# VOLTAIRE AND CLIO : FROM HISTORY TO STORY

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## Abstract

This thesis proposes to examine Voltaire as 'literary' historian and to compare the theory and practice of his histories with those of contemporary historiographers and historians. The works selected for focus are Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* (1730) and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751).

Section I, 'History Voices', centres on the enunciated theory and the actual practice of contemporary history. The prefatory writing of a selection of historians (from among Voltaire's sources) is analysed to identify a prefatory programme. This is subsequently compared to the contemporary practice of writing history and it reveals an intriguing degree of divergence concerning attitudes towards authority, objectivity and truth. Similar analysis is applied to Voltaire's theoretical writing on historiography, revealing a 'historian's voice'. While Voltaire and his contemporaries all discuss questions of the historical author, subject, style, truth, aims and reader, actual contemporary history (excluding Voltaire) discloses a monotonal texture, uniquely concerned with the chosen subject of history.

Section II, 'Story Voices', focuses on Voltaire's use of different textual levels in his composition of the *story* of his histories, that is, the telling, evaluation and presentation of historical and non-historical material within history. Analysis is made of structure, style, use of anecdotes, voices and echoes to investigate the development of a polytonal history which is simultaneously historical and contemporary, analytical and polemical, general and personal. In comparing Voltaire's histories to contemporary histories and to his own enunciated theories of historiography, textual analysis also reveals ambiguities in fact and fiction, in the historical and the *storical*, in historiography and narrative. A salient feature of the *literariness* of Voltaire's histories is the presence of duality, ironic tone and polytonal voices, all of which are audible beneath and within the official history. This *literariness* underlies and comprises the very vitality of Voltaire's history.

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## Abstract

This thesis proposes to examine Voltaire as 'literary' historian and to compare the theory and practice of his histories with those of contemporary historiographers and historians. The works selected for focus are Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* (1730) and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751). To provide a contemporary comparison, traditional historical works about Charles XII and Louis XIV are also selected for analysis from amongst Voltaire's own historical sources.

Critics have mainly tended to focus their research on *Voltaire historian* - to use the phrase coined by Brumfitt's seminal work - along two broad axes, focusing on Voltaire's historical writing either from a more general perspective, in relation to his other writing, or from a purely historical perspective, assessing the historical content for precision of fact, historical accuracy and resultant success of the works as histories. Rarely have critics considered the literary or fictional features of the work in any detail, or read the history for its non-historical content. Yet, there is no reason why eighteenth-century history should remain the sole preserve of historians. Nor is there any logic in exclusively examining Voltaire's histories alongside so potentially heterogeneous a body as his correspondence, theatre, pamphlets, poetry, fictional or philosophical writing. The originality of this thesis lies in the choice to conduct close reading of Voltaire's histories in order to identify the qualities which compose the *literariness* of these works, and in its findings.

The Preface outlines the analysis of *history* and *story* elements within Voltaire's historical writing, and proposes the term *literariness* to describe their unusual combination. The intention is to identify some of the salient qualities of the *literariness* of Voltaire's history. Research carried out to date in the area of Voltaire's historical writing, and specifically on *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, is

reviewed briefly. The Introductory Chapter recalls the literary beginnings of history, in the Homeric epic, tracing its path through Machiavelli's political expediency and the often imprecise and unscientific nature of its composition before Voltaire's day. History's literary origins are further highlighted by the comparison of dictionary definitions of *histoire* and *nouvelle*, revealing an ambiguity which Voltaire would later manipulate in his famous definition of *histoire* in the *Encyclopédie*. Drawing on twentieth-century theories of the author, the term *Voltaire* is broken down into the figures of writer, author, historian, narrator and composer of the historical text. Finally, focus turns to consideration of the varied body of writers, from historians and chroniclers to correspondents and travellers, who were among Voltaire's historical sources.

Section I, 'History Voices', focuses on late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century historians, historiography and histories of Charles XII and Louis XIV. The first chapter examines the prefatory notices in historical writing, whether history, memoirs or correspondence, by authors from among Voltaire's sources. Prefatory notices display various common concerns, the most prominent of which is the confident establishment of the writer's authority, although subsequent discussions of subject matter are less assured, with doubts voiced concerning inclusion and exclusion of material. One of the primary incongruities occurs in the untenable combination of impartiality and subjectivity. Personal insight is claimed as an extension of historical authority but this undermines the impartiality which is also demanded. In general, most writers declare categorically that historical *truth* exists and must be discovered and recounted, whilst narrative style is dismissed as irrelevant. The intention to influence readers points to the didactic design of texts which aim to provide instruction through their chosen presentation of historical events and errors. Thus, prefatory promises draw attention to common, consensual rules of contemporary historiography which nonetheless lack precise formulation.

To explore the correlation between the theory and practice of traditional, contemporary historians, Chapter 2 studies a selection of scenes and passages from history. As announced, each historical writer duly imposes his authority within the text in a persuasive manner, underlining the merits of personal experience and insight into

history. Historians who were not present at events either feign their involvement or seek to establish their authority through discussion, within the history, of matters such as subject choice and textual organisation. However, the characterisation of the monarchs Charles XII and Louis XIV is extremely variable. Innumerable depictions of both monarchs exist, but most texts reflect a prevailing stress on the depiction of an ideal portrait which projects the historian's own political and moral outlook, rather than on making a serious attempt to focus on the individual subject and his true personal qualities. Therefore, the portrayal of monarchs renders them puppets of the writer's imagination rather than revealing any attempt at real likeness. Moreover, it is evident that the concern of most writers of history is with recording and analysing foreign policy or wars of their chosen monarch. War is considered an essential ingredient in any narrative dealing with monarchs, although the tone of its presentation depends entirely on individual writers' allegiances, skill, preferences, aims and ability. Despite prefatory promises of impartiality, each writer carries his personal political favouritism and bias into the text, to varying degrees. Many choose military euphemisms for emphasis and others favour omission or oversight where defeat of their chosen protagonist is concerned. Particular examination is made of Limiers's portrayal of the Sun King playing war games, an illustration which reveals the king's character flaw. The vast divergence uncovered between theory and practice suggests that prefatory promises were pure rhetoric, whilst the histories were intended as texts of influence rather than as dispassionate or impartial chronicles of events. This analysis of traditional historical writing provides a detailed backdrop against which Voltaire's histories may be examined for differences in his treatment of Charles XII and Louis XIV and for any possible gulf between his expressed theoretical aspirations and his actual written texts.

Chapter 3 sets out to explore Voltaire's formulation of historiography in order to detect if, and to what extent, this departs from contemporary theories. A 'historian's voice' is identified as the source of historiographical theory, comment and authority within Voltaire's historical and historiographical writing. It is through this voice that authority and authoritativeness are interwoven in Voltaire's writing, and they combine with objective impartiality to reinforce the historian's dominant position of control. In

direct contrast to contemporary historians, the historian's voice in Voltaire displays no doubt about control, validity, truth or accuracy. The choice and definition of a new type of history occurs in tandem with discussion of historical subject. Part of the innovative nature of Voltaire's histories can be said to stem from the historian's vision of history as a lasting work of art, rather than an ephemeral record of petty politics or war. It is for this reason that the historian's voice places great emphasis on both artistry and entertainment within history, refusing to engage in the inaccurate hagiographic or physical portraits painted by his contemporaries. A most persuasive discussion of *vérité* by the historian's voice stresses the importance of aspiring to a high degree of factual accuracy, while permitting various different shades of truth to enter history in order to entertain and persuade. In a markedly lucid manner, the artifice of the historical composition is underlined, clearly revealing it as a selective, individual creation which is neither exhaustive in its coverage nor perfect in its *truth*. In addressing theoretical issues in such an enlightened manner, the historian's voice frees the text from contemporary constraints and uncovers a vision of history which goes far beyond contemporary history's predilection for chronicles of battle and hagiography.

Section II, 'Story Voices', compares Voltaire's histories to contemporary histories and to his own enunciated theories of historiography. To achieve these theoretical aspirations, Voltaire's history must radically differ from contemporary practice. The focus is on the practice of composing the *story* of his histories, that is, the telling, evaluation and presentation of historical and non-historical material within *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. Chapter 4 studies the unique shape of Voltaire's historical texts, structures which inevitably draw the reader's attention to their composition and internal organisation. The prominent structure of narrative duality, evident in the bi-polar focus on two monarchs in *Histoire de Charles XII*, or on public and private, war and society in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, engenders divisions which provide chapter endings full of suspense. Additional orientation is supplied through cinematographic views and proleptic anecdotes. Duality also opens the text to include *story* features which transmit the non-historical elements of the two histories, traits unhindered by picture portraits or hagiographic characterisation. As prescribed by his theory, personalities are not painted in Voltaire's histories and stock characterisation

is rejected, thus undermining the reader's expectations of history and challenging preconceived ideas of the genre. The historian's world view is global, energetic and eager to direct the reader towards a similar viewpoint. This is most evident in the unusual introduction of proleptic or symbolic motifs and anecdotes into the narrative of history. Such an unusual approach to historiography introduces subtle, literary, stylistic elements not normally found in traditional, contemporary history. As well as entertaining the reader, they challenge perceptions and preconceptions, while attracting attention to the presence of non-historical components within the *story* of Voltaire's history.

In Chapter 5, some of the voices conveying non-historical details and subtexts - especially those tagged with *je* - are identified and examined. These vary from historiographical voices to personal or contemporary voices, while an ironic running commentary weaves a polemical tone through the polytonal narrative. Ambiguities and contradictions abound and while each individual articulation is not necessarily faithful to the stated aspirations of the historian's voice, the broader perspective brought to the histories by these voices remains true to Voltaire's aspiration to write a new type of history, appealing to both contemporaries and to posterity. *Story* voices establish a relationship of complicity with the reader, with every *je*, *on* and *nous* either inviting the reader into a private realm of mutual comprehension or challenging his/her preconceptions. It is a pact of textual *literariness* more flavoured with irony and polemic than it is laden with matters historical.

The final chapter examines Voltaire's histories for evidence of other writers' fingerprints on the narrative. Analysis reveals links with Homeric epic and with Rousseau's recent philosophical essay. This classical/contemporary contrast is symbolic of the ambiguities and contradictions within the polytonal narrative of these histories, works which are firmly rooted within ancient tradition whilst reacting against traditional historiographical practice through the systematic expansion of the narrative to include non-historical elements. The discovery in Voltaire's histories of the 'heroic formula', or 'three plus one' structure which has its origins in Homer's *Iliad*, is evidence of an emphatic link between characterisation and epic. This simultaneously structures, and yet frees, the historical text by drawing it away from mere events and

into the wider, more creative realm of *story*. Impelled by such a fictional motif, the reader seeks resolution and decision in the fourth element of the equation, in the form of persuasive aphorism and social philosophy furnished in the history. From this classical, epic voice, focus returns to contemporary writing, and to the revelation of a systematic refutation of the ideas espoused within Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. A gulf exists between the socio-historical approach of the two writers, evident in their interpretation of the value of the arts and the sciences. Voltaire chooses to promote his own sociological paradigm through the convenient and persuasive substantiation offered by historical example. As with the historical epic voice, the refutation of Rousseau's historically unsubstantiated arguments shows evidence of a wider, more erudite interpretation of social history, connecting it with the historian's vision for both society and progress. This chapter concludes with a close reading of short excerpts in order to better perceive the *history* and *story* voices apparent therein.

The importance of comparing Voltaire's histories to contemporary treatment of the same historical subject both establishes Voltaire's place as historian within the contemporary tradition of historiography, and demonstrates his substantial contribution to the development of the genre, or to the beginnings of social history. In comparing contemporary theory and practice with that of Voltaire, it was possible to identify innovations and changes introduced into history by the *philosophe*, whilst also revealing his manipulation of the genre, to other ends. Voltaire's fusion of accurate historical research with stringent historiographical practices produced histories which are equal to any contemporary volumes. However, the most striking feature of these histories remains their *literariness*, that unique amalgam of history and non-historical material, which may best be summarised as the movement from *history* to *story*. This can lie in the fusion of literary style and fictional techniques, or in the inclusion of philosophical argument and defence of religious tolerance, or in the epic voice of classical history, striving towards a history which addresses universal themes, or simply in the insertion of entertaining anecdotes in short, accessible works of history. It is this *literariness* which underlies and comprises the very vitality of Voltaire's history.

*Do mo thuismitheoirí,*
*mo dhearthair agus*
*mo sheanmháthair,*
*le grá agus míle buíochas.*

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

D - Voltaire, Correspondence in *OC*, ed. Th. Besterman (Genève: Institut et musée Voltaire, 1968-71 [vols I-XV]; Banbury: Voltaire Foundation, 1971-76 [vols XVI-XLVI]; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1976-77 [vols XLVII-LI]). Referred to by D reference number.

*NFC* - *Nottingham French Studies*

*OC* - *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire/Complete Works of Voltaire*

*OH* - *Oeuvres historiques*, ed. R. Pomeau, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade

*OED* - *Oxford English Dictionary*

*SVEC* - *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*

*17th-18th century works*

*ACF* - Limiers, *Abrégé Chronologique de l'histoire de France*, 1722

Bell - Bellerive, *Relation d'un voyage [...] d'Espagne à Bender*, 1713

*DSA* - Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, 1750

Fab - Fabrice, *Anecdotes du séjour du roi de Suède à Bender*, 1760

Grim - Grimarest, *Les Campagnes de Charles XII*, 1706-11

*HC* - Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII*, in *OC*, ed. Von Proschwitz.

Hén - Hénault, *Abrégé Chronologique de l'histoire de France*, 1744

*HRL* - Limiers, *Histoire du règne de Louis XIV*, 1717

*HS* - Limiers, *Histoire de Suède ...*, 1721

Larr - Larrey, *Histoire de France sous le règne de Louis XIV*, 1718

Mot - La Motraye, *Voyages du Sr. A. de La Motraye en Europe, en Asie, et en Afrique*, 1727

*Pyrr* - Voltaire, *Pyrrhonisme de l'Histoire*

*SL* - Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, in *OH*, ed. Pomeau.

*Supp* - Voltaire, *Supplément du Siècle de Louis XIV*

Th - Theyls, *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Charles XII*, 1722

# EDITIONS OF VOLTAIRE'S HISTORIES REFERRED TO IN THIS THESIS

*HC* - Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII*, ed. G. Von Proschwitz (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996).

*SL* - Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* in *Oeuvres historiques*, ed. R. Pomeau, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 603-1220.

# PREFACE : FROM HISTORY TO STORY

This thesis sets out to examine Voltaire as 'literary historian' and to compare the theory and practice of his histories with those of contemporary historiographers and historians. The focus is on Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* (1730) and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751). These texts have been selected as particularly revealing of Voltaire's gradual development of the theory and practice of history for various reasons: they are complementary as they are both early works; each deals with the relatively recent history of two remarkable monarchs; each draws on a wide variety of contemporary sources, including correspondents and historians, to which they may be compared or contrasted. Voltaire's historiography is an area which has not yet been explored in exhaustive detail and in which there remains much analysis to be completed. Amongst the various studies of his historical writing which have already been undertaken, few acknowledge or examine the place of Voltaire within the eighteenth-century tradition of writing near-contemporary or recent history.[1]

Yet, it is not just the historical subject matter which is significant in these texts. Voltaire's histories seem just as intriguing for their non-historical qualities, varied content and composition as for their historical and historiographical programmes. *Literariness* is the term which best encapsulates the particular blend of historiography,

[1] Many critics merely cite Voltaire as the starting point of a new tradition. For instance, B. Croce defines the split in historical traditions as the dispute between 'l'historiographie française - histoire de la civilisation (Voltaire et ses successeurs) - et la germanique - histoire de l'Etat (Justus Möser et ses successeurs)'. Reductionist in its vision, this ignores the reality of Voltaire's historical texts, such as the 'histoire de l'Etat' content of chapters I-XXIV of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. See B. Croce, *Théorie et Histoire de l'Historiographie* (Geneva: Droz,, 1968), p. 99.

historical narrative of events and inclusion of non-historical elements within Voltaire's histories.[2] A close analysis of *literariness* in *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* will be undertaken and comparison made with the work of contemporary historians treating the same themes.

In relation to Voltaire's history, the *story* of history may be understood in three distinct ways. Firstly, *story* could be defined primarily as the narrative of events, representing the particular manner in which history is recounted in Voltaire's historical writing as opposed to in traditional histories. Secondly, *story* might represent a pleasing and entertaining (story-like) aspect of narrative, such as fictional anecdote, fable, legend, digression or allegory. Finally, *story* can be used in opposition to *history*, to denote the asides, opinion and commentary on non-historical issues which are included in Voltaire's history and are conveyed by specific textual voices, creating a complicitous relationship with the reader. These various interpretations of *story* add to the history/story duality of the French term *histoire*.[3]

Are Voltaire's histories composed with the attention to style and shape that would make it possible to read them as *literary* (albeit factual) works whose narrative resembles that of *stories* of an entertaining (fictional) kind? Notwithstanding their accurate historical research and moderate judgements, their *storical* (*story* elements in narrative) quality and content suggest the desire to appeal to a wider audience than

[2] Although many *literary* qualities are not necessarily exclusive to Voltaire in the eighteenth century, *literariness* may be shown to be a salient feature of his histories, in contrast to those of many of his contemporaries.
[3] See discussion of *histoire* definitions in the Introduction.

would be attracted to mere accounts and appraisals of events past. Thus, Voltaire's histories merit examination for the inclusion of *other* concerns, neither strictly historical nor directly linked to the subject in question, and for the method of their incorporation into the narrative. The texts are characterised by different narrative registers which echo the historian's various concerns. These textual *voices* range from the historical to the *storical*, from factual to fictional and from historiographical programme to narrative practice. Analysis of the two histories *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* will seek to identify different *voices* and to ascertain to what extent they contribute to a seeming paradox, that of Voltaire as 'literary historian'. Such a *literariness* would constitute a striking departure from contemporary history and would suggest the cohabitation of *history* and *story*, in which the historical subject interweaves with philosophical and narrative ornaments.

Consideration of the movement from history to story will be undertaken in Section One, 'History Voices', which will focus on the enunciated theory and the actual practice of contemporary history. The prefatory writing of selected contemporary eighteenth-century historians will be analysed for identification of their prefatory programmes (Ch.1). Subsequently, the theoretical pronouncements of contemporary historians will be compared to their actual practice of writing history (Ch. 2). Similar analysis will then be applied to Voltaire's theoretical writing on historiography, to ascertain any similarities to the aspirations of his contemporaries and to discover to what extent Voltaire's theories could be said to differ from theirs (Ch. 3).

Section Two, 'Story Voices', will focus on revealing Voltaire's actual use of textual levels and voices in composing the *story* of his histories, in comparison with his own enunciated theories of historiography and with the practice of his contemporaries. Textual analysis will begin with an examination of structure and style together with a focus on historical anecdote (Ch. 4). This will be followed by consideration of many of the textual forms and voices (Ch. 5). Finally, the text will be explored for fingerprints or echoes of other writers or concerns, whether classical or contemporary, which may be audible beneath and within the official voice of the historian. The final sections of analysis will review the functioning of the ensemble effect in selected passages of history (Ch. 6).

The combined analyses of *history* and *story* may unveil particular qualities of *literariness* in Voltaire's histories.

## ***Etat présent***

According to the era in which they write, their own intellectual baggage and the perspective from which they choose to write, all critics have their own Voltaire, 'leur propre Voltaire'.[4] The same observation is true of criticism of Voltaire's historical works, with the additional stricture that these texts have been subjected to an essentially historical criticism, rather than a reading of the histories as works of literature. Amongst the studies of Voltaire's histories which adopt a more literary approach, although pertinent, many tend to be rather general, since they form part of a wider

analysis of Voltaire's complete corpus. In his recent thesis on Voltaire and history, J. Leigh carries out an intriguing study of Voltaire's relationship with history across a wide range of historical and non-historical writing.[5] His work highlights the very considerable extent to which matters historical pervade all of the author's works and are situated at the very core of his social and literary consciousness.

Rather than viewing Voltaire's histories in the light of his historical accuracy or with reference to his other writing, as has heretofore been the trend, this thesis aims to view Voltaire the historian from a different angle, that of comparison with contemporary approaches to the same historical subject matter. Traditional histories will provide the contrast against which particular qualities of *literariness* in Voltaire's histories may be disclosed. To avoid the generalisations often proffered by critics, close examination will be made of key terms and issues such as *history*, *facts* and *truth*, primary concepts which criticism to date has rarely attempted either to question or define. Nor have other critics previously compared traditional historiography with Voltaire's history in any depth. Hence, while some study may be made of the topic in books by the most renowned Voltaire scholars, including G. Lanson,[6] R. Naves,[7] R.

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[4] Menant, S. in research seminar, 'Recherches voltairiennes'. Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne 1997-8. See also J. Sareil, ed., *Voltaire et la critique* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), Intro., p. v.
[5] Leigh, J., 'Voltaire: Between History and Frivolity' (Cambridge: Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 1998), Ch. 4.
[6] Lanson, G., *Voltaire* (Paris: Hachette, 1906), Ch. VI.
[7] Naves, R., *Voltaire, l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Hachette, 1946), Ch. III.

Pomeau,[8] P. Gay,[9] G.M. Pozzo,[10] I.O. Wade,[11] H. Mason,[12] G. Mailhos,[13] Ch. Mervaud[14] and K. O'Brien,[15] the previous research which is of most interest will remain the work carried out on Voltaire as historian and, most specifically, on Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*.

***Histoire de Charles XII***

Critical assessments of *Histoire de Charles XII* adopt considerable diversity of approach. J.H. Brumfitt's and F. Diaz's works on Voltaire historian appeared in the same year but took different viewpoints. Whereas Brumfitt prefers to provide an overview of Voltaire's works of history, Diaz delves into individual texts, giving textual history and analysis, alongside Voltaire's own comments on each work. In classing *Histoire de Charles XII* amongst the writing of the 'apprentice' historian, 'written in a direct and vivid narrative style', Brumfitt appears to dismiss the work.[16] He offers no textual analysis, presumably in accordance with his own suggestion that the history 'does not appear to present a difficult problem to anyone desirous of analysing its

[8] Pomeau, R., *Politique de Voltaire* (Paris: A. Colin, 1963), Ch. III; *Voltaire par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1956), pp. 135-152.
[9] Gay, P., *Voltaire's Politics. The Poet as Realist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 110ff.
[10] Pozzo, G.M., *La storia e il progresso nell'illuminismo francese* (Padova: Cedam, 1964), Ch. 1.
[11] Wade, I.O., *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), Ch. 8.
[12] Mason, H., *Voltaire* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), Ch. 2.
[13] Mailhos, G., *Voltaire, témoin en son temps* (Berne; New York: Peter Lang, 1983), Ch. IV-VIII.
[14] Mervaud, Ch., *Voltaire en toutes lettres* (Paris: Bordas, 1991), pp. 98-111.
[15] O'Brien, K., *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Ch. 2.
[16] Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) p. 9.

technique'.[17] To Brumfitt, the early history is clearly of little interest, either literary or historical.

In contrast, Diaz devotes an entire chapter to *Histoire de Charles XII*, preferring to place it firmly within a discussion of soldier-heroes and to regard it as a philosophical work with the denunciation of princely war obsessions as its declared principal theme.[18] Focusing more on *what* rather than on *how* Voltaire writes, Diaz reduces this history to the 'saggio sul semi-folle eroe del Nord' [The tale of the half-mad hero of the North].[19]

Diaz emphasises Voltaire's industry in locating accurate sources, an aspect which is often remarked by critics and which is the core of J.W. Felix's thesis on this history.[20] Felix's thesis is of particular importance, primarily because it traces most of the sources, acknowledged and unacknowledged, to which Voltaire referred when writing the history.[21] She assesses Voltaire's approach to the history, scrupulously based on authentic documents, representing 'a vivid programme of verified facts from which conclusions can be drawn'. She concludes that the work is essentially 'sound, free from superfluous details, artistic in its conception and finish'.[22]

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[17] *Ibid*, p. 9.
[18] 'Questa verità storica del regno di Carlo XII poteva fornire il migliore insegnamento circa le follie di cui la storia dei principi e governanti presi dalla smania di conquista è intessuta', [The historical truth about the reign of Charles XII can provide the best lesson concerning the follies which permeate the history of conquest-obsessed kings and rulers. (My trans.)], Diaz, *Voltaire storico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1958), p. 79.
[19] Diaz, p. 99.
[20] Felix, J.W., 'A Study of Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* with special reference to the author's sources and conception of history' (London: Ph.D., University of London, 1961). For comment on Voltaire's location of sources see A. Lebois, 'Voltaire historien dans *L'Histoire de Charles XII*' in *L'Histoire au Dix-Huitième siècle*, Colloque d'Aix-en-Provence (1975) (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1980), pp. 297-305, (p. 297), 'cette biographie, scrupuleusement informée'.
[21] Proschwitz further discovers Voltaire's historical sources, pp. 11-36.
[22] Felix, p. 84; Abstract, p. 1.

The history of Charles XII, termed by J-P. Findeisen as 'Voltaires spektakuläres Werk über den Schwedenkönig' [Voltaire's spectacular work on the Swedish King],[23] evokes the similar artistic analogies used by many critics. In the nineteenth century, F. Geffroy wrote of 'd'épisodes dramatiques dont Voltaire a tracé les plus attachans [sic] tableaux'.[24] A century later, in his attempt to explain the presence of the 'romanesque' in history, A. Lebois underlines the fact that Voltaire has an eye for the story-like detail:

> Voltaire a le goût des 'circonstances intéressantes' sachant qu'il n'est historien que du détail. Conception 'stendhalienne' des 'petits faits' aussi profitable à l'historien qu'au romancier.[25]

Lebois summarises Voltaire's perception of history with the equation: 'Pour Voltaire, l'histoire [...] reste un art. Le récit, vivant, est composé'.[26] That parallel between Voltaire's history and art, drawn by so many critics, is an echo of Voltaire's own depiction of the historian as artist. This is a theme pursued by Proschwitz in his introduction to the recent critical edition of *Histoire de Charles XII* (*HC*, 82). It is also a parallel which L. Gossman had already drawn many years earlier, but which he broadens to ascribe artistry to all eighteenth-century historians: 'However 'scientific' they may have been, the historians of the eighteenth-century are all great artists'.[27]

Gossman's interpretation of Voltaire's Charles XII is itself an artistic one which draws a parallel between Voltaire's history and the author's 'profound affinity with the culture of the baroque'.[28] Uniquely among critics, Gossman recognises in *Histoire de*

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[23] Findeisen, J-P., *Karl XII. Von Schweden; Ein König, der zum Mythos wurde* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1992), p. 14.
[24] Geffroy, 'Le Charles XII de Voltaire et le Charles XII de l'histoire' in *Revue des deux mondes*, 84 (1869), 360-390, (p. 360).
[25] Lebois, p. 299.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 304.
[27] Gossman, L., 'Voltaire's *Charles XII*: history into art' in *SVEC*, 25 (1963), 691-720, (p. 715); See also conclusion to Ch. 2 of this thesis.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 699.

*Charles XII* 'positions that Voltaire maintained to the end of his life', noting that the early history is not '*fundamentally* different from his more mature works of history'.[29] However, just like Van den Heuvel and Lebois, who carry out stylistic analyses on the historical text, Gossman makes no distinction between the voices of Voltaire, historian, narrator or author, preferring to focus on the general artistic and dramatic conception of the work.[30] This is quite evident from sweeping conclusions such as the following:

> The historian's conception of history as a spectacle, part comedy, part drama, more or less grandiose and impressive, of which he is the privileged and superior observer, overcoming through his voyeurism the courageous and the crafty alike...[31]

Gossman summarises Voltaire's style as one 'that is never that of debate but always supposes the reader in the secret and on the same side as the author'.[32] This collusion with the reader is one of the points of departure for this thesis which will also investigate whether the interlocutors on both sides might actually be considered to be multiple. Equally, it must be investigated whether the secret behind this spectacle rather than being single, may not, in fact, be many-sided.

The most general point of focus and argument for critics of *Histoire de Charles XII* is Voltaire's method of writing history. Most modern critics note that Voltaire's methods of historical research were scrupulous and that he was painstaking in his search

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[29] *Ibid.*, p. 704; p. 720. This is the position from which this thesis departs, making no major ideological difference between *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The traditional approach, continued and reinforced by Brumfitt, is that *Histoire de Charles XII* is, as A. Waddington writes, a 'production bien différente de celles sur lesquelles j'ai surtout insisté: L'*Essai sur les moeurs* et *le Siècle de Louis XIV*.' See Intro. by Waddington, A., ed., *Histoire de Charles XII* (Paris: Hachette, 1889). See also Almas, D. and A. Banciu, *Voltaire Istoric* (Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica, 1994), Ch. 1, where *Histoire de Charles XII* is deemed to be an 'operà de tranzitie' [transitional work], p. 26.

[30] Van den Heuvel, J., *Voltaire dans ses contes, de «Micromégas» à «l'Ingénu»* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), Ch. III.

[31] Gossman, p. 708-9.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 719.

for correct historical facts.[33] Diaz draws a link between *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* in the relevance for both works of the question of historical facts and the search for accuracy, 'delle fonti e della loro validità' [of his sources and their reliability].[34]

Another link between the two histories of Charles XII and Louis XIV, one also commented on by Diaz, is Voltaire's method of dealing with great historical characters, 'il problema del grande personaggio e della sua incidenza nel complesso dello svolgimento storico' [The problem of the famous historical figure and of his influence on the totality of the course of history].[35] His treatment of characters is deemed to be inextricably linked to the artistic quality of the work. Critics agree that *Histoire de Charles XII* has many 'novelistic' qualities and this concurrence supports the description of history as an 'artistic' creation. However, apart from Gossman's more detailed, if far from comprehensive, interpretation of the character of Charles XII, which he, like Voltaire, compares with that of Peter the Great, few critics return to an analysis of the shape, depth or style of the text itself. There is a general absence of any critical discussion of the parameters or interpretation of *history*, *historical facts* or *events* and how they impinge on the narrative of history. This is an obvious lacuna in works which

[33] It is worth noting that these critics (including Brumfitt, Diaz, Proschwitz and others) tend to accept historical 'fact' and 'truth' without question, essential points which will be discussed and elaborated upon in the course of this thesis.
[34] Diaz, p. 99.
[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

refer to *the* narrator and *the* historian and so presume a monologic discourse and a single angle on *the* truth.[36]

***Le Siècle de Louis XIV***

Critics have not restricted the use of artistic metaphors to Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII.* Many have also referred to *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* as a *tableau*, again echoing Voltaire's own description of the work:

> Un tableau: c'est le terme que Voltaire emploie habituellement pour caractériser son *Siècle de Louis XIV.* Un tableau plutôt qu'une histoire.[37]
>
> Cet ouvrage de vingt années est le tableau de la vie idéale qu'il aurait souhaitée.[38]
>
> Un tableau compris comme une oeuvre d'art, avec ses lumières et ses ombres.[39]

For critics, the term 'tableau' is a conveniently broad term which suggests artistry while allowing space for comment on the rather unique shape and content of the history.

Voltaire's historiographical methods, as employed in the composition of his 'new' type of history, are the object of almost unanimous admiration and praise from critics, historians and historiographers alike:

> Il s'agissait de toute façon d'une histoire soigneusement préparée.[40]

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[36] 'The all-seeing eye of the historian', Gossman, p. 708.
[37] Voltaire, *Oeuvres historiques*, ed. by R. Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957), Preface, p. 10.
[38] Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, ed. by E. Bourgeois (Paris: Hachette, 1906), Intro., p. i.
[39] Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, ed. by A. Adam (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), Preface, p. 29.
[40] Johnson, N., 'La théorie et la pratique de l'historiographie dans la France du XVIIIe siècle: le cas du '*Siècle de Louis XIV* de Voltaire' in *L'Histoire au Dix-Huitième siècle*, pp. 253-267, (p. 257).

> Voltaire a manifesté des exigences de critique historique qui tranchent sur les pratiques rhétoriques traditionnelles et qui annoncent les transformations historiographiques du XIXe siècle.[41]

Yet, while the historiography meets with approval, criticism still tends to focus more on the historical content than on the style in which the history is written.

Literary commentary has often consisted mainly of criticism of the history's structure. In this vein, while pointing out that 'the plan of the *Siècle* has often been criticised', Brumfitt adds his own assessment that, with the concluding chapters on ecclesiastical affairs, 'the 'architectural' unity of the whole was destroyed'.[42] However, this reading judges the history in terms of traditional chronological history which dealt with monarchs and wars, or precisely that against which Voltaire reacted in his very creation of the work.

Voltaire's 'new' project of history, so different from the previous concept or practice of 'history' is noted and highlighted by most critics:

> Parmi les ouvrages qui furent effectivement écrits au XVIIIe siècle, c'est au *Siècle de Louis XIV* de Voltaire qu'on décerne le plus souvent le premier prix d'histoire 'moderne'[43]
>
> Une oeuvre unique entre toutes les oeuvres historiques.[44]
>
> History of a new type-the history not of an individual but of an age.[45]
>
> *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* devait être, dans son esprit, l'oeuvre d'un historien «philosophe».[46]
>
> Histoire de l'esprit humain.[47]

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[41] Mandrou, R., 'La Méthode historique de Voltaire, une lecture du *Siècle de Louis XIV*' in *Historische Forschung im 18. Jahrhundert: Organisation, Zielsetzung, Ergebnisse.* 12. Deutsch-Französisches Historikerkolloquium des Deutschen historischen Instituts Paris. Hrsg. von K. Hammer und J. Voss (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1976), pp. 364-373, (p. 373).
[42] Brumfitt, p. 49.
[43] Johnson, p. 257.
[44] Bourgeois, Intro., p. xliii.
[45] Brumfitt, p. 46.
[46] Adam, Preface, p. 18.
[47] Almas and Banciu, Ch. 1.

However, Brumfitt is not alone in criticising the final execution of the 'new' project, noting that he considers the element of social history to be confined solely to a few chapters at the end of the work:

> It is in the later chapters devoted to specific topics that the historian of society reveals himself fully.[48]

Almost alone amongst the critics, Pomeau is emphatic that, because the history is written by a literary writer, the work should be analysed as a literary creation rather than a strictly historical one:

> Voltaire ne cessera jamais de traiter l'histoire en homme de lettres.
> Ne séparons point pourtant l'homme de lettres de l'historien.[49]

In a different manner, Adam also suggests that the work is certainly not simply a work of history. He highlights one 'other' aspect of the work:

> N'oublions pas non plus que Voltaire a voulu dans son ouvrage prendre la défense de la France en face de l'Europe. *Le Siècle* est un plaidoyer.[50]

Adam's suggestion that there is a great deal more to the *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* than purely a good, solid work of history, combined with Pomeau's emphasis on the 'literariness' of the history, are ideas which find an echo in M-S. Rivière's thesis, 'A Study of Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*'.[51]

Rivière's declared aim is to 'define and ascertain Voltaire's historical method and conception of history in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*'.[52] Initially, he does this through thorough historical research into the composition of, contemporary reactions to, and

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[48] Brumfitt, pp. 50-1.
[49] Pomeau, Preface to *Oeuvres historiques*, p. 9; p. 11.
[50] Adam, Preface, p. 22.
[51] Rivière, M-S., 'A Study of Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*' (Glasgow: Ph.D., University of Glasgow, 1980).
[52] Rivière, Thesis Summary.

sources for the history.[53] Of greater relevance to this thesis is his chapter on 'Form and Expression' which focuses on the style and composition of the work. In that chapter, Rivière identifies a number of what he terms Voltaire's 'manners'. This term is an attempt to label the 'various facets of Voltaire the historian' as evidenced in the many different divisions of the work itself.[54] His isolation of the 'journalistic approach' to history writing in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and his identification of 'raconteur' and 'conteur' make reference to 'Voltaire's different styles as observed in other compositions'.[55] However, just as Brumfitt preserved the unity of voice emanating from the writer 'Voltaire', Rivière, too, fails to distinguish different, contrasting or contradictory coexistent textual voices, preferring to use 'manners' to encompass the variation apparent between sections of the history.[56] Rivière's conclusion that the work is 'a fascinating compendium of Voltaire's different styles observed in other compositions', is the starting point for this thesis's analysis of the relationship between *history* and *story* in the early histories.[57] In contrast to previous criticism, the two works of history will be considered together, as a more satisfactory way of establishing comparisons.

To date, critics have tended to assess Voltaire's histories in a general manner either for factual accuracy or to make comparisons based on their relationship to his

[53] Rivière, Chs. 1,2 and 3 respectively.
[54] Rivière, p. 346.
[55] Rivière, p. 480.
[56] As where Brumfitt writes, 'Voltaire opens his discussions...'. Brumfitt, p. 53.
[57] Rivière, p. 480.

other works. In contrast, this thesis will, through analysis of the work of contemporary historians, provide a concrete comparison of different treatments of the same themes. Rather than examining one history in isolation, two histories have been chosen in order to provide a balance, a scale of contrast, a foil for observations. Where other critics tend to separate the 'apprentice' from the 'mature' work, *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* will, in the main, be considered together. This will not disregard the evident transition between the two works. Finally, to avoid generalised judgement, careful consideration will be given to key terms and issues such as *history*, *facts* and *truth*, concepts which most criticism makes scant effort to question or define.

# BEHIND HISTORY

The writing of history is inextricably linked with the philosophy of each age, yet every individual writer brings a new perspective to the genre. By way of introduction to the study of Voltaire and his contemporaries' history and historiography, it is appropriate to reflect first on the very import of *histoire* and the historian. History not only provides the reconstruction of happenings or events in the life of a leader or of a people, but also comprises a reflection on the motivation for the evolution recounted, and an interpretation of events with a reflection on their wider significance. Significant developments and trends in earlier historiography from the classics and the Renaissance through to the eighteenth century had created a historical conception which Voltaire and his contemporaries accepted as the basis for their historiography. It is not the intention here to speculate on Voltaire's entire historical knowledge.[58] Instead, a glance at some of the historical writings of authors with whom Voltaire was most familiar will place his perception of history in the context of that which preceded him and will also provide a basic measure against which to begin assessment of the relative *historical* and *storical* nature of Voltaire's writing of history.

[58] Critics have already offered many interpretations of Voltaire's historical and other learning. Amongst these, Wade traces a number of Voltaire's crucial historical and historiographical influences from Bossuet to Lenglet du Fresnoy.

