Literary Sociability and Literary Property in France, 1775-1793: ...
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nature of the book present in the firstborn of the book, the incunables, seems equally present in their electronic descendents. Both as a physical object and a preserver and conduit of information, the technology that is the book cannot be denied, even under the scrutiny of "modernity." After all, the notion that a tenth-century countess of Anjou once paid two hundred sheep, three barrels of grain, and several furs for a book of sermons is perhaps not so unusual, given what her modern counterparts might be prepared to bid for its equivalents on eBay (23). Although it is not possible to detail every step of the book's life journey, this volume brings "a potency of life" to its subject in a manner that is both necessary and long overdue.

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Literary Sociability and Literary Property in France, 1775–1793: Beaumarchais, the Société des auteurs dramatiques and the Comédie-Française. Studies in European Cultural Transition 33. By Gregory S. Brown. Aldershot, Hants, U.K., and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publications, 2006. x, 186 pp. $89.95. ISBN 0-7546-0386-5.

This book on literary sociability and property in France between 1775 and 1793 serves as a logical companion piece to Gregory Brown's earlier book, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture, and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (www.gutenberg-e.org and Columbia University Press, 2003). Brown focuses on the difficulties faced by aspiring French playwrights such as Beaumarchais, who sought to establish their personal legitimacy in literary life in the 1770s and 1780s. The official royal stage, the Comédie-Française, offered opportunities but no guarantees and "provided no juridical, institutional, or financial framework to support young playwrights in their efforts" (3). Administered by the troupe and governed by four courtiers, the First Gentlemen of the Royal Bedchamber, the Comédie did not reward writers generously, even if their plays, like Beaumarchais's *The Barber of Seville*, had enjoyed wide public acclaim. Writers found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to cede control and proceeds of their plays to the Comédie in order to ensure future performances, behave like gentlemen, and preserve their honorable reputations. This unfair situation led Beaumarchais, with the help of the duc de Duras, one of the four governors, to negotiate for changes in the royal regulations of the theater. Beaumarchais and twenty-two other authors whose works had been performed at the Comédie met on July 3, 1777 to form the Société des auteurs dramatiques (SAD). New regulations for the theater were issued in 1780 and then altered again in the early years of the French Revolution, from 1790 to 1793.

Brown's interpretation of Beaumarchais and the organization of SAD emphasizes the importance of recognized social status within the "existing lines of authority in eighteenth-century France, at the intersection of a reforming court, a monopolistic commercial theater, and fellow writers anxious about their status and identity in literary life" (7). The formation of SAD was not an attack against authority as such, according to Brown, but rather an attempt to establish literary identity and respect within the contemporary system. Beaumarchais's survival strategies included his ability to use the media to advantage and to represent

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himself favorably to those at court and their elite Parisian networks as well as to the general public. It also helped that he had previous experience in handling legal disputes.

The history of the Comédie-Française, founded in 1680 as the only royal theater "authorized to perform comedies and tragedies in Paris or at court," reveals its prestigious position in eighteenth-century literary life (5). Brown interweaves this history with the concept of literary sociability and acknowledges that his approach has been influenced by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu. As a result both literary scholars and historians are provided with an inside view of the Republic of Letters and those who lived and worked within it.

The book consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion, followed by detailed notes, an extensive bibliography, and an index. Chapter 4, "Literary Sociability and the Revolution: Social Interests, Politics, and Literary Property, July 1789–January 1791," examines legislative debates between 1789, when the revolution began, and 1791, when the Le Chapelier Law went into effect. This law broke the Comédie's theater monopoly and cleared the way for a public theater to perform all kinds of works. Named after the Jacobin deputy Isaac-Réné Guy Le Chapelier, the text held that "all privilege is destructive [and] . . . exclusive" and thus should be abolished and that new restrictions on the performance of new works by "great men of letters" would enable "despotism to exercise its tyranny . . . on the thought" of the French people. In effect, the Le Chapelier Law emphasized the moral authority of *gens de lettres* (136–37).

