

DESPERATELY SEEKING SUPPLEMENT: HOW POLLY BAKER SHEDS LIGHT ON DIDEROT'S *SUPPLÉMENT*

Abstract

This article offers a new reading of Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* in the light of its titular term, 'supplément'. Specifically, it examines the significance of the 'supplement to the *Supplément*' that Diderot added some eight years after the work was ostensibly completed: Franklin's *Speech of Miss Polly Baker*. The addition of the *Speech* highlights a central lesson of the *Supplément*, namely, that the only way to understand texts in Diderot's encyclopaedic age, in which knowledge was constantly shifting, is through a 'supplemental' practice of reading. According to this approach, texts must be intra- and inter-textually cross-referenced – as famously encouraged by the *renvois* in the *Encyclopédie*. Polly helps Diderot to flag a key inter-text to the *Supplément*, on which he also worked, and in which Polly's *Speech* also figured: Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*. Through a close reading that works with notions of the 'supplement' and the 'supplement of a supplement', as advanced by both Derrida and the *Encyclopédie*, this article argues that as Franklin's *Speech* disrupts Diderot's original *Supplément* it simultaneously adds new meaning to the work, and clarifies what was always, implicitly, there. These actions of disruption and addition elucidate some of the text's most perplexing claims.

Résumé

Cet article propose une relecture du *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* de Diderot, à la lumière de son terme titulaire, « supplément ». Plus précisément, il étudie l'importance du « supplément au *Supplément* », ajouté par Diderot une huitaine

d'années après avoir achevé – semblait-il – cet écrit : le *Speech of Miss Polly Baker*, écrit par Benjamin Franklin. L'ajout du *Speech* pointe une leçon centrale du *Supplément*, à savoir que pour bien appréhender les textes à cette époque encyclopédique où les connaissances étaient en perpétuelle évolution, il fallait pratiquer un exercice de lecture que l'on peut nommer « supplémentaire ». Selon les principes de cette approche, on doit faire des recoupements entre un texte et ses intra- et intertextes – comme préconisé par le célèbre système de renvois de l'*Encyclopédie*. Le *Speech* de Franklin permet notamment à Diderot de signaler un intertexte clé du *Supplément*, sur lequel Diderot a lui aussi travaillé : l'*Histoire des deux Indes* de l'abbé Raynal. À travers une lecture approfondie qui intègre plusieurs notions de la « supplémentarité », élaborées à la fois par Derrida et par l'*Encyclopédie*, cet article montre que le *Speech* déstabilise le *Supplément*, tout en apportant des sens inédits à cette oeuvre, éclaircissant ce qui était toujours là, en creux. Le « supplément au *Supplément* » aide ainsi à démêler quelques-unes des idées les plus déroutantes de cette oeuvre complexe.

Any good investigation begins by establishing the facts. So what do we know about Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville, ou Dialogue entre A et B sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas*? We know that Diderot started work on it in 1771, and completed it the following year. It began life as an account of French naval explorer, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville's record of his 1766–69 expedition, the *Voyage autour du monde, par la frégate du roi La Boudeuse, et la flûte L'Étoile* (1771).¹ We know that

* [Note of thanks removed for purposes of anonymity during review process]

it was initially circulated in four instalments, between 1773 and '74, in Grimm's subscription-only manuscript periodical, the *Correspondance littéraire*, distributed to select European heads of state and the wealthy elite.² And we have a fairly clear sense of its content. Once upon a time, two almost (but not quite) anonymous characters, A and B, were hoping to go for a walk but, hampered by foggy weather, they stay indoors, and pass the time by reading a text called 'Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville'. This 'Supplément', which we read along with A and B, is composed of a number of dialogic scenes (though presumably their 'Supplément' could not contain the frame in which they are diegetic reader-commentators). Most of these scenes embroider upon Bougainville and his crew's experiences on the island they named 'nouvelle Cythère', but which its inhabitants called 'Taiti'.³ Diderot uses neither of these names and instead calls his island 'Otaïti', highlighting, as Kate Tunstall notes,

¹ For the most recent critical edition, see *Voyage autour du monde par la frégate du roi la Boudeuse, et la flûte l'Étoile*, ed. by Jacques Proust (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

² The *Supplément* was not published in print until 1796, in Vauxcelles's edition of Diderot's *Opuscules philosophiques et littéraires, la plupart posthumes ou inédites* (Paris: Chevet, 1796). On the history of the *Correspondance littéraire*, see the 'Introduction générale' to the latest critical edition, *Correspondance littéraire*, ed. by Ulla Kölvig et al., 10 vols (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'étude du XVIII^e siècle, 2006–), pp. xxi–lxxii.

³ 'Taiti' is Bougainville's original spelling. Other contemporary French authors used this spelling, or added a diaeresis, as in Joséphine de Montbart's *Lettres taïtiennes* (1786).

that this is not the real ‘Taiti’, but Diderot’s own fictional creation.⁴ The scenes of the *Supplément* include, among others, ‘Les Adieux du Vieillard’, the tirade of an old Otaïtien against the corrupting influence of the European colonizers on this natural paradise; and the ‘Entretien de l’Aumônier et d’Orou’, a conversation between an Otaïtien father and a French almoner, in which the former invites the latter to have sex with his daughter.

However, there remain unanswered questions, and not least the following: why, in around 1780, some eight years after the work was ostensibly finished, did Diderot add a further dialogue to it: *The Speech of Miss Polly Baker*?⁵ This text purports to be the real-life address of a Boston woman named Polly Baker, to a panel of criminal judges who have fined her for having children out of wedlock. Polly and her speech, however, were a fiction, composed by Benjamin Franklin, and first

⁴ Kate Tunstall, ‘Sexe, mensonges et colonies: les discours de l’amour dans le *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*’, *Littératures Classiques*, 69 (2009), 17–34; p. 19, n. 9. Following Tunstall, when referring to the country and its people as described in the *Supplément*, I will use Diderot’s terms, ‘Otaïti’ and ‘Otaïtien.nne.s’.

