century libraries were censored for all illegal books before being put up for auction. The censoring may have been imperfect (Mornet found forty-one copies of Voltaire’s forbidden *Lettres philosophiques*), but it may also have been influential enough to exclude much of the Enlightenment from the auction catalogues.

Despite these difficulties, Mornet’s work remains the most important of its kind, because it covered so many (five hundred) libraries, and because Mornet was able to trace the social position of so many of the owners. He found that they came from a variety of stations above the middle middle-class (a great many doctors, lawyers, and especially state officials, as well as clergymen and nobles of the robe and sword) and that reading tastes did not correlate closely with social status. Louis Trenard got similar results from a nonquantitative investigation of libraries in Lyons.¹⁵ But the most successful applications of Mornet’s methods have occurred in studies of a single social group. Daniel Roche’s research on the library of Dortous de Mairan actually was limited to the reading of a single man. But Roche made a convincing case for Mairan’s typicality as a second-rank savant of the mid-eighteenth century; so his results suggest the general character of reading habits in the influential milieu of lesser academicians. Drawing on the research of Régine Petit, François Bluche studied the libraries of thirty members of the Parlement of Paris, which were catalogued between 1734 and 1795. He worked his findings into a convincing picture of parliamentary culture, but not as it evolved over time.

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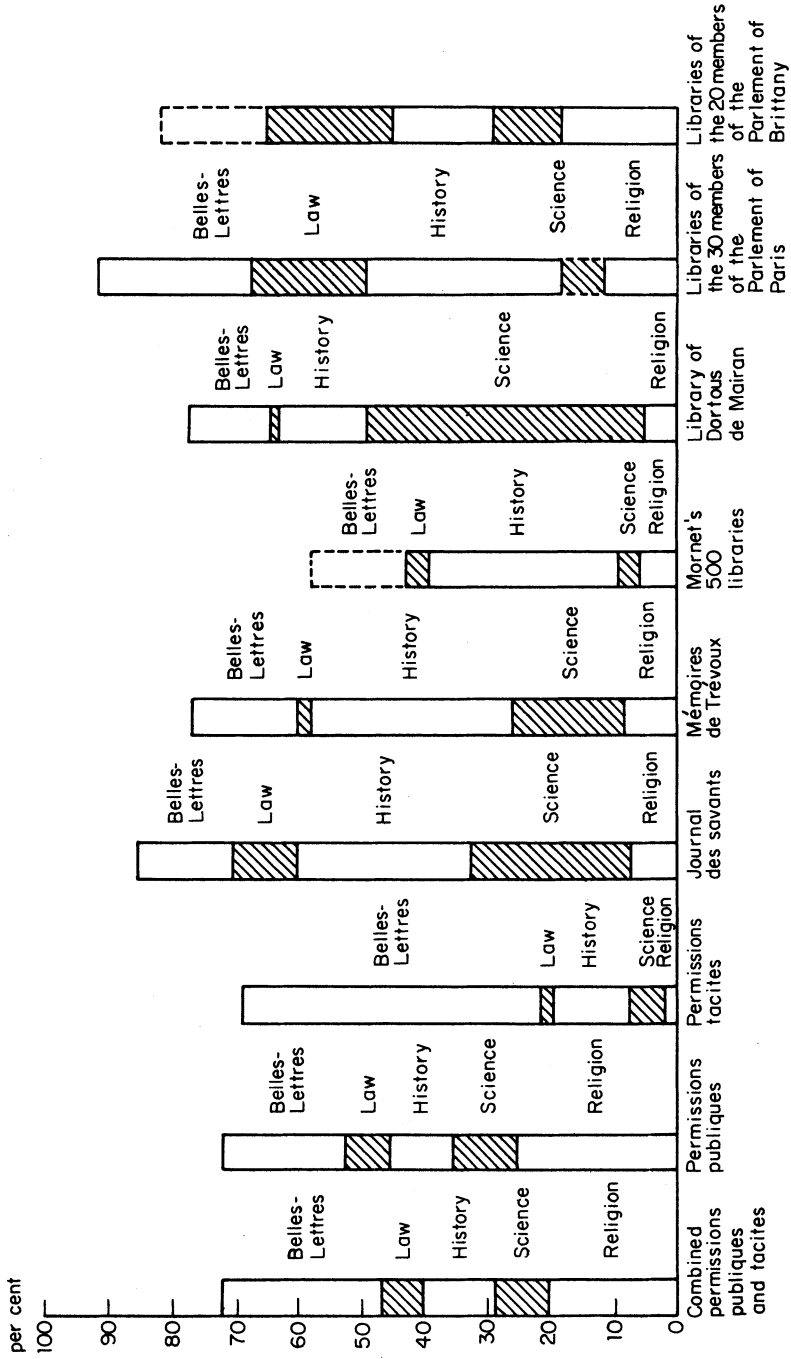
His comparison of catalogues taken from 1734-1765 and from 1766-1780 does not reveal a declining interest in law and an increased interest in *belles-lettres* and *sciences et arts*, as he maintained, because the statistical differences are trivial—not more than 1 per cent. Nonetheless, Bluche's conclusions correspond quite closely with those of Jean Meyer, who studied the libraries of twenty members of the Parlement of Brittany. Meyer based his statistics on posthumous inventories of property (*inventaires après décès*), which usually are more reliable than auction catalogues as sources. He found a preponderance of "traditional" literature in contrast to a small proportion of enlightened works, and he also noted a decline in the incidence of legal and religious works and an increase in contemporary literature as the century progressed. Quantitative history thus seems to have been instrumental in defining the culture of the high nobility of the robe.

But has it succeeded in measuring the reading habits of France as a whole? There is hope for success in the complementary character of the monographs. Where one is weak, another is strong. Furet surveyed the whole terrain but gave equal weight to every title and did not get near the eighteenth-century reader; Ehrard and Roger got nearer, but their measure of reading incidence seems faulty; Mornet, Roche, and Bluche entered right into eighteenth-century libraries, but only the sections of those libraries that reached public auctions. If each monograph covered the exposed portions of another, the entire topic may be considered safely under wraps. Are the results mutually reinforcing or mutually contradictory? The issue seems important enough to be put graphically (see page 224).¹⁶

No consistent pattern, unfortunately, can be extracted from this confusing mosaic of graphs. Some of the inconsistencies can be explained away: law naturally shows strongly on the graphs of the *parlementaires*, science on Dortous de Mairan's graph, and theology among the *permissions publiques* as opposed to the *permissions tacites*. But standard categories like *belles-lettres*, history, and science vary enormously; and the proportions are wildly different. By imagining each bar graph as a girl and each black stripe as part of her two-piece bathing suit, one can see what a misshapen, motley crowd of monographs we must live with.

There is some relief from this bikini effect in considering how the monographs spread their proportions over time. They all agree that the French read a great deal of history—so much as to make

Patterns of Reading in Mid-Eighteenth-Century France



For explanation, see note 16.

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untenable the already discredited myth about an “ahistorical” eighteenth century—and read a consistent amount of it throughout the century. The monographs also indicate that the French read less religious literature as time went on. Scientific reading probably increased, although it may have remained constant. And, in general, some “*désacralisation*,” as Furet put it, took hold of the reading public. This tendency, however, might represent an acceleration of a secularizing trend that had begun in the Middle Ages; acknowledging it does not help to refine any generalizations about the Age of the Enlightenment, and no other generalizations can be extracted from the quantitative studies.

Perhaps it is impossible to generalize about the over-all literary culture of eighteenth-century France because there might not have been any such thing. In a country where something like 9,600,000 people had enough instruction by the 1780's to sign their names,¹⁷ there could have been several reading publics and several cultures. In that case, quantitative historians would do better to avoid macroanalysis of reading and to concentrate instead on studies of specific groups like the *parlementaires* of Bluche and Meyer. When used carefully, in conjunction with other kinds of evidence and in reference to clearly-defined segments of the population, this kind of quantitative history has proved to be a valuable tool. But it has not provided answers to the broad questions raised by Mornet, and there is no reason to expect that those answers will emerge from the continued multiplication of monographs.

Just as this essay was going to press, two more statistical studies of eighteenth-century reading were published.¹⁸ They contain another whole series of bar graphs, which are as rich in mutual contradictions as the earlier series. The problem in trying to fit them all into one coherent picture of the Old Regime's literary culture is that they cover different ranges of data: some refer to the reading habits of particular milieux, others to reading throughout France as revealed by different sources. The contradictions are more serious in the second kind, but all of the monographs suffer from deficient data; and the deficiencies will not disappear if more official records and more periodicals are subjected to quantification. The run of graphs could be extended indefinitely. But where will it all lead? Perhaps back to Mornet. No later research has done much either to discredit or refine his emphasis on the mountainous deposits of traditional culture in contrast to the few rivulets of modernity in the literary habits of the eighteenth century.

But even Mornet's interpretation calls for further proof, because none of the sources examined by him or his successors was likely to contain the most modern works, and none of the categories used for the examining could be considered commensurate with the Enlightenment. The problem of measuring "inertia" against "innovation" in reading during the Old Regime always comes down to a problem of data: to sift statistics through administrative sources, censored journals, or censored library catalogues is to eliminate much of the Enlightenment. No wonder the quantitative historians found the weight of the past so heavy, when so much of the present was excluded from their balance. It may be cruel to conclude that all this laborious quantification has not advanced us far beyond Mornet, but the fact remains that we still do not know much about what eighteenth-century Frenchmen read.

III

If the sociology of literature has failed to develop a coherent discipline of its own, and if its commitment to quantification has not yet produced answers to the basic questions about reading and writing in the past, nonetheless the sociologists and quantifiers have demonstrated the importance of interpreting the Old Regime's literary culture in more than merely literary terms. Books have a social life and an economic value. All the aspects of their existence—literary, social, economic, and even political—came together with the greatest force in the publishing industry of the eighteenth century. So sociocultural history (or the sociology of literature, if the term must be retained) might gain a great deal from the study of publishing. To suggest some of the possible gains, it seems best to draw on material in the papers of publishers and other related sources in order to develop three hypotheses: what Frenchmen read was determined in part by the way in which their books were produced and distributed; there were basically two kinds of book production and distribution in the eighteenth century, legal and clandestine; and the differences between the two were crucial to the culture and politics of the Old Regime.¹⁹

The differences emerge clearly by a comparison of documents in official archives and those in the papers of clandestine publishers. The bookdealers of Lyons, for example, filled the *Direction de la librairie* with letters and memoranda about their devotion to the law,²⁰ while addressing the foreign publishers who supplied

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them with illegal books in terms like the following (A. J. Revol, a Lyonnais dealer, is arguing that he did not overcharge the Société typographique de Neuchâtel for his smuggling services):

Nous avons exposé liberté, vie, santé, argent et réputation.

