

Daniel Roche — *Les Républicains des lettres. Gens de culture et Lumières au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Fayard, 1988. Pp. 393.

This book brings together a collection of previously published articles by one of the most important French social historians. Such a collection would generally be convenient; one does not have to seek out fifteen articles published in various journals over seventeen years. However, this collection is outstanding and exceedingly useful for several reasons. The articles are grouped around important themes such as the history of the book, the question of readership, the role and work of academicians in particular, and intellectuals in general, and the dissemination of culture. Roche himself has been careful to combine these articles into a coherent schema and to provide an overall introduction to the volume, a brief introduction to each theme, and concluding reflections based largely on his recent edition of the journal of Jacques Ménétra.

Roche's introduction uses his own career from university student to professor at the Sorbonne to trace the development of historical approaches to the Ancien Régime. He defines the two essential lines which connect his essays and his career: 1) the question of whether it is possible to write a social history of culture; and 2) his method of looking at many kinds of documents to discern a pattern of gestures, knowledge, beliefs which forms what he calls "une manière de consommation culturelle" (II).

The first part, "Les cheminements du livre", is concerned with the fundamental historical question of who read and who read what in former times. Roche has studied both the production of the book and the readers at the end of the process to explore those questions. Because the censorship of the Ancien Régime allowed the church and the state to intervene in the process of book production, Roche investigates both the feats of editorial ingenuity of Ancien-Régime publishing and "livres sous le manteau". He also investigated the social ranks of those who bought books through inventories of private libraries because he claims the book played a crucial role as "a signe de puissance et de pouvoir social, instrument de conquête du monde ou objet du divertissement, compagnon d'intimité et moyen de lutte contre l'adversité" (27). These roles are demonstrated through his study of the library of Dortous de Mairan. Roche also uses particular, popular genres to illustrate acculturation from the elites to the people. For example, his study of "Préparations à la mort" reveals not only the clergy's attempt to impose order on fundamental aspects of life but also a gradual displacement of christianization. All of these studies are intended to illuminate the ramifications of book production and readership because Roche contends that the connection between the two begins a secret dialogue between the traditional society and the evolution of consciousness.

Part two, "Le livre inventeur ou le livre inventé", treats the cultural sociability of reading and focuses explicitly on the academies. The academic community is noteworthy both because of the concerns of academicians and their social role in the Ancien Régime. Academicians were concerned with books and lectures; they held public conferences and essay competitions. They participated in the production and acculturation of all forms of printed material and, thus, contributed to both vulgarization and assimilation of culture. The academy had a distinct social composition; it drew its members from the nobility, the professional classes and a few men of commerce and, thus, provided a forum where representatives of the privileged orders met with men of talent of the third estate. Roche explores the political role of

academies, their involvement in science, and the ways in which the academies wrote and used history. Ultimately, he contends that these academies were important because they cultivated public opinion, diffused culture, and formulated a vision of a lay culture whose claims to knowledge and power would be based not on authority but on experience and expertise.

The third section of this collection treats the work of intellectuals from a perspective Roche describes as "retrospective sociology" (219) which addresses the composition and activities of intellectuals in very broad terms such as their economic activities and specific facets of their privileged culture, especially travel literature and correspondence. For example, the correspondence of J.F. Seguier is used by Roche as a case study of how information circulated in the Ancien Régime and as an example of the social and cultural milieu of an intellectual. Because, he claims, intellectuals were mediators between the state and civil society, Roche specifically examined the Holbach Salon where the mix of nobles and bourgeois was accelerated. Because he considers intellectuals as a key force in the emergence of a new public, Roche treats their recruitment into an intellectual body, their formation as intellectuals, and the social ambience of their work.

In the final section, Roche treats his fundamental interest in the question of intellectual dissemination of culture in a variety of thought-provoking ways. His overarching concern is to broaden the traditional intellectual history by looking at the way cultural values and needs are circulated and exchanged. He does not underestimate the difficulty of the questions; he acknowledges that it is difficult to distinguish the culture lived from the culture to which men aspire and that texts intermingle personal and cultural issues which are difficult to separate. But despite these difficulties, Roche insists that the book and the diffusion of culture it entails provides a fundamental link between the material and immaterial manifestations of culture and is a particularly sensitive indicator of changing attitudes. In particular, Roche is interested in looking at the end of the Ancien Régime to find signs of the demise of social distinction or to determine when inequality gives way to equality. As a methodological approach, he seeks the individual in the "médiations collectives" (283). Thus he looks at the documents of French merchants, doctors, the educators of the daughters of the nobility at St. Cyr. He points to the eulogies of physician as examples of the efficacy of social symbols in circumscribing the acquisition of habits of sociability. In his last study in this section, Roche reverses his approach and looks at the autobiography of two common people, Jacques Ménétra and Louis Simon, individuals who took control of the word in the revolution and demonstrate new conditions of expression.

The importance of this volume is obvious. It assembles in one volume major articles on the Ancien Régime enhanced by Roche's reflections on his own work. It is an essential for any historian interested in the history of the Ancien Régime, the culture of the book, or the evolution of the social history of culture over the past twenty years. For the specialist, this volume is a convenient compilation of fundamental articles in the new historiographical issues of the Ancien Régime. For the non-specialist, this collection is a useful introduction to these issues and to the work of Daniel Roche.

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