

REVUE

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Échos du théâtre voltairien



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R E V U E

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qu'elle s'honore d'avoir compté parmi ses collaborateurs.*

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

En marge du tome 6
du *Corpus des notes marginales*

VOLTAIRE'S MARGINALIA :
WHO IS THE INTENDED READERSHIP¹ ?

Nicholas Cronk

Voltaire Foundation, Université d'Oxford

« L'on est en droit de s'étonner que personne encore jusqu'à présent n'ait songé à recueillir ces annotations [...]. Il y a là un Voltaire inconnu à découvrir et à mettre au jour [...] »² : so wrote J.-Édouard Gardet in 1860, describing his pioneering visit to the Hermitage library, and announcing the importance of the annotations in Voltaire's books. He himself published the marginalia on two key works of Rousseau, but otherwise, with only one exception, what was known of Voltaire's marginalia in the nineteenth century did not come from the library in St Petersburg ; and we have had to wait until the late twentieth century for the project dreamed of by J.-Édouard Gardet to be realised. The publication of the marginalia in Voltaire's library in St Petersburg was prepared by a team of Russian scholars under the leadership of Larissa Albina, and began to be published in what was then the German Democratic Republic. Volume 1 appeared in 1979, but the series sadly came to a halt in 1994, with Volume 5 (and the letter M). The National Library of Russia in St Petersburg and the Voltaire Foundation in Oxford are now working in collaboration to complete the project, and they have agreed that the *Corpus des notes marginales* will henceforth be incorporated into the Oxford *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*. Volume 6 (containing the annotations on authors from Nadal to Plato) appeared in June 2006 as Volume 141 of the *Complete works* ; the remaining three volumes will appear at two-yearly intervals, and at the same time the Voltaire Foundation will reprint Volumes 1 to 5, currently out of print. In the same way that Coleridge's marginalia occupies six volumes in the

¹ This paper was read at the ASECS conference held in Montreal 30 March-2 April 2006, as part of the panel « Recent research on Voltaire » organised and chaired by Pat Lee.

² J.-Édouard Gardet, « Une visite à l'Ermitage (le discours sur l'*Inégalité des conditions* et le *Contrat social*, annotés par Voltaire) », *Bulletin du bibliophile et du bibliothécaire*, 14th series, 1860, p. 1519-1543 (p. 1524).

great Princeton edition of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*³, so it is appropriate that Voltaire's marginalia, more extensive even than Coleridge's, should be available and edited as an integral and integrated part of Voltaire's *Complete works*.

THE STUDY OF MARGINALIA AS A LITERARY GENRE

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The inclusion of the marginalia in the *Complete works of Voltaire* is timely. It is obviously good news for editors of Voltaire, for whom the *Corpus des notes marginales* has become an essential tool for investigating Voltaire's use of sources. And beyond that, the marginalia represent in their own right a fascinating aspect of Voltaire's writing⁴. The earliest scholars to have studied Voltaire from this angle were necessarily based in Leningrad (as it then was), and less attention was paid to the subject outside Russia, until the conference held in 2002 at the Sorbonne⁵. This renewed scholarly interest in the phenomenon of Voltaire's marginalia comes at a time when the genre of marginalia in general is attracting increasing scholarly attention. In the English-speaking world, H. J. Jackson's *Marginalia : Readers Writing in Books*, published in 2001⁶, has done for the subject what Anthony Grafton's *The Footnote : A Curious History* did for the footnote a few years before⁷. The subject of marginalia has suddenly moved to the forefront of literary research, a development stimulated in English studies by R. C. Alston's superb catalogue, published in 1994, of books with marginalia held in the British Library⁸.

Scholars working in different periods are discovering the potential interest of marginalia. William H. Sherman, for example, is at present completing a study to be entitled *Used Books : Reading Renaissance Marginalia*⁹ ; but it is perhaps in the area of English Romanticism that the impact of this current interest in marginalia is most noticeable. A study of Keats's copy of *Paradise Lost*, with its nineteen marginal notes and numerous underlinings, seemingly affords us

3 Volume 12, *Marginalia*, in 6 parts (Princeton University Press, 1980-2001), ed. H. J. Jackson and G. Whalley. H. J. Jackson has also edited a one-volume anthology of Coleridge's marginalia, serving as an introduction to the great Coleridgean themes : Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *A Book I Value : selected marginalia* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

4 See Christiane Mervaud, « Du bon usage des *marginalia* », *Revue Voltaire*, 3 (2003), p. 101-127.

5 The proceedings are published in the *Revue Voltaire*, 3 (2003).

6 New Haven, Yale University Press.

7 Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1997.

8 *Books with Manuscript : a short title catalogue of books with manuscript notes in the British Library*, London, British Library, 1994.

9 Cited in Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (eds.), *Owners, Annotators and the Signs of Reading*, London, British Library, 2005, p. xii.

direct access to his response to Milton¹⁰. One can similarly study in detail Keats's responses to his contemporaries, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley, using the marginalia to establish which works Keats read and when, so as to build up a picture of the various influences at play¹¹. In these examples, the study of marginalia tells us something about the intellectual formation and the reactions of a great writer ; but from the perspective of reader-response, it can be just as interesting to study the marginal jottings of unknown readers. H. J. Jackson's most recent work, *Romantic Readers : the evidence of marginalia* (2005)¹², does just that : it studies a corpus of some 600 English books annotated by unknown (and unknowable) readers in the period 1790-1830, in an attempt to understand how readers responded to contemporary writing.

