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An Unpatriotic Frenchman

National identity and challenges to Voltaire's *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*

SUMMARY

Although Newtonian science was in the ascendancy in France by the time Voltaire published his *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* in the late 1730s, the powerful Cartesian camp did not give way gracefully.

In the acerbic responses to his exposition of Newton's work, Voltaire was accused by his compatriots of disloyalty to his native France in a series of exchanges that demonstrate clearly the tensions between the philosopher's call for a pan-European community of science and the equation of national identity and scientific supremacy.

A disingenuous Anglophile

The allegorical frontispiece, opposite the title page of the first edition of Voltaire's *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*, invites the reader to identify by association its two male figures as Newton and Voltaire. It is Newton to whom the eye is drawn first. Enthroned on dark clouds at the top left of the composition, high above the earth, his face is bathed in light reflected from a mirror held by an admiring female slightly below him to the right and supported by putti. With divine authority, he dominates the composition, measuring a celestial globe with a pair of compasses. Beneath the two elevated figures is a third, crowned with a laurel wreath. In the light slanting downward from the mirror, sits Voltaire. His head is bent industriously as he writes, surrounded by a jumble of books and scientific instruments. But it is a terrestrial globe, not a celestial globe that is by his side.¹ Such iconic apotheosis of Newton was far from unusual in the eighteenth century.² However, in Voltaire's case, it was no mere commonplace. Nor was it an accident. The choice of image reinforced a reverence for the English scientist that went far beyond a *prise de position*, being grounded in the solid conclusions of scientific enquiry.³ The *Eléments* was a serious exposition of Newtonian physics (and was exemplary in this respect), but like so many polemicists,

Voltaire could not resist promoting his chosen scientific hero by disparaging his predecessors and rivals. Chief among the latter, in France, was Descartes. To a scientific establishment in which Cartesianism was still a powerful and dominant system, Voltaire's promotion of Newtonianism was much more than an expression of scientific opinion. It was a challenge to the cultural and intellectual hegemony of France. It was, in other words, an act of wilful national disloyalty and deeply unpatriotic. By 1738, Voltaire's partiality for England and the English was well known and had already attracted criticism. André-Michel Rousseau reports, for example, that his enthusiasm for the English intellectual and cultural climate had already led to his being dubbed 'le déserteur de notre patrie' even before he started work on Newton.⁴ The intellectual influence of Bolingbroke and his circle on Voltaire, which was significant, had antedated the *Eléments* by well over a decade and during his stay in London Voltaire had already made contacts in Newtonian circles. Samuel Clarke, in particular, impressed him deeply⁵ and, as the *Lettres philosophiques* testify, the honour England accorded to Newton was a mark of recognition that Voltaire found enviable. That said, Voltaire's admiration for England went far beyond Newtonianism, and the four letters devoted to Newton's achievement in the *Lettres philosophiques*, though certainly important, were only a corner of a much larger tapestry. The England that Voltaire had constructed in that work was, in almost all respects, a more liberal, tolerant, advanced society than his benighted homeland. His esteem for Newton was emblematic of those values translated into the domain of the physical sciences and Voltaire had a natural affinity with the English scientist's empirical approach. But in those early days, there was little sign that Voltaire sought to go beyond a layman's understanding

of Newtonian physics even if the letters devoted to Newton in the *Lettres philosophiques*, unambiguously (and rashly) proclaimed the Englishman's superiority over Descartes. In letter xiv, for example, he invites his readers to share the condescension he attributed to his fictional English public, saying that Descartes was a "rêveur" and Newton a "sage".⁶ But these letters do not seriously engage with scientific



Frontispiece to the *Eléments*

debate. Voltaire's cloak of disingenuous anglophilia allowed him to attack his homeland on many other fronts and in the furore that followed, the outrage felt in the Cartesian camp was only one item on the agenda.⁷

A scientific apprenticeship

The *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* were an altogether more ambitious enterprise than the brief cameo of Newtonianism offered in the *Lettres philosophiques*. The project took Voltaire into completely new territory, away from the literary and historical domain where he had made his mark both at home and abroad. Some years after his return from England, he was living in studious seclusion away from Paris at Cirey, the home of his mistress, the marquise du Châtelet, who herself was a gifted and enthusiastic mathematician. Working alongside her, he

turned his attention to a serious and very active study of Newton, reading the available texts, consulting experts, ordering scientific equipment and replicating experiments. By the mid-1730s, the time was ripe to introduce the French to Newtonian physics and Voltaire was always quick to scent a good moment to capture public attention. Although Newtonianism had initially been slow to spread beyond England, recognition of Newton's pre-eminence had been increasing rapidly among the scientific community of Europe by the 1720s. Even in France, for so long the bastion of Cartesianism, it was beginning to make its mark. The seed corn had been provided by Newton himself. A generation earlier, as Rupert Hall has shown, he had taken steps to promote a Newtonian party in Europe, even if he did not exploit his status as Foreign Associate to the French *Académie royale des sciences* to great effect. Taking advantage of the return of peace and the greater mobility across frontiers, he had used his Presidency of the Royal Society to promote his theories within Europe. He had, for example, doubled the number of European *savants* elected as Fellows. Many of them came to visit England in person.⁸ Among them was the French scientist and mathematician Maupertuis, who was duly elected to the Society in 1728. Partly as a result of this opportunity to study Newtonian theories at first-hand, Maupertuis's contribution would be crucial to the destruction of the vortex theory in France, and Voltaire consulted him constantly during the composition of the *Eléments*. By the mid-1730s, acceptance even of gravitation was progressively spreading, so that, as Robert Loqueneux has recently pointed out, the distinction between Newtonian and Cartesian camps in France, at least among the cognoscenti, was becoming increasingly blurred.⁹ It was to Maupertuis that Voltaire had turned, from the

first, to further his knowledge of Newtonianism. The initial correspondence with the author of the *Discours sur les différentes figures des astres* dates from 1732, its year of publication, but at that stage Voltaire's studies were still rudimentary. It was not until a few years later, in 1735, that Voltaire reports a change in the intellectual climate in Paris. He wrote to his friend Cideville: 'Les vers ne sont plus guère à la mode à Paris. Tout le monde commence à faire le géomètre et le physicien.' (Poetry is hardly fashionable at all in Paris at the moment. Everyone is beginning to study geometry and physics)¹⁰. True, Voltaire did not take his compatriots' new interests very seriously. The curiosity of the Parisians, he added, was a superficial fad and would not last very long. Nevertheless, it was a happy conjuncture. For by that time, as we noted earlier, Voltaire's liaison with the marquise du Châtelet was at its happiest and his appetite to understand Newtonian physics was growing. The marquise's influence was crucial, although it is only in recent years, particularly since the appearance of the Barber edition of the *Eléments* in the *Oeuvres complètes*,¹¹ that the full significance of her contribution has been recognised. It is ironic that posterity should have been so slow to appreciate the full

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measure of her scientific ambitions, since Voltaire never tires of telling his correspondents that the talents of his 'immortelle Emilie' in the physical and mathematical sciences easily outstrip his own.¹² The Cirey period, long acknowledged as a key period in Voltaire's intellectual development, also saw the metamorphosis of his mistress from an impoverished aristocrat into an internationally known scientist in her own right. Without her vigorous pursuit of science and her depth of understanding, the scope of Voltaire's exposition of Newtonianism might have been much more restricted. Given the trenchant clarity of Voltaire's prose, it is tempting to assume that the *Eléments* must have been conceived by its author as a simple work of popularisation, capitalising on the apparent public interest. In one sense, of course, this is true: Voltaire did not aspire to move scientific thinking forward, as scientists such as Jacquier would do when they offered commentaries on the *Principia*. But equally, he took grave exception to any suggestion that he was sugaring the Newtonian pill for the common reader or women, as Algarotti had done in his work *Il Neutonianismo per le dame*, which appeared in 1737, the year before the publication of the *Eléments*. Unfortunately the title page of the first edition of Voltaire's text sent out a contrary message. To the author's title, *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*, the publishers, doubtless with an eye on the sales figures, had added 'mis à la portée de tout le monde' (for the common reader). Although Voltaire was partly to blame for the confusion, he was furious, especially as the book sold well, and he lost no time in complaining to his correspondents about the perfidy of the publishing house.¹³ Ledet had brought the edition out in Amsterdam without Voltaire's permission and with a large section of the final text missing.¹⁴ In a letter to his friend Thieriot, Voltaire declared that he would bring out a new corrected version for the French market. It would be "ni pour les dames, ni pour tout le monde" (neither for ladies nor for the common reader)¹⁵. On the contrary, it would be 'un livre à méditer' (a book to ponder on).¹⁶ The *Eléments* was intended, he tells Berger, another correspondent, for 'quiconque aura fait des études passables et qui aura exercé son esprit à réfléchir' (those who have done a reasonable amount of study and acquired the habit of serious thought). Only a charlatan, a 'vendeur d'orviétan', could give the impression that this volume could be read 'entre l'opéra et le souper' (between the opera and supper).¹⁷ It is quite clear that Voltaire wished to distance himself from the vulgarising tradition represented by Algarotti or (in an earlier avatar) Fontenelle. His purpose, as he explains in another letter to Thieriot, is to explicate and clarify, making Newton accessible for the first time to a French-speaking public. He was,

as he put it boastfully: 'le premier en France à débrouiller ces matières et j'ose dire le premier en Europe car Sr Gravesande n'a parlé qu'aux mathématiciens et Pemberton a obscurci souvent Newton' (the first in France to clarify the subject; indeed the first in Europe since Sr Gravesande wrote only for mathematicians and Pemberton often made Newton more obscure).¹⁸

