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Stéphanie Loubère, *L'Art d'aimer au siècle des Lumières*. Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 2007: 11. Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 2007. 343 pp. Illustrations, footnotes, bibliography and index. \$111 U.S./£65 U.K./€78 (pb). ISBN 978-0-7294-0917-9.

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In this erudite, careful and thorough study, Stéphanie Loubère surveys and analyzes the surprisingly rich story of the translations and adaptations of Ovid's *Art of Love* in eighteenth-century France. This is a story that is likely to interest the reader more for what it reveals about the vicissitudes of translating and adapting the classics, and for the role they continued to play in French letters throughout the Enlightenment, than for its potential to seduce the senses and captivate the amorous imagination. Indeed, the expectant reader is bound to be disappointed, for never has eroticism felt so dull, dogmatic and pedantic. Certainly, had Ovid written according to the spirit of his French translators, it is safe to assume that he would never have incurred disgrace, exile, or been accused of immorality. Like them, he would have lived and died in dignified obscurity.

Still, it was worth resurrecting those authors, if only for a moment, and we may agree with Loubère's claim that a study of the *minores* is likely to yield some interest for those who wish to explore the intellectual context, or better yet, the rhetorical and argumentative underbelly, of libertine literature, from Crébillon to Laclos. As Loubère points out, both in the Augustan empire and in the ancien régime, writing careers were shaped on the benches of law schools; all of the arts of love, to a greater or lesser extent, deliberately parodied treatises on rhetorics, at a time when rhetorics could no longer find an outlet in the practice of politics. The boudoir, rather than the tribune, became the space in which the arts of persuasion were honed and refined. The same may be argued of the Middle Ages, of such works as André Le Chapelain's *De Amore* in the twelfth century and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung's *Romance of the Rose* in the thirteenth century.

The parodistic mode informs the seventeenth century approach to Ovid. Following a chronological order, Loubère shows that this was a time that favored the more dramatically poignant and tragic Ovid of the *Metamorphosis* and the *Héroïdes* (which Racine took as a model for his theatrical heroines, Guilleragues for his *Lettres d'une religieuse portugaise* and later Duclos for his lovelorn marquise in *Lettres de la marquise de\*\*\* au comte de\*\*\**), over the lighter tone of the *Art of Love*, which inspired at most comic and burlesque adaptations, such as Charles d'Assoucy's *Ovide en belle humeur* (1650) and Dufour de la Crespelière's parodistic "travesty" entitled *L'art d'aimer nouvellement traduit en vers burlesques* (1662). Loubère notes that such works as Dufour's and Ferrier de la Martinière's *Préceptes galants* (1678) illustrate the backlash against the *galanterie tendre* and *précieuse* advocated by Honoré d'Urfé's wildly popular novel *L'Astrée* (1607-1627) and by Madeleine de Scudéry's successful *galant* romances (such as *Clélie*, 1654-1660; *Le Grand Cyrus*, 1649-1653). That is correct, but it is regrettable that Loubère does not mention the more contemporary critical perspectives on *galanterie* put forth by Delphine Denis, Alain Viala, or Joan DeJean.[1] Loubère relies instead upon the highly readable but outdated work of Jean-Michel Pelous, which depicts *galanterie* (which he calls by his historically problematic, satirical name of *préciosité*) more like a hopelessly utopian fantasy sprung from the mind of a middle-aged virgin (Scudéry), rather than as a rich cultural phenomenon which provided a new model of interaction among

the sexes and eventually contributed to shaping the public sphere of worldliness that flourished in the eighteenth-century salon.[2]

