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This is a two-part interview conducted by Emily O'Dell and Jeanne Jégouso at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana following a lecture Professor Leichman gave as part of the Academic Publishing Series sponsored by the Department of Comparative Literature at LSU.

Part 1: Book Publishing

GSC: What was the inspiration for your new book, Acting Up: Staging the Subject in Enlightenment France? Was it connected to your dissertation?

JL: Yes, the original argument was the same as in my dissertation. I have been working in theatre for a very long time. Before I was a graduate student in French I was a graduate student in theatre, in directing, and I had a theatre company in Los Angeles for a couple of years and I worked in theatres in the United States and in France. So, before I came back to literature I had a practical interest in doing plays. I entered graduate school as somebody who was not going to work on the eighteenth century at all, but I had a number of good classes with professors who changed my opinion about that. So, I sort of reoriented and it turns out that theatre and theatricality are extremely important in the eighteenth century and that acting in particular serves as a very important theoretical and practical model for self-transformation. So that's one of the main arguments in the book. The original interest probably came out of practical experience.

GSC: So, as you said in your lecture, the finished product was different from your dissertation and you had to rewrite it or change the project several times.

JL: It's interesting, the finished project is very different from the dissertation; everything in it was entirely rewritten and I think the book manuscript is shorter in terms of word count but actually contains more information. The basic argument, however, and the initial idea really is more-or-less the same. Part of that is that I had worked it out for a while before starting to write the dissertation so it was something that I felt pretty good about, that I felt like was pretty well-founded. The research both confirmed and changed this intuition, but the basic argument is something that's been with me for ten or twelve years now. In terms of what you actually read, if you compare it to what's in the online Dissertation Database there are some paragraphs that are the same but it's almost entirely been rewritten. I think that for different people there are different ways of transforming the dissertation; some people really do re-found the argument because they find that on some level it didn't say enough, or it didn't say the right thing, or they found something that the initial research works best as part of a larger argument. Whereas some people find that they don't have to reestablish the whole premise of what they're doing. I tend to think it's a sign of maturity if you're able to kind of draft your dissertation and make it into something entirely different, but I just was not able to do that. I also didn't really want to. Even all these years later, I still think it says something that is important to say.

GSC: Was part of the reason that the project changed so much because of the revisions that were required? What was the revision process like? Were the changes you made your decision or did the publisher ask you to change anything?

JL: It was probably both. I think re-reading is one of those things that is extremely hard and extremely important across the board in any of the writing professions. If you talk to novelists and playwrights they'll say the same thing and it's certainly true in academic writing. Reading your own work is painful and necessary.

GSC: Especially the dissertation, I've heard that some people don't want to look at it for several years before going back to it...

JL: Right. Well that's the other issue. It's something you spent a lot of time with and some people really do fall out of love with their topic. In terms of completing your dissertation it's important that you do have a certain amount of love for it and be married to it for a while. Then, when it's done, you no longer have to be married to it. It's still your professional calling card, it's still the long-format scholarly piece with which you'll be most associated at the beginning of your career, but you're no longer required to be writing it. So, interestingly, you can go back and read it as if it was somebody else's work. The problem is that you know that it's your work... I think it's always very humbling to go back and have to reread your work and, at the same time, it's a great opportunity to actually say, "What did I not say here? What was I trying to say?" The true challenge in any writing, as I tell my students, is to say what you mean, and that is exceptionally hard to do. Particularly when you're dealing with such a long piece of scholarship, looking back at it and asking, "Was I actually able to say what I meant?"