A rearguard action

Immodest though his claims may seem, Voltaire knew that he was putting his reputation at stake by embarking on a serious scientific project. He was celebrated primarily as a poet and a historian, not a mathematician or geometer, and he already had powerful enemies among diehard Cartesians. They would pounce gleefully on any errors in his text and expose the author mercilessly to ridicule. Voltaire was mortified by the Ledet edition which, he tells the mathematician Henri Pitot, 'fourmille de fautes' (is riddled with errors). It has left him, he goes on, 'très affligé. Il y aura sans doute bien des gens qui prendront plaisir à m'imputer des erreurs qui ne sont pas les miennes.' (very pained about it. There will undoubtedly be many people who will relish the chance to attribute other people's errors to me).¹⁹ Voltaire's fears were well founded, but the French edition, which appeared a few months later in August 1738 with a *permission tacite*, was rather surprisingly not substantially different from the Ledet text.²⁰ Criticisms were quick to follow from the Cartesian camp and, their intensity testifies to the defensive hostility of a losing side. Although the *Académie des sciences* was still broadly Cartesian, the vortex theory was 'in a parlous state' by 1738²¹ and it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. However, as had been the case with the four provocative chapters of the *Lettres philosophiques*, it was not so much the substance of Voltaire's text that fuelled the fires as the withering polemic. Once again, Voltaire damns with faint praise and relegates Descartes to a distant past, his star eclipsed by the genius of the English scientist. Descartes, he allows in chapter II, had lifted a corner of the veil of mystery covering the natural world, but it was only a corner. He was consumed with a passion to discover a universal system and this had obscured the importance of experiment and calculation, reducing his theories to imaginings and error. Even if Descartes had been a 'grand génie' in his time, science had advanced, thanks to Newton, as far beyond him as he had from antiquity.²² It is difficult from the perspective of a post-Newtonian episteme to appreciate just how offensive Voltaire's tone must have been to the French establishment, particularly when it was accompanied by a detailed exposition of the physics in which it was grounded. However, some

measure of Voltaire's intemperance can be gauged by a brief comparison between Voltaire's treatment of Descartes and that of his mistress in her *Institutions de physique*, written at roughly the same time as Voltaire was working on the *Eléments*²³. Du Châtelet, though no less certain that Cartesianism had been overtaken, was a great deal more cir-



Houdon's bust of Voltaire

cumspect than her incautious lover. In her account, Descartes had appeared 'comme un Astre qui venoit éclairer l'univers' (like a star that came to light the universe). He had caused a revolution in scientific knowledge and it was arguably to him that human reason owes the greatest debt, since it was he who had guided others to the right path. Blazing the trail was a harder task than following in another's footsteps to a greater truth.²⁴ Du Châtelet, as befitted an aristocrat and a woman, was probably unwilling to jeopardise her position by a less fulsome tribute, but as a scientist, too, her judgment was less partisan.²⁵ It is against this backcloth that one must set the accusations and protests which followed the publication of Voltaire's work. For a while at least, the work sold well, even if the colourful account in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* is somewhat overstated. 'Tout Paris', its reviewer claimed, was reading the text. Price was not a deterrent; copies vanished from the shelves and were hotly disputed, even if, in practice, the public actually read only the first chapter and the headings of the rest.²⁶ The reviewer's cynical assessment of readers' scientific assiduity has the ring of truth and echoes Voltaire's own low opinion of his compatriots' attention-span. However, the first chapter would have been quite enough. Voltaire's roughhousing of Descartes would have been perfectly obvious. Small wonder that some of the reviewers rapped in tones as immoderate as Voltaire's own, even if many others were admiring, fair and constructively critical.²⁷ Among the many brickbats that were thrown, disloyalty to France was an obvious choice and was one of the weightiest. Most formidable among Voltaire's antagonists was the waspish abbé Desfontaines, a

doughty opponent whose hostility to Newton was as pronounced as his hostility to Voltaire. A year before the publication of the *Eléments* (which Desfontaines initially ignored in his influential series *Observations sur les écrits modernes*), he had sounded a nationalistic note in defence of France when he attacked the Lesueur and Jacquier commentary on the *Principia* for *inter alia* fostering misplaced enthusiasm for a foreign *savant*:

"Nous nous passionnons pour un Philosophe étranger, tandis que nous sommes aujourd'hui indifférents pour le nôtre qui a pour lui la primauté, ce qui en fait de génie décide de la supériorité".²⁸ (We are carried away by a foreign thinker, while we are indifferent to our own. Yet he was first in the field and it is this that confirms his superiority.)

Lesueur and Jacquier were writing for a much more specialised and restricted public than Voltaire, so it comes as no surprise that Desfontaines should have reiterated his appeal to patriotism when he finally came to review the latter's more widely read text. Desfontaines claims that there is a divide between Europe and England. Throughout Europe, claimed the *abbé* inaccurately, the general physical principles of the 'Physicien Anglais' were deplored by 'tous les bons Philosophes' (all the good Philosophers). Yet, according to the author of the *Eléments*, Descartes can only be counted great by comparison with the ignorance and weakness of his seventeenth-century contemporaries. Yet it was Descartes who had opened the eyes of the world a century earlier and the only credit that Voltaire will allow the 'Philosophe Français' is to have lifted a tiny corner of the veil of darkness.²⁹

Voltaire's metaphor had clearly touched a nerve, since exactly the same point was raised by the *abbé* Machi, the author of another substantial review of the *Eléments*. Machi elaborated further. Attempting heavy irony, he wrote:

...on doit toujours...savoir gré [à Monsieur de V.] de ses bonnes intentions. C'est sans doute l'amour qu'il a pour sa Patrie qui lui a inspiré le dessein de dévoiler les mystérieux systèmes de M. Newton. Il souffroit peut-être avec peine que les Anglois se vantassent de posséder seuls ce qu'ils croyaient être la vraie Philosophie.³⁰ (We must acknowledge gratefully Monsieur de V[oltaire]'s good intentions. It is doubtless his desire to be patriotic that inspired him to unveil Mr Newton's mysterious system. Perhaps he found painful the notion that only the English could boast an understanding of what they believed to be true natural philosophy).³⁰

Another opponent, Noel Regnault, went further still. In his *Lettre d'un physicien sur la philosophie de Newton, mise à la portée de tout le monde*, he launches a vehement attack on

Voltaire and makes an explicit link between the enthusiasm for the English in the *Eléments* and the anglophilia for which Voltaire had already been criticised in the *Lettres philosophiques*. No-one, he says in his introductory paragraph, will be surprised by Voltaire's marked preference for Newton over Descartes. His partiality for the English was already notorious and indeed so excessive that he had even defended the Quakers and the execution of Charles I. Voltaire constantly seeks parallels between England and France and loses no opportunity to poke malicious fun at the latter. This explains why he has attempted (unsuccessfully in Regnault's account) to turn himself into a natural scientist to argue for the Newtonian system among his compatriots.³¹ Like Desfontaines, Regnault disputes Voltaire's claim that Europe has been won over by Newtonianism and that the Cartesian establishment is fighting a rearguard action.³² He casts doubt (exactly as Voltaire had feared) on the competence of a poet and historian to comprehend the matters he was dealing with and claims that Voltaire's irrational prejudice in favour of England has clouded his judgment.³³

With the wisdom of hindsight, it is easy to dismiss such wild accusations as simply the death throes of Cartesianism. The defenders of the vortices were fighting a battle they could not win and, as a last resort, they demonised the enemy and appealed to national pride to do so. But that is an oversimplification. Voltaire's voice was a powerful one and an exciting smell of sulphur usually lingered around pages that bore his name. If a vogue for Newtonianism was sweeping through the Paris salons after the appearance of the *Eléments*, the expectation of a *succès de scandale* was doubtless a contributory factor. The acerbic thrusts of Voltairean polemic were bound to draw blood. The eager public expected no less.