Liberté, en ce que sans nos amis, nous aurions été enfermé par lettre de cachet.

Vie, en ce qu'ayant été en différentes fois aux prises avec les employés des fermes et les avoir forcés, les armes à la main, à nous restituer les balles qu'ils nous avaient saisies (à cette époque il y en avait douze à votre maison qui auraient été perdues pour vous, sans ressource.)

Santé, combien de nuits avons-nous passé, exposés à toutes les intempéries des saisons, sur la neige, traversé les rivières débordées et quelquefois sur les glaces.

Argent, quelle somme n'avons-nous pas donnée en différentes fois, tant pour faciliter l'exportation que pour éviter les poursuites et calmer les esprits.

Réputation, en ce que nous avons acquis celle de contrebandiers.²¹

Hundreds of men like these operated the underground system for supplying French readers with prohibited and pirated works, the kind that could never qualify for *permissions tacites*. They were colorful characters, these literary buccaneers: the obscure mule-drivers who hauled crates of books over tortuous trails in the Juras for 12 livres the quintal and a stiff drink; the merchants on both sides of the border who paid off the drivers and cleared paths into France for them by bribing agents of the General Tax Farm;²² the waggoners who took the crates to stockpiles in provincial clearing houses like the Auberge du Cheval Rouge outside Lyons; the provincial bookdealers who cleared the crates through their local guilds (at 5 livres a quintal in Revol's case) and relayed them to entrepôts outside Paris; the entrepôt keepers like Mme. La Noue of Versailles—to all the world a garrulous, warmhearted widow, to her customers a shrewd businesswoman, “passablement arabe”²³ and full of professional pride (“je me flatte que lon sait me rendre justice par les precaution que je prend pour cest sorte de marchandises,”²⁴ she wrote to a client in her semiliterate hand); the colporters like Cugnet et femme, “bandits sans moeurs et sans pudeur”²⁵ as they were known in the trade, who smuggled the books from Versailles to Paris; and deviate Parisian distributors like Desauges père et fils, who were well acquainted with the Bastille,²⁶ and Poinçot, “bien avec la police”²⁷ but “l'être le plus acariâtre que je connaisse,”²⁸ according to J. F. Bornand, one of the many literary secret agents in Paris who did odd jobs for the

foreign publishers and completed the circuit by supplying them with manuscripts and best sellers to pirate.²⁹ An enormous number of illegal books passed through these slippery hands, greasing palms as they went. Their importance in relation to legal and quasilegal literature cannot be calculated until the clandestine import records are compiled. But one nonquantitative conclusion seems significant at the outset: underground publishing and legal publishing operated in separate circuits, and the underground operation was a complicated affair, involving a large labor force drawn from particular milieux. Far from having been lost in the unrecorded depths of history, the individuals who processed clandestine books can be found and situated socially. They had names and faces, which show up vividly in the papers of eighteenth-century publishers. And their experience suggests that underground publishing was a world of its own.

How different was the world of legal publishing. The thirty-six master printers and one hundred or so master booksellers of Paris lived in pomp and circumstance, parading behind their beadle, dressed splendidly in velvet trimmed with gold lilies, on ceremonial occasions; celebrating solemn masses before the silver statue of their patron, Saint John the Evangelist, in the Church of the Mathurins; feasting at the sumptuous banquets held by their confraternity; initiating new members into their guild, a matter of ritualistic oaths and examinations; participating in the Tuesday and Friday inspections of legally imported books delivered to the guildhall by "forts" from the customs and city gates; and minding their own businesses. As businessmen, they kept closed shops. Elaborate regulations—at least 3,000 edicts and ordonnances of all kinds in the eighteenth century alone³⁰—specified the qualifications and limited the number of everyone connected with legal publishing, down to the 120 ragged colporters who divided up the official monopoly of hawking almanacs and proclamations in the streets and wore leather badges to prove membership in their corps. Corporateness, monopoly, and family connections tied down every corner of the trade. In fact the cornering of the market dated from a seventeenth-century crisis. In 1666 Colbert had settled a trade war between the Parisian and provincial publishers by, in effect, ruining provincial printing and placing the industry under the control of the *Communauté des imprimeurs et libraires de Paris*. By ruling this guild, a few families of master printer-booksellers dominated legal French publishing throughout the eighteenth century.

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The guild spirit shows clearly through the major edicts on publishing issued in 1686, 1723, 1744, and 1777. The edict of 1723, which laid down the law throughout most of the eighteenth century, communicates an attitude that might be called “mercantilistic” or “Colbertist,” for it codified the reorganization of the trade produced in the 1660’s by Colbert himself. Condemning capitalistic “avidité du gain,”³¹ it stressed the importance of maintaining quality standards, which it defined in great detail. The type-face of three “l”s must be exactly the same in width as one “m,” and the “m” must conform precisely to a model “m” deposited with the syndics and deputies of the guild, who were to inspect the thirty-six printing shops once every three months in order to make sure that each contained the requisite minimum of four presses and nine sets of type, both roman and italic, in good condition. Strict requirements regulated the advancement of apprentices to masterships, which were limited in number and tended to become family possessions—for at every point the edict favored widows, sons, and son-in-laws of the established masters. These privileged few enjoyed an air-tight monopoly of book production and marketing. Non-guild members could not even sell old paper without facing a 500 livres fine and “punition exemplaire.”³² The guild was elaborately organized and favored with “droits, franchises, immunités, prérogatives et privilèges.”³³ Not only did it monopolize its trade, but as a corps within the university it benefited from special tax exemptions. Books themselves were tax-exempt. Each contained a formal “privilège” or “permission,” granted by the king’s “grâce” and registered in the chancellery and in the guild’s *Chambre syndicale*. By purchasing a privilege, a guild member acquired an exclusive right to sell a book, thereby transforming a “grâce” into a kind of commodity, which he could divide into portions and sell to other members. So monopoly and privilege existed at three levels in the publishing industry: within the book itself, within the guild, and as an aspect of the guild’s own special status within the Old Regime.

This third level deserves emphasis, because the guild’s special position involved a policing as well as an economic function. The state had not often shown an enlightened attitude in its attempts to police the printed word before 1750, when Malesherbes became *Directeur de la librairie*. In 1535 it responded to the discovery that books could be libelous by deciding to hang anyone who printed them. In 1521 it had tried to tame the new industry by subjecting it to the surveillance of a medieval body, the university. And in 1618,

it tried again, this time by confining publishers within the guild, another rather archaic kind of organization. In addition, the state attempted to bring books under control by developing its own apparatus—at first within the chancellery and the Parisian *lieutenant-générale de police*, later under the *Direction de la librairie*—and by holding its own against rival book-inspectors in the Parlement of Paris, the General Assembly of the Clergy, and other influential institutions. This bureaucratic entanglement did not choke the power of the guild; on the contrary, the guild continued to hunt out “mauvais livres” until the Revolution. The edicts of 1723 and 1777 reaffirmed its authority to search for illegal printing and to inspect books shipped to Paris. This policy made perfect sense: the state created a monopoly with a vested interest in law enforcement, and the monopolists maintained their interest by crushing extra-legal competition. Although some guild members dabbled in underground publishing, most of them wanted to stamp it out. It robbed and undersold them, while the guild existed to protect their privileges. Well-protected privileges meant secure profits, which looked more attractive than the risky business of illegal publishing, especially since illegality exposed them to a double danger: punishment for the particular infraction and then expulsion from the magic circle of monopolists. A printer-book-seller’s mastership really belonged to his family. He could not risk it lightly. Better to buy the privilege on a prayer book and to collect a certain but limited profit than to wager everything on a clandestine edition of Voltaire. Such an attitude suited a “traditional” economy, where even merchant adventurers dropped out of trade as soon as they had made enough to invest in *rentes*—or borrowed at 5 per cent to buy land that yielded 1-2 per cent of its purchase price in annual profits.³⁴

It would be a mistake, therefore, to underestimate the economic element in the Old Regime’s legislation on publishing. P. J. Blondel, an old-fashioned abbé who had no love for philosophes, fulminated against the edict of 1723, even though it tightened the restrictions on philosophic works, because he saw it as a purely economic measure: an extension of the guild’s monopoly.³⁵ Actually, the political and economic aspects of the edict complemented each other. Strengthening the guild seemed to serve the interests of the state as well as those of the privileged publishers. But the reform movement modified the state’s view of its interests, and the publishing code of 1777, promulgated soon after Turgot’s attacks on

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the six great commercial guilds of Paris, shows a shift away from the old "Colbertism." Instead of condemning "avidité du gain," the king now repudiated any intention of favoring "monopole," praised the effects of "concurrence," and relaxed the rules governing privileges in order to "augmenter l'activité du commerce."³⁶ He did not undercut the notion of privilege; in fact he confirmed its character as a "grâce fondée en justice"³⁷ rather than as a kind of property, but he modified it in favor of authors and at the expense of the bookdealers. The guild had tried to prevent such a blow long before it actually struck by getting an author to present its case. The result, Diderot's *Lettre sur le commerce de la librairie*, reiterated the old arguments about maintaining quality by restricting productivity in contradiction to Diderot's own liberal principles and Malesherbes' *Mémoires sur la librairie*, which had partly inspired the reform project. Apparently dismissing Diderot's *Lettre* as the work of a hired hack, Malesherbes' liberal successors, especially Sartine and Le Camus de Néville, pushed through the edicts of 1777 and so somewhat loosened the guild's stranglehold on the publishing industry.³⁸

But the controversial item in the code of 1777 concerned the relations of guild members and authors: privilege was now clearly derived from authorship and belonged to the author and his heirs perpetually or expired after his death, if he had ceded it to a bookdealer and the dealer had had it for at least ten years. This provision brought many works into the public domain and provoked bitter complaints by the guild members, but it did not really undermine their monopoly.³⁹ The code reinforced their power to police the book trade and repeated in the strongest possible terms that no one outside the guild could engage in publishing. So the dynasties of printer-booksellers continued to dominate their industry until the Revolution. The greatest of them, Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, operated as a sort of combination press baron and minister of culture: "sa voiture le portait chez les ministres du roi, à Versailles, qui le recevaient comme un fonctionnaire ayant un portefeuille."⁴⁰

There had never been any question of creating a free trade in books by abolishing the guild as Turgot had abolished the six great *jurandes*. The economic issue took another form; it arose from the ancient enmity between Parisian and provincial bookdealers. Provincial printing had not recovered since the trade war of the seventeenth century, but provincial booksellers survived in large

numbers throughout the eighteenth century, and they drew much of their stock (often in the form of exchanges, measured in page gatherings) from outside France, where hundreds of enterprising printers turned out cheap pirated editions of French works. The state inadvertently produced a boom in this illicit trade in the 1770's by levying a tax on paper, a much more costly item in the budget of eighteenth-century printers than it is today.