⁵ J. Viktor Johansson was among the first to discover a manuscript of the *Supplément* containing Polly’s speech, in Diderot’s manuscripts in the National Library of Russia. It was first edited by Gilbert Chinard (Paris: Droz, 1935), and is now the most widely published version of the text. See Johansson, *Études sur Denis Diderot. Recherches sur un volume-manuscrit conservé à la Bibliothèque publique de l’état de Leningrad* (Paris: Champion, 1927).

published in 1747.⁶ Thanks to the work of scholars including, most notably, Michèle Duchet and Gianluigi Goggi, it is now thought that before he added it to the *Supplément*, Diderot first inserted Polly's speech into the abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique, des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (first published 1770, edited 1774 and 1780).⁷ More broadly, Duchet and Goggi's work has significantly expanded our understanding of the (major) contributions Diderot made to the *Histoire des deux Indes*, and the inter-textual relationship between Diderot's corpus and Raynal's text.⁸ Sankar Muthu and Andrew

⁶ The most thorough history of Franklin's text is Max Hall, *Benjamin Franklin and Polly Baker: The History of A Literary Deception*, 2nd edn (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

⁷ See Michèle Duchet, *Diderot et l'Histoire des deux Indes, ou l'écriture fragmentaire* (Paris: Nizet, 1978), pp. 95, 199; and Gianluigi Goggi, 'L'Exemplaire Hornoy de H80 in-quarto et les contributions de Diderot délimitées par Mme de Vandeuil', in *Autour de l'abbé Raynal: genèse et enjeux politiques de l'Histoire des deux Indes*, ed. by Antonella Alimento and Gianluigi Goggi (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre internationale d'étude du XVIII^e siècle, 2018), pp. 245–99; p. 289.

⁸ As well as the works cited above, see Duchet, 'Le *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* et la collaboration de Diderot à *L'Histoire des deux Indes*', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 13 (1961), 173–87. Among Goggi's work see, for example, 'La Collaboration de Diderot à l'*Histoire des deux Indes*: l'édition de ses contributions', *Diderot Studies*, 33 (2013), 167–212; Denis Diderot, *Fragments politiques échappés du portefeuille d'un philosophe* (Paris: Hermann, 2011); and *De l'Encyclopédie à l'éloquence républicaine. Étude sur Diderot et autour de Diderot* (Paris: Champion, 2013).

S. Curran have also studied the inter-textual relationship between Diderot's *Supplément* and his contributions to the *Histoire*, specifically in terms of the texts' respective claims about race and anti-imperialism.⁹ Yet, few have focused on Polly. David L. Anderson is the only scholar to have studied at length the function of her *Speech* in the *Supplément*, reading the *Speech* as an 'American counterpoint to Diderot's criticism of Euro-Christian mores'.¹⁰ He argues that the *Speech* brings unity to the *Supplément* in that its third geographical space, Boston, connects Tahiti [Anderson's term] and France, and in that it crystallizes the 'themes of free love, relative morality, myth, and reality' already present in the text.¹¹ This article, however, will offer an alternative reading of the *Supplément*, and of the significance of Polly Baker's *Speech* within it.

⁹ Sankar Muthu, 'Enlightenment Anti-Imperialism', *Social Research*, 66 (1999), 959–1007; and Andrew S. Curran, 'Logics of the human in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*' in *New Essays on Diderot*, ed. by James Fowler (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), pp. 158–71.

¹⁰ As David L. Anderson notes, scholars including Chinard and Herbert Dieckmann have downplayed the significance of Polly Baker's *Speech* in the *Supplément*. See Chinard, p. 44; Dieckmann, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* (Geneva: Droz, 1955), pp. 136–37. See 'The Polly Baker Digression in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*', *Diderot Studies*, 26 (1995), 15–27; p. 18.

¹¹ D. L. Anderson, p. 19.

Following Marian Hobson's approach to Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, this article takes the *Supplément* on its own, titular terms.¹² In short, it puts 'supplementation' at the heart of the *Supplément*'s subject matter, and asks what new perspectives emerge if we take the supplement that Diderot added to his *Supplément* as the work's hermeneutic key. No consideration of the concept of 'supplement' in an eighteenth-century French text would be complete without reference to Derrida's famous reading of 'supplementarity' in Rousseau's oeuvre.¹³ This article will engage with the Derridean concept, but it will also consider eighteenth-century notions of 'supplement'. Moreover, it will examine the difference between 'a supplement' and 'a supplement of a supplement'.

My central claim is that by inserting the *Speech* into the *Supplément*, Diderot gives Polly Baker an afterlife, to borrow Terence Cave's term, in which she disrupts his text from the inside out.¹⁴ Yet, at the same time as Polly disrupts, Diderot also uses her to help readers navigate his foggy text, and others like it. By making of her a *mise en abyme* – the supplement to the *Supplément* – Diderot invites readers to adopt what we might call a 'supplemental' practice of reading, not just to the *Supplément*, but to all texts. According to this practice, all claims must be cross-checked and rectified if (or rather, when) new evidence emerges, which may be many years later.

¹² Marian Hobson, 'The *Paradoxe sur le comédien* is a paradox', in *Diderot and Rousseau: Networks of Enlightenment*, ed. by K. E. Tunstall and C. Warman (Oxford: SVEC, 2011), pp. 33–64. First published in *Poétique*, 15.4 (1973), 320–39.

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).

¹⁴ Terence Cave, *Pré-histoires: Textes troublés au seuil de la modernité* (Geneva: Droz, 1999) and *Pré-histoires II: langues étrangères et troubles économiques au XVI^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2001).

In the case of the *Supplément*, first, Diderot inserts Polly in such a way as to encourage readers to *inter-textually* cross-check the *Supplément* against the *Histoire des deux Indes*. If readers follow this implicit instruction, as I will show, they might better understand some of Diderot's jokes in the *Supplément*, and the serious points they conceal. Further, the Polly Baker anecdote helps highlight that the different parts of the *Supplément*, that were there from the beginning, in 1772, can only be properly comprehended if they are *intra-textually* cross-checked against one another, too.¹⁵

This argument builds on Daniel Brewer's claim that Diderot tells 'stories of knowledge that help grasp the limits of knowledge', and on Wilda Anderson's and Dena Goodman's interpretations of the *Supplément* as a text that teaches readers how to read, and how to judge.¹⁶ Specifically, the *Supplément* offers a lesson in how to

¹⁵ My argument speaks to work by Georges Benrekassa, Frank Cabane and Stéphane Pujol on Diderot's authorial practices. Proceeding from Benrekassa, Cabane and Pujol argue that Diderot challenges the notions of the singular, authoritative work and author by blurring the boundaries between his 'own' texts and those he borrows from others, rewrites, or otherwise engages with. See Benrekassa, 'Diderot, l'absence de l'œuvre', in *Études sur Le Neveu de Rameau et le Paradoxe sur le comédien de Denis Diderot* (Paris: U.F.R. 'Sciences des Textes et Documents', 1992), pp. 133–140; Cabane, *L'Écriture en marge dans l'œuvre de Diderot* (Paris: Champion, 2009); and Pujol, 'Auctoritas: Auteur et autorité chez Diderot (à propos de quelques épigraphes)', *Studia Litterarum*, 2.1 (2017), 62–75.

