

Françoise Lionnet, ed., *Selected Poetry and Prose of Évariste Parny*, trans. Peter Low and Blake Smith. The Modern Language Association of America, 2018, 336 pp.

The works of Évariste Parny, fourth-generation Creole French writer, have proven influential: Parny's poetry inspired Lamartine, de Musset, Chateaubriand, and Baudelaire; he counted Voltaire, Pushkin, and Sainte-Beuve among his admirers; his work was set to music by Ravel; he was the first non-Metropolitan member of the *Académie Française*. Yet, Parny is a relatively obscure figure today. Françoise Lionnet, who sets out to reinstate him in this edited collection, begins with a comprehensive introduction that contextualizes his life and influence. It situates Parny within the sociopolitical context of the French island colonies where he was born and which served as the inspiration for much of his poetry.

Lionnet has a care for the uninitiated both with regard to subject matter and terminology: French terms, when they are used, are often followed by their English equivalents. The introduction is made up of four sections that provide a historical overview of the island colonies and their role in the French colonial enterprise. Key concepts are explained, for example, the different meanings attributed to "Creole" or "creole" on the French island territories. The introduction details Parny's trajectory across four continents while presenting the reader with extracts and textual analyses of his poems. These illustrate the evolution of his writing from *Poésies érotiques* through *Chansons madécasses* to *Le Voyage de Céline*.

Parny was inspired by libertine love poetry, his own love life, and the excesses around him. Seen through a contemporary lens, he seems to incarnate a series of contradictions: He was a proto human rights figure and condemned the French colonial enterprise, but still owned slaves and even had a "relationship" with one (xvi). He disapproved of clichés about the sexuality of Creole women but displayed some of the sexism that characterized his era. He was granted a privileged entrance into high French society, thanks to his family's aristocratic title, but suffered from some of the clichés attributed to Creoles.

The thoroughness of Lionnet's introduction is reflected by Peter Low and Blake Smith's translations. In a brief note, the translators acknowledge the importance of Parny's background and influences to conveying the spirit of his writing. They explain their intentions, which theories informed their work, the difficulties they faced, and their solutions to these problems. Echoing Lionnet's comments about Parny's penchant for irony, they recognize the difficulties in conveying meaning that is multilayered. The "best" and most "intriguing" of Parny's works, with their translations, make up the bulk of the book (lii).

Each original French text is juxtaposed with its English translation, so that "Les Paradis," for instance, has "Heavens" on the corresponding page. The original French is full of imagery, and it is partly for that reason that the translators' choice to exclude rhyme from the translated poems rarely comes across as a deficiency. Low and Smith choose also to change sentence placement or punctuation for emphasis (116–17). They favor paraphrasing for the sake of readability and for preserving the oral nature and charm of the original. All these

mean that this volume should be of particular interest to students of translation. The side-by-side placement of English and French poems and letters, coupled with the translators' note, offers practical insight into the choices that literary translators must make in order to convey and balance elements like meaning and style.

In addition to those interested in translation, this book will appeal to scholars and students of literature, history, or postcolonialism. It provides insight into the political and social workings of the Indian Ocean world, as well as the relations between this and other parts of the world. The "tropicopolitan" Parny announces postcolonialism, Romanticism, anti-colonialism, and even later gender movements. His biography is intriguing for what it reveals of his extraordinary accomplishments and ambitions, as well as larger historical paradoxes and injustices. Parny's writings are enjoyable in the original and given new life in this volume.

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