## HISTORICAL TRENDS

*Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind*
*He said: I made the Iliad from such*
*A local row. Gods make their own importance.*[59]

In its earliest incarnation in classical times, history constituted a *literary* phenomenon: the origins of history lie firmly rooted in the literary Homeric lays.[60] The earliest histories lacked chronological structure. History began as a written tale, thus, the medium featured and influenced negotiations on land, power and pride.[61] Even Herodotus, the serious historian of the Persian Wars, wrote in the Homeric tradition, thus reinforcing the practices of a literary tradition based on story and effect rather than history and fact.[62] R.W. Macan gives a description of the literary capacity of Herodotus which would flatter any writer of fiction, where he refers to qualities such as:

> His insatiable interest, his insatiable curiosity, his infinite capacity for taking notes, his flair for a good story, his power of sustaining a continuous narrative, his delight in digression, aside and *bon mot*....[63]

This literary quality tended to blur the distinction between the two genres, history and biography, when its elaborations disguised the difference between accounts of a hero's

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[59] Kavanagh, P., 'Epic' in *Patrick Kavanagh: The Complete Poems* (Newbridge, Co. Kildare: Goldsmith Press, 1984), p. 238.
[60] 'The early Greeks possessed a literature which was equivalent to history for them and was accepted with unreserved credence - their epic poems.' See Bury, J.B., *The Ancient Greek Historians* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), p. 2.
[61] 'This interest in history was practical, not antiquarian'. Bury, p. 2.
[62] Grant says of Herodotus: 'His dialogues and speeches and digressions are Homeric, and so is his stress on divine epiphanies and army catalogues and leaders' individual valour, with little notice taken of strategic arguments'. Grant, M., *Greek and Roman Historians: Information and Misinformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 26.
[63] Macan, R.W., 'Herodotus' in *Cambridge Ancient History, V*, ed. R.W. Macan et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 417.

actions and anecdotes displaying the hero's character.[64] It is no surprise that Voltaire's first main historical work, *La Henriade*, focusing on Henri IV, was an epic poem.

Anecdotes in history, although varying over time in style and truth, constitute a literary feature which recurs from classical times through to the eighteenth century. Both Plutarch and Herodotus displayed a propensity for anecdotes, 'which make the latter the outstanding entertainer among Greek and Roman historians'.[65] The extent to which Voltaire employs a development of classical examples in his use of anecdotes, for character elaboration and entertainment in history, remains to be discovered. The relevance of the search for, and analysis of, such literary figures is ascribable to the classical tradition wherein history has more to do with *story* than *history*. The earlier indeterminacy of these terms underlines the non-antiquarian origins of history and its narrative qualities in the early stages of development.

From its beginnings, history developed from being the record of important events and the lives of influential people and was moulded by classical historians into a medium for delivering a particular message, sometimes didactic and frequently moralistic.[66] The influence and message within the historical text are strong features of classical history. Just as each classical historian's voice is identifiably different, the

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[64] The classical distinction between history and biography is further clarified by E.I. McQueen in *Latin Biography*: 'Whereas history describes in detail what its personages *do*, biography is more concerned with revealing what sort of person they *are*, and with this aim in view does not attempt a comprehensive survey of their deeds, but prefers rather to dwell on anecdotes and such activities as contribute towards an illumination of character, any straightforward narrative that occurs being entirely selective.' McQueen, E.I., 'Quintius Curtius Rufus' in *Latin Biography*, ed. T.A. Dorey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 18.

[65] Grant, p. 5.

[66] Q. Skinner defines classical historiography in terms of its humanist successor: 'The two basic tenets of classical - and hence of humanist - historiography were that works of history should inculcate moral lessons, and that their materials should be selected and organised in such a way as to highlight the proper lessons with the maximum force.' Skinner, Q., *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 78.

voice of the historian became synonymous with that of the advisor and the propagandist. Thucydides has been described, by Grant, as an instructor as well as a thinker, 'a social scientist who sought, continually, to deduce general, basic principles and eternal verities from particular events and actions'.[67] He recognised in history a *mode d'emploi* which could be of use as a guide for readers but would still allow the historian to sway readers by his political, social or philosophical views. In his introduction to a translation of Voltaire's *De l'utilité de l'histoire*, Stern underlines the practical value of history written by Polybius:

> He emphasised with unremitting didacticism, that, like Thucydides, he was presenting a work of practical value, designed to indicate to public figures how they ought and ought not to behave.[68]

Stern suggests that Voltaire also wrote in this tradition, manipulating the historical medium for current political or sociological messages just as Renaissance historians had done. Evidence will show that this 'utility' of history is of prime importance to the structure and tone of historical works in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Another frequently found figure in the earliest classical histories was that of the historian as a character within his own work. Grant emphasises that the message to be gleaned from classical histories, such as the social criticism made by Tacitus, is to be found within the literary features and stylistic qualities.[69] These characteristics clearly differentiate one writer from another and this study will examine if and to what extent this remains a feature of Voltaire and his contemporaries' histories.

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[67] Grant, p. 8.
[68] Stern, F., *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the present* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 35.
[69] Grant, Ch. 1.

It was under the influence of the humanists that sixteenth-century Europe produced a historiography which marked the transition from the old medieval tradition of history as chronicle, 'this recital of undifferentiated fact', to a more rational history based on fact and research.[70] The new Renaissance historiography also introduced the periodisation of history and wholly changed society's view of the past. This change is summed up by E.F. Rice and A. Grafton:

> Textual criticism of this kind is the concrete embodiment of an historical sense and represents the beginning of modern 'scientific' history.[71]

A feature developed by the Italians,[72] the new historiographical method is described by G.R. Elton as:

> A method in which matter was treated rationally and selectively, criticism applied to legend, and sense made of events.[73]

On the other hand, Q. Skinner makes the point that, in rejecting the medieval chronicle, Renaissance history returned almost completely to classical historiographical practice.[74] Amongst the writers of history who first moulded the new, more scientific Renaissance tradition, the most famous include Bruni, Machiavelli, Bracciolini, Bartolommeo della Scala, Guicciardini and Bodin.[75] Of these historians, Machiavelli was the one most familiar to Voltaire since he used Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, *I discorsi,* and the *Istorie*

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[70] Elton, G. R., *Reformation Europe 1517-1559* (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 291.
[71] Rice, E.F., and A. Grafton, *The Foundation of Early Modern Europe* (New York and London: Norton, 1994), p. 82.
[72] The term 'Italy' was not a geographical unit at this time, nonetheless, these historians may be referred to in a broad sense as 'Italians'.
[73] Elton, p. 291.
[74] Skinner, p. 78.
[75] Bondanella, P., and M. Musa, eds., *The Portable Machiavelli* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 548.

*fiorentine* in his work with Frédéric II of Prussia on his *Anti-Machiavel.*[76] Machiavelli wrote to provide an evaluation of the great history of Florence, to compare past glory with present faults and to exhort a new young prince to lead Florence to freedom and safety from threat of attack by foreign powers. Such 'scientific' innovation or political motivation in history was by no means unique to Italian historiographers and would appeal to the eighteenth-century rational mind of the *philosophes.*[77]

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Sir Philip Sidney criticises the impure science and the imprecise nature of history, historians and historiography in *The Defence of Poesy.*[78] In his analysis of the boundaries and relative merits of history, philosophy and poetry, Sidney is severely disapproving of contemporary methods of historiography while he extols the virtues of poetry, as the 'highest among the functions of the human intellect'.[79] Disparaging contemporary history for its demonstrable lack of cohesion, Sidney returns to Aristotle's *Poetics* to find justification for his own position that poetry is 'more philosophical and more studiously serious than history'.[80] In his attack on both historians and philosophers, who are compared unfavourably to the 'poet's nobleness',[81] the Englishman sketches an entertaining caricature of the

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[76] Evidence in the catalogue of Voltaire's library books in Saint-Petersburg shows that he possessed an Italian edition of Machiavelli's works, while the Notebooks suggest a specific familiarity with *Il principe.* Alexeev, M.P., ed. *Bibliothèque de Voltaire: Catalogue des Livres* (Moscou-Leningrad: Editions de l'Académie des sciences de l'URSS, 1961), p. 581. See also Voltaire, Leningrad Notebooks in Notebooks in *OC*, 81, 82, 2 vols, ed. Th. Besterman (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), I, 228-9.

[77] Early historical 'scientific' research meant returning to annals or records of 'fact' rather than recording dubious myths or superstitions within works of history.

[78] Sidney, Sir P., *The Defence of Poesy* in *Sir Philip Sidney: A Selection of his Finest Poems*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[79] J.A. Symonds suggests that Sidney's 'apology' emanated from Puritan hostility to culture. Symonds, J.A., *Sidney* (London: Macmillan, 1886), Ch. VII

[80] Sidney, p.113.

[81] Sidney, p. 109.

contemporary historian.[82] The archival historian is portrayed as a long-winded, antiquarian-type figure who commands a respect which is not entirely justified, given the unscientific and imprecise nature of his paraphrases which testify to a lack of original research:

> The historian scarcely giveth leisure to the moralist to say so much, but that he, laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorising himself (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundations of hearsay; having much ado to accord differing writers and to pick truth out of their partiality; better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age, and yet better knowing how this world goeth than how his own wit runneth; curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties; a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in table talk, denieth, in a great chafe, that any man for teaching of virtue and virtuous actions is comparable to him.[83]

Sidney's caricature stresses the imperfections of historiography, which include the practice of 'confirming stories by stories', the lack of critical interpretation or wider reflection, as well as the unreliable nature of so-called historical truths when influenced by political partiality.[84] In emphasising the limitations of history, Sidney infers that the combination of philosophy and history would form a respectable genre of study. This is a theoretical precursor of that combination of 'precept' and 'example' which Voltaire and the *philosophes* would later attempt to put into practice. Antiquarian in its external features, sixteenth-century history was often written analogically, it used the past to criticise the present. It also had the classical intent of informing and influencing the

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[82] 'The philosopher, therefore, and the historian are they which would win the goal, the one by precept, the other by example. But both, not having both, do both halt [...] The historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine.' Symonds, p. 110-1.

[83] Sidney, p. 110.

[84] *Ibid*, p. 110.

reader, whether king or client, in order to win support for the author's side of the argument.[85]

Sixteenth-century history might be considered the ideological forerunner of eighteenth-century history whereas seventeenth-century history was inclined to display different, often theologically inspired, tendencies. Whilst the medieval type of chronicle continued to exist in parallel with Catholic historians in the seventeenth century, the antiquarian tradition also flourished. Renaissance 'scientific' studies of numismatics, archaeology, sigillography and diplomatic research were further developed in order to usher in a more scientific basis for researched or antiquarian history founded on excavations and archaeological remains and artefacts.[86] These divisions were still extant in Voltaire's day, when diplomatic research was separate from the histories of the *philosophes*.[87] Amongst the writers of history in the seventeenth century, Bossuet emphasises the rôle of Providence, maintaining that a knowledge of human nature is necessary for understanding history.[88] As Brumfitt notes, Bayle and Fontenelle both evince scepticism and put forward arguments for tolerance through historical examination.[89] In so doing, they were influential for Enlightenment

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[85] L. Tennenhouse confirms this sixteenth-century motivation for writing history in his description of Sir Walter Raleigh's wish to create the 'impression of learning and industry' in his *History of the World*, which reads like an *apologia pro vita sua*. History was being manipulated by Raleigh as a display of his erudition and a defence of his life and his fall. Commenting that 'the very decision to write a history was bound to raise the question of motivation', Tennenhouse describes Grenville and Bacon hoping to gain royal favour by offering to write history which they hoped would be interpreted as 'an act of flattery in the guise of writing history'. Tennenhouse, L., 'Sir Walter Ralegh and Clientage', in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. G.F. Little and S. Orgel (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 250.

[86] 'The period 1660 to 1720 has been described as the grand old age of scholarly and antiquarian research, but the antiquarians often stood on one side while the general writers of history stood on the other.' Butterfield, H., *The Origins of History*, ed. Watson, A. (New York: Baste Books, 1981), p. 194.

[87] 'The literary men wrote a literary kind of history', Butterfield, p. 194.

[88] Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (Paris: S. Marbre Cramoisy, 1681).

[89] Brumfitt, Ch. 1.

thought.[90] Until the nineteenth century and the advent of writers such as Ranke, Thierry or Michelet, history and literature are not considered two separate genres, so that while history moves away from fiction in the eighteenth century, the overlap in genres means that history is still quite literary in its articulation. Already evident in Renaissance history, the tension in the eighteenth century would continue to be the conflict between scientific, archival details and a narrative chronicle, between impartiality and personal interests. To identify the contemporary eighteenth-century interpretations of *histoire*, consideration must be given to the expressed definitions of the period.

## DEFINING HISTORY

Examination of the signification of history in dictionaries of the period provides a variety of interpretations, spanning an entire gamut of definitions from fact to fiction. In numerous later sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century dictionaries, whether the *Dictionaire de l'Académie française* or others by lexicographers such as Boyer, Corneille, Furetière, Girard, Leroux, Miège, Richelet, Rochefort & Saint-Maurice, there is no immediate consensus on the exact definition of *histoire*, the historical novel or the *nouvelle*. Yet, it is possible to piece together an image of contemporary understanding of the word *histoire*, in particular in contrast to the *nouvelle*, aided both by the conflicting and almost diametrically opposed definitions in Richelet's and Furetière's

[90] For the influence of tolerance on the writing of history at the end of the seventeenth century see Cheymol, G., 'Tolérance et histoire à l'aube des Lumières' in *L'Histoire au Dix-Huitième Siecle*, Colloque d'Aix-en-Provence (1975) (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1980), pp. 203-211.

dictionaries and also in the light of the rather neutral definitions of the *Dictionaire de l'Académie française.*

The *Dictionaire de l'Académie française* of 1694 provides the one contemporary definition in which the two genres *histoire* and *nouvelle* nearly converge:

> *Histoire:* Narration des actions & des choses dignes de mémoire. Histoire générale. Histoire universelle. Histoire particulière. Histoire ancienne. Histoire moderne. Histoire profane. Histoire sainte. Histoire Ecclésiastique. Histoire Romaine. Histoire Grecque. L'histoire de France, l'histoire d'Espagne. L'histoire des Turcs, l'histoire de la Chine. L'histoire de Pérou. Histoire secrette, histoire scandaleuse, histoire veritable, histoire fabuleuse, histoire généalogique, abbregé de l'histoire, un corps d'histoire, écrire l'histoire. Composer l'histoire de quelque pays, lire l'histoire, scavoir l'histoire, s'adonner à l'histoire. Se dit généralement de ceux qui s'appliquent à l'estude de l'histoire ancienne & moderne. L'histoire de Saluste, l'histoire d'Herodote. L'histoire de Polybe &c. se dit, pour dire, l'histoire escrite par Saluste, par Herodote, &c. [...]
> On dit l'histoire d'Alexandre [...] il se dit aussi du récit de toute sorte d'avanture particulière. *Je veux vous conter, vous faire une petite histoire, une plaisante histoire, une histoire grotesque, une histoire facecieuse, une histoire tragique, une histoire mémorable.*
>
> *Nouvelle*: On appelle aussi *Nouvelles*, certains contes d'avantures extraordinaires, certaines petites histoires, comme les contes de Bocace, &c. *Les Nouvelles de la Reyne de Navarre, les Nouvelles de Cervantes.*[91] [underlining not in original]

Where *histoire* is defined to include *toute sorte d'avanture particulière* and the *nouvelle* is deemed to allow for *certains contes d'avantures extraordinaires*, the only difference between the two would seem to lie in the interpretation of *avanture particulière* over *avanture extraordinaire.* The former suggests a specifically personal tale which might perhaps indicate a degree of authenticity, while the latter could imply an element of the fabulous. The *Dictionaire de l'Académie Française* does not, at any stage, imply utility and so conveys the idea that the *genre* is considered neither as a useful medium for didacticism nor as a useful learning tool for the reader. The phrase *digne de mémoire* implies a certain worth or value, hinting that it is discretional rather than obligatory to record the past. It is as if the *histoire* is still as much a pleasure, entertainment or

[91] *Dictionaire de l'Académie Française: Tome premier A-K* (Paris: J.B. Coignard, 1694).

indulgence as the *nouvelle*, especially as both are linked to *avanture*. The definitions of *histoire* and *nouvelle* from the *Dictionaire de l'Académie francaise* of 1835 display no major transition from the entries of 1694, suggesting that the definition of history as *narration des actions & des choses dignes de mémoire* can be read as the basic backdrop against which historians worked in the eighteenth century.[92] Usage of *certaines petites histoires* to describe the *nouvelle* and *une petite histoire* under *histoire* further highlight the relatively indeterminate use of the word *histoire* in both historical and novelistic contexts. This broadly parallels other contemporary interpretations of *une histoire* or *l'histoire*.

Richelet's dictionary contains several entries under the term *Histoire* as well as a few entries for the term *Nouvelle*:

> *Nouvelle*: C'est le récit ingénieux d'une avanture agréable. La matière des nouvelles, ce sont les finesses & les tromperies galantes & tout ce qui se passe de surprenant & de gaillard dans le commerce du monde amoureux. Le caractère des nouvelles doit etre enjoué & naturel. Leur but, c'est d'être utiles et plaisantes. (Bocace a fait des *nouvelles* en italien fort plaisantes. Cervantes en a faite douze en Espagnol fort belles, & La Fontaine a fait heureusement revivre les nouvelles parmi les François.)
>
> *Histoire*: C'est une narration continuée de choses vraies, grandes, & publiques, écrite avec esprit, avec éloquence, & avec jugement pour l'instruction des particuliers & des Princes, & pour le bien de la société civile. [La vérité & l'exactitude sont l'âme de l'histoire. Ecrire l'histoire. Savoir l'histoire. Il y a plusieurs sortes d'histoires, la sacrée, la naturelle, la civile, la particulière, l'universelle, &c.][93] [underlining not in original]

The immediate opposition established by Richelet between *histoire* and *nouvelle* lies in the difference between 'vrai' and 'agréable'. His definition highlights the similarities as well as any difference, or overlap, between *histoire*, *conte* and *nouvelle*. Richelet is adamant that both *histoire* and *nouvelle* have a purpose. History is *pour l'instruction*

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[92] *Dictionaire de l'Académie Française: Tome premier A-K* (Paris: Chez Paul Dupont, 1835).

[93] Richelet, C.-P., *Dictionaire Français-édition de 1693* (Nimes (Gard): C. Lacour, Editeur, 1995). Edition of *Dictionaire Francois, contenant généralement tous les mots,* par P. Richelet (Genève: Imprimé pour D. Ritter, chez V. Miege, 1693).

*[...] et pour le bien de la société civile* while *nouvelles* will be *utiles et plaisantes*. His particular presentation of this viewpoint might lead a reader to understand that the purpose of the nouvelle and of history were mutually exclusive. In his differentiation between *histoire* and *nouvelle*, Richelet appears to suggest that *histoire*, or *narration continuée*, may not be stylistically innovative, while the *nouvelle*, or *récit ingénieux*, must be attractive, *agréable*, to the reader. The inference is that *histoire* need neither be written in literary style nor be attractive to read: *éloquence* does not necessarily equal *agréable*. Whether Richelet's instruction is purely factual or if his *utile* would include or exclude a moral didactic element remains uncertain.

In Furetière's dictionary, the two disciplines appear to become entwined and the line between history and story is even less distinct than in the later definition of the *Dictionaire de l'Académie française*. Where the latter definition of 1694 would proffer *narration des actions et des choses dignes de mémoire*, Furetière's 1690 definition was similar but with the additional possibility of *comme elles se pouvoient passer*. This qualification not only allows for human error and discretion, but also, since the definition casts doubt on the accuracy of human memory and interpretation of the past, it could, in addition, permit a Homeric type, heroic history:

> *Histoire:* Description, narration des choses comme elles sont, ou des actions comme elles se sont passées, **ou comme elles se pouvoient passer**. Ce mot vient du grec Historia, qui signifie *proprement recherche des choses curieuses, envie de scavoir.* Il signifie aussi l'exposition des choses dont nous avons été les spectateurs. Car *Historien* signifie précisement connoitre, scavoir une chose comme l'ayant veue. Il est vray que la signification de ce nom devient ensuitte bien plus etendue, & signifie une narration de plusieurs choses mémorables, quand bien même nous ne les scaurions qu'au rapport des autres. Ce mot vient du verbe isimi, qui signifie je scais: d'où vient que parmi les Anciens plusieurs grands hommes ont esté appelés polyhistoires: c'est à dire, personnes d'une doctrine fort diversifiée, tel qu'étoit ce fameux Appion contre qui escrit Joseph. Tel fut aussi Solin [...][94] [underlining and bold not in original]

[94] *Dictionaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots François, tant vieux que modernes, & les termes de toutes les sciences et les arts: Tome second e-o*, ed. A. Furetière (La Haye: Chez Arnout & Reinier Leers, 1690).

The Greek origins suggest that the reader of history is seized by curiosity and the quest for answers. In Furetière's definition, the utility of recording the past lies in the fulfilment of this curiosity, regardless of how incorrect the historical text may be. This is the inaccurate school of history, characterised in Brumfitt by the anecdote about Vertot's refusal to revise his history in the light of new, factual evidence.[95] Does Furetière's definition similarly imply that history may be a source of knowledge, accessible through reading of a version of the truth, so that the provision of erroneous information is still acceptable within these parameters?

Where Furetière addresses the issue of the fabulous in *histoire* and the true in the *nouvelle*, he introduces a new element into the definitions:

> *Histoire* se dit aussi des Romans, des narrations fabuleuses, mais vrai-semblables qui sont feintes par un Auteur ou déguisées. L'Histoire d'Ursace dans l'Astrée, de Brutus dans Clélie, l'Histoire des guerres civiles de Grenade. L'Histoire Comique de Francion. L'Histoire d'Héliodore. On dit en ce sens, Ce n'est pas un conte, un roman, c'est une *histoire.*
>
> *Nouvelle*: est [...] une histoire agréable et intriguée, ou un conte plaisant un peu étendu, soit qu'elle soit feinte, ou véritable. Les *nouvelles* de Cervantes, de Scarron. Les cents nouvelles qu'on attribue au Roy Louis XI. La nouvelle de Belphegor; La nouvelle Allegorique, &c.
>
> [underlining not in original]

To a seventeenth-century author, the word *vrai-semblable* is the password to publication of fiction, which may be *feinte* as long as it is made to seem possible. By emphasising the stratagems used by authors of fiction, Furetière manages to introduce them, by association, into the all-encompassing term *histoire*. In this way, his definition reflects what so many writers have actually done, or claimed to do. Moreover, use of the word *histoire* to describe *nouvelle* and the deliberate ambiguity in the use of *feintes* in both

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[95] Brumfitt quotes Vertot's alleged comment about his completed history story which he will not alter, 'J'en suis fâché, mais mon siège est fait'. J.H. Brumfitt, *Cleopatra's Nose and Enlightenment Historiography* in *Women and society in Eighteenth-Century France: essays in honour of J. S. Spink*, ed. E. Jacobs et al (London: The Athlone Press, 1979), p. 185.

definitions, together with the possible inversion of the referents of *vrai-semblable* and *véritable*, make for intriguing reinterpretation of the contemporary meaning of *histoire*.

The etymology of the word *histoire*, as it evolved in the late seventeenth century, includes history, novels, and the historical novel in its combination of the concepts of fact *observed* and fiction *invented*. In this light, it is pertinent to turn to Rey, a twentieth-century lexicographer, for his interpretation of the understanding of history in the eighteenth century, in his *Dictionnaire historique de la Langue française*. Through this etymology of *histoire*, it can again be appreciated how close history has come to *récit fabuleux* and how a continuing ambiguity between fact, *videre* and fiction, *sornettes*, stems from the Latin root *historia*:

> *Histoire*: est un emprunt adapté, d'abord sous la forme istorie (deb. XIIe s.) au latin historia 'récit d'évènements historiques', 'objet de récit historique', mais aussi 'récit fabuleux, sornettes', lui-même pris au grec historia 'recherche', 'enquête, information' et 'résultat d'une enquête', d'où 'récit', 'oeuvre historique'. Le mot appartient à la famille de eidenai 'savoir', qui se rattache à une racine indoeuropéenne weid- comme le sanskrit veda et le latin videre, 'voir'.[96]
>
> [underlining not in original]

Rey also summarises the main aspects of history as it developed through the centuries to the Enlightenment. In tracing the evolution of history as genre and as discipline, fact, *vu*, is juxtaposed with fiction, *inventé*:

> Histoire, on l'a vu, contient depuis la latinité (historia) l'idée de 'récit' fondé sur l'établissement de faits observés (étymologiquement 'vus') ou inventés. Mais le mot n'a pris le contenu que nous lui connaissons que depuis le XIXe siecle, même si une référence à l'évolution de l'humanité est introduite dès le XIIIe siècle. Le récit des évènements, construit dans beaucoup de documents ou à partir de témoignages, a gardé longtemps des buts moraux ou a été utilisé comme argument de polémiques; au moyen âge, les chroniques (l'idée dominante est alors la temporalité), les hagiographes ne se séparent que très lentement de l'épopée. Les recherches archéologiques ou numismatiques, nées à la Renaissance, relèvent de la curiosité d'amateurs et de la sensibilité esthétique ou morale sans être encore exploitées comme documents.
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> [underlining not in original]

[96] Rey, A., *Dictionnaire Historique de la langue francaise* (Paris: Dictionnaires le Robert, 1992).

Although Rey does not refer expressly to the seventeenth century, his story of *histoire* could continue through the further evolution of history and development of the historical novel where there is even more obscuring and blurring of the already insubstantial boundaries between history and literature. The same ambiguity is incorporated in the fragile opposition which Richelet establishes between *histoire* and *nouvelle* and which he identifies as constituting the balance between the *vrai* and the *agréable*. The ambiguity is embodied in the *véritable* and the *vraisemblable* of Furetière. The *Dictionaire de l'Académie française* simply deems both to be *avantures*, thus favouring an emphasis on pleasure and totally neglecting even to address issues such as truth, style or utility.

## WRITER, AUTHOR, HISTORIAN, NARRATOR

> *Une situation narrative, comme toute autre, est un ensemble complexe dans lequel l'analyse, ou simplement la description, ne peut* distinguer *qu'en déchirant un tissu de relations étroites entre l'acte narratif, ses protagonistes, ses détérminations spatio-temporelles, son rapport aux autres situations narratives impliquées dans le même récit etc.*[97]

Just as the work of traditional historians will be referred to by the writer's name, the referent *Voltaire* will be used throughout Section One of this thesis, 'History Voices', as the conventional term by which to denote the composer/author of the two works of history under focus. This usage will continue except where otherwise indicated. In contrast to traditional historians, the term *Voltaire* encompasses wider connotations and can be considered as the collective noun which embraces the ensemble

[97] Genette, G., 'Discours du récit: essai de méthode' in *Figures III* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), p. 227.

of figures from author, historian, polemicist, contemporary, public figure, editor, human, man, individual to Arouet, pseudonymous writer, exile, critical observer, social commentator, personality and philosopher, as well as the experiences and opinions of each.

It is certainly not proposed to re-open modern debates on the existence, death or resurrection of the author. Such an invasion of theoretical territory would be all the more inappropriate since modern theorists rarely address the complexity of eighteenth-century questions of authorship, censorship, cunning and anonymity. Nonetheless, in order to define further and illuminate the exploration in this thesis of terms such as *author*, *narrative* and *textual polyphony*, brief reference will be made to the work of the modern theorists Barthes, Borges, Eco, Genette, Hirsch and Wimsatt.[98]

In exploring narration, modern theorists have tended to argue against the very existence of the author and discussion of this topic is particularly relevant to the treatment of *Voltaire* and to the study of narrative and voices within this thesis. The theorists deplored critics who, instead of analysing the text, measured whether or not the author fulfilled his/her intention in the literary work. W.K. Wimsatt's seminal article 'The Intentional Fallacy' strongly criticises any excessive focus on the author in literary criticism:

> A poem is the response of a speaker to a situation. The thoughts, personality and attitudes in the poem should be imputed to the speaker of the poem and not to the writer, or author of the poem.[99]

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[98] While acknowledging Bakhtin's twentieth-century use of 'polyphony', the term is used here as it was in the eighteenth-century musical world, to describe a form of multi-voiced music. See Ch. 5.

[99] Wimsatt, W.K., 'The Intentional Fallacy' in *The Verbal Icon* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 3-18.

That sharp distinction, between the author as individual, writer or historian and actual voices in the historical text, is central and it finds distinctive literary expression in Voltaire's histories. In *La Mort de l'Auteur*, R. Barthes echoes Wimsatt, writing that identity of the author is lost both through the act of writing and within the written text:

> L'écriture est destruction de toute voix, de toute origine. L'écriture, c'est ce neutre, ce composite, cette identité où fuit notre sujet, le noir-et-blanc où vient se perdre toute identité, à commencer par celle-là même du corps qui écrit.[100]

Barthes achieves the death of the author by attributing only the moment of creation to this figure and he attacks the omniscient author or the author seen as the summa of influences in a work of literature. He explains that as soon as narration has occurred, there is a disconnection and the voice loses its origin, or the author dies, while writing begins:

> Linguistiquement, l'Auteur n'est jamais rien de plus que celui qui écrit, tout comme *je* n'est autre que celui qui dit *je*.[101]

This argument by Barthes substantiates the coexistence of seemingly contradictory voices and arguments within the one historical text without having to relate them directly to the author-source, or in this case, *Voltaire*. In 'What is an author?', M. Foucault echoes Barthes in arguing that the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality, that the author writes and dies. Foucault accepts this death and offers to look at the literary consequences of its discovery for the text, preferring to see

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[100] Barthes, R., *La mort de l'auteur* (1968) in *Oeuvres complètes, vol. II 1966-1973*, ed. E. Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1994), pp. 491-495, (p. 491).
[101] Barthes, *La mort de l'auteur*, p. 493.

the author as the principle of a certain unity of writing.[102] According to this view, Voltaire's histories may be considered to form an integral part of the *philosophe*'s life work, without necessarily speaking the same language or professing similar philosophy. J.L. Borges is reputed to have come to a like conclusion about the separateness of the author. As Foucault does, he equates dead writers with their works or with a particular style of work, rather than with the individual human writer. As friend and translator of Borges, A. Reid, writes:

> Borges used to say that when writers die they become books - a quite satisfactory incarnation in his view.[103]

Reid also believes that writers become not books but voices. Either eventuality suggests a similar distance from the figure of the author. It can further be argued that these voices need not be in total harmony with one another. Foucault suggests that since the generic term of *author* performs a certain practical role in society, the author should neither be equated with the real writer nor with the fictitious speaker within a novel narrated in the first person. He concludes that all discourses endowed with the author-function possess plurality of self. Although expressed by twentieth-century theorists, this assessment is shared by, and is at the core of, this study and analysis of voices in Voltaire's histories.[104]

Another aspect of the modern debate is in evidence in the response by E.D. Hirsch to this frenzied assassination of the author. In his countering writing, *In Defense*

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[102] Foucault, 'What is an author?' in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in post-structuralist Criticism*, ed. J. Harari (London: Methuen, 1979), pp. 141-160, (p. 145).
[103] Reid, A., 'Neruda and Borges' (article) in *The New Yorker*, June 24 & July 1, 1996, pp. 56-72.
[104] Foucault, p. 148.

*of the Author*, Hirsch rejects authorial irrelevance.[105] His primary attack is on the theory of semantic autonomy which he declares to be illogical and he mocks the conjecture that linguistic signs could somehow speak their own meaning. He argues strongly that the reader or critic is able to achieve an objective interpretation of an author's expressed meaning and thus, the author is re-established as source and part of the text.

While accepting Hirsch's argument against complete semantic autonomy, the relevance for Voltaire's historical texts must lie not merely with questions of the actual existence and beliefs of the author. It must also concern the contrapuntal text and the coexistence of numerous, distinct voices in the text. Many of these may emanate from the author or composer, despite being received at many removes within the text. The remarks of U. Eco and Borges are material in this regard. In a passage entitled 'Who speaks' in *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, Eco plays with the notion of masks and of voices, in a close examination of author, pseudonyms, narrators and reported narration.[106] The story of the alleged narrator of the pseudo-historical *The Name of the Rose*, Adso, is relayed to the reader via two intermediaries, Mabillon and the Abbé Vallet. In addition, there are the lyric tones of the young Adso, who is the story's protagonist, as well as the voice of the very aged Adso who is writing the text. Eco expresses his delight in this intrigue of multiple voices and their distancing of the author from the text. Although he is the originator and the one who contrives the schema, Eco as author distances himself metaphorically and textually from their articulations:

> This enunciative duplicity fascinated and excited me very much. Also because - to return to what I was saying about the mask - in doubling Adso I was once more doubling the series of

[105] Hirsch, E. D., 'In Defense of the Author' in *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), Ch. 1, pp. 1-23, (pp. 1-6); Appendix 2, pp. 245-264, Section A.
[106] Eco, U., 'Who Speaks?' in *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, trans. W. Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), pp. 30-35, (p. 33).

> interstices, of screens, set between me as a biographical personality, the first person narrator and the characters narrated, including the narrative voice.[107]

Eco's textual discussion of character masks is a clarification of the modern author's position and represents a decision to foreground the distance between the generic author Eco and the multiple textual duplicities and voices in the actual text. However, it must be noted that Eco's works are merely clever works of (historically researched) fiction which do not have to bend to the dictates of factual history as Voltaire's must.

Borges, in his text *Borges and I*, also articulates this crisis of subtle distinction already seen in Foucault. Borges formulates the stark dichotomy between the 'books', the author *Borges* and the *I*:

> Borges, the other one, the one, he, in him, to him, his books...
>
> The me, who wishes to speak...[108]

*Borges* has monopolised the conversation, writings and the life of the *I* in this text. It is a remarkable articulation of the *I* who, on only two occasions, dares to associate himself with *Borges*, or with the other. The ambiguity at the end of the passage, 'I do not know which of us has written this passage', derives from this position. The final disowning, or wrenching of *I* away from author, writer, scriptor, and Borges is the springboard for a return to Voltaire and to an examination of the contrapuntal narrative of history. While remaining conscious of Eco's exposure of authorial machinations and the useful prop of multiple layers of character masks in the composition of complex textual characters, the choice is to reject Barthes's total death of the author and to prefer Borges's death of *I*.

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[107] Eco, p. 33.
[108] Borges, 'Borges and I' in *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 282-3, (p. 282).

This means, as Foucault might approve, that the generic term *Voltaire* will be retained in this study.

Echoes of the author may be heard in the historian's voice but Voltaire's historical narrative also features other narrative voices within the text. In accordance with G. Genette's distinctions of *récit*, *histoire* and *narration*, any narrator, by his nature, fulfils many narrative functions:[109]

> Il peut sembler étrange, à première vue, d'attribuer à quelque narrateur que ce soit un autre rôle que la narration proprement dite, c'est-à-dire le fait de raconter l'histoire, mais nous savons bien en fait que le discours du narrateur, romanesque ou autre, peut assumer d'autres fonctions.[110]

The thesis which remains to be explored is that one of the ways in which Voltaire's *histoire* may differ so much from contemporary historians' work is that he creates a textual space for his *narration* to be performed by a chorus of narrative structures and voices, each addressing different audiences. It is in this respect that Genette's focus on the *narrataire*, distinguishing reader from imputed reader, is quite pertinent for reading Voltaire's history where the eighteenth-century contemporary reader is especially highlighted:

> Comme le narrateur, le narrataire est un des éléments de la situation narrative, et il se place nécessairement au même niveau diégétique; c'est-à-dire qu'il ne se confond pas plus a priori avec le lecteur (même virtuel) que le narrateur ne se confond nécessairement avec l'auteur.[111]

This interpretation of the *narrataire*, which allows for many imputed readers at various levels, is a perfect point of departure for reading Voltaire's histories where each *narrataire* may filter the many voices of the *narrateur*. Voltaire's historical narrative

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[109] *Récit* meaning all the signifiers, verbal representation of events, what is read; *Histoire* meaning the narrative content; *Narration* being the act of narration by writer/speaker.
[110] Genette, G., 'Discours du récit: essai de Méthode' in *Figures III* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), pp. 225-266, (p. 261).
[111] Genette, p. 265.

may even be seen to go beyond Genette's 'narrative perspective', or narrating from one point of view or another, if they function in many different ways within the narrative. Simultaneously and within the relatively restrictive framework of past historical events, these narrative (and narrators') voices introduce and fuse several perspectives.

The eighteenth-century concept of the author or the historian was not as concrete as that which the terms appear to convey today. In the eighteenth century, many contemporary works were published anonymously, others were purposely attributed to different authors.[112] Rigorous censorship meant that authorship was often denied or that texts were circulated without signature.[113] Voltaire was quick either to circulate rumours of his authorship or to deny this to the authorities. The eighteenth-century text was not necessarily reflective of the author's real opinion either. This is all too evident in the case of Defoe who was often commissioned to write pamphlets for two opposing sides of an argument or to write lyrically in favour of a cause to which he was personally passionately opposed.[114] Examination of just one week in the life of Voltaire's correspondence proves the concept of authorial censorship beyond any doubt.[115] Tone, intensity and beliefs are modulated according to the intended recipient of the letter. They also vary between the letters sent privately and those despatched by the public service, where their contents might be read and censored. In contrast to contemporary historians who will be seen to be relatively consistent in their authority,

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[112] Voltaire attributed *Candide* to the mediocre author Jean-Joseph Vadé, although it is also argued that he may well have based his famous *conte* on the same writer's original version. See Voltaire, *Contes en Vers et en Prose*, ed. S. Menant, 2 vols (Paris: Bordas, Classiques Garnier, 1992), I, 224-5.

[113] Darnton, R., *Trade in the Taboo: the life of a clandestine book dealer in pre-revolutionary France* in *The Widening Circle: Essays on the Circulation of Literature in Eighteenth-century Europe*, ed. P. Korshin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976).

[114] See *The Shortest Way with Dissenters* (1702) in which Defoe, himself a Dissenter, argued for the brutal repression of Dissent. Ironically, he was fined, imprisoned and pilloried for this pamphlet.

[115] E.g. D4388 to D4404.

Voltaire's constant denials of authorship and his ability to auto-censor, disguise or adapt his work to the requirements of publication or a perceived audience provide a starting point for examination of the many levels of *history* and *story* within the historical narrative of Voltaire's histories.

## VOLTAIRE'S SOURCES

> The Study of History - *let nobody [...] suppose that [Dr Johnson] had such a respect for the Study of History, and the Lives of ancient Heroes that he meant to reserve such Talk for* Men *by way of Preeminence-not he! he disliked the Subject exceedingly, & often said it took up room in a Man's head which might be better filled.*[116]

In order to situate Voltaire's history in relation to that of his contemporaries, a group with whom he may be compared has been selected. They are drawn predominantly from historians and writers who were Voltaire's own sources for his histories *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. These sources, as identified by Felix, Rivière and de Voorde in their theses and by Proschwitz in his recent edition, will be central in the search for theoretical voices in history and for a contemporary historiographical consensus, if such exists.[117] Before these sources may be analysed, they must first be situated within the great diversity of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century historical writing on these two monarchs.