An assumption in all these studies is of course that marginal notes reflect the immediate and intimate response of the reader (whether he/she is famous or unknown). « How can we recapture the mental processes by which readers appropriated texts ? » writes Robert Darnton. « How can we avoid anachronism, the fatal sin of most historical research ? One of the best strategies lies through marginalia¹³ ». Thus the great attraction of marginalia, according to this view, is that they accord us immediate access to the « mental processes » of the reader. But do they ? And what of the particular case of Voltaire, where, as Christiane Mervaud rightly warns us, « Voltaire n'est pas plus vrai en robe de chambre qu'en tenue de cérémonie¹⁴ ».

To put the question another way, who is the intended reader of Voltaire's marginalia ? Are we entitled to assume, in the case of Voltaire, that, as with the English Romantic poets cited above, the marginalia are composed purely for the writer's own private consumption ? Take the case of Blin de Sainmore's *Lettre de Jean Calas à sa femme*, of 1767 (BV 190). The author tells a far-fetched and sentimental tale of how Voltaire reduced his audience at Les Délices to tears with an account of the events of the Calas affair, and then produced Calas's son from a neighbouring room, to the amazement of one and all. Voltaire's remark in the margin – his only comment on the entire text – is unambiguous : « Il ny a pas là un mot de vrai¹⁵ ». Would Voltaire have felt it necessary to write this for

10 See Beth Lau, *Keats's Paradise Lost*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1998.

11 See Beth Lau, *Keats's Reading of the Romantic Poets*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991.

12 New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005. See also H. J. Jackson, « "Marginal frivolities" : readers' notes as evidence for the history of reading », in *Owners, Annotators and the Signs of Reading*, p. 137-151.

13 Robert Darnton, « Seven bad reasons not to study manuscripts », *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 4/4 (1993-1994), p. 37-42 (p. 40).

14 Ch. Mervaud, « Du bon usage des *marginalia* », p. 109.

15 *CN*, t. 1, p. 368.

himself? Or is it perhaps written for the benefit of contemporaries, to whom he might wish to show the volume? Or is it even possible that he wrote it with an eye on posterity and his posthumous biographers?

KNOWLEDGE OF VOLTAIRE'S MARGINALIA IN HIS LIFETIME

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As a first step to looking more closely at the intended readership of Voltaire's marginalia, we might consider how well known was the existence of the annotation in his lifetime. We know of one remarkable case where Voltaire deliberately manufactured annotated copies as part of a campaign against La Beaumelle. The Bibliothèque nationale de France possesses an annotated copy of a work of 1768, *Examen de la Nouvelle Histoire de Henri IV par M. de Bury*, which Voltaire believed to be by La Beaumelle¹⁶. The volume contains a note signed by Barbier which explains the presence of annotation in the volume: « Les notes qui se trouvent dans ce volume sont de Voltaire, l'écriture est celle de son secrétaire [Wagnière]. Voltaire envoya à Paris plusieurs exemplaires chargés de ces notes, dans la vue de nuire à la Beaumelle. Il parvint seulement à faire mettre au Pilon 600 exemplaires de cette brochure. Quelques exemplaires ont été vendus 76 f.¹⁷ ». The gist of this note is confirmed by a letter which Voltaire wrote to Hénault on 28 September 1768: « J'avais déjà prévenu plusieurs de mes amis qui m'ont pressé de leur faire parvenir cet examen de l'histoire de Henri 4 duquel il y a déjà trois éditions. Je l'ai envoyé chargé de mes notes dans lesquelles j'ai fait voir qu'il y a presque autant d'erreurs dans l'examen que dans le livre examiné » (D 15228)¹⁸. This example is fascinating for several reasons. First, the question of transmission: Voltaire uses the annotated book as a form of clandestine manuscript, indeed as an offensive weapon; and a manuscript note inside the BnF copy suggests that Voltaire sent this book in the first instance to Damilaville, whose role as a disseminator of the Voltairian message is well known¹⁹. In this case, Voltaire successfully destroyed a book

16 Bengesco, t. 2, p. 432; see also t. 2, p. 163-164. The authorship of the *Examen*, which attacked Hénault, was always claimed by La Beaumelle's friend, the marquis de Bélestat, and it seems as if La Beaumelle, then in poor health, was at most a collaborator in the work; see Claude Lauriol, *La Beaumelle: un protestant cévenol entre Montesquieu et Voltaire*, Geneva, Droz, 1978, p. 545, n. 40. Writing to Hénault in September and October 1768, Voltaire is unsure about the attribution of the work to Bélestat, and suspicious of La Beaumelle's involvement (D 15228, D 15278).

17 BnF, Rés 8-LB35-27, facing the title-page; quoted in Jeroom Vercruysse, « Notes inédites de Voltaire », *Studi francesi*, 7 (1963), p. 258-264 (p. 259).

18 Voltaire followed up this attack on the *Examen* with an open letter to Marin published in the *Mercur de France* in July 1769 (D 15733).

