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Charles Palissot: La Comédie des 'Philosophes' et autres
textes (review)

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female-voicing and its association with ‘natural’ writing. Graffigny’s *Péruienne* shows the attempt by a woman writer to unite the sentimental female narrative with the social critique and the scholarly footnoting that are usually seen as male. Even at this mid-century high point, however, tensions are evident. Zilia retreats into her chateau with its separate spaces of library and mirrored temple. Female writing is seemingly reconfinned with Riccoboni’s *Fanni Butlerd*, which has been taken to show that a woman can only write her own sentimental life. Wolfgang finds on the contrary another fictional model of female artistry. (But does publishing one’s love-letters like Fanni, let alone merely translating a few like Zilia, make one an ‘author?’) Finally Laclos — claiming to show the harsh social reality that the ladies with their tender imagination are spared — gives us three emblematic women. Cécile is the victim of pleasure and Tourvel of passion (thus of their own ‘biology’). Merteuil, who has the unwomanly and therefore monstrous ambition to control the pleasures of her body, is punished by disfigurement, which ‘writes her soul’ upon it. Like much else in these chapters, this is nice criticism (although one might argue that Laclos gives the moral victory to Tourvel and the foolish Valmont, the adherents of love and ‘illusion’). In her Epilogue, Wolfgang cites Mmes de Staël and de Genlis both reflecting that women of the privileged classes had more freedom before 1789 than since, albeit at a price. There is always a price.

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CHARLES PALISSOT: *La Comédie des ‘Philosophes’ et autres textes*. Présentation d’OLIVIER FERRET. Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2002. 320 pp. Pb €25.00

In some respects, French theatre of the eighteenth century has been rather slower to attract the attention of scholars than the novel, and even some of the major figures such as Diderot and Sedaine are only now receiving due critical scrutiny. Among the lesser lights, the name of Charles Palissot has never been entirely forgotten; although he was a prolific author, whose works ran to seven stout octavo volumes in the 1778 Liège edition, he owes his fame (or notoriety) mainly to the unforeseen effect of his satirical comedy *Les Philosophes* (1760). In *Le Neveu de Rameau*, Diderot, outraged at the way he had been portrayed in the work, poured unremitting scorn on Palissot and his circle of backbiting scribblers and hacks; hence, if Palissot’s name means anything today, it is largely because it was immortalized in vitriol by one of the principal victims of his pen. The scandal provoked by the play has led commentators to look at it afresh from time to time, in the hope of rediscovering some unsuspected merit in it, but to little avail. If the style is sometimes elegant, the vindictive bitterness behind the writing overwhelms any other qualities it may possess. Olivier Ferret quite rightly makes no exaggerated claims for the artistic worth of *Les Philosophes*; his aim is, rather, to provide the text of the work with footnotes, variants and emendations where necessary, and to situate it in the polemical context of the wider struggles between the *philosophes* and their enemies. To this end, his edition offers, in addition to the play itself, no fewer than twenty parodies, commentaries, rejoinders and other ephemera

generated by the *affaire*. These writings are not easily found elsewhere, and it is convenient to have them brought together in one volume. However, although the annotations are helpful, the introductory section seems rather skimpy in some respects, and could usefully have been developed further. It is true, for example, that the 1752 *arrêt* did officially suppress the first two volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, but its effect on the enterprise was negligible at that stage. Again, the curious and ambiguous relationship between Voltaire and Palissot needs to be more fully elucidated than it is here; Voltaire was, after all, the only major *philosophe* who was not attacked in the play. Ferret should have pointed out, too, that the name of Rosalie, one of the female characters in the play, was borrowed directly from Diderot's *Le Fils naturel*, which Palissot had more than once gone out of his way to attack. It would have been helpful, finally, to refer the reader to the abbé Iraitih's *Querelles littéraires* (1761), which provides one of the earliest and clearest contemporary accounts of the animosity between the *philosophes* and their enemies. Despite these omissions, Ferret has rendered a valuable service to scholarship, and his work will be welcomed by anyone wishing to explore one of the more notable episodes in the history of French theatre of the Ancien Régime.

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DENIS DIDEROT: *Éléments de physiologie*. Texte établi, présenté et commenté par PAOLO QUINTILI. Paris, Champion, 2004. Hb €85,00.

Diderot's *Éléments de physiologie* is part textbook, part methodological statement and part reflection on the nature of living matter. As a comprehensive work written very late in the *philosophe's* career, it is also something of a swansong, drawing together ideas and information that had been a lifetime in the accumulation. Given this, it is rather surprising that *Éléments de physiologie* has attracted relatively little attention over the years, the only real explorations being those of Jean Mayer in 1964 and 1987. Now, however, Paolo Quintili presents us with a thorough and very scholarly edition of this important and under-appreciated work. At the core of Quintili's interpretation is Diderot's attempt to lay the groundwork for a materialist anthropology stressing the importance of medicine, not only to the maintenance of life, but to the very manner in which humanity regards itself. For Diderot, a view of humankind based upon the idealized constructs of metaphysics is to be supplanted by an altogether more practical assessment of human beings as they are; one concerned with issues of health, of organization and of balance. By way of achieving this goal, *Éléments de physiologie* provides a complete survey not only of all parts of the human body, but also the most up-to-date theories about how these parts work and interact. Diderot's preoccupation here is not so much with the details of anatomy, but with the 'big issues' of life in general, and of human life in particular. The most crucial aspects of the work are therefore those concerning the nature of living matter, the transformation of organic forms over time, generation and the brain. Quintili is alert to the essence of *Éléments de physiologie* in that the bulk of his extensive footnotes are devoted to the sections of the book that deal with these pivotal matters. His annotation adds a great deal to the text, and does a good