

VOLTAIRE. *Candide*. Ed. David A. Ross. Newark, Delaware: Molière & Co., 2007. ISBN: 978-1-58977-038-6. Pp. 205. \$12.95.

PREVOST, ABBE. *Histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*. Ed. E. Joe Johnson. Newark, Delaware: Molière & Co., 2006. ISBN: 1-58977-029-3. Pp. 209. \$12.95.

It is quite a daunting task to review a work by Voltaire, for he is one of France's greatest pens and his witty prose has been the object of praise and studies throughout the centuries. Hence, not only would it be preposterous and certainly pretentious to critique the style that epitomizes the Enlightenment's finesse and wit, it would also be incredibly bold to disapprove of his command of the language, his intrigue, or the breathless rhythm he blows into his prose. From the kick in the rear-end to the enigmatic moral finale "*il faut cultiver notre jardin*," Voltaire invites us into the harsh reality of his century in following *Candide's* wheezing quest for his missing lover and his bygone happiness. *Candide's* readers are swept along for a journey throughout Europe and the New World in pursuit of adventures that undoubtedly expose all of the atrocities and pettiness of eighteenth-century societies. Of course, that blissful pursuit is just the motive that allows Voltaire to portray a world defined by corruption, deceit, ambition, and delusion. The *philosophe's* malicious wit derides, among others, *Candide's* ill-fated companion and former mentor, Pangloss, whose so-called metaphysical and scientific self-delusion sheds light on human absurdities. Through his characters and situations, Voltaire mockingly undermines Leibniz's theory of optimism. He weaves a world of barbaric behavior into a farce in which each atrocity is played down and brushed off with a wit so cunning that the story can go on with blissful cheerfulness.

That said, we are all familiar with the story of Cunégonde's lover. So why was it necessary to edit yet another copy of *Candide* by Voltaire? David A. Ross has created a very reader-friendly edition; the accessible glossary provides pertinent historical and cultural information while explaining the complexities of the text and the author's intentions. This new edition also serves as an introduction to eighteenth-century French culture and politics, as it locates Voltaire in the Age of the Enlightenment and describes his political engagements against religious intolerance and judicial miscarriages. Another feature of the edition is a concise biography about the author complete with a description of his most celebrated works. Here, Ross provides clues as to why Voltaire ventured in the first place to write *Candide*, and he offers an interesting interpretation of the value of the *philosophe's* work today.

The Ross edition is also very useful in a number of technical aspects, such as the complexities of the use and formation of the *passé simple* and *imparfait du subjonctif*, which are likely to puzzle even advanced learners of French. Intended also to enrich foreign language students' knowledge are the endnotes, which explain the eighteenth-century meanings of terms such as "*les humeurs*" or Leibniz's *a priori* reasoning. Here also the translations of complicated expressions are immediately accessible for the reader. The annotations also aid in the understanding of the numerous references that pepper *Candide*; for instance the 1 November 1755 Lisbon earthquake or the difference between the Jansenists and Molinists described in the text. However, the glossary is undoubtedly one of the greatest assets to this edition, with 50 pages of French-English definitions comprised of nearly all the words and expressions that appear in the original text, as well as additional or multiple meanings.

Similar to *Candide's* new edition, the reading of the *Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* by the Abbé Prévost is greatly facilitated by the notes of E. Joe Johnson. The novel begins in Normandy with the encounter of *un homme de qualité* with the chevalier Des Grieux who is following a prisoners' convoy to Le Havre where all the convicts are to be shipped to America. Among these prisoners is the young man's lover, Manon. Two years later in Calais, the *homme de qualité* meets Des Grieux again. The young man has just come back from Louisiana and he begins recounting his entire history. From this point the narration changes and all the events are seen through the eyes of Des Grieux. The plot develops among Parisian society during the time of the Regency (1715–23) and allows the Abbé Prévost to offer a varied depiction of the vices, the swindles, and the hypocrisy of the eighteenth-century Parisian and colonial milieus. This moral corruption will eventually bring about the downfall of the lovers and turn Des Grieux's passion for Manon into misery.

E. Joe Johnson inserts, in this edition, a supplement of ten pages devoted to the author, his work, the story, and the social setting portrayed in his novel. The editor also includes notes on vocabulary and grammar that explain, among other topics, the placement of object pronouns and the use of the *faire causatif* by the author, as well as the irregular simple past employed in the text. A twenty-page long French-English glossary is also available at the end of the book. Additionally the illustrations by Maurice Leloir enhance the comprehension and aesthetic of the novel. E. Joe Johnson includes translations in the margins for the words most likely unknown to even advanced learners of French. Perhaps more importantly, he adds footnotes either explaining particular grammatical and idiomatic uses or explaining cultural references like Saint-Lazare, the correctional prison for young libertines where Des Grieux is imprisoned and which today is the site of the Saint-Lazare train station.

These two new editions therefore serve as complete sources of information for understanding the depths of Voltaire's and Prévost's masterpieces. The experience of reading these canonic eighteenth-century works is greatly enhanced through the availability of Molière & Co.'s new publications. David A. Ross and E. Joe Johnson have produced well-constructed and extremely reader-friendly editions that will surely facilitate students' understanding of Voltaire's and Prévost's writings.