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Colin Jones, Juliet Carey, and Emily Richardson, eds. *The Saint-Aubin Livre de caricatures: Drawing Satire in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012. 490 pp. Illustrations, notes, and bibliography. \$117.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN-10: 0729410447.

Review by Michael Marrinan, Stanford University.

The so-called “digital humanities” certainly exist. Run a Google search on the term and discover, among other items, an entry in Wikipedia.^[1] What greater proof of existence for this age of the internet? Yet, tenure committees and funding bodies tend not to weigh digital projects on the same scale as hard copy published in peer-reviewed journals.^[2] This professional ambivalence often yields work in the digital humanities that hovers between the brave new world of glowing pixels and the rustle of bound paper covered in rows of type. The volume edited by Colin Jones, Juliet Carey, and Emily Richardson is one such work—fully a product of the academic humanities in transition.

The published volume draws upon a deep investment of time and resources in data gathering. The object of study is a handmade book of drawings, produced in Paris over a period of about thirty years (from the middle 1740s to the middle 1770s) by Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, the eldest son of a family of artisans who specialized in fancy embroideries (his father was named *brodeur du roi* in 1732 when Charles-Germain was eleven years old). Not surprisingly, the eldest son followed in his father’s footsteps. By the middle 1740s, Charles-Germain had become the leading designer of embroidery in Paris and was working regularly for members of the court including, paradoxically, both the queen and Madame de Pompadour. Sometime during these years of prosperity he began work on the book he titled *Livre de caricatures tant Bonnes que mauvaises*, but which his descendants knew familiarly as the *livre des culs*—a nickname that signals overtly the scatological nature of many of its pages (pp. 31-32). The book remained in family hands until the 1820s, when it was acquired by Gabriel-Hippolyte Destailleur, a collector of eighteenth-century materials and—not incidentally—architect for Ferdinand de Rothschild at Waddesdon Manor. The book was bought in 1893 from the posthumous sale of Destailleur’s collection by none other than Ferdinand de Rothschild, who added it to his library at Waddesdon. It has remained there ever since, nearly forgotten by all but a few specialists.

At this point the *livre des culs* enters the digital age: Colin Jones and his collaborators at Waddesdon Manor received a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council of Britain to scan the entire book, index its content with extensive keyword tags, and prepare an in-depth online catalogue for each page.^[3] A symposium held in 2009 brought together scholars from a wide range of fields who worked with the scanned material—along with the as-yet unfinished database—to prepare individual contributions for discussion. Those papers, subsequently revised and updated as the catalogue progressed, constitute the sixteen essays (plus introduction) of the present volume. Overall, the project provides a viable prototype for what “digital humanities” might be, because this collection of essays is impossible to imagine without the prior technical investment in scanning, cataloguing, and indexing. The “digital” part opened new avenues of inquiry that encouraged scholars from distinct disciplines to come together in unpredictable and even contradictory ways. Project organizers encouraged collaboration rather than disciplinary competition so as to maximize the potential branches for future research. All of this seems exactly right.

There are, nonetheless, some glitches with fitting together the various components. The published essays depend heavily upon multiple references to pages of the original book. Although there are nearly 200 illustrations in the hardcopy volume, the black-and-white prints are of such poor quality that readers are obliged to visit the website to see most of the visual details upon which the nuance of argument depends. The online database displays individual pages alongside helpful material descriptions and detailed curatorial comments. While it is possible to enter multiple accession numbers (each page has its own), and thus access the information of several pages at once, users cannot display an enlarged image of more than one page at a time. The website has a “widget” to provide “facing page” views, but this user did not find it terribly helpful. In an ideal world, users would be able to flip through enlarged and zoomable images of the volume, simulating the experience of holding and handling the original. With such a tool, reading the essays of the published volume would be a more flexible and interactive experience.