After approval by the legislative assembly, the Le Chapelier Law was promulgated as a public decree on February 4, 1791. Brown notes that the passage of the law did not, as is sometimes asserted, contribute to an "author-centered approach" but rather to "the birth of public domain in French intellectual property law," which served to benefit commercial theater operators (138).

The final chapter, "From Liberty to Patriotism," examines the conflicts that followed the passage of the Le Chapelier Law, the four subsequent laws, and legislation dealing with national intellectual property in 1793.

To the authors who formed SAD, the 1791 law was the first step in their efforts to receive fair treatment for their work. By 1793 their organization had evolved into the Bureau de perception dramatique, which "became the legal advocate for writers' material and legal interests," or, as Brown called it, "the first modern authors' agency" (155). In July 1793 the Committee on Public Instruction, followed by the National Convention, passed a law "granting property rights to individual authors for their lifetimes, plus ten years and created both a conceptual public domain and a physical dépôt legal in the Bibliothèque Nationale for all printed works" (154). This 1793 legislation also forbade corporate ownership of intellectual property rights, which included not only printed literature but theater performances as well.

Ironically, some of those who had championed such intellectual property legislation had been expelled from the National Convention in the Girondin purge of May–June 1793 and were later executed. One of the original members of SAD, the playwright and aphorist Sébastien Roch Nicolas Chamfort, had served as the first codirector (with Jean-Louis Carra) of the new national library in 1792 but had suffered imprisonment and an early death in 1794 due to his Girondin associations (Carra and the interior minister, Roland).

In his conclusion Brown points out that Beaumarchais and his fellow eighteenth-century writers understood literary property as "recognition for their social

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contribution." Through SAD they had pressed for authors' rights "more as a social status accorded based on personal qualities than a commodity belonging to an individual based on work performed" (164–65). After 1789 these writers were able to represent their creations more as a contribution to the public good, reflecting the patriotic language extolling "the nation" that was commonly used following the Revolution. It is important to recognize the eighteenth-century context in which their words were employed rather than to insert a twenty-first-century construct on them.

As with Brown's earlier book, this one presents a carefully researched treatment based on records from the Comédie-Française archives, the Bibliothèque nationale, the Archives nationales, and the Beaumarchais family archives, among others, and from numerous printed primary sources and a judicious selection of secondary sources. His detailed treatment of eighteenth-century institutions, society, and attitudes is a valuable contribution to the literature and one that writers and librarians will find useful and interesting.

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Beyond Belgium: Royal and Other Adventures of a Librarian Worldwide 1974–2000. By Herman Liebaers. Leuven, Belgium: Van Halewyck, 2003. 520 pp. £32.00 (paper). ISBN 90-5617-993-4.

Not many librarians write their autobiographies, and to produce a second volume is more unusual still. But few could have had careers as wide-ranging as that of Herman Liebaers: director of the Royal Library in Brussels, president of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), grand marshal to the king of the Belgians, and royal commissioner for the restructuring of the federal research institutions (which included the Royal Library). In *Mostly in the Line of Duty: Thirty Years with Books* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980) Liebaers confessed that it was his exposure to American librarianship as a Fulbright visitor in 1951 that prevented him from abandoning the profession. He had entered the Royal Library before the end of World War II, filling a vacancy for a philologist trained in Germanic languages who was not pro-Nazi. His intention was to leave for a livelier job as soon as possible, but he stayed and was appointed director in 1956.

In 1973 Liebaers was on leave of absence and working in Washington, D.C., as an international consultant to the Council on Library Resources when King Baudouin invited him to become his grand marshal. His main task, he was told, would be to bring the king closer to the people and the people closer to the king. In this new volume Liebaers asks why a devout Catholic monarch would appoint a self-confessed socialist and atheist to work so closely with him. His answer is that the king strove to be representative of all his "Belgian family." Also, of course, there were Liebaers's achievements over nearly thirty years at the Royal Library and his international professional reputation. As grand marshal he helped organize the king's state and private visits abroad. Much of *Beyond Belgium* is taken up with accounts of these trips as well as meditations on Belgium—its history, politics, and constitutional monarchy.

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