The response from Tournemine

A much more measured, but no less reproachful, response to the *Eléments* came from the Jesuit Tournemine, whose relations with his former pupil were on the whole cordial. Although Tournemine was a Cartesian, he was well aware that Descartes had been wrong on many counts. He would take issue with Voltaire on many occasions, but relations between them were generally cordial and certainly courteous. But in a letter of 28 August 1738, Tournemine also upbraids Voltaire for his unjust treatment of a great Frenchman. Unlike Regnault, however, he does not criticise Voltaire's competence and compliments him on clarity of exposition and mastery of the complex subject-matter. However, as a 'compatriote', he invites his former pupil to reconsider his judgment of Descartes and reflect on what the latter had achieved. In the name of fairness, Tournemine begs Voltaire to remember the parlous state of natural philosophy before Descartes. Despite

his errors, it was Descartes, not Newton, who opened up the way. The Englishman followed where the Frenchman led. Like Desfontaines and Machi, Tournemine is clearly angered by Voltaire's ungenerous relegation of Descartes to the archives and he reminds his former pupil sharply not to bite the hand that feeds him:

...permittés moi seulement de me plaindre que vous ôtiez à Descartes un puissant défenseur, qu'un François prenne le parti d'un Anglois. N'allégués point votre reconnaissance pour l'Angleterre. Et pour la haute estime qu'elle marque de vos rares talents. La France ne leur rend elle pas justice? n'y lit-on pas vos ouvrages avec la même avidité qu'on les lit en Angleterre? N'y recherche t'on pas le moindre écrit qui vous échappe? (Allow me simply to regret that [by promoting Newton] you are depriving Descartes of a powerful defender and that a Frenchman is espousing the cause of an Englishman. Do not claim that you owe a debt of gratitude to England and to the high regard in which they hold your work. Does France not pay them due tribute? Do the French not read your works as eagerly as the English? Do they not seize on every word you write?)³⁴

Voltaire could not afford to ignore such criticisms. His position vis-à-vis the censors (who had, in any event, withheld approval of the *Eléments* for many months) was never other than precarious. Reactions in court circles, too, were always unpredictable. Relations between England and France, even in a time of peace and despite the determined cosmopolitanism of the *philosophes*, were liable to deteriorate at any time. To be seen yet again as the champion of a rival nation and a detractor of France, with the *Lettres philosophiques* still a recent memory, was potentially dangerous and Voltaire lost no time in rebutting those new charges of antipatriotic sentiments. As Madame du Châtelet said in a letter to Maupertuis, in France the relative merits of Descartes and Newton had become 'une affaire de parti, on ne se croit bon citoyen que quand on croit aux tourbillons (a question of taking sides. You are only a good citizen if you believe in vortices).'³⁵

Voltaire's replies

It is this spirit of misplaced competition that Voltaire attacks in his replies. In a letter to Pitot, for example, he protests at the hostility shown by Desfontaines and the abbé de Molières, saying that such debates should not descend to the level of squabbling between two rival parties: 'Les philosophes ne doivent pas ressembler aux jésuites et aux jansénistes.' (Those concerned with philosophical debate should not behave like the Jansenists and the Jesuits).³⁶ He elaborates on this in an important open letter to Maupertuis a few weeks later, where he complains that the names of Descartes and Newton have become the rallying-call of rival parties, an unseemly state of affairs for those concerned with philosophy. An enlightened century should rise above sectarian-

ism and concentrate on the pursuit of truth:

Il ne s'agit point de combattre pour un Anglais contre un Français, ni pour les lettres de l'alphabet qui composent le nom de Newton, contre les lettres d'alphabet qui composent le nom de Descartes; ces noms ne sont réellement qu'un son. Il n'y a nulle relation entre un homme qui n'est plus et ce qu'on appelle sa gloire. Il n'appartient pas à ce siècle éclairé de suivre tel ou tel philosophe; il n'y a plus de fondateur de secte; l'unique fondateur est une démonstration. (It is not a question of fighting for an Englishman against a Frenchman, or for the letters of the alphabet that make up the name of Newton against the ones that make up the name of Descartes. This enlightened century should not simply follow one philosopher as opposed to another. An individual can no longer found a sect; only a scientific demonstration can do that.)³⁷

The same sustained metaphors of sectarian conflict appear in Voltaire's formal reply to his critics, published by Prault in 1739. The *Réponse à toutes les objections principales qu'on a faites en France contre la Philosophie de Newton* was prompted by a lengthy and excoriating attack on the *Eléments* by Jean Banières, but Voltaire cast his net widely enough to include his other opponents. He highlights the more extravagant and unscientific criticisms that had been made of his work and once again makes a point of rejecting the charge of disloyalty to France. His critics, he complains:

'ont voulu faire à l'auteur un crime d'avoir enseigné des vérités découvertes en Angleterre, ils lui ont reproché l'esprit de parti, à lui qui n'a jamais été d'aucun parti : ils ont prétendu que c'est être mauvais Français que de n'être pas cartésien ([they] sought to treat the author's exposition of truths discovered in England as a crime. They accused him of sectarianism, when he has never belonged to any sect, and they claimed that not to be a Cartesian was to be disloyal to France.)'³⁸

Reworking the same ideas as in his open letter to Maupertuis, albeit in a more extravagantly rhetorical tone, Voltaire again deplores the way in which the names of Descartes and Newton have become a 'mot de ralliement' (rallying cries). People are getting carried away by party loyalties when they should concentrate on the facts. 'Qu'important les noms! Qu'important les lieux où les vérités ont été découvertes ! Il ne s'agit ici que d'expériences et de calculs et non de chefs de parti. (What do names matter? What do the places where truths have been discovered matter? This is about experiment and calculation, not about the party leaders.)'³⁹ Only the truth should count and the truth is universal. It belongs to the world not to a particular nation. It is hard not to sympathise with Voltaire's *cri de coeur*. As readers will have seen from Haydn Mason's article in an earlier issue, Voltaire was genuinely cos-

mopolitan, genuinely concerned to promote enlightenment values across national frontiers. The persona he projects, whether in the *Eléments* and its paratexts or elsewhere, is that of an impartial seeker after universal truth, espousing the cause of reason and science, standing aloof from rearguard and partisan skirmishing. But that persona obscures the impassioned quality of Voltaire's own convictions. Voltaire was no more disinterest-



Roubillac's statue of Newton

ed or detached about Newton than about any other cause he espoused. If Newtonians and Cartesians resembled warring factions, then Voltaire himself joined the fray with alacrity. Elsewhere, possibly with belated prudence, Voltaire admits his own partiality. In a letter to Berger, for instance, he describes himself as the 'apôtre de Newton'⁴⁰ and writing to Thieriot he calls Madame du Châtelet's château 'Cirey-shire' and 'a province of England'.⁴¹ He volunteers to Dortous de Mairan, a few weeks after the *Eléments* appeared, that he has 'trop peu ménagé Descartes et Mallebranche' (not been sufficiently respectful of Descartes and Malebranche) and been too forceful in putting his readers on the track of truth.⁴² More formally, he concedes, rather grudgingly, in the *Réponse* that Descartes was the 'premier genie de son siècle'.⁴³ A few years later, in 1741, when the corrected text of the *Eléments* appeared, the comparisons between Descartes and Newton had been greatly moderated. Was this simply a precautionary gesture? Was it a function of the fact that by then the star of Cartesianism had almost set? Newton scarcely needed an ardent defender by that point. Many years later, when Newtonianism was no longer controversial, fashionable or new, Voltaire described himself as an apostle for Newton, a French martyr to the Newtonian cause.⁴⁴ These religious metaphors are well chosen. Undoubtedly, the appearance of the *Eléments* contributed substantially to the diffusion of Newtonianism in France. But in his anxiety to give Cartesianism its quietus, Voltaire found that, once again, he had gone too far and his loyalty to France was called into question. Was the latter a necessary condition of the former? If so, then Voltaire might indeed describe himself as a martyr. But martyrs have to have a cause for

which they are prepared to die and it is by their belief not their reason that they are sustained. Voltaire's enthusiasm for England and the English was not simply the fervent gratitude of a fêted exile, who finds his homeland temporarily unwelcoming. But nor was it solely a product of intellectual excitement and solid, reasoned values. Intellectual conviction may have been necessary for Voltaire, but it was certainly not sufficient.

In the case of Newton, history was on Voltaire's side. Ten years after the publication of the *Eléments*, there was no case left to prove. But the publication of the *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* and charges of disloyalty to France which followed from it offer an excellent illustration of the impassioned quality of all Voltairean polemic. Voltaire's defence of Newtonianism was grounded in a search for transcendent, universal reason, but it was underpinned by a quasi-religious fervour, a deeply felt commitment to an icon who happened to be an Englishman.

