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Helder Mendes Baiao, *Rêves de citoyens. L'utopie républicaine dans la littérature Suisse-romande au XVIII^e siècle*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021. 320pp. \$75.15 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1787076488. \$74.05 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-78-1787076501.

Review by Clorinda Donato, California State University, Long Beach.

As a professor of French eighteenth-century literature who teaches a course on the literature and culture of Francophone Switzerland, I often find myself having to insist that students and colleagues alike familiarize themselves with the distinct perspective of Swiss French writers and the socio-geographic underpinnings of one of the most prolific thinkers of the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Besides having to remind people continually that Rousseau was Swiss and not French, I am also tasked with describing the milieu from which he came and the many writers and thinkers who must be studied with him in order to understand that milieu. It is for this reason that I strongly endorse reading the book under review. In mapping the unique literary culture of enlightenment Romandy, Helder Mendes Baiao explains the background from which Jean-Jacques Rousseau's voice arose in 1757 to pit itself openly against the moral relativism of the *philosophes* in his *Lettre à D'Alembert sur le spectacle*, reminiscent of the critique that Horkheimer and Adorno would launch in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* after the Second World War.[1]

Rousseau's throwing down the gauntlet to Jean D'Alembert, author of the *Encyclopédie* article "Genève" who, at Voltaire's prompting, lamented the lack of theatre in the Protestant republic, has always baffled students of the French enlightenment who have struggled with squaring the brilliant mind that produced *The Social Contract* with the seemingly socially retrograde position of that same author to keep theatre culture from taking root in the Genevan Republic. There is no doubt, however, that the moment in 1757 when the Genevan moral imperative loomed large in this challenge to the Encyclopedists was one of the turning points of the Enlightenment, marking the moment when the *ténèbres* began to appear. It's also hard for students to fathom how a single article on Geneva could bring the publication of the *Encyclopédie*, that monument of Enlightenment, to a grinding halt for some seven years, then, ironically, only to resume publication once again and in Switzerland, of all places. This volume holds the answers. It locates the genesis, apogee, and fragility over time of the juxtaposition of the inherent moral virtue of Switzerland's Helvetians with the pressures of the economic reach of modernity through a careful analysis of multiple texts, many hardly known outside the circle of specialists of Francophone Switzerland, that shed light on the thoroughly divergent cultural underpinnings of the Suisse Romande's eighteenth century.

As stated, this seven-chapter monograph on eighteenth-century Swiss literature traces the history of the writing produced by multiple authors: moralists, historians, encyclopedists, novelists, and journalists. Far more encompassing than a simple literary history, however, Baiao's book culls from each of these genres the echoes of a vision reminiscent of Thomas More's *Utopia*. It lays out the remarkable ideological interweaving of these authors' multi-genre works as they project eternal happiness as attainable and sustainable in perpetuity if the citizens of French-speaking Switzerland would only practice and espouse the Republican virtue of the pastoral communities of the ancient Helvetians, whose lifestyles had somehow been almost miraculously preserved in the Alpine heights of Romandy over the course of some two thousand years. While the benefits of targeting ancients as models had been touted by the French *philosophes* from Montesquieu to Voltaire to Diderot, it was done with the nostalgic regret at seeing them in their rear-view mirror. Instead, the Swiss could point to active communities where the Republican virtue of Rome was still alive and well, thus flipping the discourse of the French Enlightenment from past to present. For Rousseau, maintaining an ongoing lived example of virtue was key. He was aware of the pitfalls, aptly defined in the *Social Contract*, of the problem of the human preference for material gain over liberty. His solution was to keep corrupting influences, such as the theatre, at bay through the discourse of sensibility and the cultivation of virtue, while never losing sight of what became the Swiss legacy, incumbent upon all to preserve.

For several years, this idyll appeared realistic through the continual touting of the real-time habits lived by the rural Alpine communities, and influencing, by extension the nascent cities of Bern, Geneva, and Lausanne. Those cities were still considered salvageable as idyllic, uncorrupted experiments in rustic urbanity, which had become an inspirational source for the rest of Europe. Indeed, the Swiss myth would draw new generations of grand tourists, seekers of the pristine sublime, who had cut their teeth on Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). In that work, he cleverly employed the thoroughly bourgeois trappings of the modern novel to weave a moral tale in which woman's desire is cheerfully offered up on the altar of civic virtue, held in place by a bucolic patriarchy. Julie ultimately believes that she is in control of her own moral perfectibility, which can be sustained through contact with the countryside, the *locus amoenus* where moral regeneration could take place, and where virtuous citizens could then become instruments of reform and agency within their own environment.

