H-France Review Vol. 23 (May 2023), No. 81

François Jacob, *Voltaire après la nuit: Paris, Moscou, Genève.* Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, 2021. v + 185 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography and index. €40.00 (pb). ISBN 9782845591509.

Review by Gregory S. Brown, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.[1]

On the morning of Monday, June 21, 2020, maintenance workers for the city of Paris discovered discoloration and graffiti on a stone statue of Voltaire that had stood for nearly sixty years in the Square Honoré-Champion, an enclosed public garden in the sixth arrondissement. The Centre national des arts plastiques (the national agency to which the statue belonged) removed the statue for cleaning, and a typically French contention arose, as intellectuals in the media found a larger historical and political significance in the incident. Some asserted, though with only circumstantial evidence, that the statue had been defaced in an act of anti-colonial iconoclasm, associated with the worldwide wave of demonstrations against racism.

Particularly notable was the tendentious and partisan response of political scientist, former center-right politician and perpetual secretary of the Académie française Hélène Carrère d'Encausse (who like Voltaire, enjoyed a close relationship with a Russian head of state). Raising her dudgeon to full height, d´Encausse contrasted Voltaire as an incarnation of "tolérance" with the "politique systèmatique" of the mayor of Paris (and Socialist presidential aspirant) Anne Hidalgo, whom she claimed speciously had ordered the removal of the statue of "un homme de génie." D'Encausse reached her rhetorical climax by linking anti-racism activists and Hidalgo (neither of whom necessarily had anything to do with the discoloration or removal of the statue) to, inevitably, Nazism. She observed that the stone effigy had been erected to replace a bronze which had been removed in 1942 and melted down at the order of the German Military Administration. The *bathos* would reach new lows in mid-August, when competing far-right polemicists weighed in. Florian Phillipot denounced the removal as "crime contre l'intelligence" and accused the municipal government of being unable "de protéger l´auteur de la *Traité sur la tolérance*," while Eric Zenmour applauded the removal of the statue as an appropriate gesture against the "effet corrosif" that Voltaire had wrought on French morality. [2]

These representations and misrepresentations of Voltaire help us understand the significance of François Jacob's new book, *Voltaire après la nuit.* He takes up the construction of meaning around Voltaire in scholarly, lay intellectual, and popular culture in the half generation after the end of World War II. Currently a professor of French literature at the Université de Lyon, Jacob is an eighteenth-century specialist, but the book is intended to offer neither interpretative readings of Voltaire's literary corpus nor a critical history of the reception of Voltaire's works in the post-

war period (despite a somewhat incongruous digression into reception theory in the introduction). Rather, the book is best described as an extensively researched, intellectually ambitious, and engaging cultural history of controversies over the meaning of Voltaire across Europe from roughly 1945 to 1965. While specialists of mid-twentieth century French or European culture may find it to have limited reference to the broader scholarship on the period, there is a great deal to learn from this book about cultural memory and the reconstruction of national identity in the post-war moment.

To explain Jacob's intellectual agenda, one must restate a point widely understood among eighteenth-century specialists but frequently not appreciated in the humanities more broadly: The meaning of the Enlightenment generally, and the figure of Voltaire in particular, over the past two centuries have been dynamic rather than static. The caricatural idea of Voltaire as firmly established atop a literary and intellectual canon of great thinkers and as the avatar of a triumphant movement for scientific empiricism, free thought, and social progress, is a relatively recent invention. Indeed, only in the early years of the twentieth century was Voltaire adopted into the French academic curriculum. Through the 1930s, to the extent he was considered an important writer, it was as a poet, playwright, and historiographer, rather than an advocate for modern social values. Well into the 1950s, his intellectual significance remained highly contested, upheld mostly as an advocate of anticlericalism and (in anglophone lands) anti-Catholicism. His contested status in France was such that during the Occupation, he was neither claimed by nor associated particularly strongly with the Resistance. Indeed, as Jacob points out, a book by a Vichy-endorsed academic, Henri Labroue, presented Voltaire as an "antijuif" who had lain an ideological foundation of the National Revolution's antisemitism. (Nor, for that matter, did the Military Administration order the Voltaire statue melted down as a political statement; rather, it was to meet German quotas for the requisition of metal.) [3]