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BIOGRAPHY

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¹ This lavishly illustrated edition was published in Amsterdam by Ledet in March 1738 and the frontispiece was by the well-known engraver Jacob Folkema. Although the edition was incomplete when it was published, Voltaire was almost certainly involved in the production of the engravings. Robert Walters offers a full historical and cultural analysis of these in 'The allegorical engravings in the Ledet-Desbordes edition of the *Elements de la philosophie de Newton*', *Voltaire and his world: studies presented to W.H. Barber*, ed. R.J. Howells et al. (Oxford 1985), p. 27-49.

² 'The apotheosis of Newton in art', *The Annus Mirabilis of Sir Isaac Newton 1666-1966*, ed. Robert Palter (Cambridge, Ma and London 1970), p. 302-321.

³ In a recent collection of articles on the Cirey period during which the *Eléments* appeared a number of contributors have noted the quasi-divine status which Voltaire accorded to Newton. W.H. Barber, in particular, perceptively attributes this to Voltaire. *Cirey dans la vie intellectuelle de Voltaire*, SVEC (2001:11).

⁴ *L'Angleterre et Voltaire*, SVEC 145-147 (1976), iii, p. 583

⁵ W.H. Barber, 'Voltaire and Samuel Clarke', *SVEC* 179 (1979), p.47-61.

⁶ *Lettres philosophiques*, ed. Gustave

Lanson, nouveau tirage revu et complété par André M. Rousseau (Paris: 1964), II, p. 5

⁷ Objections to the text were not confined to Voltaire's compatriots. As André-Michel Rousseau shows,

the English did not greet Voltaire's pen portrait with unalloyed enthusiasm. *L'Angleterre et Voltaire*, iii, p. 651-659.

⁸ A. Rupert-Hall, *Isaac Newton: an adventurer in thought* (Cambridge: 1992), p. 308-309.

⁹ 'La physique expérimentale vers 1740: expériences, systèmes et hypothèses' in *Cirey dans la vie intellectuelle*, p.100.

¹⁰ *Correspondence and related documents*, ed. Th. Besterman, in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire (OC)*, vol.85-135 (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford 1968-1977). (Henceforth, letters will be referred to by number and D.), 16 April 1735. (D863).

¹¹ OC 15 (1992).

¹² *Eléments*, p. 186.

¹³ Voltaire to Berger, 14 May 1738. (D1502). Voltaire had himself used the phrase in a letter to Ledet and had not objected to the words in a pre-publication advertisement that Ledet had placed in the *Gazette d'Amsterdam*, *Eléments*, p. 73.

¹⁴ The complex history of the text is comprehensively traced in Barber's introduction to the *Eléments*, p. 59-140.

¹⁵ As was so often the case, Voltaire had lobbied hard to seek approval, but had met with initial resistance.

¹⁶ 13 May 1738. D1501

¹⁷ D1502.

¹⁸ D1531.

¹⁹ 18 May [1738]. D1504.

²⁰ See *Eléments*, p.77-80. Barber suggests that once the Amsterdam edition appeared, both Voltaire and his French publisher Prault were keen to get the text published in France as soon as possible, since simultaneous publication was no longer possible.

²¹ *Eléments*, p.67

²² *Eléments*, p.256-258.

²³ We know that the *Institutions de physique* was ready in 1738. It was dedicated to her son and is also a work of exposition. After revision, it appeared in 1740, published by Prault, and it is to that edition that we shall refer.

²⁴ *Institutions de physique*, p.5-6. Interestingly, du Châtelet's image is close to the one used by Voltaire's old tutor and correspondent, the Jesuit Tournemine in his response to the *Eléments*, *vide infra* n.34.

²⁵ Du Châtelet reproached Voltaire for his treatment of Descartes in her own response: *Eléments*, p. 85.

²⁶ Published in August 1738 and quoted in the *Eléments*, p. 95.

²⁷ See *Eléments* p. 81-97 for a detailed analysis of the reception of the 1738 editions. Interestingly, the work had virtually no impact in England, possibly because Newtonianism was by then securely embedded.

²⁸ Quoted in Pierre-François Guyot de Desfontaines, *La Voltairomanie*, ed. M. H. Waddicor (Exeter, 1983), p. xxxvii

²⁹ Pierre-François Guyot de Desfontaines, *Observations sur les écrits modernes*, xv (1738), p. 52-53.

³⁰ *Réflexions sur la philosophie de Newton mise à la portée de tout le monde* ((s.l. 1738), p. 316-317.

³¹ *Lettre d'un physicien sur la philosophie de Newton, mise à la portée de tout le monde par monsieur de Voltaire*, p. 1

³² *Ibid*, p. 35-37.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 2-3.

³⁴ D1600. Ironically, the English paid scant attention to this particular text: *Eléments*, p. 95-96.

³⁵ 7 July [1738], D1548.

³⁶ 4 August [1738], D1573.

³⁷ 1 October [1738], D1622.

³⁸ *Eléments*, p. 733.

³⁹ *Eléments*, p. 73-74.

⁴⁰ [20 July 1738], D1562

⁴¹ 14 August 1738, D1588.

Voltaire was writing here in English, as he quite often did in letters to Thieriot.

⁴² 11 September [1738], D1611.

⁴³ *Eléments*, p. 734.

⁴⁴ To H. Walpole, 15 July, 1768. D15140.

Bélisaire

Histoire d'une figure européenne au Siècle des Lumières

Ami, dans quel pays voit-on les innocents / Ne devenir jamais victimes des méchants?
D'Ozicourt, *Bélisaire* (Paris, 1769).

RÉSUMÉ

Le thème de Bélisaire n'est pas une création des Lumières, mais c'est au Siècle de Voltaire que la figure historique et légendaire du général de Justinien prit toute son ampleur: ses représentations firent pour la première fois corps avec ses significations; la légende devint mythe. Européenne depuis toujours, l'histoire de Bélisaire allait illustrer le credo de la foi des philosophes dans l'universalité de leurs principes. L'actualité littéraire et artistique créait ainsi un mythe injustement méconnu.

De Marmontel à David

Au début de l'année 1767, l'académicien Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799) publie chez le libraire Joseph Merlin, rue de la Harpe, à Paris, un ouvrage intitulé *Bélisaire*. Considéré indifféremment comme un petit roman ou comme un long conte moral, le volume fait grand bruit. Dès sa parution, les regards se fixent sur son XV^e chapitre qui pose des difficultés religieuses. Construit en diptyque, le récit relate en seize chapitres les errances de Bélisaire, vieux, aveugle et mendiant, avant de développer une série d'entretiens traitant des grandes questions philosophiques du temps.

Quatorze ans plus tard, le peintre Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) reprend le thème de Bélisaire, et expose au Salon de 1781 une grande toile qui porte le titre: *Bélisaire reconnu par un soldat qui avait servi sous lui, au moment qu'une femme lui fait l'aumône*. Diderot fait l'éloge du *Bélisaire*, félicite l'artiste et s'exclame, en paraphrasant *Bérénice*: «Tous les jours je le vois et crois toujours le voir pour la première fois. Ce jeune homme montre de la grande manière dans la conduite de son ouvrage, il a de l'âme, ses têtes ont de l'expression sans affectation, ses attitudes sont nobles et naturelles, il dessine, il sait jeter une draperie et faire de beaux plis, sa couleur est belle sans être brillante».¹

Au Siècle des Lumières, les aventures de Bélisaire sont si riches qu'il y aurait plusieurs manières de les aborder, par exemple, en privilégiant le dialogue entre le tableau et le texte, ordinairement considéré comme sa source évidente. Mais entre 1767 et 1781, les oeuvres qui sont consacrées à Bélisaire se succèdent, et c'est moins l'originalité que la reprise qui est de mise. Les évolutions du goût, de l'art, de la philosophie, de la morale expliquent les succès de la figure en un temps épris de modèles vertueux. Mais les récritures et les pastiches imposent aussi de repenser l'idée de

création, quand chaque occurrence renvoie à l'actualité littéraire et artistique de son époque, et qu'elle poursuit la destinée d'un thème déjà plus que millénaire.

De fait, le personnage de Bélisaire n'est pas une invention des Lumières. Mais c'est au Siècle de Voltaire que son histoire se structure, et que la figure atteint enfin une efficacité insoupçonnée: le thème devient mythe, par l'énergie de ses nouvelles représentations comme par leur multiplication. Or, pour retrouver la place que tint Bélisaire au XVIII^e siècle, il faut retracer les étapes de sa longue odyssée, une odyssée qui n'a rien à envier à celles des héros de l'Antiquité.

D'Orient en Occident

Personnage historique ayant véritablement existé, Bélisaire fut un grand général byzantin qui vécut à Constantinople au VI^e siècle de notre ère (500-565), sous le règne de Justinien. Procope et Agathias, ses contemporains, ont montré, dans leurs histoires, que c'est à lui que l'empire romain chrétien d'Orient dut alors sa suprématie militaire; la tradition voit en lui l'un des plus grands stratèges de l'histoire et le dernier général de l'Antiquité.

