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Luba Markovskaia, *La Conquête du for privé. Recit de soi et prison heureuse au siècle des Lumières*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019. 285 pp. Foreword by Frédéric Charbonneau, notes, bibliography and index. 34€. ISBN 978-2-406-07-492-2.

Review by Siân Reynolds, University of Stirling

In his *Confessions*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau describes his positive feelings when quarantined, alone, for twenty-one days, in the lazaretto in Genoa, during the outbreak of plague in Messina in the 1740s. His fellow-travellers had decided to sit it out on board ship, and the building was completely empty. He had to make a bed of his own clothes and organize his (quite numerous) possessions in order to create his retreat—or island as he calls it, recycling *Robinson Crusoe*. As Luba Markovskaia points out, using this well-chosen example in her introduction, Jean-Jacques was able to combine to his own satisfaction the elements of *la prison heureuse* and the ability to write: a safe place to sleep and sit, a writing desk, a library (pp. 35-7). Rousseau was never, as it happened, in an actual prison, unlike some of his intellectual contemporaries, but he did spend time in various kinds of exile, retreat or self-isolation. His reactions constitute an unavoidable sub-text throughout Markovskaia's book: he is both the most famous eighteenth-century author of the *récit de soi*, and also refers frequently to the *enfermement*, literal or metaphorical, that could make writing possible and enjoyable.

This book, originating in a PhD thesis, has at its core a case-study of four eighteenth-century writers of memoirs, two men and two women: Marguerite-Jeanne de Staal-Delaunay (1684-1750); Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799); the Abbé André de Morellet (1727- 1819); and Marie-Jeanne Roland (1754-1793) – not, by the way, "Jeanne-Marie", as she is named throughout. The clearly-stated criteria for selection (p. 16) were that these memoirists had in some sense subscribed to the *topos* of the "happy prison", and that they were *roturiers/ères*, of non-aristocratic origin, thus breaking with the tradition of noble memoirs. In other respects, though, their situations were somewhat different, as were their approaches to their life stories, and the context in which they wrote. None of them spent very long in a cell: at most, eighteen months for de Staal-Delaunay (though they loom large in her memoirs); two months for Morellet; a mere eleven days for Marmontel; five months for Madame Roland, and hers were the only memoirs actually written in prison and smuggled out. (They are preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale Manuscripts department on small exercise books and rough paper, and very touching they are too.) The other three wrote their memoirs long after their confinement. It should also be noted that while De Staal-Delaunay penned her reflections in the 1730s, all the others were writing in the 1790s, not merely after (or during) the Revolution, but after the publication of Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782 and 1789).

Still, as Luba Markovskaia makes plain in the extensive exposition preceding the closer study of her corpus, the field she is prospecting is a large one. Prison can mean many forms of enclosure or isolation, and the *récit de soi* whatever one calls it, has a long history and contested periodization. Her over-arching argument is the connection between a positive (in some sense) experience of being imprisoned, and the shift from the more-or-less public memoir with its emphasis on the noteworthy events in a life, to the introspection and concentration on *le for intérieur*. The latter was originally a religious expression, but the author categorizes her memoirists of the Enlightenment as having broadly lost the spiritual faith that marked those of the seventeenth. Drawing initially on Victor Brombert's notion of *La prison romantique* (which he sees as essentially a nineteenth-century phenomenon) and Marc Fumaroli's pioneering work on memoirs as a genre (from the seventeenth), Markovskaia aims to show that the shift to a view of prison as a happy retreat for the writer, who then explores the depths of his/her being, can already be seen in the eighteenth century. While "mémoires" ("terme aujourd'hui très usité", as the *Encyclopédie* remarks) may indeed have begun to proliferate at this time, Luba Markovskaia argues that they have not attracted enough attention from scholars (p. 58) and could do with more analysis.

The first 150 pages or so of the book constitute a remarkable literature review on both *récit de soi* and prison writing. Incidentally, there are no chapter numbers, and the index that Classiques Garnier have provided is inadequate, given the book's highly referential structure: it lists by name selected writers of the time or earlier/later periods, and could have been more helpful as a pathway through the unnumbered sections. One unindexed aspect of the exposition is the explosion of academic work on life-writing generally since 2000, building on work by the above and others (Frédéric Charbonneau, Philippe Lejeune, Catriona Seth) as can be ascertained from the "Corpus critique". A crucial feature of the emergent *récit de soi* as Markovskaia sees it, and certainly after Rousseau, is the *récit d'enfance*, as a key to the construction of self (p. 92), neglected in earlier more public or religious memoirs.

The second and third sections of the study range over the literature of imprisonment, writing inside prison, and the materialities of prison life. Evidence is reported by ex-inmates including De Staal-Delaunay and Marmontel, about "la Bastille heureuse", at least in the earlier part of the century. For better-off prisoners, facilities were reasonably comfortable: food, furniture, servants and friends could be brought in. The Bastille itself had a library, from which the educated might borrow books, Marmontel doing so with the help of the governor himself in the 1760s. Prison in France in the age of *lettres de cachet* was mostly preventive or for debt, or for what might now be civil cases of libel, launched by thin-skinned aristocrats--the reason why both Marmontel and Morellet were briefly incarcerated. For the *droit commun*, whose stay normally preceded more extreme forms of punishment, things were very different, but our memoir writers usually came into the comfortable category. Still, as Markovskaia remarks, conditions worsened under Louis XVI, according to the journalist Linguet, and ex-inmates were forbidden to publish accounts of prison life.

