

Claire Trévien, *Satire, Prints and Theatricality in the French Revolution*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016. Pp. 324. £65. ISBN 9780729411875.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing number of studies on Romantic-era caricature. Its major strength is that it is the first book-length investigation of French satirical prints produced during that brief but world-historical period of the first half of the 1790s, a moment when the relaxing of *ancien regime* censorship allowed France, in this respect, to imitate its neighbour and enemy across the English Channel. Caricature was often viewed as an index of free speech and liberty, so it is ironic that it was the Directorate and later Napoleon who suppressed graphic satire in the name of the revolution. It was not until the final overthrow of the Bourbons in 1830 that French caricature re-emerged with Daumier and Philipon. If the latter names, and some of their images (such as a pear morphing into the visage of Louis Philippe) are well known, the earlier phase is much less widely studied, making this book and its images historically valuable (and in part the book is a plea for the ‘centrality of the image in the eighteenth century’ [8]). Indeed, the book began life as a PhD investigation of a large collection of French prints belonging to the Rothschild family and housed at Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire. This provenance gives the book a robust scholarly depth and also some limitations of scope, as explained below.

As we might expect, French revolutionary leaders soon latched onto and exploited the propaganda value of satirical prints, though a lingering Enlightenment distaste for the carnivalesque may explain why there was no sudden inundation of scurrilous images or (disappointingly) the rise of a cohort of professional caricaturists with the talent of Gillray, Rowlandson and the Cruikshanks. Unlike in Britain, there was no flourishing tradition of graphic satire to draw on, and the majority of the prints examined in each chapter are by anonymous artists. But if there were no rising stars in this new visual firmament, there was nevertheless a healthy supply of irreverent images aimed at a wide audience, including the lower classes who could appreciate visual humour even if illiterate. Though prices are hard to come by (unlike in Britain, there was no legal requirement to publish bibliographical data on the print), Trévien is interested in the demotic appeal of caricature, the way it ‘enabled an accelerated takeover of the “higher” strands of art’ (16). Hence chapters 2-4 cover the relationship between the satirical prints and four popular themes: the street song, the theatre (which is also a focus throughout), scientific display, and the afterlife. Chapter 2 crosses into the terrain of print culture studies as it discusses cheap broadside ballads and reiterated popular songs (sometimes with new, revolutionary tunes, including the co-opted *Marriage of Figaro*, which was hugely popular), all of which carried small, woodcut images. My favourite is ‘La Mort du Patriote Marat’ (67) which shows Charlotte Corday plunging a dagger into the Jacobin martyr above a set of lyrics set to a tune from *Figaro*: as Trévien argues, this musical allusion worked in conjunction with the visual image to produce a complex range of interpretations including sympathy for female agency or sublime love of the hero. Furthermore, hand-coloured versions (sadly not reproduced here) used vivid red to draw charged affinities between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary passion. The cult of secular martyrdom is also explored in Chapter 5 which contains some of the book’s most arresting and original images depicting the afterlife. Uneasy with orthodox Christian iconography (meaning that, unlike in Britain, Miltonic allusion is conspicuous by its absence), artists resorted to classical and mythological settings to depict both reward and punishment: heroic revolutionary death inspired a new sub-genre in both the theatre and visual arts as the question of fate, destiny and legacy occupied the public. Until Gillray showed Napoleon in the Valley of Death, there was nothing quite like this imagery in Britain, even though the thorny question of the infidel afterlife was a convenient dart to throw at Deists or infidels such as Tom Paine. Trévien shows convincingly how satirical artists drew

on new optical technologies such as the phantasmagoria to achieve their diabolical effects, and this theme overlaps with Chapter 4 on ‘spectacular science’ (117) and quackery which were used as mock-epic tropes to debunk aristocratic authority. Scholars of British prints will be interested in ‘Lanterne magique républicaine’ (150) which shows a sansculotte projecting an image of the guillotine to a startled George III and William Pitt, reversing the usual hierarchy in which the masses are duped by elite spectacle. Threaded through all such images is the theatricality and sprightly visual banter of popular entertainments such as the *commedia dell’arte*, the subject of Chapter 2. What in the British context might be called ‘illegitimate’ theatre was a locus of irreverence, though all tropes could be harnessed by the conservative political opposition, as some images demonstrate.

This is a rewarding book and I only have two small quibbles related to the exclusive focus on France: the untranslated quotations and the absence of any dialogue with British caricature. Although the war with Britain depleted the trade in prints, Trévien’s determination to bring out some of the artistic qualities of the images would have been enhanced by some reference to the flourishing caricature scene in Britain. Indeed, *Satire, Prints and Theatricality in the French Revolution* has convinced this reviewer that there was a productive iconographical dialogue between British and French satirical prints in the Romantic period, and that this history has yet to be written.

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