So, in 1944, when Jacob begins his account, and throughout the subsequent decade which draws most of his attention, we see the meaning of Voltaire to have been very much subject to argument. His first chapter begins in the weeks and months after the liberation of Paris, when a series of public events and publications reframed Voltaire to suit the cultural needs of the provisional government and the cause of national reunification. Paul Valéry dedicated his final cycle of public lectures at the Collège de France to a presentation of Voltaire as incarnating a much-needed synthesis of "raison" and "coeur" and as an author who created a "grand public pour la liberté de penser." (p. 15). His intellectual rival Julien Benda, in these same weeks of November and December 1944, wrote publicly on Voltaire as an ethically credible intellectual, an incarnation of "humanisme moderne" (p. 15), and a "civilisation européenne" (p. 25). Jacob relates a remarkable event held in December of 1944 at the Sorbonne, when Valéry, the quintessential literary aesthete, shared a stage with both the intensely politically engaged, Gaullist minister of education and culture in the provisional government René Capitant, and with Maurice Thorez, only weeks earlier re-installed by Stalin as head of the French Communist Party, in a public debate on Voltaire. This veritable popular front of Voltairism presented the writer as a *topos* fundamental to the Resistance and to the Fourth Republic, unifying the French literary, nationalist, and revolutionary traditions. Jacob relates how the celebration of Voltaire as an avatar of the liberation and the republic continued into the spring of 1945, with new editions of his histories, new productions of several of his tragedies at the Comédie Française, and the republication of several pre-war editions of his programmatic writings prepared by the progressive literary historian Raymond Naves.

Naves appears at several points in the book but features less centrally than one might have expected. More than any figure of the post-war period, he stood for the ideal type of engaged intellectual and symbol of national valor that Voltaire came to embody in that moment. In the 1930s, Naves had completed a *thèse d'état* and a *thèse complémentaire* on Voltaire at the Sorbonne under the direction of Daniel Mornet. With Mornet, Naves had edited several Voltaire texts for use in the new school curriculum which Lanson had advocated. Then, under the Vichy regime, Naves continued to teach French literature at the Université de Toulouse and published a biography of Voltaire for students while active in the Resistance. In 1944, he was betrayed, arrested, deported, and murdered in Auschwitz. After the war, his pedagogical texts were republished for use in schools, and then in the 1950s, his biography of Voltaire was republished for a general audience in four more editions. Naves thus represented a link between the Dreyfusard intellectual tradition that had brought Voltaire into the curriculum and the post-war moment that made Voltaire a national hero, a point that one might have expected Jacob to explore more fully.[4] Nevertheless, Naves provides Jacob a crucial pivot from his early discussion of the officially sanctioned post-war celebrations of Voltaire in such spaces as the Sorbonne, Collège, and Comédie Française, to the central preoccupation of the book, the construction of Voltaire as a post-war hero of rationalist, liberal, and international values. Jacob's limited but sympathetic discussion of Naves implicitly raises an important question: Did Naves's disappearance open a space in post-war French scholarship into which anglophone scholars would step in the post-war era?

This broader question is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book, considering Voltaire as a source of cultural capital and a site of contestation among different post-war national academic and intellectual cultures, not only in France but across Europe, and to a lesser extent, the United States. Although not best known as a Voltaire specialist in his previous eighteenth-century scholarship, Jacob is well situated to address this larger historical question of Voltaire in the post-war years. From 2002 through 2016, he served as the director of the Institut et Musée Voltaire (IMV) in Geneva, a public museum and archive housed in Voltaire's one-time residence, known as Les Délices. Founded in 1954, the IMV collection includes a portion of Voltaire's books and manuscripts, which Jacob's predecessor Charles Wirz began to catalog in the 90s. Jacob continued this project in the early 2000s, including in particular the archive left by the founder of the IMV and editor of Voltaire's papers, Theodore Besterman.

Besterman and the *fonds Besterman* are at the heart of the book. The archive includes almost all the correspondence that Besterman, a bibliographer and documentarian, retained from the late 1940s when he began work on the Voltaire correspondence until he returned part-time to England in the mid-1960s. Based on this rich archive, Jacob does much to flesh out the rather caricatural identity often ascribed to him, of a wealthy eccentric with a Voltaire fetish. The documented history, in fact, is much more interesting, and here Jacob has the most to say. It is important to emphasize that the book is much more than a house history of the Musée Voltaire, of Besterman, or of his contributions, editorially and organizationally, to post-war academic scholarship on Voltaire and eighteenth-century studies. Indeed, Jacob keeps a decidedly critical distance from Besterman. Besterman's English nationality, his active engagement in international bibliographic and non-governmental organizations in the 1930s and 1940s, the souring of his relations with the city of Geneva in the 1960s, and ultimately his decision to bequest his literary and financial estate to the University of Oxford in the 1970s, are, for Jacob, significant developments in the emergence of a dominant interpretation of Voltaire as anglophilic, liberal, and cosmopolitan. From the outset, Jacob makes clear that one of his

intentions is to put into question this interpretation of Voltaire, which he strongly implies is a by-product of the experience of France during and after the war: "Il semble en effet impossible, apres la Libération, d'envisager Voltaire autrement que de manière globale" (p. 3). Jacob further implies, strongly, that this "*doxa oxonienne*" amounts to a predation of Voltaire as French cultural patrimony: "Le savant britannique n'aurait-il pas plutôt réussi, au nom de la nécessaire 'internationalisation' des études voltairistes, une forme d'OPA, dont on imagine aisément les retombées idéologiques, voire économiques" (p. 5).