19 See Ch. Mervaud, « La logistique du combat contre l'infâme: la correspondance de Voltaire et de "frère Damilaville" », *Raison présente*, 112 (1994), p. 3-25.

and its reputation by means of annotated editions strategically distributed. Secondly, these notes are possibly unique in that from being manuscript marginalia they evolve, with certain changes, into printed text : some of the notes were published in Volume 2 of the *Évangile du jour*²⁰, and reprinted again the same year as a separate brochure : *Examen de la Nouvelle Histoire de Henri IV... avec des notes*²¹. Voltaire's fondness for the printed note is well known²² ; what is interesting about the present case is that it demonstrates the generic link between the marginal and the printed note : they appear to share, to some extent at least, a common strategic purpose.

Leaving this special example to one side, it would seem that at least some of Voltaire's contemporaries were acquainted with examples of his marginalia. The « Visit to Voltaire » acquired of course canonical status, often as part of an English traveller's Grand Tour, and we have some evidence that Voltaire showed off his annotated books to visitors. Paul-Claude Moultou described his impression of Voltaire's library in a letter to Jakob Heinrich Meister of December 1774 : « J'ai visité & compté sa bibliothèque : elle est de 6210 volumes. Il y en a beaucoup de médiocres, surtout en fait d'histoire. Il n'y a pas 30 volumes de romans : mais presque tous ces livres sont précieux par les notes dont M. de Voltaire les a chargés » (D 19217). Another visitor in the summer of 1777, J. de Vrintz, recalled : « Il me conduisit dans sa bibliothèque ; j'y vis toute l'enfilade des pères de l'Église, chargés de notes et commentaires²³ ». From showing the annotated volumes, it was but a step to offering them as gifts. We know that Voltaire made a gift to Wagnière of the (unique) copy of his annotations on Chastellux's *De la félicité publique*. This was a special case, to which we shall return ; but he may well have given or sent other volumes. The comte d'Antraigues visited Voltaire in 1776, accompanied by the « princess » Potoska : « L'après dîner la princesse qui se proposait de revenir avec moi à Lausanne choisit un volume dans la bibliothèque et le demanda à Voltaire. Il était chargé de notes de sa main. Voltaire lui l'offrit en lui disant, "Princesse choisissés ici ce qui peut vous plaire, je vous le donne"²⁴ ». We can only guess how many other volumes Voltaire may have given away in this manner.

20 *L'Évangile du jour*, t. 2, Londres, 1769, p. 1-76.

21 These notes, in their printed version, are not included in the Moland edition, an oversight deplored by Bengesco (t. 2, p. 164, 432). On the changes incurred in the evolution of marginal to printed note, see Ch. Mervaud, « Du bon usage des *marginalia* », p. 123-124.

22 See *Les Notes de Voltaire : une écriture polyphonique*, ed. N. Cronk and Ch. Mervaud, SVEC 2003:03.

23 Quoted by F. Bessire, « Un après-midi chez Voltaire : récit inédit d'une visite à Ferney », *Cahiers Voltaire*, 1 (2002), p. 109-113 (p. 113).

24 Colin Duckworth, « Voltaire at Ferney : an unpublished description », *SVEC*, 174 (1978), p. 61-67 (p. 66).

Knowledge of the existence of the marginalia became an issue at the time of the sale of Voltaire's library, immediately after his death. M^{me} Denis decided to sell Voltaire's library to Catherine II in early August 1778²⁵. Grimm then found himself in the delicate position of handling the negotiation between the two women over the sale, and he wrote to Wagnière on 11 August to ask about Voltaire's library; as he explained to François Tronchin : « Je lui demandais quelques éclaircissemens qui me sont absolument nécessaires, comme sur le nombre des volumes, item, s'il est vrai que M. de Voltaire a fait des notes marginales à la plupart de ses livres, car une circonstance comme celle là influerait considérablement sur le prix²⁶ ». Interestingly, Grimm has heard rumour of the existence of annotation in Voltaire's books, and seeks confirmation from those better placed to know. In due course Wagnière replied : « Il est très vrai que dans plusieurs volumes il y a des notes marginales et des signets de la main de M. de Voltaire et de la mienne par ses ordres, sous sa dictée, tres curieuses, mais il faut feuilleter les volumes²⁷ ». Meanwhile, Tronchin wrote back to Grimm : « Par ce qui ma été rapporté ou peut m'être connu, je doute que les notes marginales dont quelques-uns des livres se trouveront chargés soyent des objets de curiosité bien interessans. Le livre *De la félicité*, le vol. de l'histoire de Veli, sont je crois les plus apostillés²⁸ ». Wagnière, as Voltaire's right hand for the previous twenty-four years, is of course best placed to know – and some of the marginalia are indeed in his hand, Voltaire dictating his marginalia in the same way that he dictated his other works. But Grimm knows only of vague rumours that the books might contain marginalia, and François Tronchin, though a friend and presumably a frequent visitor at Ferney, is not especially well informed either; he interestingly singles out just two works which he knows to contain extensive marginalia – we can only assume that Voltaire must have shown them to him : Paul-François Velly's *Histoire de France* (BV 3409), and Chastellux's *De la félicité publique*.