The history of two relatively recent monarchs, Charles XII and Louis XIV, is the subject matter of those writers used as sources by Voltaire and who constitute a control

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[116] Ingrams, R., ed., *Dr Johnson by Mrs Thrale* (London: Chatto & Windus/The Hogarth Press, 1984), pp. 21-22.

[117] Van de Voorde, J., 'La documentation historique de Voltaire d'après les marginalia' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de la Sorbonne-Paris IV, 1988). See Ch. 1 of this thesis.

group for comparative purposes. As great European leaders, both Charles XII and Louis XIV inspired many works of narrative, journalism and history during, and after, their reigns. Charles XII's short life as Swedish monarch and hero-figure was documented across the length and breadth of Europe in many languages, editions and translations.[118] Voltaire was far from alone both in seizing the literary, historical, dramatic and didactic potential to be harvested from such a Herculean figure as Charles XII, or in grasping the obvious significance of the figure of Louis XIV for history.

The writers of history, documenters and historians who provided a corpus of source material for Voltaire's histories make up a disparate group. They come from very different backgrounds and have varied motivations for composing their works. From the outset, no typical profile exists of the author who chooses to write about either monarch. For instance, amongst these authors is the Chancellor to the King of Sweden, Adlerfelt, who died at Poltawa (1709), but whose history was just one of many written almost contemporaneously with the events which were recounted.[119] Other early works include three unattributed works, in English (1700),[120] in Latin (1701),[121] and in German (1708),[122] as well as the history in Latin verse by a Scot, Pitcairn (1711).[123] Many histories were written in favour of, or against the king, according to religious allegiance,

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[118] H. Fielding translated a history of Charles XII, written by Adlerfelt, from French into English in 1740: H. Fielding, trans., *The Military History of Charles XII. King of Sweden. Written by the express order of his Majesty, by Mr G. Adlerfeld, Chamberlain to the King...* (London: J. and P. Knapton, J. Hodges, A. Millar and J. Nourse, 1740).

[119] Adlerfeld, G. *Histoire militaire de Charles XII, roi de Suede, depuis l'an 1700 jusqu'à la bataille de Pultowa en 1709...* (Paris: J. Wetstein & G. Smith, 1740).

[120] Anon., *The History of the remarkable life of the brave and renowned Charles XII, King of Sweden* (London: Bow-Church Yard, 1700).

[121] Anon., *Gratulatio ad urbem Rigam cum a diuturna obsidione, quam per sesquialterum annum fortissime toleraverat, liberata esset: per invictissimum & potentissimum principem Carolum Duodecimem, Svedorum Gothorumque Regem* (France: 1701).

[122] Anon., *Schwedische und Sachsische Staatscantzley, in welcher alle diejenigen Geheimen und andere Schriften...* (Köln: J. Margenau, 1708).

[123] Pitcairn, A., *Carole Gothorum longe fortissime ductor* (Edinburgh: 1711).

as witness the case of Levesi's work of 1703, allegedly a papal harangue.[124] In 1717, on the eve of the monarch's untimely death, Susanna Centlivre penned an admiring epistle to the king of Sweden 'from a lady of Great-Britain'.[125] The king's death prompted new historical and biographical works and epitaphs, such as the anonymous rhymed anti-Lutheran epitaph entitled *Der Sueden Gott ist Maus-Tod.*[126] Many of the works immediately following his death were hagiographic in nature, celebrating the life and times of a great hero, and many 'lives' of Charles XII appeared in various languages, such as Dublar's Latin work (1718)[127] or Schmauss's (1720)[128] and Le Long's (1721),[129] works in German and Dutch respectively. Nor did the interest in Charles XII ever wane completely. Voltaire constantly updated his own text, according to new historical evidence and, in the eighteenth century alone, it was translated into German, English, Danish, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Swedish.[130] Throughout the eighteenth century, the unusual and apparently fearless figure would continue to inspire works from writers as diverse as Frederick II of Prussia,[131] an anonymous English-language dramatist[132] and, towards the end of the century, the Hungarian Gvadanyi.[133]

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[124] Levesi, A., *Harangue faite au Roy de Suede: de la part du Pape à Mavodieze, le 11. Decembre 1702* (Paris, Bordeaux: A. Calamay, 1703).
[125] Centlivre, S., *An epistle to the King of Sweden from a lady of Great-Britain* (London: J. Roberts and A. Morris, 1717).
[126] Anon., *Der Sueden Gott ist Maus-Tod* (1718).
[127] Dublar, M.D., *In Carolum XII. Suioniae regem: regum fortissimum maximum semper augustum.* (London: 1718).
[128] Schmauss, J.J., *Das glorwurdigste Leben und die grossen Helden-Thaten Sr. letztverstorbenen Majest. Caroli XII, Konigs in Schweden...* (Halle: In verleg. Der Neuen Buchhandlung, 1720).
[129] Le Long, I., *Het leven van Carel den XII* (Amsterdam: Janssoons van Waesberge, 1721).
[130] Proschwitz, pp. 138-142.
[131] Frederick II, King of Prussia, *Reflections sur les talens militaires et sur le caractere de Charles XII, roi de Suede* (Berlin: C.F. Henning, 1759).
[132] Anon., *The Northern Heroes, or, The Bloody Contest between Charles the Twelfth, King of Sweden and Peter the Great, Czar of Muscovy, a new historical drama* (London: M. Cooper, 1748).
[133] Gvadányi, J., *Tizen-kettodik Karoly' Svetzia orszag' kirallyanak elete, es almelkodast fel-mulo vitezsegenek...le-irasa* (Pozsonyban es Komaromban: Weber Simon Peter koltsdgevel es betuivel, 1792).

When Voltaire published his history of Charles XII in 1730, he was very obviously seizing on a popular figure and writing in a well-established European tradition. In addition, he had no shortage of historical texts, travel records, personal letters or diaries, novels and diplomatic memoirs to which he could refer in order to compile his own story of the history of Charles XII. The story or history which resulted could perhaps be said to be an amalgam of all the sources to which he referred, but was also a personal reaction to, and manipulation of, a very current contemporary phenomenon. When Charles XII was shot while besieging Fredrikshald on 30 November 1718, Voltaire was twenty-four years old and it is a relatively young Voltaire who sets out to write *Histoire de Charles XII.*

Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* was the work of a more experienced writer who incorporated a great deal of his own reading in the text, particularly in the chapters on the economy, arts and the sciences.[134] Rivière documents many of Voltaire's sources, underlining the vast amount of contemporary source material available to Voltaire for the study and history of Louis XIV and noting that the list of Voltaire's sources, acknowledged and unacknowledged, is a lengthy one. Amongst others, it includes varied works by Gourville, Temple, Le Brun, Francheville, Niceron, Ferrault, Mme de Motteville, Limiers, Rapin, Boulainvilliers, Juvernal, Lenglet du Fresnoy, Larrey, Lamberti, Roussel, Reboulets, Henault, Pellisson, Villars and Dangeau. The subjective manner in which Voltaire referred to his sources and relied upon them for extracting anecdotes and unusual details, is emphasised by Rivière who notes that the writer 'organises and manipulates the material borrowed according to his thesis'.[135] It

[134] Rivière, pp. 173-4.
[135] Rivière, pp. 289-90.

seems inevitable that Voltaire will have been influenced in turn, not only by the content, but also by the form, interest and focus of the many varied writings and approaches of his quite disparate sources.

J.W. Felix, who traces most of the sources to which Voltaire referred when writing his history of Charles XII, notes that his text is remarkable both for its unity and its consistency, despite being built from fragmentary evidence.[136] Voltaire's conception of Charles XII would have been formed gradually from the various opinions and influences of contemporary manuscript and published sources, private correspondence and the English press of the period before and during his stay in England (1726-8), and their many different portrayals of the monarch. From his historical reading and explorations, the young writer would also have gained an acute awareness of form, structure and questions of historiography, all of which continue to be of interest to him throughout his life-long historical writings.

In addition to written texts, Voltaire's sources for Charles XII also numbered oral accounts or personal correspondence from people such as Poniatowski, Villelongue, Schulenbourg, Fabrice and others. Rivière demonstrates the continuing importance of oral sources to Voltaire in the writing of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, emphasising the tireless nature of the writer's constant enquiries, and the influence which these sources would have had upon the construction of the final work of history:

> Often depicted as a journalist interviewing prominent people, collecting numerous anecdotes handed down through an oral tradition, in order to enliven his narrative, searching at the same time for serious information and making full use of his travels throughout Europe to verify facts and discover little-known details pertaining to the age of Louis XIV.[137]

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[136] Felix, Chs. I, II.
[137] Rivière, p. 190.

For many decades, Voltaire corresponded with people the length and breadth of Europe. He was determined to check and cross-check his information before and after publication before including it in his narrative. In the case of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Rivière lists among these correspondents the familiar figures of Thieriot, Cideville, d'Argental, d'Olivet and Berger. Many sources are openly acknowledged and referred to either in the historical text itself or in footnotes added by Voltaire (*HC*, 265, 173; *SL*, 864). Unacknowledged sources for *Histoire de Charles XII*, as identified by Felix, include contemporary works such as those by Bellerive, Boyer, Chevalier, Dalerac, Defoe, Fabrice, Grimarest, Gröning, Gyllenborg, La Motraye, Limiers, Lucas, Perry, Pufendorf, Rousset de Missy and Theyls. The discovery or pursuit of minor authors or other short contemporary articles which Voltaire may have read or which may have had a small input into the author's reading or understanding of the life and career of either monarch is not the focus here. Such historical details have been adequately researched and identified, both in the theses of Felix and Rivière and in critical editions of the histories. Rather, this thesis concentrates on contemporary historians in order to compare their methods to those utilised in Voltaire's works. The variety in compilation and presentation of works on Charles XII and Louis XIV demands that they be divided into categories. In seeking to establish a traditional theoretical voice of history, the main published sources identified as having been used extensively by Voltaire in writing his two works of history are of particular interest.

Delving into the diverse sources, it is possible to divide them into three genres, travel literature, correspondence or personal memoirs, and historical works. The first of

these, travel literature, was a flourishing genre in the eighteenth century but its relevance here is only in relation to sources for Charles XII. That monarch's extended travels outside his own kingdom and his prolonged stay in the Ottoman Empire featured in such literature, whereas, partly because Louis XIV was a French monarch, Voltaire was less likely to read foreign travel writers' accounts of his reign. The (quasi) exception might be the *Lettres persanes*, which can scarcely be numbered in this category since their claim to eastern origins was fictional. Travel writers who deal with Charles XII are represented by such travellers and authors as Lucas, Bellerive, Browne and La Motraye. Their works abound in geographical, sociological, historical and political observations as well as instructive remarks on customs, traditions and local opinions. P. Lucas's work recounts a visit to Turkey where, as an envoy of Louis XIV, he mixed in the highest diplomatic circles and he includes perceptive commentary on general society in Turkey at the time.[138] The Chevalier de Bellerive also tells of political events and incorporates an account of his stay at the camp of the King of Sweden at Bender.[139] In addition to translating P. Chevalier's *Histoire de la guerre des Cosaques*, E. Browne also wrote an account of his own travels which contained a description of the Turkish court and the Empire's 'power, greatness and policy'.[140] Among these travel writers, particular focus will be placed on the writing of the much-travelled La Motraye, who describes himself as 'ayant employé plus de vingt-six ans à

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[138] Lucas, P., *Troisième voyage du sieur Paul Lucas, fait en MDCCXIV, &c. Par ordre de Louis XIV. Dans la Turquie, l'Asie, la Sourie, la Palestine, la Haute et la Basse Eygpte, &c.* (Rouen: R. Machuel le jeune, 1719).

[139] Bellerive, Chev. de, *Relation d'un voyage du Chevalier de Bellerive d'Espagne à Bender, et de son séjour au camp du Roy de Suède* (Paris: P. Huet, 1713).

[140] Browne, E., *A Brief Account of Some Travels in Hungaria, Servia, Bulgaris, Macedonia, Thessali, Austria, Styria, Corinthia, Carniola and Friuli* (London: Tho. Warner, 1673), p. 1.

voyager dans des Païs étrangers [..]'.[141] This author was present at the Battle of Pruth and in his lengthy two volume account of travels spanning Europe, Asia and Africa and illustrated with maps and charts, he writes in detail about the King of Sweden's four years at Bender and continues to follow the monarch's progress right up to his death at Fredrikshald.

The second group of sources focuses on correspondence and memoirs. As is evident from the letters of C.G. Gyllenborg, Baron de Fabrice and Pellisson, all of which Voltaire consulted, correspondence is a genre more usually, although not exclusively, intended for private consumption. Gyllenborg's letters relate to a particularly specific subject matter, as is apparent from the title of the final part of the collection: *Relating to the Design of Raising a Rebellion in his Majesty's Dominions to be supported by a force from Sweden.*[142] Baron de Fabrice's letters, which were only published in 1760, had been seen in manuscript form by Voltaire who met Fabrice during his period in England.[143] These letters were one of Voltaire's most important sources for the period which Charles XII spent in exile among the Turks. Since they were written by a skilful and relatively objective close observer, they must be considered to be of particular importance for their attempts at an accurate portrayal of the elusive monarch. Pellisson's *Lettres historiques* are similar to the letters of Fabrice insofar as they also document the foreign campaigns of a monarch, in this case, Louis

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[141] La Motraye, A. de, *Voyages du Sr. A. de La Motraye en Europe, en Asie, et en Afrique*, 2 vols (La Haye: T. Iohnson & I. Van Duren, 1727), I, Avis au Lecteur, p. 1.
[142] Gyllenborg, C. G., *Letters which passed between Count Gyllenborg, the Barons Gortz, Sparre and Others; relating to the Design of Raising a Rebellion in his Majesty's Dominions to be supported by a force from Sweden* (Dublin: Tho. Hume, 1717).
[143] Fabrice, Baron de, *Anecdotes du Sejour du Roi de Suede à Bender; ou Lettres de Mr le Baron de Fabrice pour servir d'éclaircissement à l'histoire de Charles XII* (Hambourg: Ch. Herold, 1761).

XIV, from 1670 to 1688. The introduction to Pellisson's letters extols them as being ideal historical sources for any writer or student interested in this precise period:

> Les personnes qui voudront étudier, ou écrire l'Histoire du Règne précédent, ne sauroient puiser dans une source, ni plus pure, ni plus abondante que celle-ci.[144]

Pellisson's letters are extremely detailed in their descriptions of the army on the move under Louis XIV. They provide personal details for his addressees, frequently Mlle de Scudéry. However, the volume containing these letters is most useful and interesting for a very exciting historical proposal which was published as an appendix to the volume. It will merit particular examination.

From the reign of Louis XIV, memoirs abound, whether they are purely private or private but intended for public consumption. Rivière identified these memoirs as particularly revealing sources which were exploited by Voltaire, primarily for anecdotal qualities and personal details which magnified the details of intrigue and the conspiratorial tone of many of his chapters. The *Mémoires de Villars*, can be included in this category.[145] It also includes observations on politics, the court, finance, the judiciary and other topics of interest. Rivière notes that Voltaire turned to the work of Dangeau as the main source for his chapters on *Particularités et anecdotes du règne de Louis XIV*, chapters XV-XVIII of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. When reading the rather abrupt and unembellished *Mémoires du Marquis de Dangeau* in manuscript form, Voltaire took copious notes from Dangeau's accounts of life at court and of private

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[144] Pellisson, P., *Lettres historiques* (Paris: Jean-Luc Nyon, 1729), Avertissement.
[145] Vol. 1 is by the Maréchal himself, who had a glittering military career; Vols 2 & 3 were compiled by the abbé La Pause de Margon.

matters, which he would later incorporate.[146] Rivière notes that 'Dangeau's memoirs were to help him characterise the spirit of the age and courtly life'.[147]

In the last division of sources are narrative works of history which are often written on very specialised themes and the content of which forms a small part of the eventual work by Voltaire. Examples of these include a short work by Gröning which is notable for its lyrical praise of Charles XII, and Boyer's political journal, *The Political State of Great Britain.*[148] Boyer was the editor of this publication from 1710 to 1729 and the reportage of the King of Sweden and his campaigns within its coverage of foreign affairs and international politics could well have been another influence for Voltaire's depiction of the figure of Charles XII. These historical sources are of most interest for their eclectic nature or content or for their expertise on quite specialised subjects, characteristics which duly affect their focus, tone and register and which are recognisable and identifiable. One such account is Captain Perry's record of life as an engineer under Peter the Great. It provides a fascinating record of that Czar's remarkable modernisation and reorganisation of Russia and its echoes are evident in Voltaire's detailed passages on Russia, such as his account of the building of Petersburg or of the Russian navy.[149] Rousset de Missy's writings were also of considerable

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[146] Dangeau, Marquis de, *Mémoires du Marquis de Dangeau écrits par lui-même, extrait du manuscrit original, contenant beaucoup de particularités et d'anecdotes sur Louis XIV, sa cour [...]* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1817).

[147] Rivière, M-S., 'Voltaire's use of Dangeau's *Mémoires* in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*: the paradox of the historian-*raconteur*' in *SVEC*, 256 (1988), 97-106.

[148] Gröning, J., *Bibliotheca universalis seu codex operum variorum: IV. Historia expeditionis Russicae nuper suscepiae a Carolo XII* (Hamburgi: AP. Godf. Liebezeith, 1701), pp. 1-22.

[149] Perry, Capt. J, *The State of Russia, under the present Czar, In relation to the several great and remarkable Things he has done, as to his Naval Preparations, the Regulating his Army, the Reforming his People, and Improvement of his Countrey* (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1716).

interest to Voltaire as sources of details and anecdote from Russian history.[150] Similarly, Dalerac's history, dealing principally with Poland and the reign of Jean Sobiescki III, would have been of importance, primarily as a source of background material for the writer of history.[151]

The historical works based around Charles XII and written by writers such as Grimarest,[152] Theyls,[153] Limiers[154] and Defoe, and the histories on aspects of the life or reign of Louis XIV written by Limiers,[155] Larrey,[156] Reboulet,[157] Lamberty[158] and Hénault,[159] are of particular interest. The texts on Charles XII by Grimarest and Limiers, are, as works of history, sources of varied historical voice and commentary, according to each writer's own preferred focus or brand of historiography. A different angle was taken by Theyls, a diplomat posted to the Ottoman Empire during the years of Charles XII's exile there, and his one-volume work includes many original letters and his personal accounts of diplomatic solutions, mediations and re-negotiations. Président

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[150] Rousset de Missy, *Mémoires du règne de Cathérine* (La Haye: Alberts & Vander Kloot, 1728); *Mémoires du règne de Pierre le Grand, Empereur de Russie, Père de la Patrie &c., Par le B. Iwan Nestesuramoi* (Amsterdam, La Haye: 1725-1726).

[151] Dalerac, F.P., *Les Anecdotes de Pologne, ou mémoires secrètes du règne de Jean Sobiescki III* (Amsterdam: Henry Desbordes, 1699).

[152] Grimarest, Le Gallois de, *Les Campagnes de Charles XII, roi de Suède* (Paris: J. Le Febvre, 1705).

[153] Theyls, W., *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Charles XII, Roy de Suède* (Leyde: Jean du Vivier, 1722).

[154] Limiers, H.-P. de, *Histoire de Suède, sous le règne de Charles XII. Où l'on voit aussi les Révolutions arrivées en differens tems dans ce Royaume*, 12 vols (Amsterdam: Jansons, 1721).

[155] Limiers, H.-P. de, *Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France sous les règnes de Louis XIII et de Louis XIV*, 2 vols (Amsterdam: D. Mortier, 1720); *Histoire du règne de Louis XIV* (Amsterdam: Aux dépens de la Campagnie, 1717).

[156] Larrey, I. de, *Histoire de France sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Rotterdam: Bohm & Cie, 1718).

[157] Reboulet, S., *Histoire du règne de Louis XIV. Surnommé le Grand, Roy de France*, 3 vols (Avignon: F. Girard, 1744). Rivière cites this work, which follows a chronology of wars, as the main source for the first 24 chapters and the chapters on religion in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*.

[158] Lamberty, G. de, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Mortier, 1735) Rivière notes that this history was not drawn upon by Voltaire.

[159] Hénault, le Président, C.J.F., *Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France, contenant les événemens de notre Histoire depuis Clovis jusqu'à Louis XIV. les Guerres, les Batailles, les Siéges, &c. Nos Loix, nos Moeurs, nos Usages, &c.* (Paris: Prault père, 1744).

Hénault's work on Louis XIV forms part of a greater work of chronological lists of noteworthy events in the history of France. It is divided into sections and commented upon in sectional appendices called 'Remarques particulières'. Hénault's work was of interest to Voltaire as a source of factual information and Rivière describes the relationship between the two popular historians as one of 'mutual respect and co-operation based on a thoroughly professional approach to the craft of historiography'.[160] As shall become apparent, Hénault's comments betray an uncommonly acute awareness of his audience. The Protestant Dutch writer Limiers (already noted for his substantial history on Charles XII) also wrote two works of history on Louis XIV. His histories are chronicles, insofar as they focus on chronological details and statistics of battles and wars, and shy away from any intimate tone or private anecdotes. Larrey is another exiled Huguenot historian and his work centres on the external battles and images of the reign of Louis XIV. Whilst he, Limiers, Reboulet and Lamberty are quite aware of the task of the historian, they lack a concomitant eagerness to impress their audience.[161]

One of the most exciting and promising documents from this selection of historical authors is Pellisson's formulation of a proposal, addressed to Colbert for approval, which includes the elaboration of a theoretical basis for writing a work of history on Louis XIV.[162] The discussion of the proposed work and its place in a genre which the author proceeds to define quite precisely, is of enormous interest in terms of historiography and analysis of the conventional historical voices of the time.

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[160] Rivière, M-S., 'Voltaire, Hénault and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*', in *NFS*, 28 (1989), 1-15, (p. 1).
[161] See Ch. 2.
[162] Pellisson, P., *Projet de l'histoire du Roy Louis XIV à M. Colbert* in *Lettres historiques*, III, 421-5, Appendix.

Other unusual works to be considered include Defoe's various histories of the reign of Charles XII. The core history is that of a 'Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service' and it is allegedly written from one particular personal perspective. It is an intriguing text which demands special attention as it appeals to readers on several levels and was read by contemporaries as a genuine historical source. The prefatory claims and content of Defoe's work must also be considered along with Voltaire's other main sources.

These 'source' texts are the contemporary texts selected for analysis of their declarations on the theory of writing history and for examination of the practice of writing history, in order to provide a comparison for Voltaire's theory and practice of historiography in *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.*

# HISTORY VOICES

## SECTION ONE

*The difference between the historian and the poet is [...] that the one tells of what has happened, the other of the kinds of things that might happen. For this reason, poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts.*

Aristotle, *Poetics*.

# CONTEMPORARY HISTORIANS: PREFATORY THEORY

*Soit coutume, soit bienséance, un Livre ne seroit pas bien reçu, s'il n'avoit une Préface; elle est d'ailleurs souvent nécessaire pour donner cours à l'Ouvrage. C'est une affiche qui promet beaucoup, un hameçon qui trompe les Lecteurs.*[163]

Together with their lengthy works of history, the authors of eighteenth-century historical texts present aims, problems and promises for the readers' perusal in prefatory notices which are replete with rhetoric.[164] From any such prefatory notice, it may be possible to identify a historian's theories, whether enunciated or implied, on the writing of history. By focusing on the work of several selected eighteenth-century authors of histories, it may be ascertained whether there existed a code of rules particular to historiography, one which could be considered equivalent to those prevailing in contemporary theatre and poetry. Establishing the content and nature of such a traditional historiographical consensus would provide a model against which Voltaire's historical compositions might be compared and contrasted.

In his preface to the *Lettres persanes,* Montesquieu draws attention to the divergence often found between the intentions of the author as articulated in a typical eighteenth-century preface and the material delivered in the actual work. In characteristically straightforward style, the *Lettres persanes* are served up to the reader without any habitual apology or statement of approval. At the head of this alleged

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[163] Anon., *Dialogue entre le siècle de Louis XIV et le siècle de Louis XV* (La Haye: 1751), Preface, p. v.
[164] Not all works of history have theoretical prefaces. In one particular case (P. Pellisson's proposal for a history of Louis XIV), the prefatory note is in fact the model for a proposed history which was only ever written in part (1749) covering the years from 1660 to 1670.

'translation', the translator's usual panegyric is openly rejected, on the basis that if the work is any good, it will be read, and that if not, readers will discard it. In explaining this rejection of panegyric and preface alike, Montesquieu remarks on the artificial, inconsequential and insubstantial nature of contemporary prefaces, which were usually displays of inherent dishonesty and feigned objectivity:

> Ce serait une chose très ennuyeuse, placée dans un lieu déjà très ennuyeux de lui-même : je veux dire une Préface.[165]

However, Montesquieu was an exception to the rule, as L. Lynch underscores in his work on the eighteenth-century novel in which he affirms that prefaces were 'an indispensable part of the main work'.[166] Moreover, Lynch is obliged to concur with Montesquieu's assertion that the preface was in danger of taking on a life of its own, and he allows that 'those old preambles often contained promises which were not meant to be kept'.[167] Nonetheless, even if novels have more freedom than histories, Montesquieu's articulated rejection of the preface was a bold move and a step which few historical authors had the audacity to attempt. This reality highlights a conventional prefatorial programme, whether for actual histories or for apparently 'true' novels or historical novels which aspire to imitate history.

This chapter proposes to identify an underlying theoretical convention which guided contemporary works of history. In historical works, it is the *Préface, Avertissement, Epitre, Avant-Propos, Préface de l'Éditeur, The Author's Préface* or *Introduction* which featured elaboration by the author, editor or historian on his aims,

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[165] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* in *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols, ed. R. Caillois, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1949) I, 129-372, (p. 132).
[166] Lynch, L.W., *Eighteenth-Century French Novelists and the Novel* (York, South Carolina: French Literature Publications Company, 1979), Preface.
[167] *Ibid.* Preface.

methods, aspirations and his theories of history writing. The fact that the stated intentions of the preface may differ radically from the main thrust of the text in many areas renders the initial prefatory statement all the more intriguing and noteworthy.

## HISTORIANS' CLAIM TO AUTHORITY

*Mais il ne doit jamais ni suposer, ni déguiser les faits, & c'est en quoi consistent l'impartialité & la fidelité que j'ai gardées; caractères qui distinguent l'histoire de la fable & du Roman.* (Larr, xxix)

The nature, content and tone of each history varies considerably, mainly in accordance with the type of text being produced and the individual personality, background and interests of the authors themselves. Although the travel writing of La Motraye and the diplomatic correspondence of Baron de Fabrice were not written as strict accounts of historical events, Voltaire trawled these source works, as thoroughly as purely historical works, for details which would add local colour to his text and enhance the picturesque quality of his writing, without unduly weighing down the narrative. In histories by Grimarest, Limiers, Theyls and Larrey, he looked for a more substantial and factual historical narrative from which to select intriguing details to form the basis for his own history.[168] In their prefatory writing, these contemporary historians introduce their own personality and assert their authority over the text, drawing the parameters within which the historian proposes to work. These elements are the

[168] See Introduction to this thesis.

reflections of the theory and constituents of the practice of historiography in traditional contemporary history.

Authors of the period, whether in historical or political works, travel writing or memoirs invariably establish their own credentials at an early stage in prefatory passages. The purpose is to show their worthiness and the qualifications which permit them to be authors of the particular texts. Hénault, La Motraye, Theyls, Pellisson, Larrey and others all do this in their individual ways. Hénault insists that his work is the culmination of an entire forty years of thought, reading and intellectual activity:

> Je versai dans les intervalles tout ce que la lecture de quarante ans, des reflexions, & sur-tout des conférences particulieres m'avoient fait recueillir. (Hén, Preface)[169]

La Motraye, referring to himself in the third person for greater stylistic effect, underscores, in the *Avis au Lecteur*, his uniqueness as a travel writer through stating that, amongst other qualifications, he has been to places where no others have ventured:

> & d'ailleurs sa curiosité l'ayant porté en divers endroits où nul autre Voyageur qui nous soit connu n'a été. (Mot, 1)

La Motraye is so eager to prove his originality and his difference from the many other eighteenth-century writers of travel literature that he reiterates both qualities at various intervals throughout his *Avis au Lecteur*:

> Quantité de pieces rares & singulières qu'aucun autre n'avoit deterrées avant lui;
> en particulier sur tout ce qui a été ou omis ou mal raporté par d'autres Voyageurs.

Similarly, Theyls, in dedicating his work in the *Epître* to the Ambassadors whom he has served for more than fifty-two years, eagerly draws attention to the fact that his history is an assessment and an account of his life's work, based on the notes which he took so assiduously throughout:

> Mais sur tout j'ai conservé exactement tout ce qui regarde les troubles et les guerres excitées entre le Czar & le Grand Seigneur par le Roi de Suède Charles XII, pendant son séjour dans l'Empire Ottoman.

In the fashion of La Motraye, Pellisson assures his readers that he is delivering a special combination which has not been supplied by anyone else. By suggesting the title 'journal' as an alternative to 'lettres', he even implies a more private source and unique, personal viewpoint:

> Pour donner d'abord une juste idée de ce qui est contenu dans ce Recueil de Lettres Historiques, il n'y aurait qu'à l'intituler: Journal des Voyages & Campagnes de Louis XIV, depuis 1670 jusqu'en 1688. Il s'y trouve une infinité de faits & de circonstances qu'inutilement on chercheroit ailleurs.[170]

Grimarest is so conscious of being heretofore entirely unknown and so wary lest, in the rush to document King Charles XII's campaigns, he might be regarded as an outsider, merely 'un Particulier', that he resorts to hyperbole and superlatives. His *Avertissement* insists that he is the only one who could possibly be qualified to write his history and would never have forgiven himself had he not done so:

> Il n'y a personne dans le commun des François qui soit plus en état que moi d'en savoir les circonstances; & je me serois reproché de n'en avoir point fait part à ma Nation.

Although the historians' claims often focus on the subjective input of one individual, this is presented as the valuable, personal insights of the particular historian and is portrayed as a positive, original element.

Larrey, a Protestant exile, is the most insistent in the area of authorial authority as he suspects, like Grimarest did, that he has more to prove than others. Adding a further dimension to his authorial credentials and the subjective emphasis of his

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[169] Preface to 1756 edn.
[170] Pellisson, P., *Lettres historiques* (Paris: Jean-Luc Nyon, 1729), Avertissement.

contemporaries, Larrey, articulating an awareness of the difference between *histoire* and the *fable* or *roman*, provides an insistence on his impartiality. Devoting an entire paragraph towards the end of his preface to introducing himself as the calm, unbiased, qualified author of the work, he emphasises that his work is completely and consciously impartial. In case some might presume him to be bitter and biased with regard to the King who forced his exile, he underlines that this state of impartiality was achieved only through time and reflection, 'j'ai attendu que le calme fût revenu dans mon esprit'. In the following passage, Larrey predicts the objections which could be raised against him, and answers them all in a persuasive manner, insisting on his absolute impartiality:

> Je viens à des objections qui me regardent. On dira peut-être qu'un François Réfugié, tel que je le suis, n'étoit guère propre à écrire l'Histoire d'un Roi qui a proscrit tous les Protestans de son Roiaume. J'avoue que d'abord le chagrin de ma proscription eût pu m'y rendre trop sensible, pour parler sans émotion du Roi & de la Patrie qui me la faisoient souffrir: mais j'ai laissé refroidir cette première chaleur, & j'ai attendu que le calme fût revenu dans mon esprit avant que de mettre la main à la plume. Me trouvant alors tranquille, j'ai cru pouvoir écrire sans passion, & à même tems sans partialité d'une Histoire si pleine de grands Evénemens: & j'ai consulté mon honneur & ma Religion pour ne rien avancer aux préjudices de l'un & de l'autre. (Larr, xxvii)

Another Protestant historian, Limiers, also provides a token statement of impartiality where he writes, 'sans partialité, sans intérêt' (*HS*, I, xxxi). Limiers' preface is similarly unconcerned with his religious background and bears more upon biased sources whom he may have consulted. Vertot claims to have read his source historians 'sans intérêt et sans passion', whilst La Motraye insists that he recounts his travels 'sans préjugé et sans déguisement' (Mot, 1), and proceeds, with a customary near self-contradiction, to emphasises both his impartiality and his personal subjectivity at once.[171] Larrey's very personalised authorial insistence is particular to his rather

[171] Vertot, abbé de, *Histoire des Révolutions de Suède. Où l'on voit les changemens qui sont arrivés dans ce Royaume au sujet de la Religion et du Gouvernement* (Paris: F. Barois, 1722), Avertissement.

sensitive case. In many cases, impartiality is implied rather than stated, as if historians do not wish to draw attention to their ideological background. Although seemingly almost contradictory, the insistence on impartiality is viewed by contemporary historians as an issue separate from their claims of subjectivity, which is put forward as a positive attribute deriving from the personal insights of the individual author.[172]

Equivalent narrative assertions of authority are made in historical novels and are remarkably similar to those found in history. Novelists adopt the historians' insistence and discourse, asserting primarily their closeness to the subject in question to establish their authorial credentials. In the *Avis* to *Dom Carlos* the 'historian' introduces his chosen subject, which concerns the 'historical truth' behind the relationship between the prince and the Queen of Spain. Listing his 'historical' sources, the historian proposes the story to the reader, couched in 'real' historical details. Thus he imposes his authority with the claim that he is the only one to know the real story:

> L'auteur ayant trouvé en divers lieux les particularités de leur histoire, il a cru devoir en faire part au public...[173]

Among historical novelists, Defoe's realism is such that the reader becomes utterly convinced by the total veracity of the story told within the historical novel.[174] The artifice which Defoe used with most success was the voice of the single author as an actual historical or 'real' character who decides to narrate his/her history/story, as in the 'fictions' *Moll Flanders, Robinson Crusoe* and in the 'histories' *A Journal of the*

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[172] See Historical Subject below.
[173] Saint-Réal, C.V., abbé de, *Don Carlos, nouvelle historique 1672*, ed. A. Lebois (Avignon: Edouard Aubanel, 1964), Avis.
[174] Defoe is another of Voltaire's historical sources for *Histoire de Charles XII.*

*Plague Year*, *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and *The History of the Wars of his Late Majesty Charles XII...by a Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service*. The striking verisimilitude of these works is due to the combination of attention to historical detail and the idiosyncratic, credible person of each narrator; in each case, the reader is charmed and duped. While they were actually historical novels written and created by Daniel Defoe, Voltaire and his contemporaries accepted them as works of history. Felix and Von Proschwitz have shown that not only were Limiers and Voltaire deceived in this manner, but so also were subsequent historians. In this way, historians inadvertently infused their own and future texts with fictitious details from a fictional historical source.[175] Much of the apparent authenticity of Defoe's historical novels derived from mimesis, or close adherence to the form and tone of actual historical accounts, and the claim to authority was the first, albeit external but essential hallmark of any historian.

It is possible to conclude therefore that, almost universally, writers of history of this period in France demonstrate a common insistence on unique access to, and originality of, material and each historian stakes out his entitlement to his own particular subject territory. It is evident that writers feel the need both to state their impartiality and to establish authorial licence to write the work before they begin to deal with the actual historical subject.

[175] See Von Proschwitz, pp. 11-36.

## HISTORICAL SUBJECT

*Je ne m'étendrai pas beaucoup ici sur la peine que cet ouvrage m'a donné; le Public en est assés persuadé.*[176]

Once the position of the historian as historical authority has been established, the same confident self-assurance does not always extend to the subject matter in hand. Many historians willingly admit difficulties in tackling their subject matter. In most cases, matters of inclusion and exclusion have little to do with the readers' enjoyment and everything to do with the great doubt surrounding the established boundaries and precise focus necessary for a work of history.

Limiers concludes his Preface with a foolishly honest plea for corrections so that errors can be rectified in subsequent editions:

> Je ne demande pas mieux que de profiter des avis qu'on voudra me donner, & de faire usage des Mémoires que voudront m'envoyer les personnes Judicieuses. (*HS*, I, xlvi)

Limiers's declaration of reliance on other sources, which he admits may in turn be very unreliable and therefore may inadvertently cause errors or misrepresentations to enter his own text, immediately introduces an elastic margin of error into his history. His promise to correct any such errors in future editions is a pronouncement which does not inspire faith either in the accuracy of his history or in his judgement. His protestations are too strong for a piece of work which presents itself as a researched, fair and impartial, fact-based unit of history:

> Je proteste que j'ai été trompé le premier sans le savoir; que je n'ai eu intention de fâcher personne; que j'ai dit le bien et le mal tel qu'il m'a paru; sans prévention, sans partialité, sans intérêt; & qu'au premier avis, je suis tout prêt à rectifier ce qui aura pu déplaire le moins du monde [....] (*HS*, I, xxx-xxxi)
>
> ...que je n'ai rien omis à dessein; & que je ne suis pas [...] coupable d'une dissimulation affectée à cet égard. (*HS*, I, xxxi)

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[176] Reboulet, I, Preface, p. i.

Allowing for such a margin of error undermines his insistence of authority as it suggests that he may not have access to all the facts and may not be able to present the full picture that he wishes to depict. On various occasions within his preface, Limiers also wavers regarding various digressive and peripheral passages in his history:

> J'ai long-tems hésité, si je parlerois de toutes ces choses [...] (*HS*, I, xxix)
> Dira-t-on que ces Episodes soient Etrangers à la matière que je traite? [...] (*HS*, I, xlii)
> Regarderoit-on aussi comme inutile ce que j'ai dit de... (*HS*, I, xlii)

An awareness of the scope for error and an underlying doubt with regard to his work are constantly reiterated by Limiers in his preface. Having outlined the contents of each of his twelve books, he concludes with a question doubting as to whether he has included everything. Larrey is even more irresolute. He wonders about the amount of space given to various subjects, as if the reader could solve such a problem for him at this remove. The effect is to undermine confidence in the published text:

> Je ne sai si je ne me suis point un peu trop étendu sur le chapitre des Impôts. (Larr, xiii)

Grimarest, while adamant that he is better qualified than anyone else to write his history, is also nonetheless content to reveal a feeling of inadequacy in dealing with his chosen subject matter, as in his dedication 'Au Roi de Suède':

> Il est au-dessus de moi de remplir dignement le grand dessein que je me suis proposé.