Printer's *papier blanc* had been taxed from time to time, notably in 1680 and 1748, but not at a ruinous rate and not much, if at all, outside Paris—until March 1, 1771, when the abbé Terray, trying desperately to cut the deficit accumulated during the Seven Years' War, taxed it 20 sous per ream. In August 1771 he increased that rate by 10 sous as a result of the across-the-board tax of 2 sous per livre. Since exports of French paper went duty free, foreign printers and their provincial allies gained an enormous advantage. A ream of good white *papier d'Auvergne* cost 11 livres in Paris and 8 livres in Switzerland, according to one estimate.⁴¹ To right the balance, Terray placed a duty of 60 livres per quintal on imports of French and Latin books on September 11, 1771. But this measure massacred the exchange trade between provincial dealers and foreigners.

Seized by panic, publishers like the Société typographique de Neuchâtel suspended all shipments to France and cast about desperately for ways of cracking the tariff barrier while their tough customers in the provinces, men like Jean Marie Bruyset and Périsset Duluc of Lyons, agitated for the repeal of the duty.⁴² The agitation paid: on November 24, 1771, the tax was reduced to 20 livres; on October 17, 1773, it went down to 6 livres 10 sols; and on April 23, 1775, Turgot withdrew it altogether. But this reversal of policy again tipped the economic balance in favor of the foreign publishers. An unsigned memorandum to the ministry reported: "C'est depuis ce moment que les Suisses, ayant senti qu'ils pouvaient donner nos livres à 50% meilleur marché que nous, ont pillé et ravagé notre librairie, et en effet ils donnent nos livres à trois liards ou un sol de France la feuille, et comme aux frais de l'impôt sur le papier, du haut prix de l'impression et du tirage en France, il faut joindre l'achat des manuscrits, on ne peut souvent pas trouver de bénéfice en vendant cette même feuille deux ou trois sols." As an example, the writer said that Panckoucke's new *Encyclopédie méthodique* would have to sell at 11 livres a volume for Panckoucke merely to cover production costs, while a pirated

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Swiss edition could sell in Paris at 6 livres a volume and produce a 40-50 per cent profit.⁴³

Until mid-1783 the business of foreign publishers and provincial dealers seems to have flourished at the expense of their Parisian rivals, but on June 12, 1783, Vergennes, the foreign minister, destroyed it with a stroke of the pen. He issued orders to the General Tax Farm requiring that all book imports—garnished with the usual seals, lead stamps, and *acquits à caution*—be transmitted to the Chambre syndicale of the Parisian guild for inspection before being delivered to their final destination. Without tampering further with the taxation system or passing through formal, legal channels like the earlier edicts, this measure at once restored the guild's domination of the book trade. It meant that a crate of books sent from Geneva to Lyons now had to pass through the hands of the guild officials in Paris, which gave the Parisians an opportunity to weed out pirated editions and saddled the Lyonnais with a detour that would cost more than the books were worth. Even the extra trip from Rouen to Paris and back would ruin his business, a desperate Rouennais wrote.⁴⁴ Booksellers in Lille reported that they had no choice but to let imports pile up and rot in their damp customs house.⁴⁵ The Lyonnais claimed that they had suspended all book imports—a matter of 2,000 quintals a year—and were in danger of suspending payments.⁴⁶ And while protests from provincial dealers flooded the *Direction de la librairie*, frantic letters flew around the circuit of publishers who fed the provincials from across France's borders. Boubers of Brussels, Gosse of The Hague, Dufour of Maestricht, Grasset of Lausanne, Bassompierre of Geneva, and dozens of others, all trembled for their commercial lives. The Société typographique de Neuchâtel sent out an agent, J.-F. Bornand, to inspect the damage done to its supply lines. Bornand reported that the "malheureux arrêt" had stopped all book traffic in Savoy and Franche-Comté. A side trip to Grenoble showed him that the southern route was "hérissée de gardes, au point qu'au bureau de Chaparillan on m'a saisi tous mes livres dans ma malle . . . en nous faisant voir l'ordre du roi qui leur enjoint de ne laisser passer aucune librairie quelconque."⁴⁷ The bookdealers in Lyons told Bornand such gloomy stories that he concluded, "Il faut renoncer à la France."⁴⁸ They believed that Panckoucke was behind the crackdown, because he wanted to destroy his Swiss competitors, notably Heubach & Cie, of Lausanne, whose pirating had cut deeply into the sales of his edition of Buffon's *Histoire*

naturelle. Bornand reported the same rumor from Besançon; and when he arrived in Paris, the booksellers turned their “air de mépris” on him with full force. One threatened to cause him “tout le mal possible, et c’est un pacte formé entre les libraires de Paris contre les libraires étrangers et même contre ceux de province.”⁴⁹ By mid-1785, the Neuchâtelois still found it impossible to get their books to the great clandestine trade center of Avignon,⁵⁰ and they abandoned attempts to reach Paris through smugglers stationed in Geneva, Besançon, Dijon, Châlons-sur-Saône, and Clairvaux. Their booming business in France had been cut to a trickle. It never recovered, because, as they explained to a Parisian confidant, “Nous ignorons de quelle voie se servent les autres imprimeurs d’ici, de Lausanne et de Berne; nous ne connaissons point d’autre que d’expédier sous acquit à caution pour Paris . . . Toute autre voie nous est interdite, parce que nous ne voulons pas courir des risques, ni nous exposer à la confiscation et à l’amende.”⁵¹ Vergennes had cut the lifeline linking foreign producers and provincial distributors.

According to the provincial protests, Vergennes’ orders would decimate the legal foreign trade in books. By making imports impossibly expensive, the new rules would produce an inevitable decline in exports, especially since the import-export business was usually conducted in exchanges of so many page-gatherings rather than in money. The state saw the orders as a new policing technique, aimed at the destruction of pirated and prohibited books—the bread and butter of underground publishing. Both views may have been correct, but the clandestine trade probably suffered the most. The monopolistic practices of the Parisians had forced the provincials to seek shelter underground. There they formed alliances with foreign publishers, who sent them illegal works under cover of an *acquit à caution*, a customs permit that protected book shipments from all inspection between the border and their points of destination within France, where they were to be examined by the nearest official bookdealer. He would certify their legitimacy by endorsing the back of the *acquit* and returning it, by the driver who had delivered the books, to the border station where it had been issued. A dealer collaborating with an illegal publisher could either market the books himself (instead of impounding them), or he could relay them on toward Paris and collect a commission. Since domestic book shipments were never inspected en route, they could reach an entrepôt outside Paris, usually in Versailles, without risk

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and then could be smuggled in small quantities into the capitol. The system worked quite well as long as provincial dealers could discharge the *acquits à caution*. But by placing that function in the hands of the Parisian guild, Vergennes undercut the whole operation. Of course there were other ways of reaching the market, but it was no easy task to thread one's way through the internal customs barriers and to dodge the roaming inspectors of the General Farm, who received a reward and a portion of the goods after every confiscation. What the drivers and clandestine agents wanted was legal camouflage so they could send whole wagonloads rumbling down the middle of France's splendid highways to provincial guildhalls and to the very palace of the king. The clandestine trade was a matter of calculating risks and profit margins. Too chancy, too elaborate a system of smuggling would not pay. So when Vergennes changed the rules of the game, the foreign suppliers and provincial dealers faced disaster. If the papers of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel indicate the general reaction to the order of June 12, 1783, the whole underground industry fell into a depression that lasted for at least two years and perhaps until 1789.⁵² As far as foreign publishing was concerned, the French government had finally committed itself to a policy of *laissez faire* but not *laissez passer*.

Curiously, the graphs of legal French book production constructed by Robert Estivals and François Furet also show a spectacular drop in 1783, the low point of a slump extending roughly from 1774 to 1786.⁵³ Why this slump occurred is difficult to say. It does not seem to be related to Labrousse's prerevolutionary economic crisis or the Labrousse-like "cycles" that Estivals somehow sees in his statistics. Could it be connected with Vergennes' orders of June 12, 1783? The purpose of the orders stands out clearly in the text: to put an end to "la multitude de libelles imprimés dans l'étranger et introduits dans le royaume."⁵⁴ Even the petitions from the provincial bookdealers acknowledged that "le motif de l'ordre est d'empêcher l'introduction des libelles qui viennent de l'étranger."⁵⁵ And a glance at Vergennes' correspondence with his ambassadors shows how much the *libelles* concerned him. In 1782 and 1783 he wrote as many letters to England about the need to suppress a smut factory run by émigré French "libellistes" as he did about the diplomatic preliminaries to the Treaty of Paris. He sent secret agent after secret agent (a bizarre collection of bogus barons and one police inspector disguised as an umbrella salesman) to buy

off or kidnap the *libellistes*. No details of their fantastic, rococo intrigues were too trivial for Vergennes' attention, for he feared the effect of the *libelles* on public opinion in France. Well before the Diamond Necklace Affair, he exhorted the French chargé d'affaires to stamp out political pornography: "Vous connaissez la malignité de notre siècle et avec quelle facilité les fables les plus absurdes sont reçues."⁵⁶ The orders of June 12, 1783, must have been part of this campaign, and they must have been fairly successful, judging from the consternation they produced in the world of underground publishing and the large collection of works like *Les amours de Charlot et Toinette* and *Essais historiques sur la vie de Marie-Antoinette* that the revolutionaries gleefully inventoried in the Bastille after 1789.⁵⁷