25 M^{me} Denis wrote from Paris to Wagnière in Ferney : « J'ai une grande nouvelle à vous apprendre. L'impératrice de Russie me demande la Bibliothèque de mon oncle, elle a voulu que j'y mis le prix, je l'ai refusé, elle me promet si je lui donne cette Bibliothèque de faire un petit temple où elle la logera et au milieu de ce temple un beau mozolé à M. de Voltaire, j'ai été si flatté de cette offre que je l'ai accepté, je lui ai donné ma parole avant-hier par M. Grime, ainsi la Bibliothèque ne m'appartient plus » (11 August 1778, in *Jean-Louis Wagnière ou les deux morts de Voltaire : correspondance inédite*, éd. Christophe Paillard, Saint Malo, Éditions Cristel, 2005, p. 164).

26 Grimm à Tronchin, 15 September 1778 (*Jean-Louis Wagnière ou les deux morts de Voltaire*, p. 208).

27 Copy of letter from Wagnière to Grimm, quoted by Sergei Karp, *Quand Catherine II achetait la bibliothèque de Voltaire*, Ferney-Voltaire, 1999, p. 28.

28 Tronchin à Grimm, 27 September 1778 (*Jean-Louis Wagnière ou les deux morts de Voltaire*, p. 219).

This last example is particularly interesting²⁹ ; it evidently enjoyed a special status for Voltaire, whose annotations in this instance were a genuine expression of his admiration for the work. He wrote to the author in December 1772, informing him of his marginal homage : « Je chargeai de notes mon exemplaire ; et c'est ce que je ne fais que quand le livre me charme et m'instruit » (D 18067) ; and it seems that Voltaire offered the annotated copy to Wagnière, who at a later stage must have sold it. In the 1820s, it was acquired by Count G. V. Orlov, and is now in the Historical Museum in Moscow. It was this volume which formed the basis for the publication in 1822 by A.-A. Renouard and Alfred de Chastellux, the first full set of Voltaire's marginalia to be published. Wagnière, perhaps at the time of the sale of the library, copied the notes from the edition given him into another identical edition, and the volume containing the notes copied in Wagnière's hand remains in the St Petersburg collection, a striking example of how the manuscript marginalia had even by that time acquired a certain status within Voltaire's *œuvre*³⁰. There has survived another edition of the same book containing just one marginal note by Voltaire – and in this case we really can suppose he is writing for himself rather than for an audience³¹.

There were in the nineteenth century a small number of publications of Voltaire's marginalia (see the Appendix) ; but with two important exceptions – those of Voltaire's annotations on Nieuwentijt, published by Beuchot in 1834, and on Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* and *Du contrat social*, published by Gardet in 1860 – these were not derived from books in the library in St Petersburg. Indeed, one of the particularities of the library, and the challenge of studying its marginalia, is what one might term the problem of the diaspora : what is the status of the annotated volumes that exist outside the Voltaire library now housed in the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg, and what is their relationship to that collection ? The correspondance of Wagnière and others from the years 1778 and 1779, recently edited by Christophe Paillard³², gives evidence of the extreme care taken to ensure the integrity of the library after Voltaire's death and before it was shipped to Russia³³.

29 Bengesco, t. 2, p. 432-433. See Roland Mortier, « Voltaire lecteur de Chastellux », in *Le Siècle de Voltaire : hommage à René Pomeau*, ed. Ch. Mervaud and S. Menant, 2 vols, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1987, t. 2, p. 663-673.

30 *CN*, t. 2, p. 518-602 ; and p. 871, n. 344.

31 *CN*, t. 2, p. 602-603.

32 *Jean-Louis Wagnière ou les deux morts de Voltaire*.

33 The volumes which Voltaire had sent to Paris from Ferney in the last weeks of his life were for the most part returned : see Christiane Mervaud and Catriona Seth, « Notes marginales inédites sur *Le Vrai Sens du Système de la nature* », *Revue Voltaire*, 4 (2004), p. 299-340 (p. 306, n. 18).

Even so, one can understand that some individual volumes may have escaped Wagnière's vigilance, books which Voltaire perhaps left behind on his travels (though it has to be said that he travelled little from Ferney in his later years) or which were simply removed from the library, with or without the knowledge of Voltaire or of his secretary. Voltaire's contemporaries would certainly have been aware of the potential value of such volumes. We know of a small number of annotated volumes in circulation in France in the early nineteenth century. One such is Voltaire's annotated copy of le Père Gabriel Daniel's *Observations critiques sur l'Histoire de France de Mézerai* (1700) ; this volume was known to Charles Nodier, and its marginalia were eventually published in 1860 (and reprinted in the Moland edition³⁴). Another example is a copy of La Mothe Le Vayer's *Doutes sceptiques* which belonged to Renouard and was sold in 1829, but whose annotations were never published³⁵. The whereabouts of both these copies remains unknown ; and neither work is present (in any edition) in the library in St Petersburg, leading us to conjecture that these are volumes which somehow were removed from the library before it was shipped to Russia³⁶. The « Société des études voltairiennes » has launched a project to produce as full a list as possible of the annotated volumes outside the library in St Petersburg³⁷ ; but on present evidence the number of books like these which « got away » seems relatively small. Indeed it may well turn out to be the case that the majority of « leaks » from the library took place in Russia, after Wagnière had delivered the books, witness, for example, the two volumes by Fénelon and Guibert identified as coming from Voltaire's library and recently found at Tsarskoe Selo³⁸.