While his interpretation of Besterman and international scholarship as asserting an ideologically and economically motivated buy-out of Voltaire is provocative, to say the least, Jacob's contextualization of that history is excellent. After a "Faux départ" (the title of chapter one) in post-war France, he turns in chapter two ("L'Heure de Moscou") to an original, deeply researched and historiographically significant discussion of mid-twentieth-century Soviet scholarship on Voltaire. This account is not archival and is based mostly on printed sources in French, including the newsletter of the Soviet embassy in France, as well as on German and Russian printed sources. As in France, the post-war period in the Soviet Union saw a number of scholarly and public events intended to revise the understanding of Voltaire in the Soviet Union. While the Enlightenment figure most featured in Soviet accounts in the 1930s was the egalitarian Jean Meslier, the post-war years saw an effort to present Voltaire as a hero of the "masses" and an influential figure in Russian history, through his relationship with Catherine II.

This chapter continues with a detailed discussion of post-Stalin era Soviet scholarship on Voltaire. Understanding Soviet scholarship is crucial to the larger story, because Voltaire's personal library at Ferney and many manuscripts had been sold upon his death in 1778 to Catherine II and had remained in the Imperial Library, closed off from scholarly consultation almost entirely until the Bolshevik Revolution, after which they were nationalized. The full extent of these holdings was never properly established, despite the work of a French scholar, Fernand Caussy, in the 1890s and 1900s, and then of two Americans, Norman Torrey and George Havens, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Both Caussy and the team of Havens and Torrey published selected transcriptions and partial inventories of the collection, but even after a significant, but not fully known, portion of the manuscript material was sold off in the early 1930s, a substantial portion remained unstudied, including Voltaire's handwritten marginalia on many of his personal copies of books.

Jacob offers a detailed accounting of the work of several important Soviet scholars on this material between 1944 and 1954, of whom the most significant was Vladimir Lublinksi, to whom Jacob gives due credit. At several points, he implies that the work of Soviet scholars from the 1930s through the 1960s was underappreciated by western scholars due to Cold War competition. He notes that by the end of the 1950s, two competing catalogs of the library were prepared, one by Lublinksi and one by Havens and Torrey, and explains that it was only due to the "diplomatie" of certain anglophone scholars and anti-communist sentiment of the 1950s that the work of the latter remain a reference for anglophone scholars, despite what Jacob sees as the clear superiority of the former. Jacob remains unimpressed by the recent publication of Voltaire's handwritten marginalia by a team of Russian, French, and English scholars, noting that the transcription had been begun by Soviet scholars in the 1930s and the publication had begun in 1979 by an East German academic press. Only in 2019 was this editorial project completed and published in nine volumes of the *Oeuvres complètes de* Voltaire, referred to initially only as the "édition oxoniene" (p. 39).[5]

The most detailed chapter is the third ("Mon ami Voltaire"), devoted to the work of Besterman and the Institut-Musée Voltaire after 1954. This history is well-told, avoiding the tendency in previous accounts to rely on recollections of contemporaries or narratives which cede to the temptation to elide Besterman with Voltaire. Jacob explores parts of this story not previously discussed in published scholarship. In this portion of the book, he draws extensively on some of the available archival source material, notably the rich, but incomplete, portion of Besterman's papers held in the Musée Voltaire. Jacob thus begins with Besterman's initial agreement with the city of Geneva in September 1951 and moves quickly to Besterman's inaugural address at the formal opening of the IMV in October 1954. Yet, as Jacob acknowledges, Besterman had been working on Voltaire materials as early as 1945 and planned already in 1947 to produce a critical edition of the correspondence. While working as head of the Division of Libraries at UNESCO in 1946-1948, Besterman drew upon his extensive pre-war network of bibliographers forged through his involvement in the International Institute for Documentation, and he expanded his network in these years to include leading book dealers, archivists, and librarians. He also sought, in the years before he began negotiating with Geneva, to establish a base of operations in the United States, at the American Philosophical Society and Princeton University. This portion of the history, prior to the IMV, is addressed only very cursorily. Likewise, although Jacob alludes to Besterman's difficulties with the renowned philologist and senior official of the French CNRS, Mario Roques, he does not consult available material pertinent to this relationship prior to 1954, when the French state did provide crucial early funding to the project.