Had Loubère taken note of those new approaches, she would have been able to better situate the conflict between those two kinds of love, that is, the enmity between Apollo and Cupid (I am referring here to Marivaux's delightful comedy *La Réunion des amours*, 1731, which explores the ground between Tendre, embodied by Apollo, now depicted as outmoded, and the libertine, fleeting, irreverent Goût embodied by Cupid). In other words, rather than seeing, as she does, a "subversive" reaction on the part of Dufour, Ferrier and others, against the "Platonistic" excesses of Tendre (p. 41), it would have been more correct and critically productive to see in their burlesque adaptations of Ovid a reactionary backlash against the new form of *galanterie* that had emerged in the novels and in the salons of the time.[3] In the seventeenth century, in fact, there was no such thing as an opposition between, on the one hand, an allegedly puritanical, ideological, *Préciosité*, enemy of the body and of sensual pleasure, intent on endless speechifying and procrastination, and on the other, a more "realistic," sensual, subversive and playful Eros, harbinger of a subsequent reevaluation of the body. Rather, there was an opposition between two rival conceptions of *galanterie*: a modern, worldly one that stressed conviviality, good manners, conversation, a taste for poetry, and an old-fashioned one that stressed intrigue, deceit, and a state of war between the sexes. One wonders whether this insouciance, on the part of an otherwise very knowledgeable *dix-huitièmiste*, towards that most creative and dynamic moment in French literature and culture—a time that witnessed a confluence between a new art of love and the practice of worldliness, the search for an innovative *modus vivendi* between the sexes and a redefinition of the passions in the social space—might not be due to the strict academic partition between historical periods that sometimes characterizes the French universities.

Be that as it may, Loubère does show in the subsequent chapters that the trend is towards syncretism, and that her authors are, by and large, interested in having their cake and eating it too, that is, in showing that sexual gratification may be perfectly compatible with the dictates of Christian morality. All too often, however, such an attempt leads the French authors to try amending Ovid, not so much for what they might see as immoral (indeed, some passages in the translation are more explicit than the original), but for his alleged stylistic offenses. Such an endeavor yields mixed results, as one perceptive Abbé Goujet, a contemporary critic, noted: "As for me, I found it [the anonymous translation of 1696] very tedious. It is at times a rephrasing, at others a summary. The translator resorts to a sententious language, he turns into aphorisms all that Ovid had expressed as narrative." [4]

Between 1736 and 1750 a slew of new adaptations of Ovid may be classified as free imitations rather than translations. They tend to fall between two trends: a moralistic one, which seeks to improve on the original, and a more "philosophical" (in the libertine sense it had at the time) one, which sees in Ovid fodder for a materialistic and sensualist view of erotic passion. In the wake of the publication of Voltaire's poem *Le Mondain* (which, in its praise of the modern age of luxury and his skepticism towards the myth of the golden age is itself based on the imitation of lines 121-200 in book 3 of the *Art of Love*), the new French Ovids (Gentil-Bernard and the Chevalier de Cogolin) see a link between progress in the arts and sciences and the improvement of manners. Their own art of love debunks of the myth of the golden age and of an original state of simplicity and authenticity. Their defense of luxury is correlated to the praise of artifice, strategy and refinement in the relation between the sexes. Such attitude elicits a formal rebuttal from three authors: d'Alègre (*Art d'aimer*, 1737); the Abbé Claude-Henri de Fusée de Voisenon (*Code des amants*, 1739); and François-Etienne Gouges de Cessières (*L'Art d'aimer*, 1742 and 1750). Why should the lively and worldly Abbé de Voisenon—a member, alongside Crébillon le fils, of the satirical Société du Bout du Banc hosted by the actress Mlle Quinault, a protégé of Voltaire, Mme de Pompadour and the Duc de Choiseul, the author of such amiably libertine works as *Le sultan Misapouf*—venture into a didactical poem praising a modest eroticism regulated by reason remains a bit of a mystery. The reader wishes that Loubère had joined, to her vision of a self-enclosed literary world, in which written texts influence or generate other written texts, at least a smattering of cultural history,

an interest for the authorial strategies that might have encouraged the production and the multiplication of those Ovidian works. Obviously it was one thing to write an imitation of Ovid, and quite another to write a libertine novel. Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's wonderfully, subtly satirical *Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit* (1736), which Loubère does analyze in light of the Ovidian influence, does reflect much the same Ovidian material, but it presents it within an entirely different genre. Loubère has missed here a chance to explore, thanks to such intersections in subject-matter, the sociology of genres and forms. What was for an author the payback of choosing to practice a classical genre as opposed to writing in a modern, arguably less prestigious (but perhaps more profitable) one? When Voisenon was elected to the Académie Française in 1762, what weight did his *Code des amants* have in making up his profile as an author? Those questions would have given historical texture and interest to Loubère's readings.

