Newcastle University e-prints

Date deposited: 11th February 2011

Version of file: Published

Peer Review Status: Peer Reviewed

Citation for published item:


Further information on publisher website:

http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Journals/mlr.html

Publishers copyright statement:

This paper is published by the Modern Humanities Research Association, and is available with access permissions, from the DOI below:

http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20467336

Always use the definitive version when citing.

Use Policy:

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not for profit purposes provided that:

- A full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- A link is made to the metadata record in Newcastle E-prints
- The full text is not changed in any way.

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne. NE1 7RU. Tel. 0191 222 6000
This issue of Nottingham French Studies explores aspects of the transition from Enlightenment to Revolution in developments of cultural production in France. The authors, mostly from the UK and one each from France, Italy, and the United States, cover the following topics: pastoral fiction and the art of persuasion 1790–92; a quantitative analysis of play titles during the Old Regime and the Revolution; aesthetics of Revolutionary attitudes to dialects; the use of the volcano in discourse from Enlightenment to Revolution; reference to contemporary events in Revolutionary theatre; factual accounts of the Revolution in the theatre; émigrés and their politics in literature; utopian fiction of the Revolution. In his introduction the editor illustrates the premiss of the title, referring to Hannah Arendt’s claim that ‘the Revolution was characterized by a double movement: a process of restoration, of continuity with the past [...] along with an illusion that the experience is one of rupture’ (p. 1). The claim to originality is that although there has been extensive literature, especially since the bicentenary, both on cultural production of the Revolutionary period and on specific cultural forms, of the recent works that have referred to the coexistence of continuity and change with the Old Regime, no studies have centred on the way in which the Revolution treated the cultural forms and structures of preceding times.

The picture that emerges from the collection is one of intricacy of continuity and change, in both the long and the short term. The long view of history is vital to see this two-way process both in the assessment of the relationship between the Enlightenment and the Revolution and in the formulation of cultural historiography. The immediate impact of the Revolution on artistic and literary production provides the shorter-term perspective. The Revolutionary events themselves are in the background: the early moderate phase, Robespierre’s dream of the Republic of Letters, the effect of the Le Chapelier law of 1792 on theatrical production, the identification of specific cultural policies as being integral to the construction of the nation, the mythologizing of the volcano-like eruption of political change that was 1789.

The editor’s introduction and the literature review given by each author provide ample references for further investigation into the perspective of the historical overview for those unfamiliar with scholarly works on culture in the second half of the eighteenth century in France. Interdisciplinary and intertextual readings of cultural creation enable literary scholars to pursue a historical line of enquiry in their analysis. The historian reading this collection would be asking how much these cultural investigations enlighten us further about one of the most scrutinized historical periods and what particular events are of note. The authors are claiming that the connection it is possible to make between the history of the arts and politics is in itself a key development. Of particular interest to historians of the Revolution is the way culture produced a new relationship between the state and citizen, seen in the chapters on language policy and interventionist theatrical censorship. Others interested in other chronological intersections have examined the devising of republican cultural policy and the question of continuity (in particular, David Andress and David Wisner, both in The French Experience from Republic to Monarchy, 1792–1824, ed. by Maire F. Cross and David Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000)). The novelty here is the actual treatment of the immediate past both from ideas and philosophers of the Enlightenment into fiction and from the spillover of real-life drama of revolution into staged drama. The collection contains a variety of approaches: close textual readings of fiction and plays, a quantitative analysis of play titles, and exploration of concepts (patois) and paradigms (volcanoes and the sublime). The relatively limited range of genres
under scrutiny provides coherence. Three chapters discuss very different questions in fiction; the three on politics and theatre come to quite different conclusions.

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

MAIRE F. CROSS