While the study of Voltaire's identity in the Soviet Union and in France are strengths of the book, Jacob's account in chapter four ("Mauvaise Langue") of scholarly study of Voltaire in England and the United States in the 1950s is much more limited. He refers only briefly to the publications by Norman Torrey and George Havens of the materials they consulted in Leningrad in 1927 and 1932, and only in passing to the Anglo-French collector and bibliographer, Seymour de Ricci, and not at all to the London antiquities dealer Maggs Brothers. Maggs and De Ricci played a crucial role in bringing much of the source material for post-war Voltaire scholarship to London and to Paris. For that matter, he also devotes limited attention to the role of Bernard Gagnebin, the Genevan scholar, editor, and librarian, who also played a crucial role in the constitution of the known corpus of Voltaire manuscripts. Finally, Jacob gives only passing mention to French-born André Delattre, who made his entire academic career in the U.S. His transcriptions and reproductions of Voltaire manuscripts from Paris and Geneva in the years 1940-1944 and 1948-1952 produced ten cartons of microfilm, including the De Ricci collection and the portions of the correspondence Gagnebin had cataloged at the BPU. All of this material was donated upon Delattre's death by to the American Philosophical Society, which Jacob notes but does not describe fully. This material was so significant that in 1956, when Ira O. Wade (also mentioned only once) wrote his influential essay *The Search for a New Voltaire* (not cited by Jacob), the APS collection represented the largest single collection of reproductions of Voltaire manuscripts anywhere in the world.[6] These lacuna by Jacob are attributable to choices of emphasis, not ignorance, but they represent missed opportunities to tie this history even more fully into broad global developments of the post-war years.

In his account of Besterman's work in the 1950s, Jacob correctly highlights the significance of language. Besterman sought to produce an edition with commentary and critical apparatus in English, oriented towards the growing demand from research libraries in the post-war United States. This approach raised objections from potential French financial supporters at the CNRS, from scholarly reviewers in France, and in the mainstream press. Jacob notes but takes an

unsympathetic view of Besterman's innovative use of microfilm to obtain reproductions of many letters. Besterman enthusiastically embraced the use of microfilm to gain access to sources from many repositories across Europe and North America. Rather than seeing this as an extension of the early to mid-twentieth-century international documentation movement, Jacob views it as a cutting of corners, criticizing him for not consulting the material documents and thus failing to engage with the more rigorous (and difficult to the point of impractical) methods of codicology. This tension between text as language to be read and text as material artifact ahs had many complex permutations from the 1930s through the 1950s, and it remains a pressing issue in current scholarship. Jacob might have chosen to engage more fully with this question.

Chapters five ("Mauvaise genre") and six ("Voltaire in Love") address two key figures in the 1950s, both of whom had close (if very different) relationships to Besterman and wrote two influential (if very different) books on Voltaire. The first was the French scholar René Pomeau, whose thesis on Voltaire's religious thought in the 1950s represented a major turning point in Voltaire scholarship and made its author the first significant post-war French Voltairist. The second was the English *grande dame* Nancy Mitford, whom Besterman had befriended during his time among the "Bright Young Things" of London in the 1920s, and who wrote *Voltaire in Love*, on his romantic and intellectual relationship with Emilie du Châtelet. Mitford's book represented an important advance in the general culture's appreciation of and interest in Voltaire and a rare, early invocation of the issues of gender and sexuality in the interpretation of Voltaire.[7] As historical scholarship, Jacob's chapter discussion of Pomeau is largely an encomium while his chapter on Mitford is more interesting, drawing on Mitford's correspondence with Besterman (held in the Taylor Institution at Oxford).

In this latter chapter on Mitford, Jacob moves away from the history of academic scholarship into the place of Voltaire in civic and popular culture of the 1950s, which he takes up more generally in chapter seven. This chapter considers primarily interpretations of *Candide*, from the radio play directed by Jean Tardieu in the weeks after the liberation to the light opera by Lillian Hellman and Leonard Bernstein developed over several years in the mid-1950s to the cinematic adaptation into a contemporary comédie de meours directed by Nobert Carbaonnaux (1960). Here his methodology is a bit scatter-shot, drawing primarily on press reviews of these works, and Jacob engages very little with the historiography of 1950s culture. The result is an interesting and original set of vignettes but a missed opportunity to explain the larger social, political and cultural stakes of these adaptations during these turbulent years.

