

## Book Reviews



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Sébastien Drouin, *Journalisme et hétérodoxie au Refuge hollandais. Le cas de l'Histoire critique de la République des Lettres (1712-1718)*, Honoré Champion, Paris 2023, 348 pp.

Sébastien Drouin's book investigates the role of periodicals in the development of the radical Enlightenment taking into consideration the «free-thinker philologist[s]» (p. 220), or, according to their opponents' label, the «libertine critics» (p. 107), who made use of their erudition to show the shortcomings of orthodox theology and of traditional ethics. In order to do so, he has chosen as a case-study the history of a single journal, the short-lived *Histoire critique de la République des Lettres* (1712-1718), which emphasized the polemical and erudite dimension of scholarship. In particular, he considers a single episode in its history, namely the controversy arisen from the publication in the first three issues of an exegetical dissertation on the Psalm CX, its context, and reactions. This journal, edited by Samuel Masson and printed in Utrecht and later in Amsterdam, was written by minor figures in intellectual history, people always on the brink of economic ruin and thus always being willing to sell their own pens (pp. 223-226). Nonetheless, they were «cultural go-betweens» (p. 21) whose relationships and networks can be studied not only through their contribution to the press, but also through their manuscripts remains (such as correspondences and diaries). This methodological aspect allows Drouin to escape the blame of historiographical idealism usually directed against radical Enlightenment narratives. Starting from Martin Mulso's concept of 'philosophical constellation' (p. 25), he takes into consideration a large documentary base, such as correspondences, manuscript notes, ecclesiastical registers, periodicals, and books – having been part of the team behind the editing of Charles La Motte's letters to Pierre Desmaizeaux (Honoré Champion, Paris 2021) enables the author to disentangle himself from this web of documents.

The book is divided into two sections (each of which is divided into two chapters) and four documentary appendixes. The first section reconstructs the theological controversy that agitated United Provinces Calvinism around the value of allegorical exegesis and the condemnation both of Pierre de Joncourt and of the *Histoire critique*. The second section explores the reactions to the *Histoire critique* affaire, taking into consideration the way the *Journal littéraire* and Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe ridiculed Masson's erudite pose, in what can be considered as an outburst of the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*.

The first chapter reconstructs the emergence of a new theological consensus around Cocceianism. In exegetical matters, Cocceian theologians rejected Hugo Grotius' dogmatic minimalism and literalism, preferring instead an allegorical reading of the prophecies of the Old Testament, projecting them to the New Testament but also to contemporary and future his-

tory (and thus to eschatology). The author presents two different replies to this consensus. The first is Jean Le Clerc's review of Campegius Vitringa's *Commentarius in Librum Prohatiarum Jesaiae* (1713), published as appendix 3 (pp. 297-312). The Swiss theologian stressed the rhetorical dimension of typology (and thus its uselessness against non-Christians, such as Jews and libertines) and the extreme aleatory character of this exegetical style, that renders the biblical text like Aristotelian first matter, «capable of assuming any form whatsoever» (p. 55, n. 67). The other is Joncourt's, who compared Cocceian and Voetian exegesis in print in 1708 and was swiftly condemned by the Synod of the Walloon Church, whose acts are partially published as appendix 2 (pp. 284-293). Joncourt stressed that typological exegesis had become a preaching style detrimental to the clergy's duty of teaching morality and sanctity. Moreover, in Joncourt's opinion, the allegories were only particular examples whose exegetical method cannot be generalized to the whole Scripture (pp. 56-70).

The second chapter is focused on Masson's *Dissertation critique sur le Psaume CX* printed in the first three issues of the *Histoire critique*. The choice of this psalm is particularly relevant, first because it was one of the psalms usually interpreted as predicting Christ's coming, and secondly because it was one of king David's psalms, thus reopening the issue related to this king of Israel occasioned by Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Masson's subversive gesture consisted in stripping the psalm of its New Testament usage and in reading it in its proper historical context. This exegetical move was far from innocent. Firstly, because Masson used comparative methods in reconstructing the historical context of the biblical narrative (a point that could explain his later interest in John Toland's dissertation on the Egyptian theology in Desmaizeaux's possession: see appendix 1, pp. 263-265), and secondly because he resorted to linguistic analysis as a legitimate exegetical tool, recalling Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* (pp. 77-97). The *Histoire critique* was condemned by the Synod of Brede in 1713 for having discussed religious topics in print and in vernacular, and criticized by the *Mémoires de Trévoux* and the *Journal littéraire*, both stressing the dangers of erudition, the latter also publishing replies from Cocceian theologians (pp. 97-126).

