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Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003. ix + 209 pp. Table and index. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-226-43023-5. \$19.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-226-43024-3.

Review by Raymond Birn, University of Oregon.

For at least two centuries Rousseau has challenged his interpreters to locate elusive patterns of thought encased in a complex, heterogeneous, and often contradictory body of work. Refusing to concede that paradox and contradiction may after all be the essence of the treatises, dialogues, plays, novels, music, autobiography, and correspondence of the Citizen of Geneva, thereby frustrating reasoned analysis, critics from the erstwhile king of Poland in 1751 to the most newly-minted PhD nevertheless have conscientiously mined Rousseau's corpus. And because Rousseau insisted that understanding his life was essential to comprehending his authorship, he has made the issue of interpretation even more difficult. Still, the Rousseau industry continues to thrive, seducing academicians as well as critics of middlebrow and popular culture.

Christopher Kelly has emerged as one of the leading *rousseauistes* of the present generation. In 1987 he published Rousseau's *Exemplary Life: The "Confessions" as Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), and he is a major participant in the English-language translation project of Rousseau's complete works, undertaken by the University Press of New England. The present volume, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth*, is the distillation of at least half a dozen articles that Kelly published in journals between 1987 and 2001. Kelly sets out to examine, in six chapters and a postscript, Rousseauian notions of authorial responsibility and the practice of self-restraint, with respect to the writer's case for and against the arts, his views on heroic, anti-heroic, and literary citizenship, and his position on philosophic good and bad faith. Kelly uses Rousseau's motto, *Vitam Impendere Vero*, as a kind of measure of authorial consistency.

Kelly's program is ambitious, and he refers to a wide range of Rousseau's published writings as evidence. Kelly also seeks to revive the interpretive principle of authorial intent as an alternative to the psychological and linguistic techniques established by Starobinski and Derrida. [1] Bravo! Whatever turn theorists may have slipped Rousseau into, he was a writer with a powerful, albeit elusive, sense of purpose; and Kelly believes that two of the author's compositional practices can help the critic locate it. The first practice is Rousseau's assertion of responsibility for whatever he wrote; the second is his adoption of self-restraint in the face of communal censorship standards. For Kelly, both practices distinguished Rousseau from less responsible Enlightenment authors, particularly Voltaire, who wrote anonymously or pseudonymously and wished to scandalize, in various and imaginative ways, churchmen, censors, and ordinary readers alike.

Kelly validates Rousseau's published positions on authorial responsibility and self-censorship by citing texts from the *Letter to d'Alembert*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Émile*, the *Letter to Christophe de Beaumont*, the *Letters Written From the Mountain*, and other works—including the *Confessions*. More rarely does he use

Rousseau's correspondence, now available in Ralph Leigh's monumental edition. Had he probed the publishing history of the works via the correspondence, however, Kelly might have discovered that Rousseau was a more typical Enlightenment author than he takes him to be. For example, Rousseau's dedicatory essay prefacing the *Discourse on Inequality*, presented to the Petit Conseil of Geneva in 1755, was motivated by local political events and was intended to maneuver the Voltairean aristocrats of the Conseil into endorsing the *Discourse* and its ideas. Five years later, Rousseau's use of the franking privileges of his friend, French book trade Director Lamoignon de Malesherbes, for page proofs of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* shipped from Holland was meant to short-circuit what he knew would be a painful official censorship process. When this tactic failed and, without Rousseau's cooperation, a heavily censored *Julie* appeared in Paris, the author fumed but still accepted 1,000 *livres* in compensation. My point is that in the rough-and-tumble, day-by-day world of ancien regime publishing, Rousseau was less the high-minded theorist of authorial responsibility and self-restraint and more the realistic—even opportunistic—manipulator of the literary system. He consistently took advantage of being a Genevan who resided in France and published in Amsterdam. Furthermore, his chief preoccupation appeared to be more with issues concerning literary property and literary piracy than with those dealing with authorial responsibility and censorship standards.

