A Failed Attempt at Censorship: the British Diplomatic Service and Pöllnitz’s *Histoire secrette de la Duchesse d’Hanover*

Material in the British diplomatic papers provides fascinating evidence of an attempt in 1732 to suppress the sale of a book deemed embarrassing for George II. It also provides an opportunity to attempt to disentangle the provenance of various works associated with the quixotic German adventurer Freiherr Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz (1692-1775).

Compared to the French government, troubled in the 1720s and 1730s by ecclesiastical disputes stemming from the Jansenist controversy, the British government of the period made little effort to suppress or hinder the publication of books. The principal exception, as in the case with the newspapers, was material favouring the Jacobite cause. Thus in 1723 Stephen Poyntz, who had accompanied Viscount Townshend, the Secretary of State for the Northern Department to Hanover, wrote, clearly on behalf of Townshend, to Charles Delafaye, Under Secretary in the Southern Department and the official principally responsible for the surveillance and prosecution of opposition publications:

You will see in the advertisements a Book printed for Vaillant and published by one Ramsey in Engl. and French which pretends to give an account of the life of the late Archbishop of Cambrai, and last year the same author published another piece entitled Maxims of Government on the principles of ye archbishop of Cambrey or to that effect. You will find the drift of both these pieces is to lend the name and authority of that great man towards recommending the person and cause of the Pret. which I think deserves your animadversion.

Pöllnitz’s publication presented a different problem, one of royal embarrassment. George II’s mother Sophia Dorothea (1666-1726) had been divorced by her husband in 1694 as a result of her relationship with Count

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1 Sir John Willes, Attorney General, to Duke of Newcastle, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, 23 Dec. (old style) 1734, Public Record Office, State Papers (hereafter PRO) 36/33, fo. 147.

2 Fenelon.

3 Poyntz to Delafaye, 3 Sept. 1723, PRO. 43/4, fo. 319A. For Jacobite verses on George I’s being a cuckold, *Address to Britannia* and Sir James King’s *Key to Sir George Horn’s Padlock*, PRO. 35/6, 24.
Philipp Christoph von Königsmarck (1665-94) an officer in the Hanoverian army. The latter had disappeared, probably murdered. The episode provided an opportunity for British anti-Hanoverian propaganda and, in particular, for the Jacobites. Thus, news of the appearance of a book devoted to the subject in 1732 was far from welcome.

_Histoire secrète de la Duchesse d’Hanover, Épouse de Georges Premier, Roi de la Grande Bretagne. Les Malheurs de cette infortunée princesse, sa prison au Château d’Ahlen […] ses intelligences secrètes avec le comte de Konigsmarck, assassiné à ce sujet_ appeared anonymously with a title-page announcing it was published in London by La Compagnie des Libraires. The book was brought to the attention of the British government by their agent in Amsterdam, a man by the name of Renard, who in the recent List and Index Society report on _State Papers France_ is falsely given as the printer of the book. Renard wrote on 13 August 1732 to James Dayrolle, British Resident at The Hague, and the highest-ranking British diplomat in the United Provinces, to inform him that the ‘Histoire de la Princesse de Zell espouse du Roi George Premier’ by the ‘Baron de Pelnitz’ had appeared. He claimed that in 1730 the Earl of Chesterfield, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in the United Provinces, had ordered him to stop the printing of the work and that he had done so, but that he now found that the booksellers in Rouen had printed it. Renard had accordingly complained to the French agent in Amsterdam. On 15 August Dayrolle wrote to Earl Waldegrave at Paris, enclosing a copy of Renard’s letter and announcing that he had spoken to the Dutch ministers on the matter. On the following day Dayrolle sent another copy of Renard’s letter to George Tilson, Under Secretary of the Northern Department, then with George II in Hanover. He reported that he had seen Simon van Slingelandt, the Pensionary of Holland, who had promised both to stop all the booksellers in The Hague from accepting or selling the work and to see what could be done in other towns. The federal

4 _Korrespondenz der Prinzessin Sophie Dorothea von Hannover mit dem Grafen Philipp Christoph Königsmarck 1690-1694_, ed. G. Schnath (Hildesheim 1952); G. Schnath, _Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Landesgeschichte Niedersachsens_ (Hildesheim 1968); R. Hatton, _George I_ (London 1978), pp. 54-68.
6 There are two copies in the British Library, 10805 aa 42 and 900 C 23(1).
7 List and Index Society, vol. 205, _State Papers France 1732-1738_ (London 1984), pp. 2, 208. The lists of State Papers France contains several errors and should only be used with care.
8 Renard to Dayrolle, 13 Aug. 1732. Two copies of this letter survive, one forwarded by Dayrolle to Hanover, the other sent to Earl Waldegrave, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in Paris, PRO. 84/319, fo. 119, Chewton Hall, Chewton Mendip, Papers of James, first Earl Waldegrave. Sophia Dorothea was the daughter of George William Duke of Celle. Thus Zelle, Zell.
9 Dayrolle to Waldegrave, 15 Aug. 1732, Chewton.