Les nombreuses campagnes de Bélisaire étendirent sa renommée; comme

Alexandre, il parcourut une vaste partie du monde connu, et, les armes à la main, le généralissime mena au combat les imposantes armées impériales. Ses succès sur les Perses et les Huns, sa guerre victorieuse en Afrique et sa reconquête de la péninsule italique contre les Goths frappèrent les esprits en Occident. Bien des siècles plus tard, M^{me} de Staël évoque encore Bélisaire dans *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807), et le représente au moment où il lance sur les Goths les «belles statues» du tombeau d'Adrien qu'il est censé défendre (liv. IV, chap. III). Si Justinien nourrissait en Orient le rêve de reconstruire le grand empire romain universel, et si Bélisaire était l'instrument de cette ambition, son projet engendra en Occident des incompréhensions et des oppositions qui devaient se prolonger longtemps. Les Romains tenaient en effet les Byzantins pour des envahisseurs qui cherchaient à usurper une histoire qui n'était pas la leur, détruisant au passage les vestiges d'une civilisation prestigieuse dont ils se réclamaient injustement. Or, Bélisaire disputait militairement un idéal, il n'était pas le garant nostalgique des ruines du passé.

À côté du personnage historique, dont la biographie est

parfaitement connue depuis le temps où il vécut, une figure légendaire du même nom apparaît bientôt. Dès le VIII^e siècle, une légende grecque se développe à Byzance; elle est consignée pour la première fois dans les *Patria*, et rapporte que, envieux des succès militaires de son général, jaloux de sa fidélité, l'ingrat Justinien aurait fait aveugler Bélisaire dans sa vieillesse, et l'aurait réduit à mendier son pain dans les rues de Constantinople. Plusieurs textes diffusent par la suite cette fable, sans doute imaginaire, qui s'inspire des disgrâces répétées du capitaine, faisant finalement de lui une synecdoque de l'histoire de l'empire byzantin.

La renommée de Bélisaire était si grande que des chroniqueurs latins en tirèrent une seconde légende. Selon Aimoin de Fleury, Bélisaire aurait combattu les Francs; mais au mépris de l'his-



BÉLISAIRE,
David, huile sur toile, 1781
(Lille, musée des Beaux-arts. © RMN)

toire, il le fait périr sous leurs coups, cherchant ainsi à renverser l'image d'un général universellement redouté. Des procédés semblables furent utilisés, en 1939, par Lyon Sprague de Camp, dans *Lest Darkness Fall...*, roman américain de science-fiction, où Bélisaire se trouve vaincu par un nouvel ennemi. Cette fois, l'adversaire vient de l'avenir, montrant que seul l'impossible peut terrasser l'invincible Bélisaire!

La fin malheureuse, mais imaginaire, du personnage, rendait exemplaire une carrière qui n'était encore auparavant qu'exceptionnelle. Forte de cette double dimension historique et légendaire, la figure traversa les frontières et les siècles. De Baronijs à Gibbon, de Pagi à Bosuet, de Montesquieu à lord Mahon, les aventures du général byzantin partagent les histoires: certains s'efforcent de faire coïncider le personnage historique avec la figure légendaire, tandis que d'autres les opposent. Mais la vie de Bélisaire inspire aussi les poètes: dans la *Divine comédie* (XIV^e siècle), Dante évoque celui auquel «la main du Ciel se montra si propice» (Chant VI^e du Paradis), et le Trissin en fait l'un des personnages principaux de *Italia liberata dai Goti* (1547-1548).

De nombreux dramaturges exploitèrent dans toute l'Europe la légende grecque de Bélisaire. Les auteurs ecclésiastiques s'en servirent à des fins d'édification, car ils voyaient dans l'aveuglement du général une punition divine pour avoir déposé le pape Silvere. Entre 1625 et 1734, plusieurs pièces laïques furent écrites pour le théâtre, composant, d'un pays à l'autre, un cycle dramatique homogène. Bélisaire y apparaît comme un innocent calomnié par l'épouse de Justinien, Théodora, qui l'envoie au supplice. L'impératrice adultère renoue avec les drames de Phèdre et de Crispe. La *Comedia famosa El Exemplo Mayor de la Desdicha y Capitán Belisario* (1625), de l'espagnol Mira de Amescua, inspire en France une tragi-comédie de Desfontaines (1641), puis une tragédie à Rotrou (1644), avant d'être reprise à Venise par Carlo Goldoni dans une *tragedia*, en 1734.

Au début du XVIII^e siècle, plusieurs poèmes anglais publiés à Londres établissent des parallèles entre le général byzantin et certains de leurs compatriotes illustres; en 1724, William D. Phillips publie dans la même ville une tragédie de *Belisarius*. La renommée de Bélisaire s'est propagée jusqu'aux lieux qu'il n'avait pourtant jamais foulés.

Un sage au Siècle de Voltaire

Les premières oeuvres publiées au XVIII^e siècle sur le thème de Bélisaire s'inscrivent dans le prolongement de celles écrites au siècle précédent, dont elles reprennent les motifs et les thématiques; mais avec le roman de Marmontel, une nouvelle phase de l'histoire du thème s'affirme, la plus importante de sa longue carrière.

John Renwick dégage tout l'intérêt de l'affaire de *Bélisaire*, qui, à l'occasion de la parution du livre, opposa les tenants de la tradition aux esprits de progrès, conduisant les philosophes, guidés par Voltaire, alors lancé dans sa lutte contre l'infâme, à combattre la Sorbonneⁱⁱ. L'affaire fit du roman de 1767 un véritable best-seller. Toute l'Europe voulut lire un texte condamné à Paris, et défendu par les souverains du Nord. *Bélisaire* fut lu en français jusqu'en Amérique; mais il fut également traduit en anglais et en allemand dès 1767; en italien, en suédois et en russe en 1768, Catherine II traduisant elle-même le chapitre IX. En juillet 1781, Marmontel écrit à Beaumarchais que *Bélisaire* «est traduit dans toutes les langues».ⁱⁱⁱ

Sur la durée, les raisons du succès international du livre ne s'expliquent cependant pas exclusivement par son quinzième cha-

pitre. Le volume possédait d'autres atouts qui en firent un des grands romans du temps. Les conversations qui structurent tout le livre (des rencontres du début aux entretiens qui les suivent) offraient aux lecteurs étrangers un modèle de sociabilité à la française; les vastes exposés de la seconde partie du texte, qui traitent de tous les sujets politiques du temps (chap. VII, sur les devoirs de la noblesse et de la cour; chap. VIII, sur le rôle du roi et du gouvernement, etc.), constituaient un véritable résumé des idées des Encyclopédistes. Étant à la fois représentatif et modéré, l'ouvrage toucha un large lectorat, souvent méfiant à l'égard des doctrines nouvelles ou radicales. C'était le livre tout entier qui intéressait. La démonstration du roman, qui repose sur le spectacle de la vertu précipitée dans le malheur, mais qui s'achève sur la réconciliation du sujet injustement opprimé et de son souverain repentant, correspondait à la sensibilité larmoyante de l'époque, et s'accordait à un retour moral au stoïcisme. L'ouvrage se clôt par ailleurs sur le mariage de la fille de Bélisaire avec le successeur de Justinien; illustrée par Thomas Stothard pour deux éditions londoniennes (1794, 1796), la scène prouve la séduction de son intrigue romanesque.

La multiplication des oeuvres tirées du roman dans les années suivant sa publication témoigne de l'intérêt que son histoire suscita. Pour la plupart, il s'agit d'adaptations dramatiques (*i. e.*, *Bélisaire* d'Ozicourt, et de Moissy, en 1769, celui de Delisle de Sales, en 1781, etc.). Que les pièces aient pour objet d'être représentées en public, en société, ou d'être lues, elles témoignent de la sociabilité du temps, où le théâtre tient une place essentielle. Mais le travestissement burlesque (*Hylaire*, par Marchand, 1767), le roman d'imitation (*Philemon*, par un anonyme, 1778) ont aussi leurs lecteurs. Tout ensemble exercice de style et d'esprit, la réécriture est un plaisir en soi, où des auteurs, souvent oubliés, jouent de la connivence culturelle avec leur public.

Tous les textes reprennent la structure élaborée par Marmontel: les rencontres se transforment en autant de scènes d'accueil de l'illustre inconnu, et lorsque les identités se dévoilent, elles posent la question de la reconnaissance morale au sein d'une composition allégorique, où l'aveugle est clairvoyant.

