

Jean-Luc Guichet, ed., *La Question sexuelle. Interrogations de la sexualité dans l'œuvre et la pensée de Rousseau*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012. Pp. 445. €39.55 (pb). ISBN 9782812403767.

It was to be expected that the tercentenary of Rousseau's birth would coincide with a surge in celebratory publications, colloquia and other events; indeed, as John C. O'Neal remarked in the *état présent* prepared by him for a recent issue of *French Studies*, 2012 was something of an *annus mirabilis* for Rousseau studies, as witnessed both by the abundance and variety of new critical studies devoted to him and by the commencement of not one, but two new major editions of Rousseau's complete works, the first published by Slatkine–Champion under the direction of Raymond Trousson and Frédéric Eigeldinger, the second led by Jacques Berchtold, François Jacob and Yannick Séité at Classiques Garnier, also the publishers of the present volume. The intellectual richness and compelling complexity of Rousseau's thought and works clearly continues to exercise its fascination over readers and scholars throughout the world.

Jean-Luc Guichet (Université de Picardie–Jules Verne) is well known to many working in the field of Rousseau studies; among his previous publications, a perceptive and subtly argued study of *Rousseau, l'animal et l'homme : L'animalité dans l'horizon anthropologique des Lumières* (Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2006) broke new ground in its analysis of the notion of 'animality' as a vital anthropological concern not only for Rousseau but for several of his contemporaries. In 2008, while Programme Director of the Collège international de Philosophie, Prof. Guichet organised a conference on 'La question de la sexualité chez Rousseau : problèmes anthropologiques et éthiques', of which this volume is in part the natural outcome. However, the content of the conference papers from 2008 has been substantially refined, and their number more than doubled by contributions gathered in the interim. The volume consists of a substantial and engagingly written introduction followed by eighteen essays, all of them of a very high order indeed, grouped thematically under five headings: 'Le jeu du désir, de l'amour et de la séduction', 'La sexualité en miroir: écriture, dispositifs spéculaires, relations triangulaires', 'La différence sexuelle: enjeux anthropologiques, éthiques et sociopolitiques', 'Éducatrices sexuelles?' and 'L'émotion sexuelle: violence, altérité et identité' – the final section being the largest. Refreshingly, an editorial decision has been taken to avoid any artificial compartmentalisation along the lines of, for example, 'literary' vs 'philosophical' approaches.

The very word 'sexualité' was of course not available to Rousseau or his contemporaries, but no reader of the *Confessions* can be in any doubt as to its importance in his life and works. The theme is therefore not a new one, and the 'classic' studies of Allan Bloom, Joël Schwarz, Pierre-Paul Clément *et al* are all duly acknowledged and re-engaged with at several turns. Attentive to recent theoretical developments, all of the studies presented here eschew the easy anachronism of retrospectively psychoanalysing Rousseau, or seeking to 'contemporise' his thought – 'le faisant parler avec des mots qu'on ne trouve pas sous sa plume', as Guichet rather poetically puts it (10) – while simultaneously discovering and elucidating a number of previously neglected or overlooked aspects of the author's richly complex and often ambiguous vision. As might be expected, frequent and fruitful comparisons are drawn, and lines of divergence delineated, between the perspectives of Rousseau and those of Montesquieu, Marivaux, Diderot, Laclos, and others. More than once the reader is invited to conclude that, notwithstanding certain notoriously peremptory declamations, Rousseau's position on matters ranging from the nature of *pudeur* to the effect of feminine *parure* (not least upon himself) deserves, at the very least, closer attention and more nuanced interpretations than have sometimes been advanced.

In the introduction, Guichet proposes a dual focus for this volume – to explore and interrogate the question of sexuality in Rousseau’s works, while simultaneously using his concepts in order to reflect upon the nature of sexuality itself – and this ambition is largely achieved in the course of the work. From the outset, one is struck by the fact that so many of the authors draw for their discussions upon a particularly broad cross-section of Rousseau’s corpus. *Les Confessions* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* feature prominently, naturally, as does *Émile* and, of course, the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, but the references and readings found within these pages extend to virtually all of the major works and, pleasingly, to the correspondence (in the case of Jean-François Perrin’s superbly poised study, to a single, unsent letter to the comtesse d’Houdetot).

There are fresh readings and compelling insights in each of the chapters, and the book will be welcomed by all those with an interest in Rousseau. In an otherwise impeccably produced volume, regrettably, this reader spotted two minor typographical errors (in the introduction; 27 & 32). However, these minor flaws detract little from an impressively varied, stimulating and thought-provoking collection of essays which assuredly merits a place of honour at the tercentenary table.

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