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Book Review

O'Malley, Maria and Denys van Renen
eds. *Beyond 1776. Globalizing the Cultures
of the American Revolution.*

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Picture of Boston tea party etc...

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The volume credits ASECS and the American Literature Association for providing a forum to gather interested parties to this project, that was strongly supported by the University of Nebraska at Kearney. I did not go to the panel at ASECS but it created some heated discussions that to date, I recall hearing from the hallways. The reason was set anywhere between a revision of history to include the fate and the role of minorities or of women from its making, or to show how history was irrelevant to marginalized margins, and the inclusion of international contexts in national history humiliated narrow nationalism.

The volume opens on the rather provoking thought that instead of to the Declaration of Independence or military victories, the sovereignty of United States is credited to France's willingness "to enter a peace treaty" in 1778, as evidence that the colonies were "treaty worthy" (p. 1). All the same, the thirteen colonies were allying with the British to impinge on the French fishing rights "off the Canadian coast" (p. 1), that is by expertly shifting alliances between European powers as any political entity might, demonstrating that they were acting as autonomous political entities. The second point of the introduction is that the American Revolution is understudied and perhaps less momentous in itself than in the sum of peripheral cultural transactions that if brought to light could reconstitute the "global dimensions that undergirded the very founding of the United States" (p. 3). National history would then demand that we "sift through the subtle gradations of exchanges across cultures" (p. 4).

The studies at hand go beyond the transatlantic network to include hemispheric or global frameworks (p. 9). Divided in two parts, the essays first focus on the European and transatlantic circulations of ideas through print, either supporting revolutionary impetus or as negotiating leverage (p. 12), whereas the second part articulates "how revolutions fostered [...] exchanges, in the West Indies and in the first penal colonies of Australia; along the Celtic Fringe and Pacific Rim" and in the areas where the slave trade occurred (p. 13). Throughout the volume, water would be the "ideal signifier of the globalizing subject" epitomized by Olaudah Equiano in his biography (p. 18). Such are the claims the introduction, however, by the end of the book, the perspective of historical events has become so marginal that they are barely recorded. Perhaps the volume has the added merit of showing the limits of globalizing history. National history as emanating from the purview of other nations is vexing, particularly when the United States successfully emancipated from the British to create their own autonomy, and it might be overly myopic to consult the perspective of one individual whose daily life is predictably moderately affected by given historical events, or somehow excluded from their immediate impact or simply allowed to remain unaware of their context. It is easy to recognize that the role of historical narratives comes into play in nation building and in sentiments of belonging to any given nation as constitutive of a social identity that might ease radicalisms, terrorisms, racisms, and other -ism from all fronts. Yet counting on the powers of economic globalization for the foundation of a friendlier, less racist, more inclusive

society may also be a stance to presents itself as beyond paradoxical. Perhaps it is to be understood that watershed moments in the constitution of nations do not touch everyone's destiny evenly, and if it does, one could find oneself the unwitting agent of it all. It is the case of most soldiers. Would historical events be more expediently defined as founding mythology fostering national unity, while recognizing that no nation truly exists in a vacuum? Since history tends to repeat itself, scholars may provide insights and depth to practices and situations inherited from the past.

The volume follows a stream of history of ideas, yet its intent is to decenter the traditional analysis of nodal landmarks historians practiced, to contemplate the formation of the United States as a cosmopolitan operation. In the first part entitled "transatlantic Cliques" the American Revolution is seen from afar, such as from the Netherlands or from the reading habits of the large population of German immigrants to North America who adopted a bi-focal perspective of their new nation. Like most immigrants, the Americans from Germany saw their own nation from afar and "from home" in views that might not be reconciled. Likewise, the Netherlands sorted through the American and the French Revolutions to accomplish their own social renewals.

