CHAPTER 9

Enlightenment and Revolution

JEFFREY FREEDMAN

IN 1783, in the city of Geneva, a magistrate, a bailiff, and a surgeon broke into the bedroom of a 19-year-old man who had barricaded himself in his room. Drawn there by the complaints of a downstairs neighbour who had testified to seeing blood dripping from the ceiling, the three officials discovered the lifeless body of the young man seated in a chair, the back of his head resting against a wooden partition and his brains scattered around the room. On a night table beside the body lay a small book entitled *Werther, traduit de l'allemand*. The magistrate noted that 'the book was opened', 'its pages covered with blood', and that the young man 'held a pistol in his hand'. A year later, in London, the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported a similar incident. This time, the victim was a young woman, found dead by her own hand, with an English translation of *Werther* under her pillow.

The man in Geneva and the woman in London were only two of the many young people across Europe who apparently took their own lives after reading *Werther*, the short epistolary novel by Johann Wolfgang Goethe. The novel's tragic story of a young, moody, and lovelorn artist, who escapes the pain of romantic heartbreak by shooting himself with a pistol, was reported to have ignited an epidemic of copycat suicides. The threat of 'Werther-fever' indeed seemed serious enough that several states tried to ban the sale of the novel. Although some reports of suicide were almost certainly apocryphal, there can be no doubt that a great many readers of the novel identified closely with its hero. Some signalled their identification by imitating Werther's style of dress (yellow hose, blue waistcoat, and brown boots), others by travelling to the actual locations (the stations of Werther's *Leiden*) at which the story was supposed to have taken place. Such readers seemed ready to efface the boundary between art and reality—much to the horror of Goethe himself, who had intended to write a work of literature (*Dichtung*), not a brief for suicide. Many years later in his memoirs, Goethe described how the reception of *Werther* had dramatized for him the 'enormous chasm' separating authors from their public.

Yet such a chasm had not always existed. European court poets in earlier centuries had written for a narrow circle of patrons, friends, and admirers—readers whom they

knew and whose reactions they could predict. The sense of estrangement and loss of control that Goethe described were the characteristic experiences of a new type of author who wrote not for a patron but for an anonymous literary market. The origins of that new type can be traced back to the early eighteenth century and the career of such figures as Alexander Pope in England. By the last third of the century, it was becoming increasingly common for authors of imaginative literature to sell their works to commercial publishers. Goethe released the manuscript of *Werther* to a publisher in Leipzig named Johann Friedrich Weygand. Thereafter, he no longer had control over what became of his work or who read it. As many as fifty translations of the novel into French, English, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, and even Russian were published between 1774 and 1792, in addition to dozens of editions in German. Copies of the novel were sold not only across Europe but also in Europe's colonial outposts—in bookshops from Philadelphia to Bombay. To describe *Werther* as a 'bestseller' hardly does justice to its impact. It was practically a global phenomenon, an early example of what Goethe himself designated 'World Literature'.

Few if any other books published in the eighteenth century were translated as frequently and disseminated as widely as *Werther*. And yet the production, circulation, and reception of Goethe's work exemplified the ways in which the relations between authors and readers were mutating during the last third of the eighteenth century. The strong demand for a work of fiction (specifically, a novel); the multiple, mainly unauthorized reprints and translations that the novel spawned; the ineffectual attempts by the authorities to prevent it from circulating; the frenzied competition among book dealers to profit from it; the small-format editions (mainly octavo and duodecimo) in which it was printed; the empathic, emotional responses it provoked in readers; and the sense of bewilderment the readers' responses inspired in the author—all of these phenomena pointed beyond the specific case of *Werther* to deep structural changes in the book culture of eighteenth-century Europe and its colonies, particularly in the three largest and most dynamic markets for modern vernacular literatures: the German, the English, and the French.

By contrast, the technologies of European bookmaking remained largely unchanged during the eighteenth century. The far-reaching transformations to which the history of *Werther* bore witness occurred within the framework of traditional artisanal modes of manufacture, a system of production historians describe as the *ancien régime typographique*.

The Book Trade

Goethe's novel burst on the market during a tumultuous period in the history of the European book trade. As recently as the mid-eighteenth century, the book trade in many parts of Europe had resembled a gentleman's club. In Germany, for example, several hundred publisher-booksellers from across the German states would come together twice a year at the Leipzig and Frankfurt fairs to socialize, settle accounts, and

swap their editions sheet for sheet. Hardly any money changed hands, and the swapping took place on such a large scale that all the major German firms ended up owning much the same stock of books. It was a system with obvious advantages at a time when publishers were also booksellers and had to operate in conditions of chronic monetary scarcity. But it worked only so long as the sheets exchanged at the fairs were of roughly equal value.

By the time of *Werther*'s publication, that equivalence no longer held. A group of publishers in Leipzig (including Weygand, Goethe's publisher) had managed to acquire a virtual monopoly on the original editions of works by Germany's leading contemporary authors. Instead of swapping such valuable editions against those of other dealers, the Leipzig publishers insisted that their books be paid for in money, at low discounts (just 16 per cent off the retail price), and with no provision for the return of unsold copies. Judged by the traditional standards of conduct in the German book trade, such demands were a serious breach of propriety. In retaliation, publishers in other regions of the German book trade reprinted the Leipzig editions, and they did so on an unprecedented scale, attracting accusations not just of impropriety but of attacks on property, or, as it had come to be known, 'piracy'. The once placid and cosy world of the German book trade reverberated with accusations and counter-accusations so rancorous that historians have described the last third of the eighteenth century, in analogy to the contemporary literary movement, as the *Sturm und Drang* period of the German book trade. The conservative ethic of the gentleman's club had given way to the rapacious spirit of corsair capitalism.

Similar storms unsettled the book trades of other European countries. The publishing booksellers of the London Stationers' Company and those in the Paris Book Guild (*communauté des libraries*) occupied positions analogous to that of the dealers in Leipzig: like the latter, they dominated the publication of original editions, and complained bitterly—and ineffectually—of piracy. Most of the pirates, or reprint publishers, clustered on the periphery of the major book markets: in Scotland and Ireland for the English market; in the Netherlands, the Rhineland, and Switzerland for the French; and in Swabia and Austria for the German. In some of those locations, they enjoyed the protection and support of their governments. The Empress Maria Theresa, for example, decided after the Seven Years' War to build up the Austrian book trade, which until then had been largely dependent on imports. Her goal reflected the doctrine of mercantilist economics: to promote a favourable balance of trade and stimulate domestic manufactures. To that end, the Empress ordered Johann Trattner, a Viennese bookseller and printer, to publish reprint editions of contemporary German literature. Trattner succeeded so well that he became one of the wealthiest book dealers in Europe.

Whether actively supported by their governments or merely tolerated, reprint publishers plied their trade unencumbered by the weight of bad conscience. The consensus against such activities—the consensus that reprinting was ipso facto piracy—had not yet crystallized. If anything, the situation was the reverse. Reprinting

Wercke der Finsternis.
oder Beytrag zur Geschichte des Buchhandels in Deutschland. Allegorisch vorgestellt zum besten,
auch zur Warnung aller ehrliebenden Buchhændler.

1. This engraving by Daniel Chodowiecki, published in 1781 by C.F. Himburg in Berlin, bears a caption which reads (in translation), 'Works of Darkness. A Contribution to the History of the Book Trade in Germany. Presented Allegorically for the Benefit of and as a Warning to All Honest Booksellers'. An elegant and well-fed 'pirate bookseller' (Raubdrucker) removes the shirt of an honest bookseller, already robbed of his coat. Two of the pirate's assistants laugh as the coat is cut apart. Other victims of the robbers flee in terror, and the honest bookseller points to reclining Justice, her sword and scales discarded. Above hover two bat-like creatures, one a devil. The faces in the engraving are identifiable as those of contemporary booksellers and statesmen: the villains are all Austrians, the victims either Prussians or Saxons. This mapping of the conflict makes it seem as if the moral battle coincided with a geographic division between the Catholic south and the Protestant north. The irony of Chodowiecki's engraving is that Himburg was himself a pirate publisher, notorious for producing unauthorized editions of Goethe's works during the 1770s.

yielded so many benefits—from increased economic activity for the state to cheaper and more plentiful books for the public—that the burden lay with those who wished to ban it. On what grounds could one justify outlawing so apparently useful an enterprise? The answer was by representing it as an offence against authors. The argument in favour of what came to be known in English as 'copyright' derived that right from the creative act of authorship. And yet the agitation in support of copyright legislation came less from authors themselves than from oligarchs within

the trade, such as the leading publishers of London (most of them members of the Stationers' Company) who strove to uphold what they took to be their common law right of property.

The history of copyright protection can be traced back to the traditions of the Stationers' guild and its incorporation by Royal Charter in the mid-sixteenth century. The Stationers, to whom the state devolved much power to regulate and police the book trade, claimed exclusive rights to the titles they published, and treated those claims as forms of property—in effect, therefore, as perpetual. When, as often happened in the eighteenth century, several publishers pooled resources and shared risks by coming together to publish a joint edition, the copyright was divided up like real estate. Each member of the consortium owned a part share in the enterprise. In attempting to enshrine these customs in statute in the early eighteenth century, leading London booksellers lobbied Parliament for new legislation on the book trade. What they got was not what they had lobbied for. The resulting 1710 'Bill for the Encouragement of Learning by Vesting the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors, or Publishers, of such Copies, during the Times therein Mentioned' recognized authors, or the publishers to whom the authors had ceded their manuscripts, as the proprietors of their works and accorded them an exclusive right of publication, but only for a limited term of fourteen years, plus an additional fourteen years if, at the end of that term, the author was still alive. As passed, the Act left open the question of what became of works once their term of protection had expired. In the following decades, uncertainty reigned over which editions were pirated. The Stationers' Company acted on the assumption that its underlying common law right of property was still valid, and that any works registered continued to be its property in perpetuity. Scottish booksellers, on the other hand, took the view that works whose copyright had expired fell in the public domain and could be reprinted legally. The battle came to a head in the early 1760s when the Scottish bookseller Alexander Donaldson opened a shop in London, from which he sold reprint editions of works by such famous authors as Defoe, Fielding, Locke, Milton, Pope, Shakespeare, Swift, Thomson, and Young at 30 to 50 per cent less than the usual London prices. Donaldson's move was a flagrant provocation. A series of court cases ensued, culminating in a definitive decision by the House of Lords in 1774. That decision vindicated Donaldson's interpretation of the statute, thus establishing the modern institution of copyright as a time-limited form of protection: a compromise that balanced the property rights of authors and their publishers against the interests of the public in securing easy and cheap access to works of literature. Henceforth, books whose copyright had expired entered the public domain and could be freely reprinted.