THE PROBLEM OF DUPLICATE EDITIONS

There is a peculiarity about Voltaire's library which gives us pause to reflect, however : this is the phenomenon of duplicates, that is to say, those books which Voltaire annotated more than once. These « duplicates » fall into two distinct groups.

Firstly, there are those cases where Voltaire read and annotated the same text more than once, in different editions, and where the library in St Petersburg still retains these multiple copies. Thus the *Œuvres* of Guez de Balzac are to

³⁴ M, t. 29, p. 411-438 ; see Bengesco, t. 2, p. 428-429.

³⁵ See Bengesco, t. 2, p. 433.

³⁶ The library in St Petersburg contains other works by these authors, however ; see BV 938-939, and BV 1900.

³⁷ See *Revue Voltaire*, 6 (2006), p. 359-361.

³⁸ See Irina Zaitseva, « Des marginalia inédits de Voltaire sur deux livres de sa bibliothèque retrouvés à Tsarskoë Selo », *Cahiers Voltaire*, 5 (2006), p. 119-132.

be found twice, in editions of 1628 (BV 103) and 1665 (BV 104), both of them with copious marginal markings. Sometimes the reduplication of editions simply reflects the fact that Voltaire felt the need to return at intervals to certain key authors : thus the library contains editions of Corneille's theatre from 1664 (BV 410), 1723 (BV 411) and 1747 (BV 412), texts which Voltaire read and reread, so it is hardly surprising that they all contain markings. Similarly with the plays of Crébillon père, which Voltaire owned in editions of 1720 (BV 436) and 1750 (BV 437), or with Amelot de La Houssaie's *Mémoires historiques*, of which Voltaire possessed no fewer than three copies (BV 26-28), all of them showing signs of reading. It is certainly no surprise that he should have annotated Diderot's *Pensées philosophiques* more than once in different editions – it was a text which troubled him, and to which he felt compelled to return³⁹. In other cases, it is clear that Voltaire wished to read the revised editions of certain texts (so these are not duplicates in the strict sense). Thus a 1749 edition of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (BV 1157) is copiously annotated ; Voltaire also acquired an edition of 1753 (BV 1158), « nouvelle édition, revue et corrigée, avec des changements considérables », and this volume is also annotated, but more lightly, reflecting the fact that the annotation here represents his second reading of the book⁴⁰. Two editions of d'Holbach's *Système de la nature* of 1770 (BV 753) and 1771 (BV 754) are both annotated, and again, as one might have expected, the first heavily, and the second very much more briefly⁴¹. Even though he owned La Beaumelle's *Mes Pensées* in the sixth edition (BV 820), Voltaire would still have wanted to acquire the seventh edition, « augmentée de plus de la moitié », and so he did (BV 821) ; the markings on both these editions are minimal, but clearly he did read both⁴².

The second group of duplicates is much smaller, and more puzzling. These are the instances where the same text has been annotated more than once, in an identical edition, and where one of the two copies forms part of the Voltaire library in St Petersburg while the other remains outside it. One of the most important publications of Voltaire's marginalia in the nineteenth century is that of Beuchot, who included in his edition (t. 50, 1834) the annotations of three works. These three sets of marginalia, reprinted without further comment by Moland (t. 31, 1880), are curious and demand closer attention than they have so far had.

39 See N. Cronk, « Voltaire lecteur de Diderot : le dialogue manqué des notes marginales », *Revue Voltaire*, 3 (2003), p. 69-78.

40 *CN*, t. 5, p. 727-759.

41 *CN*, t. 4, p. 439-454.

42 *CN*, t. 5, p. 38-39.

The three annotated works in question are : (i) D'Holbach's *Le Christianisme dévoilé ou l'Examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne*⁴³ ; (ii) Nieuwentijt's *L'Existence de Dieu démontrée par les merveilles de la nature*⁴⁴ ; and (iii) D'Holbach's *Le Bon Sens, ou Idées naturelles opposées aux idées surnaturelles* (Londres, 1774)⁴⁵. All three are key texts in so far as they provide Voltaire with a pretext to rehearse and develop his – by now, well-known – views on religion ; and to that extent these constitute what we might term « seminal » Voltairean annotations. All three have been long familiar, thanks to their inclusion in the Moland edition. And all three are also oddly problematic.

Only the marginalia of Nieuwentijt's *L'Existence de Dieu* are announced by Beuchot as being taken from a volume in the St Petersburg library ; but this begs a question. Beuchot (1777-1851), who never travelled to Russia, cannot have seen the original volume ; if we believe his account, he had access to a copy of the volume made in St Petersburg in 1823, and which he then re-copied in 1829 into an edition now held in the BnF. (This tortuous process explains the « mistakes » in transcription noted by Jeroom Vercruysse⁴⁶). But who was this person who obtained access to the Hermitage library in the 1820s, at a time when it was the Tsar's private library ? And why did he or she choose to copy this particular volume ? The provenance and status of these annotations is more complex than appears at first sight⁴⁷.