What exactly is the document brought to light via the internet and this collection of essays? Jones and Richardson nicely lay out the issues of material history, use, and intent circulating around the volume. Between the final end-sheet, where a verse in Charles-Germain’s hand refuses to “sign” the work (p. 32), to a “myth of origins” facing the frontispiece that claims the bulk of drawings were bought from a *bouquiniste* along the Seine, the book’s maker seems intent on dissimulating his identity, and he implies that others had a hand in the task.[4] The underlying assumption of both the editors and several contributors is that some of the drawings are so pointedly satires—notably of Madame de Pompadour, but also Louis XV and other court luminaries—that concealing authorship was a protective move in case the book’s existence became known beyond a small circle of intimates.[5] The exclusivity invoked here is not the bourgeois public sphere of Jürgen Habermas (p. 46), but “something like a secret society of licensed folly” (pp. 49-52) more closely allied with contemporary *sociétés de rieurs* studied by Antoine de Baecque.[6] Who actually comprised the Saint-Aubin laughing group remains a mystery, as does the nature of their gatherings.[7]

Charles-Germain implies that his friends were occasional participants in the book’s making, and the problem of authorship is further complicated by the range of formal styles that appear in the volume. The research team designates as “style A” those drawings exhibiting “a childish and naïve aesthetic and sometimes subject matter ... characterised by crispness of execution, clear outlines and smooth application of colour” (p. 34). Style A is found mainly in the first part of the book, gradually giving way to “a greater degree of refinement, a sketchier quality, more nuanced use of colouring and lighter outlining” (p. 34). Nonetheless, the editors come to the conclusion that Charles-Germain “had a significant role with regard to all of the drawings, including those in Style A,” by arguing that he was a versatile artist able to work in “very different styles” (p. 34). This direction preserves a monographic authorship for the volume and, by extension, enables reading its imagery as “very much the product of Charles-Germain’s imagination, persistence, and orchestrating skill” (p. 23). What gets lost in this scenario is all but the most circumspect input of the other members of the laughing club. Was their role merely to add an occasional caption to finished drawings presented by Charles-Germain?

Monographic authorship encourages speculation about the milieu, political opinions, and cultural preferences of the presumed author. Not surprisingly, precisely those themes divide the essays into four large categories. In the first, entitled “The *Livre de caricatures* and the Saint-Aubins,” Colin Jones and Emily Richardson begin with a fine-grained analysis of the book as made object. John Rogister proceeds from two basic assumptions: the book was “highly subversive” due to its criticisms of court figures like Madame de Pompadour, and its meanings would have been clear to “any intelligent eighteenth-century French person” (p. 56). Kim de Beaumont sets selections from the *Livre* of Charles-Germain alongside images by Gabriel, his younger brother, to suggest an extended dialogue between them with regard to subjects derived from contemporary life—witness the execution of Damiens and the launch of the *petite poste*. Thus, we are introduced to the author’s immediate milieu.

The second group of essays is called “Historical Perspectives.” John Shovlin discusses two clusters of works that focus upon the War of the Austrian Succession (1741–48) and the Seven Years War (1756–63). He wonders if all the images were actually made by one person but in the end opts for “a consistent point of view on military and diplomatic affairs” (p. 95). Julien Swann usually prefers to speak of Saint-Aubin and his circle, although the distinction is elastic: there are moments when “they” slides into an authorial “he” (p. 133). Swann remarks that satires of both Jansenists and Jesuits reveal an “ecumenical approach to humour” to suggest Charles-Germain and his friends “were personally anticlerical, happy to mock the clergy for its vices real or imagined” (p. 133). Swann concludes somewhat blandly that Charles-Germain and his friends were “products of the *ancien régime*,” who can help us to “understand a political culture that was rarely deferential and, in private at least, was constantly questioning the actions of those in authority” (p. 150). Valerie Mainz revisits the disgrace of military defeat in her essay about the construction of *gloire* and its antipodes within the *Livre*. What distinguishes her contribution is the first sentence, where she disavows the idea that the drawings are done by a single hand (p. 151). Central to her interpretation is the claim that the book’s visual components—images, texts, juxtapositions—are left purposefully discontinuous and thus demand the active participation of users to animate their layers of meaning (p. 154). Finally, Humphrey Wine returns to the subject of Madame de Pompadour, but with different standards. His essay opens with an admission that he will pick and choose images from the *Livre* with little concern for where they stand in the book. He assumes that all the caricatures to be discussed are by Charles-Germain (p. 179). The takeaway from Wine’s essay is rather modest, for he concludes that “Charles-Germain’s response to her [Pompadour], although critical, was rarely vicious” (p. 190).