¹⁶ Daniel Brewer, *The Discourse of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France: Diderot and the Art of Philosophizing* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 261; Wilda Anderson, *Diderot's Dream* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University

decipher the sort of encyclopaedic texts that Joanna Stalnaker studies in *The Unfinished Enlightenment*. These are texts that recognised gaps in their knowledge and, as both an expression and a result of that acknowledgement, were frequently expanded, edited, and supplemented.¹⁷ Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–72); Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*; and Diderot's *Supplément* are precisely three such texts. The *Supplément* might appear to be the odd text out in this list; unlike the *Encyclopédie* and the *Histoire des deux Indes* it was not worked on by multiple authors, and it is several thousands of pages shorter than the other two. Yet, this article views the *Supplément* as an encyclopaedic text in miniature. As such, if we learn its lesson about how to read and judge accurately, it can serve as a roadmap to help us navigate fragmentary, ever-changing texts.

Sorts of supplement

I will begin by outlining the concepts of 'supplement' mobilised in this argument, for they are not always the same. Diderot's *Supplément* is Derridean in the sense that it reveals what it claims was a lack at the heart of Bougainville's *Voyage*. As Derrida puts it, 'en tant que substitut, [le supplément] ne s'ajoute pas simplement à la positivité d'une présence, [...] sa place est assignée dans la structure par la marque d'un vide'.¹⁸ Bougainville described Tahiti as an unspoilt paradise. 'Je me croyais

Press, 1990), p. 128; Dena Goodman, *Criticism in Action: Enlightenment Experiments in Political Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 174.

¹⁷ Joanna Stalnaker, *The Unfinished Enlightenment: Description in the Age of the Encyclopedia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Derrida, p. 208.

transporté dans le jardin d'Éden', he wrote, using Christianity's originary metaphor.¹⁹ The *Supplément* initially appears to confirm this assessment that the islanders are uncorrupted by culture, in particular in the Vieillard's harangue. However, as I will show, the text subsequently deconstructs itself by going on to undercut this colonial stereotype. By (re-)imagining what Bougainville's crew would have seen and heard on the island (assuming there were no language barrier...), Diderot supplements Bougainville's *Voyage* in the multiple Derridean senses of that term: his text adds itself to the *Voyage*; replaces Bougainville's Tahiti with a vision of a cultured, imperfect Otaïti; and reveals that the 'original state of nature' in which Bougainville thought he found the Tahitians was an illusion: culture and society were already there.²⁰

This Derridean concept of the supplement is also, however, Beauzéean. In the *Encyclopédie*, the first of the five articles entitled 'Supplément' is by the grammarian, Academician, and teacher at the École royale militaire, Nicolas Beauzée.²¹ Beauzée

¹⁹ Bougainville, p. 235.

²⁰ The 'supplément', Derrida explains, 'abrite en lui deux significations dont la cohabitation est aussi étrange que nécessaire. Le supplément s'ajoute, il est un surplus, une plénitude enrichissant une autre plénitude, le *comble* de la présence. [...] Mais le supplément supplée. Il ne s'ajoute que pour remplacer.' (p. 208).

²¹ See *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. by Diderot and d'Alembert, 28 vols (Paris: Le Breton, Briasson, David and Durand, 1751–72), xv (1765), pp. 671–81 [*sic.* 673]. Page references refer to the edition held in the Bibliothèque Mazarine, which scholars have recently digitized as part of the *Édition Numérique, Collaborative et CRitique de l'Encyclopédie*

considers ‘supplément’ in the domain of grammar, in which he says the term signifies the words of a Latin phrase that have been elided for stylistic reasons, and which grammarians might restore to expose the full, original sense of the phrase. Like Derrida’s supplement, Beauzée’s does several things at once: it adds to a Latin phrase; rewrites it; and reveals that the phrase purporting to be the ‘original’ was never the original at all: it was missing something that was also, paradoxically, there all along. A similar idea is expressed in the third, anonymous *Encyclopédie* article ‘Supplément’, which defines the term ‘en matière de littérature’.²² The author explains that ‘supplément’ ‘se dit d’une addition faite pour suppléer à ce qui manquoit à un livre.’²³ Once again, ‘le supplément supplée’ (in the double sense of that verb, ‘to replace’ and ‘to add’), and it fills a lack. Diderot obviously could not have known of the Derridean concept of the supplement, but he could have known of those in the *Encyclopédie*, and they describe well the way in which his *Supplément* supplements Bougainville’s *Voyage*.

However, Polly Baker’s *Speech* is a different sort of supplement. Diderot makes no claim that the *Speech* fills a lack in the *Supplément*; it does not purport to uncover a ‘missing origin’ to the text. In this sense, the *Speech* lacks one of the characteristics of a Beauzéean-Derridean supplement. Several scholars have already identified texts that might potentially elucidate the ‘origins’ of the *Supplément*, and

(ENCCRE), <<http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/encyclopedie/>> (2017) [accessed 22 March 2019].

²² Of the five articles, three are signed and two are anonymous. The remaining articles describe ‘supplément’ in the fields of geometry, horology and finances, and are not directly relevant to this argument.