The two other sets of marginalia, both commentaries on d'Holbach, present a different puzzle. Again Beuchot must have seen editions in circulation in France, but in these two cases he gives no indication at all of their provenance ; we can only conjecture that he had access to copies in private collections, and that he wished to respect the privacy of the collectors. (If the volumes had been in his own collection, they would presumably have passed to the Bibliothèque nationale together with the rest of his library.) What Beuchot could not have known (and what we only learned with the publication of Volume 4 of the *Corpus des notes marginales* in 1988) is that in both cases, the same text, in the very same edition, exists in the library in St Petersburg, with annotation – but

43 M, t. 31, p. 129-133 ; see Bengesco, t. 2, p. 423. This work was at one point attributed to Damilaville, which explains why some of these annotations were first published in the article « Damilaville » of the *Biographie universelle*.

44 M, t. 31, p. 135-150. Compare BV 2576.

45 M, t. 31, p. 151-160. Bengesco, t. 2, p. 430.

46 See J. Vercruysse, « La fortune de Bernard Nieuwentydt en France au XVIII^e siècle et les notes marginales de Voltaire », *SVEC*, 30 (1964), p. 223-246.

47 See below my article « Voltaire (non) lecteur de Nieuwentijt : le problème des causes finales dans la pensée voltairienne », p. 169-181.

with different annotation⁴⁸. The annotated copy of d'Holbach's *Le Bon Sens* which Beuchot saw has not, so far as I am aware, been located. The copy of d'Holbach's *Le Christianisme dévoilé* known to Beuchot would appear to be the volume, clearly a collector's item, now in the British Library in London⁴⁹. Of this last annotation, Beuchot writes : « Je donne [les Remarques] toutes pour la première fois. J'en ai fait moi-même le relevé sur l'exemplaire qui contient les notes de la main de Voltaire⁵⁰ ». Beuchot, quite reasonably, believed he was looking at Voltaire's « personal » copy, which had somehow separated itself from the library ; he could not have known that there was an identical edition, differently annotated, in the library in Russia. A further example of this phenomenon of duplicates is provided by *Le Vrai Sens du Système de la nature* (Londres, 1774) : we know of two annotated copies, one in Voltaire's library in St Petersburg⁵¹, and the other, a differently annotated copy of the same edition, in the Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen ; this latter edition is the object of a meticulous study by Christiane Mervaud and Catriona Seth⁵².

In these three cases, then, Voltaire annotated the same text in the same edition twice. How do we explain this phenomenon ? It is admittedly a small corpus, but even so it is very striking, not least because all three works in question are convenient springboards for the (re-)exposition of Voltaire's religious thinking. It is theoretically possible that the volumes in circulation outside the Voltaire library are clever forgeries ; but in that case, one would have to imitate not only Voltaire's hand, but also his style of annotating, and all three volumes in question seem plausibly Voltairian ; and in the case of the first two, Beuchot would not have included them in his edition if he had seriously doubted their authenticity. Assuming then that these duplicate editions are genuine, as they seem to be, we have to account for three coincidental facts : (1) that Voltaire annotated the same book twice, in identical editions ; (2) that one of the two copies in each case remained in Voltaire's library, while the other remained in circulation in France ; and (3) that these are in each case seminal texts.

48 See *Le Christianisme dévoilé* (1756 [1761]), BV 1649, CN, t. 4, p. 422-432 ; and *Le Bon Sens* (1774), BV 1648, CN, t. 4, p. 407-421.

49 British Library, shelfmark C.28.k.3. A note on the flyleaf of this copy reads : « Ce volume annoté de la main de Voltaire m'a été donné par Madame la duchesse Decazes, en Juin 1834. » It would seem therefore that the volume was in the possession of the duchesse Decazes when Beuchot copied the annotations from it. Élie, comte then duc, Decazes was a prominent minister under Louis XVIII (1815-1820), then ambassador to Great Britain (1820-1821).

50 M, t. 29, p. 129.

51 BV 1613 ; CN, t. 4, p. 334-360.

52 Ch. Mervaud and C. Seth, « Notes marginales inédites sur *Le Vrai Sens du Système de la nature* ».

The only apparent explanation of this series of circumstances is that Voltaire did not always annotate books purely for private consumption, but sometimes, as seemingly in these cases, produced annotated volumes which he presented as gifts and which were therefore intended to be circulated for public consumption. Voltaire's marginalia, at least in these selected cases, far from providing us with a key to his innermost private thoughts, as Gardet (« un Voltaire inconnu ») and Beuchot must have thought, are public utterances designed to influence others, in effect a form of manuscript publication. The case of the *Examen de la Nouvelle Histoire de Henri IV* is exceptional to the extent that a version of these marginal notes ended up in print ; but it is not exceptional as an example of marginalia conceived by Voltaire for circulation and a wider audience. Voltaire was endlessly creative in seeking means to drive home his message, and he makes of marginalia a polemical genre.