Markets

Donaldson, Trattner, and the other reprint publishers who flourished in eighteenth-century Europe plundered what they judged to be most valuable: those books that seemed

to be attracting the strongest demand. But what kind of books sold best in the age of Enlightenment? And what general trends did the literary markets of the period reveal?

The principal sources to which historians have turned in order to answer those questions yield information about markets at central sites of production and exchange such as Paris or Leipzig. They tend to omit those genres of print with a distinctively regional appeal, such as Catholic devotional tracts that circulated widely in Bavaria but were rarely if ever traded at the German book fairs. The coexistence of such regional markets with national and transnational ones makes it difficult to characterize the evolution of eighteenth-century literary markets in general terms. But it is nonetheless possible to identify at least four broad trends: the overall expansion in the volume of production; the dwindling market share of books printed in Latin; the growing importance of translations; and a shift in the nature of religious publishing.

The first of these trends stands out clearly, even if we discount for the moment the rapidly growing sector of newspapers and journals—genres of print that enjoyed increasing popularity during the last third of the century. The number of book titles entered in the Leipzig fair catalogues went up from 1,360 in 1763 to 3,719 in 1793, while the number of imprints recorded by the English Short-Title Catalogue (a compendium of surviving editions) rose, for those same years, from 2,701 to 6,801—in both cases, an increase of nearly threefold. The data for the French market do not reveal quite so sharp a rise in the decades following the Seven Years' War as occurred in the German and the English markets. In fact, the overall production of books in French may have contracted slightly following the adoption, in 1777, of new laws that limited the duration of publishers' book privileges. It certainly shrank during the early years of the Revolution, when, as we shall see, Parisian presses were occupied in turning out the political ephemera of the new revolutionary political culture—above all, pamphlets and journals. From the start of the century until the mid-1770s, however, the total volume of books printed in French exhibited sustained growth, expanding by approximately threefold, according to data compiled from administrative sources, the registers of the *dépôt légal,* and bibliographic reference works.

While markets were expanding, the percentage of books printed in Latin continued to decline. In England and France, that decline had been under way since the seventeenth century. In Germany, publication in the vernacular was somewhat slower to develop: German titles did not definitively outnumber Latin ones in the book fair catalogues until 1692. After that, however, the process accelerated. In 1740, Latin titles made up 27.7 per cent of the entries in the fair catalogues; in 1770, only 14.25; and in 1800, a mere 3.97. By then, the Frankfurt fair, once an obligatory rendezvous for the international Latin book trade, a gathering that had attracted humanist printer-publishers from beyond the Alps and across the Rhine, had dwindled into insignificance.

With the decline of Latin as the traditional cosmopolitan language of scholarly exchange, translations assumed a vastly expanded role. More translations were published in the eighteenth century than ever before, not just from ancient languages into modern ones, but also between modern languages, and in a few memorable cases—

notably Galland's *Mille et une nuits*—from a non-Western into a Western language. Of those languages, one stood out as being of particular importance: French. In the age of what contemporaries called *L'Europe française*, French taste set the standard for cultural and political elites everywhere in Europe. The French language sat atop the linguistic hierarchy, and French books were sold all across the continent from Milan to Moscow. French translations, in this period, performed a role analogous to that of English translations today: they were the gateways to a wider market. *Werther*, for example, was translated three times into French in the years immediately following its publication in 1774, before it was finally translated into English five years later. Cesar Beccaria's treatise on crimes and punishments—arguably the most influential and widely discussed Enlightenment text on legal reform—reached a broad European public as *Traité des délits et des peines*, the French translation by the abbé Morellet, which appeared in 1766, two years after the Italian edition and one year before translations in English and German. In such cases, the French translations did the job of conferring recognition, endowing works of literature with the prestige of French language and culture. If the translation sold well, translations into other languages would follow, often based on the French translations rather than the originals. During the first half of the eighteenth century, German publishers typically awaited the French translations of English works before publishing German translations based on the French. They seldom had to wait very long, for more works were translated into French from English—roughly 500 during the course of the century—than from any other language. French translations did the job of conferring recognition on English works so well that eventually English literature was able to stand on its own. By the 1770s, German publishers were translating English works directly from the English, while Goethe and his fellow *Stürmer und Dränger* were lionizing Shakespeare as an alternative to the French classicism beloved of German princes. *Anglomanie*, a transnational movement of ideas mediated and spread through French translations, contributed, in the long run, to undermining French cultural hegemony in Europe.

The overall increase in the volume of book production was accompanied by a notable decline in one of the traditional mainstays of the Parisian publishing trade: religious literature. The requests of Parisian printers for authorizations to publish reveal a marked decrease during the eighteenth century in the market share of theological, liturgical, and devotional works. Such works accounted for half of the production of Paris printers at the end of the seventeenth century, and still made up a third of their production in the 1720s, but they accounted for only a quarter in the early 1750s and a tenth in the 1780s. The decline was so steep that François Furet interpreted it as evidence for the *désacralisation* of the world.

Outside of Paris, however, the situation looked quite different. Excluded from the lucrative printing contracts for Parisian first editions, printers in remote corners of the kingdom such as the Franche Comté survived by turning out Catholic devotional works (*livres d'usage* in the jargon of the trade), while booksellers in the area filled their shops with cheap, mass-produced editions of *L'ange conducteur* and *La journée du chrétien*.
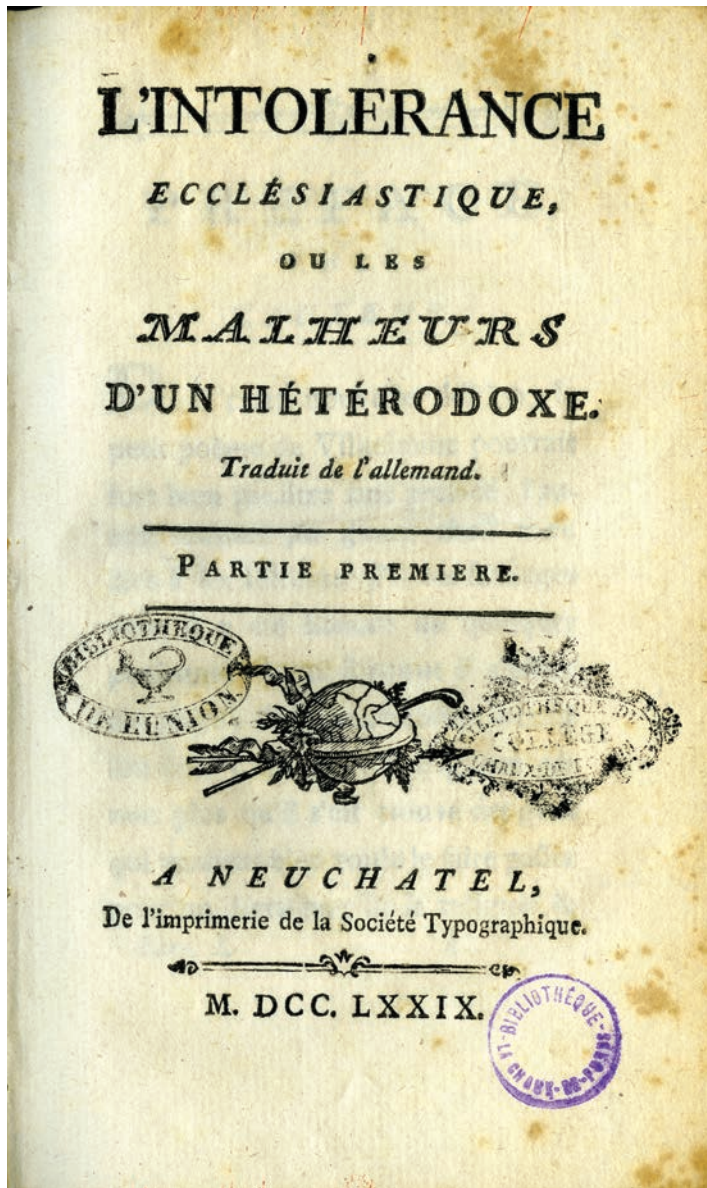
LA VIE

ET

LES OPINIONS

DE MAITRE

SEBALTUS NOTHANKER.

Traduit de l'allemand par un ami du héros.

PREMIERE PARTIE.

A LONDRES,

M. DCC. LXXIV.

L'INTOLÉRANCE

ECCLÉSIASTIQUE,

OU LES

MALHEURS

D'UN HÉTÉRODOXE.

Traduit de l'allemand.

PARTIE PREMIERE.

A NEUCHATEL,

De l'imprimerie de la Société Typographique.

