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Review of: Gwenaëlle Boucher, *La Poésie philosophique de Voltaire*, and Jennifer Tsien, *Voltaire and the Temple of Bad Taste: A Study of 'La Pucelle d'Orléans'*

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Le concept de mythe aurait d'ailleurs pu servir d'ancrage théorique à la démonstration et aidé l'auteur à préciser la notion d'« appropriation » définie sans grande fermeté dans son introduction (17).

En somme, l'auteur conduit son analyse sans envolée aucune, mais avec rigueur et finesse, et apporte une belle contribution aux études rousseauistes. Pour qui s'intéresse à l'histoire et à la réception des *Confessions*, l'ouvrage de Kuwase devient incontournable.

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Gwenaëlle Boucher, *La Poésie philosophique de Voltaire* in *SVEC* 2003:05, 1–286. Jennifer Tsien, *Voltaire and the Temple of Bad Taste: A Study of "La Pucelle d'Orléans"* in *SVEC* 2003:05, 287–422. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2003. ISBN 0-7294-0817-5.

These two book-length studies are welcome signs of a revival of interest in the critical examination of Voltaire as a poet. Taken together, they examine his work in the most serious of non-dramatic poetic genres, with special reference to the *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*, and the mock epic on the life and mission of Jeanne d'Arc. It is refreshing to learn that this forgotten Voltaire is being brushed off and brought back to the light of day.

Several years ago, I had the good fortune of attending a conference where the principal speaker was Maynard Mack, the great Pope scholar, who illustrated his talk about Pope's poetry by reading from the *Essay on Man* and other works. All in attendance were in awe: Pope the poet and Pope the philosopher became one, Pope the poet philosopher. Mack's was a living demonstration that there is such a thing as philosophical poetry, and that the poetry and the philosophy of Pope supported each other, indeed made each other whole. If Gwenaëlle Boucher's book has a weak point, it is that she does not refer often enough to Pope, who does not figure in her bibliography but who is mentioned fleetingly in the text when the *Discours en vers sur l'homme* is mentioned, and that she never cites Mack. These absences are all the more odd in that, given the admiration that Voltaire expressed and felt for Pope, the English poet would seem to have a natural home in a work of this sort.

That shortcoming aside, this is a splendid book, and even a courageous one, since Voltaire's verse is so unappreciated in the twenty-first century. Boucher wastes no time in getting to the point in her introduction: the opening section is entitled "Le cas Voltaire: ni poète, ni philosophe?" A few hundred pages later, after an exhaustive study of the different aspects of the French author's philosophical poetry and philosophical prose, the conclusion—although never

so starkly stated—is a ringing affirmation: he was both, and both together, in the sense that his poetry supported his philosophy and vice versa; if he was not the poet that Pope was, his philosophy was no less profound (or no more shallow) than his English counterpart's.

Following a three-section introduction, the book is organized in two almost equal parts: "Poésie et philosophie chez Voltaire," and "La raison ardente." Each of these parts is divided into chapters, which are subdivided into sections. Thus, for example, part 1, chapter 3, "La didactique du vers," contains four sections: "La découverte du sens," "L'heuristique du vers," "Rime et pensée," and "La force argumentative du poème." Similarly, part 2, chapter 2, "Les armes poétiques," contains five sections: "Poétique polémique," Affolement des formes," "Les figures imposées," "Poésie gnomique," and "Rhétorique et poésie." The final chapter of this part constitutes the book's rather too brief conclusion. There follow a "Corpus de la poésie philosophique voltairienne" and a "bibliographie" that includes a listing of the "Œuvres poétiques de Voltaire" in the most up-to-date and the most standard, reliable editions, a listing of "Ouvrages publiés avant 1800," and a final listing that is unceremoniously entitled "Autres ouvrages."

Boucher's arguments are based on careful close readings of an enormous number of documents related to Voltaire's immense outpouring of poetry and philosophical writings. She seems to have consulted almost every critic except, curiously, Raymond Naves, and relies most often upon Sylvain Menant, a wise choice. She examines virtually every aspect of Voltaire's own writings on poetry as well as critics both favourable and unfavourable to him as poet and/or as philosopher. She shows how, according to Voltaire, philosophical poetry requires inspiration, brilliant images ("Une idée poétique c'est [...] une image brillante substituée à l'idée naturelle de la chose dont on veut parler" as he expressed it to Frederick in D1407, dated 20 December 1737), and "la clarté, la transparence et l'évidence." He says in the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*: "Je dis donc qu'un vers, pour être bon, doit être semblable à l'or, en avoir le poids, le titre et le son. Le poids, c'est la pensée; le titre, c'est la pureté élégante du style; le son, c'est l'harmonie. Si l'une de ces trois qualités manque, le vers ne vaut rien" (43–44). Boucher applies these and other principles to Voltaire's verse and demonstrates that, in the context of seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century theory and practice, his philosophical verse, and more particularly the *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne,* generally rises to his standards.

Voltaire, virtually from the start, augmented his philosophical poetry and his tragedies by the use of explanatory notes and introductions. Aware of his weakening poetic talents later in life, Voltaire expanded this practice and eventually reduced the scope of individual writings to brief forms, such as encyclopedia or dictionary entries. In other words, prose virtually always accompanied his verse and eventually replaced it. A large corpus of philosophical poetry remains, however, and Boucher seems to invite her readers to examine these poems with open minds.