Nor did authors always find it easy to write when inside. Casanova is one famous name (from outside France) who appears as a witness: frustrated for want of a pen, he describes how he had grown the nail on the little finger of his right hand very long, then sharpened it, and by holding it between thumb and index, could use it to write with (p. 119). (I tried this on my own hand and it would work in theory.) This comes in a section--fascinating, admittedly, but perhaps not

strictly germane to the central corpus—on the material difficulties of writing *in* prison: finding pens, paper, ink, writing in code and so on. Besides Casanova, other well-known detainees, including Latude, Chateaubriand, Sade, and especially General Dumouriez, make witness appearances too. But towards the end of this exposition, Markovskaia rightly reminds the reader that her selected writers are not necessarily providing a transparent account of how it was, but a *mise en récit* of their prison experience.

Accordingly, when we cut to the chase, three more-focused sections explore key themes through the chosen memoirists: the happiness conferred by solitude; sociability and *mondanité*; and the idea of liberty in prison. In the section entitled *Retraites carcérales*, the emphasis is on solitary writing and the need for a room of one's own: one sub-section is actually called "Une chambre à soi" (and the book indeed ends with a coda on de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre*). Both Marmontel and Mme Roland are cited for their pre-figurations of prison: private physical spaces they had devised for study and thought in an earlier life. In the next section, *La prison et les salons*, the emphasis is on the contrast with "le monde"—and prison as an escape from it—but it is a complicated relation. To be *embastillé(e)* could be a badge of honour under the ancien regime, bringing some celebrity. Mme de Staal-Delaunay found she was much visited after her release (it didn't last). Marmontel and Morellet, both energetic visitors to "salons", could be said with only a little exaggeration to have dined out on their imprisonment for the rest of their lives. Mme Roland is a different matter. The terms *salon* and *salonnière*, applied to her here, were not of course current in the eighteenth century. This is a quibble on which I won't dwell, but to describe Mme Roland (whether as a newly-arrived provincial, renting two rooms on the rue Guénégaud, or later as the wife of a government minister) as being a hostess entirely in the mode of Mme Geoffrin et al. is to my mind something of a category mistake, though often repeated. What is certainly clear is that, as Luba Markovskaia says, Mme Roland considerably underplays her political role in the memoirs, for obvious reasons, and that she was, no doubt accurately, viewed by others as a *femme savante* and increasingly by herself as a *femme-auteur*, despite her ambivalence about the term. This section contains well-supported and pertinent insights on her style as echoing, perhaps involuntarily, that of polite society in the ancien regime.

The final section is on the paradoxical notion of *Liberté en prison*. To Morellet, for example, it signified lack of censorship: he could write freely, expressing ideas he could not publish at the time—indeed, surprisingly, he also sang to himself and danced in his cell (p. 157). For Mme de Staal-Delaunay, it meant freedom from being a servant: a *femme de chambre* herself, she now had a serving maid with her in prison. As for Marie-Jeanne Roland, one aspect not mentioned at all in the memoirs, only in her correspondence, is that prison freed her from a distressing domestic situation in 1793. After being cooped up in an apartment with her broken-hearted husband, to whom (*à la Julie* in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*) she had admitted her love for the *député* Buzot, she was now able to indulge her feelings and write to her lover.

This is in many ways a useful and appealing book that can be read with pleasure for its range, its many examples and its insights. Where I am more doubtful is the extent to which the main thesis is supported by the case studies. The direction of travel is certainly towards introspection, but is the periodization not a little undercut by the skewed dates of the four writers? Mme de Staal-Delaunay is an interesting curiosity, a woman and an outlier, but she was writing in the early years of the age we call the *Lumières*, long before the others. Neither is it a trivial matter that the other three memoirists were well aware of Rousseau's example. Both Marmontel and Morellet professed to be unsympathetic to him, yet he inevitably pervades their thinking, as Luba

Markovskaia readily recognizes (pp. 84-85). As for Marie-Jeanne Roland, she positively revered Jean-Jacques, casting her memoirs explicitly in the same mode, admitting to "shameful" episodes of her childhood, and so on. Certainly, the basic argument works quite well in her case, given her explicit distinction between her initial account of public matters and the later memoir of her early life. But all three later authors, though unarguably *formed* by the Age of Enlightenment, were already writing in what might be called the post-*Confessions* atmosphere. In the end, the periodization is perhaps a little doubtful, but does not seem to be what matters most. As a result, for me, the book's very suggestive sections add up to more than its whole.

It certainly provides food for thought at the present time (spring 2020), when many people worldwide have been quarantined like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at first in cruise ships, hotels or military bases, then increasingly locked-down in their own homes, because of the coronavirus. From the accounts that trickle out, a predominant feeling, despite electronic distractions, is of boredom and the need to do something creative and helpful. On the evidence of this book, one way to construct *la quarantaine heureuse* would be to start writing your life story.

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