M. DCC. LXXIX.

2a and **b.** Between 1774 and 1777, the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), a French-language publishing house in western Switzerland, published a three-volume French translation of the bestselling German novel by Friedrich Nicolai, *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magisters Sebaldus Nothanker* (1773–6). Sales proved disappointing, and in 1779, with hundreds of unsold copies still in its warehouse, the STN retitled the work and announced it as a new publication. The new *L'intolérance ecclésiastique ou les malheurs d'un hétérodoxe* attracted orders from booksellers all across Europe. The STN's creative reinvention of Nicolai's novel allowed a major work of the Aufklärung to burst through the linguistic borders of the German-speaking world.

The notion of *désacralisation* hardly does justice to this large provincial trade in religious books. Nor does it capture what was happening in Britain and the Protestant lands of Germany. Under the influence of the Great Awakening and Pietism, various Protestant charitable societies launched ambitious campaigns to promote the dissemination of Bibles and other religious works cheaply and in large quantities—from the Kanstein Bible Institute, a Pietist-inspired organization associated with the *Waisenhaus* of Johann Francke in Halle, which printed 850,000 copies of a German Protestant Bible from standing type between 1712 and 1739, to the British and Foreign Bible Society, founded in the early nineteenth century, which arranged to have copies of the Bible mass-produced from stereotype plates for distribution across the far-flung territories of the expanding British empire. Such initiatives released vast quantities of religious literature into circulation, including cheaply produced editions of tracts by contemporary authors associated with Congregationalism, Methodism, and the Evangelical movement inside the Church of England.

Overall, religious publishing in the eighteenth century did not contract so much as it moved—down-market and out into the provinces. With its displacement, the main commercial firms of Paris, London, and Leipzig went in search of other, more secular genres of literature to fill out their catalogues.

What other genres? Surprisingly—given the oft-repeated association of the eighteenth century with the 'rise of the novel' and of the novel with England—the market share of novels does not appear to have increased appreciably in England during the eighteenth century. Individual novels, however, were among the best-selling works of the entire century both in England and on the Continent. Although the print run of each edition rarely exceeded a thousand copies, such novels as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pamela*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and *Werther* were reprinted, pirated, serialized, adapted, abridged, translated, or anthologized with greater frequency than practically any other books published in the eighteenth century. That novels were disseminated on a massive scale cannot be doubted, nor can there be any doubt about the celebrity of their authors. Showered with fan mail, Richardson, Rousseau, and Goethe became literary stars, subjects of adulation of a kind that authors had seldom, if ever, enjoyed during their own lifetimes.

Authorship

As literary markets expanded, so also did the population of authors. More men and, especially in England, more women, were publishing their works—whether under their own names, under a pseudonym, or anonymously—than ever before. Few of them, however, enjoyed anything like the celebrity of Richardson, Rousseau, and Goethe, and hardly any were able to live comfortably by their pens; publishers rarely paid enough for manuscripts to make an independent existence as an author economically viable. Even so spectacular a publishing success as *Werther* brought very little money to its author. Writing to a friend several months after *Werther* exploded onto the

market, Goethe remarked tartly: 'My authorship has not yet put any fat in my soup'. ('Mir hat meine Autorschaft die Suppen noch nicht fett gemacht'.)

Not that Goethe was in any danger of starving. Scion of a patrician family in Frankfurt, he soon became a courtier in Weimar. He embodied a model of authorship that many of his compatriots envied but few could achieve: the author who wrote for the marketplace but who was also independently wealthy and the beneficiary of princely patronage. Until the age of Weimar classicism, German princes rarely bestowed their patronage on German authors. The primary beneficiaries of their support were the many expatriate French protégés and epigones of Voltaire who congregated at the princely courts and learned academies of small German states. Cut off from the sources of princely patronage, German authors who did not enjoy the benefits of inherited wealth had to enter a profession, as pastors, professors, magistrates, or government officials; otherwise, they ran the risk of falling into the ranks of the intellectual proletariat, a class of literary wage labourers that was growing up around the large publishing firms in Leipzig. In his satirical novel *Sebaldus Nothanker* (1773–6), the Berlin bookseller Friedrich Nicolai provided an—admittedly caricatured— image of the factory-like conditions in one of those firms:

> There is more than one publisher who commissions his authors to produce what he thinks he may need: histories, novels, murder stories, reliable news reports of things no one has seen … I know one such publisher who has ten or twelve authors sitting at a long table in his house, and to each he assigns a quota of work in exchange for a daily wage.

The situation was hardly any better in France. There, too, the way to financial security was not through the marketplace. It passed, rather, through what the French called *le monde*, the exclusive milieu of Parisian salons in which reputations were made, connections cultivated, and protections secured. The would-be *philosophe* who cut a smart figure in that world could aspire to the various lucrative posts, pensions, and sinecures—as editors of privileged journals, *historiographes du roi*, and academicians— that provided a secure alternative to the vicissitudes of the literary market. Those who failed to win those positions, the *philosophes manqués* whom contemporaries derided as 'poor devils' or 'Rousseaus of the gutter', survived in whatever way they could, by churning out libels, peddling prohibited books, or spying for the police. Only in England was it possible—just barely—to live comfortably by one's pen, as Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson demonstrated. Even there, however, 'hacks' (an early-eighteenth-century neologism derived from 'hackney', a horse available for hire) were multiplying in Grub Street, the milieu of down-and-out authors satirized by Pope in his *Dunciad*.

While impecunious authors were struggling to survive, publishers were prospering, or so it appeared to contemporary observers. Actually, many publishers were struggling, too, not least because of the constant threat of piracy. But there can be no doubt that some publishing ventures yielded handsome profits in comparison to which the payments made to authors seemed paltry. *Les Moeurs* by François-Vincent Toussaint, a

succès de scandale published in 1748, netted roughly 10,000 livres for its Amsterdam publisher Delespine, but only 500 for its author. The bestselling *Fabeln und Erzählungen* by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, published in the same year, made its Leipzig publisher Johann Wendler a wealthy man for life, but brought its author only a meagre one-time payment of twenty Reichstaler. These glaring discrepancies seemed all the more galling in light of the new conception of the author as original creator. This emerging view of authorship, expressed most famously by Edward Young in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), fed a growing sense of outrage over the shabby treatment of authors by booksellers. Frequently disparaged as miserly, mendacious, and untrustworthy, booksellers may have had a worse reputation in the second half of the eighteenth century than at any time since the invention of moveable type. And although some of the accusations levelled against them were unfair, individual booksellers were far from blameless. The pirate publisher Himburg in Berlin produced an edition of Goethe's complete works without paying a penny to the author, and then, as if to make amends, sent Goethe a set of porcelain dishes from the Royal Porcelain Manufactory in Berlin. In a letter to his close friend and correspondent Charlotte von Stein, Goethe made it clear what he thought of such a gesture: 'What to others is done after death,/To me was done during my life./But I do not write for porcelain or bread–/For the Himburgs I'm dead'. ('Was man anderen nach dem Tode thut,/That man mir bey meinem Leben./ Doch ich schreibe nicht um Porcellan noch Brod–/Für die Himburgs bin ich todt'.)

Eventually, the outrage boiled over. Beginning in the mid-1760s, German authors organized a series of 'self-publishing' initiatives, with the goal of freeing themselves from their dependence on the professional book trade. The high point of the movement was the publication in 1774 of Klopstock's *Gelehrtenrepublik*, a work completely financed and distributed through subscriptions. Venerated as the author of *Der Messias* (an epic poem based on the Bible) and widely regarded as Germany's 'national poet', Klopstock was able to mobilize a vast network of 'collectors'. In small and large towns all across German-speaking Europe, volunteers came forward to gather subscriptions, inspired by their wish to enter into a collaborative relation with the author; and the results were impressive—more than 3,500 subscribers from 263 locations. Reproduced at the start of the published volume, the list of subscribers' and collectors' names, organized in alphabetical order by location, covered nearly seventy pages. It expressed a widely shared yearning to transcend the anonymity of the capitalist literary market and resurrect a community of authors and readers. What functioned well in the case of Klopstock, however, proved to be an impracticable model for more obscure authors. In the years following the publication of *Die Gelehrtenrepublik*, other attempts were made to replicate Klopstock's example, but with less and less success. In the end, the principal legacy of the experiments with self-publishing was the bitter realization that there was no durable alternative to the professional book trade as an intermediary between author and readers.

So what was to be done? According to the French *philosophe* Denis Diderot, the answer lay not in supplanting the commercial publishers who dominated the trade but, on the contrary, in protecting their legal position. In his *Lettre à un magistrat sur le*

commerce de la librairie, written in 1763 at the behest of the Paris Booksellers' Guild, Diderot made himself the spokesman of France's publishing elite, those booksellers who owned the exclusive privileges for most of the legal literature published in France. The booksellers in the Paris guild, like their counterparts in the English Stationers' Company, had always regarded their privileges as perpetual, as a form of property that could be divided, sold, and inherited just like any other kind of property; they also feared—rightly, as it turned out—that the administration was contemplating legislation to limit the duration of book privileges and thereby revive competition in the publishing industry. Diderot made the case on behalf of the booksellers for preserving the status quo. One part of that case took the form of a straightforwardly economic argument: perpetual copyright was necessary for the commercial viability of publishing. This was so, Diderot maintained, because backlist titles generated the steady stream of profits required to offset the risks of financing new publications, and because it sometimes took several generations for even the greatest works of literature to be recognized as great and to begin yielding profits. But Diderot did not rest his case for perpetual copyright on the profitability argument alone. To the economic rationale, he joined a legal–aesthetic one. Since creations of the mind belonged to their authors, so the argument went, the latter were at liberty to sell their works to publishers, ceding full ownership to whoever purchased them; to limit the duration of that ownership would be to negate the original proprietary claim of the author. It would therefore be a form of theft.