²³ *Encyclopédie*, xv (1765), p. 681 [*sic.* 673].

particularly the source of its interest in women and sexuality (which I discuss below, and which Polly's *Speech* extends). Walter E. Rex, for instance, considers Diderot's letter to his daughter, Angélique, on the occasion of her marriage, as the *Supplément*'s missing counterpoint.²⁴ While Diderot was working on the *Supplément*, he was also organising Angélique's marriage; his letter to her, dated 13 September 1772, frames her recent marriage as a property transfer from Diderot to his son-in-law, and Diderot clearly outlines Angélique's spousal duties. Insofar as the *Supplément* imagines a society in which marriage and sexuality are regulated according to different laws from those of Diderot's France, Rex sees the opposing views in these two, contiguously composed texts as evidence of a 'dynamics of contrariety' traversing Diderot's work. Janet S. Whatley also reads aspects of the *Supplément* as a response to Angélique's marriage, arguing that 'in Diderot's creation of a taboo-free Tahiti, he is allowing himself an imaginative release in creating a little world in which daughters do not have to choose irrevocably between fathers and husbands.'²⁵ One might also consider that in 1772, Diderot penned the other tales that – with the *Supplément* – formed the triptych circulated in the *Correspondance littéraire: Madame de La Carlière* and *Ceci n'est pas un conte*. And, that same year, he wrote *Sur les femmes*, a response to

²⁴ Walter E. Rex, *Diderot's Counterpoints: The Dynamics of Contrariety in his Major Works* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), pp. 41–59.

²⁵ Janet S. Whatley, 'Un Retour secret vers la forêt: The Problem of Privacy and Order in Diderot's Tahiti', *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 24 (1977), 199–208; p. 204. Considering Diderot's own difficult marital relations, as well as his relationship with Angélique, Curran similarly argues that the *Supplément*'s 'meditations on infidelity and the inanity of marriage [...] stem from personal experience.' See *Diderot and the Art of Thinking Freely* (New York: Other Press, 2019), p. 277.

Antoine-Léonard Thomas's *Essai sur le caractère, les mœurs et l'esprit des femmes dans les différents siècles* (1772).²⁶ All of these texts include important reflections on women; they might thus be seen as implicit inter-texts to the *Supplément*'s representation of women. Yet, these are by no means the only Diderotian texts to reflect on women and sexuality. Moreover, the intention of this article is not to identify a biographical or intellectual origin for the *Supplément* that Diderot did not acknowledge, but rather to consider the effects of the supplement to the *Supplément* that Diderot himself explicitly added.

Indeed, the very fact that Polly's *Speech* is a 'supplement to a supplement' exempts it from the logic of the 'supplement', as Derrida and Beauzée describe it. Interestingly, both Derrida and the *Encyclopédie* hint at how a 'supplement' and a 'supplement of a supplement' are different. In a fascinating moment of coincidence, Derrida mentions this idea at the single point in *De la grammatologie* when he refers to Diderot's *Supplément*. In the section on Claude Lévi-Strauss's anthropological memoir, *Tristes tropiques* (1955), Derrida describes this work as 'une sorte de supplément au *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*'.²⁷ *Tristes tropiques* could not have been a 'supplément', in the Derridean sense, to the *Supplément*: having been published nearly two hundred years after Diderot's text was written, it cannot represent the missing origin of the *Supplément*. But this is not what Derrida claims. Instead, he gives it the particular status of 'a sort of supplement to the *Supplément*'. Although he provides little clarification, Derrida implies that Lévi-Strauss adds to and

²⁶ For the most recent critical edition of Thomas's text and the responses by Diderot and Louise d'Épinay, see Élisabeth Badinter, *Qu'est-ce qu'une femme?* (Paris: P.O.L., 1989).

²⁷ Derrida, p. 157.

extends ideas evoked by Diderot, such as the critique of anthropologists and ethnocentrism, even though his work cannot reveal something that was missing (but paradoxically there all along) in Diderot's text.

In the *Encyclopédie*, too, a similar notion is expressed in what is, ironically, a sort of supplement to the article 'Supplément, en matière de littérature'. The article has two *renvois*, 'Appendix' and 'Parergon', which respectively refer to the fields of literature and architecture.²⁸ The author of the literary article, Edmé Mallet, describes an appendix as 'une addition placée à la fin d'un ouvrage ou d'un écrit, et pour l'éclaircissement de ce qui n'a pas été suffisamment expliqué, ou pour en tirer des conclusions; en ce sens ce mot revient à ce qu'on appelle supplément. Voyez Supplément'.²⁹ Turning full circle, the article refers readers back to 'Supplément'. What is more, it does not suggest that an appendix fills an originary lack, but rather that it adds to a text, to clarify its meaning or to help readers reach conclusions. Both Derrida's implicit description of a 'supplement of a supplement', and the *Encyclopédie* article 'Appendice' (itself a supplement of the article 'Supplément') show that a supplement of a supplement does not adhere to the same logic as that of a 'simple' supplement. It will not fill a lack, but it will add to, extend and elucidate existing ideas in a text. As I will now go on to show, this is the logic of Polly's *Speech*, Diderot's supplement to the *Supplément*.

²⁸ *Encyclopédie*, xv (1765), p. 681 [*sic.* 673]. The former article is actually entitled 'Appendice'. The reference to 'parergon' will strike readers of Derrida as particularly interesting, discussed, as it is, in *La Vérité en peinture* (1978). A constellation of terms relating to supplementarity seems to have interested both the *Encyclopédistes* and Derrida.

²⁹ *Encyclopédie*, I (1751), p. 549.

A pol(l)ygraphic inter-text

The Speech of Miss Polly Baker is the fictional address delivered by a Boston woman who has been prosecuted, for the fifth time, for having a child out of wedlock, and she has been ordered to pay a fine. Standing before her judges in the courtroom, Polly protests against what she sees as this unjust, illogical punishment for her so-called crime. She notes that her offence cannot be against nature since procreation is natural, nor can it be against Christianity since God told people to multiply. If, by some other religious tenet, it is considered a sin, Polly reasons that the law should leave it to God to inflict the punishment. She claims that she works hard to support her children, and could have done so all the better had she not been forced to pay fines for their existence; she is not a prostitute, she notes, and would have preferred to raise children as a married woman. In a final twist of irony, Polly observes that the man who abandoned her with child is now a magistrate, known to the judges. In the first known printing of the text, in the *London General Advertiser* of 15 April 1747, Polly then calls for promiscuous bachelors to be punished either by being compelled to marry the women they seduce, or by paying double the current fine imposed upon women for having children out of wedlock. The speech concludes with a note explaining that Polly's speech was a success: not only was she spared punishment, but one of her judges married her the very next day.