However, it is obvious that an element of rhetoric is involved in that assertion as Grimarest, in that flattering dedication to the King, is equally quick to point out that he is not alone, as no author would be swift enough to keep pace with the actions of the Swedish monarch:

> Il n'y a point d'auteur assez rapide pour suivre exactement Votre Majesté dans ces nombreux événemens qui étonnent toute l'Europe.

Rather than suggesting a concern for readability, these particular rhetorical questions must be read as normal prefatory discussion of the exact remit of history.

Significantly, in his historical novels, Defoe also manipulates this device of the doubt-ridden historian to give his work the appearance of *real* history. This suggests the extent to which it is part of normal prefatory discourse. In *A Journal of the Plague Year*, which A. Burgess defines as belonging in the genres of both history and literature, the narrator refers to his own position as a mere individual recording the Great Plague of 1665, drawing attention to his own acute awareness of the subjective and personalised nature of his account of conditions.[177] By including a discussion of the weaknesses of this very subjectivity and further expressing his inability to articulate the horrible nature of what he saw, the narrator not only justifies numerous textual digressions, as a personal attempt to represent history through isolated or sequential images, but also echoes and mimics the doubts typically voiced by the historian. Ironically, it was realistic textual details like this sheer inability to express events or states in words, as in the following narrative voice, which led people to assume that this was a real witness account, and therefore truth, or historical memoir:

> This may serve a little to describe the dreadful conditions of that day, although it is impossible to say anything that is able to give a true idea of it to those who did not see it, other than this, that is was indeed very, very dreadful, and such as no tongue can express.[178]

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[177] Defoe, D., *A Journal of the Plague Year*, ed. A. Burgess (London: Penguin Classics, 1966).
[178] Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, p. 79. More recently, this same, actual, 'real-life' inability to articulate horrific real situations once witnessed is vividly illustrated by F. Keane, *A Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey* (London: Viking, 1995), pp. 69-70, pp. 78-82.

In Defoe's case, the device of the personal witness who voices an inability to articulate a broad, objective account gave the narrator licence to include the most obscure and abstruse details in his text, the better to paint a picture by disjointed images which are explained as being due to the narrator's descriptive inadequacy. This is the model for a particular type of fictitious history, or alleged memoirs, which Defoe was interested in constructing, ones which focus on personal accounts and are eminently marketable.

Similarly, in Defoe's history/story of Charles XII, which claims to be written *By a Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service*, the cessation of narrative focus on Charles XII when physical separation occurs is a very plausible, seemingly authentic effect. So, when the Scots soldier is separated from King Charles XII who flees to safety among the Turks, leaving his soldiers to wander Europe, attention is perforce drawn to a whole variety of historiographical questions about the very idea of chronological history, omniscient narrative, and subjectivity in historical accounts.[179] Works of *actual* history have already been shown to be self-referential in this manner, whether confessing weaknesses in subject or sources or claiming subjectivity. Although it is of no interest to the proceedings of the historical novel to answer these questions, the apparent formulation of them within the text gives the work the stamp of real history, just as is done by Saint-Réal when he footnotes his *Dom Carlos*.

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[179] Defoe, D., *The History of the Wars of his Present Majesty Charles XII, King of Sweden, from his First Landing in Denmark, to his Return from Turkey to Pomerania, By a Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service* (London: 1715); *The History of the Wars of his Late Majesty Charles XII, King of Sweden, from his First Landing in Denmark to his Return from Turkey to Pomerania: the Second Edition with a Continuation to the Time of his Death: By a Scots Gentleman in the Swedish Service* (London: H.P., 1720).

In turn, these issues focus attention on the gulf which exists between the experience itself and the articulation of this experience in memoirs or history, as well as displaying the impossibility of omniscience on the part of the witness or historian, a state which many *actual* historians preferred simply not to address, or to feign. In Defoe, the audacious exposure of the impossibility of omniscience, through devices such as the willing affirmation of proud subjectivity and the narrator's (or author's) declaration on inadequacy of articulation, is the result of simulation of the (not always true) prefatory claims by traditional historians which allowed Defoe's histories to be read as *true* accounts, and gave them such a semblance of being real efforts at addressing the difficulties of historiography. However, it must be remembered that Defoe exaggerates such weaknesses to an extent which most *actual* historians would have avoided.

In any writing of history or historical novels, such honesty, to whatever degree, contradicts the earlier explicit assertions of authority made by the historian. Rather than reassuring the reader of the conscientious nature of the historian who would only deal with judicious people, or having the desirable effect of smoothing over any unintentional omissions or necessary exclusions, these confessions of fallibility on the part of a self-proclaimedly great historian risk undermining the security of the text and the credibility, reliability and very authority of its author.

## STYLE IN HISTORY

*Il me reste à dire deux mots sur le stile dans lequel j'ai crû qu'il convenoit que mon Histoire fût écrite.*[180]

Another common feature of prefatory discourse is commentary which pronounces on the relation between the author's style and the material presented. Here the exposition seems initially disparate and contradictory. Defoe's authenticity was seen to lie partly in the expression of a pretended inability to articulate realities which causes the narrator to rely on inclusion of 'petty detail' rather than on great style. S.H. Monk notes the effectiveness of this device in simulating reality:

> Nothing in Defoe's craftsmanship has been more frequently remarked on and admired than his achieving an almost photographic impression of reality, piling up one petty detail after another until the reader cannot fail to be convinced that the novel is a literal transcription from life.[181]

As Defoe is the great mimic of writers of history and of historical memoirs, it is no surprise to find similar, if less exaggerated, reliance on unusual events or details entwined with an individual writer's own remarks about style within genuine historical writing.

La Motraye lays out his personal modus operandi, as if it were a general manifesto for the writing of travel literature, implying that deviation from these criteria would result in a work without value:

> Il a soin par les details où il entre, de nous representer l'état présent des Cours, des Païs, & des Villes dont il parle, sans en negliger l'ancien; il s'est attaché à faire connoitre le genie, les moeurs, les coutumes, les opinions des differens peuples, le plus naturellement qu'il lui a été possible, sans préjugé & sans déguisement. (Mot, 1)

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[180] Reboulet, Preface, p. viii.
[181] Defoe, D., *The history and remarkable life of the truly honourable Col. Jacque, commonly call'd Col. Jack,* ed. S. Holt Monk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), Intro., p. xix.

Two elements stand out in this passage. Firstly, there is the dedication to politics, 'l'état présent', and to history, 'l'ancien', or a linking of past and present within his narrative, a method which is worth comparing to Voltaire's parallel approach. Secondly, the insistence on 'naturellement', 'sans préjugé & sans déguisement', points towards a discussion both of style and of truth. Interestingly, although his acute awareness of style leads him to write his preface in the third person singular for more persuasive effect, La Motraye still comments on his own lack of style, begging the readers' indulgence. Further insisting on the rough nature of his style, he admits to having had his work checked and corrected by another writer. However, he promises to compensate for the lack of style through the sheer quality and unique nature of the material being presented.[182] He also voices his awareness that others might have dressed such a narrative in more decorative language. He was not incorrect in this, insofar as Voltaire would pilfer details and anecdotes from La Motraye's and others' work and dress them in his own more remarkable style and form.

Limiers's purely rhetorical statement on the historian's perfect style is to be found in the remarkably theoretical preface to his *Histoire du règne de Louis XIV* wherein he delineates the difficulties involved in writing a history:

> Son Stile doit être clair & noble, ni trop nombreux ni trop négligé ; ses Périodes ni trop longues ni trop recherchées, ses Figures ni trop élévées ni trop fréquentes. En un mot il doit joindre la netteté à la précision, & conserver avec la pureté du langage, la dignité & le naturel. (*HRL*, [10])

Alongside the lofty, oratorical ideal, Limiers also addresses more practical aspects of style in his prefatory writing. Having seen the negative effect of Limiers's focus on his

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[182] This insistent apology for lack of style reflects the contemporary expectation of more literary travel writing, as W.A. Guentner concludes, 'De la sorte, le récit de voyage est transformé d'un genre d'écriture en un genre littéraire'. W.A. Guentner, 'Comment le récit de voyage français devint littéraire au XVIIIe siècle', in *SVEC*, 296 (1992), 53-70.

involuntary textual omissions, it is worth noting that this author is more positive about some incongruous but specially chosen inclusions, as well as about some deliberate omissions (*HRL*, 38-40). Reflecting the common authorial uncertainty about the exact boundaries of history, the historian also displays a concern with producing good reading material. In his *Histoire de Suède*, while apologising for textual digressions, or any matter which is not directly concerned with Charles XII, he justifies the inclusion of some unusual details purely on the grounds of potential reader interest, hoping that they will damage neither the style nor the unity of the historical work:

> Si ce sont des Digressions, j'espère qu'on les trouvera non seulement utiles, mais nécessaires.
>
> Si c'est encore une Digression [...] j'espère qu'on la trouvera solide, impartiale & aussi peu étrangère à mon sujet, que toutes celles dont j'ai parlé jusques ici. (*HS*, I, xxxvii, xliv)

For Limiers, 'solide' and 'nécessaire' are more important than beautiful prose. Deliberate omissions are used to define his approach, style or genre, as when he states that it is, 'une Histoire où l'on ne doit point chercher les Fêtes Galantes ni d'intrigues d'amour' (*HS*, I, xliii). Thus, the reader recognises that Limiers actively differentiates himself from the writers of fictional *histoires secrètes*. He delineates the subject matter of his history as being serious and political, and beyond light moments of trivial entertainment such as love affairs. This is an important distinction as the love interest could be considered one of the hallmarks of the eighteenth-century novel from *Marianne* through to *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

Also rejecting fiction, while echoing Hénault's connection of history with 'd'anciennes tapisseries', Larrey describes history as 'une riche Tapisserie'. He is concerned to note that the historical scene or backdrop is picturesque enough in its

natural state and needs no further imaginative decoration or embellishment from the author:

> Elle n'a pas besoin de l'art de l'Historien pour l'orner & pour l'embellir. Il n'est pas nécessaire qu'il cherche dans son imagination des idées de grandeur pour lui donner du relief: elles sont naturellement attachées aux Conquêtes, à la Magnificence, & à toutes les merveilleuses Scênes de ce Regne. (Larr, xi)

In contrast to La Motraye, Larrey and Limiers, Vertot, in his history of 1722, describes the historian as a combination of a painter and a dramaturge - most successful if style, intuition and good judgement are combined by the author:

> Quand l'Historien est bon Peintre, c'est pour le Lecteur le plus beau spectacle du monde; si outre cela il est bon juge, il rend ce spectacle utile en montrant d'un côté les malheurs affreux qui accompagnent & qui suivent ces étranges révolutions, & de l'autre en exposant fidelement le caractère des principaux Acteurs qui paroissent sur le Théâtre, & en rendant à ces hommes fameux toute la justice qui leur est dû.[183]

Vertot's mixture of art with drama calls for a degree of style against which Dangeau's editor later protests. In the 1817 edition of Dangeau's memoirs, the editor emphasises the simple nature of the text, focusing not on the artifice of style but on the straightforward delivery which reflects no obvious pretensions to publication:

> Mais ce n'est point des Mémoires, ce n'est qu'un simple Journal, écrit sans aucune espèce de prétention, qui n'a pour but que de retracer avec exactitude tout ce que l'auteur a vu dans l'espace de vingt ans.[184]

Just as histories were imitated by historical novels, this 'simple' language of memoirs is also imitated by fictional memoirs, such as by Marivaux's Marianne who, in *La Vie de Marianne*, also makes claims to an absence of style:

> Il est vrai que l'histoire en est particulière, mais je la gâterai, si je l'écris; car où voulez-vous que je prenne un style?[185]

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[183] Vertot, Avertissement.
[184] Dangeau, Marquis de, *Mémoires du Marquis de Dangeau*, ed. Madame de Genlis (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1817), p. 15.
[185] Marivaux, *La Vie de Marianne* (1731) (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1978), 1ère partie, p. 50.

Most representative of the confusion shown with regard to style are the questions which Marianne asks naïvely of the friend for whom she writes. We may presume that Marivaux, having noted the lack of uniformity or consensus of style in contemporary history, travel journals or memoirs, addresses the question both to authors and readers:

> Au reste, je parlais tout à l'heure de style, je ne sais pas seulement ce que c'est. Comment fait-on pour en avoir un? Celui que je vois dans les livres, est-ce le bon? Pourquoi donc est-ce qu'il me déplaît tant le plus souvent? Celui de mes lettres vous paraît-il passable? J'écrirai ceci de même.[186]

The definitions of style by many of the main historians consulted by Voltaire would appear to be founded on apology, anti-definition and antithesis, suggesting the subordination of a formal style to 'solide' content and originality. There is neither consensus nor thorough discussion of what style should be. Where the text is not intended to be a pure historical work, as in La Motraye or Dangeau, the eclectic nature of the style appears to be extolled more as a virtue and a mark of authenticity than a failing, as is evident from Defoe's eagerness to mimic this. Historical style was not expected to be as ornamental as literary style and the absence of strict convention denotes a looseness in the parameters of the historical genre. It may be supposed from the imitations of historical novels and fictional memoirs that the lack of style, ornament or embellishment were hallmarks of history which suggested genuineness, in opposition to fiction which was equated with style, fabrication and illusion. Thus, certain conventions existed to underline authenticity, and one which appears almost indispensable is the insistence on *vérité*.

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[186] Marivaux, p. 51.

## ***VÉRITÉ***

*On ne peut s'intéresser qu'à ce qu'on croit vrai.*[187]

The linchpin of theories about history in eighteenth-century historical prefatory writing could be said to be the declaration of adherence to the immutable principle of *vérité*. The insistence on *vérité* in history is one of the primary tenets of works of history and of historical narrative in the period from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century. When Grimarest insists upon his impeccable lineage as a historian and his resultant entitlement to write the history of Charles XII, even if situated far away from the action, his main focus is on his assertion that he has very close access to the real truth. His sources are quoted just to show that he hears his history at first hand, out of the mouths of the protagonists, thus supporting his vociferous claim to veracity and authenticity:

> Je tiens tout ce que j'avance de la bouche même de plusieurs Officiers, qui ont été témoins des Actions de ce grand Roi : Et pour m'assurer davantage de leur certitude, je m'en suis informé à des Personnes du Parti oposé qui se sont fait honneur d'en avouer la vérité. Et le Public n'auroit rien à souhaiter davantage, si un Auteur plus entendu que moi la lui avoit renduë.[188]

The historiographer insists that *vérité* may be ascertained by consultation with both warring factions and that the truth lies in the coincidence and correspondence of the details.[189] Not only does this point towards *the* truth but, as Grimarest's text indicates, truth is depicted as being immutable, regardless of who the purveyor may be.

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[187] Diderot, D., *Jacques le fataliste* in *Oeuvres de Diderot*, ed. A. Billy (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951), pp. 475-712, (p. 708).
[188] Grimarest, Avertissement.
[189] This method of correlation of stories from opposing sides is also used by Voltaire to his own advantage. See Ch. 3.

This faith in a connection between the source of the information as proof of truth and the veracity of the history is reiterated by Theyls in the preface to his work. Theyls draws a connection between the material he produces and the original manuscript notes which he still possesses and which he holds up as alleged infallible proof of the veracity of his published text. What Theyls does not openly address are questions of partiality, omission or misunderstanding. Nor does he consider the issue of misinterpretation, revisionism, time or memory lapse when he assures the Ambassador of his extensive research:

> J'espère que votre Excellence trouvera d'autant plus de satisfaction à les [ces Mémoires] parcourir que j'ai aporté une attention extraordinaire à n'y rien mêtre que de véritable, dont les originaux sont entre mes mains.[190]

Of all the histories considered, Theyls's work provides extensive details of the unimportant solutions, resolutions and re-negotiations which form the background to decisions, so that climactic events are somewhat smothered in the endless, albeit factually accurate and possibly literally *true* accounts of meetings and letters which led to the resolutions. Yet, even such apparently historical *facts* are subject to misinterpretations and nuances. They must be regarded with the same suspicion as Vertot's text wherein he declares that everything in his history is true only because he has painstakingly deciphered other histories, which were full of untruths, and intentionally misleading. Having siphoned off the inaccuracies and elaboration of other authors, whom he also accuses of partiality, Vertot promises to present the pure and unadulterated 'truth':

> J'avouë que j'ay été blessé du peu d'exactitude ou du manque de bonne foi de plusieurs Historiens; qui ont parlé des affaires de la Suède; les uns ont déguisé la vérité & les autres n'ont pas eu assez de soin de nous instruire ni des événemens ni des motifs des entreprises; plus ces

[190] Theyls, Epître.

> Auteurs m'ont paru se contredire, plus je me suis appliqué à les concilier, ou à démêler le vrai du faux.[191]

This way of persuading the reader of one's superior critical faculties and ability to distinguish 'le vrai du faux', is a clever one, achieved by freely admitting the existence of phoney, partial histories and then by insisting on being able to distinguish real from false. Apart from gaining the confidence of the reader, this also, once again, presupposes the existence of an actual truth waiting to be uncovered:

> J'ai lû avec attention les Historiens Suédois, Danois, Allemans & François, Catholiques & Protestans, je les ay lûs sans intérêt & sans passion, que celle de connoître la vérité, & de l'écrire avec exactitude, & j'ai lieu d'esperer qu'on ne me reprochera point certain esprit de parti indigne de la fidelité & du désintéressement d'un veritable Historien.[192]

However, the idea of the *fidelité* of the credible historian is considered in a different light by the earlier La Mothe le Vayer in his theoretical work *Préface d'une Histoire* wherein he classes textual omissions as being as damaging to the historian's credibility as are blatant lies:

> Une obmission qui n'offense souvent pas moins la fidelité de l'Histoire que le mensonge.[193]

The author anticipates Vertot's insistence that history is dependent on information from sources which may be less than reliable, but his corollary is curiously different from that of Vertot. La Mothe le Vayer agrees, for example, that popular myth, belief, support and opinion may demand inclusion of some doubtful material:

> Mais á l'égard de l'Histoire, qui n'est qu'un registre, ou un memorial, appuié le plus souvent sur la fidelité des yeus & des oreilles d'autrui, ce n'est pas merveille si on s'écarte par fois du but de la vérité. Il est mesmes du devoir d'un Historien d'escrire assez ordinairement des choses qu'il ne croit point, ne fust-ce que pour remarquer ce qui a esté tenu pour constant par le peuple.[194]

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[191] Vertot, Avertissement.
[192] Vertot, Avertissement. See Ch. 2.
[193] La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire* in *Jugements sur les Anciens et Principaux Historiens grecs et latins dont il nous reste quelques ouvrages* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1646), p. 336.
[194] La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire*, p. 350.

This seems to be an artless suggestion on the part of La Mothe le Vayer that the historian is obliged to choose the best truth available, or the most popular one, even when not necessarily the factual truth, if such could be said to exist. His allowance for popular opinion, even where signalled as such, in turn invites the recording of myth and a resultant stretching of the properties of *vérité*. The difference between his work and that of the later historians is that a prudent silence is espoused by the latter group who do not openly address the issue of accepting popular myth within history.

Amongst historical novelists, Le Noble's promise to 'suivre exactement la vérité de l'histoire' is a typical, exact echo of historians' comments.[195] Defoe refers to common knowledge in a different way, mimicking the later historians' insistence on presenting the real truth as it actually occurred. He manipulates the reader by the assertion that what he presents is common knowledge and he challenges them to expose their ignorance by claiming otherwise:

> As these Memories are meerly Historical, they need little Apology, they contain a relation of Things transacted within the View, and perhaps in the Memory of most that shall now read them, and need no better Appeal for their Authority and Truth, than the General Knowledge of Mankind; the Assent of which in this Age, must needs pass for Approbation in the next.[196]

The above passage is among the deftest pieces of persuasion to be found in any preface. By using the words 'meerly Historical' the author is following in the footsteps of La Motraye and other historians in their insistence that they are so concerned with the true transmission of experiences that they appear to pay little attention to style or form of the words chosen to convey their story. The assessment of truth is not openly insisted upon but, cunningly, passed on to the reader for judgement. By appealing to the general

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[195] Le Noble, E., *Histoire secrete des plus fameuses conspirations de la Conjuration des Pazzi contre les Médicis* (Paris: 1698), Preface, p. [5].
[196] Defoe, *The History of the wars of his present majesty Charles XII...*, Preface.

knowledge of the reader, the narrator forces the reader to accept the work as true since the converse would amount to renunciation of the 'General Knowledge of Mankind' and would merit being judged ignorant, inadequate and wrong by posterity. By the same token, posterity is being advised to accept as truth that which contemporaries knew to be fact, 'des veritez historiques'.[197] Nor is this reference to posterity a device without foundation in real history, as is evident from La Mothe le Vayer who writes of posterity:

> De mesme que les histoires ne doivent estre escrittes principalement *que* pour elle [...] il n'y a qu'elle aussi, comme plus exempte de passion, qui les puisse mettre à leur juste prix [...] le tems seul, qui conserve la memoire de toutes choses pouvant donner à un chacun la reputation qui luy apartient.[198]

Therefore, Defoe's is a clever double manipulation of readers present and future. His technique helped to influence the reception of his history of Charles XII and to ensure that it was considered *real* or *true* for many years after its publication.

Addressed to varying degrees by all the authors mentioned, *vérité* becomes 'les véritez' for Grimarest, or 'la Verité dans le Récit' in Limiers, 'avec certitude' in Pellisson, 'des veritez historiques' in La Mothe le Vayer and 'le caractère d'Historien qui raporte simplement les faits' in Larrey. *Vérité* is further supported by the historians' statements of impartiality already examined, such as the 'exactement & sans partialité' of Larrey, 'sans préjugé & sans déguisement' of La Motraye, or the 'sans partialité, sans intérêt' of Limiers. In this light, truth and impartiality may be isolated as the two highest aspirations to which historical works lay claim in order to persuade their readers that they are of value and worth reading. *Vérité* is promoted as the foundation stone, which should be the hallmark and distinguishing factor of excellence in history.

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[197] La Mothe le Vayer, *Discours de l'histoire* in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1662), Intro.
[198] La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire*, p. 350.

## DISTANCE BETWEEN HISTORY AND READER

*The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.*[199]

Evident in consideration of prefatory references to subject, style and *vérité* is an acute self-awareness on the part of the authors. This has already been seen to manifest itself through self-justification and is mimicked to perfection in Defoe's juxtaposition of 'Authority and Truth' in his preface to his history/story of Charles XII. Such authorial self-awareness suggests a corresponding awareness of the reader. This is evidenced by the attention paid to the unspoken and even unformulated questions of the intended readership. In one of Hénault's histories, the use of columns and the choice of the *abrégé* form is ascribed to the need to facilitate readers in their interpretation of potentially confusing facts:

> Leur histoire se croise continuellement dans tous les autres Ouvrages, & jette dans la narration un embarras qui se communique à l'esprit du Lecteur.[200]

In the *Avertissement* to his history of France, Hénault writes about readers' expectations, and how they may only anticipate a recital of dates and facts, whereas his history is a lot more extensive in its format:

> Le titre de cet ouvrage n'annonce que des faits & des dattes, cependant il est vrai que ç'a été le prétexte d'un plus grand dessein.

From the very start, Hénault appears extremely conscious of his readers. Perhaps it is no surprise that his history was a popular one since he allows for varying depths of

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[199] Benjamin, W., *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (1968) (London: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p. 257 [first published as *Schriften*, 1955].
[200] Hénault, le Président, C.J.F., *Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire d'Espagne et de Portugal* (Paris: Jean-Thomas Hérissant, fils, 1765), Avertissement.

reading. In this, he predates, by more than two centuries, Eco's presentation of different layers of textual interpretation, decipherable according to the reader's astuteness:[201]

> & tel mot qui échapera peut-être aux lecteurs moins attentifs ou moins versés dans la connoissance de notre histoire, sera apperçu avec fruit par ceux qui en ont déjà fait une étude particulière. (Hén, Preface).

Hénault's awareness of his readership is particularly sharp and in this, he is as alert as La Motraye, who worried about the appeal of his style for the reader. Their sensitivity contrasts with the rather banal prefatory platitudes directed by some of the other historians at a less important, much more amorphous reader-figure.

The question of textual interpretation is connected with the issue of public news and private information. In the *Lettres historiques*, Pellisson insinuates that there is habitual censorship of some information, 'Je n'en dis rien ici, & je n'en écris rien au logis'.[202] This suggests the existence of privileged information, available at certain levels to a select few readers:

> Je n'ai pû écrire le dernier ordinaire, & à vous dire la vérité, on a eu durant ces huit jours beaucoup plus de conjectures que de nouvelles, au moins pour le public.[203]

This keen awareness of censorship, of different authorities, of rank and of various levels of truths suggests that eighteenth-century historians displayed caution, rather than naïvety, on the question of absolute and total *vérité*, depending on the reader targeted. When Pellisson declares ambiguously, 'Voilà à peu près ce qui s'étoit passé', he is voicing the dilemma faced by each historian, the problem of formulating a concrete

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[201] Eco, U., *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, trans. W. Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), pp. 47-53, (p. 58).
[202] Pellisson, *Lettres historiques*, A Compiegne, 30 Avril 1670, à Mlle de Scudéry.
[203] Pellisson, *Lettres historiques*, Vendredi 5. Aoust 1673, Sur le chemin, entre Lunéville & Raon.

work of history and supplying a version of reality in words.[204] It must also be borne in mind that some of the readership of the day might not have had the critical apparatus or a consciousness which would have allowed them to differentiate rhetoric from conviction or to appreciate the difficulties of censorship, subjectivity and bias.

Baron de Fabrice's letters were not intended for publication, nor were they ostensibly intended for even limited public consumption. Yet, the author of these letters is very aware of his readership, as aware as if he had written a preface to them to introduce his style and method. In a subtle manner, Fabrice had already broached the subject of truth and authenticity in various ways within his letters, demonstrating an awareness of a critical reader. It can be seen from markers in the text that, unlike other historians, he does not claim to be omniscient, nor always to have perfect insight into the politics around him, such as the instance when he prefaces a comment with the words:

> On a enfin commencé à ouvrir les yeux & à s'apercevoir que le Grand-Seigneur, ou ses Grands-Visirs, ont eu tort de faire espérer au Roi, qu'on le feroit reconduire dans ses états avec une nombreuse escorte. (Fab, 160)

On occasion, to illustrate to the addressee/reader that his assessment of the events about which he is writing is his personal view, he physically distances himself from the location of the narrative. In one such instance, in the 47th letter *A monsieur le Baron de Görtz*, he writes about his choice of lodgings, 'ma maison au fauxbourg'. This represents a strategic distance from the whereabouts of Charles XII, appropriate when the Baron came to act as mediator between the king and the factions coming to

[204] Pellisson, *Lettres historiques*, Du Camp devant Mastrick, ce Lundi 12. Juin 1673.

evict him. In an explanation to the intended reader, he notes within the text his reasons and justification for his choice:

> Je m'étois dès la première aparence de brouilleries mis en tête de m'ériger en Médiateur entre les Turcs & ce Prince. Ce fut dans cette intention qu'au lieu de m'enfermer avec lui, je me logeai dans ma maison au fauxbourg. (Fab, 168-9)

This anxiety to explain and comment within the text is there to accommodate the reader, who is consequently less perturbed when Fabrice recounts his own disagreements with Charles XII on issues of strategy or when he describes the monarch's unyielding nature, 'Ce fut là tout ce que j'en pus tirer' (Fab, 173). Fabrice's additions and explanations of local colour, such as the routine treatment of interpreters who deliver unwelcome messages, are also rendered less shocking:

> J'ose dire que cela, prononcé avec fermeté, fit son éfet, quoique rendu en tremblant par mon interpréte, de peur de la bastonade, punition assès ordinaire pour les interprétes qui s'emancipent trop dans leurs discours aux Grands de la *Porte*. (Fab, 178)

Not only does Fabrice write his letters in French and in the first person, but he also engages in a discussion of language. He seems very aware both of its barriers and limitations as well as of its capability to symbolise different mentalities and customs, such as in the case of the interpreter. The reader is made aware of the Babel-like circles in which Fabrice moves. In these milieux, words are ambiguous and potentially dangerous. This is made clear to the reader in cases such as that when a letter written in German by Fabrice to the Swedish King was intercepted by the *Han*. The letter was written at a time when Fabrice had been instructed not to communicate with Charles XII and it contained detailed complaints about his interceptor, made by Fabrice to the King. Later, Fabrice narrates the entertaining resolution of his predicament to the reader, telling how he managed to tear off the offending passages and to return the letter to the *Han* without those sections. Suspense is broken for the reader when the text divulges

that Fabrice was released again on condition that he does not attempt to re-contact his King.

The nature of the diplomatic intrigues and negotiations which are carried on in the Ottoman empire is such that the stress was on the word, either spoken or written. In contrast, it is a combination of physical actions and the symbols of power which would decide the outcome of King Charles XII's stay at Bender. The final attack and siege of Charles XII's house was a spectacle without equal, an occasion without verbal diplomatic exchanges but replete with events and actions which had no recorded precedent in any type of history. As Fabrice notes:

> L'étrange catastrophe de cette grande journée, de la quelle on n'a aucun exemple dans les Histoires anciennes & modernes. (Fab, 213)

Nothing linguistic could resolve such an impasse. Fabrice the storyteller is eager to recount and exaggerate this in his epistolary accounts of this peculiar time, always manipulating the reader's responses and provoking thought.

If Fabrice is concerned both with events without precedent in writing and with language failing to establish contact, it is quite ironic that the editor of this edition of his letters should introduce blatant fabrication into the text and be unfaithful to the author. He does this by including a footnote which recounts, in direct speech, an anecdote about the King of Sweden being advised on how to travel incognito, specifying that he need only drink heavily and sleep late to conceal his identity. Although the anecdote is entertaining for the reader, it is patently a fictional construct and is made even more obviously so by the editor's referral of the reader back to the works of Limiers, Lamberti, La Motraye and Voltaire himself who had initially used Fabrice's letters as

source material. To further diminish the effect of authenticity from the letters, the editor comments on *fausseté*, a fault which he alone introduces into this text:

> Il dépendra de l'éditeur d'amplifier un peu cet article s'il le veut, pour faire dignement la cloture de ce Tome, mais toujours en gardant une extreme precaution pour ne pas avancer de fausseté. (Fab, 215)

Taken together, the insertion of the anecdote in a footnote and the editor's reference to sources such as the writers who used Fabrice as their own source, all serve to accentuate the difficulty of detecting origins of anecdotes and of isolating from real events the fabrications which undermine the reader's trust. Fabrice was not alone in being much concerned with accuracy and very aware of the duplicitous nature of language in any form. Nor was he the only writer to try to demonstrate his loyalty to his readership through detailed textual asides, explanations and constant reassurance. On the surface at least, the historian is eager to present himself as a mere conduit for history rather than as its artist or a biased commentator.

Historians cross-referred to one another without necessarily acknowledging the fact within their prefaces. Therefore, cross-reference and intertextuality affected each eventual reader, although some were more oblivious to this than others. While Voltaire turned to all the contemporary accounts and histories of Charles XII as sources for his history, Von Proschwitz notes that Limiers himself referred to Grimarest and Defoe.[205] An echo of this incestuous cross-reference resounds in Grimarest's *Avertissement* which draws attention to the deceptiveness of history and points to the ever-present distances and subjectivities involved in historical writing. In admitting from the outset of the

[205] Von Proschwitz, pp. 11-12.

*Avertissement* that he is miles distant from the events recounted, Grimarest unwittingly exposes the inherent weaknesses of his position and begins his work on a negative note:

> On s'étonnera peut-être qu'un Particulier, comme moi, éloigné des lieux où le Roi de Suède fait la Guerre, puisse donner un détail de ses Campagnes.

Unlike La Motraye, whose apology is focused on his perceived lack of style, Grimarest immediately draws attention to the figure of the historian. The readers of these histories are many removes from the actual events and the ensuing potential for distortion, memory lapse, bias, subjectivity, partiality and distance in time and space means that the account delivered by Grimarest is as vulnerable as any other work which sets out to record, and eventually to assess, historical events for the reader. The historian is so far distant from the action that the eventual reader (at least one remove further away again) is served almost a tenth-hand account of what actually happened and the account is taken from many different eye-witness views of the events. These come from two opposing, but equally subjective, accounts of the 'témoins des Actions' and are filtered by the drama and extraordinary nature of the unusual happenings themselves. All is distanced by time and by physical travelling space between the Northern countries and France, where the author lives and writes. There is distortion by translation and various language barriers and by the influence of politics both of the warring factions and of the country of writing. The accounts are tainted by the particular rank and position of the witnesses and the lack of access to secret information afforded to the *Officiers qui ont été témoins*. All this is finally digested by the relatively unknown author Grimarest, screened through his own partiality, imagined as a subjective view of the sequence of events and transmitted in written form to the page on which it was printed and then became a published work. The historian's repeated promises of *vérité* and fact, if they

once existed, are very far removed from the final version provided for the reader of Grimarest's work of history. In this particular history, despite adamant protestations of subjectivity and reliable, exclusive *true* information, the historical event is a great distance and many interpretations away from the reader.

## ENUNCIATED AIMS OF THE HISTORIAN

*L'histoire est une école de réflexion. Les faits ne sont que des autorités qui appuient la raison, ou des sujets qui l'exercent, en dehors de tout psittacisme.*[206]

The stated aims of the writer of a history, or the mimicked aims of a historical novelist, are capable of revealing much about the underlying motivation for the work. Not all writers expound on their actual aims in the preface to their work, however, and in these cases, the intentions, aims and motivations can be implicit and subtle or possibly, more easily deduced.[207] Two main categories of purpose are predominant, that of a general expression of concern regarding the *utilité* of the works and that of the seventeenth-century focus on the Horatian *plaire et instruire*, although with those echoes somewhat muted. The deep self-awareness which existed amongst seventeenth-century historians, evident in the probing and questioning of the prefaces already examined, led many authors, such as Le Moyne, Mezeray, Bouhours, Sorel, Rapin, La Mothe le Vayer or Saint-Evremond, to write about historiography. Authors such as

[206] Saint-Réal, *Don Carlos*, p. 13.
[207] The aims and motivations of the author are usually closely related as one mirrors or facilitates the other.

Guez de Balzac, Gueret, Saint-Réal and La Mothe le Vayer also write about the *utilité* of history, often with one eye on posterity, 'aux siecles suivans'.[208]

Amongst these, Saint-Réal draws a clear connection between history and a moral didacticism, criticising the learning of history which involves recitation of dates and occludes both reflection and instruction. If taught and studied correctly, the belief is that history, which has moral and intelligence-forming qualities, could actually teach a code of living:

> Savoir l'Histoire, c'est connoitre les hommes, qui en fournissent la matiere, c'est juger de ces hommes sainement; etudier l'Histoire, c'est etudier les motifs, les opinions & les passions des hommes, pour en connoître tous les ressorts, les tours, & les détours, enfin toutes les illusions qu'elles savent faire aux esprits, & les surprises qu'elles font aux coeurs.[209]

His assessment is based primarily on the moral potential of history and on the concomitant duty of the historian, recalling the *plaire et instruire* dear to seventeenth-century writers. The phrase 'la véritable Morale' draws attention once again to the suitability of carefully selected passages of history as examples of morality in action:

> L'Histoire devroit servir à leur faire aprendre, comme d'eux-mêmes, la veritable Morale, par les reflexions qu'on leur devroit faire faire sur les endroits les plus singuliers & les plus *instructifs*.[210]

In his 1646 *Préface d'une histoire*, La Mothe le Vayer emphasises the didactic function as being the utility of history which took precedence over any concern with truth or accuracy. For useful, didactic purposes, emphasis must be on the reasons and discussions which led to an event rather than purely on the details of an event in isolation:

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[208] La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire*, pp. 358-9.
[209] Saint-Réal, *De l'Usage de l'histoire* (Paris: C. Barbin & E. Michallet, 1671), Intro., p. 4.
[210] Saint-Réal, *De l'Usage de l'histoire*, pp. 11-12.

> De ne raporter pas simplement l'évenement des choses, mais d'en dire toujours les raisons, & les conseils qui ont précedé.[211]

The preface to *Jugements sur les Anciens et Principaux Historiens* further emphasises the utility of history in its discussion of selective truth. The suggestion is that a historian, for didactic convenience and, therefore, for utility, is obliged to select the best truth available, or the most popular one, if not necessarily the accurate, factual, *true* one, where such a popular truth exists

> Il est mesmes du devoir d'un Historien d'escrire assez ordinairement des choses qu'il ne croit point, ne fust-ce que pour remarquer ce qui a esté tenu pour constant par le peuple.[212]

The seventeenth-century choice of didacticism and popular story is a clear rejection of accuracy or factual truth in favour of *plaire* and *instruire*, whatever the historical price.

In this connection, one of the most fascinating texts must be the proposal for a history of Louis XIV's wars, submitted by Pellisson to Colbert.[213] As the very nature of a proposal is such that it is entirely hypothetical and, unlike a preface, it predates the production itself, it is possible to read the claims it makes as aspirations, pure and simple. Not only does this proposal represent one writer's theory for the perfect work of history, but it also presents the factors which the author perceives as essential, to be expected in any serious history proposal and, by extension, in history itself. It is no surprise that the author addresses the matters of authority, the historical subject, *vérité*, the reader and the intended aim of such a work, as well as style, characterisation,

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[211] La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire*, pp. 329-359, (pp. 332-3).
[212] *Ibid.*, p. 340.
[213] Pellisson, P., *Projet de l'histoire du Roy Louis XIV à M. Colbert* in *Lettres historiques*, III, 421-5, Appendix.

selection and exclusion, theatricality and response. Even a superficial examination of Pellisson's proposal will indicate to what extent his expressed aspirations correspond with the claims of the prefaces already examined. This will in turn allow a better assessment of his aims and help to appraise the level of agreement or coincidence of aim amongst contemporary historians, if such exists.

As is manifest in prefatory passages already examined, the confident historian of Pellisson's proposal eagerly boasts of prowess and defines an intriguing hierarchy of styles and types of history in order to distinguish his own history from others':

> Je n'entendrois pas que ce fût en forme de Journal, ni de Relation, & de simples Mémoires, ni d'Eloge, ou de Panegyrique, qui sont tous caractères & stiles différens, qu'il faut bien distinguer.[214]

Although similar to the prefatory work of other historians, Pellisson reveals a vulnerability beneath his display of confidence. This emerges in the brief revelation of initial uncertainty regarding subject definition, which he had already discussed with Colbert, 'quoiqu'assez confusément...'.[215] However, while admitting that treatment of some material demands knowledge and may constitute a challenge, 'pas le plus aisé', his definition of style is very precise, differentiating between the equally explicatory approaches of the historian and the lawyer:

> Il y faut également éviter la longueur &l'obscurité.
>
> Un récit sommaire, mais fort digéré & fort étudié des raisons que les deux Couronnes alléguent, écrit en termes choisis & réduits, au terme du sens naturel.[216]

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[214] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 421.
[215] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 421.
[216] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 422.