The combination of the economic with the legal-aesthetic argument in Diderot's *mémoire* reflected the historical connections between the commercial interests of publishers in perpetual copyright, the proto-Romantic conception of the author as original creator, and the practical demands of authors to be fairly remunerated for their manuscripts. Seen from the standpoint of Diderot, those connections made authors and their publishers allies rather than foes in the battle against piracy. And yet, in other respects, Diderot and the Parisian guild made for odd bedfellows. One problem, as Diderot frankly acknowledged, was that he, like most of the *philosophes*, usually supported free trade and opposed the monopolies of privileged corporations. Another, even more serious problem was that the Parisian guild was closely tied to a government agency of which Diderot and his fellow *philosophes* had so frequently been the victims: the institution of censorship.

Censorship

In contrast to England, where experiments in pre-publication censorship came to an end with the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695, the absolutist monarchy in France created a powerful apparatus for controlling the production and circulation of the printed word. A special branch of the royal administration in charge of the book trade, *La Direction de la librairie*, coordinated the labours of a growing staff of censors (roughly sixty in 1700 and nearly 180 by the eve of the Revolution), who vetted manuscripts and decided whether to allow their publication; the Lieutenant General of the Paris Police directed a team of inspectors who worked with thousands of spies (*mouchards*) to

maintain surveillance over a shifting population of colporteurs, *bouquinistes, nouvellistes,* Grub Street hacks, and café denizens, while officials of the Paris guild inspected printing houses and examined crates of books arriving in the capital from other locations. The role of the guild was of particular importance. The regulations on the book trade, enacted through a series of edicts beginning in the late seventeenth century, were designed to shore up the position of the guild by setting strict limits on the size of its membership, by giving it a near monopoly on the publication of new works, and by enforcing the system of exclusive book privileges. As the beneficiaries of that system, the guild members had a built-in incentive to comply with the requirement of pre-publication censorship and to work with the police in rooting out prohibited books, a vast category of literature that embraced practically all of what we would today recognize as the French Enlightenment.

It was a formidable system, one in which the administration of censorship was inseparable from the economic regulations governing the book trade; but it failed to prevent the publication and dissemination of prohibited books. Unable to publish their works legally inside the kingdom, the *philosophes* turned instead to publishers located just beyond France's eastern frontier in an area stretching from Amsterdam in the north through the German Rhineland and down to Geneva and the Papal enclave of Avignon in the south. There, all along what Robert Darnton memorably described as the 'fertile crescent' of extraterritorial French publishing, printing houses turned out editions of works that could not pass the censorship in France, as well as pirated editions of works that had been published legally. To get the prohibited merchandise safely to its destination inside the kingdom was a complicated business. On some occasions, foreign suppliers would hire smugglers to haul crates of books across the border. Usually, however, they would send the crates through the normal legal channels to the provincial guild halls in the cities designated as points of entry for book imports, but would conceal the sheets of prohibited books by sandwiching them between those of legal works. In the late eighteenth century, it was still common for books to be transported and sold in the form of loose sheets. The hope, in such cases, was that the guild officials in charge of inspecting the crates would content themselves with a quick glance at the outer sheets. And such tricks usually succeeded, for the provincial book guilds did not have the same incentive as their Parisian counterpart to hunt out prohibited books and enforce regulations. Once cleared through the guild halls, the shipments could proceed to their final destinations, often to the shops of provincial booksellers who did not belong to any guild and whose businesses were not subject to any kind of regular inspections.

By mid-century, prohibited books were circulating so widely that to the Director of the Book Trade, Lamoignon de Malesherbes, the situation had become absurd. 'A man who had read only books that originally appeared with the formal approval of the government', Malesherbes remarked, 'would be behind his contemporaries by nearly a century'. The solution Malesherbes adopted was to expand the use of 'tacit permissions', an intermediary grade of legality that allowed works to be published in France

without the government's full stamp of approval. Works published in that semi-legal fashion did not bear an official *approbation du roi* on the title page, nor, in most cases, did they indicate the correct place of publication. In general, the tacit permissions were granted on the understanding that the publisher would place a false, usually foreign place of publication on the title page. By means of such subterfuges, the government avoided any impression that it was sanctioning the publication, but ensured that the economic benefits would accrue to printers and booksellers inside the kingdom.

The compromise embodied in Malesherbes's use of tacit permissions reflected the twofold nature of the book as a carrier of ideas and an object of economic exchange. In light of that duality, even the most conservative regimes tended to moderate somewhat the severity of their censorship policies if they feared that repression would be economically harmful. In the clerical-dominated city of Cologne, for example—the German Rome, as it was known in the eighteenth century—the resident Papal nuncio organized, during the 1770s, several book burnings; large quantities of irreligious and pornographic French books were consigned to the flames in vast *autos-da-fe*. Like other port cities on the Rhine, however, Cologne derived much of its fiscal revenue from levies on trade, including the transshipment of books between Switzerland and the Netherlands; and the authorities had no wish to compromise that lucrative source of tax revenue. Thus, a crate of books transiting through the port of Cologne would be offloaded, weighed, and taxed, but not inspected. In the early 1770s, the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, a Swiss publisher of prohibited books, sent hundreds of copies of *Système de la nature*, the notorious atheistic treatise by the Baron d'Holbach, through the city of Cologne to a bookseller in Cleve, a Prussian enclave in the lower Rhine. The crates took nearly three months to reach their destination, so cluttered was the Rhine with tolls, tariffs, and customs barriers. At no time, however, were they in any danger of being confiscated. Even so militantly atheistic a work as *Système de la nature* could sail through the very heart of the Catholic Rhineland without running into any obstacles.

Such examples of ideological rigour softened by economic pragmatism serve to remind us that censorship was not a uniformly repressive institution, even in a bastion of Counter-Reformation Catholicism like Cologne. It was still less uniformly repressive in the France of Malesherbes. Censorship in France had a positive as well as a repressive dimension. The censors' reports were often reprinted in books graced with privileges. Incorporated into the front matter, they functioned like the endorsements on the dust jackets of books today: they praised the book, vouched for its quality, and recommended it to readers. What mattered to the censors, moreover, was not just, or even mainly, the ideological orthodoxy of the manuscripts they examined; books that were obviously offensive to 'religion, the state, and good morals' were rarely submitted to them in the first place. Many of the censors were men of letters who regarded themselves as guardians of good taste and style. Endowed with a lofty sense of their cultural mission, they would work with authors to 'improve' their manuscripts, rather like peer reviewers and copyeditors at academic presses today.

Although the censors were generally careful and conscientious, they were not immune to slipups. The most spectacular blunder occurred in 1758 when a censor named Jean-Pierre Tercier approved the manuscript of Helvétius's atheistic treatise, *De L'Esprit*. The publication of so obviously heterodox a work with a full privilege and *approbation du roi* printed on its title page was bound to produce a scandal. And so it happened. The Parlement of Paris, always eager to reassert its jurisdiction over the book trade, reacted with particular fury. It used the occasion to condemn not only *De L'Esprit* but also a long list of other Enlightenment works, including the first seven volumes of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. On 10 February 1759, all those books, minus the *Encyclopédie*, were lacerated and burned by the public hangman at the foot of the great staircase of the Parlement. To mollify his Parlementaire critics, Malesherbes was obligated to rescind the privilege for Diderot's publication. But at the same time, he warned Diderot of an impending police raid on the headquarters of the *Encyclopédie*. Alerted in time, Diderot was able to remove his papers before the arrival of the police, depositing them for safekeeping in the house of Malesherbes! Eventually, once the storm had blown over, work on the project resumed, and the final volumes appeared quietly in 1765. The greatest publishing enterprise of the Enlightenment owed its survival to the timely intervention of France's censor-in-chief.

While it would be a mistake to view censorship as rigidly opposed to the Enlightenment, it would be equally mistaken to treat it as a benign institution. Even after the tenure of Malesherbes as Director of the Book Trade, the police made repeated efforts to break up underground networks of production and distribution, above all when the works coursing through those networks were political libels. Purportedly based on genuine news sources, libels offered salacious exposés of moral turpitude in the royal bedchambers, the councils of state, and the corridors of Versailles. To the authorities in France, they were known as 'bad books' (*mauvais livres*), so irremediably bad that they could never qualify for a tacit permission. Such books existed entirely outside the law. And the authors who wrote them, the printers who printed them, and the pedlars who sold them continued to land in the Bastille through the 1780s. Eventually, in order to stem the tide of libels flowing into the kingdom, the French foreign secretary, the comte de Vergennes, issued an order in 1783 requiring that all book imports, regardless of their ultimate destination, travel for inspection to the guild hall in Paris. The order was so effective in disrupting the cross-border trade that it plunged the extraterritorial publishing houses into a deep crisis from which most of the firms never recovered.

The enormous efforts that the authorities made to halt the circulation of political libels in France expressed a fear that those works were dangerous. Indeed, all regimes of censorship can be said to express some degree of fear. In the Habsburg monarchy during the reign of Maria Theresa, the Austrian Censorship Commission took its fear of the printed word to such an extreme that, in 1777, it reportedly placed its own voluminous *catalogus librorum prohibitorum* containing nearly 5,000 titles on the *catalogus librorum prohibitorum*. To a north German *Aufklärer* like Friedrich Nicolai, this seemed an act of intolerance bordering on self-parody. The goal of such a move, Nicolai observed

sneeringly, was to prevent 'bad people learning of bad books, and clever people learning of clever books, from the same source and then obtaining the dirty writings from smugglers at ten times the usual price'.

