

The Darnton debate

books and revolution in the eighteenth century

Series:

SVEC

Volume:

359

VolumeEditors:

Haydn T. Mason

Publication Date:

1998

ISBN:

978-0-7294-0566-9

Ever since Professor Robert Darnton aroused the interest of all Enlightenment scholars with the publication of 'The High Enlightenment and the low-life literature in pre-revolutionary France' in 1971, he has been in the forefront of debate about that period and the French Revolution which followed it. His work has long been an indispensable study for all those who ponder on the nature and evolution of these great movements.

By the mid 1990s, however, it was apparent that Darnton's far-reaching conclusions on the relationship of the Enlightenment to the Revolution, together with his historical accounts of printed works and the *mentalités* of the eighteenth century, merited a comprehensive debate on his whole *œuvre*. The present collection sparks off that debate. The contributors to this volume were invited freely to address any particular aspect of Robert Darnton's researches or to discuss the whole trust of his thinking about the past. Darnton readily agreed to this proposal, encouraging the editor to send invitations to long-standing critics just as much as to more sympathetic readers.

The essays collected here respond to the original request, in diverse ways. Taking up a whole spectrum of positions about Darnton's work, they attempt an answer based on deep reflection or assiduous source-research or both.

In a coda to the volume Robert Darnton responds robustly to the various readings of his work. In places he seeks to rescue it from what he considers to be false interpretations and to set the record straight. But his essay is not just a rebuttal. It moves the debate on, bringing new insights and information not previously published. His conclusion are as flexible open-ended as one could wish, and in line with which they have been richly plumbed in his writings.

The threads running through the various essays are drawn together by a comprehensive

index of eighteenth-century persons and writings.

List of illustrations

Foreword

D.F McKenzie, Trading places? England 1689-France 1789

Roland Mortier, Le savant, le chat et le cataplasme

Francois Moureau, Le rendez-vous manqué de Bougainville: du voyage au livre

Carla Hesse, French women in print, 1750-1800: an essay in historical bibliography

Jonathan Rose, The history of books: revised and enlarged

Jeremy D. Popkin, Robert Darnton's alternative (to the) Enlightenment

Daniel Gordon, The great Enlightenment massacre

Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, Bypassing the Enlightenment: taking an underground route to revolution

David A. Bell, Why books caused a revolution: a reading of Robert Darnton

Thomas E. Kaiser, Enlightenment, public opinion and politics in the work of Robert Darnton

Dominique Varry, Pour de nouvelles approches des archives de la Société Typographique de Neuchâtel

Robert Darnton, Two paths through the social history of ideas

Works by Robert Darnton cited in this volume

Index of persons and publications

Pages:

319

Price Sterling (£):

45

Collaborators:

David A. Bell, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, Daniel Gordon, Carla Hesse, Thomas E. Kaiser, D. F. McKenzie, Roland Mortier, François Moureau, Renato Pasta, Jeremy D. Popkin, Jonathan Rose, Dominique Varry. With a concluding essay by Robert Darnton

Times Literary Supplement

Darnton at his best [...] adds new and often vivid evidence to support arguments he has

advanced before. The book is no Festschrift...; a commentary on the impact on his chosen field of an original mind and a distinguished stylist.

Modern language review

This excellently conceived volume reflects the centrality of Darnton's achievement to the historical orientation of eighteenth-century scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century by bringing together the views of twelve distinguished specialists. The collection concludes with a reaction to the debate by Darnton himself. Not all the contributors are pro-Darnton enthusiasts, and the volume is far more than just a tribute to the work of a great scholar. It offers thoughtful reflections on, and a

vigorous critical engagement with, the way Darnton addresses the past.