Max Hall has traced the lifeline of Franklin's *Speech*, uncovering that Polly made her French debut only in 1770, in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*.³⁰ This work sought to provide a history of European commercial activities in what was then the East Indies and the New World. It was a multi-volume, polygraphic compilation of

³⁰ Hall, p. 58.

material from many sources, with an impressive list of collaborators.³¹ In book seventeen, Raynal reproduces Polly Baker's *Speech*, glossing it as an example of the 'loix trop sévères' of New England.³² However, it is now reasonably certain that it was not Raynal who brought Polly to the *Histoire*, but rather his most famous collaborator, Diderot.

Diderot was not officially recognised as Raynal's associate, and there is no authoritative record of his contributions to the *Histoire des deux Indes*; scholars have instead had to use a patchwork of evidence to piece them together. Until recently, the primary source was the *fonds Vandeul*, the archive of Diderot's papers left to his daughter. It suggests that some 271 passages by Diderot were included in the *Histoire*.³³ In 2015, an acquisition made by the BnF seemed like it might confirm, once and for all, Diderot's contributions.³⁴ The item in question was a 1780 edition of

³¹ Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Anthony Strugnell note that Raynal's collaborators were not officially known in the eighteenth century, and many remain anonymous. See *L'Histoire des deux Indes: réécriture et polygraphie*, ed. by Lüsebrink and Strugnell (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1995), p. 5. See also *Raynal's Histoire des deux Indes: Colonialism, Networks and Global Exchange*, ed. by Cecil Courtney and Jenny Mander (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015).

³² Raynal et al., *Histoire philosophique et politique, des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 6 vols (Amsterdam: [n. pub.], 1770), VI, p. 257.

³³ The figures here are established by Goggi (2018).

³⁴ On this acquisition, see Jean-Marc Chatelain and Marguerite Sablonnière, 'L'Histoire des deux Indes de Raynal', *Le Blog Gallica*

Raynal's text with marginal annotations by Diderot's daughter, indicating the passages that her father contributed.³⁵ The text once belonged to Alexandre Marie François de Paule de Dompierre, seigneur d'Hornoy (1742–1828), member of the Parlement de Paris and great-nephew of Voltaire. The so-called 'Hornoy copy' marks 352 passages as being by Diderot, in other words, 81 more passages than the figure indicated by the *fonds Vandeul*. However, as Goggi explains, neither the Hornoy copy nor the *fonds Vandeul* provides a complete picture. Both sources omit passages that Diderot is known to have contributed, and although there are many overlaps in the passages indicated by the two sources, there are also discrepancies. One of these is precisely over Polly's *Speech*. The *fonds Vandeul* includes the body of Franklin's *Speech*, whereas the Hornoy copy does not; instead, the latter only marks up the following paragraph:³⁶

[Figure 1] Raynal, et al., *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 4 vols (Geneva: Pellet, 1780), iv, p.

<<https://gallica.bnf.fr/blog/26102015/lhistoire-des-deux-indes-de-labbe-raynal>> (26 October 2015) [accessed 30 July 2018].

³⁵ Goggi (2018) accepts that the annotations are indeed by Diderot's daughter, Mme de Vandeul. A team of scholars, led by Glenn Roe, has incorporated the marginalia into a searchable digital edition and visualisation of Raynal's *Histoire*. It is now possible to view digitally the passages marked in this copy. See Glenn Roe, 'Digitizing Raynal' <<http://www.glennroe.net/2016/07/30/digitizing-raynal/>> (30 July 2016) [accessed 2 May 2018]; and Whitelaw, Hinchcliffe and Roe, *Visualising Raynal* <<http://cdhr-projects.anu.edu.au/raynal/>> [accessed 2 August 2018].

³⁶ See Goggi (2018), p. 289; and Duchet (1978), p. 199, n. 2.

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Available at <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1073204c/f262.item>> [accessed 2 May 2018].

The majority of this passage was only added to the third, 1780 edition of Raynal's *Histoire*.³⁷ Parts of it will be familiar to readers of the *Supplément*. 'Ce discours, qu'on entendroit souvent dans nos contrées et par-tout où l'on a *attaché des idées morales à des actions physiques qui n'en comportent point*, si les femmes y avoient l'intrépidité de Polli Baker [...]' (my italics). The italicised phrase is, of course, the subtitle to the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville, ou Dialogue entre A et B sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas*. This textual mirroring all but confirms that Diderot edited this part of the *Histoire*. Ultimately, Goggi concludes that scholars will need to use both the *fonds Vandeul* and the Hornoy copy in order to get close to establishing a complete list of Diderot's contributions to the *Histoire des deux Indes*.³⁸ The current view, then, suggests that Diderot probably contributed both introduced Polly's *Speech* to the *Histoire* in 1770, and then edited the paragraph following it, for publication in the 1780 edition of the text.

³⁷ For this change, see book 17, paragraph 154 (1770). It can be viewed using Whitelaw, Hinchcliffe and Roe's online tool (see above n. 35).

³⁸ As Goggi (2018) puts it, 'il faudra, tout d'abord, s'appuyer à la fois sur l'exemplaire Hornoy et sur les documents du fonds Vandeul', p. 254. The forthcoming vol. XXVI of DPV promises to provide the most accurate list of Diderot's contributions.

However this detective story ends, the inter-textual echoes between the *Histoire* and the *Supplément* clearly remain, and serve as long-hand *renvois* linking the *Supplément* and the *Histoire*.³⁹ These textual flags subtly mark the terrain of Raynal's work that Diderot has colonized, and they might remind a few, careful readers (of both texts) of something they have heard before. Diderot's *Supplément* can now be seen not only as a supplement (in the Beauzéean-Derridean sense) to Bougainville's *Voyage*, but also to Raynal's *Histoire* – a text which it exposes as having had, all along, an unacknowledged editorial hand: Diderot's.

Back in the *Supplément*, after Polly's address, Diderot's diegetic readers discuss her speech, and in so doing highlight the inter-textual relationship with the *Histoire*:

A: Et ce n'est pas là un conte de votre invention?

B: Non.

A: J'en suis bien aise.

B: Je ne sais si l'abbé Raynal ne rapporte pas le fait et le discours dans son Histoire du commerce des deux Indes.

A: Ouvrage excellent et d'un ton si différent des précédents, qu'on a soupçonné l'abbé d'y avoir employé des mains étrangères.

B: C'est une injustice.

A: Ou c'est une méchanceté. On dépèce le laurier qui ceint la tête d'un grand homme et on le dépèce si bien qu'il ne lui en reste plus qu'une feuille.