Recent research by Norbert Bachleitner has cast some doubt on the veracity of the oft-repeated story that the Austrian Commission banned its own catalogue of banned books. What cannot be doubted is that the Commission often bent its own rules, allowing qualified scholars to obtain prohibited books for their own use. In making such exceptions, it signalled its recognition that danger inhered less in the prohibited books themselves than in how they were read. Later, under Joseph II, a reformed and relatively liberal Austrian Censorship Commission took a similar view: although it eliminated more than 80 per cent of the titles from the old catalogue of prohibited books, it imposed stringent regulations on commercial lending libraries, institutions to which the subscribers were generally 'young and uneducated', in the estimate of the commissioners.

Both in its Theresian and its Josephist incarnations, Austrian censorship was premised on the idea that different segments of the public read differently. The challenge for the historian is how to make sense of those differences.

Reading

From the standpoint of the history of reading, the most significant difference within the populations of early-modern Europe lay between those who possessed basic literacy skills and those who could not read at all. In an age before the establishment of compulsory primary education, literacy was unevenly distributed. Studies of signatures on marriage contracts, wills, court depositions, and other official documents in France, Britain, and the German lands during the eighteenth century reveal significant regional differences as well as persistently higher literacy rates in towns than in the countryside and among men than among women. Overall, however, literacy rates were increasing. They rose in France from 29 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women in the late 1680s to 48 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women a hundred years later; in England, male literacy is estimated to have doubled in the hundred years from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, rising from 30 to 60 per cent with a corresponding rate for women by the later date of between 35 and 40 per cent. Comparable aggregate figures for the German lands are hard to come by, but it is clear that literacy was more widespread in western than in eastern regions. In the northwest Duchy of Oldenbourg, signature rates for men in the late eighteenth century exceeded 90 per cent in some districts.

Admittedly, 'literacy' is an imprecise term since it encompasses such a wide range of abilities. More significant than the mere ability to sign a document is the ownership of books. And, on that score, the evidence is quite clear: both the percentage of people owning books and the size of personal libraries increased markedly. Estate inventories compiled after death in Paris in the early eighteenth century record the presence of
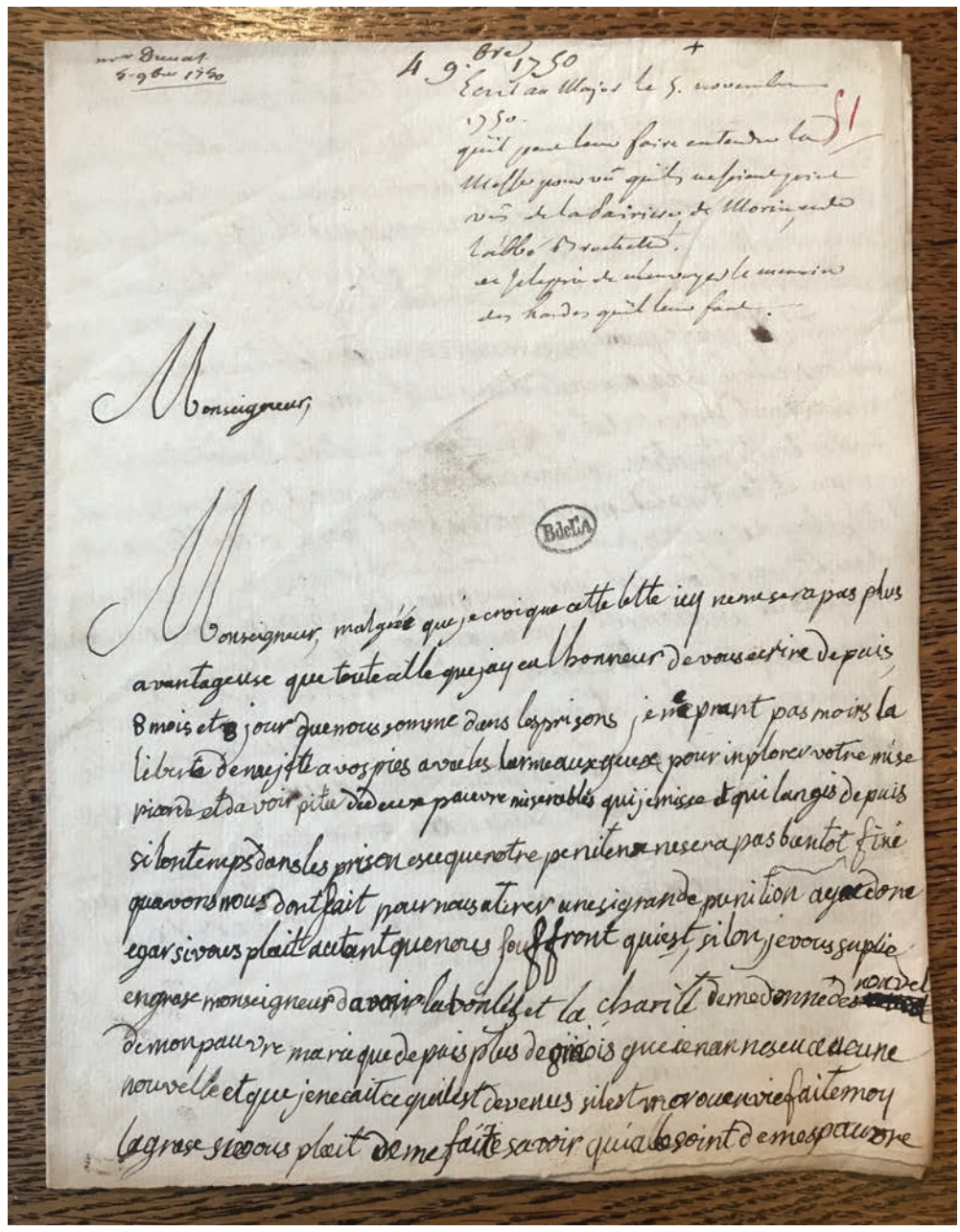
3. Letter of Marie-Elisabeth Michaud de Morin to the Lieutenant General of Police, Nicolas René Berryer, 4 November 1750, Archives de la Bastille, MS 11,730, fol. 51. The author of this letter was imprisoned in the Bastille along with her 11-year-old son on 27 February 1750; her husband, imprisoned on the same day and confined in a different cell, was unaware of his wife's imprisonment for roughly a year, writing multiple undelivered letters to her. The couple seem to have moved in Jansenist circles and to have been arrested in connection with the police's efforts to penetrate and dismantle the clandestine printing operation of the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, the prohibited Jansenist journal. From the sloppy penmanship and erratic spelling of her letter we can tell that she was little practiced in the art of writing. While her husband's letters are correctly spelled and written in a practised and confident hand, hers bear the traces of a still predominantly oral culture in which the relation to the written word is mediated through speech. Whole phrases in her letters lack word spacing and have to be read aloud in order to be intelligible. The page shown is the first of a multipage letter in which she pleads with Berryer for permission to hear mass in the prison chapel and receive warmer clothes in advance of the coming winter.

books for only 30 per cent of domestic servants and 13 per cent of journeymen workers; by 1780, those figures had risen to 40 and 35 per cent. During roughly the same period, the size of personal libraries in the possession of middle-class professionals rose, on average, from between one and twenty volumes to between twenty and a hundred; of the clergy, from between twenty and fifty to between a hundred and 300; and of nobles and magistrates, from between one and twenty to more than 300.

With the widening diffusion of print, even those town dwellers who did not own books themselves and who lacked basic literacy skills could no longer be said to live in a purely 'oral' culture. The urban landscape was littered with writing—from street signs, which began going up in Paris in the 1720s, to public notices of judicial rulings, ecclesiastical proclamations, and administrative decrees, which job printers turned out in increasingly large quantities and which were prominently displayed in squares and marketplaces, to the occasional handwritten *pasquinade* or graffiti, composed in secret and surreptitiously posted, through which public opinion found inchoate expression in moments of political turmoil.

That the posting of handwritten messages could still play an important role in politics during the eighteenth century may seem surprising. The use of urban surfaces as public bulletin boards went back many centuries, to early-sixteenth-century Rome, where citizens would post handwritten satirical verses critical of the papal government on the statue of Pasquino (hence 'pasquinade'). Yet, as late as 1776, following the supposed poisoning of the communion wine in the Zurich cathedral, a brazenly seditious pasquinade shook the Zurich republic and threatened to ignite violent civil strife. Its explosive impact provides a useful reminder that modes of communication originating in different historical epochs coexisted throughout the age of the wooden hand press.

While manuscript modes of communication retained their importance in the eighteenth century, urban institutions designed to facilitate access to print were proliferating. Two of the most important such institutions were the commercial lending library, established by a bookseller, and the reading society, organized by the citizens of a town. The former allowed subscribers to borrow books from the bookseller's catalogue, to read periodicals on the premises of his shop, and, in many cases, to meet with other subscribers in a room set aside for discussions. Accessible to anyone who could afford the annual or monthly membership fee, to women as well as men, the commercial lending library was a relatively open institution—more open, in any case, than the reading society, which was a civic association rather than a commercial establishment. Particularly widespread in the German-speaking lands, reading societies afforded many of the same advantages as lending libraries: access to a common stock of books and journals, as well as a room for discussion and socializing. The members of the societies, however, decided collectively which works to obtain (usually periodicals and 'useful' works on such subjects as history and geography, but no novels) and whom to admit (usually bourgeois men but no women or workers).
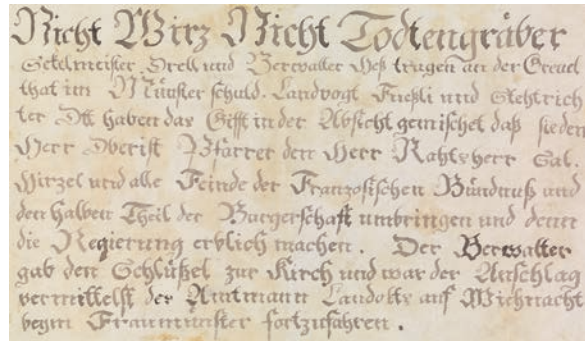
4. Zurich pasquinade, October 1776. Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zurich, A27 153, Kundschaften und Nachgänge. Early on the morning of 13 October 1776, almost one month exactly after communion wine in the Zurich cathedral was believed to have been poisoned during a religious festival, pasquinades were discovered in four heavily travelled locations. The one shown proclaims the innocence of a suspect arrested several weeks earlier, the gravedigger Hartmann Wirz, and accuses some of Zurich's leading magistrates of having organized and carried out the poisoning. The text is handwritten, but not in a cursive script—the characters imitate those of Fraktur, a German typeface. In that way, the anonymous authors of the libel may have hoped to endow their seditious pronouncements with the authority of an official printed proclamation or edict. Over the next month, the magistrates rounded up and interrogated, sometimes under torture or the threat of torture, more than two dozen witnesses and suspects in an ultimately futile effort to identify the persons responsible for writing and posting the pasquinades.