I do not know if Boucher reads Voltaire's verse as well as Maynard Mack could read Pope's, but this book establishes her as a major critic of Voltaire's poetry, and if she persists in this field, she will remain for many years a force in our understanding and appreciation of Voltaire.

Jennifer Tsien's task is of a different nature. For some reason (perhaps we take ourselves too seriously), French students of poetry seldom examine and even less often teach the light verse of our authors. Pope's mock epic *The Rape of the Lock* is a staple in college courses, along with the *Essay on Man*. In Voltaire's case, professors mention but almost never require students to read the *Henriade* (and perhaps many have never read it themselves), but *La Pucelle d'Orléans* is not even recommended reading and, if Voltaire's mock epic is mentioned at all, it is often with some embarrassment. More's the pity, since the poem is at its best rollicking and funny, even if to our sensitivities it is at times off-colour and in any case deprecatory of the French national heroine. We should recall, though, that when Voltaire wrote and much later published the comic work, the female warrior that he satirized was not yet the figure we know today. Jeanne d'Arc was not yet conceived of as the icon that she has deservedly become, nor was she canonized until 1920. Those things would happen thanks not to a Frenchman but to Friedrich Schiller, whose *Jungfrau von Orléans* dates from 1801 (Tsien does not discuss this aspect of Jeanne d'Arc's stature, which might have added another dimension to her admirable study).

Tsien writes in an engaging style, letting her erudition show without ostentation. Her analysis proceeds in a double wave. On the one hand, she examines in the four chapters of her book, in between an introduction and a conclusion, four aspects of Voltaire's epic, while on the other hand, and simultaneously, she leads the reader by a process of accrual to a synthesis of her critical appraisals. This accomplishment attests to the unity of vision she has in her study and to the acuity of that vision.

Voltaire and the Temple of Bad Taste: A Study of "La Pucelle d'Orléans" relies heavily on three critical texts: Voltaire's *Le Temple du Goût* (the first version published in 1733, about the time Voltaire was beginning to work on *La Pucelle*), Raymond Nave's 1938 essay "Le Goût de Voltaire," and Sylvain Menant's *L'Esthétique de Voltaire* (1995). In addition, Voltaire's *Essay on Epick Poetry*, published in London in 1727, also figures in the critical apparatus, especially as it relates to Continental epics in Renaissance Italy.

The book's four chapters show the gradual unfolding of various themes in *La Pucelle* that are explored in detail. Chapter 1, "The Effeminate Epic," explores the use of the lover rather than the warrior as the central figure, and the use of female warriors throughout. Frederick, a male warrior by day and a female lover at night, is satirized in the character Hermaphrodix. Charles VII, the French king, is shown to be more interested in his love-life than in his kingdom, and Jeanne's predecessors are seen to derive from Ariosto and Tasso as well as from French history, all of which are viewed through the prism of satire. Jeanne's lower-class origins and the peasant

origins of some of the other characters are the subject of chapter 2, "The Lower-Class Epic." In this story, Voltaire does not deal with the conventional shepherds-who-are-really-nobles of the pastoral tradition, elements of which can be traced back to Homer. The coarse country folk in this epic have nothing to do with the traditional characters of courtly and French classical literature. Their base instincts might be summed up by the amorous donkey and stableboy episodes, and the relations between these characters and Jeanne. Lust and sex are comic restatements of the love plots in Tasso and Ariosto, who are parodied mercilessly in Voltaire's mock epic. Chapter 4, "The Mad Epic," has as its main point of reference Ariosto, whose Orlando is furioso, but even in the "official," tamed-down version that Voltaire acknowledged, "[t]he king of France becomes the King of Fools" (394).

If Tsien's book does nothing more than impel a generation of scholars to reread and reappraise *La Pucelle*, and Voltaire's comic genius in general, it will have accomplished a revolution of sorts in Voltaire studies, and might even encourage professors to put this vibrant—although flawed (and Tsien does not cover over the weaknesses in the poem)—masterpiece on their syllabi. They and their students will be the richer for it.

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Laurence Mall. *"Émile" ou les figures de la fiction.* Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002. xv+334pp. £65; €112; US$98. ISBN 0-7294-0793-4.

Puisque Rousseau propose un programme éducatif pour régénérer l'humanité, Laurence Mall met en évidence la façon dont *Émile* définit la nature de l'humain. Ses neuf chapitres sont autant d'éclairages sur la pensée de Rousseau, remodelant les disciplines dans la perspective de la fiction. La politique, l'histoire, la sociologie et la morale sont déterminées par rapport à la vision d'une humanité régénérée, entre l'état présent et cet état de trace ou de virtualité naturelles difficile à placer au niveau temporel. En effet, dans son sixième chapitre, Mall signale que Rousseau « utilise les temps du commentaire pour faite un récit » peint « sur le mode de l'inaccompli » ou de la « prévision qui fixe le présent dans ce qu'il est en tant qu'il est déjà son devenir » (186, 196). Il s'agit donc d'un commentaire sur une certaine permanence (la nature humaine) qui se révèle comme une dynamique que l'éducateur doit retarder pour la conserver pure: « toujours plus où il est qu'où il sera » commente le mentor d'Émile après ses considérations sur la pédagogie du freinage, du *festina lente*, tendant à promouvoir l'émergence de la perception d'un bonheur immédiat plutôt qu'une course vers l'avenir, que ce dernier soit objet de désir ou destin (212–14).