Marmontel a fait débiter son intrigue là où les pièces du XVII^e siècle s'arrêtaient: au lieu de dépeindre un supplice effrayant, il retrace, et ses suiveurs après lui, la quête d'un sage parti, sur la route de l'exil à la recherche de la vérité. Il exploite les conséquences de son malheur, de manière poétique et idéologique. Bélisaire s'impose dès lors comme un *exemplum* vertueux, en un siècle où les héros sont de grands

Five years of Eurolinguistics 1999-2004

hommes, où l'aura des guerriers s'estompe devant les enseignements de Socrate, d'Oedipe ou d'Homère. Dans un contexte où la charité devient bienfaisance, où le bien s'écarte de la foi, les exemples de ces hommes tournés vers leurs semblables prennent valeur de modèles universels. Utiliser des figures connues de l'Europe toute entière assure la diffusion des idées nouvelles et permet d'exercer, en terrain connu, une réflexion critique sur les autorités du passé.

Entre le *Bélisaire* de 1767 et celui de 1781, il n'y a donc pas seulement quatorze années d'écart, mais une succession d'œuvres qui déclinent en autant de variations un même ouvrage, avec, quelquefois, de sensibles écarts. À côté des textes, tableaux et sculptures se succèdent: par Jolain (1767), par Houdon (1773), par Peyron (1779), etc. Mais que les représentations puisent directement dans les scènes du roman, où qu'elles s'en démarquent, elles conservent toujours la même image de Bélisaire: l'aveugle mendiant balaye l'ombre du guerrier illustre d'autrefois; le *date obolum Belisario* est le signe du don de soi.

Quand David représente Bélisaire mendiant, il donne à son image la valeur d'une icône, capable de signifier tout à la fois la fidélité malheureuse au Prince, même si celle-ci est vaine, ou si le souverain s'en montre indigne, et l'appel à la révolte devant un spectacle scandaleux (mais est-ce celui de Bélisaire malheureux, ou celui de la femme qui, au lieu de le secourir, lui fait l'aumône?). La situation est figée; elle est sans issue, contrairement à la narration qui débouchait sur la réconciliation. L'œuvre invite à une *ca-tharsis*; mais cette purgation des passions ne doit pas être assimilée à un manifeste révolutionnaire: la simplicité de la composition lui confère seulement une plasticité capable de recevoir tous les discours. Ainsi, Bélisaire peut figurer Lally-Tollendal (1702-1766), victime de l'absolutisme, ou Dumouriez (1739-1823), qui soutint la monarchie au lieu de secourir ses compatriotes opprimés. Illustrer les valeurs aristocratiques de l'Ancien Régime, justifier l'ordre nouveau, la représentation peut tout signifier; autant dire qu'elle n'a pas une valeur politique, mais symbolique. Bélisaire incarne des principes, non leurs applications.

Une histoire pour quoi?

L'influence poétique du récit de Marmontel sur le thème de Bélisaire fut décisive; elle ne peut s'expliquer sans la longue tradition qui l'a précédé et qui a laissé des traces dans les mémoires nationales. Après plus de mille ans d'existence, l'emblème reçoit enfin son grand texte de référence: les représentations du personnage sont codifiées, et le récit de son histoire fait corps avec ses significations. L'image du père déchu s'est transfigurée en une allégorie du sacrifice héroïque, devenant un grand mythe des Lumières. Aussi, jusque dans les années 1850, toutes les reprises du thème renvoient au livre de 1767; c'est encore le cas du roman de Robert Graves, *Count Belisarius*, en 1938. Quant au tableau du ba-

Eurolinguistic activities and *The Pushkin Manifesto*

In this summary of five years of Eurolinguistics since the foundation of *Eurolinguistischer Arbeitskreis Mannheim* (ELAMA) in 1999, I will present a number of Eurolinguistic activities such as conferences, publications and research cooperation as well as a few words about the decline of general linguistics as a university subject in Germany.¹ Eurolinguistics is a new branch of European Studies that describes the interaction of European languages within a Europe-wide framework, an aspect of research which has been unnoticed or ignored for the most part by systemic oriented, mainstream linguistics. The reception of the goals and views of Eurolinguistics has been slow despite the fact that a sufficient number of Eurolinguistics conferences have been held and a number of Eurolinguistics publications have appeared since the first Eurolinguistics symposium was held in Glienicke in 1997.²

One could delve long into the social and historiographical reasons for this slow acceptance of a necessary reorientation in European language research. From the very beginning, Eurolinguistics research meant a reconceptualisation of research into multilingualism, language contact and European minorities concerning both languages and individuals. Individual multilingualism and contact linguistics have become crucial points of departure for rejuvenating European language research during the past few

decades. They also are a central interest of Eurolinguistics, as confirmed by Theses 1 and 2 of *The Pushkin Manifesto*.³

Thesis 1: Departing from the insight that man is endowed with a *faculté du langage* that is not of a monolingual but a multilingual nature, Ethnolinguistics places the multilingual individual in the centre of research.

Thesis 2: Linguistic and cul-

pose of which was to create a synopsis of research between the East and the West. It was believed that contact linguistics in the West would profit from such an exchange with East European researchers working on linguistic minorities and ethnic groups in Eastern Europe — in particular with Russian, Polish and Czech linguistics, which were felt to have been neglected in the period after the Second World War and the down-fall of The Prague Linguistic Circle.

the national philologies thereby breaking the monolingual monopoly in language research (cf. *Pushkin Theses 9 and 10*).

To foster a sense of European togetherness and to contribute to the creation of a European identity (cf. *Theses 7 and 8*). To contribute to the most important goal of the European Union: to create PEACE between the peoples and nations of Europe (cf. *Thesis 12*). To make a substantial contribution to a new branch of the humanities: *Europäistik* 'Europeanistics' (cf. *Thesis 13*).

Since language is the most important means of human communication, the study of language contact and conflict is one of the most urgent tasks of linguistics. At stake is a necessary integration of linguistics with other humanistic disciplines into a new overall Europe-oriented subject at European universities and schools, which will take several generations to introduce. The plan of such integration for *Europäistik* is outlined in Fig. 1.

As things now stand, most young people involved with third-level education leave school more or less unprepared for the new, political, economic and social challenge. The European Union appears to them as a bureaucratic machine far away in Brussels, the goals of which seem abstract and empty. This abstractness and emptiness will be even greater in the next few years as the Union is enlarged to 25 member states in May 2004.⁴

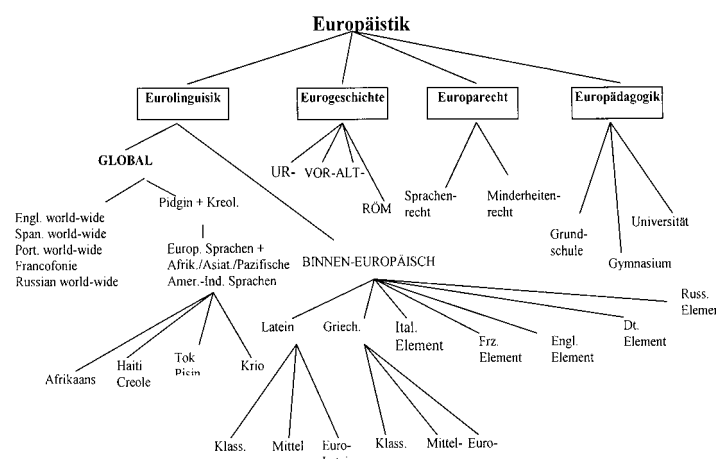


Fig. 1: An interdisciplinary outline of the integration of Eurolinguistics in Europeanistics

tural divergence or convergence which arises through the effects of multilingualism is the focus of Eurolinguistics

The two first Eurolinguistics symposia held in Glienicke (1997) and Pushkin (1999) were concerned primarily with defining the position of Eurolinguistics. They resulted in formulating the 20 theses of *The Pushkin Manifesto*, the pur-

The following five points determined the preconditions for such a cooperation and synopsis:

To create a Eurolinguistics framework acceptable to all researchers concerned for future research and conferences (cf. *Thesis 18*).