These details once again indicate the possibility of personal input into theories of style. With no evidence of a fixed convention on style, the resultant void allows each author to develop his own theory, aspects of which may not be unique but may coincide with the styles of others.

Selection, rejection, inclusion or exclusion of material by a writer appears to be closely connected with that author's concept of history and with his aims in writing the work, whether enunciated or not. Pellisson is unusually decided about the selection process, 'fort digéré & fort étudié', adjectives full of thought, filtering and concentration, which might also suggest not only a lack of positive theories or guidelines on the topic, but also an ulterior motive and focus by the author from the outset. Linking the rôle of historian with the purpose of recording and clarifying for posterity, Pellisson indicates that he wishes to depict the wars of King Louis XIV in such a way that the main protagonists would be painted clearly and without confusion both for posterity and for contemporaries:

> Ensuite il faudroit travailler à ce que peu d'Historiens modernes ont sû bien faire, & presque pas un de nos François. C'est-à-dire, qu'il faudroit faire connoître les Auteurs principaux en cette guerre, comme si l'on supposoit que personne ne les connût encore. Car on écrit pour la postérité, qui ne les aura pas vûs, & ce n'est pas même toujours les connoître que de les voir.[217]

In quite blatantly wishing to please His Majesty with his work, 'Il seroit à souhaiter sans doute que Sa Majesté approuvât & agréât ce dessein',[218] Pellisson appears to pledge an openly biased and potentially revisionist vision of Louis XIV, despite his own former clash with the monarch on the imprisonment of Fouquet. One of his stated aims is to

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[217] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 423.
[218] *Ibid.*, p. 424.

accentuate the King's virtues and greatness through subtle juxtaposition with other sovereigns, a comparison which, he insists, will not go unnoticed by the reader:

> Par la secrette comparaison que le lecteur feroit lui-même de Sa Majesté avec tous les autres Souverains.[219]

In this, Pellisson is advocating the very antithesis of La Mothe le Vayer's theories of historiography. The latter insists that the perfect historian must suspend judgement in order to be able to praise or blame men's actions 'selon qu'elles le méritent sans partialité'.[220] However, even he points out that the ideal historian would have to be entirely without opinions on politics or religion to achieve this. In reality it is the political or religious passion of the historians which drives or inspires them to write. Among others, Pellisson is extremely aware of an audience for his passion. Interested in pleasing in order to influence, Pellisson's text only offers one particular picture of the monarch and his times to the 'esprit du Lecteur':

> L'esprit du Lecteur, quand il s'est une fois formé ces différentes idées, & qu'il voit ensuite chaque personnage remplir la sienne, s'en fait un spectacle très-délicieux.[221]

Subtle manipulation would continue throughout the intended work of history, until finally, the historian would have presented a wonderful but understated tableau of the great King, without ever verging on the panegyric, 'évitant dans les expressions tout ce qui tourne vers le panégyrique'.

Pellisson makes no mention of *vérité* in this proposal. This may indicate that *vérité* was something which would be promised to the reader in the rhetoric of an

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[219] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 422.
[220] La Mothe le Vayer, *Mémorial de quelques conférences avec des personnes studieuses* (Paris: L. Billaine, 1669), pp. 385-387. See F.L. Wickelgren, *La Mothe le Vayer: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: P.André, 1934), p. 117.
[221] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 423.

eventual preface, but which merited no articulation in an initial historical proposal. The history's eventual audience is certainly not foremost in Pellisson's mind as he formulates this proposal which privileges the author's own private agenda of obtaining the King's approval for his proposed history. Furthermore, the author allows for possible dissimulation on the part of the king who need neither openly approve nor order the work, 'il ne faut pas qu'elle paroisse l'avoir agréé ni sû; moins encore commandé'.[222] The use of the verb *paraître* suggests a clear dichotomy between seeming and being, appearance and reality, and it highlights the flagrant falsity of insistence by other authors in their prefaces on the presentation of *vérité* in their history. It also underlines the importance of the author's aims in writing the work. These were not always articulated so explicitly as in Pellisson's proposal nor were they inevitably stated in every preface.

From this rather declamatory outline of aims in the proposal, it is apparent that Pellisson is capable of many permutations of manipulation. Equally, his style promises to surpass anything that a *Journal* or *Mémoire* could ever offer because of its superior register:

> Un stile plus noble, plus composé, qui renferme beaucoup en peu d'espace, & où il n'y a point de paroles perduës.[223]

Not all of the historians mentioned could aspire to anything so perfect or definite although most articulate their original aims in their prefatory writing, with many

[222] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 424.
[223] Pellisson, *Projet...*, p. 425.

historians tending towards the idea of instruction through a readable (if not always entertaining) text, or an echo of the classical double aim of *plaire et instruire*.

La Motraye wishes to bring pleasure and his own experiences to his readers, through his unique insight and choice of subject, 'et qui ne sauroit manquer de faire plaisir à tous ses Lecteurs', but he also wishes to instruct in a more general, factual sense, 'd'aprendre bien des choses inconnues à tous ceux [..]'.[224] In the *Avis au lecteur*, as La Motraye catalogues the innumerable points of interest in his work and emphasises the added merit of its instructive quality, the reader is alerted to the fact that there is so much material here that any individual must surely be instructed by reading some part of the work:

> D'ailleurs il a mis ici une si grande varieté de remarques & d'observations sur tant de matières différentes, qu'il faudroit être d'un goût bien bisare & bien extraordinaire pour n'y pas trouver quantité de choses amusantes & instructives.

The dual purpose 'amusantes & instructives', a revealing echo of *plaire et instruire*, is not unique to La Motraye, although the specific interpretation of 'instructives' differs from one author to the next. It could be argued that Larrey focuses more on pleasure. In the dedication of his *Histoire de France sous le regne de Louis XIV* to Sa Majesté la Reine de Prusse, he writes that his history is provided to give pleasure to the reader:

> Je souhaite que la lecture Lui en puisse plaire, & occuper agréablement les heures de son loisir.[225]

Although there is little mention of instruction here, it is implied in the author's great concern about the inclusion and exclusion of key topics and his awareness of not wishing to be too obviously pompous or pedantic. Where La Mothe le Vayer insisted

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[224] La Motraye, Avis au Lecteur.
[225] Larrey, Epître Dédicatoire.

that the event cannot speak for itself, Larrey implies that rather than being overtly or pompously didactic, a select presentation of the event may influence subtly through *les faits*:

> En gardant le caractère d'Historien qui raporte simplement les faits, non en Orateur qui étale pompeusement ses raisons. (Larr, xx)

Hénault reduces his philosophy of presentation to the basic aspiration to inspire in the reader 'de la curiosité et du plaisir' with regard to modern history (Hén, 887). Limiers prefers to suggest that the writing of history is a morally uplifting exercise, underlining that the main protagonist must be portrayed in a positive light, to allow for the dignity due to a hero figure, 'celebrer dignement leurs grandes Actions'. With regard to depiction of the main protagonist, Larrey could be said to express a remarkably similar sentiment. His words, *obligé* and *approuver*, have, nonetheless, a faint didactic ring:

> Cela vient de ce qu'un Auteur est en quelque sorte obligé de revetir l'esprit du Pais dont il écrit l'Histoire, & de former son Plan sur les Principes du Gouvernement, qu'il y trouve établi, sans en aprouver les défauts. (Larr, xxix)

While Defoe used art as artifice in his mixture of history and literature, La Mothe le Vayer favours an image of history as art, with some allowance made for the possible multiple levels of interpretation (identified by Hénault) and for the complexity of any work of art which is the product of many influences. The imagery used by La Mothe le Vayer anticipates Flaubert's embodiment of the dual inspiration and manifestation of art in the form of a statue and Yeats's 'How can we tell the dancer from the dance?':[226]

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[226] Flaubert, G., Correspondance, I, 1830-1850 (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1920), p. 157; Yeats, W. B., 'Among School Children' from *The Tower* in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. R. J. Finneran (Basingstoke, Hampshire & London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 215-217.

> J'ai tousiours creu qu'il estoit des histoires comme des statuës, où l'on observe mille delicatesses quand elles doivent estre veuës de prez, que l'art rejette si elles sont pour estre regardées de loin.[227]

His awareness of writing for posterity echoes that of Pellisson, but it goes further in conveying that the universal and perhaps moralistic message of the text is superior to one which would only address ephemeral politics. In this, his history is to resemble a lasting work of art rather than a journalistic rendition of a political situation. La Mothe le Vayer seems to wish to reverse the Aristotelian distinction of history and poetry by rendering history full of universal truths within a more philosophical context, rather than a mere reportage of particular facts. Aware of the blemishes of any history which is too contemporary in nature, La Mothe le Vayer reminds the reader to be generous and to allow for political sensitivities which may enter the text, those 'mille delicatesses'. He is, however, prepared to leave judgement of the historical work as a whole to posterity, suggesting an Aristotelian preference for high, didactic, universal tone (with the addition of the seventeenth-century predilection for morality) rather than local, ephemeral politics:

> Une narration aussi qui se fait plus pour le present que pour l'avenir, a besoin de beaucoup de flatteries, comme d'autant de mignardises, qui ne seroient pas bonnes aux siecles suivans, où rien ne se lit plus volontiers qu'une vérité hardie, & s'il faut ainsi dire, grossière, & sans deguisement.[228]

On the other hand, Vertot may refer to the pleasure of history, 'les évenemens qui plaisent dans l'Histoire', but he clearly regards history as instructive and didactic, something which should be more 'utile' than anything else.[229] This moralistic 'utile'

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[227] La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire*, p. 358-9.
[228] La Mothe le Vayer, *Préface d'une histoire*, p. 358-9.
[229] Vertot, Avertissement.

should encompass both reflection on the horrors of war and praise of great hero-figures who are justly deserving of adulation.

In Lettre XI of the *Lettres persanes* Montesquieu explains *vérités de morale* and it is his connection of history, story, moral and philosophy which appears to provide a clue as to the ultimate malleability of the historical form and the potential usefulness of a historical narrative in the eyes of the eighteenth-century writer:

> Il y a certaines vérités qu'il ne suffit pas de persuader, mais qu'il faut encore sentir. Telles sont les vérités de morale. Peut-être que ce morceau d'histoire te touchera plus qu'une philosophie subtile.[230]

As is evident from such diverse usage and application of the word, the concept of *Utilité* of history is a non-specific term. Stemming from the desire to record a correct version of a monarch's wars for posterity, historians write history for egotistical reasons, for didactic purposes, or for political or moral instruction through example. Some advocate strict focus on reportage of *les faits*, while others give preference to the reasons and discussions behind events. History is often moulded to supply an entertaining subject, which conveys *morale*, but this must be elaborated upon by each individual author in order to indicate clearly a precise motivation.

Among writers of historical novels and fake memoirs, Defoe's obvious external motivation was subsistence. He needed to sell lots of copies, the most obviously logical and self-evident *utilité* of a writer's enterprise. When Defoe uses the apparent oxymoron 'meerly Historical' to apologise for the lack of style, excitement or coherence in his novels, it might be wondered what purpose, if any, he ascribes to this genre.

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[230] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, Lettre XI, pp. 145-150.

Considering that his historical novels are fiction masquerading as history and that he was slavishly faithful to the form and aspirations of what he perceived as representing the inflections of *real* history when writing them, it is extremely ironic that he commends the subject of the history of Charles XII as being a particularly suitable subject for a story as it has all the best trappings of 'real History'. He even defines these features as follows:

> Many Glorious Actions, Battles, Sieges and Gallant Enterprizes, Things which make a History Pleasant, as well as Profitable.[231]

A further reading of Defoe's history reveals that the author's *Profitable* comes from his own aim of employing such a promising historical subject in many versions of the historical story, thus further intertwining the barriers between history and story, fact and fiction. However, his articulation of 'Pleasant, as well as Profitable' initially suggests moral possibilities in the bones of the story or history which would allow the writer both to entertain and to instruct. As some historians prefer to do, Defoe places the outward emphasis on entertainment, without any mention of another purpose:

> Thus I chose to do in a Method, by which I Promise my self not only to compass my Design, but to have the Pleasure in Diverting my readers; and that is Entertaining them in the first Place with a Relation of the most surprizing and extraordinary virtuous and noble Exploits of one of the best and greatest Monarchs that the *European* World can boast of![232]

As his ostensible focus is on entertainment, it can only be presumed that the actual 'Profitable' purpose of his histories remains a subtly disguised one - a method espoused by Larrey - given that most of Defoe's work is deeply self-conscious and deliberate and very little of it is devoid of artifice. The Dissenter who was to be pilloried for writing

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[231] Defoe, *The History of the wars of his present majesty Charles XII, King of Sweden...*, Preface.
[232] Defoe, D., *A Short View of the Conduct of the King of Sweden* (London: A.Dodd, 1717), p. 5.

the ironic pamphlet *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702) was well able both to judge and to manipulate humanity's general gullibility and impressionable nature.

As author of many *histoires secrètes*, Mlle de la Force serves, in contrast, as the representative of a genre which was entirely interested in entertainment, but which relied on the convention of *truth* for its credibility. Therefore, it is unsurprising to find in her prefaces the reiteration of the *plaisir* which the public would derive from her history but with no accompanying claims to instruction, 'J'ai cru faire plaisir au Public de lui en faire une Histoire entiere & complète'.[233] Although lip-service is paid to the idea of history, the treatment is only superficial, as is the discussion of style and the reiteration of interest in *vérité*. The focus cannot be said to be 'entre Mars & Venus' but quite definitely in the sphere of the latter.

In the main, Venus is absent from the contemporary historians considered. This absence would have reduced the interest of a history to a very small core of the already minimal contemporary reading public, an even smaller proportion of which liked to think, as Voltaire asserted.[234] Denial of love matters suggests an attempt to address more erudite subjects in an elevated register of text, but the lack of space for personal affairs makes the text less palatable to many, as Oscar Wilde would later wittily

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[233] La Force, Mlle de, *Mémoire historique ou anecdote galante et secrete de la Duchesse de Bar, soeur d'Henri IV, roi de France, avec les intrigues de la cour pendant les règnes d'Henri III & Henri IV* (Amsterdam: Desbordes, 1709), Préface au Lecteur.

[234] Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques* in *Mélanges*, ed. J. van den Heuvel (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961), XIII, 'Sur M. Locke', p. 42.

surmise.[235] In the seventeenth century, the novelist Desmarets argues that history is not a satisfactory conduit for moral lessons, partly because fiction with a basis in *truth* is a lot more appealing to the reader than *truth* or moral with no romantic embellishments. Due to the fact that, as Desmarets maintains, history or 'histoire simple' is so limited by the patterns and events of actual reality, it risks being unable to present clear moral outcomes to certain situations. It certainly does not guarantee the victory of good over evil. On this account, Desmarets recommends the historical novel over history as a more successful means to present a moral stance:

> L'Histoire simple a ses bornes bien plus estroittes; & en disant les choses comme elles ont esté, n'approche pas de la beauté d'une Histoire meslée de fiction, qui represente les choses comme elles ont deu estre.[236]

This is quite a rigid position and Desmarets insists that the 'amours' in his book are not there just for the reader's pleasure. As the entire book must be, these amours are instructive for the future leader. The tone of insistence on 'instruire' is adamant.[237] Without any apology, fiction will be manipulated to present a sound moral lesson:

> Enfin j'espere faire voir dans cet ouvrage la vertu si belle & le vice si laid, qu'il n'y aura point de Prince à qui l'une donne de l'amour & l'autre de l'horreur; & ce n'est pas une chose de peu de consequence, que de former les moeurs de ceux qui doivent estre les modelles comme les maistres de tout un Peuple; puis qu'en les instruisant, c'est instruire tout le monde.[238]

Desmarets's contemporary Sorel would be less extreme in his insistence on the lack of

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[235] 'Even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.' Words spoken by Gwendolen in Act II of O. Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* in *The Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Galley Press, 1987), pp. 321-369, (p. 352).

[236] Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, *Rosane, histoire tirée de celles des Romains et des Perses Dédiée à Madame la Duchesse D'Esquillon Par Mr Desmaretz* (Paris: Henry le Gras, 1659), Préface, p. 13.

[237] Wilde teasingly addressed these lucid moral expectations in Act II of *The Importance of Being Earnest* where Miss Prism concludes, 'The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means', p. 339.

[238] Desmarets, Preface, p. 17.

moral value in history but would be equally adamant that history should be presented predominantly with moral instruction in mind. This foreshadows the aspirations of some eighteenth-century historians. Sorel's argument is more concerned with the assertion that *l'Histoire* equals *Véritable*. Like Saint-Réal, he posits that the lesson to be learned from history is the lesson of experience for life, both from good and bad historical characters :

> Histoire, laquelle recite les actions des hommes bonnes ou mauvaises.[239]
>
> C'est là que les bonnes actions sont exaltées afin que les successeurs en reçoivent de l'honneur & du profit, & qu'ils ayent de l'émulation pour égaler ceux qui les ont devancez; Et comme on void là aussi les mauvaises actions de quelques hommes & leurs punitions apparentes, ou le desordre de leur vie, on y doit prendre de l'aversion pour le vice qui est cause de tant de maux.[240]

A close link may be observed between this firm insistence on the classical *plaire et instruire* on the part of seventeenth-century theoreticians and the more subtle, but still tight, moral grip on history written in the eighteenth-century. As Diderot suggests in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, the moralist and the historian may work in similar ways, 'un moraliste ou un historien relève et fait éclater les circonstances d'une action héroïque'.[241] Yet, the two disciplines are certainly not synonymous and, as has been shown, many historians expand the definition of instructive to include that which enriches and broadens the mind by teaching the art of reasoning, as well as that which provides a moral element.

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[239] Sorel, Ch., *De la Connoissance des bons livres, ou examen de plusieurs autheurs* (Paris: André Pralard, 1671), p. 66.
[240] *Ibid.*, p. 71-2.
[241] Diderot, D., *Le Neveu de Rameau* in *Oeuvres de Diderot*, pp. 395-474, (pp. 449-450).

## CONCLUSION

The examination of historiographical theory in prefatory notices of selected eighteenth-century historical texts reveals a certain consensus among writers as to the desired shape of history. Yet, the lack of any strict guidelines means that many authors imitate each other and their predecessors without ever formulating a personal vision of history or historiography. Most of the authors - and Voltaire's sources constitute a varied body of writers, from travel-writers and correspondents to a diplomat and a Huguenot historian - establish their authority very confidently but are remarkably less persuasive with regard to their subject matter. It might be suggested that their assertions of *vérité* are possibly made only because the reader expects them and not because the authors necessarily believe that they have access to any particular historical *truth*. This would explain some of the doubts voiced in connection with exclusion, inclusion, selection or rejection of material. Despite declared wishes to be impartial, historians appear to see no incongruity in also claiming to write subjectively since this would allow the reader to gain from their personal insight into the histories recounted. This claim of subjectivity calls into doubt the impartiality which they have also sought. Although historians vary in their aims or aspirations for history, many declare categorically that a historical *truth* exists and that it must be conveyed. Again, no incongruity is seen in this juxtaposition of doubt about delineation of subject and the proposal to narrate the historical *truth*. The supposition of *the* historical *truth* was probably a consensual fundamental principle from which most historians departed.

An awareness of the reader is apparent from prefatory works, a fact which suggests that historians wrote with the intention of providing entertainment and

instruction (whether in morality, facts or reason). The inherent discord between confident authority and authorial doubt, between hesitation and absolute truth, between didacticism and entertainment, between the rational and the moral, and between a common consensus and a lack of strict rules, creates an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty in historical prefatory writing. Since these historians apparently aspire to recount facts of which they are not necessarily sure, without any particular narrative style and at considerable length, such theoretical discussions undermine rather than strengthen readers' confidence. It remains to be assessed whether such doubt and confusion also pervade the actual historical text itself and to what extent these historians are strict in their adherence to their own theories.

Anxious to imitate history, the historical novel highlights similar difficulties by paying overstated attention to *vérité*, lack of style, discussion of subject boundaries, awareness of the reader and most of the other traits outlined as hallmarks of contemporary history. Limiers's articulated rejection of romantic interest is one which is commonly adopted amongst historians, thus aspiring to the removal of private affairs from the public domain of history, although historical novels evidently imposed no such restraint. Pellisson's proposal for history further outlines typical prefatory concerns, addressing aims, obligations and expectations, and underlining the attempt to steer history away from the fictional towards the factual. His proposal furthermore draws attention to the consensual rules of contemporary historiography and to their relative lack of formulation.

# CONTEMPORARY HISTORY: TRADITIONAL PRACTICE

The prevailing theories of historiography, as expounded in prefaces to contemporary works on the monarchs, Charles XII and Louis XIV, indicate that amongst historians a consensus existed on the theory of writing history but that no explicit rules were laid down.[242] To explore the correlation between the theory and practice of contemporary historians, analysis will focus on textual authority, on characterisation and on the depiction of war. Any similarity or divergence between theory and practice will provide an interesting scale of comparison against which to measure Voltaire's own approaches, declared and actual, to writing history.

## AUTHORITY

There is a lack of uniformity in the profile of the contemporary historian and a parallel variety in the approach, style and format of historical writing.[243] Yet, right across a range of prefatory writing, the historian is seen to impose his authority over the text in a persuasive manner. In emphasising the merits of his subjective view of the topic presented, the historian proposes to put his personal stamp on his work.[244] Within the main body of the historical text, many authors continue to stress their identity as

[242] See Ch. 1.
[243] See Introduction to this thesis.
[244] See Ch. 1.

historians by revealing a personal relationship with the material presented within the history. Echoing the claims of authority and personal knowledge made in his preface, Larrey reiterates his personal involvement in the reign under scrutiny by insinuating, within the historical text, that he was present at events, using the form *nous*, as when he writes 'nous avons vu...' (Larr, 201). This iteration of personal involvement is also very strongly present in writing by Theyls, who inserts a note of individual participation throughout his history, using *je*, *me* or *on*:

> Je fis cette reponse à son Excellence ... (Th, 95)
> On peut voir par la lettre suivante du Baron de *Schaffirof* qu'il m'écrivit le 28...(Th, 97)
> Je reçu la réponce [sic] suivante à cette lettre. (Th, 104)
> Je fis la réponce [sic] suivante le 1 Juin à Mr. le Baron de *Schaffirof.* (Th, 105)
> Le même jour le Baron de *Schaffirof* m'écrivit la lettre suivante. (Th, 107)

Theyls is particularly eager to highlight not only his involvement but his own important, and even pivotal, rôle in the diplomatic exchanges which he recounts. La Motraye also inserts himself as participant into his travel accounts on a very personal level. In so doing, he adds to the length and detail of his book and occasionally risks losing his audience with digressions such as the following:

> Après avoir soupé & nous être reposez quelques heures, nous remontames à cheval pour continuer notre voyage, pendant le reste de la nuit qui étoit fort serene. Nous gagnames le lendemain sur les trois heures après-midi *Tergovitz*, sans nous être arretez que dans quatre Villages pour changer de chevaux. (Mott, 217)

Fabrice's account is an epistolary correspondence also claiming personal participation in the events recounted. In order to reinforce the writer's authority as historian, the writer in the first person is often involved and linked with Charles XII and his military manoeuvres or political affairs:

> C'est là ce qui nous a retenus depuis si longtems en Turquie. (Fab, 160)

It is evident through his involvement with the monarch that the two have a close personal relationship, although Fabrice, who writes, 'je conoissois assés le Roi...', does not claim either to understand or to agree with all of the monarch's motivations or decisions. As with Theyls, the accounts of Fabrice's own actions bring the historian into the work of history as a participant and a historical character:

> Je fus d'abord au camp rendre compte au Roi de la resolution qu'on avoit prise...
> Je fis tout ce qui étoit de mon pouvoir pour l'obliger à prendre d'autres mesures.
> Mais je ne puis rien gagner sur lui. Au contraire il me dit ...
> Je repondis, que je le souhaitois ainsi de tout mon coeur... (Fab, 178)

As well as adding an element of dramatic reconstruction and immediacy to history, the degree of personal participation in historical events further reinforces the prefatory equation of authority with subjectivity, rather than with objectivity. Gone are the references to impartiality which were already theoretically awkward and difficult to reconcile with this emphasis on eager participation and the resultant subjectivity. Those who experienced the event boast personal insight and accuracy whilst impartiality is relegated to the realms of rhetoric. In such histories, rather than valuing mature detachment and reflection, subjectivity is perceived as a virtue which strengthens the historian's case and echoes the authorial confidence exuded in prefatory writing.

In comparison with Theyls, La Motraye or Fabrice, who were actually present, or Larrey who insinuates that he witnessed events, other historians have a less obviously valid reason to involve themselves in the text. Nonetheless, to establish their identity as writers of history, many authors insert a personal *je* form into history. Conscious of

being heretofore unknown as a historian, Grimarest is particularly insistent in establishing his credentials as writer in the text by a continued insertion of *je*:

> C'est pour mériter l'estime de ma Nation que je me hazarde de lui donner les Campagnes de Charles XII. (Grim, 43)

This *je* or *me* is particularly common where the historian explains the organisation of the history:

> C'est par où je rentre dans le fil de l'histoire. (Larr, 223)
> Voilà le Prince dont je vais décrire les actions.(Grim, 19)
> J'ai donné le portrait du visage, il faut maintenant donner celui de l'esprit. (Larr, 226)

An added, if less common use of *je* in contemporary histories is the interruption of the historical narrative to explain inclusion or exclusion of a point, almost as a continuation of the discussion on these topics already broached in the preface:

> ...est assez singulière pour que j'en fasse le récit à mon Lecteur. (Grim, 195)
> Je ne parle pas des progrès des sciences & des arts... (Hén, 887)

In Grimarest's case, such constant explanation betrays both authorial insecurity and an acute awareness of his reader or judge. This is further evidenced in the following typical, detailed explanation of why he decided to include, as an aside in the text, an explanation of Polish history:

> Le détail de ces petites actions n'a rien d'intéressant pour un Lecteur éloigné de ces frontières, & ne regarde pas même les campagnes du Roi de Suède, que je me suis proposé de décrire; mais j'ai cru que je devois succinctement les raporter afin que l'on fût toujours instruit de la situation où ce prince se trouvait avec ses ennemis. (Grim, 212)

In Pellisson's *Lettres historiques*, it is inevitable that, due to the epistolary form, the *je* form recurs with great frequency, as it does in Fabrice's writing. Asides such as, 'si je ne me trompe', prolong the question of authorial doubt which was found to be a

dominant and undermining theme in prefaces.[245] This common use of *je* highlights, rather than diffuses, that authorial insecurity which features whenever discussion of subject, inclusion or exclusion occurs in history.

These instances of *je* in history are closely linked to the individual writer and are the direct expression of his doubts and insecurities. Therefore, these *je* are simply monologic; they do not provide commentary or alternative readings; and they may not be analysed for further levels of interpretation, unlike the many different *je* which will be perceived and examined in Voltaire's texts. Nonetheless, this personal element signals that Voltaire's expansion of *je* is not a total departure from contemporary historiography.

Almost uniquely, Limiers is remarkable for his lack of signalled intervention in the historical text. His texts on Charles XII and Louis XIV both proceed chronologically and in both works, discussion of authority is conducted almost exclusively in the prefaces. The presence of the historian is also infrequent in Hénault's historical texts and the result is, in twentieth-century terms, a more polished and professional impression than that which comes from the constant interruptions, explanations and justifications of many of his contemporaries. Nonetheless, the historian does use *je* and *on* on occasion to insert personal comments such as, 'on a remarqué avec raison...' (Hén, 884). His subtlety does not exclude either the potential to comment from within the text or the chance to impress the reader. This is particularly apparent in the historian's depiction of his subject, Louis XIV, whom he equates with the great Augustus. In order that the reader might fully appreciate the similarity between the leaders, the text draws a very prolonged analogy between the two

[245] Pellisson, *Lettres historiques*, p. 288.

men. This includes many generalisations and a profusion of terms such as *beaux, illustres, sublimes* or *supériorité*:

> Par combien de moyens il falloit que la nature préparât deux siècles si beaux! Le même fond qui avoit produit des hommes illustres dans la guerre, produisit des génies sublimes dans les lettres, dans les arts, & dans les sciences: l'émulation prit la place de la révolte; les esprits accoutumés à l'indépendance, ne la chercherent plus que dans les vûes saines de la Philosophie: il n'étoit plus question d'entreprendre sur ses pareils, il fallut s'en faire admirer; la supériorité acquise par les armes fut remplacée par celle que donnent les talens de l'esprit, en un mot, les mêmes circonstances réunies donnerent à l'univers les regnes d'Auguste & de Louis XIV. (Hén, 884)

The analogy is also one which Voltaire would make in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, although, unlike Hénault, he refines the comparison to focus on the societies of Ancient Greece and Renaissance Florence, a contrast which is an implicit rejection of a contemporary tendency to provide a rather hagiographic depiction of Louis XIV as leader and monarch.

In sum, it is clear that, just as they did in their prefatory writing, each of these authors places the same emphasis on authority and on the merits of personal insight into history and evokes both issues regularly within the main body of the text. The most common articulation of this personal insight is the declared participation of the author in the events recounted. Historians who were not present either feign this personal involvement, especially through the use of *nous, je* or *on*, or seek to impress their authority on the reader through discussion within the history of matters such as inclusion, exclusion and organisation of the text.

## CHARACTERS ON THE HISTORICAL STAGE

Historical characterisation can suggest strong individual input or reveal a standard formula, according to the style of the individual historian or the strength of historical tradition or consensus at the time. At first glance, it might appear that Charles XII had an advantage over Louis XIV in terms of favourable depiction, purely because his geographical distance from the French reader allowed for a considerable accentuation of positive attributes and for an encouragement of the development of myth and hero-worship. This combination suited both moralising and hagiographic historians. However, Louis XIV created a similar myth and distance by moulding his court at Versailles into 'a permanent spectacle for the people' and designed his own hero-status by building the state about his royal person.[246] In this regard, both monarchs were ideal candidates for historians whose works appear grounded in respect and awe of them. It would seem likely that these works would tend inexorably towards a degree of hero-worship in presentation, interpretation and characterisation.

## Charles XII

The success of the popular image of the geographically distant Charles XII could be said to be based primarily on the accounts of writers, whether chroniclers or historians, who depicted the monarch in glowingly positive terms and in tones of awe and adulation. At a distance from events and protagonists, contemporary French historians were naturally obliged to recreate or construct their own image of Charles XII from the accounts received.

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[246] Cobban, A., *A History of Modern France; Old régime and revolution 1715-1799*, 3rd edn. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 11.

Amongst these, Grimarest can be accused of over-simplification in his history of Charles XII. In spite of convoluted prefatory protestations of proximity to Charles XII, the image of the monarch which emerges from the pages of this history is an impersonal, puppet-like portrait painting of 'le héros', as Grimarest chooses to refer to him from the first lines of the history (Grim, 10). Hero status renders the entire history excessively hyperbolic and blindly uncritical of the monarch's every move. As a result, the characterisation of Charles XII is only interesting for the excesses in which the historian indulges. Divided into three sections, the portrait begins with a general description of the king's education, proceeds to his love of war and concludes with his daily routine. The final character portrait is as void of objectivity or personal traits as it is full of hyperbolic praise. For example, the king is invariably depicted as being perfect and larger-than-life in all things:

> Ce grand Roi...
> Au dessus des autres...
> La vigueur de son tempérament...
> La grandeur de sa taille...
> Le juste arrangement de ses traits...
> Il les surpasse par ses actions...
> L'homme privé le plus aisé, le plus recherché...
> Le prince le plus obéi, le plus aimé...
> [Le prince] le plus adoré de ses sujets...
> [Il] a un génie supérieur pour la guerre... (Grim, 9-20)

As Grimarest persistently reminds the reader, the monarch is morally beyond reproach, 'sa bonne foi est inviolable', and displays great self-control, 'exempt de ces passions' (Grim, 11, 12). Grimarest ascribes ideal activities and traits to the monarch but to such a degree that the entire account of Charles XII is rendered implausible to a reader with any critical sense (Grim, 9-20). As Von Proschwitz notes, Lenglet-Dufresnoy and his

contemporaries reacted in this manner.[247] Grimarest never reaches a critical position on Charles XII and the characterisation attains an uncritically idealised level and remains in the realm of the hyperbolic throughout the history.

In contrast, those writers geographically closest to Charles XII, such as Fabrice, Theyls and La Motraye adopt more muted tones of admiration. Without explicitly criticising the monarch, they are much less likely to present him as an unmitigated hero. Proximity to the hero reduces the fabulous to human proportions and brings the story nearer to the plane of reality. For example, the diplomat Theyls designates the monarch with the phrase 'ce Grand Prince' and illustrates his character exclusively through the events recounted. When *le Grand Seigneur* orders Charles XII to return to his own lands and demands a choice of itinerary, Theyls describes the resultant anger and reaction of the monarch through his actions:

> Cette proposition irrita tellement ce Grand Prince qu'il tomba dans une dangereuse maladie, qui l'autorisa à demander un delai de quelques jours après lesquels il declareroit sa resolution. (Th, 93)

Unusually, no physical or character description is offered in isolation and Theyls maintains his diplomatic distance at all times. He merely suggests allegiance or support through strategic use of words such as 'ce mépris'. The impression given is that Theyls is often in favour of the politics of Charles XII but there is no explicit endorsement of the monarch and certainly no inordinate hero-status is conferred on him.

La Motraye's character assessment of Charles XII is reduced to the almost

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[247] Von Proschwitz, p. 65. See Lenglet du Fresnoy, N., *Méthode pour étudier l'histoire* (Paris: 1735), ii, 320.

epigrammatic formula, 'cet inflexible & infatigable Héros de nos jours'. This ambiguous character description has little in common with the blind, ingratiating, over-idealised hero qualities offered by Grimarest. La Motraye's acute observations offer glimpses into the psyche of Charles XII and while far from being uncritical, they nonetheless suggest a strong element of admiration. On occasion, the writer has difficulty modulating his wonder at the monarch who is so *extraordinaire*. This term is one often used to describe the monarch who displays phenomenal yet portentous prowess and energy in every field:

> Mais le Roi toujours extraordinaire sembla prendre plaisir à déranger le flegme *turc*, lors qu'il commença la nuit du 6 à faire sonner le boutesells à une heure du matin pour signal de marche. (Mott, 215)

Of all who write about Charles XII, the Baron de Fabrice was closest to him. Partly due to the nature of his writing, which is presented as a collection of letters, only a few specific and isolated physical character portraits of the monarch are provided. However, some of the illuminations of the monarch's psyche offered by Fabrice are much more plausible, natural and realistic than the artificial or unrealistically idealised offerings of some of his contemporaries. The modesty of the king is a recurrent feature in the letters. An example of this occurs after the fateful siege of the king's quarters and the seizure of the monarch. Fabrice gives an account of the king's version of events which demonstrates great admiration both for the king's actions and for his subsequent modesty and good humour in understating the danger:

> Il repondit toujours que ce n'étoit rien, & insensiblement la conversation tomba sur l'action même, dont il me fit avec beaucoup de vivacité un assès long detail, où il omit seulement par modestie les circonstances qui le regardoient personnellement, & ne voulut jamais convenir au bruit qui couroit, qu'il avoit tué de sa propre main 15 *Janissaires*, disant que c'étoit une médisance, & qu'il ne faloit jamais croire que la moitié de ce qu'on disait. (Fab, 212)

This is an attractive account which celebrates both the prowess and the modesty of the monarch. Fabrice captures this duality in the following observation, made on the occasion of the seizure of the king:

> Ce qu'il y a de plus extraordinaire, c'est que dès qu'il se vit desarmé, il passa en un instant de la plus grande ardeur à la plus grande tranquilité. (Fab, 208)

The character of Charles XII is conveyed by a duality which is discreetly explored in Fabrice's account. A facet of this duality, a narrative form in history which would also appeal to Voltaire, is displayed through juxtaposition of the perseverance and the playful streak of the monarch, also encapsulated in the term *extraordinaire.*[248] On the one hand, we see Charles XII prepared to push his hosts to extremes:

> Il me répondit avec beaucoup de vivacité, qu'on n'oseroit jamais l'attaquer; qu'en tout cas il ne craignoit rien, & qu'il étoit prêparé à tout. (Fab, 172)

This fearlessness seriously unnerves the author and both he and Grothusen remain in awe of what transpires to be an impressive, single-minded determination:

> ...que le Roi avoit resolution de pousser les choses au bout, & que son imagination étoit déjà chatouillée d'avance d'un combat si extraordinaire. (Fab, 174)

On the other hand, through his questioning of the king's actual motivation and understanding of the situation, Fabrice further illustrates the energetic, playful streak of the king who evidently thrived on intrigue, enjoyed teasing his adversaries and pushing his colleagues and troops to the limit. It is clear from a recurring motif of questioning in Fabrice's accounts that he had difficulty interpreting the moods and motivations of the monarch:

> Je crus entre voir dans ses yeux une secrete joye làdessus; mais....

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[248] See Ch. 4.

> Je ne sais si le Roi avoit déja résolu de pousser les choses à bout, ou si effectivement il crut, que les *Turcs* n'oseroient rien entreprendre contre sa personne.
>
> Ce fut là tout ce que j'en pus tirer. (Fab, 172-4)

Despite his proximity and his critical awareness, Fabrice still endows the *extraordinaire* monarch with the common term, 'ce héros' (Fab, 209). However, unlike those historians who use the term blindly, Fabrice employs it while still realistically conveying some of the monarch's main character traits, including strong streaks of determination and doggedness, counterbalanced by depictions of privacy and modesty.

In contrast to the *extraordinaire* hero of his contemporaries, Limiers's construction of the character of Charles XII is particularly interesting for its critical perspective. In his work, the historian seizes the occasion of the monarch's death to fuse portrait and character assessment, description and obituary, in four divisions which clearly separate into *Portrait de ce monarque, Son caractère, Sa manière de vivre* and *Réflexions sur toute la suite de sa vie* (*HS*, XI, 230-237).

