



de La Boétie, Étienne. Discourse on Voluntary Servitude

Myron McShane

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de La Boétie, Étienne.

Discourse on Voluntary Servitude. Trans. James B. Atkinson and David Sices. Intro. and annot. James B. Atkinson. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012. Pp. xlix, 46. ISBN 978-1-60384-839-8 (paperback) \$7.95.

With the publication of the present translation of *De la Servitude Volontaire*, Étienne de La Boétie's essay gained a remarkable honour. In the last 30 years, this work of the *sage périgourdin* has been translated more frequently than the *Essais* of his younger friend Michel de Montaigne. It should first be pointed out that recent English translations of the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* are very difficult to come by. David Schaefer's translation is squirreled away at the end of an expensive hardcover collection of essays entitled *Freedom over Servitude* (1998); Malcolm Smith's version, *Slaves by Choice* (1987), was issued by a tiny, now defunct British press; although Harry Kurz's venerable 1942 attempt—endlessly reissued and repackaged—remains in print, it can be found only through small press publishers.

Happily this is not the case with James Atkinson and David Sices's fluid new translation. Hackett, which has admirably supplied undergraduates and non-specialists with easily obtainable translations of foreign classics for a generation, has once again provided a reliable edition. Although La Boétie's tract is included in Atkinson/Sices's new translation of Montaigne's *Essais*, it is helpful that readers have the option of purchasing a standalone edition too.

The translation itself employs idiomatic contemporary English rather than the more stilted language of previous versions. Atkinson/Sices offer "It is certainly something" (2) rather than Smith's antiquated "It is a grievous matter" for the text's "Grand choses certes." The translators also adroitly incorporate scholarly details in their version. For example, they draw out the metaphor of hunting in a key passage critiquing the Pléiade. La Boétie employs the phrase "les erres de nos Poètes," which our translators render skillfully as "our poets' game," (27) thus following Smith's suggestion, in his excellent edition of the *Discours*, that *erre* is a "terme de venerie" (1987, 65, n. 52). The notes and introduction are virtually always current, concise, and accurate, though one should read King Francis II for King Francis I (4, n. 9). The well-chosen bibliography should have included Schachter (2008); and while this work was in press, the very useful work of Bizer (2011) has also appeared.

It is no defect that the introduction to this translation is longer (42 pages) than the text itself (38 pages); prospective readers are urgently in need of contextualization in order to understand this fiery condemnation of tyranny. Atkinson provides a richly annotated biography of La Boétie's short life. Judiciously, he does not just emphasize La Boétie's political writings, but also underlines the importance of his poetry which, though originally included in the *Essais*, is curiously omitted from modern translations of Montaigne. Here, he may have directed readers to the only available English translation of these sonnets (Schaefer, 224–35). In stressing the importance of La Boétie's translations from Greek authors, such as Xenophon and Plutarch, Atkinson supplies a crucial link in understanding the close connection in La Boétie's works between matters of the hearth and those of the state.

Atkinson rightly dismisses Jacques-Auguste de Thou's belief, often passively accepted, that the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* was prompted by the salt-tax revolt of 1548. He is equally skeptical of Montaigne's anodyne suggestion that the *Discourse* was merely a rhetorical exercise. However, it would have been beneficial if Atkinson had more fully drawn out the startling contrast between the impassioned arguments for liberty in the *Discourse* and the same author's later *Memoir Concerning the Edict of January 1562*, where La Boétie, in a striking *volte-face*, claims that liberty can be "the sweetest and most enticing poison in the world" (*la plus douce et la plus friande poison du monde*).

The reception of La Boétie's treatise is a remarkable story in and of itself. Atkinson recounts the reaction of the Florentine exile, Jacopo Corbinelli, who referred to the work as "dangerous" in 1570. He proceeds to list figures, such as Thoreau and Tolstoy, from the long tradition of civil disobedience that the *Discourse* has inspired. However, La Boétie has also had his conservative devotees. Though Atkinson briefly mentions the libertarian economist Murray Rothbard, who wrote an enthusiastic introduction to a later edition of Kurz's translation, he ought also to have discussed the thought-provoking work on the *Discourse* by the conservative scholar David Lewis Schaefer. Atkinson's introduction concludes with an elegant discussion of Philip Glass's opera devoted to Gandhi. But one might also consider how La Boétie's hortatory tract has encouraged more extremist views. When James J. Martin, a notorious Holocaust denier, republished an eighteenth-century anonymous translation of the *Discourse* as *The Will to Bondage* (Ralph Myles, 1974), we

might conclude that the reception of La Boétie's work has not always been sweetness and light.

MYRON MCSHANE

New York University

Deutscher, Thomas B.

Punishment and Penance: Two Phases in the History of the Bishop's Tribunal of Novara.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. xiii, 215. ISBN 978-1-4426-4442-7 (hardcover) \$60.

This interesting volume analyzes the documentation related to the diocese of Novara in two distinct time periods: after the Council of Trent (1563–1615) and in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Novara is annexed to the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia.

Geographically speaking, the diocese of Novara was the northernmost part of the duchy of Milan, which from the 1530s was under Spanish control, as were many Italian states. The extreme western border of the diocese was Switzerland and the local diocese of Sion. This border, frequently crossed for trading, was considered a soft spot and possible way of entry for Protestant doctrines. Because of this, especially during the Counter-Reformation era, bishops and administrators of the Novara diocese made a particular effort to keep under control the roads connecting with Switzerland. Among the many bishops of Novara, the most active was Carlo Bascapè who, like his predecessors, followed instructions given by Carlo Borromeo. Bascapè, in order to better manage the territory and the farthest parishes, reorganized the diocese into vicariates, and the vicariates into four distinct administrative regions.

The technical and practical aspects of the reorganization of the diocese should have offered the possibility to control and prosecute a series of sins that implicated both ecclesiastical and lay people. These included heresy, illicit magic, blasphemy, witchcraft, and bigamy as well as usury and physical violence. The ecclesiastical court should have prosecuted and judged on every matter that involved the life of parishioners, using the "tool" of moral control and the administration of sacraments (or its estrangement) to achieve discipline. But