There is no reason to connect the campaign against *libelles* with the drop in legal book production. Nonetheless, it seems possible that Vergennes was so determined to shut off the flow of *libelles* from outside France that he dammed up the channels of legitimate imports, too. His action could have created repercussions in the legal system of publishing, exactly as the provincial dealers argued. It would have forced even the most honest provincial booksellers to retrench, because it would have increased their expenses drastically and destroyed their exchange trade. It would also have eliminated their roles as middlemen (an important business in Lyons) in commerce between northern and southern Europe. As always, the Parisians might have profited from the provincials' losses. But provincial dealers drew some of the stock that they used for foreign exchanges from Paris. So Vergennes' offer also could have damaged part of the Parisians' market. It certainly reduced book imports on a national scale and, owing to the crucial importance of exchanges in the book trade, probably produced a corresponding drop in exports. Over-all French book production therefore would have suffered, just as it suffered from the buffeting given it since 1771 by the succession of taxes and tariffs. If these hypotheses are correct, they suggest that underground and legal publishing were not so separate and so inimical that they could not be injured by a common blow. A certain symbiosis might have attached segments of the two circuits. Each circuit relied heavily on injections of foreign books, and that foreign element must be measured if there is to be more exact knowledge about the circulation of ideas in the Old Regime. At this prestatistical stage, however, it seems legitimate to insist on one point: far from flourishing as a result of

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virtual freedom of the press, as is usually maintained, French publishing underwent a severe crisis on the eve of the Revolution, a crisis that has not been noticed by historians, because it did not manifest itself in formal documents, like the edicts on the book trade.⁵⁸

The publishing crisis seems especially worthy of notice, because its economic and intellectual aspects were related in a way that reveals aspects of the prerevolutionary crisis. Economically, legal and clandestine publishing stood for antithetical ways of doing business. Faithful to the old "Colbertist" methods, the Parisian *Communauté des libraires et imprimeurs* produced a limited number of quality goods according to official specifications. It turned out traditional books for a traditional market, which it controlled by virtue of an official monopoly. It ran no risks, because it owed its profits to its privileges; and its privileges were family treasures, handed down from father to son and husband to widow. Furthermore, the guild fortified its monopoly by a share in the repressive power of the state. In publishing, as in so many other cases, the Old Regime was eaten away by privilege—not the juridical privileges dividing nobles from commoners, but the privilege of vested interests, which devoured the state like a cancer. In its last years, the government tried to rally and reform. But its efforts reactivated the century-old conflict between provincial and Parisian bookdealers, and the book duties of 1771-1775 followed by Vergennes' order of June 12, 1783, represented the final triumph of the Parisian publishing dynasties.

But this triumph was limited by the limitations of an archaic production system. Despite the flexibility introduced through the use of *permissions tacites* and the adventurous policies of a few guild members, privileged publishing failed to satisfy the demand created by an enlarged readership and by changing literary tastes. The reading patterns of the past weighed heavily in the traditional sector of publishing, as the statistics of Mornet and Furet demonstrate; and the reluctance of most traditional publishers to deviate from those patterns is perfectly understandable. Why should they abandon their privileges, risk their special status, and endanger their families' livelihood by producing new literature of uncertain legality? "Innovation" came through the underground. Down there, no legalities constrained productivity, and books were turned out by a kind of rampant capitalism. Not only did the state's misguided fiscal policies make it cheaper to produce new works outside

France, but foreign publishers did a wild and woolly business in pirating old ones. As soon as their agents reported that a book was selling well in Paris, they began setting type for a counterfeit edition. Some of them also printed prohibited, hard-core “mauvais livres.” They were tough businessmen who produced anything that would sell. They took risks, broke traditions, and maximized profits by quantity instead of quality production. Rather than try to corner some segment of the market by a legal monopoly, they wanted to be left alone by the state and would even bribe it to do so. They were entrepreneurs who made a business of Enlightenment.

The enlightened themes of the books they produced—individualism, liberty, and equality before the law as opposed to corporatism, privilege, and “mercantilist” restrictions—suited their way of doing business. A Marxist might argue that the modes of production determined the product—an extravagant interpretation, but one that might serve as an antidote to the conventional history of ideas.⁵⁹ Books are economic commodities as well as cultural artifacts; and as vehicles of ideas, they have to be peddled on a market. The literary marketplace of eighteenth-century France calls for closer analysis, for its books—whether privileged or philosophic, traditional or innovative—epitomized the character of the Old Regime.

IV

Since the Old Regime was a political as well as a social and economic system, a socioeconomic interpretation of its publishing ought to take account of political factors. What, in fact, were those books that Vergennes wanted so desperately to keep out of France? They were listed in handwritten catalogues entitled “livres philosophiques,” which circulated secretly and offered such delicious forbidden fruit as:⁶⁰

Vénus dans le cloître, ou la religieuse en chemise, figures
 Système de la nature, 8°, 2 vol. 1775 très belle édition
 Système social, 8°, 3 vol. 1775
 Fausseté des miracles
 La fille de joie, 8°, figures
 Contrat social par Jean-Jacques Rousseau 12°
 Journal historique des révolutions opérées en France par M. Maupeou,
 3 vol. 8°
 Mémoires authentiques de Mme. la comtesse Du Barry, 1775
 Margot la ravaudeuse, 12°, figures

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Lettres de l'abbé Terray à M. Turgot
Les droits des hommes et leurs usurpations

The same underground publisher also circulated a formal printed catalogue, openly advertising its name, address, and items like the following:⁶¹

Bélisaire, par Marmontel, nouvelle édition augmentée, 8°, figures, Lausanne, 1784: 1 livre.

Bible (la Sainte), 8°, 2 vol., Neuchâtel, 1771: 6 livres.

Bibliothèque anglaise, ou recueil des romans anglais, 14 vol., 12°, Genève, 1781: 15 livres.

Bonnet (M. Charles), ses oeuvres complètes de physique et d'histoire naturelle, 4°, 8 vol., figures, Neuchâtel, 1782: 81 livres.

The books in the second catalogue may have been legal or pirated, but they did not offend religion, morality, or the French state. Those in the first catalogue offended all three and therefore earned the title “livres philosophiques”—a very revealing trade name, which recurs constantly in the commercial correspondence of underground publishers.

How offensive actually was this “philosophy”? *Les amours de Charlot et Toinette*, a work that was high on Vergennes' list of *libelles*, began with a description of the queen masturbating and then moved on to an account of her supposed orgies with the comte d'Artois, dismissing the king as follows:⁶²

On sait bien que le pauvre Sire,
Trois ou quatre fois condamné
Par la salubre faculté,
Pour impuissance très complète,
Ne peut satisfaire Antoinette.
De ce malheur bien convaincu,
Attendu que son allumette
N'est pas plus grosse qu'un fétu;
Que toujours molle et toujours croche,
Il n'a de v . . . que dans la poche;
Qu'au lieu de f . . . il est f . . .
Comme le feu prélat d'Antioche.

Crude stuff, but no less ineffective for its gross versification. A similar work, which pretended to defend the queen, and various courtiers and ministers as well, by refuting the calumnies against her in minute, scabrous detail, explained that the *libelles* circulated through several strata of society:⁶³

Un lâche courtisan les [“ces infamies”] met en vers en couplets, et, par le ministère de la valetaille, les fait passer jusqu'aux halles et aux marchés

aux herbes. Des halles elles sont portées à l'artisan qui, à son tour, les rapporte chez les seigneurs qui les ont forgées, et lesquels, sans perdre de temps, s'en vont à l'Oeil-de-Boeuf se demander à l'oreille les uns aux autres, et du ton de l'hypocrisie la plus consommée: Les avez-vous lues? les voilà. Elles courent dans le peuple de Paris.

No doubt one could pick up some smut from the gutter at any period in the history of Paris, but the gutters overflowed during the reign of Louis XVI; and the inundation worried Louis' chief of police, J.-C.-P. Lenoir, because, as Lenoir put it, "Les parisiens avaient plus de propension à ajouter foi aux mauvais propos et aux libelles qu'on faisait circuler clandestinement, qu'aux faits imprimés et publiés par ordre ou permission du gouvernement."⁶⁴ Lenoir later reported that his attempt to suppress the circulation of *libelles* "furent combattus par des hommes de la cour qui faisaient imprimer ou protégeaient l'impression d'écrits scandaleux. La police de Paris ne pouvait atteindre que les marchands et colporteurs les vendant et débitant. On faisait enfermer les colporteurs à la Bastille, et ce genre de punition ne mortifiait pas cette classe de gens, pauvres mercénaires qui souvent ignoraient les vrais auteurs et imprimeurs . . . C'est surtout à l'égard des libelles contre le gouvernement que les lois, dans les temps qui ont précédé la révolution, furent impuissantes."⁶⁵ The police took the *libelles* seriously, because they had a serious effect on public opinion, and public opinion was a powerful force in the declining years of the Old Regime. Although the monarchy still considered itself absolute, it hired hack pamphleteers like Brissot and Mirabeau to give it a good name.⁶⁶ It even attempted to manipulate rumors, for eighteenth-century "bruits publics" produced eighteenth-century "émotions populaires"—riots. A riot broke out in 1752, for example, because of a rumor that the police were kidnapping working-class children to provide a literal blood bath for some royal prince of the blood.⁶⁷ It was the primitiveness of such "emotions" and opinions that made the regime vulnerable to *libelles*.