To foster a Europe-wide feeling among scholars who may have been educated and trained in

ron François Gérard (1770-1837), présenté au Salon de 1795, il semble suggérer que Bélisaire pauvre, aveugle et mendiant, est encore un géant. Bélisaire, cependant, n'a pas la consistance des guerriers antiques; chevalier chrétien, il ne possède pas la fougue de Digenis Akritas, de Roland ou d'Arthur, et n'a pas leur succès auprès des femmes. Ses exploits personnels s'effacent devant les victoires de ses armées, remportées au nom d'un autre. Sa vertu, souvent mal comprise, est assimilée à de la faiblesse, et le rend incapable d'incarner un modèle éthique immuable. Les textes écrits sur le thème, sans cohérence les uns avec les autres au fil du temps, font du personnage un éternel suiveur, dont l'histoire se calque sur les récits dominants. Pourtant, entre Orient et Occident, Antiquité et Chrétienté, passé et présent, Bélisaire, à la fois grec et romain, demeure une figure de notre culture européenne commune, dont il ne devrait pas être si aisé de faire l'économie. En effet, bien peu de person-

nages sont partagés par tant de pays et se trouvent aussi constamment présents dans la littérature et dans les arts. L'oubli dont Bélisaire souffre aujourd'hui n'est qu'une invitation à retrouver la place réelle qui lui revient. D'ailleurs, si un romancier contemporain, tel

que Frank Gardian, fait encore de Bélisaire le héros d'un de ses livres (2001), c'est bien parce que l'oubli qui le frappe n'est qu'apparent, et que le personnage permet, sans doute mieux que tout autre, d'exprimer bien des paradoxes de notre vieux continent, notamment sa fascination pour un Orient qui l'inquiète. Bélisaire ne fut-il pas *Magister militum per orientem* et comte de Mésopotamie, c'est-à-dire que son autorité s'étendit, en son temps, sur ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui l'Irak? Quant aux techniques militaires qu'il imagina, elles inspiraient encore l'état-major français au cours de la guerre d'Indochine, et son nom planait sur la guerre d'Algérie. Est-ce à dire que l'histoire culturelle de l'Europe se confond avec l'histoire de ses guerres? C'est sans doute vrai, quand il s'agit de suivre d'âge en âge la destinée posthume d'un des plus grands généraux de l'histoire. Mais Bélisaire fut aussi l'un des grands symboles des valeurs universelles des Lumières façonnées par la France de Voltaire. C'est de ce

double visage qu'il conviendrait de se souvenir.

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Docteur ès lettres, chargée de cours à l'Université de Cergy-Pontoise, l'auteur achève sa thèse à la Sorbonne sur l'histoire de Bélisaire dans la littérature française. Elle a publié un article sur «Bélisaire: personnage historique, mythique et allégorique» (Oxford, SVEC 2003: 07, p. 411-428). Elle a aussi redécouvert l'œuvre de Jean-Henri Marchand, avec un ouvrage intitulé Voltairomanie: l'avocat Jean-Henri Marchand face à Voltaire (Presse de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2004, 190 p.).



BÉLISAIRE PORTANT SON GUIDE PIQUÉ PAR UN SERPENT
Gérard (d'après), A. Boucher-Desnoyers, Gravure sur cuivre, 1806. (© Coll. part.)

¹ *Oeuvres, Esthétique-Théâtre*, t. IV, éd. L. Versini, R. Laffont, coll. «Bouquins» (Paris, 1996), p. 998.
² Voir Marmontel, *Voltaire and the Belisarius Affair*, SVEC: 121 (Oxford, 1974).
³ Cité par R. Grandroute, in *Bélisaire*, par Marmontel, STFM, (Paris, 1994), p. XXIV.

Background and partially Europe-wide approaches

It would be an exaggeration to claim that attempts to introduce an overall European perspective of the languages in Europe in interaction are only a very recent occurrence. A series of preliminary studies and sketches describing the ethnic and linguistic structure of Europe had already come to light in some publications and research undertakings decades before the 1997 Glienicke symposium. These deserve mention here (note I am excluding in this list the goals and accomplishments of the Indo-Europeanists during the 19th century whose ambition to include the Near and Middle East eclipsed even that of Eurolinguistics):

The idioethnic studies by Kopitar 1826; Miklosich (1861, 1884), Sandfeld, Trubetzkoy; Jakobson, and Savickij who introduced the ideas of Balkan studies, linguistic unions (*jazykovej sojus*, *Sprachbund*) and *Eurasia* (*Evrázia*) based on Balkan and Russian studies. This was to have a great impact on the overall European orientation in linguistic studies, but with the exception of Balkan studies they did not survive the National Socialist and Communist purges before and after the Second World War (cf. Toman 1995:241-261). This Sprachbund-research was continued later by Décsy 1973 ('Wikinger Bund', 'Peipus Bund', 'Rokytno Bund') and Haarmann (1976a, 1976b). The two most recent — 'Karl-der-Große-Sprachbund' and 'Dschingis-Kahn-Sprachbund' — are extreme examples of this flora of areal linguistic terms. Their semantic contents remain nebulous and badly defined. Worthwhile Sprachbund-research has lately seen a renaissance among Balkan linguistics experts under another term, cf., e.g., Hinrichs (ed.) (1999) ('Südosteuropa-Linguistik').

The publications of Celtologists such as Pokorny, Lewy and Wagner. These approaches include the termini 'The Atlantic Linguistic Union', 'The British Linguistic Union' and 'North European Geography of Sounds' (cf. the summary of Wagner's typological research in, *Geographic Typology of Languages* ed. by Beneš, Fromherz and Gröbli 2002).

The Europe-based dialectology in the sense of ATLAS LINGUARUM EUROPAE (ALE) founded by Weinen and continued by Alinei (1993) and Viereck. Due to a lack of funding, nowadays it is regarded as "a ruin of research" (cf. Wagener 2003) despite the newly founded association "Société Internationale de Dialectologie et Géolinguistique".

The important conference series on European minority languages (mostly West European) and minority studies initiated by Haugen, McClure et al. (eds.) (1981) and continued by Molde and Sharp (eds.) (1984); MacEoin, Ahlqvist, and O'hAodha (eds.) (1987); Born and Dickgieser (1989), a compilation of information on German minorities world-wide; Giordan (1992) or Hinderling

and Eichinger (1996) on European minorities; Gustavsson and Runblom (eds.) (1995); Siguan. This early endeavour coincided with the foundation of *The Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL)* in Dublin in 1982 and *The Contact Bulletin* financed by Ireland and other EU-members and the European Commission.

The large number of publications on language contact and conflict, including: works published by the Brussels Research Centre of Multilingualism (cf. Nelde 1980, 1982-95); Meid and Heller (eds.) (1981); *Niederdeutsch in Skandinavien* ed. by Schöndorf et al. (1987-1993); the *Handbook on Language Contact* by Goebel et al. (eds.) (1996-97); the *Lexikon der romanistischen Linguistik* by Holtus, Metzeltin and Schmidt (eds.) (1989, 1999); the conference publications of the Centro Internazionale sul Plurilinguismo in Udine (e.g. Fusco, Orioles and Parmeggiani (eds.) (2000) and, last but not least, those of (E)LAMA) *Language Contact in Europe* by Ureland (ed.) (1978-2003); Ó Corain and Mac Mathuna (eds.) (1999) on minorities in the British Isles and Huss (ed.) (1999) on Northern Scandinavian minorities etc.⁵

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¹ This chapter is a summary of a paper given in connection with my retirement speech to the Faculty of Philosophy of The University of Mannheim on Nov. 7, 2002, after 26 years of service at The Institute of General Linguistics (cf. the German full-length version published in Hinrichs (ed.), 2004).

² Cf. Reiter (ed.) (1999).

³ First presented to The Pushkin Symposium on Sept. 10-16, 1999, and then at the Convegno Internazionale of the "Centro Internazionale sul Plurilinguismo", Dec. 9-11, Udine (cf. Fusco, Orioles and Parmeggiani (eds.) (2000: 429-430).

⁴ See also the two workshops on "Der Europa Tag 2003" and "Der Europa Tag 2004" organised at the University of Mannheim by ELAMA during "Europäische Woche" celebrating the end of The Second World War on May 8/9, 1945.

⁵ The following list of references includes more references than given in the text of this article for general information on language contact studies and Eurolinguistics.

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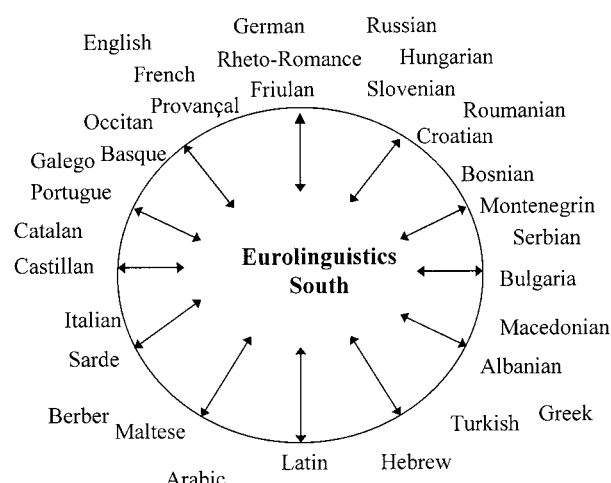


Fig. 2: Logo of Eurolinguistics South

guages: Bern-Berlin. Peter Lang.