Yet, cracks began to appear in this façade. The accumulation of wealth and its corollary among the citizenry—luxury—became inevitable corrupting influences for the Republic of Geneva and the Pays de Vaud alike as they sought to balance their economic ledgers against the books of virtue and morals that the citizenry composed at a surprisingly rapid clip. Baiao's observations on the burgeoning of the sentimental novel are particularly instructive here as he deftly traces the emotional effects of so much pressure to live up to a *Suisse romande* identity and to preserve it for posterity on men and women alike. Indeed, the analysis of any number of novels, several epistolary, by writers who are virtually unknown even to experts of the place and period, constitutes one of most salient contributions of this volume, with an open invitation to future scholars to continue this work with an even greater attention to questions of gender, for example, and a further honing of *Suisse romand* femininities and masculinities. He offers a thought-provoking juxtaposition in his analysis of the suicide of the demoralized gentleman farmer husband, Monsieur Bompré in Samuel Constant de Rebeque's 1783 novel *Le mari sentimental ou le mariage comme il y en a quelques uns* with the suicide of the Mistress Henley in a similar marriage as told from the woman's point of view in Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistress Henley*. Monsieur Bompré tries valiantly to uphold Republican virtue in his country home by living

simply, but his world caves in, and he must succumb to his younger wife's preference for finery and repartee in a sorrowful confession made to his correspondent and friend, Monsieur St. Thomin: "I wish I could shut an idea out of my mind that is tormenting me, which is that she doesn't love me: no, my friend, my wife doesn't love me!" (p. 128). In a reversal of feelings of inadequacy and unrequited love, Mistress Henley finds herself stifled by her husband's imposition of a life of moral virtue so strict that it denies any value to Mistress Henley's attempts to impart culture to their children. In this epistolary novel, de Charrière appears to have written the dismal aftermath of *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and the personal toll that living up to the expectations of republican virtue took on the consciences of the *Romands*, who tried to sustain the sublimation of personal desire. Some twenty years following the publication of Rousseau's novel, women reject the model of Julie.

Baiao's thorough grounding in the interplay throughout Europe of rising commerce engendering new forms of work that drew people from the fields to the cities, and the texts, most especially, Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714), that justified the resulting moral shift to *amour-propre* that took place as a result, captures the dilemma that ultimately threatened the idyll: Wealth and honesty can't be cultivated contemporaneously, and virtue and simplicity don't do a very good job of nourishing nations. Producing wealth requires a desire for material gain, and the balancing of these tendencies is the greatest challenge to the utopian republic. Nonetheless, Baiao contrasts the jaded position of the *philosophes* with the counter discourse found in the writings of Jean de Muralt, the Yverdon encyclopedists, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Albrecht von Haller, Isabelle de Charrière, and even Germaine de Staël, as well as those of far lesser known figures such as Jean François Butini, Paul-Henri Mallet, and Samuel Constant, aspiring novelists who grappled with the stakes of creating and maintaining a mode of Republican civic virtue.

By the end of the eighteenth century and the Revolution of 1798, the Swiss fully understood what was at stake as they tried to hone a model of Republican civic virtue. It was celebrated in rather surprising municipal grandeur and sophistication, but it also advocated for the equality of a citizenry that should sublimate human desire to material gain by renouncing luxury and maintaining as frugal a lifestyle as possible on the individual level: this, even as they made their wealth available to the republic, which would then ensure that the citizenry collectively benefitted from shared civic opulence. This utopia remains unfulfilled, though it lives on in the Swiss national imagination as always within reach through a literature of sensibility that warns against the dangers of egoism, while promising glorious rewards for those who deny the self in favor of civic virtue.

NOTES

[1] For more on the convergence of the critique of Enlightenment shared by Rousseau, Horkheimer and Adorno, see Julia Simon-Ingram, "Alienation, Individuation, and Enlightenment in Rousseau's Social Theory," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24/3 (1991): 315–335. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2738666>.

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