So, the initial revision was really in terms of that, for me, how can I make this into something that reflects what I think right now? Much of that I did when I won an ATLAS (Awards to Louisiana Scholars and Artists) grant after coming to LSU, which allowed me to spend an entire year revising, reviewing reader's reports from the dissertation and from when I had submitted it to the Walker Cowan Award. This version got very favorable reviews, but they had ended up publishing somebody else's book, a senior scholar's book. In the end it was for the best because I had submitted it more or less unrevised. So, I had a number of different sets of written comments to work with, but it can also be very difficult to separate the signal from the noise. What in these things that are being said reflects this scholar's personal bias? What reflects something that I need to really take seriously? My challenge was to triangulate all of that with what I really wanted to say. So, I was very fortunate to be able to spend a concentrated amount of time doing that. It involved a lot of cutting and refocusing things. Making sure that when there were digressions they were helping and saying something necessary. Sometimes there's a tendency to, in your first scholarly work, include all of your erudition. While it's an important part of the dissertation exercise to demonstrate mastery of your subject, what people want from a book is (in the American context, this is not necessarily the case in the French context) something that is more focused and more argument driven. The assumption is that you have mastery of your subject, but you don't need to necessarily show that you can say every single thing there is to be said about it. They want to know that you can identify and express what is interesting, new, and thought-provoking about your topic. So, there was a lot of cleaning up, a lot of refocusing, paring down things that seem repetitive (I think dissertations are often a little bit repetitive, you're under

a lot of time pressure and you haven't necessarily written a three-hundred page essay before and you're going to repeat yourself a little bit). I also focused on cleaning up the prose style, trying to simplify and shorten phrases, to be efficient without sacrificing readability.

Since it was very important to me that the book be accessible to non-French-speakers, I translated all French quotations into English. I was fortunate that Bucknell was willing to publish the original French in the footnotes, so for all the primary sources people who read French can go back and consult and check my translations. That's not often the case and I think that that's also something to consider when talking to publishers, whether or not that's important to you. Often, particularly in literature, scholars will want to read source material in the original language which, in America, can limit your readership. The revisions also involved adding another chapter (the end result is both shorter and more complete) and significantly updating the bibliography. I try to do this with a sort of light hand and not make it such that every paragraph reads like bibliography, but I also wanted this to be something that reflected a more-or-less current state of bibliography on a couple of major authors and some less-known authors around the particular questions that interest me. There is undoubtedly more complete bibliographic work on Rousseau, for example, but I was not trying to do that; rather, my goal was to give a snapshot of the field in terms of the questions that I was interested in. So this entailed a fair amount of new research as well. All of this also inflected the argument and helped me refine what I needed to say in terms of not repeating what other people had already said. In some cases this pushed me in a different direction and made me think a little bit harder about some of the assumptions that I had made. It turns out, when you work in the eighteenth century, people have been talking about this stuff for three centuries so a lot has already been said!

GSC: About the publisher, how did you end up publishing with Bucknell University Press?

JL: For some people it works extremely well, the first place they send it to says, "Great! We want to publish it! It's going to be amazing! Here's a team to help you!" This was not my experience at all. I did submit it to a lot of places. Submitting your manuscript, inasmuch as I didn't have introductions to presses or any connections to presses, for me is still one of the great mysteries of academic life. For many academic journals, you know who the editors are, they are people who are in your field and you can tell what the intellectual or ideological bent of a journal is. There are a lot of things that you can know about that aspect of publishing. In terms of books, editors at presses are often not working academics; they are full-time editors at academic presses. Many of them have had academic careers but are not currently involved in academia, so it can be very hard to meet these people and find out what they're interested in. A good approach is to look at the other books published by the press but it is not always easy to tell what the criteria for selection is. For me, I felt that the socialization part of my academic work, being out there and communicating my research and hearing other people communicate their work, felt rather cut off from the book publishing process, which can be nerve-wracking because the book publishing is the gateway to tenure. This strikes me as an important place where there's a break in communication. Perhaps this is intentional, such that there can't be any corrupting influence, but I think it's more likely an accident of institutional evolution; it just happened that way and there isn't any real rationale.

However, there are some presses that are run by active scholars, and Bucknell is one of them. The editor is in the field, so that makes a big difference. In eighteenth-century studies the other major example of this is what is now called "Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment" (which was published for six decades as "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century"), and they publish both a serial and monographs. It's a very highly respected series and it is run by academics, university professors in Europe and America.