B: Mais le temps rassemble les feuilles éparses et refait la couronne.

³⁹ These echoes are not explicit, like the *Encyclopédie*'s *renvois*, but they nevertheless encourage a practice of reading that is 'supplemental', requiring texts to be cross-referenced.

A: Mais l'homme est mort, il a souffert de l'injure qu'il a reçue de ses contemporains, et il est insensible à la réparation qu'il obtient de la postérité.

(617)

Here, Diderot explicitly mentions the *Histoire*, cross-referencing the *Supplément* with Raynal's work. Yet, more than one Diderotian wink tips off the reader that all may not be as it seems. A seed of doubt is planted that Polly Baker's speech might in fact be a fiction, 'un conte', and Raynal's work is no sooner cited as an authority than undermined by the suggestion it could have been (and of course was) worked on by 'des mains étrangères'. The irony, of course, is that one of these pairs of hands is far from foreign to readers of the *Supplément*: those of Diderot himself. The invitation to follow the textual breadcrumbs, even after an author's death, is reinforced by the closing metaphor of A and B's dialogue: of picking up 'les feuilles éparses' of the victor's laurel wreath – not only leaves, of course, but also pages – and piecing them back together. By following the paper trail from the *Histoire des deux Indes* to the *Supplément* and back, readers find that, in the end, it leads to Diderot. While A and B's dialogue appears to suggest that it is Raynal who has been unjustly deprived of his laurels, given what we now know from having tracked Polly, we realise that Diderot is in fact also making an oblique joke about his own little known work, at his time of writing, on the *Supplément* and the *Histoire*.⁴⁰ And yet the joke ends on a sour note insofar as Diderot suggests that even if time allows readers to piece back together the scattered pages of his oeuvre, by that time he will be long gone, and

⁴⁰ A and B's praise of Raynal bears interesting similarities to the 'Lettre apologétique de l'abbé Raynal' that Diderot later wrote, in March, 1781, in response to Grimm's attack against Raynal and his collaborators.

‘insensible à la réparation qu’il obtient de la postérité’.⁴¹ Nonetheless, however many (or few) readers appreciated it, by supplementing the *Supplément* with Franklin’s *Speech* and the subsequent discussion between A and B, Diderot flags the *Histoire des deux Indes* as a key inter-text to the *Supplément*.

Intra-texts as supplements

Diderot’s insertion of the *Speech* also highlights that the *Supplément* can be better understood if its numbered sections are cross-read *intra-textually*, as well as *inter-textually*. The 1772 version of the *Supplément* consists of four main parts, or ‘acts’ (the short sections bear some resemblance to acts in a play, and Diderot is known for writing – and writing about – theatre). In 1780, *The Speech of Miss Polly Baker* and the accompanying dialogue between A and B was added in the structural centre of the *Supplément*, splitting the ‘Entretien de l’Aumônier et d’Orou’ in two and turning the *Supplément* into a ‘five act’ text.

But – to extend the theatrical vocabulary – beyond these five ‘acts’, the *Supplément* can be divided in other ways, too. Most ‘acts’ contain several ‘scenes’. ‘II: Les Adieux du Vieillard’, for instance, is composed of three discernable scenes: the old Otaïtien’s harangue, A and B’s discussion of it, and B’s narration of the incident featuring Jeanne Barré, which I will discuss below. At other times, meanwhile, one act is framed as being the extension of an earlier one. For example, ‘V: Suite du dialogue entre A et B’, is the continuation of A and B’s dialogue, which has been a refrain across multiple acts. This architectural asymmetry mirrors the

⁴¹ This discussion of posterity echoes Diderot’s correspondence with Falconet between 1765 and 1767, in which Diderot evokes the degree to which he believes all artists are motivated by posterity. For this correspondence, see DPV, xv (1986).

seemingly contradictory claims of the *Supplément*'s different speakers. For many years, scholars interpreted the Otaïtien 'père de famille', Orou's challenge to the French Aumônier's mores as Diderot attacking European, Catholic society, and eulogising the simple morals of natural man. This reading seems to be supported by the preceding act, in which the Vieillard condemns Bougainville and his crew: 'Nous [les Otaïtiens] suivons le pur instinct de la nature', he cries, 'et tu [Bougainville] as tenté d'effacer de nos âmes son caractère. Ici tout est à tous, et tu nous as prêché je ne sais quelle distinction du tien et du mien' (590).

However, if our interpretation of Orou and the Aumônier's conversation is supplemented not just by the preceding dialogue but by other scenes in the *Supplément*, Otaïti begins to look like anything but a natural, egalitarian paradise. We learn, for instance, that Aotourou – the Otaïtien taken to France, who could not learn the French language or customs – possesses his own customs. B explains, 'l'usage commun des femmes était si bien établi dans son esprit qu'il se jeta sur la première Européenne qui vint à sa rencontre, et qu'il se disposait très sérieusement à lui faire la politesse d'Otaïti' (586). Sex, for Aotourou, is a matter of good manners, so it is 'only natural' (a phrase that almost always means quite the opposite, 'only social custom') that he should be polite.

Likewise, when Bougainville's crew and the Otaïtiens meet, it quickly becomes clear that this meeting stages a culture clash, not a nature-culture clash. As the sailors disembark on the beach, the Otaïtiens show the same gesture of 'politeness' as Aotourou: they attempt to rape a crew member. B describes the moment to A:

B: De jeunes Otaïtiens s'étaient jetés sur lui, l'avaient étendu par terre, le déshabillaient et se disposaient à lui faire la civilité.

A: Quoi! ces peuples si simples, ces sauvages si bons, si honnêtes...

B: Vous vous trompez. Ce domestique était une femme déguisée en homme.