A third institution in which urban residents could gather to talk about what they had read was the coffee house, one of the principal settings for the emergence of what Jürgen Habermas has described as the 'bourgeois public sphere'. Unlike the lending library and the reading society, the coffee house did not impose any formal requirements for admission. At least in theory, practically anyone could enter such an establishment and take part in the often animated, and sometimes raucous, debates spurred by the reading of newspapers and manuscript news sheets circulating among the customers. Yet despite such apparent openness, various selective filters operated to restrict access. In London, where disputes among customers sometimes degenerated into physical violence, the reality of coffee house culture was so far removed from the Addisonian ideal of polite sociability that it was deemed unsuitable for women. In comparison, the Parisian café was rather urbane. With its marble table-tops, mirrors, silver utensils, and crystal, it exuded an air of gentility; and because, in addition, it did not allow smoking and offered chocolate and a range of liquors as well as coffee, it seemed more inviting to women than the coffee houses of London. Yet, for those same reasons, it was unlikely to attract workers or the poor.

Although the lending library, reading society, and coffee house catered for different clienteles, they shared at least one point in common: they enabled men—and some women—to read a much wider range of printed material than would otherwise have been possible. In that way, such institutions contributed to the spread of 'extensive

5. *Les motionnaires au caffé* (sic) *du Caveau*, Musée Carnavalet, Paris. This anonymous Paris engraving of 1789 depicts the café du Caveau in the Palais Royal. The interior of the establishment appears less refined than an aristocratic salon, but more elegant, sober, and restrained than a plebeian tavern. Its clientele—all men except for the woman behind the counter—could be described as 'bourgeois'. Different styles of reading coexist. A young man in the foreground is absorbed in silent reading; a man standing to the right of the partition reads aloud to other people. A young boy enters the café bearing news-sheets hot off the press. In such spaces, reading and the discussion of reading focus not on books, but on political ephemera.

reading', to borrow a term coined by the historian Rolf Engelsing in his study of reading practices among the bourgeoisie of north German trading cities. Until the second half of the eighteenth century, Engelsing argued, most people, if they read at all, read the same small number of texts over and over. In Reformed Protestant households, for example, the Bible was read repeatedly year after year, often aloud by the head of the household at family gatherings in the evening. The object of such reading was not to discover new worlds but to recapitulate what one already knew. Extensive reading, by contrast, involved a relentless quest for novelty. The practitioners of

6. Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *Père de famille lisant la Bible à ses enfants* (*c.*1755) represents a classic scene of intensive reading. A peasant family gathers around a table in the evening to listen to the father read aloud from a large-format edition of the Bible. His authority and that of the Bible reinforce one another, inspiring reverence among other members of the household. In Catholic France, however, the reading of the Bible *en famille* was never as widespread as in Protestant lands. Rather than documenting contemporary rural reading practices, Greuze's painting expressed the nostalgia of educated urbanites for an ideal world of transparency, shared knowledge, and reverence for the book.

extensive reading would rush through a text once before moving on to the next one, always with a view to broadening their intellectual horizons.

Did extensive reading in fact supplant the older style of reading in the second half of the eighteenth century? The answer to that question is undoubtedly 'no'. The history of reading cannot be adequately contained within so rigidly linear and starkly binary a framework. That extensive reading was becoming more common in the second half of the eighteenth century, however, is beyond question.

The clearest indication of its spread was the growing popularity of newspapers. No other genre of print available in the eighteenth century was more conducive to an extensive style of reading than the newspaper, each issue of which was immediately superseded by the next in an endless sequence. And during the second half of the eighteenth century, the volume of newspaper production exploded both in Europe and in European areas of settlement in the New World. In the German states, the linguistic area of Europe with the largest number of newspapers, production increased by roughly two-thirds in the space of thirty-five years, from ninety-three papers published in 1750 to 151 in 1785; by the eve of the French Revolution, the German paper with the largest circulation, the four-day-a-week *Zeitung des Hamburgischen unpartheyischen Correspondenten* (*Hamburg Impartial Correspondent*), was being printed at a pressrun of 20,000 copies. In the newly independent United States, the increase was even more dramatic: there the number of newspapers rose from about twenty-five to approximately 230 in

the period between the Declaration of Independence and the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800. Of course, such aggregate data conceal a wide range of journalistic forms—from decorous and respectful court gazettes to the relatively lively, though notoriously corrupt, newspapers of England and the avowedly partisan, vituperative, ad hominem journalism of early-republican America and Revolutionary France. Whatever their tone or content, however, all newspapers shared at least one feature: periodicity. Appearing every week on the same days, they imposed a new, distinctively modern experience of time on printing house workers and newspaper readers alike—on the workers, who had to labour according to the inflexible rhythms of production schedules and press deadlines; and on the readers, who came to expect the delivery of newspapers at regular intervals.

In addition, the typographical design of newspapers was growing more and more distinct from that of other genres of print, above all in England. While most papers on the Continent continued to be printed in either a two-column quarto or a single-column octavo format, London dailies of the 1770s adopted a new folio design: their large pages of newsprint were broken up into three or four columns, each of which contained short articles or advertisements separated from one another by printers' rules or individual titles. Such a page layout invited a particular style of reading: it directed readers to jump around within the text, to move from one item to another rather than to read the newspaper through from start to finish—precisely the kind of segmental or fragmentary reading one would expect to encounter among the distracted denizens of a crowded and noisy London coffee house.

But now, by way of contrast, consider the type of reader represented most frequently in French paintings from the second half of the eighteenth century: the solitary, usually young, female reader seated in some cosy interior space. In such paintings, the interior setting of the scene accords with the deeply private nature of the act of reading. In *La Jeune fille lisant* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, for example, one sees a young woman comfortably installed with her back against a pillow, her body immobile and her eyes trained fixedly on the pages of the slender volume she holds daintily in her right hand; the expression on her face is one of intense mental concentration, absorption in the act of reading so thorough as to make her seem oblivious to the world around her.
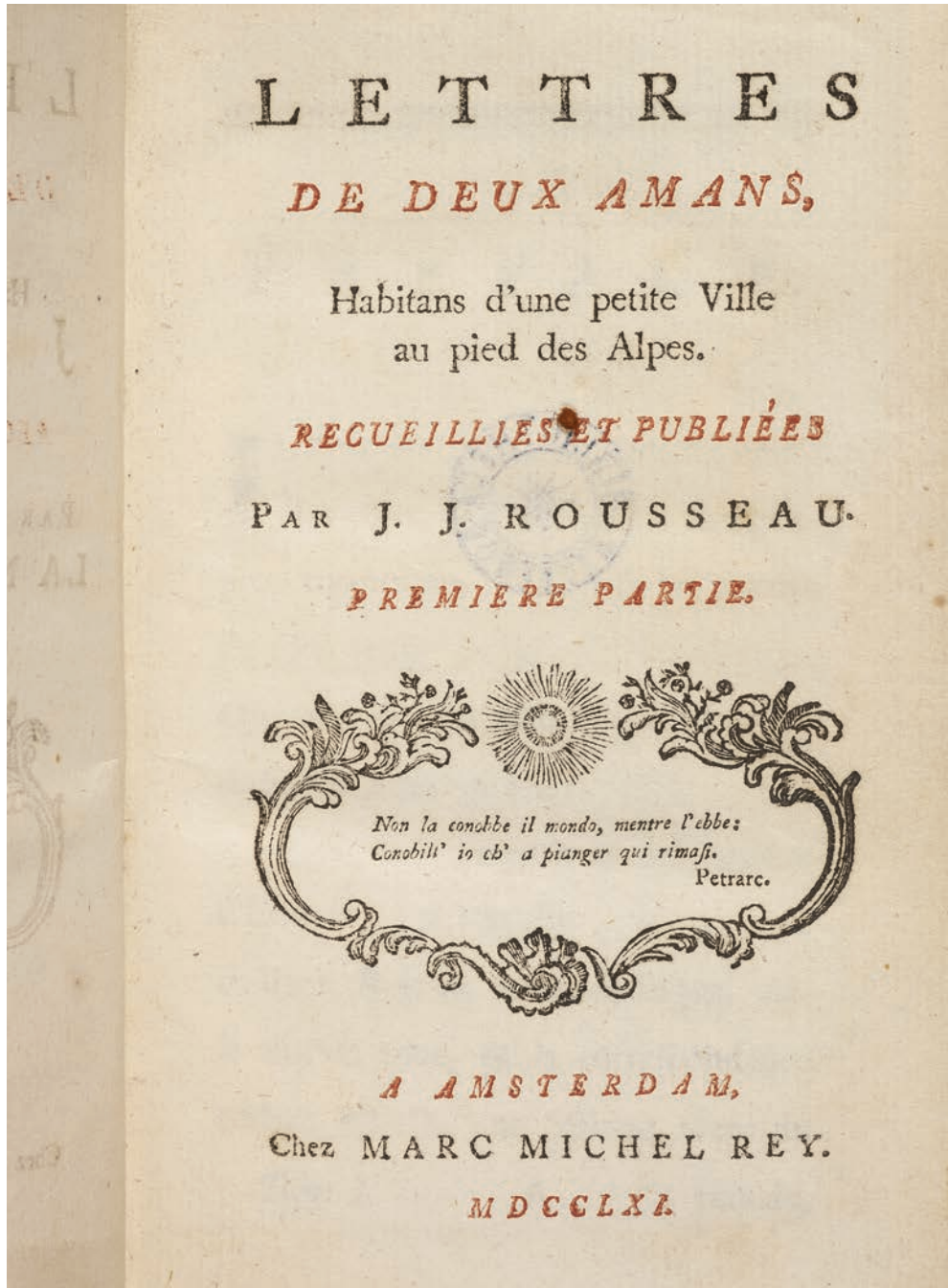
Of course, artistic representations do not provide direct evidence of actual reading practices. Several aspects of Fragonard's painting, however, tally with what we know from other sources. To begin with, there is the detail of the small-format book, a volume so diminutive that it can be balanced in one hand. Although such small-format editions were not new to the eighteenth century (their origins went back to the portable editions of classical works published by the Aldine Press in Renaissance Venice), they were undoubtedly becoming more common; in the early 1780s, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, an astute chronicler of Parisian fashion, wrote of the 'mania for small formats'. Such books were ideally suited for reading in the privacy of a boudoir or bedchamber, where they could be laid on a night table or slipped under a