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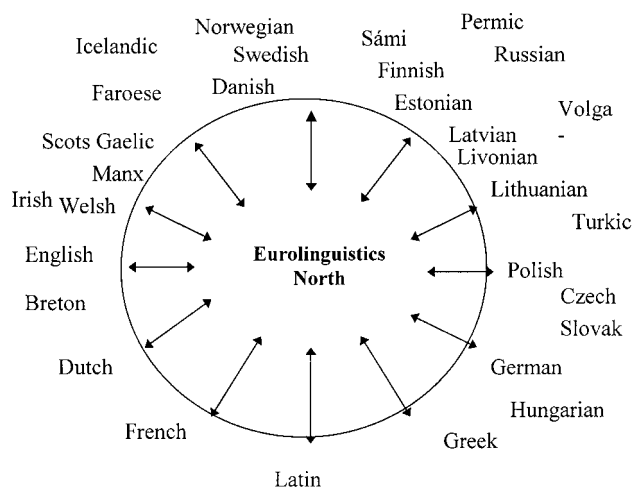


Fig. 3: Logo of Eurolinguistics North

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Europe in Trouble for Lack of Love

SUMMARY

'Europe', in the sense of the European Union, lacks the unifying and dynamising force of a felt patriotism. It is in trouble because the citizens who comprise it do not love it.

When they think of it, all that comes to mind is an intrusive, regulating 'Brussels'. The Europe of history was great in the world because it consisted of a community of nations, each of which was rendered dynamic and creative by a patriotism embedded in its nationalism. The elites who built the European Union discouraged these nationalisms while not taking care to construct a European 'nationalism' in their place.

What we have got used to calling 'Europe', meaning the European Union, is in trouble because, unloved by its citizens, it faces an America, a Japan, and a China, which are bonded and dynamised by love. Put differently, this 'Europe', lacking the unifying and dynamising force of a patriotism, is faced by powerful nations which possess that in good measure. To say this is to place 'Europe', with respect to patriotism, in a global geopolitical context. But even ignoring that context, and viewing this 'Europe' simply as a human collectivity led by ambitious national elites, it is in trouble because the many millions who compose it do not love it.

There is, indeed, a Europe that is loved by many Europeans, but it is Museum-Europe: the Europe inherited from the European nations, collectively, that is visible, audible or otherwise perceptible in its art, architecture, music and literature, its beautiful cities, its diversity of languages and customs, its lovingly tilled countrysides, its remembered great men and women, its variety of

landscapes, house-styles and cuisines. But the love that exists of that inherited Europe does not extend to or connect with the Europe of now: the institutionally and administratively united Europe that has been engineered during the past half-century, in the wake of World War II.

True, this new Europe is appreciated in various degrees and ways. In a gamut ranging from politicians and bureaucrats pursuing their careers to migrant workers, farmers, travellers spending money, and ide-

grateful love, directed towards individual European nations, which made the Europe of history – as it makes America now – leader and mistress of the world. Within each of the leading nations, a collective self-image constructed out of values which purported to define and to distinguish that nation, induced that dynamising love. (In recent years, under Putin's skilful guidance, we can see such construction under way in the Russia that is emerging from the wreck of the Soviet Union.)



THE EUROPEAN UNION

ologues who are pleased by some of its decrees, this new Europe is judged advantageous or useful. But such appreciation by the mind is not attachment by the heart. It falls far short of the patriotic love which evokes, in citizens, disinterested desires to contribute to the collective wellbeing, pre-eminence or power, and willingness to suffer for the common good.

Positive role of the nationalisms

It was such love, a prideful and

Because in that historic Europe the arenas in which this image construction, and consequent patriotism, took place were nation-states, it was called nationalism. It was the European nationalisms, singly, together, and in emulating rivalry, that made Europe, until the middle of the last century, the world's main centre both of creativity and cultural radiation, and of economic, military and economic power.

Inasmuch as the united Europe that has been created in this last half-century sought con-

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cordant unity in place of competing plurality, it was a negation of that historic Europe. It was for Europeans a novel, unaccustomed phenomenon. It was novel, too, inasmuch as, under American urging, it substituted for Europe's home-grown and basically Christian rules of interpersonal behaviour a new collection of post-European rules. It was therefore a case crying out for the classic operation by which a new human collectivity is welded into an emotionally bonded, creative and powerful community. But this work, namely, the construction and diffusion of a value-encrusted image of present-day Europe that would distinguish it, positively, in the eyes of its citizens, from all other world communities, was not done. (In the popular imagination the resulting vacuum was filled by the image 'Brussels', which has induced, much more commonly than any positive sentiment, emotions of hostility and contempt).

The lost opportunity

The time to begin that vital constructive work was when the new Europe comprised six nations of Western Europe. The time to complete it was when it comprised twelve. Then, when the big extensions eastwards took place, and the membership became twenty-

five, it would have been a matter of inviting those new peoples to adhere to a core Europe that knew proudly what it was; a Europe which, having defined its distinctive, bonding values, knew and loved itself accordingly and could communicate that love. Instead, an amalgam of West European national elites who did not love - merely drew advantage from - the collectivity they had hammered together, persuaded an East European set of elites that there was something in it certainly for themselves, and possibly also for their peoples. Small wonder that these new adherents have behaved as they have. Feeling that they have joined something which, apart from the hoped-for material advantages, constitutes no attractive human value and may be a threat, they have taken out insurance with the distant - powerful, value-trumpeting and self-loving - United States of America.

I am not, as people often are when they write articles of this kind, arguing towards a recommendation or advice. I am merely, I hope, throwing some explanatory light on psychological factors which are impeding this new Europe in its bid to become like the old Europe a force in the world. It is better to know how things stand than not to know.

Desmond Fennell
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The *Société d'Etudes des Pratiques et Théories en Traduction*, SEPTET, was founded on 29 April 2005. SEPTET has been officially recognised as a Specialist Society by the SAES, the body federating English Studies within French Universities. Its registered office is at Marc Bloch University in the European city of Strasbourg.

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TRADUCTION ET PHILOSOPHIE DU LANGAGE: Bilan et perspectives

Les pratiques et théories de la traduction révèlent une approche du langage multiple, définie à partir de la compréhension que l'homme prend de lui-même et du monde. Le langage dont se sert le traducteur repose sur une philosophie du langage qui a varié au cours des siècles : objet d'un débat autour de la dialectique au moyen Age, puis pris dans les discussions du nominalisme, de la théorie des signes au XVIIIème siècle, de l'origine des langues dans l'idéalisme allemand, le langage devient parfois à l'époque contemporaine système autonome de dépendances internes pour certains linguistes. Mais l'activité traduisante, en particulier dans le domaine littéraire, pose une problématique essentielle : celle du rapport du langage aux opérations logiques non réductibles à telle structure de langue. Si donc le problème central du langage est celui de la référence à quelque chose d'autre que lui-même, si sa fonction est symbolique, alors la traduction, située au carrefour des sciences humaines et sociales, implique:

- 1. une réflexion sur la solidarité entre théorie du langage, théorie de la littérature et théorie de la philosophie, ainsi qu'une interrogation sur la distinction ontologique entre écriture et traduction et la dichotomie sens/forme en poésie.*
- 2. la prise en compte de l'altérité d'autres traditions culturelles et philosophiques, d'une véritable ouverture interculturelle de la traduction où les catégories occidentales devront se remettre en question à travers un regard vers l'orient en particulier.*

Ces deux problématiques pourront être abordées soit dans une perspective diachronique, soit dans une perspective synchronique à travers divers courants philosophiques: celui de la conception analytique de la philosophie du langage qui poursuit une tâche de clarification du langage(une certaine traductologie descriptive ne participe-t-elle pas du positivisme logique dans sa volonté de systématiser les phénomènes observables?), celui de la philosophie du langage ordinaire avec Ludwig Wittgenstein ou J.L. Austin ou encore celui de la phénoménologie du langage issue de Husserl (le langage est renvoyé à une expérience qui précéderait le langage) et de Merleau-Ponty pour qui les structures linguistiques sont subordonnées au travail de l'expression. On pourra également s'interroger sur les conséquences pour le traduire de l'héritage marxiste où l'on exclut de faire de la signification un objet idéal, une essence habitant la matérialité du signe (qu'en est-il alors des problèmes d'équivalence, de fidélité au texte, etc.?). Le courant herménéutique, quant à lui, en renvoyant à une accentuation du signifié et de l'au-delà du signifié, à l'intention du texte et de l'auteur du texte, n'a-t-il pas tendance à magnifier un modèle idéal de traduction? Le débat pourra évidemment s'éclairer en direction de la sémiotique où les cinq concepts, le signe, le signifié, la métaphore, le symbole et le code (Umberto Eco) seraient revus à travers la pratique du traduire.

Personnalités ayant déjà donné leur accord de principe quant à une participation:

Henri Meschonnic, Lawrence Venuti, Jean-Jacques Lecercle, Jean-René Ladmiral, Françoise Wuilmart, Lance Hewson, Laurence Wong, Andrew Parkin, J. Schmidt-Radefeldt, J. Takachi.

Comité organisateur: Florence Lautel-Ribstein, Camille Fort, Jean-René Ladmiral, Annie Cointre, Marielle Seichepine, Yann Tholoniat.

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