Ignorée de l'équipage entier pendant tout le temps d'une longue traversée, les

Otaïtiens devinèrent son sexe au premier coup d'œil. (597–98)

This crew member was in fact a woman, Jeanne Barré, who had dressed up as man to join the expedition. Her disguise, however, did not fool the Otaïtiens. These tales involving Aotourou and Jeanne Barré reveal Diderot's imagined version of the Otaïtiens' sexual practices. As such, they are necessary supplements to the Vieillard's tirade, and to Orou's entreaty to the Aumônier, calling into question their claims (themselves European ethnocentric stereotypes) that Otaïti is a non-civilised paradise, where sex is a natural act free of moral significance. The contradiction between what the Vieillard and Orou *say* the Otaïtiens are like, and what we *see* they are like in the episodes involving Aotourou and Jeanne Barré exposes Otaïti as the cultured civilisation it is. B's remark to A regarding Jeanne Barré – 'vous vous trompez' – thus applies to two of A's assumptions: first, 'you are mistaken, the Otaïtiens were not really going to rape a man', and more broadly, 'you are mistaken, the Otaïtiens are not really simple and good'.⁴² If the Otaïtiens are savages, it is not in the natural sense (of being primitive), but in the moral one (of being cruel). They are not that different from Europeans, after all.

At times, it is not even necessary to look to another dialogue for a mitigating supplement, since contradictory claims can be found within a single 'scene'. For

⁴² Disturbingly for today's readers, B's response ('do not worry, this servant was actually a woman') presumes that A's shock comes not from the idea that the Otaïtiens would rape someone, but from the idea that they would practice homosexual sex. On Diderot's writing on homosexuality, see Curran (2019), pp. 285–91.

instance, Orou's claim not to understand what the Aumônier means by 'religion' is particularly dubious in that it follows Thia's prayer to the almoner to bear her a child, delivered in wholly religious terms:

Si tu m'accordes cette faveur, je ne t'oublierai plus; je te bénirai toute ma vie;
j'écrirai ton nom sur mon bras et sur celui de ton fils, nous le prononcerons
sans cesse avec joie; et lorsque tu quitteras ce rivage, mes souhaits
t'accompagneront sur les mers jusqu'à ce que tu sois arrivé dans ton
pays. (602)

Thia's and Orou's discourses betray the fact that the Otaïtiens *do* have a religion, but rather than Christianity it is a cult of procreation.⁴³ Otaïtien social practices may not be European but, as critics have noted, they are social nonetheless.⁴⁴ The Vieillard's claim that the Otaïtiens will become slaves to the French colonizers must also be reconsidered in the light of Thia's prayer for sex. Her request is motivated by her

⁴³ Whether contemporary Tahiti had such a religion is not the issue. Diderot was not interested in producing an anthropologically accurate account, but in creating a fictional Otaïti to challenge fallacious European stereotypes of the New World. In short, he uses fiction to expose fiction.

⁴⁴ See, for example, George Van Den Abbeele, 'Utopian Sexuality and its Discontents: Exoticism and Colonialism in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*', *Esprit créateur*, 24 (1984), 43–52; Christie McDonald, *The Dialogue of Writing: Essays in Eighteenth-Century French Literature* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), pp. 61–104; W. Anderson, pp. 136–52; Rex, pp. 50–51; Muthu, pp. 975–77; Sharon A. Stanley, 'Unraveling Natural Utopia: Diderot's *Supplément to the Voyage of Bougainville*', *Political Theory*, 37.2 (2009), 266–89; and Tunstall, pp. 30–31.

wish for a child, in turn driven by her desire to climb the social and economic ladder in Otaïti, where children equal power and wealth. In a reversal of conventional colonial roles, the European submits to his New World hosts, and it is the native woman, not the foreign man, who comes away from this encounter having made her fortune.⁴⁵

Finally, Polly's *Speech* also serves as an internal counterpoint to the dialogues of the *Supplément*, such as Orou and the Aumônier's dialogue, which resumes just after the *Speech*. This juxtaposition encourages readers to compare Otaïtien society, in which children bring status and wealth, with that of New England, in which the opposite is the case for unmarried women. At first glance, Otaïti might therefore appear less repressive than New England. However, Orou explains that Otaïti does have sexual laws: infertile or menstruating women must wear grey veils branding them as such, and if these women have sex they are condemned as 'libertines'. When supplemented by prior reading of Polly's speech, Otaïtien laws no longer look very different from those of the patriarchal 'Old World', be it France or New England, in which sexual conduct is regulated and nonconformist acts are publicly punished. The *Supplément* can therefore be more fully understood if readers recognise that its different fragments – its acts and scenes – all supplement one another intra-textually. Unlike in the *Encyclopédie*, however, in which *renvois* between articles are explicitly provided, the *Supplément*'s readers must decide for themselves how the text's parts

⁴⁵ Tunstall (p. 30) notes the irony that as the almoner breaks his vow of chastity he performs his role as alms giver, providing Thia with the currency of Otaïti. On the notion of children as currency, see W. Anderson, p. 136, and Van Den Abbeele, pp. 45–46.

are interrelated before they can cross-reference them and, hopefully, understand the whole.

Polly, or 'pour l'éclaircissement de ce qui n'a pas été suffisamment expliqué'

In the closing pages of the text, A and B discuss what they have learned from the 'Supplément'. In response to Orou's praise of the Otaïtien way of life, A asks B, 'malgré cet éloge, quelles conséquences utiles à tirer des mœurs et des usages bizarres d'un peuple non civilisé?' (628). A has still not understood that the Otaïtiens are not 'non civilisé[s]' at all. Despite B's attempts to qualify the answers A makes him give, A persists in jumping to conclusions. A wants to know which virtues and vices are natural, for instance, and he enquires about jealousy, which B defines as '[la] passion d'un animal indigent et avare qui craint de manquer; sentiment injuste de l'homme' (632). A takes this to mean that jealousy is natural. 'Je ne dis pas cela', replies B, 'vices et vertus, tout est également dans la nature' (632). Finally, B states that although we might conceive of a state of nature, this does not mean it actually exists. At this, A is at a loss:

A: Pas même à Otaïti?

B: Non. (634)

At last, B gives A some advice, consonant with the implicit message throughout the *Supplément*: 'Méfiez-vous de celui qui veut mettre de l'ordre; ordonner, c'est toujours se rendre le maître des autres en les gênant' (639).

A is still struggling. 'Que ferons-nous donc? Reviendrons-nous à la nature? Nous soumettrons-nous aux lois?' (643). It is at this point that B tries to 'bring order' to proceedings by telling A precisely what to do: 'Nous parlerons contre les lois insensées jusqu'à ce qu'on les réforme et en attendant nous nous y soumettrons. [...]