Finally, the book comes to a close with a short chapter ("Le Planetarium") that will be of particular interest to current eighteenth-century scholars. It describes the planning for and some of the communications delivered at the first International Congress of the Enlightenment, organized by Besterman and held in Coppet, Switzerland, in the summer of 1963. Here again, we encounter mostly vignettes about the challenges of ensuring the participation of one or another scholar or a summary of their communications from the published proceedings. One choice nugget Jacob uncovers is a review by the late Daniel Roche of the important, but dry, bibliography of Voltaire scholarship by the American scholar Mary Margaret Barr. Roche, true to his methodological convictions of the moment, calculated the percentage of works on Voltaire published between 1920 and 1960 in anglophone countries (40%) compared with francophone ones (37%) (p 154).

A brief conclusion alludes to the establishment of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and to the departure of Besterman from Geneva. These topics are significant and deserve further study, but they are given only limited treatment here.[8] For Jacob, however, they are significant as endpoints, because the underlying theme of the book has been the internationalization of Voltaire in the post-war world. Jacob's book concludes, as it began, with a subtle but clear implication that the author does not see this internationalization of scholarship or this claim on Voltaire as a cosmopolitan figure as a positive development. For Jacob, Besterman's background, the importance of his internationalism as a former UNESCO official, and his interest in finding support from and an audience for his Voltaire editions in the United States, constitute a "rejet de toute solution française" (p. 164). Ultimately, Jacob's reading is that this history is the story of a failure by the French government and scholarly world to maintain its predominance in the field of Voltaire scholarship. He describes the first International Congress as the "point culminant" of the reception of Voltaire, "avant le lent *descrescendo* ponctué par la parution, pendant un demi siècle, des *Oeuvres completes de Voltaire* dans leur version oxonienne" (p. 165).

Such cultural nationalism does not sit well with the general understanding we have of Voltaire, apostle of toleration and an internationalist humanism. Nor will this conclusion sit well with the readership of *H-France*. But this, one senses, is Jacob's point. The Voltaire we inherited fifty years ago was, as Wade put it, certainly a "new Voltaire," but as Jacob shows us, it was also a contingent and historically determined construct of the postwar moment. And as events from 2015 through today might remind us, the process of construction remains open-ended and ongoing.

NOTES

[1] In the interest of full transparency, the reviewer wishes to disclose that he is a supernumerary Senior Research Fellow of the Voltaire Foundation, which is the beneficiary of the Besterman bequest and presumably the keeper of the *doxa oxonienne* referred to in the book under review. The reviewer has not been involved in the preparation of the *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* or any other of the publications referred to in the book under review.

[2] Marie-Liévine Michalik, "À Paris, le retour de la statue de Voltaire se fait longuement attendre," *Le Figaro* (October 27, 2022). For an intelligent discussion of some of these polemics, which does presume Voltaire to have been a deserving target of Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, as part of an interrogation of explicitly racist statements in Voltaire's correspondence and texts, and his likely financial investment in slave ships, see Gianamar Giovannetti-Singh, "Racial Capitalism in Voltaire's Enlightenment," *History Workshop Journal* 94 (Autumn 2022): 22–41.

[3] Henri Labroue, *Voltaire antijuif* (Paris: Documents contemporains, 1942). On Vichy's removal of statues, which created (rather than responded to) the political significance of these effigies, see Elisabeth Karlsgodt, "Endangered Local Patrimony: Bronze Statues in Paris, Chaméry and Nantes," in her book *Defending National Treasures: French Art and Heritage under Vichy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 145-164.

[4] Raymond Naves, *Voltaire, l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Boivin & Cie, 1942). Naves has been the subject of two recent books: a collection of his writings with commentary by leading current scholars (Renaud Bret-Vitoz, dir., *Raymond Naves. Les débuts de l'esthétique au XVIIIe siècle*

(Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2018.) and a Pierre Petremann's monograph, *Raymond Naves: Un humaniste en résistance* (Villemur-sur-Tarn: Éditions Loubatières, 2020).

[5] Natalia Elaguina et al. eds., *Corpus des notes marginales de Voltaire* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008 - 2019), vols 136 - 145 of Nicholas Cronk et al. eds., *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire.*

[6] Ira O. Wade, *The Search for a New Voltaire* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1958).

[7] Nancy Mitford, *Voltaire in Love* (New York: Harper, 1957).

[8] A more thorough history of ISECS is being undertaken by an international working group under the direction of current Society president Penelope Corfield and vice-president Daniel Fulda.

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ISSN 1553-9172