I submitted to a number of very high profile presses. This involves writing a cover letter, and often a separate prospectus or précis of your work. Some presses also want a kind of annotated bibliography talking about where your work stands in relation to other current work in the field and what the potential markets for your work are. Each press tells you on their website what they're interested in receiving from you. Almost nobody wants to see actual excerpts from the book until they've expressed some interest. Some of them say to send a chapter as well, but nobody wants to receive your manuscript "over the transom", as they say. I wrote to a number of them and some of them probably didn't open the envelope, I got back a two-sentence form letter. Some of them clearly read the proposal and perhaps even discussed it and just weren't interested. So I was really getting no traction. I did get a reading by a major press, they asked for the manuscript. They sent it out to two different reviewers and it came down as a split decision; one of them really liked it and one of them hated it, and they passed on it. At this point I had already sent the manuscript to Bucknell because they publish a great deal in eighteenth century and it's all excellent research. I had the opportunity to sit down with Greg Clingham, the editor, at the ASECS convention and remind him that I'd sent him the manuscript. He said, "Oh, terrific! I know just the person". It turns out that there was a new series that they were starting in French language theatre across the centuries that just happened to be edited by somebody whom I know, Logan Connors. I had submitted this long before I knew Logan would be involved and, in fact, he joined the board in the same meeting that they discussed my proposal. It turns out that he was the editor in the series under which it was proposed but I didn't ever send him the manuscript directly. In the end they accepted it. They used the reviews from the previous press; this involved getting permission from the press, and the reviewers, who of course remained anonymous throughout. I proposed revisions based on these reviews. Then I did spend another period of time, probably about two and a half months last summer, doing another set of revisions. This was interesting because (in completing the response to the previous question) the first set of revisions were really for me; I was working off of comments from the dissertation, but really it was about my rereading, whereas the second round of revisions I did a little bit of rereading but I had just rewritten this so it was pretty clear that most of what I had said I felt pretty good about. Now I was responding to somebody else's critiques rather than my own. Some of these were really useful in terms of reordering certain ideas, sharpening some parts of the argument, but inasmuch as the negative reviewer didn't like the foundation of the book, there was not a lot that I was going to be able to do to make that person happy. In the end, that's OK with me. I'm not necessarily trying to please everybody. Nevertheless, there were some really valuable comments, and I was grateful for the attention and care that both readers devoted to this work. So, I did revise again, I did cut a lot again, and that's what led to the final to the final project. Surprisingly, I found working with a copy-editor to be fantastic! I'm a very careful reader of my own work, I take the copy editing part of it seriously and yet she found so many tiny things. It was really fascinating. She was an excellent reader. Again, I tend to be very detail oriented, but it was great

to work with someone who was checking the italics in the bibliography. So, if you find a mistake I would be impressed because it's pretty thoroughly combed over.

GSC: So, after this whole experience, do you have any more advice for people looking to publish their work as books?

JL: I think the general advice is to not get discouraged because publishing, particularly in foreign language literature, is extremely difficult. Just like there are relatively few jobs in foreign language literature, there are relatively few presses that are publishing this work. Everybody is having a hard time. I think that, despite what I said about what I perceive as a disconnect between the book publishing world and the world of academic communication, it's important to be out there telling people about your research. It's a really great way to get feedback and to talk to people about their experiences. It's important to stay up on the current bibliography in your field and know who is publishing what because these things change too. It's important to understand that editorial regimes change. The one press that I had always thought would certainly publish my work got back to me very quickly, because I had initially said "I am only sending this to you", and the reply was very nice and said, "Thank you for getting in touch with us. I know why you sent this to us but we're no longer publishing in this field." This was from one year to the next and it's true, they had very consistently been publishing in eighteenth century French literature and they stopped, perhaps because somebody had left. Editorial policies change so it's important to stay abreast of who is publishing, there may be somebody who started working at a particular press that has only published one or two books in your field but is looking to expand. It's important to keep your finger on where the good current work is coming from because often we think about where are the real landmarks of the field and where were they published, but anything that was published fifteen to twenty years ago, who knows who works at that press now? They may not be out there doing the same things. Identifying presses that are doing good work and identifying presses that have published things that you like, those are really good ways to start. Getting rejected is hard, but you have to try not to take it personally. I hope that everyone gets lucky but if you don't it's going to take a little while. You just have to persevere.