A long third section of essays is collected under the rubric “Sites of Culture.” Despite the editors’ salutary reminder that “the volume is no more a transparent depiction of Parisian eighteenth-century life than the chronicles of Hardy and Ménétra” (p. 49), most of the seven essays in this part perform a fair amount of window-gazing through the pages of the *Livre*. Mark Ledbury details the personal ties that bound the Saint-Aubins to the poet and playwright Michel-Jean Sedaine, and situates them squarely in the literary and theatrical milieux of Paris. James H. Johnson draws our attention to the wide range of musical humour in the *Livre*, from bawdy and erotic, to mordant, witty, or simply absurd. Aileen Ribeiro analyzes the many renderings of contemporary women’s fashion across the pages of the *Livre* to demonstrate “how dress, accessories and deportment were used, as on a stage, to suggest the range of roles that women played in the last years of the *ancien régime*.” On that score, the essay by Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell situates the *Livre* within a tradition of costume books and fashion plates to suggest it bridges historically the luxury volumes published in the 1680s and the proliferation of inexpensive fashion plates of the 1780s that gave rise to a form of anti-fashion caricature “illustrating what not to wear” (p. 253). Juliet Carey studies a single drawing that ridicules a male courtier who abandons implements of masculine activity—sword, music, globe and compass—to receive an embroidery frame from the figure of Cupid, while a well-dressed woman (presumably Pompadour) attends to her own needlework.[8] The implication is that Saint-Aubin, like many of his peers, worried in 1758 about emasculation of the court—especially the King—under Pompadour’s influence. Charles-Germain’s relationship to the art world practices of collecting and connoisseurship are the focus of the final two essays in this section. For Charlotte Guichard, this was a microcosm that Charles-Germain and his brothers knew well to judge from the notes they made at sales, sketches of exhibitions, and frontispiece designs for auction catalogues. Guichard claims that the *Livre* was directed against the subculture of antiquarians and connoisseurs who fetishized originality, attribution, and provenance to fix a monetary value for works of art (pp. 290–296). A salient example is Saint-Aubin’s send up of Pierre-Jean Mariette, one of the most esteemed collectors of the day, who is depicted as a myopic street vendor, oblivious to all but his quest for masterpieces.[9] Finally, Perrin Stein focuses upon the satiric use of vases that recurs throughout the *Livre*. Stein discusses four themes—antiquarianism, anthropomorphism, exoticism, and eroticism—from which he argues that the vase was an ideal vehicle to pillory contemporary attitudes about artistic value, cultural difference, and the relationship between

past and present (p. 321). Although these essays are related by converging upon a single object and a unique author, they actually present a mosaic of independent studies more than a model of interdisciplinary research. Digital access does not necessarily provoke a rethinking of disciplinary categories.

The final two essays under the rubric “Contexts” offer, in the words of the editors, “an even broader framework of analysis” (p. 26). Actually at stake is less a broadening of framework than a fundamental change in it, for both Richard Taws and Katie Scott attend to the *Livre* more as a book than an assemblage of individual pages. Taws wants to describe “certain characteristics ... that transcend the specificity of each image, and which lend a curious structural coherence to the *Livre* as a whole” (p. 330). He notes that many pages comprise elements “fixed in a kind of animated suspension” or are “balanced perilously in staggering formations” to “evoke states of becoming, of transition and mutation” (p. 333). This strikes me as an important intuition, although perhaps not leading so directly to French caricatures of the Revolution as Taws seems to suggest (pp. 343-344). Taws is correct, I think, to suggest that visualizing this precariousness across the several hands of the *Livre* indicates “a shared satirical language that crossed stylistic boundaries” (p. 332). He provides a way of thinking about the volume within a history of caricature larger than Saint-Aubin’s immediate circle.[10] Katie Scott’s essay is the longest and most ambitious of the collection, and also aims to address its topic “in terms of its name, as a *livre*, a book” (p. 349). Scott finds the volume to be “the performance, not the script, of the jokes it contains,” with particular attention to the fact that its jokes are visual (pp. 349-350). She turns to Freud’s 1905 essay, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, as a way to “understand better where, when, and how an artist active in Paris and at the court ... made jokes in the later eighteenth century” (p. 353). She draws our attention to how the *Livre* “impersonates the format of the printed book to parody its formalities and pretensions” (p. 356). She interprets the author’s dissembling of self as a stepping-back from the high seriousness of “authorhood” into the role of joker whose work “promises a performance” (pp. 359-361). Scott convincingly demonstrates that the editors’ division of the book between Style A and everything else is too simple. She distinguishes at least four manners that are not Style A and sees evidence of these hands doubling back and adding material to Style A pages (pp. 375-384). She discusses several examples to bring into focus “the circumstances of the book’s creation, its social context” (p. 385), which she takes to be a kind of “masculine gregariousness” where the players “turn round lean back, lurch forward to connect with one another across the breaks and gaps in the pages” (p. 388). We might hesitate to follow Scott’s bold move to place the *Livre* under the sign of Oedipal rivalries among brothers, but her attention to a comparative, non-linear grasp of the book’s structure offers a fresh and compelling view of the whole.