One thing seems clear: for some of those writers, the composition of an art of love in verse was an extremely lucrative venture. That was certainly the case for Pierre-Joseph Bernard (1708-1775), the son of a modest sculptor from Grenoble, who was able to parlay his successful *Art d'aimer*, which for thirty years he would read assiduously in the salons (but which, rather wisely, he only published toward the end of his life), into a lucrative pension as Secrétaire des Dragons, to which he added other sinecures, such as the position of librarian of the duc de Choisy; at the age of thirty nine, this man whom Mme de Grafigny and Marmontel described as charmless, of limited knowledge and coarse, was enjoying the amazing revenue of 20,000 livres. He divided his time between the frequentation of the salons (in particular that of the young Mme d'Etoiles, the future marquise de Pompadour) and an epicurean existence enlivened by several, simultaneous *affaires galantes*. His reputation and success were due entirely to those public readings. Once the poem was published, the author suffered a fate similar to that of Chapelain (1595-1674), when the public finally became acquainted with the dull verses of his epic poem *La Pucelle* (1656).

Stephanie Loubère has written an exhaustive, carefully detailed catalogue of all the major instances of translation and imitation of Ovid's *Art of Love*. Despite the methodological limitations mentioned above, her book will be very useful to those who are interested in the history of the evolving representation of libertinage, the body and the passions. It will also yield valuable material for anyone wishing to pursue a study in the endurance and the relevance of the classical literature throughout the Enlightenment.

## NOTES

[1] Delphine Denis, *La Muse galante: poétique de la conversation dans l'oeuvre de Madeleine de Scudéry* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997) and *"De l'air galant" et autres conversations: pour une étude de l'archive galante* (Paris: Champion, 1998); Alain Viala, *La France galante: essai historique sur une catégorie culturelle, de ses origines jusqu'à la Révolution* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008); True, not even the sternest critic could lay blame on the author for failing to make reference to a book that was published one year after hers.... Still, Alain Viala has been working on galanterie for several years, and his many articles on the topic have circulated widely. See for instance "D'une politique des formes, la galanterie," *XVIIème siècle*, 46 (182), 1994: 143-151; "La littérature galante, histoire et problématique," *Il Seicento francese oggi. Situazione e prospettive della ricerca. Actes du colloque international*, éd. G. Dotoli, Bari-Paris, Adriatica-Nizet, 1994: 100-113; "L'esprit galant," *Biblio 17, Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 101 (1997): 53-74; "Le naturel galant," in Christian Delmas and Françoise Gevrey, eds., *Nature et Culture à l'âge classique* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1997), pp. 61-76; "Molière et le langage galant," *Mélanges offerts à Claude Abraham in Biblio 17, Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 102 (1997): 99-109; "Qui t'a fait minor? Galanterie et classicisme" *Littératures classiques*, 31 (1997): 115-134; "Les Signes Galants: a Historical Reevaluation of Galanterie," *Yale French Studies* 92 (1997): 11-29. See also Joan DeJean in *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de*

*Siècle* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) and *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[2] Jean-Michel Pelous, *Amour précieux, amour galant, 1654-1675* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1980).

See also Louis Seifert, *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

[3] The dictionaries show that a new meaning of *galanterie* appeared alongside the old one, which saw in the “galant” a thief, a swindler and an unscrupulous seducer: “GALANT, ANTE; adj. Honneste, civil, sociable de bonne compagnie, de conversation agréable. *Galant homme, galante femme.* (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie*).

*Galant, galante, adj.* (...) Qui a de la bonne grâce, de l’esprit, du jugement, de la civilité et de la gaieté, le tout sans affectation. (*Dictionnaire* by Furetière).

GALANT (...) se dit aussi d’un homme qui a l’air de la Cour, les manières agréables, qui tâche à plaire, et particulièrement au beau sexe. En ce sens, on dit que c’est un esprit *galant*, qui donne un tour *galant* à tout ce qu’il fait; qu’il fait des billets doux et des vers *galants*. (...) Qui sait bien choisir et recevoir son monde: une fête *galante*, une réjouissance d’honnêtes gens (*Dictionnaire* de Richelet).

[4] Abbé Goujet, *Bibliothèque française*, vol. 6, p. 7, quoted in *L’Art d’aimer au siècle des Lumières*, p. 174.

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