7. In Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *La Liseuse ou la jeune fille lisant* (*c.*1770; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) reading is an intensely private act, isolating the reader from the world around her. And is this one of those books that, as Rousseau memorably put it, 'one reads with only one hand'? The placement of her free hand, combined with her flushed cheeks, invites speculation.

pillow, as, in fact, occurred with the copies of *Werther* belonging to the Geneva and London suicide victims we mentioned at the start of this chapter.

Secondly, there is the association in Fragonard's painting of the small-format book with a female reader. That, too, seems credible in light of the fact that small formats were often used for the publication of novels, and other evidence suggests that many novel readers were women. The novelists whose unprecedented celebrity we noted earlier, above all Richardson and Rousseau, received large quantities of fan mail, much of it from female admirers who described in their letters how deeply the experience of reading had affected them. Their descriptions highlighted two things in particular: the intensely emotional nature of their reading experience and their imaginative identification with the characters of the novels. In one such testimonial, the marquise de Polignac told Rousseau of how she had broken down when she got to the deathbed scene of Julie in Volume Six of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*: 'I dare not tell you the effect it made on me. No, I was past weeping. A sharp pain convulsed me. My heart was crushed. Julie dying was no longer an unknown person. I believed I was her sister, her friend, her Claire. My seizure became so strong that if I had not put the book away I would have

LETTRES
DE DEUX AMANS,

Habitans d'une petite Ville
au pied des Alpes.

RECUEILLIES ET PUBLIÉES

PAR J. J. ROUSSEAU.

PREMIERE PARTIE.

> *Non la conobbe il mondo, mentre l'ebbe:*
> *Conobbil' io ch' a piunger qui rimaſi.*
> Petrarc.

A AMSTERDAM,
Chez MARC MICHEL REY.

MDCCLXI.

8. Title page of the original edition of Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* published by Marc-Michel Rey in Amsterdam in 1761. The full title reads: 'Letters of two lovers, inhabitants of a small town at the foot of the Alps. Collected and Published by J.J. Rousseau'. The title page invites readers to treat the letters not as literary inventions but as the genuine expressions of sensitive souls.

been as ill as all those who attended that virtuous woman in her last moments'. In comparison to the vehement passions described by the marquise de Polignac, the emotional state of the young woman in Fragonard's painting seems restrained; but she, too, gives the impression, by her total absorption in the act of reading, of having transported herself imaginatively to some fictional world.

The style of reading evoked by the marquise de Polignac and depicted by Fragonard coincided with the heyday of the epistolary novel. Both Richardson and Rousseau cast their novels in the form of letters, as did Goethe and scores of other authors during the period from the 1740s through the 1780s. Such a device enhanced the reality effect of the fiction: it supported the illusion that the novels were not novels at all but authentic collections of letters discovered, edited, and published. How many readers were actually fooled is hard to say. But clearly many *wanted* to believe in the genuineness of the letters; and in the mid- to late eighteenth century, such a belief was not as farfetched as would have been the case in earlier periods. That's because the rise of the epistolary novel coincided with an actual increase in the volume of personal corre-spondence and marked improvements in the quality of postal services. Speedy, regular, and reliable mail deliveries—the same basic communications infrastructure that made possible the widening circulation of newspapers—formed the basis of a new epistolary culture. Correspondents, now increasingly confident that their letters would arrive at their destination, lavished greater care on their letters than had been common in the past. At the same time, the new cult of sentimentality infused personal correspondence with a confessional tone, a development in which women letter writers played a particularly important role.

For all these reasons, the letters of fictional characters such as Julie and Claire possessed a certain plausibility. Readers of those letters were able to give way to the fantasy that the characters were real, and so participate vicariously in the sorrows and joys to which the letters bore witness. Today, such an emotional response would be described as empathic. In the eighteenth century, it was associated with 'sympathy', in the literal sense of 'suffering with', and its cultivation though novel reading had far-reaching consequences. According to Lynn Hunt, the emotional identification of readers with fictional characters contributed to developing the sense of a common humanity, a feeling of kinship with unknown others that was a necessary condition for the emergent ideology of universal rights.

From the reading of epistolary novels to the *Declaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*? That connection may seem a little farfetched, but it deserves to be taken seriously because reading was such a powerful force in the eighteenth century. For some, that power was deeply unsettling. Cultural conservatives of the late eighteenth century imagined a wide range of contemporary ills that they blamed on the malign influence of untutored reading: a wave of suicides, set off by the reading of *Werther* and the writings of the *philosophes*; an epidemic of masturbation, spread through the solitary reading of erotic literature and which led its victims down a slippery slope to frailty, impotence, blindness, and insanity; and, most ominously, a growing

9. The anonymous, fashionably attired subject of Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's painting, *Portrait d'une femme* (*c.*1787; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Quimper) wields her quill with the facility expected of an upper-class woman. The boudoir or cabinet in which she sits is suitably furnished with quills, paper, writing table, ink stand, and sealing wax. In a departure from most portraits of female letter writers, Labille-Guiard shows a woman writing not to a male lover or husband but to her own children, a change that may reflect the contemporary sentimentalist cult of maternal love.

incapacity of women afflicted with 'reading addiction' to distinguish adequately between fact and fiction and to attend responsibly to their daily chores. From such an alarming list of ills it was but a short step to blaming the outbreak of the French Revolution on the same pernicious influence, as the abbé Baruel, the theoretician of the Counter-Revolution, did when he attributed the Revolution to an evil conspiracy of *philosophes* and Freemasons. *C'est la faute à Voltaire, c'est la faute à Rousseau.* Supporters of the Revolution, however, were equally insistent on drawing that connection. The nation's representatives expressed their debt to Voltaire and Rousseau by ordering the remains of the two *philosophes* to be enshrined in the Pantheon; and after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1792, a petition was submitted to extend a similar honour to Gutenberg, the inventor of the European printing press.

That there existed a close link between the Revolution and print was a point on which both Revolutionaries and Counter-Revolutionaries could agree. But what exactly was the nature of that link?

Print and Revolution

In their determination to eliminate privilege in all its forms, the Revolutionaries destroyed the institutional and administrative infrastructure of Old Regime culture: not just learned academies and privileged journals, or the pensions, sinecures, and *gratifications* reserved for authors, but also the printers' and booksellers' guilds, the edicts on the book trade, book privileges, *La Direction de la Librairie,* and royal censorship. The destruction was so great that it catapulted the world of print into a legal void. Eventually, that void would be filled with new laws—a law on libel and sedition adopted as part of the constitution of 1791; and a law on literary property, the so-called Declaration of the Rights of Genius, passed by the Convention in 1793. In the meantime, an unprecedented situation prevailed in Europe's most populous state: a condition of near total freedom of the press. During the first several years of the Revolution, just about anything could be printed, and anyone could set up shop as a printer or bookseller. While the members of the old Paris book guild bombarded the National Assembly with petitions and memorandums in a vain attempt to restore their privileged position, new printing and bookselling establishments were springing up all around them. Hundreds of such establishments came into existence to satisfy the public's insatiable thirst for political pamphlets and newspapers. And the Revolution generated huge quantities of both. At least 2,600 pamphlets were published between January and the opening of the Estates General on 5 May 1789. Nearly 250 newspapers appeared during the six months after the storming of the Bastille, and more than 500 between 14 July 1789 and the overthrow of the monarchy on 10 August 1792. The revolutionary experiment with a free market in ideas produced an explosive growth in the volume of print.