Imitons le bon aumônier, moine en France, sauvage dans Otaïti' (643). Critics have often expressed surprise at these words, which have been read – as if they were B's final conclusion, and as if B were the mouthpiece for Diderot – as 'a note much more timid than revolutionary', as 'conformism', and as 'a synthesis of cultural relativism and [...] pragmatic conservatism'.⁴⁶ First, A should surely be wary of accepting B's instructions, since only moments earlier B advised A to beware of those who try to 'ordonner' (both 'to put in order' and 'to give orders'). B's orders must be supplemented, and thus questioned, by what he said just moments before. Moreover, critics seem to have paid particular attention to B's 'conservative' advice because it comes in the closing pages of the *Supplément*. According to literary convention, this is where a text's moral is to be found. Yet, if the *Supplément as a whole* recommends anything, it is to challenge conventional practices of reading and interpreting, to beware of a neat order, and never to base judgement on a single piece of evidence. Indeed, B's supposed 'conclusion' to the *Supplément* makes more sense if as just one more piece of evidence to add to what has already been gathered. In other words, the *Supplément* makes more sense if read 'supplementally': by intra-textually cross-referencing the text's different fragments, and by inter-textually checking it against Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*.

Following B's 'conclusion', A and B have one last conversation about how they should behave in future, and what they will do that afternoon:

B: Et surtout [nous devrions] être honnête et sincère jusqu'au scrupule avec des êtres fragiles qui ne peuvent faire notre bonheur sans renoncer aux

⁴⁶ Respectively, Arthur M. Wilson, *Diderot* (New York: OUP, 1972), p. 591; Rex, p. 58; Curran (2011), p. 159.

avantages les plus précieux de nos sociétés. Et ce brouillard épais, qu'est-il devenu?

A: Il est retombé.

B: Et nous serons encore libres cet après-dîner de sortir ou de rester?

A: Cela dépendra, je crois, un peu plus des femmes que de nous.

B: Toujours les femmes; on ne saurait faire un pas sans les rencontrer à travers son chemin.

A: Si nous leur lisions l'entretien de l'aumônier et d'Orou?

B: À votre avis, qu'en diraient-elles?

A: Je n'en sais rien.

B: Et qu'en penseraient-elles?

A: Peut-être le contraire de ce qu'elles en diraient. (643–44)

B turns the discussion to 'des êtres fragiles', by which he means women. Yet, on the evidence of the *Supplément*, women are not fragile at all: Jeanne Barré disguises herself as a man and sails across the world; Thia begs the almoner for sex and gets what she wants; and Polly speaks out in a court of law and wins her case. These women do all 'renounce' at least one of the Old World's female gender norms: Jeanne her feminine appearance, Thia her 'pudeur', and Polly her passive public persona. However, contrary to what B claims, these sacrifices actually help these women to secure a social advantage, be it freedom, status, wealth, or justice. Even in the closing pages of the *Supplément*, then, readers must question what they are told by comparing it with evidence gathered elsewhere.

In the final dialogue quoted above, B asks A (for B is now the one with the questions) whether the metaphorical and literal fog has lifted, and only now does A think he can safely answer: yes. As if to check this is true, to check that A can see

clearly, B poses a series of questions about what they will do later that day. A admits that he is unsure; he will wait and see what the women think. ‘Toujours les femmes; on ne saurait faire un pas sans les rencontrer à travers son chemin’, replies B, recalling the meeting with Polly, whom Diderot placed in the centre of the *Supplément*, blocking the reader’s path.⁴⁷ B then asks A two subtly different questions: ‘in your opinion, what would the women say about the ‘Supplément’?’ and ‘what would they think about it?’ A’s answers are not really answers at all (and are, therefore, the best kind): he admits that he does not know what they would say, and that they might not say what they really think.⁴⁸ By reading the ‘Supplément’, A has learned that words and appearances can be deceptive, and that conclusions are only ever provisional. He will wait for the women to supplement his (non-)answers.

Polly Baker is the supplement to the *Supplément* that has helped to elucidate this complicated text: she is, as the *Encyclopédie* article ‘Appendice’ puts it, ‘nécessaire pour l’éclaircissement de ce qui n’a pas été suffisamment expliqué’. And it is with one final inter-textual supplement, a *renvoi* back to Polly’s appearance in the *Histoire des deux Indes*, that this becomes clear. We recall that Diderot edited the paragraph following Polly’s speech in the 1780 *Histoire* to read, ‘ce discours produisit

⁴⁷ Lisa Gasbaronne also sees Polly as the key to this closing discussion about women and, more broadly, as a remarkably eloquent woman among those in Diderot’s dialogues. See ‘Voices from nature: Diderot’s dialogues with women’, *SVEC*, 292 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991), pp. 259–91; p. 289.

⁴⁸ This echoes Diderot’s assertion towards the end of *Sur les femmes* (first version written 1772) that, ‘ou les femmes se taisent, ou souvent elles ont l’air de n’oser dire ce qu’elles disent.’ See *Sur les femmes* in *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, ed. by J. Assézat (Paris: Garnier, 1875), II, pp. 251–62; p. 261.

dans la Nouvelle-Angleterre *une révolution étonnante dans tous les esprits*’ (my italics).⁴⁹ The italicised words replaced the previous phrase, ‘une révolution touchante’. As Diderot (re)writes it, Polly’s courageous act of speaking out against nonsensical laws produced a staggering transformation in everyone’s mindset. This amendment can be seen to reflect back onto B’s ‘concluding’ remarks which have seemed surprisingly conservative to so many. If B’s suggestion that ‘nous parlerons contre les lois insensées jusqu’à ce qu’on les réforme et en attendant nous nous y soumettrons’ is supplemented by Diderot’s revision to the 1780 *Histoire*, we find that speaking out is not described as a paltry, pragmatic solution, but as an act that can cause ‘une révolution étonnante’. Diderot gives speech political power. What is more, he implies that by speaking out, like Polly, one might not have to wait and (in the meantime) submit to ‘les lois insensées’ at all. When read inter-textually, B’s advice gains new, less conservative, connotations; Polly helps us to see this. With her, Diderot teaches a lesson as useful for eighteenth-century readers as for those in our era of ‘fake news’, and a lesson that researchers trying to reassemble the scattered pages of Diderot’s oeuvre know very well: that no single piece of evidence is enough, and that we must constantly seek out supplements.

Word count (including footnotes, excluding abstracts): 8,191

⁴⁹ *Histoire des deux Indes* (1780), IV, p. 244.