How badly the *libelles* damaged the public's faith in the legitimacy of the Old Regime is difficult to say, because there is no index to the public opinion of eighteenth-century France. Despite the testimony of expert observers like Vergennes and Lenoir,⁶⁸ it might be argued that the public found its dirty books amusing, nothing more. *Libellistes* had piled up trash for years without burying anyone. But there also could have been a cumulative effect that produced a deluge after Louis XV. Louis' private life pro-

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vided plenty of material for the *Vie privée de Louis XV*, which in turn set the tone for a whole series of *Vie privées* about court figures. These scurrilous works hammered at the same points with such ferocity that they probably drove some home, at least in the case of a few leitmotifs: Du Barry's sexual success story (from brothel to throne), Maupeou's despotism (his search for a man to build a machine that would hang ten innocent victims at a time); and the decadence of the court (not merely a matter of luxury and adultery but also of impotence—in the *libelles* the high aristocracy could neither fight nor make love and perpetuated itself by extramarital infusions from more virile lower classes).⁶⁹ Louis XVI, notoriously unable to consummate his marriage for many years, made a perfect symbol of a monarchy in the last stages of decay. Dozens of pamphlets like *La naissance du Dauphin dévoilée* (another on Vergennes' list) provided dozens of revelations about the real lineage of the heir to the throne. And then the Diamond Necklace Affair produced an inexhaustible supply of muck to be raked. A king cuckolded by a cardinal: What better finale to a regime that was finished—better even than the rumor of the warming pan that brought public opinion to a boil in England on the eve of 1688.

It is easy to underestimate the importance of personal slander in eighteenth-century French politics, because it is difficult to appreciate that politics took place at court, where personalities counted more than policies. Defamation was a standard weapon of court cabales. And then as now, names made news, although news did not make the newspapers. Rigorously excluded from legal periodicals, it circulated in pamphlets, *nouvelles à la main*, and by *nouvellistes de bouche*—the real sources from which political journalism originated in France. In such crude media, politics was reported crudely—as a game for kings, their courtiers, ministers, and mistresses. Beyond the court and below the summit of salon society, the “general public” lived on rumors; and the “general reader” saw politics as a kind of nonparticipant sport, involving villains and heroes but not issues—except perhaps a crude struggle between good and evil or France and Austria. He probably read his *libelles* as his modern counterpart reads magazines or comic books, but he did not laugh them off; for the villains and heroes were real to him; they were fighting for control of France. Politics was living folklore. And so, after enjoying *La gazette noire's* titillating account of venereal disease, buggery, cuckoldry, illegitimacy, and im-

potence in the upper ranks of French society, he may have been convinced and outraged by its description of Mme. Du Barry⁷⁰

passant sans interruption du bordel sur le trône, des bras des laquais dans ceux du monarque; culbutant le ministre le plus puissant et le plus redoutable; opérant le renversement de la constitution de la monarchie; insultant à la famille royale, à l'héritier présomptif du trône et à son auguste compagne, par son luxe incroyable, par ses propos insolants, à la nation entière mourant de faim, par ses profusions vaines, par les déprédations connues de tous les roués qui l'entouraient; voyant ramper à ses pieds non seulement les grands du royaume, les ministres, mais les princes du sang, mais les ambassadeurs étrangers, mais l'Eglise canonisant ses scandales et ses débauches.

This was more dangerous propaganda than the *Contrat social*. It severed the sense of decency that bound the public to its rulers. Its disingenuous moralizing opposed the ethics of little people to those of "les grands" on top, because, for all their obscenities, the *libelles* were strongly moralistic. Perhaps they even propagated a "bourgeois morality" that came to full fruition during the Revolution. "Bourgeois" may not be the proper term for it, or for the Revolution either, but the "petits" who rose against the "gros" in the Year II responded to a kind of Gaulois Puritanism that had developed well before 1789. Gullible about the plots and purges of the Terror,⁷¹ they had gullibly assimilated legends from their earlier *libelles*. Thus an aristocratic plot to kidnap bourgeois wives before the Revolution: "Avez-vous une jolie femme? Est-elle du goût de quelque nouveau parvenu, de quelque petit fat en puissance, de quelque talon rouge, par exemple? On vous la séquestre proprement. Voulez-vous raisonner? On vous envoie aux galères."⁷² Of course one can only speculate about what went on in the minds of such primitive readers, but it might have been "désacralisation," occurring at levels well below the elite. Without this occurrence, it is hard to understand how the *Père Duchesne* could have had such an appeal or how people brought up to believe in the royal touch could have read about "la tête de véto femelle séparée de son foutu col de grue"⁷³ without erupting in "émotion populaire." The king had lost some of his mystical touch with the people long before Hébert's harangues about the "louve autrichienne" and her "gros cocu." How great a loss it was, no one can say, but works like *Les rois de France régénérés* made the Bourbons look literally illegitimate. The administration feared those works, because it appreciated their power to make a mockery of the monarchy. The ridiculing of Louis XVI

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must have done a great deal of damage at a time when nobility was still identified with “liqueur séminale”⁷⁴ and when the Salic Law still required that the royal “race” be transmitted through a magical unbroken chain of males. The magic had gone out of the Bourbons by the reign of Louis XVI. Lenoir reported that as the Revolution approached he could not get crowds to applaud the queen by paying them, although they had cheered spontaneously earlier.⁷⁵ And in 1789 Desmoulins described a four-year-old being carried around the Palais-Royal on the shoulders of a street-porter, crying out, “ ‘La Polignac exilée à cent lieues de Paris! Condé idem! Conti idem! d’Artois idem! la reine . . . !’ je n’ose répéter.”⁷⁶ The *libelles* had done their work all too well.

The step from publishing to libeling was easily taken outside the closed circles of the guild because nonguild publishers could only exist outside the law, and law in the Old Regime meant privilege (*leges privatae*, private law).⁷⁷ The nuances of legality and illegality covered a broad enough spectrum, however, for many underprivileged bookdealers to do a pretty legitimate business. The underground contained several levels. Its agents near the top may never have touched *libelles*, while those at the bottom handled nothing but filth. The Société typographique de Neuchâtel generally pirated only good, clean books like the works of Mme. Riccoboni, but the neighboring house of Samuel Fauche and his prodigal sons produced the very works that Vergennes tried to suppress in London. Fauche also printed the political and pornographic writings of Mirabeau: *l’Espion dévalisé*, *Ma conversion ou le libertin de qualité*, *Erotika Biblion*, and *Lettres de cachet*.⁷⁸ And yet when the last ten volumes of the *Encyclopédie* appeared in 1765, they bore the false imprint “A Neufchastel chez Samuel Faulche.” The underground genres easily got mixed up, and underground dealers often moved from one level to another. Hard times forced them into lower reaches of illegality; for as they sank deeper into debt, they took greater chances in hopes of greater profits. The crisis of the 1780’s might have produced precisely that result. Ironically, Vergennes might have transformed some rather inoffensive pirates into purveyors of *libelles* and actually increased the circulation of “livres philosophiques” by decreasing the relatively above-the-board traffic in *contrefaçons*. The Société typographique de Neuchâtel seems to have done more business in *libelles* after 1783 than before Vergennes’ crackdown.⁷⁹ As the Revolution approached, provincial dealers who earlier had merely

discharged a few false *acquits à caution* may have speculated more on shipments of works like *Les amours de Charlot et Toinette* and passed around more catalogues of “livres philosophiques.” Or perhaps their customers’ tastes changed in response to episodes like the Diamond Necklace Affair. It is impossible at this point to tell whether supply followed demand fairly neatly or whether demand was influenced by what could be supplied. Reading habits could have evolved as a result of the peculiar conditions determining literary output or could have been the determining factor themselves; or each element could have reinforced the other. Whatever combination of causes was at work, the Old Regime put *Charlot et Toinette*, *Vénus dans le cloître*, d’Holbach, and Rousseau in the same boxes and shipped them under the same code-name. “Livres philosophiques” to the dealers, “mauvais livres” to the police, it made little difference. What mattered was their common clandestineness. There was equality in illegality; Charlot and Rousseau were brothers beyond the pale.

The very way in which these works were produced helped reduce them to the common denominator of irreligion, immorality, and uncivility. The foreigners who printed them felt no loyalty to France, the Bourbons, or, often, the Catholic Church. The dealers who distributed them operated in an underworld of “bandits sans mœurs et sans pudeur.” And the authors who wrote them had often sunk into a Grub Street life of quasi-criminality. The arch-*libelliste* Charles Théveneau de Morande was brought up in brothels and educated in prisons, and those milieux provided the material for his writing.⁸⁰ Perhaps the underground’s impurities rubbed off on the books that passed through it: the message certainly suited the medium. But what a state of affairs! A regime that classified its most advanced philosophy with its most debased pornography was a regime that sapped itself, that dug its own underground, and that encouraged philosophy to degenerate into *libelle*. When philosophy went under, it lost its self-restraint and its commitment to the culture of those on top. When it turned against courtiers, churchmen, and kings, it committed itself to turning the world upside down. In their own language, the *livres philosophiques* called for undermining and overthrowing. The counterculture called for a cultural revolution—and was ready to answer the call of 1789.

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REFERENCES

1. Marc Bloch, "Critique historique et critique du témoignage," *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 5 (1950), 5; reference supplied by Roberto Vivarelli.
2. Daniel Mornet, "Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées (1750-1780)," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 17 (1910), 449-492.
3. Although he carefully qualified the conclusions in his article, Mornet made more sweeping statements in his later work. He wrongly implied that his research on the *Social Contract* was valid for the period after 1780: "De ce livre redoutable, c'est à peine si l'on parle avant 1789," Daniel Mornet, "L'influence de J.-J. Rousseau au XVIIIe siècle," *Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 8 (1912), 44. See also Daniel Mornet, *Rousseau, l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Boivin, 1950), pp. 102-106, and Daniel Mornet, *Les origines intellectuelles de la Révolution Française*, 5th ed. (Paris: Colin, 1954), p. 229. Robert Derathé accepted Mornet's interpretation: "Les réfutations du *Contrat Social* au XVIIIe siècle," *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 32 (1950-1952), 7-12. And Alfred Cobban extended it: "Rousseau's *Contrat social* had no ascertainable influence before the Revolution and only a very debatable one during its course"; see his "The Enlightenment and the French Revolution," reprinted in *Aspects of the French Revolution* (New York: Braziller, 1968), p. 22. The latest extension is Joan McDonald, *Rousseau and the French Revolution, 1762-1791* (London: Athlone Press, 1965).
4. See the devastating review article by R. A. Leigh, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau," *The Historical Journal*, 12 (1969), 549-565.
5. Although Rousseau's treatise was too abstruse to provoke the sort of controversy that followed *Emile* and his discourses (except in Switzerland), its influence, like all ideological influence, is difficult to measure. If repression is any indication of importance, it should be noted that the French state never formally condemned the *Contrat social* but did not permit it to circulate freely. The revolutionaries found it locked up with other seditious literature in the *pilon* of the Bastille: Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 10305, "le pilon de la Bastille."
6. Escarpit's book was published in the widely-read "Que Sais-Je" series and has already gone through four editions. As an example of its influence, see Louis Trenard, "La sociologie du livre en France (1750-1789)," *Actes du cinquième Congrès national de la Société française de littérature comparée* (Paris, 1965), p. 145.
7. Robert Escarpit, *Sociologie de la littérature*, 4th ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), p. 46. It should be noted also that the development of writing as a *métier* in the eighteenth century did not correspond to the sociological phenomenon of professionalization. See the article "Professions" by Talcott Parsons in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, XII, 536-547.