The second section investigates the role of ridicule in the reaction to Masson's work by Saint-Hyacinthe in the *Chef d'oeuvre d'un inconnu* in 1714 (enlarged in the following editions) and by the journalists involved in the *Journal littéraire*. The genesis and the material character of this text offer a glimpse of Drouin's method – he analyses the engravings that accompany the text and

that were made by Bernard Picart and reconstructs the problem of their authorship through Prosper Marchand's testimony (pp. 141-142, 150-151). The *Chef d'oeuvre* was intended to be a satire against the philological style of glossing texts – and thus it is framed after a commentary of a song attributed to the fictional character of Chrisostome Mathanasius – a character destined to acquire an autonomous life thanks to Desmaizeaux, Desfontaines and then in 1732 to Saint-Hyacinthe himself in the *Déification de l'incomparable Aristarchus Masso*, an addition to the *Chef d'oeuvre* where the parodic identification of Mathanasius and Masson was made transparent (pp. 167-175). In these same years, a recrudescence of the ancients' and moderns' dispute arose between Anne Dacier and Houdar de La Motte about the translation of Homer's *Iliad* (pp. 159-161). The reception of the first issues of the *Histoire critique* is thus contextualized on one hand in Calvinistic exegesis and on the other in a polemic about the role of erudition and philology in modern culture.

What is interesting in Saint-Hyacinthe's and his companions' reaction to Masson's journal are the redefinition of the character of the 'charlatan' and the heterodox, irreligious use of ridicule. In 1715 Johann Burkhard Mencke published his *Charlataneria eruditorum*, where the charlatan is distinguished from the pedant – the former being one who knows but emphasizes unimportant things, and the latter being one who pretends to know (pp. 177-181). The charlatan became thus the target of the moderns' party (pp. 181-184), but also of the orthodox's party – Masson was blamed by the Synod of Breda for having made «a wicked use of erudition» (p. 193) and described as a charlatan (pp. 193-196).

The coterie who made the *Journal littéraire* was far from being orthodox despite their role in spreading the Cocceian replies to Masson's *Dissertation* and their belonging to the Walloon Church: Marchand and Picart, for example, were members of the Knight of Jubilation. Moreover, giving space to replies to a heterodox text means spreading the contents of the heterodox text itself. But also in the texts making up the *Chef d'oeuvre* there are heterodox hints. In *De l'origine de Catin*, the fantastic framework of the tale of Olybama recalls that of Noah and the flood. Furthermore, there are some references to a book of Enoch – thus evoking the spectre of apocryphal literature (pp. 198-204). In this way, the specificity of sacred history is not only lost, but also becomes indistinguishable from a fantastic tale. Another point addressed is antitrinitarism. In *De l'origine*, there is also a dissertation on the number three, considered «the odd number which has always been pleasant to the Gods» and which great men have made use of (pp.

204-205), showing how this number recurred in heathen mythology and in modern Christianity (a fact highlighted also in Jean Frédéric Bernard's and Picart's *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses*) and shaking the spectre of imposture (pp. 204-211). The last point is the question of obscenities. In commenting about how to procure good health, Saint-Hyacinthe called into question original sin. Among Marchand's papers there is Bernard's French translation (published in 1714) of Adriaan Beverland's *Dissertatio de peccato originali* which is also mentioned in the *Chef d'oeuvre* (pp. 211-220). We can appreciate here how Drouin's philosophical constellation works through the reconstruction of the many links between persons, texts, engravings, and manuscripts.

The book is interesting for at least three reasons. First, it reconstructs the early years of the *Histoire critique de la République des Lettres*, which so far have been not so studied extensively. Secondly, it reassesses the value of erudition, philology, and scholarship in the genesis of the radical Enlightenment, in particular showing that religious controversies should be rightly considered as sources in the spreading of heterodoxy. Thirdly, the variety of the sources available (and made available in the appendixes) shows the complexity of the historical context of the United Provinces press in the early Enlightenment, also positing the fascinating suggestion (that should maybe be strengthened through further research) that the continuous printing of heterodox or controversial works was a way to keep the market functioning (pp. 227-230). Its stressing the role of scholarship and of the press in reassessing the radical Enlightenment can be of some use in broadening the history of this journal – for example, it may be worth considering the 1716 issue devoted to Leibniz's philosophy, which started from a debate on the exegesis of a Hippocratic text and wherein Desmaizeaux (twice), Leibniz himself, Toland (anonymously) and Bayle (even if posthumously) intervened. In conclusion, this book is path-breaking and invites scholars to push the historical research further.

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