

Book Reviews

Laurence Brockliss (ed.), *From Provincial Savant to Parisian Naturalist: The Recollections of Pierre-Joseph Amoreux (1741–1824)* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2017), pp. xx + 435, £78, paperback, ISBN: 9780729412032.

In the final decades of his life, the naturalist, agronomist, and bibliographer Pierre-Joseph Amoreux (1741–1824) did something quite unusual. He set pen to paper and wrote up a 100 000-word account describing everything from his earliest childhood memories through to his final years. *From Provincial Savant to Parisian Naturalist* offers a faithful transcription in French of this previously unpublished manuscript.

Amoreux lived in Montpellier through the end of the old regime and into the early nineteenth century. He was destined by his father's wish for a career in medicine. As the editor, Laurence Brockliss, explains, the *Recollections* form a tremendously useful source on medical education in Montpellier and Paris between 1759 and 1765. Amoreux's personal wealth, however, meant that he devoted much of his adult life to scholarship rather than to medical practice. His writings thus reveal the dynamism of Enlightenment intellectual activity, and show how one provincial participant in the so-called 'Republic of Letters' worked to gain scholarly recognition during the final decades of the old regime. Amoreux's memoirs also hold further significance: they show how he then negotiated the structural changes brought about by the 1789 Revolution, revealing how he constructed a fresh reputation within the new intellectual *milieu* of post-revolutionary France.

Brockliss introduces the *Recollections* with a substantial hundred-page essay in English. Drawing additional evidence from Amoreux's correspondence and other papers (not reproduced here), this critical discussion offers an extensive examination of the shifting intellectual and social worlds within which Pierre-Joseph Amoreux operated. Brockliss assesses the educational and social opportunities that were available to Amoreux, explains how the Republic of Letters functioned both as a concept and in practice, and explores the radical changes that took place within the world of science after the French Revolution.

Pierre-Joseph Amoreux's account offers a strikingly idiosyncratic view of Enlightenment intellectual activity. Indeed, Amoreux cuts a very different model from his contemporaries, not least the Avignon savant Esprit Calvet (the subject of one of Brockliss's earlier monographs, *Calvet's Web* [Oxford University Press, 2002]). Brockliss's explanations of how the Republic of Letters functioned builds on his own earlier scholarship as well as on recent work by historians such as Mary Terrall (*Catching Nature in the Act* [University of Chicago Press, 2013]) and Mara Van der Lugt (*Bayle, Jurieu and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* [Oxford University Press, 2016]), but he also contributes further insights drawn directly from Amoreux's own recollections. One key addition concerns the ways in which a scholar might gain respect within the Republic of Letters. Fostering a reputation was a matter of pressing importance in an age before professional qualifications existed to define intellectual merit. As its name suggests, correspondence was a very serious matter for many participants in the Republic. But Amoreux took a different tack. Unenthusiastic about letter-writing, he instead focused his energy on securing a well-connected patron, the Narbonne botanist and savant Jean-François Séguier, and on writing essays (mostly on medicine or natural history) for the

prize competitions run by European provincial academies. Amoreux, then, presents a stimulating rejoinder to our received view of how the Republic of Letters functioned.

Two thirds of Amoreux's memoirs describe his activities after the Revolution. The dissolution of old regime scientific institutions, followed by the foundation of new, national institutions in Paris, meant that the scientific world was radically reoriented after the 1790s. Gaining distinction was less a matter of forging a reputation within the Europe-wide network of the Republic of Letters, and more a question of obtaining recognition from key savants in Paris. Amoreux astutely recognised that the means of achieving such credit was, quite simply, to go to the capital city. He thus made seven trips northwards between 1800 and 1821, writing up accounts of these afterwards in his *Recollections*.

Amoreux's *Recollections* reveal how he forged connections not only with the more senior members of the Parisian scientific world but also with lesser figures, including private collectors and well-informed traders such as the nurseryman Philippe-Victoire Lévêque de Vilmorin. In some ways, Amoreux simply continued an old regime practice of visiting the capital city and benefitting from the relative proximity of the wide range of intellectual resources – this has been well described by Antonella Romano and Stéphane Van Damme. The twist of course is that in the post-Revolutionary world, gaining acceptance from Parisian savants had become absolutely essential for any aspiring scholar. Amoreux's memoirs reveal in fascinating detail how the informal and formal intellectual institutions that supported intellectual activity in France had changed.

Amoreux composed his memoirs after the Revolution, when a new set of standards were in play compared to the old regime. Reading Amoreux's *Recollections* to find out about eighteenth-century practices is thus a complex matter. While Brockliss allows the actual text to speak for itself, with minimal editorial interventions, his introduction offers some initial guidance on how Amoreux's writings might be interpreted. Indeed, the *Recollections* are unusual – and significant in their own right – for the very fact that they are a form of early autobiography. There is also much here that remains ripe for further analysis, for example concerning the history of gender and social relations, as well as pertaining to the history of memory and the impact of the Revolution.

The book has been produced to the highest scholarly standards. Careful attention has been paid to the complexity of transcribing the manuscripts themselves, not least because Amoreux's spelling, punctuation, and grammar is quite peculiar. The original page breaks and annotations are clearly indicated in the printed edition, and the explanatory footnotes extremely helpful for deciphering Amoreux's more abstruse references, and for contextualising his activities. The book also includes an index of persons alongside a general index.

Sadly, no likeness of Amoreux survives. The book's front cover features instead an engraving of a rather hostile-looking scorpion that the savant described in 1789. This somewhat uninviting image belies a book rich with warmth, vigour, and fascinating anecdotes.

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