8. David Pottinger, *The French Book Trade in the Ancien Régime, 1500-1791* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 9.
9. The studies, to be cited henceforth by name of author, are: François Furet, "La 'librairie' du royaume de France au 18e siècle" in *Livre et société dans la France du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris and The Hague, 1965); Jean Ehrard and Jacques Roger, "Deux périodiques français du 18e siècle: 'le Journal des Savants' et 'les Mémoires de Trévoux.' Essai d'une étude quantitative," in the same volume; Daniel Roche, "Un savant et sa bibliothèque au XVIIIe siècle: les livres de Jean-Jacques Dortous de Mairan, secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie des sciences, membre de l'Académie de Béziers," *Dix-huitième siècle*, 1 (1969), 47-88; François Bluche, *Les magistrats du Parlement de Paris au XVIIIe siècle, 1715-1771* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), pp. 291-296, which incorporates the findings of an unpublished study by Régine Petit, *Les bibliothèques des hommes du parlement de Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (1954); and Jean Meyer, *La noblesse bretonne au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1966), pp. 1156-1177.
10. Furet, p. 19.
11. Ehrard and Roger, p. 56.
12. Mornet, "Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées," p. 473.
13. Quotation cited in Raymond Birn, "Le Journal des savants sous l'Ancien Régime," *Journal des savants* (January-March 1965), p. 28 and in Eugène Hatin, *Histoire politique et littéraire de la presse en France* (Paris, 1859-1861), II, 192.
14. Jean-Louis and Marie Flandrin, "La circulation du livre dans la société du 18e siècle: un sondage à travers quelques sources," *Livre et société*, 2 (Paris, 1970), 52-91. The Flandrins studied three private or at least uncensored literary journals, which discussed philosophic works that could not be mentioned in the pages of quasi-official, heavily-censored periodicals like the *Journal des savants*. But the Flandrins' three journals show the opposite bias from those studied by Ehrard and Roger. They discussed mainly sensational books—books that made news—and thus do not represent the general literary tastes of their readers any more than do the *Journal des savants* and the Jesuit *Mémoires de Trévoux*.
15. Trenard, "La sociologie du livre en France."
16. The main problem in constructing these graphs was to find comparable units and statistics for them in the eight studies under analysis. In order to make comparisons possible, it was necessary to redo some of the mathematics and to reconvert some of the data that appeared in graph form in the two articles published in *Livre et société*. The graphs all refer to the mid-century, although they represent slightly different time spans. The subjects that do not appear on them mostly concern the various "arts" catalogued under the heading "sciences et arts." Because that heading seemed too broad to mean much to the modern reader, it was replaced by the subcategory "sciences." Composed of four subsubcategories—*phy-*

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sique, médecine, histoire naturelle, and mathématiques—the “sciences” could be computed in every case except those of Mornet and Bluche-Petit. Mornet gave no statistics on mathematical books, but the omission probably concerned much less than 1 per cent of all his titles and so did not affect the general pattern. Bluche did not differentiate “sciences” from “sciences et arts” at all. Although the subcategory “sciences” varied widely in other cases (from 10 per cent to 70 per cent of the general category), it seemed reasonable to estimate it at half of Bluche’s “sciences et arts” or 7 per cent of the total—a rough approximation indicated by broken lines that the reader may prefer to discount. Mornet’s figures covered only “romans” and “grammaires” in the category “belles-lettres,” which probably left out a little over half that category, judging from the distribution in Furet’s *permissions publiques* and *permissions tacites*. The category probably would have occupied between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of Mornet’s total and is indicated as 15 per cent by broken lines. Unlike the others, Mornet did not classify travel literature with history, as was the practice in the eighteenth century. Had he done so, his “history” division would have expanded by another 1.5 per cent. Meyer’s “belles-lettres” also is approximate and therefore appears in broken lines.

A graph combining Furet’s studies of *permissions publiques* and *permissions tacites* was constructed from computations based on his original data, because it was hoped that an over-all picture of literary output would emerge by combining statistics from those two very different sources. Suggestive as it is, this composite bar graph contradicts all the others. For example, it somewhat resembles the graph based on Mornet’s statistics, but Mornet would have the French reading far fewer religious works (6 per cent) in relation to science (3 per cent) and especially history (30 per cent) than would Furet, whose combined graph shows 20 per cent religion, 9 per cent science, and 11 per cent history.

Because all eight studies kept close to the eighteenth-century classification scheme, they do not give much help to the modern reader in search of the Enlightenment. Does he associate Enlightenment with “philosophie,” one of the eight subcategories under “sciences et arts”? If so, he must contend with four sibling subsubcategories: *philosophie ancienne, logique, morale, and métaphysique*. The last two seem promising, but (except in Roche’s statistics, which include two additional subsubcategories) the data do not distinguish them from their two predecessors. The four studies that provide statistics on “philosophie” as a whole suggest it comprised a small, stable portion of eighteenth-century reading: the *permissions publiques* fix it at 3 per cent (1723-1727), 3.7 per cent (1750-1754), and 4.5 per cent (1784-1788); the *permissions tacites* at 6 per cent (1750-1759), 5 per cent (1770-1774), and 6 per cent (1784-1788); the reviews in the *Journal des savants* at 3 per cent (1715-1719), 4 per cent (1750-1754), and 5 per cent (1785-1789); and it made up 7 per cent of Dortous de Mairan’s library. Not much evidence for the spread of *lumières*. But then the Enlightenment cannot be identified with any of the eighteenth-century categories or their subdivisions.

It would also be possible to express Pottinger’s study of two hundred eighteenth-century authors in a bar graph, because he produced a statisti-

cal table of their publications, taking Mornet's work as a model. But, as explained above, Pottinger's selection of writers is so arbitrary and his statistics so incomplete and unrepresentative that the graph would not mean very much. Nonetheless, for purposes of comparison, his findings ought to be mentioned (Pottinger, *The French Book Trade*, pp. 30-31): religious works 11 per cent of the total produced by his authors, science 20 per cent, history 20 per cent, law 2 per cent, belles-lettres 10 per cent.

17. This figure is based on the Maggiolo study of literacy as presented by Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary in "Les progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoléon III d'après l'enquête de Louis Maggiolo (1877-1879)," *Population* (1957), pp. 71-92, estimating the population at 26 million.
18. Julien Brancolini and Marie-Thérèse Bouyssi, "La vie provinciale du livre à la fin de l'Ancien Régime" and Jean-Louis and Marie Flandrin, "La circulation du livre dans la société du 18e siècle: un sondage à travers quelques sources," both in *Livre et société*, 2 (Paris, 1970). For a detailed discussion of these studies, see Robert Darnton, "In Search of the Enlightenment: Recent Attempts to Create a Social History of Ideas," a review article that will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Modern History*.
19. The remainder of this essay is essentially a "work in progress" report based on the first stages of research in the papers of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel in the Bibliothèque Publique de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Switzerland, cited henceforth as STN. Other important sources were the papers of Jean-Charles-Pierre Lenoir, *lieutenant-général de police* of Paris from 1774 to 1775 and 1776 to 1785, in the Bibliothèque municipale d'Orléans, Mss. 1421-1423; the Archives de la Chambre syndicale and Collection Anisson-Duperron papers of the Bibliothèque Nationale (especially fonds français, Mss. 21862, 21833, 22046, 22063, 22070, 22075, 22081, 22109, 22116, 22102); the papers of the Bastille and related papers on the book trade in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (especially Mss. 10305, 12446, 12454, 12480, 12481, 12517); and the Ministère des affaires étrangères, Correspondance politique, Angleterre (Mss. 541-549). For information on the underground book route through Kehl and Strasbourg as opposed to Neuchâtel and Pontarlier, the relevant papers in the Archives de la ville de Strasbourg (mainly Mss. AA 2355-2362) were consulted but turned out to be less useful than the others. Research on publishing under the Old Regime by now has made J.-P. Belin, *Le commerce des livres prohibés à Paris de 1750 à 1789* (New York, no date, a Burt Franklin reprint of the original edition, Paris, 1913) somewhat dated. For information about the most important secondary works, see the bibliographies in Nicole Herrmann-Mascard, *La censure des livres à Paris à la fin de l'Ancien Régime, 1750-1789* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), and Madeleine Ventre, *L'imprimerie et la librairie en Languedoc au dernier siècle de l'Ancien Régime, 1700-1789* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1958). The present essay was written before the thesis of H.-J. Martin became available, but it relies heavily on his article, "L'édition parisienne au

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XVIIe siècle: quelques aspects économiques,” *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 7 (July-September 1952), 303-318. Another suggestive article is Léon Cahen, “La librairie parisienne et la diffusion du livre français à la fin du XVIIIe siècle,” *Revue de synthèse*, 17 (1939), 159-179.