Chapters three through six of *Rousseau as Author* stray somewhat from the focus of the first third of the book. "The Case against (and for) the Arts" revisits Rousseau's political and natural critiques of the arts, particularly the theater. Subsequently, Kelly finds in the Legislator of the *Social Contract* and *Considerations on the Government of Poland* a figure who creates an environment controlled by "sentiments of sociability"—a euphemism which simply means making the arts compatible with community values, palatable and imitative, in Rousseau's view recovering the ancient Greek links between the arts and political life. To my mind, however, the Legislator is a conjurer, a clumsy remake of the Platonic myth-creator, and Kelly fails (as so many have failed before him) to base the Legislator on any political right. The Legislator's vaguely defined powers of "persuasion" remain an unconvincing tactic for establishing a social entity. In the chapter called "Heroic and Antiheroic Citizens" Kelly observes what he believes to be Rousseau's literary turn away from treatise- and play-writing and towards the novel. For Kelly *La Nouvelle Héloïse* succeeds where the tragic fragment *The Death of Lucretia* fails because Rousseau's provincial readership wished to identify with the passion, sentiment, and "beautiful soul" of Julie. How and why this audience of 1761 was so receptive to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, why the public was so prepared to accept the antiheroes of Clarens and, in fact, just why the novel had so much staying power are questions that Kelly does not deal with fully. To request that he do so may be too much to ask, but at the least a recapitulation of the well-known readership studies of Darnton and Labrosse would refine his analysis. [2]

Chapter five, "Rousseau and Literary Citizenship", is the most suggestive essay in this volume. Kelly cites Rousseau's horror of factionalism and suspicion of government for his decision to live and write abroad, working on theoretical issues of sovereignty while avoiding the hurly-burly of Geneva's public politics. Though not necessarily consistent with Rousseau's motives and action regarding the *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), this decision, called by Kelly an act of "Literary Citizenship", formed the backdrop for the *Letter to d'Alembert* (1758). Written hundreds of miles from Rousseau's birthplace, the *Letter to d'Alembert* is not what it purports to be (practical political advice for Geneva's city fathers) but rather the Literary Citizen's theoretical treatise on the status of Geneva's General Will and observations on maintaining the city's social contract. For Rousseau (and Kelly) the *Letter* had to be written beyond the fray, by a Legislator-like Literary Citizen. Six years later, prior to composing the *Letters Written From the Mountain*, critiquing Genevan politics directly and defending inhabitants' sovereign right to remonstrate, Rousseau performed the ultimate civic duty: he renounced his physical citizenship altogether. In other words, he insisted on writing as an outsider, not as an interested party. Kelly writes: "Rousseauian political activism, then, requires that one remain open to the possibility of complete withdrawal from the community as part of the fulfillment of one's civic duty" (p. 135). Admittedly, this

is a peculiar form of political activism, but it makes sense within the context of Rousseau's convoluted political and social theory.

Chapter six, "Philosophic Good and Bad Faith", concerns Rousseau's conflict with the *philosophes*. According to Kelly, Rousseau envisioned his enemies as sharing with one another the notorious "esoteric doctrine," a private philosophic prejudice they had inherited and developed, and which they slyly imposed upon an unsuspecting public. For Rousseau, then, the *philosophes* were not responsible authors but rather sectarian plotters. Instead of keeping their esoteric doctrine to themselves, they let the venom fall drop by drop. Finally, in a postscript, Kelly tries to reconcile Rousseau's hostility regarding *philosophie* with his public communication with philosophers in his books. It all boils down, it seems, to the uses of *philosophie*. As a didactic tool, in the hands of the Voltaires, Diderots, and d'Alemberts, philosophy is dangerous. As a guide to private introspection and even reverie, it is invaluable. A final Rousseauian paradox, then—philosophers are requested to maintain discreet silence.

Rousseau as Author is a rather difficult book to review. It has the merit of avoiding jargon and of restoring Rousseau's texts to the centrality that they deserve. Professor Kelly avoids using Rousseau as a vehicle for fashionable theorizing, and he is sensitive to the paradoxes and ironies of Rousseau's thought. At the same time, the volume is more suggestive than compelling in its argument, and Professor Kelly never brings to fruition his promising hypotheses concerning Rousseau's authorial transparency and self-restraint. The consequence is a series of essays, somewhat loosely related to one another and impressionistically argued. Fuller use of Rousseau's "artless" texts—his correspondence—might have left the reader with less of a thirst for deeper analysis than presently is the case. Still, as I note above, Rousseau virtually defies tight, rigorously consistent readings. It may well be that, as a representative of the post-Starobinski/Derrida generation of critics, Professor Kelly is restoring authorial intent to his argument; however, it is applied tentatively and experimentally—consistent perhaps with the ultimate literary project of *citoyen* Rousseau.

NOTES

[1] Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[2] Robert Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity" in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 215-256, 279-282; and Claude Labrosse, *Lire au XVIIIe Siècle: La Nouvelle Héloïse et ses Lecteurs* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1985).

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