Let us look more closely at one specific example of duplicated editions, that of d'Holbach's *Le Christianisme dévoilé*. This work makes a crude, not to say bigoted, attack on Christianity, and Voltaire's marginal response is of course intriguing : he is fascinated by the arguments, tempted by some of them, yet disapproving of others. A letter to M^{me} de La Tour du Pin de Saint-Julien of 15 December 1766 makes clear one reason why Voltaire was exercised by the work – it was being attributed in some quarters to him : « Vous m'apprenez que dans votre société on m'attribue le *christianisme dévoilé*, par feu M^r Boulanger ; mais je vous assure que les gens au fait ne m'attribuent point du tout cet ouvrage [...]. Il est entièrement opposé à mes principes. Ce livre conduit à l'athéisme que je déteste. J'ai toujours regardé l'athéisme comme le plus grand égarement de la raison » (D 13737). And one way of proving his innocence in this case is of course to show to visitors his marginalia on the volume in question, as he goes on to offer in the same letter : « Ma coutume est d'écrire sur la marge de mes livres ce que je pense d'eux. Vous verrez, quand vous daignerez venir à Ferney les marges du *Christianisme dévoilé* chargées de remarques qui démontrent que l'auteur s'est trompé sur les faits les plus essentiels ».

We know of two sets of annotation of this work, and for ease of reference I shall refer to them as the St Petersburg and the London copies. How does the annotation of the two editions compare ? In the St Petersburg copy, we find occasional indications, exclamations almost, of unambiguous agreement : « neuf et fort » (twice, p. 427), « bien » (p. 429), « bravo » (p. 432). More often however the remarks are critical. It may be a simple disagreement, as in « non pas toujours » (p. 423). Voltaire repeatedly corrects points of fact in the text :

thus « cela nest pas vrai. la genese admet le cahos » (p. 426)⁵³. Voltaire is also critical of d'Holbach's style : « plate préface » (p. 422), « ce livre est trop plein de déclamations vagues » (p. 423), or more succinctly, « bavarderie » (twice, p. 424), « trop vague » (p. 425). Even when Voltaire is in agreement with the idea being expressed, he can show reservations about the form of its expression : « bon ; mais trop long et trop faible » (p. 422), or « bon mais mal écrit » (p. 424).

In the London copy, Voltaire again corrects errors, for example a quotation of the scriptures : « La citation n'est pas juste » (p. 130). On three occasions (all p. 130), the correction takes the form of a rhetorical question, as in : « Peut-on appeler perversité la morale de Jésus-Christ ? » Again, there are criticisms of language and style. « Qu'est-ce que *parler à l'unisson* ? On s'est fait dans ce siècle un style bien étrange » (p. 129). When d'Holbach writes of « le soleil, qui ne tourne point », Voltaire corrects him thus : « Il tourne sur son axe. Il faut dire : qui ne tourne point autour de la terre » (p. 133). Some comments are short and snappy : « qu'importe » (p. 131), or « Exagéré » (p. 131). But other sentences are surprisingly long and well-formed. Correcting a point of fact, for example, Voltaire writes : « Cela n'est pas vrai. Les apôtres se disent envoyés par toute la terre. L'auteur confond continuellement la religion mosaïque et la chrétienne » (p. 131) – three sentences in all. To d'Holbach's comment that Christians use fear of God as a break on immoral behaviour, Voltaire responds with a fully-fledged refutation, in this case two sentences, designed it would seem to be quoted : « Pourquoi ôter aux hommes le frein de la crainte de la divinité⁵⁴ ? Tous les philosophes, excepté les épicuriens, ont dit qu'il faut être juste pour plaire à Dieu » (p. 133).

What are the differences ? There are in total 29 comments in the St Petersburg copy, and 30 in the London copy, so in extent, the two annotations are comparable. In both sets of annotation, Voltaire is critical of the content of the book, and of its linguistic expression. There is furthermore a slight overlap. On p. 60-61, when d'Holbach is speaking of the « tempérament » of Moses and then Christ, Voltaire writes « qu'importe » : at slightly different points in the text, but the same reaction (St Petersburg, p. 426 ; London, p. 131). Still on p. 60, the same sentence attracts comment in both editions. « Enfin, quelle preuve avons-nous de sa [de Moïse] mission, sinon le témoignage de six cens mille Israélites, grossiers et superstitieux, ignorans et crédules [...] » writes d'Holbach. In the St Petersburg copy, Voltaire underlines « témoignage de six cens mille » and writes in the margin : « il semble que six cent mille hommes aient écrit » (p. 426). In the London copy, the riposte is different : « Si

⁵³ See also p. 423, three examples, and p. 431.

⁵⁴ Moland has « Divinité » ; but the BL copy has « divinité ».

l'auteur admet ce témoignage, il se réfute lui-même » (p. 131) : the same idea, but differently expressed. On one occasion only, the same passage about the Christian hell is annotated in the same way (I will return to this).

On the whole, however, it is the differences between the two annotations which are most striking. Even when he comments on the same page in the two books, the reaction is different : thus on p. 67, in the St Petersburg copy Voltaire writes « neuf et fort » against one sentence (p. 427), in the London copy against one sentence Voltaire writes a corrective (« L'effet des miracles de Mahomet fut au moins de convaincre les Arabes qu'il était un homme divin », p. 131). On p. 109, in the St Petersburg copy one passage is marked in the margin (p. 431), in the London copy an entirely different sentence is annotated (p. 132).