20. A typical example is the memoire of August 2, 1783, by Périsse Duluc, syndic of the Chambre syndicale of Lyons in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss. français 21833, fol. 96.
21. Revol to STN, July 4, 1784, STN Ms. 1205.
22. For example, the Société typographique de Neuchâtel received a letter dated October 30, 1783, from François Michaut, its agent on the Swiss side of the French border, which explained, “Votre partie est assez chato-uilleuse à raison de la crainte que les porteurs ont qu’en cas de prise ils ne fussent saisis comme introducteurs d’ouvrages qui attaquent la religion ou qui traitent à dénigrer certaines personnes en place . . . Si vous ne voulez introduire que des livres irrépréhensibles par leur contenu, les porteurs vous demanderont votre garntie pour ces faits là, et vous en trouverez dans nos environs qui vous rendront le quintal à 12 livres de France à Pontarlier ou même une lieue plus loin s’il le fallait. Autre quoi il faut encore donner à boire à chaque porteur avant que de partir. Il faut vous observer, Messieurs, qu’à ce prix là les porteurs font pour le mieux sans vous répondre de la marchandise.” Michaut observed with some pride that “effectivement ma position est assez avantageuse pour les entrées clandestines” but warned, “l’on trouve le long de la route et dans les villages des employés ambulants, qui malgré que l’on soit en règle arrêtent et éppluchent la charge d’un voiturier.” He therefore stressed the need of having an agent to dupe or bribe the employees of the General Farm from the French side of the border: “Je ne connais personne de plus propre à cela que le sieur Faivre,” STN Ms. 1183. Faivre did not hesitate to recommend himself. On October 14, 1784, he informed the society, “Samedi prochain vos balles entreront. J’ai tant fait et promis à ces porteurs que je leur donnerai de quoi boire et qu’ils seront contents, ce qui les a ranimés à retourner . . . Je suis au moment de traiter avec un employé des fermes pour nous laisser passer librement la nuit et m’indiquer les chemins où l’on doit passer en sûreté,” STN Ms. 1148.
23. STN to J.-P. Brissot, April 29, 1781, STN Ms. 1109.
24. Mme. La Noue to STN, September 8, 1782, STN Ms. 1173. Mme. La Noue was sensitive to complaints that she overcharged and underprotected her customers. On December 9, 1780, she wrote to the STN, “Je vous prie M. vouloir bien aïtres tranquille sur le sort de vos objet. Lorsquils sòn entre mais mains je ne negligé rien pour le mettre a labry des evenements. Obligé moy davoïr confiance en ma façon de travailler.” But on January 13, 1783, she confessed that six of its crates had been seized at her doorstep: “Le voiturie ètoit suivi au point quil cest trouvé icy a la de charge dudit voiturie 3 personne de la prevottè qui ce sont emparrè des ditte 6 balles et de lettres de voiture que le voiturie na put leurs reffuzè par les menaces quilz luy on fait et amoy bien des question pendant quinze jour pour

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declarrè les personnes a qui apartenoit les dittes balles et dou elle venoit aquoy je me suis reffuzè," *ibid.*

25. Paul de Pourtalès to STN, June 23, 1784, STN Ms. 1199.
26. See the Desauges dossier in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 12446. On April 4, 1775, Desauges père wrote dyspeptically from the Bastille to his son, who had just been released, "il faut prendre son mal en patience. Je t'avoueraï franchement que je m'ennuie à la mort." The Desauges dossier in Neuchâtel, Ms. 1141, shows the sharp practices of underground book-dealers at their most cutthroat.
27. Mme. J. E. Bertrand to STN, October 7, 1785, STN Ms. 1121.
28. J.-F. Bornand to STN, August 10, 1785, STN Ms. 1124. Poinçot occasionally smuggled books from Versailles to Paris for Desauges at twelve livres the quintal, which apparently was cheap compared with the charges of Mme. La Noue: three livres per "gros objet," which her nephew delivered to appointed hiding places on the outskirts of Paris (see Desauges to STN, November 24, 1783, Ms. 1141 and Mme. La Noue to STN, June 22, 1781, Ms. 1173).
29. Among his tasks, Bornand had to try to cope with the "verbiages" of Mme. La Noue (Bornand to STN, February 19, 1785, Ms. 1124), the ruses of Poinçot and Desauges, and the impecuniousness of authors: "C'est une triste ressource que les auteurs pour l'argent" (Bornand to STN, March 9, 1785, *ibid.*).
30. Giles Barber, "French Royal Decrees Concerning the Book Trade 1700-1789," *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 3 (1966), 312.
31. A. J. L. Jourdan, O. O. Decrusy, and F. A. Isambert, eds., *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises* (Paris, 1822-1833), XXI, 230.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
34. George V. Taylor, "Noncapitalist Wealth and the Origins of the French Revolution," *American Historical Review*, 72 (1967), 469-496.
35. P. J. Blondel, *Mémoire sur les vexations qu'exercent les libraires et imprimeurs de Paris*, ed. Lucien Faucou (Paris, 1879); see especially pp. 18-25 and 45.
36. Quotations from *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises*, XXV, 109, 119, and 110 respectively.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
38. Because of the complicated problems of dating Diderot's *Lettre*, relating it to earlier documents that influenced Diderot's argument, and establishing a correct version of the text, it is important to read the *Lettre* in the critical edition by Jacques Proust (Paris: Colin, 1962). But even the old edition in Diderot's *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J. Assézat and Maurice Tourneux

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(Paris, 1876), XVIII, 6, included a note by someone in the *Direction de la Librairie* (d'Hémery?) which observed that Diderot wrote the *Lettre* "d'après le conseil des libraires et sur des matériaux que M. Le Breton . . . lui a fournis, et dont les principes sont absolument contraires à la bonne administration des privilèges." Although the *Lettre* contains some heartfelt statements about liberty and the tribulations of authors, its logic is twisted to favor publishers and it reproduces the old arguments advanced by the guild. It is therefore difficult to accept Brunel's claim that Diderot did not write the *Lettre* either as an ally or as a paid propagandist of Le Breton and the other privileged publishers: Lucien Brunel, "Observations critiques et littéraires sur un opuscule de Diderot," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 10 (1903), 1-24.

39. The code of 1777 weakened some of the Parisian guild's power by giving authors the right to sell their own works and by providing for two public book sales in Paris every year. It favored provincial publishers by permitting them to print the increasing number of books that it caused to fall into the public domain—an acknowledgment of the fact that they had engaged in illegal activities for lack of "un moyen légitime d'employer leurs presses," *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises*, XXV, 109. The edicts of 1777 thus attempted to "faire cesser la rivalité qui divise la librairie de Paris et celle des provinces, de la faire tourner au profit de cette branche importante du commerce, et de former de tous les libraires une même famille qui n'aura plus qu'un même intérêt," *ibid.*, pp. 119-120. But this rivalry went too deep to be settled by such small concessions to the provincial dealers, who continued to protest against exploitation by the Parisians throughout the 1780's. The 1777 code also extended and strengthened the guild system in the provinces, because "S.M. a reconnu qu'il serait dangereux de laisser subsister les imprimeries isolées dans un état d'indépendance qui y facilite les abus," *ibid.*, p. 112. So the reorganization of the guilds did not substantially weaken them or impair their policing function.
40. D.-J. Garat, *Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits et sur le XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1820), I, 274.
41. Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss. français 21833, foll. 87-88. This account of French tax and tariff legislation is derived from several documents in Ms. 21833, particularly foll. 89-91 and 129-140.
42. The tariff legislation was a constant theme in the commercial correspondence of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel for the first half of the 1770's. The society even sent one of its partners on a business trip through eastern France to sell books, to find new ways of making fraudulent shipments, and to learn as much as possible about tariff policy. According to the instructions in his travel-log, he was to seek out "J. M. Bruysset, homme froid et habile: 1° S'entretenir avec lui de la librairie française en général, savoir de lui si en effet l'impôt sera levé ou diminué," STN, Ms. 1058, "Carnet de voyage, 1773, J. E. Bertrand." The Bruysset house was one of the most effective lobbyists against the tariff, judging from the memoranda in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss. français 21833, especially foll. 87-88 and 129-140. The tariff damaged the illegal trade, because pirated works

were usually shipped through legal channels, at least at the border, under false *acquits à caution* and therefore paid duty.

43. Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss. français, 21833, foll. 87-88. This memoir reads as though it were the work of Panckoucke. One sou per gathering was the normal printing charge of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel, whose flourishing business in the late 1770's seems to have resulted from the combination of France's favorable tariff policy and the cheap conditions of printing in Switzerland.
44. *Ibid.*, foll. 111-115. The dealer showed, by a very detailed argument, that a six-hundred-pound crate would cost him 61 livres, 15 sous in extra charges, would cause enormous delays and damage through mishandling, and would make it impossible for him to collect insurance for damaged shipments.
45. *Ibid.*, fol. 70.
46. *Ibid.*, fol. 107: "Les libraires éloignés de Paris, et ceux de Lyon en particulier, ont sur le champ contremandé les envois qu'on devait leur faire, fait rétrograder les ballots qui étaient en route, annulé leurs marchés, et renoncé aux entreprises d'impression pour lesquelles ils se voient maintenant sans débouchés. Enfin, il n'existe déjà plus de correspondance active entre les libraires français et les libraires étrangers."
47. J. F. Bornand to STN, April 12, 1784, STN Ms. 1124.
48. J. F. Bornand to STN, April 9, 1784, *ibid.*
49. J. F. Bornand to STN, February 19, 1785, *ibid.*
50. STN to Garrigan, a bookdealer in Avignon, August 23, 1785: "Nous partageons sans doute bien sincèrement le regret sur l'interruption de notre correspondance que vous voulez bien nous témoigner par l'honneur de votre lettre du 10 de ce mois, mais vous n'ignorez pas que la cause fatale ne peut en être attribué qu'à la rigueur toujours subsistante des ordonnances concernant l'introduction de la librairie étrangère dans le royaume. Les choses sont encore sur un tel pied à cet égard, que nous ne pouvons faire entrer une balle *Libri* par le bureau de notre frontière qu'en prenant un acquit à caution pour Paris, où les vôtres seraient obligés d'aller en faisant ainsi un détour immense et subissant l'examen de la Chambre syndicale Parisienne, ce qui est absolument impraticable," STN Ms. 1110.
51. STN to Mme. J. E. Bertrand, early October 1785, STN Ms. 1110.
52. The archives in Strasbourg, an important center of the clandestine trade, complement those in Neuchâtel in that they show a determined effort by the government to stop traffic in prohibited works. Strasbourg's *préteur royal* received frequent reports from local officials about seizures of illegal shipments from the publishers across the Rhine; and he also received strict orders from his own superior, the *garde des sceaux* (letter of April 26, 1786, in Archives de la Ville de Strasbourg, Ms. AA2356): "La librairie proscrite par nos lois vous environne de toute part; et elle pénétrera par les moyens

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que vous ne lui aurez pas interdits, si vous ne les lui interdisez pas tous . . . Je vous exhorte donc fortement, vous et le magistrat de votre ville, à prendre les mesures convenables." Despite this rigor, printers in Kehl seem to have got a great many books—political pamphlets and *libelles* as well as Beaumarchais' Voltaire—through the traps laid for them in Strasbourg. The town's semiautonomy, guaranteed by the capitulations of 1681, may have made it relatively easy to penetrate.