Limiers signals the moment of death with the marker 'Ainsi fut éteinte dans l'obscurité la vie glorieuse & éclatante de Charles XII' (*HS*, XI, 229). The opposition of 'obscurité' and 'glorieuse & éclatante' is the chosen binary axis along which the life of Charles XII is reviewed and assessed. Loath, on moral grounds, to grant Charles XII full hero status, Limiers nonetheless charts a hero's progress in terms of monarchical hubris which exceeds its bounds. On arrival at the zenith of his successes, the king is destined to decline radically and to meet his nemesis, in the shape of death. However, 'obscurité' is purposely ambiguous. This leads to two possible interpretations, the physical and the metaphorical. The first evokes, to a degree, the natural pity which both

the world and Limiers feel for the young monarch who dies all alone on the battlefield, victim of a stray bullet 'à la fleur de son âge' (*HS*, XI, 229). This interpretation allows for the very positive, uncritical physical and character portraits of the monarch. On the other hand, interpreting 'obscurité' in the metaphorical and moralistic sense suggested by *Réflexions sur toute la suite de sa vie*, the reader is led to a deeper, more fundamental, impersonal, criticism of the young monarch (*HS*, XI, 235-7). This figure of moral darkness was a king who endangered society through his large scale war-mongering. The tone of Limiers's text would suggest that the monarch's death was required as an example and as a moral warning for others.

In his presentation of two interpretations of 'obscurité', it might be presumed that Limiers would first depict the monarch in glowing terms at the height of his victories. Strategically, this would allow him to draw a second, mature, critical character portrait in which he could choose to view Charles XII's life more objectively and less favourably in his later reflections on the monarch's life, *Réflexions sur toute la suite de sa vie*. But this was not the route chosen by Limiers. Instead, the physical and character portraits of Charles XII are intricately linked to the moral assessment of the monarch which follows them. The portraits are based on details generally identifiable as those attributed to Charles XII, insofar as history, as it is read today, has chosen to remember him from the accounts of those closest to him. However, there is nothing individual about the portraits of Charles XII painted by the historian. Instead, stock positive descriptions and ideal physical and character traits are presented. The result is a portrait dense with moral overtones, a picture of how *the* perfect monarch should

appear. The balance and eloquence of the writing masks the banality and impersonality of description:

> Ce monarque étoit d'une taille au dessus de la mediocre, d'un air fier & majestueux, mais dont la fierté étoit mêlée d'une douceur charmante. (*HS*, XI, 230)

The 'mais' introduces the dual quality which becomes the hallmark of Limiers's physical portrait of Charles XII, a binary division also favoured by Fabrice. Firstly, the reader is shown the 'fier & majestueux', depicted through stock physical details which betray no blemish or imperfection:

> Le front élevé...
> Les yeux bleus, à fleur de tête, vifs & perçans...
> Le nez aquilin...
> Les épaules bien quarrées...
> Le corps délié & d'une juste proportion dans toutes ses parties... (*HS*, XI, 230-1)

Then, the reader is introduced to the 'douceur charmante' (*HS*, XI, 230). This *other*, or the complementary side of the monarch's character, is here represented in minute physical details which are calculated to make him appear attractive, self-disciplined and almost religiously abstemious:

> La bouche agréable...
> Il n'y avoit rien de riche dans ses habits...
> Son chapeau, qui n'était pas bordé, avoit seulement un gros bouton de cuivre...
> Ses bottes étoient d'une vache molle...
> On ne lui voyoit ni galons, ni dentelles, ni manchettes...
> Sa cravate n'étoit que de crépon noir...
> Il n'y avoit ni faux fourreaux, ni croupiere, ni poitrail... (*HS*, XI, 230-1)

A similar combination of neutral virtue and ability appears in a description of the monarch's dealings with horses, the wildest of which he could calm and always with a

mastery typical only of that superior, majestic prowess which he also demonstrated in his own physical training:

> Il étoit presque toujours à cheval, & en changeoit plusieurs fois par jour, il n'y en avoit point de si fougueux qu'il ne pût réduire aisément, & rien n'égaloit son adresse dans tous les exercices du corps. (*HS*, XI, 231)

The list of positive traits presented in catalogue form at the outset of the character portrait of Charles XII best betray the historian's own vision of the monarch:

> Pieux, Tempérant, Débonnaire, Frugal, Ennemi du Luxe, Libéral, amateur de la Justice, chérissant le mérite dans ses ennemis mêmes, dont il récompensait la valeur avec éclat, lors qu'il les avoit vaincus; ferme, intrépide, suivant avec ardeur la route où il se croyait guidé par la gloire. (*HS*, XI, 231)

Despite the doubt which is sown by the addition of 'se croyait guidé par la gloire', that collection of traits presents a basket of general moral values to which more are added as the text continues:

> Ennemi de la flaterie...
>
> Content de faire des choses dignes de louanges...
>
> Genereux & charitable, il faisoit des présens médiocres aux Grands, pour leur marquer son estime; & répandait de grandes Liberalitez sur ceux qui avoient besoin de son secours, avant même qu'ils ne l'implorassent. (*HS*, XI, 231-3)

Any traits which have the potential to be interpreted even slightly negatively are transformed into positive attributes through the judicious use of *mais*:

> Il étoit d'un génie vif & penetrant, mais qui ne se laissoit pas de se fixer aisément & qui donnoit beaucoup à la reflexion.
>
> Il parloit peu mais il parloit toujours juste, & très-souvent avec énérgie... (*HS*, XI, 231)

In an equally moralistic tone, an anecdote is recounted about an occasion in the king's youth when excessive drink led to unacceptable behaviour. After that, 'ce sage prince', (*HS*, XI, 232) resolved to abstain from wine for the rest of his life. As in the case of the subsequent section, entitled *sa manière de vivre*, it is difficult to separate the moral from

the monarch in Limiers's writing and, on this occasion, the point of the story is just too neatly moralistic to be taken at face value. The result is that Limiers's portrait of Charles XII is a moralistic portrait without real human dimensions, a harangue praising an implausibly virtuous monarch.

From the point where Limiers allows an element of criticism or a shade of violence to enter the description of the apparent hero-figure Charles XII, the gradual diminution of hero status begins. Phrases such as 'se croyait guidé par la gloire' and 'sa passion pour la Gloire étoit si violente, qu'elle étoufoit en lui tout autre sentiment' contribute to erosion of such status (*HS*, XI, 232) The section *Réflexions sur toute la suite de sa vie* begins by praising Charles's 'qualitez si extraordinaires', but this is almost immediately qualified by the hypothetical form, 'eût été un Héros incomparable si...' (*HS*, XI, 235). In a rather convoluted manner, the remainder of the passage deliberates on the relative merits of the quest for glory and to what extent, if any, glory could be considered a virtue. Once more, Limiers's discussion has a moral and almost religious tone in the way it establishes a subtle but clear connection between the quest for glory, 'les chimères' and excess, 'se laisser emporter', coupled with 'un caractère absolument mauvais', which leads to ultimate moral blindness or 'un Esprit ébloui de l'éclat de la gloire' (*HS*, XI, 234, 236). Limiers finds Charles XII's intentions 'problematiques' and judges the monarch on his excesses which he describes as misjudged and demonstrative of a faulty relationship with glory (*HS*, XI, 236). Larrey takes a similarly moralistic line with regard to Louis XIV whom he condemns as a flawed hero, a monarch who was undermined by his over-attachment to 'l'amour & l'ambition' (Larr, 190). Equally, in moral terms, Charles XII had an unhealthy interest

in the quest for glory, and is therefore not a hero but a monarch who led his people and country astray to worship the regal golden calf of war, or 'les égaremens qui l'ont jetté lui & son Peuple dans les derniers malheurs' (*HS*, XI, 236).

Through moral reasoning and judgements, Limiers reconciles the rise and success of Charles XII with his decline and fall. The initial glory of 'ce jeune héros', sketched in the character portrait, was merited because the monarch's spirit was essentially a positive one, proud in defence of his country. Just as Larrey will blame the mentors and educators of Louis XIV, Limiers indicates that fault lay with Charles XII's educators who failed to correctly steer 'le coeur & l'esprit' (*HS*, XI, 236). Because of this, Charles's fall was inevitable, as La Motraye and Fabrice already indicated with their ambiguous use of *extraordinaire*. In moral terms, he had sought personal glory, 'les fausses idées de la Gloire', beyond what was necessary (*HS*, XI, 236). Limiers's criticism is essentially a very moralistic assessment, although presented with a curious mixture of fate and justice and in a rather impersonal style.

It might be suspected that the nearer the writer is to the events recounted, the more balanced and objective any character portrait becomes. This is apparent from the writing of La Motraye, Theyls and Fabrice. Conversely, as is evident in the texts of Grimarest and Limiers, the more distant the writer is from the action and the protagonists, the larger the element of hyperbolic hero-worship and the greater the degree of moralistic criticism which echoes the writer's own interests and proclivities. The result is detrimental to objectivity, observation and constructive character assessment.

**Louis XIV**

Numerous volumes, concerned both with the iconography and the literary characterisation of Louis XIV, were produced before and after Voltaire's own work appeared. The topic fills a multitude of historical works even today. One amongst the many modern writers on Louis XIV is P. Burke whose work shows that the great strength and success of Louis XIV's propagandist and image-manufacturing machine was such that the monarch became as distant in real terms from both historians and public as Charles XII was in geographical terms.[249] It could be argued that Louis was, in fact, even more distant due to the linguistic, social and figurative barriers erected by the court machinery which indelibly imprinted the image of a 'sun king' on to the minds and writings of his subjects. Charles XII put no such machinery in place. The two historical subjects clearly pose different, but equally important, challenges to the historian. Even those who criticised Louis XIV could not escape the influence of the monarch's projected image. All of Voltaire's sources - including the Huguenot exiles Larrey and Limiers, who were physically more detached than others, although potentially more hostile - had to wrestle with this image and the projection of the great monarch's power. A glance at their attempted pen portraits may indicate the degree of success they achieve and to what extent they manage to distinguish myth from reality.

When composing their biographical and historical works, late seventeenth- or

[249] Burke, P., *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); This work has as its primary focus a study of the sculpted image of Louis XIV fabricated and projected by the monarch and his régime.

early eighteenth-century writers felt obliged to construct and to present an image of Louis XIV which did not clash either with the image promoted by the régime or with the stages of development of this image as the monarch's life progressed. In a modern work which borrows Voltaire's own title, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, P. Goubert emphasises, almost self-evidently, that such a huge variety of images of Louis XIV exists that almost any mood, image, quality, or lack of them - with perhaps the exception of serenity - has been attributed to the monarch over the ages:

> Quant aux images qu'on donne de Louis XIV, il convient à la fois de forcer et de nuancer: les unes sont d'or, les plus nombreuses, les autres grises, avec vingt nuances tirant vers le noir [...] c'est la sérénité qui manque le plus.[250]

Goubert's rather predictable conclusion is that there are several different images of Louis XIV, depending on the stages of his life. Certainly, contemporary histories were mainly written in glorification of the monarch although the contemporary works of literature listed by Burke were published in criticism of Louis XIV.[251] The prevailing attitude is evident in titles such as *Le glorie della virtù nella persona di Luigi il Magno*,[252] *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand*,[253] *Ludovico Magno Panegyricus*,[254] *Panegyrique historique de Louis le Grand pour l'Année 1689*,[255] *Portrait de Louis le Grand*,[256] *Ode pour le roi sur ses conquestes*[257] and from many other publications with titles in the

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[250] Goubert, P., *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1996), p. 201.
[251] Burke, Appendix 3.
[252] Benedetti, E., *Le glorie della virtù nella persona di Luigi il Magno* (Lyons: 1682).
[253] Perrault, C., *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1687).
[254] La Beaune, J. de, *Ludovico Magno Panegyricus* (Paris: 1684).
[255] L'Hérault de Lionniere, T., *Panegyrique historique de Louis le Grand pour l'Année 1689* (Paris: M. Juvenel, 1692).
[256] Bosquillon, *Portrait de Louis le Grand* (Paris: 1688).
[257] Genest, C.C., *Ode pour le roi sur ses conquestes de cette compagne* (Paris: E. Martin, 1672). Genest's verses claim that 'le vaillant & sage LOUIS' is greater than any 'Heros, Conquerans, & Rois' whose exploits are recounted in both 'la fable & l'histoire', suggesting that Louis's exploits are the fabric of both fact and fable.

same vein. As Burke demonstrates, most of the seventy main works written in criticism of Louis XIV between 1665 and 1714 were written anonymously or under pseudonyms.[258]

Of particular note is the fact that Voltaire insists on referring to the monarch Louis XIV simply by the number fourteen, or as ruler during 'le grand siècle' of 'grands hommes' (*SL*, 929, 1015, 1022). While so many terms, like 'le Roi Soleil', 'Louis le Grand', 'le Grand Roi', or 'Ludovico Magno', were used to designate the king, Voltaire refers to him simply as 'Louis XIV' or 'Louis 14'.[259] This could be read as the deliberate choice of a less grand term of address, from a social historian who valued the reign more highly than its ruler. If the use of a number were to signify purely that he was a monarch in a line of many *Louis*'s, this would be consistent with Voltaire's design to write a social history including sociological, political and economic elements rather than royal hagiography. Indeed, P. Goubert, whose work shares Voltaire's own title, has also noted this dogmatic use by Voltaire of 'Louis XIV', attributing it to the writer's unusual and contradictory view of the monarch:

> Sauf erreur, il ne l'appela jamais ni Louis le Grand ni le Roi Soleil, ne lui ménagea pas les critiques, mais moins que les hommages.[260]

However, the idiosyncrasy must not be overestimated. Furthermore, Saint-Simon also alluded to 'Louis XIV' and M. Déon points out that even the monarch liked to refer to himself as 'Louis XIV'.[261]

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[258] Burke, Appendix 3: Chronology of published literature against Louis XIV.
[259] See Correspondence: e.g. 15 septembre 1733. Voltaire to marquis de Caumont. D654.
[260] Goubert, p. 203.
[261] Saint-Simon, *Louis XIV et sa cour*, ed. D. Dessert (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1994), p. 282, p. 270; Déon, M., *Louis XIV par lui-même* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), Intro., p. 14.

In prefatory writing, one of the hallmarks of history was defined as the presentation of the *vérité*. The truth was usually deemed to be accessible through some close connection to the king or a source close to the king. In contemporary history, the result is an interesting mixture of propaganda and imagination. Pellisson never quite completed the promised history of Louis XIV for which he wrote such an eloquent proposal and to which l'Abbé d'Olivet refers as 'un grand ouvrage qu'il avoit presque fini'.[262] Nevertheless, as *Directeur de l'Académie*, Pellisson made many speeches, dedicated 'à la gloire du Roi', and delivered numerous grand orations in honour of the King, either to mark victories in war, such as his *Harangue au Roy, sur ses heureuses conquêtes; prononcée le 25 juillet,* or purely to celebrate the greatness of Louis XIV.[263] In every way, these discourses are exaggerated works of oratory. Evidently, Pellisson revels in hyperbolic excess, referring to his own inordinate worship of the monarch in terms of zeal, which evoke the image of religious emotion of an extreme kind, 'Mais où m'emporte le mouvement de mon zèle?'.[264] Moreover, the Abbé d'Olivet is alacritous in reminding readers that Pellisson's panegyric, or 'ce fameux Panégyrique' was immediately translated into Italian, Spanish, English, Latin and even into Arabic. While recognising that Pellisson was a part of that propaganda machine examined by Burke, it is possible to derive considerable enjoyment from examples of his complete hero-worship. One such example of the general, hyperbolic, passionate, persuasive, exhortative, effusive, anonymous and idealised praise which Pellisson provides for the

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[262] D'Olivet, abbé, *Extrait de l'histoire de l'Académie Françoise* in *Lettres historiques* de M. Pellisson, p. 16.
[263] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[264] Pellisson, P., *Panegyrique de Louis XIV prononcé dans l'Académie Française, pp. 204-223,* in *Oeuvres Diverses*, 3 vols (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), Réimpression de l'édition de Paris, 1735, p. 223.

symbolic, almost unidentifiable figurehead of a powerful state:

> Et puisque vous êtes témoins de ma foiblesse, soyez-le de ma passion, ou si vous voulez, de mon emportement; & que s'il m'eût été possible, ébloui des lumières d'un si grand Roy, charmé de ses vertus, penetré de ses bontés, j'aurois fait mille & mille fois davantage.[265]

This non-specific but extravagantly demonstrative and emotional rhetoric displays an effusiveness which renders specific detail irrelevant and thus Pellisson's panegyric manages to exclude any possibility of criticism or assessment.

In marked contrast to Pellisson, the historian Larrey paints portraits of Louis XIV in quite a different style. Although both historians were born into Protestant families, Pellisson converted to a zealous Catholicism. His over-eagerness to prove his attachment to Roman Catholicism, or the preferred state religion, became a vehement rejection of Protestantism, which, as Abbé d'Olivet notes, gave rise to criticism by Protestants:

> Quant à son zèle pour l'avancement de la Religion, les Protestans s'en plaignoient si hautement dans tous leurs écrits, qu'il seroit inutile d'en alléguer d'autres preuves.[266]

On the other hand, Larrey remained Protestant and suffered for his religious allegiance at the hands of Louis XIV. After many failed attempts, he, like many other Huguenots, fled France with his family after the persecution which followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. It is evident from the preface to his work that Larrey is determined not to concentrate overmuch in his history on sole criticism of Louis XIV's severe treatment of Protestants.[267] It is indeed in this spirit of promised

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[265] Pellisson, *Panegyrique...*, p. 223.
[266] D'Olivet, Abbé, *Extrait de l'histoire de l'Académie Françoise*, p. 17.
[267] See Ch. 1.

magnanimity that Larrey introduces the young king in a balanced and generous portrait which depicts him in 1660 as young, kingly, almost divine:

> Toute sa personne étoit charmante: tout en étoit auguste, tout annonçoit le Roi : une présence majestueuse, un port presque divin, un air, une taille, une bonne mine, qui attiroient les yeux & les respects de tout le monde. (Larr, 190)

It is a memorable character portrait, its fulsome praise possibly belonging more to the novelistic school than to history. However, Larrey is one of the few authors whose texts do not totally ignore reality and the blemishes on the monarch's face are not neglected, 'son visage étoit marqué de petite vérole' (Larr,190). These blemishes reveal that the monarch is not only human but imperfect, as the rest of Larrey's history would continue to illustrate, although not in a retributive manner. Although realistic, the emphasis of the history remains positive and, as promised in the preface, the work is not written in a spirit of revenge or of retaliation. It is this relatively balanced attitude which contributes to fairness and realism, despite occasional bursts of superlatives and unadulterated praise reminiscent of Pellisson and other historians:

> S'il n'avoit pas la peau délicate, c'étoit sans contredit l'homme le mieux fait de son Roiaume. (*HF*, 190)

> Tous conviennent, Amis et Ennemis, qu'il étoit né pour regner. (Larr, 226)

Larrey entitles the passage where he depicts the monarch as *Portrait du roi de France*, as did Limiers. Where Limiers divided the portrait into the physical and the moral, Larrey divides his portrait into the physical and the spirit of the monarch, marking the transition clearly within the text with the following introduction:

> J'ai donné le portrait du visage, il faut maintenant donner celui de l'esprit. (Larr, 226)

Larrey proceeds to further subdivide this depiction of the monarch under headings such as *Belles qualitez du Roi, Caractères de son esprit & de son coeur, Sa diligence et son*

*secret, L'amour & l'ambition sont les deux passions dominantes.* While the section titles may appear somewhat neutral, the author cleverly manages to provide a flattering depiction and portrait of the young king, the details of which emanate from the quoted words of Protestants. Thus, he emphasises that he and other Protestants could be objective and unresentful subjects. Distinguishing himself from writers such as Pellisson, or 'ses Flateurs', Larrey offers a degree of realism in his portrait but still provides an element of criticism in descriptions such as that wherein he describes the occasion when Louis took absolute control of the government of his state:

> S'étant fait le centre de tout, il ôta aux Parlemens le pouvoir de controller ses Edits, mais il avoit si bien gagné l'amour de ses Sujets que personne n'en murmura. (Larr, 229)

Larrey's assessment appears balanced and practical, based on concrete examples, showing both the positive and the negative and written in counterpoised style:

> S'il chargeoit les Peuples par les Impots, il les enrichissoit par la Navigation et le Commerce [...] qu'il fit fleurir en France mieux qu'on n'avoit jamais vu avant lui. (Larr, 229)

However, this apparent objectivity and proportion masks an insurgent myriad of accusations, primarily connected to the hero's flaws, the 'deux passions fatales' or 'l'amour & l'ambition' with which Louis XIV was born. Using the duality favoured by Limiers, Fabrice and La Motraye, it is implied that these two flaws provide the explanation for Louis's subsequent treatment of his Protestant subjects.

Having introduced the topic of Louis XIV's oppression of Protestants, Larrey returns once again to this underlying preoccupation under the rather pointed subject heading, *A quoi il faut imputer sa conduite à l'égard de ses sujets protestans.* Despite his repeated denials, it is apparent that Larrey's entire work centres on this topic and matters related to it, and his judgement and depiction of Louis XIV can likewise be

measured in the light of it. To this end, his apparently disinterested voice is deceptive. In a magnanimous tone, Larrey hints that Louis's excesses such as 'la Révocation des Edits, les Abjurations forcées & les Dragonnades' can be ascribed to the king's cloistered or blinkered religious upbringing and to the deliberately erroneous advice given him by the clergy. As proof, the historian later cites two episcopal harangues, with the judgement:

> Religion naturellement cruelle, dans laquelle il a été élevé, & la mauvaise foi de son Clergé qui lui déguisoit la vérité. (Larr, 232)

Larrey's portrait of the 'esprit' of Louis XIV is devoted to a defence of the monarch and a criticism of Roman Catholic clergy who falsely depicted Protestantism to the innocent king. Protestant Limiers makes a similar accusation against Louis XIV's advisors, also defending the king as having been innocently misled by religious ogres.[268] This is a convenient route by which to attack religion without seeming to dint the shining image or reputation of the king. In using this pattern, Larrey's elaborate effort to provide a balanced and disinterested portrait of the king, whilst still condemning the religion which he espoused, shows his appreciation of the importance of appealing portraiture in preference to accurate depiction.

In sum, most of the historians who write about Charles XII or Louis XIV use the term *héros* in a loose manner, meaning great and memorable leaders, and with classical overtones. From Grimarest to Larrey, they define, on their own terms, the degree to which the monarch is a hero. Limiers's restriction of this term to the depiction of

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[268] See War below.

Charles XII before Pultava is typical, as is Larrey's insinuation that Louis XIV was only great in his youth. The use of the term *héros* is nonetheless inextricably linked with moral judgements and with condemnation of inherent character flaws which, in the manner of tragic flaws, are bound to lead the monarchs to excess.

Pellisson and Larrey's portraits are just two from among the innumerable depictions of Louis XIV. Their very different historical pictures are typical of the diversity of history in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They are representative in that their texts reflect a prevailing stress on depicting the ideal portrait and projecting the historian's own political and moral outlook rather than on making a serious attempt to focus on the individual subject and his true personal qualities. Such depictions pre-date modern developments in psychological insights into character traits and the angles chosen by the authors are most revelatory of the approach and attitude of the historians in question. The portrayal of the monarchs renders them puppets of the writer's imagination rather than revealing any attempt at real likenesses. The rhetoric of *vérité* so fervently declaimed in prefatory writing is again a casualty of practicality. Studiously avoided within the historical text, it is incompatible here with the idealised and stylised depiction of the monarchs.

In terms of distance and contact, both monarchs are equally remote from writers and public alike. The fact that both monarchs were rather lone, solitary individuals in life tends to imbue them with an aura of power which grows with this distance. The distance also gives them the superior status of principal actors on a tragic stage and shows them as the main protagonists in the play of regal life, watched from the *parterre* by both historians and public. R. Debray's analysis of the stage in relation to the

successful functioning of the British monarchy at the end of the twentieth century is an analogy which is equally valid in relation to the time of Charles XII and Louis XIV.[269] The monarchy must remain in front of the people although not directly with, or among, them in order to perpetrate a physical divide which is essential for the co-existence of reality and myth, the actual and the image, people and leader, human and hero.

## WAR, WARRIORS AND HISTORIANS

*Je songe à une Guerre, de droit ou de force, de logique bien imprévue.*
*C'est aussi simple qu'une phrase musicale.*[270]

Most contemporary historians wrote histories which were primarily concerned with recording and analysing the foreign policy, and hence the wars, of their chosen monarch. At the basis of this interest, evidently, lay the fact that dynastic battles symbolised the success of one king over individual rulers of neighbouring dynasties in contemporary Europe. Thus, the omnipresent motif of war is of pivotal importance to the presentation and interpretation of Charles XII and Louis XII in contemporary histories. War both predominates and steers these works of history and it is heralded in prefaces as a mark of distinction which singles out great monarchs from the rest of humanity, or at least from their predecessors. In order to study the treatment of war in contemporary history, varied approaches to depiction of war and battles must be examined to determine the existence of any possible pattern. Such a pattern would be

[269] Debray, R., 'Admirable Angleterre' in Le Monde, mercredi 10 septembre 1997, p. 14.
[270] Rimbaud, A., 'Guerre' from *Illuminations* in *Poésies* (Paris: M.V.E., 1984), p. 243.

significant in the assessment of the difference between the historians' theoretical aspirations and the reality of their texts.

Amongst the contemporary historians whom Voltaire used as sources, the content and style of their war depictions depend more on the individual historian than on the nature or outcome of the battles themselves. Quite unusually, there are some occasions when Grimarest tones down his almost relentless hyperbole in order to use war-speak such as, 'cette glorieuse journée', in reference to a day of battle (Grim, 108). When he wishes to indicate that the enemy was bombarded to pieces, he provides a classic example of war-time understatement:

> Les travaux de ce siège furent conduits si heureusement... (Grim, 291)

Elsewhere and more predictably, Grimarest's history concentrates on providing a generalised and mostly unsubstantiated, hero-worshipping account of Charles XII. He offers only the vaguest of battle details in accounts which exude further blind idolatry of the Swedish monarch in comparison with what he openly refers to as 'ses ennemis' (Grim, 456). The result may be factually unreliable but it can be evocative and effective, as for example, the following extravagant depiction of the Swedish victory at Narva:

> Il en eut de terribles [fatigues de la guerre] à souffrir dans une si pénible marche; des chemins affreux & incertains; le défaut de vivres [...] le froid, les pluies, la neige, tout paroissoit concourir à la ruine de l'armée Suédoise. Mais elle surmonta tout, parce que Charles XII la conduisoit. (Grim, 85-6)

Fabrice, already seen to be balanced in his writing, adopts a language of war which is as careful as that which he employs elsewhere. Mirroring the style seen in his

attentive characterisation, his language about war is filled with a recurrent use of the imagery of progression and metamorphosis to enrich his historical accounts:

> Ces messagers de paix devinrent tout d'un coup des Ministres de guerre. (Fab, 201)

He maintains this balanced style and approach and never indulges in the excesses of a writer such as Grimarest. Evenness is achieved through use of proportioned structures such as *soit que... soit que*, as in the following phrase where the image of Charles XII suggests a monarch addicted to war:

> Soit que l'idée de ce nouveau combat tentat le Roi, soit qu'il crut la chose effectivement possible [...] il y consentit. (Fab, 208)

Through this apparent balance, Fabrice's subtle use of language conveys his message while managing to avoid the war related excesses of other historians.

Echoing Grimarest's more lavish excesses, in his harangue in praise of Louis XIV's victories during the Dutch War, Pellisson sketches a protracted analogy between Louis XIV and his Roman predecessors. Drawing direct parallels between key events, he elaborates, at length, an analogy between Louis's symbolic crossing of the Rhine, 'le mémorable passage du Rhin', the dramatic naval prowess the monarch developed and the precedent of Roman success in defeating the Carthaginians:

> Elle [V. M.] qui n'a pas seulement relevé & rétabli, mais tiré presque de rien les Forces navales des François, comme pour faire revivre en nos jours toute la magnanimité des Romains [...].[271]

Pellisson's war-language is that of victory over the opponent, and the tone and content of his harangue is triumphalist. Like Grimarest, this history makes no apology for

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[271] Pellisson, P., *Harangue au Roy, sur ses heureuses conquêtes, prononcée le 25 juillet 1676*, in *Oeuvres diverses* (Paris: 1735), p. 235.

lacking in information and analysis. Pellisson's version of history is on all occasions completely biased in favour of Louis XIV and is highly selective in the pieces of information provided on wars and events:

> Et cacherions-nous dans ce Tableau le débris encore fumant des Flotes d'Espagne & de Hollande jointes ensemble...?[272]

Revelling in the success story of two almost mythical monarchs, historians seized the literary opportunity to turn the spotlight on their hero posed upon a pedestal of war. Rather than highlighting other aspects of their reign, war is considered an essential primary point of focus. In embracing a variety of different narrative styles to highlight the monarchs' successes, it is noteworthy that many different authors choose to employ lists in distinct ways. Where Pellisson's lists display a predilection for increasingly splendid adjectives to shower upon Louis XIV, Hénault and Theyls excel in providing lists of events. Grimarest also offers lists, remarkable for their obsession with numbers and figures, statistics which might be considered dubious in comparison with more modest contemporary accounts:

> Les Suédois eurent à cette glorieuse journée douze cens trente blessés, onze cens trente sept morts, du nombre desquels fut le Maréchal du Camp... (Grim, 108)

It is Hénault who is master of this art of writing history in lists. He presents history as an 'abrégé' wherein he lists key dates, events, battles, births and deaths. The very title of his work suggests an implicit prioritisation, with war, battle and siege in pole position:

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[272]Pellisson, *Harangue au Roy*, p. 235.

*Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France, contenant les événemens de notre Histoire, depuis Clovis jusqu'à Louis XIV, les Guerres, les Batailles, les Siéges, &c. nos loix, nos Moeurs, nos Usages, &c.*

He reduces war to lists of battles, diplomatic moves, victories, harangues and defeats, as in the following extract:

> 1668. Conquête de la Franche-Comté en hiver, en moins d'un mois, par le Roi en personne: il avoit sous lui le Prince de Condé, que M. de Louvois, dit-on, fit préférer à M. de Turenne. M. le Prince prit Besançon en deux jours le 7. février, tandis que M. de Luxembourg penoit Salins. Dole se rend au Roi le 14. & Grai le 19. L'Académie Françoise en eut l'honneur, pour la première fois, de complimenter le Roi sur cette conquête. (Hén, 635)

Limiers also writes a history of Louis XIV which he entitles an *abrégé* but it is one which does not employ lists but rather privileges narrative over factual detail. Whatever the narrative approach selected for the depiction of war, the common desire seems to be to depict victory, as the single most important as well as the greatest personal achievement of any individual monarch.

Both Limiers and Larrey consider the reign of Louis XIV in relation to his wars. This is particularly evident in a passage where Larrey explains the divisions of his history and his preference for a focus on the monarch's very active foreign policy, rather than on economic, religious or social policy aspects of his reign, or even on Versailles culture or the absolutism of Louis XIV. His divisions reflect the fact that Louis XIV was at war for almost thirty years of his lengthy reign, between the War of Devolution, the Dutch War, the Nine Years' War and the War of the Spanish Succession:

> Je le diviserai en plusieurs Périodes. Le premier commencera à la naissance du Roi, & finira à sa majorité, jusqu'à son mariage & la Paix des Pyrénées. Le second s'étendra depuis sa majorité jusqu'à son mariage & à la Paix des Pyrénées. Le Troisième continuera depuis cette Paix, jusqu'à celle d'Aix-la-Chapelle. Le quatrième continuera ce qui s'est passé ensuite, jusqu'au Traité de Nimègue. Le cinquième renfermera les Guerres & les événemens dont il fut suivi jusqu'à la Paix de Ryswyck. On verra dans le sixième ce qui s'est passé depuis, jusqu'à l'installation du Duc d'Anjou dans le Trône d'Espagne. Le septième & dernier contiendra les suites de ce grand événement, les Siéges, les Batailles, la longue & fameuse Guerre enfin qui occupa cette Epoque, la plus mémorable de toutes, jusqu'à la Paix d'Utrecht. (Larr, 4)

Periods of war are interspersed with various treaties and these lists become the chosen centre pivots for Larrey's interpretation of the monarch's reign. This recurrent choice of equating a monarch with battle successes is such an all-pervasive technique of writing history that one can again refer to a consensus amongst historians, even if no precise, written rules exist.

Continuing the obsessive focus on war and with his customary efficiency, Theyls renders the history of Charles XII's reign, up until his stay in Bender, as a potted list of wars and threats of war. After this, his text becomes entangled in complicated details of labyrinthine diplomatic exchanges and negotiations. That, for Theyls, history may be summarised simply as a list of facts, is evident from the sequence of descriptions at the very beginning of the first page of his *Mémoires curieux pour servir à l'histoire de Charles XII roi de Suède.* In this passage, Theyls provides a résumé of recent events in the reign of Charles XII. He deals with the defeat at Pultava in a very pragmatic manner, almost without apology, excuse or comment, before proceeding in linear and unemotional fashion to the monarch's exile, or what Fabrice would euphemistically term his *séjour* at Bender. The account is strikingly matter-of-fact and comprehensive:

> Charles XII, Roi de Suède, après avoir porté le flambeau de la Guerre dans la *Pologne* & jusques dans le Coeur de l'Electorat de *Saxe*, contraignit enfin *Auguste* I Roi de Pologne, & Electeur de *Saxe* à renoncer à la Couronne en faveur de *Stanislas Lenzici*, qui avoit été elu Roi par la faction du Roi de Suède. Après ce succès ce Prince tourna ses Armes contre les Muscovites Alliés du Roi Auguste, & forma le dessein de porter le fer & le feu juqu'au sein des Etats de Sa Majesté Czarienne. Tout fut favorable dans le commencement à l'execution de ce Projet; l'Armée Suédoise chassa les Muscovites de la Pologne, & les obligea de se retirer chez eux par l'*Ukraine*, où le Roi de Suède les joignit enfin près de *Pultawa*, & leur livra Bataille. L'action fut plus chaude qu'on ne l'auroit creu; Le Moscovite fit ferme avec une valeur qui étonna son Ennemi; Et celui-ci se voyant tout d'un coup enfermé, fut enfin contraint de prendre la fuite, laissant à l'Ennemi, & le champ de Bataille, & toutes les marques de la Victoire la plus

> complete. Le Roi n'eut que le tems de passer avec une petite suite le fleuve du *Boristhene*, & de se retirer sur la Frontiere de l'Empire Ottoman, sous la Protection du Grand Seigneur; Le Bacha Gouverneur de *Bender* y receut ce Prince avec tout le respect du à son rang. (Th, 1)

A similarly neutral tone is maintained for the reportage of other momentous events and for scenes which were potentially full of local colour. Even when the Port declares war on the Czar, an event remarkable for the symbolic imprisoning of the Russian ambassador, Theyls reports without comment:

> On resolut à la Porte, de déclarer la Guerre au *Czar*, dont on envoya l'Ambassadeur au *Sept-Tours*. (Th, 6)

Perhaps more intriguing for its exclusions than for the history it imparts, Theyls's text, as his contemporaries' tend to be, is predominantly composed of lists of events leading to victories. It omits examination of questions such as social difficulties in Sweden, moral problems concerning war, the logistical difficulty of nourishing large numbers of troops on the move or practical issues other than strategic or tactical ones directly related to war. To this extent, the choice of subject matter is entirely at the discretion of the historian, in stark contrast to prefatory promises to provide the entire *truth*. Theyls is not unique in providing a concise account of the difficulties at Pultava without allowing the text either to dwell on or even to admit the defeat and exile of the Swedish monarch. However, in other writers this becomes more of a calculated omission. Grimarest strategically extends his history beyond the defeat at Pultava as far as the sultan's declaration of war on the Czar, in order to avoid ending his history with a downturn in terms of military endeavour or involvement for Charles XII.

When recounting Charles XII's monumental defeat at Pultava many historians prefer to maintain the positive tone adopted in the history up to that point. Rather than

deal with defeat, they choose instead to distort the image and even to depict the day in terms of victory. In such a manner, Bellerive provides an account of the flight of the Swedish monarch after the defeat at Pultava. His text is a great deal more detailed and explicit than that of Theyls, although firmly biased in favour of the Swedes, a bias which is evident in his every sentence. He first introduces the extremely difficult terrain, 'le trajet étoit long, et les chemins presque impraticables'; next, he stresses the determination of Charles XII to avoid capture at the hands of the enemy, 'un ennemi fier et enflé de sa victoire'; then, he emphasises the extreme difficulties which had to be overcome even in flight (Bell, 37). Use of the word 'facheux' is a further indicator of the author's positive empathy with Charles XII, as are the convenient adjectives 'fort', emphasising the difficulty presented by the river as obstacle:

> Ce qu'il y avoit même de facheux étoit de passer à la nage une rivière fort large et fort rapide. (Bell, 37)

Finally, he shows the king crossing the river Dniepr to safety and depicts Charles in his accustomed victorious pose once more. Since he could not personally provide victory at the battle of Pultava, Bellerive instead offers the monarch victory against all the odds in his escape, a kind of textual compensation for the actual loss on the battlefield:

> Cependant, malgré cette inanition et le mal que lui faisoit sa blessure, il la traversa et ceux qui étoient bien montez le suivirent. (Bell, 37)

La Motraye addresses Pultava from a different perspective again. This may be due to his physical proximity to the events since he witnessed their aftermath during his stay at Bender. His account of Charles XII leaving the battlefield is written in an easy, narrative style, and the details selected are both interesting and informative, without being too evidently biased:

> Le Roi, ayant été mis par une blessure au pied hors d'état de monter à cheval, s'étoit fait porter à la Bataille dans une Litiere. Cette Litiere fut brisée d'un coup de canon, & un cheval qu'il voulut monter malgré sa blessure ayant été tué sous lui, on l'arracha par force de la mêlée, où il se laissa vaincre enfin [...] & il consentit à passer le *Boristene* ou *Dnieper*, comme on l'appelle aujourd'hui, pour éviter de tomber entre les mains du *Czar*. Pour cet effet, il donna ordre de bruler le gros bagage, & passa le Fleuve la nuit du 19 au 20 de Juin avec environ dix-huit cens hommes, tant *Suedois* que *Polonois & Cosaques*. (Mott, 413)

Excitement at such unusual drama pervades La Motraye's account but it rings true because the tone is not excessively biased in favour of either monarch and the narrative appears to record the actions of both in a balanced and non-partisan manner.