Nearly all that growth, however, was in the field of political ephemera. Book publishing—the kind of serious, large-scale, capital-intensive activity associated with the Paris guild—went into steep decline. Various factors lay behind that decline. One was simply that political ephemera were the genres of print most in step with the revolutionary experience of time: its sense of rupture with the past and rapid, dizzying change in the present. Newspapers, in particular, were of crucial importance in helping citizens to comprehend the meaning of rapidly unfolding events. And some of the men who wrote and edited those papers—Brissot, Desmoulins, Marat, and Hébert—enjoyed a degree of fame and visibility such as journalists had never before enjoyed. The most famous 'authors' of the Revolution wrote newspapers and pamphlets, not books. And yet book publishing would not have declined as steeply as it did had it not been for a second, even more important factor: the lack of an adequate regulatory framework. In effect, the revolutionary crisis in publishing vindicated the position Diderot had defended in his mémoire on behalf of the Paris guild: commercial book publishing was not viable without the security of legally guaranteed copyright protections. The Convention sought to provide those protections through the Declaration of the Rights of Genius, but that law was not enough in itself to place book publishing on

MEMENTO MORI

Je suis le veritable Pere Duchesne, foutre!

LA GRANDE JOIE

DU

PERE DUCHESNE,

EN apprenant la destruction totale des rébelles de la Vendée, et en songeant au désespoir des brigands couronnés, quand ils vont apprendre cette nouvelle. Sa grande colère contre certains jean-foutres qui veulent recruter tous les brigands et former une nouvelle Vendée en proposant d'ouvrir les prisons et de faire grace aux conspirateurs. Ses bons avis aux braves montagnards pour les empêcher de donner dans un pareil paneau, et pour les engager à continuer d'exterminer les fripons et les traîtres.

JE suis d'une telle joie, foutre, que je ne

328.

10. The figure of the Père Duchesne, a straight-talking, oath-swearing, pipe-smoking stove merchant, derived from the boulevard theatre of the Old Regime. During the Revolution, several journalists and pamphleteers sought to appropriate it for their own purposes. But it was the radical publicist Jacques-René Hébert who most successfully fused his own authorial persona with that of the legendary *homme du peuple*. Three-hundred-and-ninety-one issues of Hébert's *Père Duchesne* appeared between the autumn of 1790 and early 1794, with each issue consisting of four leaves (eight pages) printed in a single-column octavo format. Press runs of the journal reached as high as 60,000 to 80,000 copies. The woodcut image of an axe-wielding Père Duchesne standing beside a kneeling, cowering priest with the words 'memento mori' in the bottom right corner is crudely executed in a style reminiscent of the *Bibliothèque bleue*, the cheap printed chapbooks hawked by pedlars under the Old Regime (n.d. but probably published December 1793).

a stable economic foundation. The term of protection afforded by the law was too short (just ten years after the death of the author); the enforcement mechanisms were too weak; and the protection did not, in any case, extend to books published before 1789. Those books were deemed the property of the nation, and so passed into the public domain. The entire literary inheritance of France was merged into a vast cultural commons, no part of which could be fenced off and enclosed.

The Triumph of the Book

Ultimately, it fell to the Napoleonic state to create the conditions in which book publishing could flourish anew. Following a wave of bankruptcies that shook the Parisian book trade in the early years of the new century, the French authorities took steps in 1810 to re-establish a comprehensive regulatory framework. The *règlement* of 1810 created a new organ of government, the Direction générale de l'imprimerie et de la librairie, to superintend the administration of the book trade, and a corps of inspectors and police officials to monitor the trade; it re-imposed limits on the number of printing houses in Paris and required of all printers and booksellers that they obtain a licence (*brevet*) from the Direction générale; and it lengthened the term of copyright protection to twenty years following the death of the author, his widow, and their children.

Most important from the standpoint of book publishing, the *règlement* mandated that one deposit copy of each new publication be submitted to the *dépôt* at the Bibliothèque nationale, and all new publications registered with the Direction générale. With a general system of registration and legal deposit in place, it became possible for the first time to compile a reliable and exhaustive catalogue of books in print—*La Bibliographie de l'empire francais ou Journal de l'imprimerie et de la librairie*, which the Direction générale published and updated periodically beginning in 1810. The information contained in that catalogue allowed publishers to survey the entire literary market and plan their publishing strategies accordingly. In addition, the requirement of registration for all editions made it possible for publishers to exploit the public domain effectively. The Direction générale would grant authorization for the re-edition of works belonging to the public domain provided that the editions were different from others on the market. In such cases, the protection conferred by the state applied not to the text, which at least in theory remained part of the cultural commons, but to what the literary scholar Gérard Genette has dubbed the 'paratext'—all those aspects of an edition (format, notes, introduction, illustrations, and so on) that distinguish it from other editions of the text. So attractive did the re-edition of classic works now become that it threatened to tip the balance in the world of publishing, from the production of *nouveautés* to the reproduction of cultural patrimony.

Of course, the revival of book publishing was not the only goal that the architects of the 1810 *règlement* had in view. Their overriding concern was to control the circulation of ideas; and to that end, the *règlement* reintroduced pre-publication censorship. But the principal mechanism of control in the new system was surveillance, not censorship,

which, in any case, applied more to pamphlets and periodical literature than to books. Decades of political agitation stretching back to the 1770s had demonstrated that the most incendiary genres of print were the shortest—from Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, which set the North American colonies on a course toward independence from Great Britain; to the abbé Sièyes's *Qu'est-ce que le tiers état?*, which fixed the terms of political debate in the crucial period before the meeting of the Estates General; to Hébert's *Père Duchesne*, the unofficial organ of the Parisian Sans-Culottes during the Terror. Compared to such pamphlets and journals, longer works now seemed benign, as the liberal political philosopher Benjamin Constant explained in 1814:

> All enlightened men seemed to be convinced that complete freedom and exemption from any form of censorship should be granted to longer works. Because writing them requires time, purchasing them requires affluence, and reading them requires attention, they are not able to produce the reaction in the populace that one fears of works of greater rapidity and violence. But pamphlets, handbills, and newspapers are produced quickly, you can buy them for little, and because their effect is immediate, they are believed to be more dangerous (Benjamin Constant, *De la liberté des brochures, des pamphlets et des journaux* (Paris, 1814), p. 1.).

Eventually, in accordance with Constant's reasoning, the restored Bourbon monarchy would exempt works containing more than nineteen sheets from the requirement of pre-publication censorship; then, following the Hundred Days, it would eliminate book censorship altogether, even while it maintained strict control over the periodical press and preserved other aspects of the system established by the law of 1810. In that way, it encouraged what Carla Hesse has described as an 'elite civilization of the book' in contrast to the more popular print culture of pamphlets, newspapers, and handbills.

A similar bias against popular print culture can be seen in the censorship policies of other regimes during the Restoration era. Under the influence of the Austrian chancellor Metternich, the newly created German Confederation adopted the Karlsbad Decrees in 1818, draconian censorship laws that were designed to stifle political opposition but that exempted works of twenty or more sheets from the requirement of censorship: 'Nineteen sheets are dangerous, but twenty make [a work] honourable … [A work of] twenty sheets one doesn't buy', joked the satirist and poet Robert Prutz. ('Neunzehn Bogen sind gefährlich, aber zwanzig machen ehrlich … Zwanzig Bogen kauft man nicht'.)

While the Confederation displayed considerable zeal in censoring publications of fewer than twenty sheets, it was slow to adopt a ban against book piracy—much to the disappointment of Germany's leading publishers, who had hoped that the meeting of the new Federal Diet in 1815 would lead to a copyright law valid for all member states. The following year, when the Diet gave no sign of taking action, the Hamburg publisher Friedrich Perthes issued an anonymous appeal to its deputies in the form of a pamphlet with the portentously Kantian-sounding title, *The German Book Trade as the Condition for the Existence of a German Literature* (*Der deutsche Buchhandel als Bedingung des*

Daseins einer deutschen Literatur). Only with the legislative support of the Confederation, Perthes argued, could German booksellers perform their exalted mission—to confer material existence on the products of the German Spirit (*Geist*). His appeal, however, fell on deaf ears, not least because piracy continued to be a lucrative branch of the publishing industry in Austria. It was not until 1835 that the Diet finally adopted a general prohibition against piracy, and not until the establishment of the Reich in 1871 that the German book trade was subject to a uniform copyright law.

Nor did piracy disappear from the world of the English-language book trade, notwithstanding the decision of the House of Lords in favour of Donaldson. In the nineteenth century, as the threat of piracy from Scotland and Ireland receded, a new pirate nation arose on the other side of the Atlantic: the United States. In the nineteenth century, American publishers practised piracy on an industrial scale, and they did so, moreover, with the full support of the U.S. government, which was not a signatory to international copyright agreements.

And yet, as the age of the wooden hand press gave way in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to the industrial age of the steam-powered rotary press, book publishing unquestionably rested on a more stable economic foundation, and authors enjoyed greater bargaining power in their negotiations with publishers than had been the case a half-century earlier. At that time, as we saw, the spectacular international success of *Werther* had yielded practically no economic benefit for its author. By the 1820s, when Goethe prepared the final edition of his collected works—his 'intellectual bequest to the nation and his financial bequest to his descendants', in the words of Reinhard Wittmann—the author once decried as a corrupter of youth and an apostle of suicide had been elevated to the rank of national hero. So celebrated was Goethe, in fact, that all thirty-nine member states of the German Confederation agreed to protect the edition of his collected works against piracy, the first time that any publication had enjoyed such protection in German-speaking Europe. Whoever won the competition to publish Goethe's works would be assured of a monopoly. And the competition in such a high stakes game was ferocious. Leading publishers in Germany sought to outbid each other, raising the price until, finally, Goethe accepted the offer of Johann Friedrich Cotta in Stuttgart, 'the Bonaparte of the book trade' as he was known to his contemporaries. The price was 65,000 Taler! Goethe's experiences in the literary market were, of course, no more typical at the end of his career than they had been at the beginning. But the difference between his early and late experiences provides a measure of just how much had changed in the world of print. By the end of the *ancien régime typographique,* the literary author had been enshrined at the centre of a civilization of the book mediated through the book trade and increasingly supported by the power of the modern state.