53. See Furet, p. 8, and Robert Estivals, *La statistique bibliographique de la France sous la monarchie au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris and The Hague: Imprimerie nationale, 1965), p. 296.
54. Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. français 21833, fol. 107.
55. *Ibid.*, fol. 108; see also foll. 99-104.
56. Vergennes to d'Adhémar, May 12, 1783, Ministère des affaires étrangères, Correspondance politique, Angleterre, Ms. 542. The details of "cette machination d'intrigues, de cupidité, et de fourberie," as Vergennes called it (Vergennes to Lenoir, May 24, 1783, *ibid.*)—and which I plan to recount in a later work—can be found in the series 541-549.
57. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 10305. The inventory also included *Le gazetier cuirassé*, *L'espion dévalisé*, *Vie privée de Louis XV*, *Le diable dans un bénitier*, and other classics of the London School of *libellistes*. It specified that they had been shipped to some of the customers of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel, notably Poinçot, Blaizot, and Mme. La Noue. Poinçot himself drew up the inventory.
58. For the conventional view that the government's policy was severe in theory and permissive in practice, see J.-P. Belin, *Le commerce des livres prohibés à Paris de 1750 à 1789* (New York, no date, a Burt Franklin reprint of the original edition, Paris, 1913) and the restatement of Belin's interpretation in Nicole Herrmann-Mascard, *La censure des livres à Paris à la fin de l'ancien régime, 1750-1789* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968). Both books dismiss the June 12, 1783, orders in two sentences—the same sentences, curiously, almost word for word (Belin, p. 45; Herrmann-Mascard, p. 102).
59. It also might serve as a corrective to the Marxist tendency to treat the Enlightenment as bourgeois ideology. One version of this tendency argues that ideas such as social contract, individualism, liberty, and equality before the law derived from capitalist methods of exchange, which involve contractual obligations between legally free and equal individuals: Lucien Goldmann, "La pensée des 'Lumières,'" *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 22 (1967), 752-770. Considering the multitude of writers who expressed such ideas before the development of capitalism, this argument seems less convincing than its opposite, which relates the Enlightenment to a tradition of aristocratic liberalism: Denis Richet, "Autour des origines idéologiques lointaines de la Révolution française: élites et despotisme," *ibid.*, 24 (1969), 1-23.
60. STN, Ms. 1108.

61. *Ibid.* In contrast, the manuscript catalogue offered the following under the letter “B”: “*La belle allemande, ou les galanteries de Thérèse, 1774; Bijoux indiscrets* par Diderot, 8° figures; *Le bonheur*, poème par Helvétius; *Le bon sens, ou idées naturelles, opposées aux idées surnaturelles.*”
62. Reprinted in A. Van Bever, *Contes et conteurs gaillards au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Daragon, 1906), pp. 280-281. In notes that he assembled for his memoirs, the former lieutenant general of police J.-C.-P. Lenoir associated this work with a widespread outbreak of libeling in the 1780’s (Bibliothèque municipale d’Orléans, Ms. 1423): “Les moeurs du successeur de Louis Quinze étant inattaquables, le nouveau roi fut inaccessible de ce côté à la calomnie pendant les premières années de son règne, mais on commença en 1778 à le diffamer du côté de sa faiblesse, et les premières calomnies qui furent ourdies contre sa personne ne préludèrent que de très peu de mois ceux de la méchanceté contre la reine. M. de Maurepas, qui jusques là avait été fort insouciant touchant des épigrammes et des chansons faites contre lui, M. de Maurepas, qui s’amusait de tous les libelles, de toutes les anecdotes privées et scandaleuses qu’on fabriquait et imprimait avec impunité, eut avis que des écrivains avaient fait entre eux une sorte de spéculation, qu’ils avaient lié une correspondance au moyen de laquelle les uns envoyaient de Paris les histoires courantes et fournissaient des titres et des matériaux à ceux qui les composaient et faisaient imprimer à La Haye et à Londres, d’où ils les faisaient entrer en France en petite quantité par des voyageurs étrangers. Un secrétaire d’ambassade d’Angleterre lui annonça qu’on devait incessamment y introduire en France un libelle abominable intitulé *Les amours de Charlot et d’Antoinette.*”
63. *Le portefeuille d’un talon rouge contenant des anecdotes galantes et secrètes de la cour de France*, reprinted under the title *Le coffret du bibliophile* (Paris, no date), p. 22. Lenoir’s manuscripts confirm this account (Bibliothèque municipale d’Orléans, Ms. 1422): “Il n’est plus douteux maintenant que c’étaient MM. de Montesquiou, de Créqui, de Champcents, et d’autres courtisans, qui de concert avec Beaumarchais, Chamfort, et autres écrivains vivants encore avaient composé des libelles contre la cour, contre les ministres, et même contre ceux des ministres qui les employaient. Il est plus que probable que Beaumarchais avait composé, porté à Londres, où il a été imprimé, un libelle avec figures gravées intitulé *Les amours de Charlot et d’Antoinette.*”
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.* Lenoir’s remarks might seem to contradict the above interpretation about a crackdown on underground publishing, but they refer primarily to the circulation of *libelles* inside Paris, not to the traffic from outside France to the capital. There seems to have been a considerable domestic production of *libelles*, which survived the police’s attempts to impound them because of influential “protection” and the immunities of “lieux privilégiés” like the Palais-Royal, where the police could not penetrate. See *ibid.*, Ms. 1421.
66. See Robert Darnton, “The Grub Street Style of Revolution: J.-P. Brissot, Police Spy,” *Journal of Modern History*, 40 (1968), 320-321.

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67. Lenoir later tried to investigate the rumor and the riot but without success: Bibliothèque municipale d'Orléans, Ms. 1422.
68. Lenoir developed his observations most fully in an essay entitled "De l'administration de l'ancienne police concernant les libelles, les mauvaises satires et chansons, leurs auteurs coupables, délinquants, complices ou adhérents," *ibid.*
69. [Charles Théveneau de Morande], *Le gazetier cuirassé: ou anecdotes scandaleuses de la cour de France* ("imprimé à cent lieues de la Bastille à l'enseigne de la liberté," 1771), p. 92: "La nation française est si mal constituée aujourd'hui, que les gens robustes sont sans prix: On assure qu'un laquais qui débute à Paris est payé aussi cher par les femmes qui s'en servent qu'un cheval de race en Angleterre. Si ce système prend faveur, une génération ou deux suffiront pour rétablir les tempéraments." In *Le libertin de qualité*, reprinted in *L'oeuvre du Comte de Mirabeau*, ed. Guillaume Apollinaire (Paris, 1910), Mirabeau described aristocratic immorality in great detail. After recounting a depraved duchess' abandonment of her lover, he remarked (p. 232), "Elle l'a remplacé par un prince, et réellement, quant au moral, ils se convenaient; pour le physique, elle eut ses laquais: c'est le pain quotidien d'une duchesse."
70. [Charles Théveneau de Morande], *La gazette noire par un homme qui n'est pas blanc: ou oeuvres posthumes du gazetier cuirassé* ("imprimé à cent lieues de la Bastille, à trois cent lieues des Présides, à cinq cent lieues des Cordons, à mille lieues de la Sibérie," 1784), pp. 194-195.
71. See Richard Cobb, "Quelques aspects de la mentalité révolutionnaire," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 6 (1959), 81-120, and "The Revolutionary Mentality in France," *History*, 42 (1957), 181-196.
72. *La gazette noire*, p. 7. For a similar example of such rumors about the promiscuous use of police by "gens en place" see M. de Lescure, ed., *Correspondance secrète inédite sur Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, la Cour et la ville de 1777 à 1792* (Paris: H. Plon, 1866), II, 157-158.
73. The subheadline of the account of the queen's guillotining in *La Père Duchesne*.
74. Pierre Goubert, *L'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Colin, 1969), I, 152.
75. Bibliothèque municipale d'Orléans, Ms. 1423.
76. Quoted in Frantz Funck-Brentano and Paul d'Estrée, *Les novellistes* (Paris: Hachette, 1905), p. 304.
77. Goubert, *L'Ancien Régime*, p. 152. The connection between privilege and monopoly is brought out clearly in the first definition of "privilège" given in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (Paris, 1778): "Faculté accordé à un particulier ou à une communauté de faire quelque chose ou de jouir de quelque avantage à l'exclusion des autres."
78. See Charly Guyot, *De Rousseau à Mirabeau: pèlerins de Môtiers et prophètes de 89* (Neuchâtel and Paris: Victor Attinger, 1936), chap. 4.

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79. Although the increased severity in the policing of the book trade cut down on its business in France, the Société typographique de Neuchâtel still did its best to supply works like the following, which it entered in its "Livres de commission" (STN Ms. 1021, foll. 173-175) after receiving an order from Bruzard de Mauvelain, a clandestine dealer in Troyes, dated June 16, 1784: "6 *Les petits soupers de l'Hôtel de Bouillon*; 6 *Le diable dans un bénitier*; 6 *L'espion dévalisé*; 1 *Correspondance de Maupeou*; 1 *Recueil de remontrances au Roi Louis XV*; 2 *Mémoires de Madame de Pompadour*; 2 *Vie privée de Louis XV*; 12 *Fastes de Louis XV*; 6 *Histoire philosophique* 8°, 10 vol; 6 *Erotika biblion* 8°; 1 *La Mettrie*; 1 *Boulangier complet, antiquité, Christianisme, et despotisme*; 1 *Helvétius complet*; 6 *Lettres de Julie à Calasie, ou tableau du libertinage à Paris*; 1 *la dernière livraison de Jean-Jacques* 12°; 6 *Chronique scandaleuse*; 6 *Les petits soupers du comte de Vergennes*; 6 *Le passe-temps, d'Antoinette*."
80. See Paul Robiquet, *Théveneau de Morande: étude sur le XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1882).