Amongst the many practical details supplied by La Mottraye, the writer also broaches the suggestion of defeat for Charles XII, through terms such as, 'cette journée si fatale à la Suède' (Mott, 413). This is a formulaic term also used by Bellerive in the context of Pultava:

> Cette fameuse bataille si fatale au roi de Suède. (Bell, 33)

This 'fatale' is later echoed as 'catastrophe' or 'tragédie' by Fabrice and Theyls when they recount details of the next traumatic day of defeat for Charles XII, the momentous siege of his fortress at Bender. Rather than adopt this formula, Theyls maintains his composure in the face of extraordinary actions and events. He prefers to view the event from a professional perspective and hence he suspends personal judgement on Charles XII's position. However, in providing a rare professional opinion, he deems the event, or 'tragédie', to be a diplomatic disaster for Turkey:

> Mais la tragédie qui s'ensuivit & qui fut sçuë de toute la Terre...(Th, 66)

While Theyls's term evokes the tragic hero, Fabrice's understatement summarises the siege and subsequent seizure of the monarch with characteristic calm:

> L'étrange catastrophe de cette journée. (Fab, 213)

Both the content and style of war depiction in contemporary historical accounts depend more on each individual writer than on the actual nature or outcome of historical wars and battles. Their utilitarian and personal stamps were also evident in the historians' approach to painting character portraits of the main protagonists. Limiers is a prime example of the contemporary historians' approach which involves moulding both character and war portrayals in history according to personal interest or motivation. His history of Louis XIV is a well-documented and extremely precise one, as befits a text written by a scrupulous archival historian. He allows only essential details to enter the historical text and, unlike Larrey, who constantly returns to the motif of his Protestantism and the effects of Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Limiers does not emphasise his Protestantism or the fact that he is a French historian not based in France.[273] Textually, there are very few indicators that Limiers, as author, might not be fully supportive of all the king's policies. Yet, he lived as a second generation exile, among the French Protestant Huguenot refugee community in Holland, a group which had clearly suffered under Louis XIV's religious persecution. Limiers's history is meticulous but based primarily on the wars and military campaigns rather than on the king's social or religious policies. Thus, in his history, the account moves from one military campaign to the next and from one treaty to its subsequent dishonouring. The volume leaps from the War of Devolution to the Dutch War, from the Nine Years' War to the War of Spanish Succession. The litanies of war are almost unending and apparently completely devoid of comment or judgement on the historian's part. In his succinct style, Limiers highlights Louis's enthusiasm for waging war through signalling

[273] Limiers's parents were forced into exile due to their religion.

the start of a battle without authorial comment or judgement. He opts instead to provide concrete detail to illustrate the momentous decision:

> (1667) En effet le Roi entra en Flandre, à la tête de trente-cinq mille hommes. (*ACF*, 196)
>
> (1672) Toutes ces mesures étant prises, il ne fut plus question, que de déclarer la guerre dans les formes aux Hollandois, pour ne pas encourir, comme le Roi d'Angleterre, le blâme de l'avoir commencée par des hostilitez [...] Il se mit aussi-tôt en Campagne prenant sa marche par la Picardie... (*ACF*, 218)
>
> (1690) Le Duc eut le tems de se preparer à la Bataille qui se donna le lendemain. Elle fut sanglante, aiant coûté sept à huit mille hommes aux Alliez, & près de quatre mille aux François. Mais elle fut pour ceux-ci la source de plus grands avantages... (*ACF*, 371)

For the most part, the text appears to present a detached view. Yet, there are some small indicators of partiality, including an unusual insertion which appears to provide a key to reading the secrets of the text. That short passage betrays a great deal more of the author's attitude than the reader would initially expect from its brevity.

The occasion is 1698 in the period after the Nine Years' War. Louis XIV has been almost constantly at war throughout the previous thirty years. Abruptly, there is a lull and peace leaves the king at a loss for entertainment. The setting is near Compiègne and the events being organised are war games, or reconstruction of military camps and manoeuvres in order to recreate war as a game for entertainment. The preparations are lavish. Limiers is characteristically diligent in his immaculate presentation of facts and figures. Interestingly, he prefaces his text with a brief explanation that the king was beginning to miss the familiarity of war and decided to recreate it in the form of games:

> Comme la guerre ne donnoit plus de véritable occupation au Roi, il voulut du moins en conserver l'image, en ordonnant près de Compiegne un des plus beaux Camps qu'on n'eût jamais vus. (*ACF*, 417)

Limiers then proceeds to describe the military preparations for the war games, pausing to remark with some irony on the fact that most of the colonels suffered financial ruin in

order to turn out their regiments in the requisite regal style. The result was splendid and effective:

> Rien n'étoit plus brillant que les Equipages des Officiers, ni rien de plus magnifique que tout ce spectacle, qui, au milieu de la paix, retraçoit un fidele Tableau de la guerre. (*ACF*, 418)

Despite inclement weather, the king and the entire court watch this recreation of war. Limiers again allows a mild irony to enter the text where he notes that *les Grands* spare no expense in creating games for entertainment even if, due to rain, they only watch a part of the mock war in the end. Ironically, some are depicted as not being used to real battle, 'ceux qui n'y étoient pas accoûtumez':

> Comme rien ne coûte aux Grands, dont les recreations ne connoissent point d'obstacles, le Roi & toute la Cour assista pendant la pluye à plusieurs de ces actions. Le Siège de Compiegne en fut la clôture; l'Armée se partagea en deux Corps, l'un pour attaquer la Ville, & l'autre pour la défendre. [...] & l'on força enfin les assiégez à capituler. Le feu fut très-grand dans toutes ces occasions, & cette image de la guerre parut à ceux qui n'y étoient pas accoûtumez aussi terrible que la chose même. (*ACF*, 418)

Particular reference is made to Louis XIV who is depicted as enjoying himself just as much as if it had been a question of real war and not merely a war game. At the end of this passage, Limiers notes briefly that these games enticed Louis XIV to return to real war as he missed the thrill and excitement:

> Le Roi en fut aussi content que d'une véritable expedition [...] & ce qu'il venoit de voir l'excita à former bientôt de nouveaux desseins. (*ACF*, 418)

The implication, which cannot fail to strike the reader of this history, is that this king of extremes and excesses does not distinguish between the confusions of war and games, essentials and excitement, reality and recreation. Moreover, he is impervious to the financial and human tragedies involved in both. After this brief interlude of war games,

included to provide an insight into the deeper motivation of the king, Limiers sweeps the reader on to an account of the subsequent war.

This short apparent diversion to include games in history contributes little to elucidating the monarch's war strategies or philosophy but it actually provides a key to reading the portrayal of Louis XIV in this history.[274] Limiers depicts a monarch obsessed with war as an entertainment, without the wit to distinguish right from wrong, life from death, or war games from the real war. Clearly, more than the sheer incongruity of the scene touched a chord with the historian. The reader quickly ascertains from his attitude to the mock siege of Compiègne that, in Limiers's opinion, an innate weakness of character made the king responsible neither for his war obsession, nor for his many, lengthy and ill-advised wars which resulted from this mania.[275] Thus, in a work of history which records public events of war, it is in the private detail or the study of the king at play that the revelation of the king's character flaw and of the author's attitude to the main protagonist of his history are disclosed.

In sum, from the examination of contemporary historians, various patterns emerge in the practical and stylistic approach to chronicling history. It could generally be concluded that history, for many, is synonymous with war. Even where that is not the case, as in the travel accounts of La Motraye, war is considered an essential ingredient in the narrative. The tone and approach to the narrative of war are entirely dependent on the individual writer's skill, allegiances, preferences, aims and ability. As

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[274] For close examination of the connection between characterisation and games in history, see my article, 'Limiers and Voltaire: historical games', (forthcoming in *SVEC*, 1999).
[275] Larrey adopted a similar approach to Louis XIV, see above.

was the case in the study of characterisation, Pellisson is effusive, Grimarest hyperbolic, Fabrice understated, Theyls systematic, Larrey defensive and Limiers pragmatic. Despite all promises of impartiality, each writer carries his personal political favouritism and bias into the text to varying degrees. Their subjective approaches outweigh by far any attempt to be impartial and this quality is most obvious in the cases of Larrey and Pellisson. Most writers provide extensive battle details, figures and statistics and use the technique of the list for enhanced effect. Specialising in the clichéd language of war, many choose war-time euphemisms for emphasis and prefer omissions or oversight where defeat of their chosen protagonist is concerned. Monumental in length, many of the histories appear bulky, awkward and laborious in their painstaking division of the material. This also suggests that, in line with prefatory dismissals of style, the very narrative was subordinated to inclusion of detail. The nexus between depiction of war and the selected character portrait of the main protagonist is most apparent in the case of Limiers's portrayal of the Sun King playing war games. Limiers's evocation of a flawed tragic hero is a surface allusion which many historians make, placing their historical actors on the stage of war, without necessarily providing any further development of the dramatic metaphor.

## CONCLUSION

Various stylistic choices and patterns emerge from examination of the approach of different historians to the actual writing of history, as opposed to their theorising on historiography. Most evident are the patterns of the historians' use of *je* to diffuse

authorial insecurity, a tendency to idealise the character portrait of the main protagonist and a predilection for focusing, almost uniquely, on war. Only rarely, if ever, do writers deviate from a strictly chronological organisation of their work, or what Larrey would term 'le fil de l'histoire' (Larr, 233). Stylistic features demonstrate a very personal approach and input of each historian to his own work and their unique personalities dictate the choice, length, tone and direction of the work, whether the individual author is the exaggerating Grimarest, the grandiloquent Pellisson, the calm Fabrice, the diplomat Theyls or the Protestant Larrey.[276] Prefatory comments advocate certain approaches and adherence to standards of professionalism and truth and, on the evidence examined, it is possible to assess the degree of correlation between that theory and actual practice.

Although prefatory statements of historical authority were full of confidence, prefatory discussion of subject demarcation revealed a sense of authorial insecurity due to a lack of formal historiographical rules or guidelines. In reality, allusion to limits of chosen material draws attention to weaknesses which otherwise might have been overlooked by the reader.

On the question of *vérité* in the histories, it is difficult to assess how much each historian believes, or wishes the reader to believe, that he is presenting the real *vérité*. Studiously avoided in history, subjectivity substitutes for the discourse of *truth* whilst

[276] The inaccurate nature of contemporary history does not necessarily make all of its authors synonymous with 'great artists', contrary to L. Gossman's assertion that, 'the historians of the eighteenth century are all great artists'. Many were simply poor authors or inaccurate historians whilst others were motivated by partisan affiliations. Gossman, 'Voltaire's *Charles XII*: history into art', p. 715.

characterisation is so stylised that it dares make no such pretence. Whilst prefatory notices asserted that *vérité* was the foundation stone of the historical text, in practice, this is indeed rhetoric reserved for prefaces and is not directly confronted within the history, presumably lest it detract from the entertainment or the intended slant. This studied absence of the issue of *vérité* in histories supports the hypothesis that *truth* was in fact explicitly considered one of the primary tenets of history and that, for this reason, few historians troubled to question the absolute nature, or even the existence of, the *truth*.

Where style in history is concerned, there is a large divergence between theory and practice, in particular with regard to characterisation. Historians promised faithful accounts and accurate portraits of the monarchs about whom they chose to write, often based on claims of physical proximity to the historical subject. In reality, the character picture portraits are puppet-like, idealised, moralistic, imagined and contrived images of the monarchs according to how an individual historian chooses to depict them. Travel writers and authors of works other than strictly chronological history, such as Fabrice, Pellisson, Theyls or La Motraye, undermine and disprove such images in offering less hagiographic portraits of what is, almost universally, termed *le héros*. Failing to adhere to their own guidelines, the idealised regal portraits provided are highly subjective ones which serve the historian's own interest in entertaining and moralising.

In subordinating narrative and style to battle lists, strategies, figures and war details, history tends to be equated with the wars and foreign policies of the monarch in

question. Considering the strong focus on war in contemporary histories, particular emphasis on one favoured side of the warring factions suggests a degree of partiality, despite prefatory promises to the contrary. Most of the authors promise a fair and unbiased, or as Limiers formulates it, 'sans partialité, sans intérêt', view of history. This is already rather difficult to reconcile with coterminous promises of personal, subjective insight into history. In the light of the enormous influence exerted on the text by each writer's own political inclinations, that vaunted impartiality has been seen to be a purely rhetorical aspiration.

The precise relationship between the prevailing theories of historiography and the practice of writing history is an indicator of writers' stylistic aspirations - or lack of them - and political partisanship. The vast divergence between theory and practice suggests that the histories were intended as texts of influence rather than as dispassionate records of events. The distance between the reader and the actual historical events is immense. The historical end-products vary enormously, often exposing the writers' prefatory aims as purely aspirational or misleading, perhaps also stylistically conventional. A substantial difference in both tone and content is evident between preface and historical work. This is due, in part, to the difficulties of reporting historical events but more frequently, it is the result of an individual writer's strong personal bias and his conscious and purposeful influence on the content and direction of the text.

This review involving textual analysis of contemporary historical practice provides a detailed backdrop against which Voltaire's histories may be examined for differences in his treatment of Charles XII and Louis XIV and for any possible gulf between his expressed theoretical aspirations and his actual written texts.

# HISTORIAN'S VOICE: THEORY IN VOLTAIRE

*Après tout, l'historien n'est pas celui qui juge, mais celui qui essaie de comprendre.*[277]

The formulation of historiography which emerges from Voltaire's historical writing is one which clearly departs from contemporary practice. His is a distinctive theory, gradually enunciated in various pronouncements on history, historians and historiography. To assemble a profile of Voltaire's propositions requires analysis of theoretical statements found in his correspondence, in prefaces to his historical works and in his early historiographical works. Features of this theory which are of particular interest are those which suggest *literariness*, or the welding of history and story, such as the inclusion in *history* of non-historical elements, more typical of *story*, where considerations of content, form, stylistic approach and artistic appeal are important. Analysis of such features will reveal a theory of historiography as enunciated in Voltaire's writing, in comparison with traditional historians.

## HISTORIAN'S VOICE

At first glance, the majority of Voltaire's historiographical writing appears to form part of his later work, written long after the publication dates of *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The theoretical historiographical focus is strong in such works as the *Préface historique et critique*,[278] preface to *Histoire de*

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[277] Goubert, p. 201.
[278] Voltaire, *Préface historique et critique*, preface to *Histoire de l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand* in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. L. Moland (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1878), 16, 377-392.

*l'empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, in *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (1764),[279] in *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire* (1768),[280] in *Défense de Louis XIV contre l'auteur des Éphémérides*,[281] as well as the seminal article 'Histoire' written for the *Encyclopédie* (1765) and published in *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie* (1771).[282] However, these late works are the result of a lifetime's thought about, and experimentation with, writing history. In the development of theories on the writing, aim and interpretation of history, the process of experimentation and re-evaluation was a lengthy one, beginning with *Essay on the Civil Wars of France* and *La Henriade* and culminating in the article 'Histoire'. Voltaire's famous aphorism opposing history to fable, which has come to symbolise the very basis of his thesis on history, was not fully formulated, or at least not articulated, until that latter article was published in 1765:

> Histoire, c'est le récit des faits donnés pour vrais; au contraire de la fable, qui est le récit des faits donnés pour faux.[283]

To assess the historiographical theories relevant to the writing of *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, this analysis must focus primarily on Voltaire's earlier theoretical writing, including works such as *Remarques sur l'histoire* (1742),[284] *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire* (1744),[285] the *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*

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[279] Voltaire, *La Philosophie de l'histoire*, ed. J.H. Brumfitt, in *OC, 59*, gen. ed. Th. Besterman (Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), Chs. I, LII.
[280] Voltaire, *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire* in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. L. Moland (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1879), 27, 235-99. Reference in this thesis is to its earlier form (1748) in ed. Von Proschwitz, *Histoire de Charles XII*, pp. 567-578.
[281] Voltaire, *Défense de Louis XIV contre l'auteur des Éphémérides* in *Oeuvres historiques*, ed. R. Pomeau, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 1281-1295.
[282] Voltaire, 'Histoire' in *Oeuvres alphabétiques I*, ed. J. Vercruysse, in *OC, 36* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1987), pp. 164-186.
[283] Voltaire, 'Histoire', p. 164. First published in 1765, the article 'Histoire' is not a focus of examination here as this thesis focuses mainly on Voltaire's earlier works published just before, with, or just after, *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*.
[284] Voltaire, *Remarques sur l'histoire* in *Oeuvres historiques*, pp. 41-45.
[285] Voltaire, *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire* in *Oeuvres historiques*, pp. 46-49.

(1753)[286] and the *Avant propos* to the two chapters of his *Nouveau plan d'une histoire de l'esprit humain*, which appeared in the *Mercure de France* (avril 1745).[287] Of equal importance are statements on theories of historiography found in works not strictly devoted to historiography. These appear in appendices, prefaces or letters accompanying early historical works such as *An Essay on the Civil Wars of France*, *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. Amongst the appendices and letters are *Lettre à Monsieur Norberg* (1744) and the earlier of two texts both entitled *Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire* (1748).[288] Similarly, the prefatory *Discours sur l'histoire de Charles XII*, one of Voltaire's very earliest historiographical works, was published as part of the 1731 edition of *Histoire de Charles XII*. However, Voltaire's correspondence is the textual form which allows most scope for emphatic policy statements on historiography and, within it, reference is made to work in progress and to the gradual evolution of his theories of historiography. Much of this theoretical work refers, in the first instance, to ancient history and to the writing of universal histories, but it is evident that Voltaire's design is to address the question of historiography in contemporary rather than in ancient history.[289]

Early theoretical statements, written in historical works, in theoretical works and in prefatory or ancillary writing, help trace the development of Voltaire's early historiographical convictions and his later definition of history. The articulation of these pronouncements, sometimes tagged with a personal pronoun *je* but more often

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[286] Voltaire, *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*, in *Oeuvres historiques*, pp. 1223-1274.
[287] Voltaire, *Avant-Propos* to 'Nouveau plan d'une histoire de l'esprit humain', *Mercure de France* (April 1745), 3-8.
[288] The later text is 1768 and some of its material comes from the article 'Histoire' from the *Encyclopédie*.
[289] See *Pyrrhonisme...*, p. 567 and *Remarques...*, p. 44.

presented anonymously in a persuasive or emphatic manner, displays a certain uniformity of purpose and origin. Thus, this theoretical voice may be termed the 'historian's voice'. In a steady, determined manner, this voice makes numerous statements, mainly theoretical, both on historiography and on the shape of history. In *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, the 'historian's voice' is easily identified within the text as it makes comments in the form of asides on the theory of historiography, on choice of subject, on inclusion and exclusion, on impartiality and objectivity, and on truth in history. In providing its opinion, addressed to the reader, on the use and aim of history, the historian's voice discloses the mechanics of moulding and designing the historical narrative presented. This voice stands outside the historical events, revealing the text as the art-work of a historian, or an artifice and thus, drawing the reader's attention to the figure of the theorising historian who has definite ideas about the writing of history, and who firmly believes that historiography, far from being simple, has a carefully sculpted complexity.

Such a prefatory voice is not inevitably found in all prefaces to history although contemporary historians were seen, on occasion, to use a personal *je* in their prefaces.[290] However, they used this *je* form primarily to comment sporadically on their personal insecurities and doubts as historians, rather than to develop a coherent theory of historiography. As there was no intent to influence or to provide an alternative commentary through their use of *je*, it was not possible to refer to the presence of a historian's voice as a separate source of comment, theory or advice within the text.

This analysis of Voltaire's theories, as articulated through the historian's

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[290] See Ch. 1.

theoretical voice, seeks to establish any similarity to the aspirations of his contemporaries and to ascertain to what extent Voltaire's theories could be said to differ from them.

## Authorial Control

The definition and establishment of the historian as author in control of the text (as distinct from historian in control of the authority of the material, which is more the case of contemporaries) is one of the recurrent elements of the historian's voice in Voltaire's writing, although it is not a feature of traditional histories. That his historiographical writing would equate the figure of historian with a position of control is in direct correlation with actual life experiences of Voltaire historian. It might be expected that Voltaire would also equate the historian with power and prestige, considering the assiduity with which he sought out and achieved the appointment as royal historiographer to Louis XV (1745-7). His ambition suggests that he saw the position as one worthy of his time and effort. However, his statements on historiography made after he had been forced to leave the post are most revelatory. In his correspondence, Voltaire refers to his former mandate and implies that he will continue his task as court historiographer, although no longer working in an official capacity, and in spite of the lack of support and recognition which he endured while in the position. He would later write, 'Moi j'ai fait le Siècle de Louis XIV pour la France'.[291] After his dismissal, Voltaire defends himself in a peeved tone repeating 'je

[291] [c. 31 August 1750]. Voltaire to Louis Armand François Du Plessis, duc de Richelieu. D4206.

ne l'ay plus' which underlines an acute awareness of his loss of face and position. However, this is not simply a question of perceived loss of power. On two occasions, he mentions to the Comte d'Argental his determination to pursue his former vocation of historian, one which had led to his being appointed France's historiographer. The references are made as if to justify the initial appointment and to vindicate his unfair dismissal:

> Car je seray historiografe de France en dépit des jaloux; et je n'ay jamais eu tant d'envie de faire bien ma charge que depuis que je ne l'ay plus.[292]

> Je profite du peu de temps que ma mauvaise santé peut me laisser encore pour achever ce grand bâtiment dont j'ay tous les matériaux. Ne sui-je pas un bon Français? et n'est il pas bien honnête à moy de faire ma charge quand je ne l'ay plus?[293]

Both of the above statements suggest that Voltaire saw the position of royal historiographer as a convenient, but not an indispensable, one. In reality, the appointment was not a powerful position for the incumbent and, initially, Voltaire was both denied access to many of the records and excluded from the charmed inner circle of Louis XV. Strict political constraints would have made the writer even more aware of censorship and of the relative ineffectuality of the rôle. As royal historiographer, he began the works *Histoire de la guerre de 1741* (1755) and the *Précis du Siècle de Louis XV* (1768), both of which were published much later, mainly due to lack of access to essential material. In writing these works, as in his other historical writing, Voltaire attempted to reconcile the rôles of historiographer, of the pacifist *philosophe* and of the polemic historian he had already become. While juggling these incongruent positions, he neither promotes the virtues of war nor writes a royal hagiographic biography. This

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[292] 15 mars [1751]. Voltaire to Charles Augustin Feriol, comte d'Argental. D4420.
[293] 27 avril [1751]. Voltaire to Charles Augustin Feriol, comte d'Argental. D4450.

show of resilience and defiance, atypical for a court historiographer, leads to the conclusion that he viewed the rôle of the historian not as one of temporal power or prestige, but rather as one whose importance lay in the control and, consequently, in the textual freedom it affords the author.[294]

As already evident in the doubts voiced by contemporary historians, the writing of history at the time is not immediately associated with control, possibly because the arbitrary nature of events in history could not be altered in order to provide a satisfactory moral conclusion.[295] If an author's ability to extract a didactic moral message from unpredictable historical circumstances was not certain, history became an unsatisfactory medium for moral teaching. However, the historian's voice in Voltaire refuses to be constrained in this manner by pre-ordained historical outcomes. Instead, he proposes to assert authorial control over the message of history (moral and other) by choosing his own textual subject and organisation. In arguing for textual freedom and authorial control, the historian's voice proposes the development of a greater historiographical plan and a methodology for the writing of history.

While contemporary historians may lament a lack of control over their historical subject, they firmly establish the historian's authority over the text. The historian's voice in Voltaire not only establishes his authority and knowledge but furthermore imposes authorial control over the choice and organisation of his history, with phrases

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[294] Some of the salient aspects of the textual freedom afforded by authorial control form the basis of exploration of Section II of this thesis.
[295] See Ch. I.

such as, 'il est permis à l'auteur de le dire' (*Supp.*, 1230). This control is often established at the expense of others whom it criticises. At the end of *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire*, a historian is ironically defined as a worldly-wise writer with experience of life outside archives, who would produce an accessible history, rather than merely collect the government stipend to which he was entitled. The assertive definition is acidic in relation to others, but includes the assumption that historians seek governmental backing, a support which would neither be sought nor received by Voltaire later in his career:

> Mais, pour entreprendre un tel ouvrage, il faut des hommes qui connaissent autre chose que les livres. Il faut qu'ils soient encouragés par le gouvernement, autant au moins pour ce qu'ils feront, que le furent les Boileau, les Racine, les Valincour, pour ce qu'ils ne firent point; et qu'on ne dise pas d'eux ce que disait de ces messieurs un commis du trésor royal, homme d'esprit : «Nous n'avons vu encore d'eux que leurs signatures».[296]

The wish of Voltaire, historian, to be in complete control of his historical text is apparent from the authorial assertion that Voltaire will write his own type of history, 'une histoire de France à ma mode',[297] and from the *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV* where the decisive historian's voice boasts that he is *the* authority on this subject, 'le premier qui ait su' (*Supp.*, 1237). This voice in Voltaire is adamant that not only is he *the* authority on his own chosen topic but also the best author. That becomes apparent in Voltaire's later objection to La Beaumelle, his quarrels with Desfontaines and the personal attack on, and defamation of, Norberg at the end of *Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*:

> Norberg n'avait ni lumières, ni esprit, ni connaissance des affaires du monde [...] et Charles XII serait ignoré, s'il n'était connu que par Norberg.[298]

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[296] *Nouvelles considérations...*, p. 49.
[297] 26 janvier [1740]. Voltaire to René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson. D2148.
[298] *Pyrrhonisme...* , p. 577-8.

Criticism of a lack of 'Esprit' may suggest that historians must also display literary creativity and style.

Such quarrels are just one component of a strong, recurrent vein of criticism of contemporary historians with the apparent aim of reinforcing the historian's own authority. Within the text of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* in particular, this critical motif recurs in various guises but is predominantly linked with the peremptory condemnation of individual historians for their lack of correct method:

> La plupart de nos historiens n'étalent à leurs lecteurs que ces combats et ces prodiges de courage et de politique [...] (*SL*, 663)
>
> Pellisson [...] plus capable de bien écrire que de ne pas flatter. (*SL*, 713)
>
> Ceux qui ont écrit l'histoire de Louis XIV ont copié servilement le marquis de Feuquières pour la guerre, ainsi que l'abbé de Choisy pour les anecdotes. Ils ne pouvaient pas savoir que Feuquières [...] était un esprit non moins chagrin qu'éclairé [...] il altère les faits pour avoir le plaisir de censurer des fautes. (*SL*, 783)
>
> Quelques historiens ont supposé que la reine Anne était d'intelligence avec son frère. C'est une trop grande simplicité de penser qu'elle invitât son compétiteur à la venir détrôner. (*SL*, 852)
>
> Les historiens, ou plutôt les écrivains de Hollande, qui ont affecté de le [le maréchal de Boufflers] blâmer, auraient dû se souvenir que, quand on contredit la voix publique, il faut avoir été témoin, et témoin éclairé, ou prouver ce qu'on avance. (*SL*, 854)
>
> Il eût été à désirer qu'au moins on l'eût [Louis XIV] instruit de l'histoire, et surtout de l'histoire moderne; mais ce qu'on en avait alors était trop mal écrit. (*SL*, 891)

Voltaire's responses to La Beaumelle and other critics are notorious. Among contemporary historians, this sharp reaction was particular to Voltaire, partly because traditional historians were rarely well-known, public or polemical figures. The tone and frequency of criticism display the force with which the historiographer interjects comments within the text of history, and expose one of his methods of establishing textual control. As is clear in the pejorative comment about Pellisson, the historian's voice is often quite scathing and quick to state the obvious in a very ironic and biting manner, especially when passing judgement on lack of ability in others:

> Quelques historiens ont blâmé le général dans sa disposition. «Il devait, disaient-ils, passer une large trouée, au lieu de la laisser devant lui.» Ceux qui de leur cabinet jugent ainsi ce qui se passe sur un champ de bataille ne sont-ils pas trop habiles? (*SL*, 863)

In the manner of Defoe, the historiographer combines a value judgement in disdainful tone with an appeal to the reader for support, predisposing the reader either to admit ignorance or to agree with the particular historian writing and to cede control to him. Coming from Voltaire, who does not hesitate to use history for assessment of protagonists or to address and influence the reader in quite subtle ways, the condemnation of armchair critics by the historian could be considered rather audacious and humorous but in this instance, his criticism is of style, not of motivation:

> On trouve encore dans une *Histoire du prince de Condé*, sortie de ces mêmes bureaux d'ignorance et d'imposture que le roi se plaisait en toute occasion à mortifier ce prince [le prince de Condé] [...] L'écrivain qui a composé l'*Histoire de Louis XIV* dans Avignon, en partie sur ces malheureux mémoires, pouvait-il assez ignorer le monde et les usages de notre cour pour rapporter des faussetés pareilles? (*SL*, 932)

Such textual intimidation is extremely effective from the perspective of reinforcing the image of the historian's complete control imposed upon the reader. In criticising others, the historian's voice creates a standard of composition against which the virtues of Voltaire's text can only be extolled. Indeed, praise for one instance of authorial attention to detail reflects positively on the whole of Voltaire's work:

> L'attention de ces petites vérités fait voir avec quel scrupule on a écrit les faits principaux de cette histoire. (*SL*, 935)

In sum, Voltaire's desire for authority in history is demonstrated through authorial pride and peremptory control over the historical text. The historian's voice of control in Voltaire customarily belittles other historians. The authority with which this criticism is conveyed is not one normally found among traditional contemporary historians as they were seen to be hesitant and apologetic in their prefatory writing on

authorship. Thus, the praise and promotion of the authority and authorial skill of Voltaire's histories are to the detriment of other historians and critics.

## Impartiality / Objectivity

The question of impartiality also gives rise to severe criticism of other historians' practices, with the consequent opportunity for the historian's voice in Voltaire to further assert his control and judgement in this area. From the outset, the historian's voice, as all contemporary historians were careful to do, extols the virtues of his own impartiality:

> Cela ne prouve-t-il pas que j'ai gardé mon caractère, que je suis impartial? (*Supp.*, 1274)

Criticism of other historians is aimed at those who succumb to flattery in any form, which the historian's voice rejects for various reasons. As well as distorting history, it is declared futile from the point of view of both monarch and historian, as it does not guarantee any promise of immortality for either:

> En vain la malignité ou la flatterie s'est exercée sur presque tous les princes.[299]

To affirm his independence, Voltaire has not dedicated *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* to anyone in particular, and especially not to a monarch for favour or patronage, as was the custom at the time.[300] By way of illustration that such independence is one of the strongest guarantees of impartiality in a text, a historical example of fickle partiality is provided in the anecdote about the Duchess of Marlborough reassessing her written

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[299] *Discours...*, p. 151.

[300] Typical dedications include La Motraye's dedication of his *Voyages...* 'Au Roi de la Grande Bretagne', pp. [0]-[1], or Pellisson's lengthy dedication of his *Projet de l'histoire du Roy Louis XIV* 'A M. Colbert', pp. 421-5.

opinion of Queen Anne in the light of historical events (*Supp.*, 1255). The historian's voice also criticises the subjectivity of others, the licence taken by them in the writing of history and the resultant inaccuracies in the chosen historical subject. As his contemporaries did, Voltaire sets out the rules according to what best suits him, but where they vaunted subjectivity, he condemns it as being as unsound as partisan affiliation or an over-confident historian.[301] Criticism expands to include historians who impute convenient or desirable thoughts or feelings to historical protagonists:

> Des écrivains qui devinent d'après leurs propres idées celles des personnages du temps passé, et qui de quelques événements peu connus prennent droit de démêler les plus secrets replis des coeurs, bien moins connus encore... (*Supp.*, 1256)

The historian's voice also castigates those who import partisanship, excess emotion or involvement into their texts, emphatically declaring that history stands above all such interests and allegiances. Thus, Voltaire differs radically from his contemporaries who combined impartiality with subjectivity, whereas he equates impartiality with objectivity. Paradoxically, it is the *je* of the historian's voice which dominates these statements:

> On mêle partout de l'entousiasme et il n'en faut avoir qu'en vers. Pour moy je n'en ay point eu en écrivant l'histoire, et si jamais j'écris quelque chose sur le siècle de Louis 14, je le feray en homme désintéressé.[302]

Rejecting subjective history as history of a lesser quality, Voltaire's historian's voice constantly reasserts his independence, as in the double-edged admission that flattery or allegiance to ephemeral monarchs is very short-sighted since very few monarchs are worthy of such attention.[303] This controversial stance is the very antithesis of

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[301] See Ch. 1.
[302] 15 septembre 1733. Voltaire to marquis de Caumont. D654.
[303] Coming from the author of histories of kings such as Charles XII, Peter the Great, Louis XIV and Louis XV this may appear ironic, but the author's actual approach will be shown to adhere as closely as possible within his own capabilities or vision to his enunciated theory. See Ch. 4.

subservience and is continually reiterated in his very early *Discours sur l'histoire de Charles XII*:

> Pour tous les autres princes [...] comme leur vie ne fournit aucun exemple ni à imiter ni à fuir, elle n'est pas digne qu'on s'en souvienne.
> Qu'arrive-t-il? ce prince meurt; [...] on oublie et les intrigues de sa cour, et [...] et [...] et [...] et [...] et [le prince] lui-même.[304]

In the *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*, impartiality is defined as, 'un devoir indispensable', and its presence in Voltaire's work is given further credibility by the alleged report of another critic:

> La même impartialité inconnue règne dans le livre, mais avec une attention beaucoup plus scrupuleuse. (*Supp.*, 1230)

For the most part, however, the historian's voice can only offer his own, stated, theoretical good intentions and their repeated textual insistence as proof of impartiality, and often without a shred of evidence. Since Voltaire's public persona was neither anonymous nor impartial, one might well wonder if the historian really wants the reader to believe he is impartial, or whether it could be just the formulaic rhetoric that it was for contemporary historians. The historian's criticism of other historians and critics is not in any way impartial or objective. Nonetheless, the historian is insistent on extending impartiality to include objectivity, a distinction which contemporaries were unwilling, and perhaps unable, to make.

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[304] *Discours...*, pp. 152-3.

## The Authoritative Historian

The historian's voice in the text of *Histoire de Charles XII* is remarkable for its consistency, regardless of subject, and it is overwhelmingly concerned with establishing its authoritativeness, through proof of access to sources and claim of unique knowledge of events, unavailable to other historians. This particular emphasis is not a dominant trait elsewhere in Voltaire's actual historiographical writing and is somewhat reminiscent of the insistence in prefatory works by contemporary historians. In contrast to the characteristics previously examined, it may be considered an early, more traditional feature in Voltaire's historiography. More evident in *Histoire de Charles XII* than in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (*SL*, 831), this less common facet of Voltaire's historian's voice, occurring at times of ambiguity, is persuasive and convincing as a preface to an expressed doubt or to unlikely stories within the text. It is easily recognisable and punctuates the text at regular intervals to remind the reader that the historian is in control and, in added reference to sole authority and uniqueness, that he has carried out vast research on this work. Predominantly flagged by *je* or *me*, the frequency and similarity of the interjections by the historian's voice would suggest an authorial eagerness to draw attention to his carefully researched and sculpted work of history. The historian's pride, in the amount of research carried out and in the eminent people consulted in the process, is thus reflected:

> C'est ce que je lui ai entendu conter. (*SL*, 271)
>
> Ces particularités m'ont été confirmées par Madame la duchesse de Marlborough, sa veuve, encore vivante. (*SL*, 312)
>
> Charles n'était plus lui-même. C'est ce qu'on m'a assuré, et qui est plus vraisemblable. (*HC*, 359)
>
> Je l'ai fort connu à Paris; il m'a confirmé toutes les particularités que je vais raconter. Le comte Paniatowski m'a dit lui-même, et m'a écrit [...] (*HC*, 373)

> J'ai su ces particularités par des lettres de M. Bru mon parent, premier drogman à la Porte ottomane; et je les rapporte pour faire connaître l'esprit de ce gouvernement. (*HC*, 398)
>
> C'est ce que cet ambassadeur m'a raconté. (*HC*, 512)
>
> Je sais de celui qui m'a confié les principaux mémoires de cette histoire, que [...] (*HC*, 543)

Some of these references would appear to have the sole function of historical name-dropping included to boost the status of the young historian or even to lend gravitas to the real Voltaire who actually met king Stanislas in Paris and is eager to boast about it.[305] The accusation that the historian was inclined to 'citer des autorités respectables', led Voltaire to retaliate in the *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*, where he states emphatically that he is not so impressionable, 'comme si j'étais un homme ébloui de la grandeur' (*Supp.*, 1242). One might be tempted to add 'no longer', since many of the references in the selection are there solely to bolster the authority of the young historian's voice in control of the text and its presentation. Yet, several references of this kind also suggest ambiguity, as when the historian adds, 'qui est plus vraisemblable'. Such vagueness raises questions of veracity and is the antithesis of the traditional, concrete, fact-filled territory of history as presented by his contemporaries.[306]

Where authoritativeness is to be implied, verbs are chosen to appear definite and frequently to indicate first-hand access to the word of others: *entendre conter*, *confirmer*, *assurer*, *dire lui-même*, *savoir*, *apprendre*, *raconter*, *confier*. It is as if the historian had been entrusted with private and delicate information and is sharing actual history with the reader. These solid verbs are further reinforced on occasion by a

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[305] See Ch. 5.
[306] See *Vérité* below.

second opinion, such as where the historian's voice adds, 'm'a confirmé aussi'. This is a double guarantee of the worthiness of the source, whether gentleman, officer or king:

> Le roi de Pologne Stanislas, qui m'a fait l'honneur de m'apprendre la plupart de ces particularités, m'a confirmé aussi [...] (*HC*, 466-7)
>
> Ce que je raconte ici paraîtra peut-être peu croyable; mais enfin je n'avance rien que sur la foi des lettres de M. de Villelongue lui-même; quand un si brave officier assure un fait sur son honneur, il mérite quelque créance. Il m'a donc assuré [...] (*HC*, 470-1)
>
> Au reste toutes ces particularités [...] m'ont été confirmées par le comte de Croissy, ambassadeur auprès de ce prince, après m'avoir été apprises par M. Fabrice. (*SL*, 493)

The weak, imploring assertions of authority made in a haphazard manner by contemporary historians are far less complex than the manipulative element in the historian's voice in Voltaire which indicates that the voice is not just a random marker in the text or an aberration within the historical or historiographical work. Rather, the historian's voice is a sophisticated tool which can attract the reader's attention by discussing such important features as authorial control, impartiality, objectivity and authoritativeness. Authority and authoritativeness are interwoven and combine with objective impartiality to reinforce the historian's dominant position of control. Part of the credibility and plausibility of the authoritative historian's voice is that, in direct contrast to contemporary historians, it displays no doubt about control, validity, truth or accuracy.[307] This assured quality is borne out in the following textual examples taken from *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. In turn, each emphasises the historian's control, authority and skill.

[307] Further explored in *Vérité* below.