Scott’s essay also stimulates reflection on the imagined relationship between Saint-Aubin’s volume and the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert, the most ambitious publishing project of the 1750s. No book taking shape in Paris during this decade could ignore that enterprise, and two pages of the *Livre* refer explicitly to it. The *Livre* also gestures textually to the *Encyclopédie* with a string of cross-references [*renvois*] linking the page immediately after the frontispiece to six others scattered throughout the book. The editors consider this exercise a “wild goose chase” that demonstrates Charles-Germain belief that “the encyclopedist quest for reason was manifest folly” (pp. 45-46). But the book’s references to the *Encyclopédie* do not openly condemn that vast project. Nor do the *renvois* of Saint-Aubin strike me as a poke in the eye of Diderot and d’Alembert. Rather, following Katie Scott, the second page of the *Livre* incites its reader/user to thumb through its materiality. This gesture does not propose an end point or a final answer, which were not exactly the purposes of *renvois* in the *Encyclopédie* anyway[11], but encourages the reader/user to shuffle the pages, to engage the imagery, to handle the book in a physical, bodily, and non-linear manner—precisely how internet users cannot experience it on the present-day Waddesdon website. Katie Scott’s essay helps us to see that Saint-Aubin’s use of *renvois* might actually be an homage to the immersed, pre-digital reader imagined by Diderot and d’Alembert, in short, a case of imitation being the sincerest form of flattery.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Colin Jones and Emily Carey, "Introduction"

Colin Jones and Emily Richardson, "Archaeology and materiality"

John Rogister, "Decoding the *Livre de caricatures*"

Kim de Beaumont, "The Saint-Aubins sketching for fun and profit"

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Richard Taws, "The precariousness of things"

Katie Scott, "Saint-Aubin's jokes and their relation to ..."

NOTES

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities (cited April 13, 2013).

[2] William Cronon of the AHA does not exaggerate when he writes: "At many institutions, a published book is still the sine qua non for promotion and tenure, and articles are merely the icing on that indispensable cake". In "How long will people read history books?" *Perspectives*, 50/7 (October 2012): 5-6.

[3] The online catalogue is at: <http://www.Waddesdon.org.uk/collection/special-projects/st.-aubin>, from which one must follow the link: "search the Saint Aubin database."

[4] "En 1740 je trouvoy ce volume sur les Quais avec quelques figures dessinnés sans intention, mes amis y mirent des légendes et m'engagèrent à continuer ce mélanges des folies qui ni sont pas assez

bonnes pour êtres montrées à des gens raisonnables, il y a heureusement toujours des cranes vuides” (cited on p. 33).

[5] pp. 35-36, 56, 117-118, and 124.

[6] Antoine de Baecque, *Les Eclats du rire : la culture des rieurs au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2000).

[7] Some of the possible members include the younger brothers of Charles-Germain, Gabriel and Augustin, their uncle Pierre, the author/dramatist Michel-Louis Sedaine, and the painter François-Adrien Grosognon de Latinville (pp. 46-47).

[8] Accession number 675.359.

[9] Accession number 675.293.

[10] Precariousness, for example, is a regular feature of Hogarth's *Progress* series from the 1730s, the plates for *Marriage à la mode* published in the 1740s, and his iconic *Gin Lane* of 1751.

[11] John Bender and Michael Marrinan, *The Culture of Diagram* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 8-18.

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