The title of "clique" is perhaps suggested by the article of Carine Lounissi who explains how a network of "merchants, lawyers, journalists, printers, and *polygraphes*" read and answered each other (p. 76). They triangulated between the English, French and Netherlands "Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, The Hague, and London and a few of them across the Atlantic to Santo Domingo and North America" (p. 76). The *polygraphes* were the most intriguing kind of authors in many genres who were often translators as well. Among them Hilliard d'Auteuil corresponded with Benjamin Franklin and associated with Mandrillon and Cerisier who held the United States in high regards as "a promising country peopled by vigorous republicans" (p. 77), because it served their "rejection of hereditary powers" (p. 78). But French approval of the commercial composition of North-American economy was harder to come by, and France's perception of the United States economical basis was warped by physiocratic views (pp. 88-91), whereas the American Enlightenment comprised a religious outlook of the world that was not a priority to most European philosophers. Likewise, Charlotte Corday is unrecognizable when used by Sarah Pogson in defense of terror to define a new brand of American republican motherhood: the legions of women who "will act violently to protect their sacred roles of wife and mother, their homes, and their nations" (p. 124) when men are unequal to the task (p. 137). However "clique" may be indicative of programmatic exclusivity or even vying for cultural influence which does not really embrace the spirit of cosmopolitan Enlightenment. On the other hand "clique" is consistent with power struggles to influence society as they are laid out in some of the articles in the second part.

Part II opens with considerations on the aftermath of the American Revolution as strengthening the Imperial purpose of England, with the exception of Ireland and Scotland that gained in autonomy. Their elites negotiated "their connections with the imperial state" (p. 146) as "major contributors to the British military" (p. 146), around 1778 : "The trump card for Catholic elites was manpower" that raised troops though "the recruitment of Catholics was still illegal" (p. 155)— indeed, this reflection irrepressibly brings to mind such novelistic passages as the following one, concerning the Irish Redmond Barry of the novel *Barry Lyndon* (1844) together with the cynical reply of the king of England:

One of the main causes of expense which this ambition of mine entailed upon me was the fitting out and arming a company of infantry from the Castle Lyndon and Hackton estates in Ireland, which I offered to my gracious Sovereign for the campaign against the American rebels. These troops, superbly equipped and clothed, were embarked at Portsmouth in the year 1778; and the patriotism of the gentleman who had raised them was so acceptable at Court, that, on being presented by my Lord North, His Majesty condescended to notice me particularly, and said, "That's right, Mr. Lyndon, raise another company; and go with them, too!"

Thackeray casts a grave doubt on the efficacy of bartering with troops of disposable populations, and first nations of America also experienced it first hand in their attempt to forge alliances by giving military support to English, to colonists or to French crown. The Iroquois confederacy

(with Mohawks among them) aligned with the British to inflict the worst defeats to Washington only to see their treaty revoked and most of their land taken away by England despite any treatises and promises. On this chapter, it seems that the Iroquois might have been more aware of the effects of the United States sovereignty or Canadian commonwealth meant for their present and future fate than Olaudah Equiano's individual perspective allows. There stands perhaps one of the weaknesses of the volume.

Maria O'Malley also focusses on the wars that secured the victories of the colonies with "gun trafficking" as reflected in Melville's novels. It involves illegal smuggling by ships, secret mails, and spying from the likes of Franklin (pp. 166-167). Occasionally, her article clarifies information difficult to come by about Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais involving Silas Deane, the American agent sent to France whose mission "was to secure goods for the American army under the guise of trading for the Indian Nation" and provide instead the guns to the colonists of the United States, by writing to an agent to the Dutch company which served as the Frenchman's cover (p. 180): "Beaumarchais acted for the French ministry [...] to supply the colonists" (pp. 180-181). However, Deane was confused by "the transactions that Franklin's committee had set up":

For instance, in France, Deane was instructed to gain the supplies from the French and "contact C. W. F. Dumas, the colonial agent in Holland", and through them "the United Colonies were to bear the full cost" of transporting these French goods "including insurance and risk of capture at sea". But Deane could not always read between the lines to determine who actually bore the cost. (p. 181)

Moreover, Deane's secretary, Edward Bancroft, was a British spy, which did not help him defending himself from nefarious accusations, until he was vindicated by Franklin and the Comte de Vergennes. Beaumarchais was compelled to reveal to the American congress that the "Hortalez and Company" was but himself (p. 181).