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The two volumes clearly represent two « readings » of the work : there can be no question of the annotation having been copied or adapted from one volume to the other, the differences are simply too large. It is even possible to detect a certain change of emphasis between the two volumes. The London copy has no positive comments of approval at all, and it has some longer, fully-formed sentences. Take d'Holbach's sentence « le fanatisme des chrétiens se nourrit par l'idée révoltante d'un enfer » : in the St Petersburg copy, Voltaire's riposte is brief : « les payens admettaient un enfer éternel » (p. 425) ; the response in the London copy is not dissimilar in sentiment, except that this time the reply is cast in the form of a full sentence : « L'auteur oublie que les autres religions admettaient un enfer longtemps auparavant » (p. 130). We might conjecture that the St Petersburg copy seems to reflect a first reading, while the London copy reflects a second reading, by which time Voltaire's views had become more entrenched. Certainly the writing in the London copy is more rhetorical, more quotable, more... presentable. It seems a reasonable conjecture that the St Petersburg volume was Voltaire's personal copy ; and that the London copy (which Beuchot understandably mistook for Voltaire's personal copy) was deliberately written with a « public » in mind and never formed part of his personal library. This sense of Voltaire writing in a more public voice is strikingly present in the London copy, in a comment on the title-page which conveniently sums up Voltaire's view of the whole work : « Cet ouvrage est plus rempli de déclamation que méthodique. L'auteur se répète et se contredit quelquefois. On dit que c'est l'impiété dévoilée » (p. 129).

Voltaire's thought does not appear to have evolved from one edition to the next ; nor does it seem likely that Voltaire could have « accidentally » annotated the same text twice in the same edition : we cannot of course date the annotations, but these duplicated volumes were all first published late in Voltaire's life, so there can have been no significant passage of time between

one annotation and the other. We can only conclude that Voltaire sometimes composed marginalia with a specific readership in mind, and that he made gifts of his annotated volumes. The Humanists habitually offered copies of their own books to friends⁵⁵ ; but in this case the gift forms part of a strategy of publication, a strategy with which Voltaire had been long familiar. The genre of marginalia is thus a complex one in Voltaire's case, and he seems to have experimented with this genre in just the way he experimented elsewhere. Voltaire is the least autobiographical of writers, and the public/private divide in his work is always a tricky one to negotiate. It seems that in some cases the intended readers are his chosen friends, who are entrusted with a precious copy annotated in his hand. It is hard otherwise to explain the phenomenon of the duplicate copies. Thus in these few cases, the marginalia become Voltairean manuscripts like any other, a part of his campaign after 1770 to combat the growing tide of atheism. When in future we identify other works annotated by Voltaire, we will need to ask if they are genuine items of his personal library which somehow found their way into private hands ; or whether they are works which Voltaire composed, from the outset, as gifts. We certainly cannot always assume that the intended reader of Voltaire's marginalia is Voltaire himself.

55 Dedicating his new collection of metaphors to his friend Pieter Gillis in Antwerp in 1515, Erasmus wrote from Basel that « any loss due to separation in the actual enjoyment of our friendship should be made good, not without interest, by tokens of this literary kind » (quoted in Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 59-60).

Publication of Voltaire's marginalia to 1885

1769

Examen de la Nouvelle Histoire de Henri IV. Published (by Voltaire himself, in an edited version), in *L'Évangile du jour*, t. 2, Londres, 1769, p. 1-76 ; and separately. Not in Moland.

1796

Virgil, published by Fontanes. Proved in 1822 to be a fake⁵⁶.

1813

D'Holbach's *Christianisme dévoilé*. Published (extracts only) in *Biographie universelle*, t. 10 (p. 471), art. « Damilaville ».

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1822

Chastellux, *De la félicité publique. Nouvelle édition augmentée de notes inédites de Voltaire* (Paris, 1822) ed. Renouard. Not in Moland.

1834

Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes*, Beuchot edition, t. 50 : (i) d'Holbach, *Christianisme dévoilé* (in full, for the first time) ; (ii) Nieuwentijt, *Existence de Dieu* ; (iii) d'Holbach, *Le Bon Sens*.

1860

J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* and *Du contrat social*. Published by J.-Édouard Gardet, « Une visite à l'Ermitage », *Bulletin du bibliophile*, 14th series (1860), p. 1519-1543.

1873

Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes*, Édition aux bureaux du « Siècle », t. 9 (p. 67-73) : Le Père Gabriel Daniel, *Observations critiques sur l'Histoire de France de Mézerai*.

⁵⁶ See N. Cronk, « À l'origine de l'étude des *marginalia* de Voltaire : Fontanes et la "Lettre sur quelques notes écrites à la marge d'un exemplaire de Virgile" », *Revue Voltaire*, 5 (2005), p. 311-324.

1879

Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes*, Moland edition (t. 29, p. 411-438) : Le Père Gabriel Daniel, *Observations critiques sur l'Histoire de France de Mézerai*. Reprinted from the Édition aux bureaux du « Siècle ».

1880

Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes*, Moland edition (t. 31) : (i) d'Holbach, *Christianisme dévoilé* (p. 129-133) ; (ii) Nieuwentijt, *Existence de Dieu* (p. 135-150) ; (iii) d'Holbach, *Le Bon Sens* (p. 151-160). Reprinted from the Beuchot edition.

Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes*, Moland edition (t. 32, p. 468-482) : Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité et Du contrat social*. Reprinted from Gardet.

1883

Separate publication of Gardet.

1885

Bengesco (t. 2) records known published marginalia.

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