Otherwise, O'Malley makes a case for current "globalization" as a mere continuation of "eighteenth-century smuggling" and shady trading activities (p. 184), and Jeng-Guo Chen traces the use of tea associated to rituals of gathering as one of the consumer goods imported from China that shaped the conflicts that eventually let United States to break away from England. This article also states how China could ignore the advent of the American and the French Revolutions for over a century because although its tea trade could create havoc in the Western world—perhaps revolutions—, and bring prosperity to China, it could not affect it politically. The last article makes a similar claim to view the American Revolution from a personal autobiographical perspective where it all but disappears, and all adversity is characterized as water.

The volume offers interesting insights on secret or obscure networks of singular actors that impacted historical events sometimes decisively. Jeng-Guo Chen's article makes an important case for the way global economy best control political developments and shapes nations much more so than the other way around — even crediting the seven year war [which governs much of Redmond Barry's life and the life of so many non-fictional compatriots] on tea taxes, showing how governments ride popular purchases to raise funds and merchants latch on natural socializing impulses to facilitate them with consumer goods, that shape such impulses and canalize their means of expression with profitable results. Chen explains how Chinese tea, porcelains and tea pots rode on socializing and even political sentiments, but modern readers may also think of newspapers maintained afloat with ads, and consider platforms such as Facebook that facilitate individual socializing and the sharing of information while gathering data to hone commercial advertisements. Commerce and mail are also bound in ways highlighted in O'Malley's article, because the routes selected for offshore relays in islands that fudge legal tracking and control permitted Franklin to cultivate secret correspondence.

Yet mail as exchange of letters must have been restricted to financial elites because of the cost involved. In a book that came out in 2018 as well, Hans Brot reflects on the expenses incurred by people engaged in private correspondence as it hinders the exchange and spread of

ideas. Though such literary commerce was targeted and efficient, it was reserved to a handful of influential propagators and a few Huguenots.¹ Brot explains how Pierre des Maizeaux communicated more economically via journal articles. Socio-Political and economical criticism was even cheaper and potentially momentous since it rode on entertainment activities as O'Maley's frequent references to Melville suggests that much. She also exposes how secret correspondence could evade legal controls by using the same routes as smuggling networks, showing that politicians and business people shared much characteristics, whereas Chen seems to think that the historical destiny of nations remains secondary to the powers of the business world, or to the decisions and opportunities followed by a handful of business people. Since business is generally handled without the pretence of a mission for public good (unless some money is donated in generosities often tainted by suspicions of PR and advertising ploys), and then its benefits are controlled by a shrinking percentage of humanity, we might consider ourselves advised that we should become individually vigilant and counter or salvage what we can from this vice. Perhaps we should be more attentive to what we consume and to the economies attached to our socializing practices, as those may lend astronomical powers that may come to hurt us personally, and affect the destiny of humanity if not the future of the planet. Goods affixed to our social nature may be particularly dangerous as it may end up controlling our interaction with one another and with the world in insidious ways. For instance, everyone will experience a very different visit of a place and of people with or without a camera. The camera makes us sort our experience of the visit as a series of picture opportunity destined to a gallery, and making us rush from one spot to another and dismiss the in-between segments of our journey, spent in mentally calculating how to best frame subjects into the camera's rectangle, instead of living the visit in a novel flow of impressions and effusions of which we are the sole recipient, and that we may share only with immediate companions. In a similar fashion, after reading this volume, we may come to the conclusion that while riding the cultures of communication, the exchange of ideas and the socializing mores (cf. the tea article), all three parts of enlightened cosmopolitanism, economical globalizing corrodes its nature. Another benefit of the volume is that new areas of inquiries may be derived from this collection of studies if we heed Melville's jaded realism to create more inclusive, interconnected and self-aware portrayals of national history.

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¹ Hans Brots, «Pierre Des Maizeaux, a Great Cultural Intermediary», in Robert Mankin, editor, *The Internationalization of Intellectual Exchange in a Globalizing Europe, 1636-1780* (Lewisburg : Bucknell University Press ; The Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), pp. 55-56 of pp. 55-74.

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