King Augustus's Letter

In *Histoire de Charles XII*, the King of Sweden meets the defeated King of Poland *le roi Auguste* and compels him to write a letter to Stanislas, his successor, wishing him well. Augustus is understandably reluctant to do so but Charles XII forces him to write. Although the event is unbelievable, the historian's voice is inserted to attest to having seen the document and the complete text of it is provided with the following introduction:

> La voici telle que je l'ai vue depuis peu copiée fidèlement sur l'original que le roi Stanislas garde encore. (*HC*, 545)

The modern reader can appreciate a further irony in this presentation of the actual text since the modern editor Von Proschwitz provides the information that Voltaire had received two copies of the text, from Bertin Du Rocheret and from Fierville, and that his final text is an amalgam of both.[308] This not only shows the voice of authorial control to be a strategy but raises doubts about numerous other assertions of authoritativeness in history. Earlier editions of the text featured a response from Stanislas, the removal of which calls into question its authenticity. Furthermore, the introduction, in which the historian's voice claims to have read the letter and copied it 'fidèlement' from the original, was only inserted in the text by Voltaire in response to an accusation of fabrication by Norberg. The historian's voice raises many issues at once but the textual effect still tends towards an appearance of complete control by that voice and the reader is inclined to bow to its authority, regardless of the version of events which happens to be provided.

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[308] Von Proschwitz, p. 297, fn. 41.

Siquier's Acquittal

Another example of the historian taking control of the text to ensure achievement of his desired effect appears in the concluding section of *Histoire de Charles XII*. Here, the historian discusses the doubt surrounding the death of the monarch. By referring to the controversy in rather trenchant terms, there can be no illusion as to how this historian views the affair:

> Une calomnie renouvelée trop souvent à la mort des princes, que les hommes malins et crédules prétendent toujours avoir été ou empoisonnés ou assassinés. (*HC*, 545)

The historian in the text is confident that this was not so in the case of Charles XII and, to prove that Siquier did not assassinate the king, he asserts that the former had told him so personally, 'il me dit ces propres paroles' (*HC*, 545). However, he also provides a detailed explanation of the grounds for suspecting Siquier in the first place, the officer's publicly declared intention of regicide, on an occasion when he had a severe fever. The historian's voice also elaborates on the pain caused to Siquier during his lifetime by any questioning of his loyalty to the king. The historian's personal involvement with this man is emphasised through the constant reiteration of *je*:[309]

> Je sais bien que Siquier lui-même avait donné lieu à cette fatale accusation.
>
> Il m'avoua lui-même qu'à Stockholm, dans une fièvre chaude [...]
>
> Je n'ai point voulu révéler cette anecdote pendant sa vie.
>
> Je le vis quelque temps avant sa mort, et je peux assurer que loin d'avoir tué Charles XII, il se serait fait tuer pour lui mille fois. (*HC*, 545-6)

In case the reader is resistant to such tugging at the heart-strings, the historian's voice then supplies forensic evidence that Siquier could not have killed the King. In this way,

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[309] See Ch. 5.

the historian's voice asserts its authority to the very end of the text, and even controls the conclusion with yet another reliable, unique, personal source, and an entreaty to the reader to accept and believe the one who knows.

Dangeau's Anecdote

Further evidence of the labyrinthine relationship between the self-referential historian's voice and the historical subject occurs in the historian's criticism of Dangeau's false anecdote on the subject of the poisoning of the Queen of Spain, Marie-Louise (*SL*, 927-8). The historian in the text recounts his historical researches, asserting his authority and vaunting his methodology as if he were a sleuth. He first checks the origins of the anecdote, then cross-checks the details with the king and a duchess and finally deduces that the anecdote is entirely false and without foundation. These investigations are flagged in the text by the personalised *je* of the historian's voice:

> Je ne laissai pas d'être encore en doute;
>
> Je m'informai à d'anciens domestiques du roi [...]
>
> Ils m'assuraient tous que rien n'était si faux.
>
> Je demandai à Mme la duchesse de Saint-Pierre [...]
>
> Elle me donna des attestations [...]
>
> Enfin je sus que ces mémoires [...] n'étaient que des *nouvelles à la main*[...] et je puis répondre qu'on s'aperçoit souvent au style, aux inutilités, et aux faussetés dont ce recueil est rempli.
> (*SL*, 927-8)

The historian concludes his detective work by demonstrating his skill in assessing the literary styles of others and a similar prowess in evaluating the authenticity of documents and historical sources. This is a type of pre-emptive validation of any

anecdotes which the historian may include in the text despite their possibly dubious origins. Interestingly, a narrator's voice subsequently dismisses the Dangeau inquiry as a textual digression and this repudiation serves two important fundamental purposes within the text. Firstly, it allows the narrator to tell the exciting, albeit false, story of poisoning to entertain the reader. Secondly, once the anecdote has been recounted, it allows the historian's voice to dismiss it as false, thereby underlining the author's superiority as a historian and reinforcing his control. The text remains entertaining even while the historian's voice is didactic and authoritative. Neither does the story appear to undermine the history because, as the historian separates out fact from fiction, he seems to reinforce the allegedly real, factual nature of the history. Thus, within the history, the historian's voice still asserts control over his own historical terrain, while allowing history and story to coexist within the one textual space.

## Conclusion

It is clear that authorial control is of paramount importance to, and becomes the main feature of, the historian's voice within Voltaire's historical and historiographical texts. In the establishment of control, the textual concentration of some of the features used is unevenly spread between historical and historiographical works. Thus, while the insistence on impartiality occurs in Voltaire's correspondence and in historiographical and historical texts, the consistent criticism of other historians' partiality is at its most acerbic within the histories. The manipulative voice of the chameleon-like historian is also at its most effective within the histories where it becomes enmeshed and closely

blended with the dense fabric of the other narrative levels of the text.[310] When examined in isolation, it is a very strong and resolute theoretical voice but one whose early articulations of authoritativeness could be purely rhetorical, as most of what it claims, however persuasively, is rather difficult to disprove or quite erroneous. Whilst the fundamental eagerness to assert his authority echoes that of contemporary historians, the authorial confidence and the insistence on control which permeate the historical text are the prime distinguishing factors between Voltaire's authoritative voice and the somewhat less assertive tones of his contemporaries.

## HISTORICAL PROJECT

*Si Charles XII n'avait pas été excessivement grand, malheureux et fou, je me serais bien donné de garde de parler de lui. J'ai toujours eu envie de faire une histoire du siècle de Louis XIV; mais celle de ce roi, sans son siècle, me paraîtrait assez insipide.*[311]

The historian's voice asserts his choice and definition of the historical project with customary control and confidence. The wavering, doubt-ridden, somewhat apologetic voice of the contemporary historian is dwarfed by the conviction of such truisms as, 'je ne suis qu'historien, je ne suis point devin' (*Supp.*, 1241). That statement is made in connection with the unusual anecdote concerning the *homme au masque de fer* (*SL*, 896-7).[312] In the *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV*, the historian's voice uses the case to explain questions of inclusion and exclusion, and of subject choice and definition in history, without ever claiming infallibility for its reportage, choices or

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[310] See Section II of this thesis.
[311] 13 février [1735]. Voltaire to Jean Baptiste Nicolas Formont. D844.
[312] In the history, this is one of the more poetic episodes. The opportunity is seized to exploit an intriguing story riddled with innuendo and the apparently unsolved question of the identity of the prisoner. See Section II of this thesis.

judgements. Such abdication of omniscience and of infallibility gives the historian freedom to select, view, understand and interpret the past according to his own philosophy of history. The historical project can be considered as a combination of the choice of material and of the historian's philosophy of interpreting the past. The initial choice of historical framework should not, in theory, affect the general tone of impartiality and objectivity connected with its final presentation. In Voltaire, the writing and understanding of history become inseparable as each decides the other. The historian's independent stance provides freedom from the constraints of traditional history, from the usual subject approaches, from organisational conventions and from the guilt of omission, inclusion and digression. This allows discussion of the historical project to focus on the precise nature of the historian's innovations in the writing and interpretation of history.

The historian's voice develops a new theory for the presentation and interpretation of history which, in turn, influences choice of material and historical subject focus. Where other historians waver about deciding which battle details are most relevant, the historian's voice in Voltaire reveals his vision for the development of history, an evolution which would begin with *Histoire de Charles XII* and would be realised with notable success in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. Within the historical text, the historian's voice explains his criteria for inclusion and omission and reveals the subject which breaks with tradition and purports to be a new type of history. The very difference of this plan for *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is perhaps an excuse for the excessive criticism by Voltaire of other historians and histories (observed above).

Controversially, for the eighteenth-century, his histories do not focus on those mortals who become kings, as he considers them unworthy of such attention:

> Je crois qu'il n'y a homme sur terre qui mérite qu'on fasse sur lui deux volumes in-4°. C'est tout ce que peut contenir l'histoire du siècle de Louis XIV; car tout ce qui a été fait ne mérite pas d'être écrit.[313]

Just as he rejected flattery, he rejects history which espouses hero-worship, again asserting that most monarchs' lives do not deserve immortality. This apparently complete disdain for monarchy and external authority means that the author will not write a conventional history of Louis XIV but a new, concise history.

In a letter to Thieriot in 1735, referring to the broad focus of his work on the century of Louis XIV, Voltaire makes his well-known pronouncement on the distinction between a plunderer-hero and a great man. He had already revealed this ambiguous reaction towards heroes in his depiction of Charles XII at the battle of Pultava.[314] In the letter to Thieriot, he clarifies the definition and in alluding to the classical criteria of 'utile' and 'agréable', he helps to pinpoint his approach to a 'different' type of history:[315]

> Vous savez que chez moi les grands hommes vont les premiers, et les héros les derniers. J'appelle grands hommes tous ceux qui ont excellé dans l'utile et dans l'agréable. Les saccageurs de provinces ne sont que des héros.[316]

Eager to create a monument to one of the four greatest centuries which mark the progress of mankind, without having to focus only on a 'saccageur', Voltaire would reject the focus on king and battles in favour of a much broader and more encompassing

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[313] 25 juin [1735]. Voltaire to Jean Baptiste Nicolas Formont. D882.
[314] See Ch. 4 of this thesis.
[315] The apparent contradiction of the fusion of tradition and difference is one which underpins Voltaire's historical writing and which is further discussed in Ch. 6 of this thesis.
[316] c. 15 July 1735. Voltaire to Nicolas Claude Thieriot. D893.

historical subject matter, one intended to merit the attention of posterity. For over two decades, Voltaire eagerly wrote to his correspondents and contacts in a constant search for materials relating to Louis XIV and his century. He borrowed books from the 'Bibliothèque du roi', looking not just for historical facts but for anecdotes and cultural, scientific or artistic details which would enrich his histories. In choosing his subject material, the historian rejects conventional history, drawing an analogy with old money which looks pretty in cabinets but serves no purpose. Instead he wants his history to be useful and worthwhile and *usable*:

> Les seconds [les monnaies courantes] circulent dans l'univers pour le commerce des hommes.[317]

The tone of most references to subject matter by the historian's voice is the very antithesis of doubt-ridden or apologetic and is quite unlike the utterances of his contemporaries. Having framed his own histories within original parameters, the historian is keen to present and discuss this novel approach to history and historical subject, one heralded by Frederick II of Prussia as entirely new, 'dont l'univers n'a point encore d'exemple'.[318] This difference is particularly apparent in the second section of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* where Voltaire fulfils his ambition to present 'le génie des peuples, leurs goûts, leurs sottises',[319] rather than details of war. He had expressed this, as early as 1735, in a letter to Caumont:

> Une erreur détruite, un art inventé ou perfectionné me paraît quelque chose de bien supérieur à la gloire de la destruction et des massacres.[320]

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[317] *Nouvelles considérations...*, p. 49.
[318] 9 novembre 1738. Frederick II of Prussia to Voltaire. D1649.
[319] 24 août 1735. Voltaire to Joseph de Seitres, marquis de Caumont. D905.
[320] 24 août 1735. Voltaire to Joseph de Seitres, marquis de Caumont. D905.

In a letter responding to Frederick, King of Prussia, Voltaire again demonstrates the inextricable link between choice of material or focus and the underlying philosophy of history:

> Je fais plus de cas d'une lieue en carré défrichée, que d'une plaine jonchée de morts.[321]

Voltaire makes a case against a tradition of writing history which centred on minute details of battles, as was the practice of epic history, claiming that this either rendered the genre archival or, through its excessive supply of detail, over-stressed that which was trivial or irrelevant to the progress and history of mankind:

> Il est bon qu'il y ait des archives de tout, afin qu'on puisse les consulter dans le besoin [...] Mais, après avois lu trois ou quatre mille descriptions de batailles [...] j'ai trouvé que je n'étais guère plus instruit au fond.[322]

In the same work, the historian propounds his theories for a more vibrant history to interest the thinking public, 'quiconque veut lire l'histoire en citoyen et en philosophe'; the use of 'philosophe' suggests a new, rational, even iconoclastic, approach.[323] Brumfitt would later refer to this new type of history as 'social history';[324] Voltaire described it as *l'histoire des moeurs des hommes* (*SL*, 722-3), as opposed to history which was merely a litany of royal intrigues or battles:

> On saurait ainsi l'histoire des hommes, au lieu de savoir une faible partie de l'histoire des rois et des cours.[325]

Complaining that historians were focusing on the wrong type of subject material and that it was futile to search for the history of men in the annals of France because the real, useful details were missing, 'nos historiens se taisent sur tous ces détails', the

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[321] c. 1 juin 1737. Voltaire to Frederick, King of Prussia. D1334.
[322] *Nouvelles considérations...*, p. 47.
[323] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[324] Brumfitt, p. 50.
[325] *Nouvelles considérations...*, p. 48.

historian urges the writers of history to reconsider their subject and to write as thinking, political men and 'philosophes'. This again demonstrates the inextricable link between choice of material and a philosophy for understanding and interpreting the past:

> Je crois que c'est la seule manière d'écrire l'histoire moderne en vrai politique et en vrai philosophe.[326]

The historian's voice in *Histoire de Charles XII* also reflects this attitude to history. He lays out his own plans and explains, rather than apologises for, unlikely inclusions or digressions in the choice of subject material:

> Cette prière est trop singulière pour n'être pas rapportée. La voici. (*HC*, 220)
>
> Je les [ces particularités] rapporte pour faire connaître l'esprit de ce gouvernement. (*HC*, 398)
>
> Ibrahim Molla, fier, brave, et grossier à l'excès. Il n'est pas inutile de savoir son histoire. (*HC*, 474)
>
> Il n'est pas indigne de l'histoire de dire qu'un écuyer arabe, qui avait soin de ces chevaux, donna au roi leur généalogie. (*HC*, 486)

Yet, it is in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* that Voltaire has most success in putting his particular philosophy of history into practice. The drive to change the subject and focus of history becomes more apparent in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* because of the abundance of textual allusions to his originality and to his plans for a new type of history. In his correspondence, Voltaire begs his correspondents to supply him with unusual historical material, 'à faire connoître le progrès des arts dans le siècle de Louis 14'.[327] Most innovative is the fact that the historian will not write purely about Louis XIV, but predominantly about his century, 'une histoire du siècle de Louis XIV'.[328]

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[326] *Nouvelles considérations...*, pp. 48-9.
[327] [c. 30 juin 1735]. Voltaire to Pierre Joseph Thoulier d'Olivet. D887.
[328] 13 février [1735]. Voltaire to Jean Baptiste Nicolas Formont. D844.

The historian's voice in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* alerts the reader, in the very first chapter, to the innovations in form and subject of this work of history and the text has numerous explanatory markers throughout. These markers are like policy statements and are often tagged by *on, nous* or *je* of the historian's voice. The earliest examples appear in the opening lines of the history. The more official tones of the historian's voice, using a formal *on*, begin this history, with a discussion of subject:

> Ce n'est pas seulement la vie de Louis XIV qu'on prétend écrire; on se propose un plus grand objet. (*SL*, 616)
>
> On se propose de montrer ce qu'ils [les Français] ont été sous Louis XIV. (*SL*, 619)
>
> Il ne faut pas qu'on s'attende à trouver ici, plus que dans le tableau des siècles précédents, les détails immenses de guerres, des attaques de villes prises et reprises par les armes, données et rendues par des traités. (*SL*, 619)
>
> On ne veut point répéter ici tout ce qui a été écrit sur ces troubles et copier des livres pour remettre sous les yeux tant de détails alors si chers et si importants et aujourd'hui presque oubliés. (*SL*, 648)
>
> Tous ces détails de la gloire et de la félicité de la nation trouveront leur véritable place dans cette histoire; il ne s'agit ici que de [...] (*SL*, 705)
>
> On croit nécessaire de dire à ceux qui pourront lire cet ouvrage qu'ils doivent se souvenir que ce n'est point ici une simple relation de campagnes, mais plutôt une histoire des moeurs des hommes. (*SL*, 722-3)
>
> Nous verrons dans les chapitres réservés à la vie privée et aux anecdotes comment mourut Louis XIV [...] Mais je considère ici l'état où il laissa l'Europe. (*SL*, 888)
>
> Je voudrais ici pouvoir rendre justice à tous les grands hommes qui ont comme lui illlustré leur patrie dans le dernier siècle. J'ai appelé ce siècle celui de Louis XIV non seulement parce que [...] mais parce que... (*SL*, 1022)

The frequency with which these policy markers occur is rendered ironic in the light of the extensive borrowings which Voltaire took from other historians.[329] Yet, the framework which surrounds these borrowings is indeed extremely different and innovative and hence, it is striking that the historian should feel that the reader would

[329] See Rivière's thesis.

need a degree of guidance to identify the historian's difference from what has gone before:

> On n'a fait que l'histoire des rois, mais on n'a point fait celle de la nation [...] mais nos moeurs, nos lois, nos coutumes, notre esprit, ne sont ils donc rien?[330]

Disdain for the verbosity of his predecessors is reflected in Voltaire's condemnation of Limiers's six-volume history of Charles XII:

> Je peux vous assurer qu'il y a au moins sept fois plus de faits, et sept fois moins de pancartes dans mon ouvrage que dans le sien.[331]

Although this ignores various verbatim borrowings from Limiers's work (noted by Rivière), the historian's voice overlooks such a contradiction, triumphantly proclaiming the resolute omission of senseless and petty details from *Histoire de Charles XII*:

> Qu'importe après tout qu'un Polonais dans le dix-huitième siècle ait voyagé ou non en Italie pour son plaisir? Que de faits inutiles il faut trancher de l'histoire! et que je me sais bon gré d'avoir resserré celle de Charles XII![332]

The historian's choice of subject and interpretation of history, is unique among contemporaries. His willing inclusion of what might be omitted or ignored in others' histories gives him new textual freedom. He acknowledges that there is no one history, but many histories of each subject. The pragmatic admission that the historian cannot be everywhere and know everything supports this assertion. At the same time, it provides a description of history which undermines the very foundations of the pedestal upon which his contemporaries wished to pose. The historian's voice uses the context of factual errors to remind the reader that, for a change, this particular historian is not

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[330] 26 janvier [1740]. Voltaire to marquis d'Argenson. D2148.
[331] 8 may 1739. Voltaire to Johann Bernoulli. D2009.
[332] *Pyrrhonisme...*, p. 577.

trying to be infallible or omniscient, 'Je crois qu'il faut désespérer de savoir jamais tous les détails au juste'.[333] This is an even more distinct and innovative declaration of the impossibility of infallibility. While admitting the possibility of factual errors on his own part, he argues for the relative unimportance of such small mistakes and denounces the pettiness of critics who focus on this and nothing else:

> Je tombai dans plus d'une erreur, non sur les faits essentiels, mais sur quelques anecdotes, qui sont assez indifférentes en elles-mêmes, mais sur lesquelles les petits critiques triomphent.[334]

However, the historian does admit that his freedom is not a licence to be fallacious or inaccurate, and he appears extremely anxious to be as factually correct as possible. His sincerity seems to be borne out by his exhaustive inquiries and researches and by his prickly response to Norberg's criticisms of his *Histoire de Charles XII*:[335]

> Il est très naturel que M. Norberg Suédois, et témoin oculaire, ait été mieux instruit que moi étranger. Je me réformerai sur ses mémoires, j'aurai le plaisir de me corriger.[336]

It is as if the historian is saying to Norberg that the latter has missed the entire point of Voltaire's historiography, that details are not important, but rather choice of subject matter and of project, and his difference from other historians. Voltaire's awareness of the potential for many different histories to be written on each historical subject means that he does not need to agonise over details, inaccuracies or possible omissions in a vain effort to write *The* history. This attitude will be seen to have consequences for his vision of *vérité*.

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[333] [c. 15 February 1742]. Voltaire to the *Journal des savants*. D2593.
[334] *Pyrrhonisme...*, p. 576.
[335] It might be argued that a reflection of the accuracy of Voltaire's exhaustive researches is apparent in the fact that *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* still appears on modern day history faculty reading lists as a valuable contemporary source.
[336] *Lettre à M. Norberg* in *Histoire de Charles XII*, p. 560.

The freedom which Voltaire accords himself means that he constructs and fashions his own monument to the reign of Louis XIV, a monument which is, 'plus durable que toutes les flatteries dont il a été accablé pendant sa vie'.[337] The historian is patently proud of his difference and of his project and his pride emerges from the policy statements which tag each section of his histories. By setting himself an entirely different task, the historian writes different history, with new subject focus, which will be a lasting work of art:

> Ce n'est point une histoire, c'est la peinture d'un siècle admirable.[338]

## ART BEHIND HISTORY

The voice of traditional history seemed to imply that style in history was extraneous to the project in hand. There was no consensus on a particular approach to writing about history, and discussions of style resulted in apology, anti-definition and antithesis. No such doubt plagues Voltaire's histories, and he advances specific theories on the artistic nature of history as well as on the stylistic approach to characterisation in history.

When contemporary historians, such as Larrey, speak of history as a rich tapestry which needs no further stylistic embellishments, they are suggesting that the act of reportage itself, rather than a literary style, will suffice in history. Vertot, who demands that the historian, or the 'bon Peintre', should write a history which combines

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[337] 3i aoust 1751. Voltaire to Louis François Armand Du Plessis, duc de Richelieu. D4561.
[338] 3 aoust [1735]. Voltaire to Cideville. D895.

literary style, intuition and good judgement, is the historian who comes closest to Voltaire. The historian's voice in Voltaire returns relentlessly to this familiar metaphor of the painter depicting a scene from history, giving an indication as to how Voltaire viewed the composition process of history. He scans all information as potential material for his mosaic and he constantly searches for another shade so that the scene could be painted in its full splendour:

> On veut essayer de peindre [...] l'esprit des hommes dans le siècle le plus éclairé qui fut jamais. (*SL*, 616)
>
> C'est la peinture d'un siècle admirable.[339]
>
> Dont je veux être le peintre et non l'historien.[340]
>
> Je me suis établi peintre du siècle de Louis XIV, et tout ce qui se présente à moy est regardé dans cette vue.[341]
>
> Je tâcherai de présenter à mon esprit une peinture fidèle de ce qui mérite d'être connu.[342]
>
> Cet immense tableau d'un beau siècle me tourne la tête.[343]
>
> Un peintre qui tâche d'appliquer des couleurs vraies sur les desseins qu'on lui a fournis.[344]

When begging Voltaire to lengthen his history, or to increase the examples in his depiction of the century of Louis XIV, Dubos employs the same metaphor of historian as painter:

> Multipliez plustost le nombre de vos tableaux, car votre Clio sçait peindre.[345]

Equating painter and historian, Voltaire's historian voice utilises the image of painter to dispute some contemporaries' suggestion that history needs no literary style.[346] Putting

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[339] 3 aoust [1735]. Voltaire to Pierre Robert Le Cornier de Cideville. D895.
[340] [c. 15 August 1735]. Voltaire to Nicolas Claude Thieriot. D899.
[341] 24 aoust 1735. Voltaire to Pierre Joseph Thoulier d'Olivet. D906.
[342] *Nouveau plan d'une histoire* in *Mercure de France*, avril 1745, p. 7.
[343] 15 mars [1751]. Voltaire to d'Argental. D4420.
[344] [c. 15 February 1742]. Voltaire to the *Journal des savants*. D2593.
[345] 3 décembre 1738. Jean Baptiste Dubos to Voltaire. D1672.
[346] See Ch.1.

forward the image of a masterpiece produced by a talented painter whose subject is some unimportant, ephemeral, local issue, he suggests that histories which can depict a Mona Lisa with the skill of Homer's depiction of the Trojan wars, would become eternal monuments, purely because of the flourish of the individual painter. Again, the strong implication is that the subject, unless of an outstanding nature, is radically less important than the project and the style of its treatment:

> Les seuls qui restent sont ceux qui ont produit de grandes révolutions, ou ceux qui, ayant été décrits par quelque écrivain excellent, se sauvent de la foule, comme des portraits d'hommes obscurs peints par de grands maîtres.[347]

That idea could almost give the reader to understand that the historian might be nearly more important than the history, an idea already ironically hinted at in Voltaire's criticism of Norberg at the end of *Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*:

> Et Charles XII serait ignoré, s'il n'était connu que par Norberg.[348]

However, Voltaire can be suspected of making doubly sure in his own choice of historical subjects. In Charles XII and Louis XIV, he selected two memorable figures who certainly brought about great change, 'de grandes révolutions'. Yet, these figures have to share the focus of history with the rival of one and the century of the other, and possibly with the proud figure of Voltaire historian as well. This prevents the monarchs themselves from monopolising the historian's, or great painter's, attentions in the works.[349] The innovative nature of Voltaire's paintings lies in the choice of angle and central focus which was original in its day.

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[347] *Discours...*, p. 153.
[348] *Pyrrhonisme...*, p. 578.
[349] See Ch. 4.

History is not just a great tableau and the historian's voice stipulates that it must also evoke a response, that the painting must stir the passions as theatre might do. In Voltaire's theory, the sign of an ineffective historian is one who bores the reader with endless facts and figures, inspires no feeling and, equally importantly, invites no judgement. Combining the painting metaphor with the metaphor of theatricality, the historian is critical of long-winded, excessively archival historians who neither paint well nor stir the emotions:

> Mezeray et Daniel m'ennuyent, c'est qu'ils ne savent ny peindre ny remuer les passions.[350]

The historian likens the idea of writing history to the process of composing a successful tragedy, thereby introducing not only literary style but also drama and moral substance into history, and also emphasising the unusual modernity of the writer's relatively heightened awareness of a public or audience for his history:

> Il faut dans une histoire comme dans une pièce de théâtre exposition, noeud et dénouement.[351]

The connection between history and drama, or between Clio and Melpomene, is not an isolated one. It is reiterated many years later in *l'Ingénu* where the narrator of the *conte* is allowed to expand on the concept of history as drama, a practice successful only if depicted in close proximity to tragedy:

> Il semble que l'histoire ne plaise que comme la tragédie, qui languit si elle n'est animée par les passions, les forfaits et les grandes infortunes. Il faut armer Clio du poignard comme Melpomène.[352]

This enthralling link between history and metaphorical theatricality introduces yet

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[350] 26 janvier [1740]. Voltaire to marquis d'Argenson. D2148.
[351] 26 janvier [1740]. Voltaire to marquis d'Argenson. D2148.
[352] Voltaire, *Ingénu* in *Contes en Vers et en Prose*, ed. S. Menant, 2 vols (Paris: Bordas, 1992[I]; 1993 [II]), II, 59-132, Ch. X.

another element into history. As tragedy is written to be performed, when Voltaire sketches Clio with 'un poignard', he signals his intention that his histories should be dramatic, entertaining and appealing to the audience or readership while simultaneously delivering a striking and dramatic message. While many of his contemporaries focused primarily on the compilation and reportage of facts, and could not have envisaged such an emphasis on both artistry and entertainment within the text, the historian's voice in Voltaire will tolerate nothing less.

## The Art of Characterisation

The historian's voice is quite specific in relation to characterisation. He emphasises that the metaphor of the painter historian does not stretch to include the painting of portraits in history. Although it may amuse the imagination to see portraits of famous people, 'portraits de la figure, de l'esprit, du coeur' (*Supp.*, 1255-6), the intellect must be on guard against such depictions, 'le bon sens est souvent en garde contre elles' (*Supp.*, 1255). How can a portrait possibly capture the essence of a person?:

> De tous les caractères tracés par des contemporains, qu'il y en a peu d'entièrement fidèles!
> (*Supp.*, 1255)

In a letter of 1742, Voltaire had drawn a parallel between painting and the impossibility of creating an image which reflects life in all its details since the selective perspective of history, as in paintings, only allows the creator to select one single viewpoint which cannot represent an entire event or person:

> Il importe peu que les autres [les petites figures du tableau historique] soient vues toutes entières. Les règles de la perspective ne le permettent pas; la perspective de l'histoire ne souffre guère non plus que nous connaissions exactement les petits détails.[353]

[353] [c. 15 February 1742]. Voltaire to the *Journal des savants*. D2593.

The critic La Beaumelle reproached Voltaire for his lack of portraits in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, 'de ne pas avoir semé assez de portraits dans [son] ouvrage' (*Supp.*, 1255). In reply, the historian's voice in the *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV* justifies their absence and uses the opportunity to flaunt that difference:

> J'ai peint le siècle et non la personne de Louis XIV. (*Supp.*, 1255)
>
> J'ai porté la vue sur ce qu'il [Colbert] a fait de mémorable [...] non sur la manière dont il mettait son rabat. (*Supp.*, 1256)

The condemnation of the practice of pen portraits in history-writing is quite firm. Complaining that this urge to entertain readers, by embellishing the personal life and psychology of the historical protagonist, is the sign of a bad historian, the historian's voice emphasises that such knowledge is usually unavailable to the historian, due to the retrospective nature of the medium:

> Les hommes publics avec lesquels on n'a pu avoir de liaison. (*Supp.*, 1255)
>
> Des portraits recherchés et fleuris des héros que l'on n'a pas vus de près. (*Supp.*, 1255)
>
> Qui de quelques évènements peu connus prennent droit de démêler les plus secrets replis des coeurs. (*Supp.*, 1256)

This last criticism also clearly distinguishes these histories from *histoires secrètes* or pseudo-historical fictions which focused on the imagined personal lives of historical figures or characters in historical situations.[354] In addition, the historian

[354] Contemporary examples of the *histoire secrète* focus on the private lives of real historical figures such as Gustave roi de Suède, Charles, Prince de Bourgogne, Elisabeth I, reine d'Angleterre, Frédéric II de Prusse, Isabelle, reine de France, or people close to them. *Histoires secrètes* range from Mlle de la Force's early *Gustave Vasa, histoire de Suède* (Paris: Bernard, 1697) and *Histoire secrète de Bourgogne* (La Haye: L. & H. van Dole, 1694) to E. le Noble's *Mylord Courtenay, ou Histoire secrète des premières amours d'Elisabeth d'Angleterre* (Lyon: H. Baritel, 1703), Mirabeau's *Histoire secrète de la cour de Berlin*, 2 vols (Rotterdam: Alençon, Malassis le jeune, 1789), to Sade's *Histoire secrète d'Isabelle de Bavière reine de France* (1813) in *Oeuvres complètes du Marquis de Sade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), XV, 247-497, and constitute a genre which has steady popular appeal right up to the present day.

retorts to La Beaumelle that his own historical projects are far too complex and weighty to engage in mere portrait painting and reconstruction of historical personalities, activities which must, by their very retrospective and unrepresentative nature alone, be flawed and inaccurate:

> J'ai toujours pensé que c'est une espèce de charlatanerie de peindre autrement que par les faits les hommes publics avec lesquels on n'a pu avoir de liaison. J'ai peint le siècle et non la personne de Louis XIV. (*Supp.*, 1255)

The 'charlatanerie' is a shot fired directly at La Beaumelle, but the general theory is also clear. The historian is not interested in detailed facial features, clothes worn or physical minutiae, but in characterisation based on *les faits*.[355] Yet, the historian's abdication of responsibility removes absolute certainty even from *les faits*, so that the unnatural and inaccurate nature of portrait painting and character depiction in history is even further underlined. Stating clearly that those who expect to see a portrait in history just as it might be painted on canvas will be disappointed, the historian reiterates that these are two completely separate things, 'il n'en va pas de même' (*Supp.*, 1256). Reinforcing the theatrical metaphor, the historian refers to historical figures as actors, 'ceux qui jouent les premiers rôles sur le théâtre du monde' (*Supp.*, 1256). It is not the physical descriptions which are relevant, but the symbolic attributes, apparent through *les faits*.

Shunning pen portraits, the historian uses the *Supplèment au siècle de Louis XIV* as a forum for theoretical discussion of the complexities of literary style and of depiction in history. If avoiding character descriptions and physical features is deemed a crime, then the historian is happy to plead guilty but, in his famous pronouncement on

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[355] See Ch. 4 of this thesis.

character, 'le caractère de chaque homme est un chaos', he demands acquittal (*Supp.*, 1257). Explaining that he views character as a chaos, that the soul is inconsistent, and that personality and character are subject to modification by age, illness, fate or fortune, the historian's voice demonstrates the impossibility of reducing a person to a one-dimensional physical portrait within the text. Nor should the character of a man be defined by one dominant trait since, as the historian reminds us with an earthy irony, this can change any minute of any day. The character is as fluid and unreliable as *les faits* will be shown to be:[356]

> Ces traits principaux de l'âme s'altèrent encore tous les jours, selon qu'on a mal dormi ou mal digéré. (*Supp.*, 1257)

The triumphant conclusion is that man does not possess an immutable nature. Therefore, only second-rate historians would allow themselves to attempt the textual depiction of a man's character or the fluid physiognomy of a historical figure:

> Pour l'historien qui ne veut peindre que de fantaisie, qui ne veut que montrer de l'esprit, il n'est pas digne du nom d'historien. Un fait vrai vaut mieux que cent antithèses. (*Supp.*, 1257)

Of course, none of this will impinge on the overall aim of the historian who declares his subject to be *l'histoire de l'homme* and the history of the progress of man, with specific focus on the nature of particular episodes of this advance. He expresses the programme in policy terms:

> Mais on doit dire ce qui caractérise l'esprit de la nation, et moins ce qui appartient à toutes les guerres civiles que ce qui distingue celles de la Fronde. (*SL*, 649)

In sum, the historian's voice emphasises the importance of an artistic presentation of history, equating historian with artist and protagonist with actor. This

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[356] See Vérité below.

introduces an original element of literariness into the historical text.[357] Rejecting physical detail in favour of characterisation based on *les faits*, which promotes a wider interpretation of history rather than physical details or personalities, the historian reduces the importance of the individual in history, and thus features Louis XIV as only the great conductor of an orchestra filled with geniuses, as were Alexander the Great, Augustus and the Medicis in their times. This acknowledgement of history as based on the fabric of society, or 'l'histoire des moeurs des hommes', and composed of various perspectives on society, or *l'esprit*, rather than on one dominant ruler, is a new one (*SL*, 722). The historian's refusal to focus exclusively on monarchs and battles is also an enlightened approach in a period which produced La Beaumelle, portrait painting and hagiographic history.

## ***VÉRITÉ***

*Writ with Truth and not without Liberty.*[358]

*Vérité* in history has been established as the one immutable principle upon which contemporary eighteenth-century historians agree and on which historical novelists of the period never fail to insist. *Vérité* becomes the watchword of each historian and, in imitative fashion, writers of historical novels are eager to impress upon the reader the

[357] Voltaire's insistence on style in the historical text emphasises the *litérarité* in his history which prompts the next section's analysis of *story* voices in history. The image of text as a work of art would form the basis of Roman Jakobson's definition of *litérarité* in the 20th century, 'ce qui fait d'un message verbal une oeuvre d'art'. R. Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique générale* (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1963), p. 210.

[358] 27 juillet [1751]. Voltaire to sir Everard Fawkener. D4529. (Voltaire on his History of Lewis 14.)

absolute veracity of each detail of their own historical story.[359] The historian's voice in Voltaire is more complex with regard to this issue which marks the divide between *histoire/fable* and *vrai/faux.*[360] This is the divide which would be emphasised in his seminal definition of history in the *Encyclopédie* article 'Histoire' of 1765. In that definition, *histoire* and *fable* are both rendered as 'le récit', thus suggesting that the only factors differentiating those genres are the content and the veracity of the history. However, there are many other elements in this definition, including the 'unknowable' nature of truth and the rhetoric of objectivity, both already apparent in the theoretical discussion about, and choice of, historical project. Moreover, this discussion of *vérité* provides a cloak of convenience for an author whose text is not exclusively concerned with events past. Nothing can be said to be clear-cut in Voltaire's histories where *histoire* and *vérité* are concerned.

When in the *Supplément au siècle de Louis XIV* the historian's voice declares with great assurance that no historian is omniscient, he is stating a basic premiss of Voltaire's concept of history:

> Une grande partie de l'histoire n'est fondée que sur des ouï-dire rassemblés et comparés. Aucun historien, quel qu'il soit, n'a tout vu. (*Supp.*, 1241)

This blunt affirmation of the impossibility of omniscience releases the historian from all sorts of restrictions and from indulging in various textual contortions undertaken by

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[359] Saint-Réal, C.V. abbé de, *Don Carlos, nouvelle historique 1672*, ed. A. Lebois (Avignon: E. Aubanel, 1964), *Avis*, 'Il est vrai de dire que sans elle [sa belle-mère] jamais le prince de Navarre ne serait devenu le plus grand roi du monde'.

[360] Voltaire may well have been influenced by Limiers's similar, if less elaborate, opposition between *histoire* and *roman* or *fable* in his *Histoire du règne de Louis XIV*, '...Etablissez une Maxime contraire, l'Histoire ne sera plus un Récit de faits certains, ce sera un Roman ou une Fable', Préface, p. 16.

some of his contemporaries in an effort to appear as omniscient and infallible purveyors of *the* truth.[361] No other contemporary historian has either the audacity or the vision to impose such an enlightened and self-serving qualification on history, a fact which caused great difficulty and resulted in discussions of inclusion and exclusion which weakened the text. In a letter to the *Journal des savants*, Voltaire had gone as far as insisting on the pyrrhonism of history, or that certain, true knowledge of events could never be attained:

> Je crois qu'il faut désespérer de savoir jamais tous les détails au juste.[362]

Moreover, even first-hand witnesses who possess such knowledge are faced with the impossibility of ever being able to fully articulate events in words. In *Jacques le fataliste*, Diderot would later imply that truth is impossible to convey:

> Le Maître. - Ne sois ni fade panégyriste, ni censeur amer; dis la chose comme elle est.
> Jacques. - Cela n'est pas aisé. N'a t'on pas son caractère, son intérêt, son goût, ses passions, d'après quoi l'on exagère ou l'on atténue?[363]

In Voltaire, this early realisation is further supported by the historian's composition of two pieces of work, both entitled *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*, in which he freely comments that no historian can know or relate all the facts, especially if reliant on others as sources, but even if a first-hand witness himself. However, the inaccuracy of sources neither deters Voltaire from writing history nor does it faze him in the slightest:

> Et moi, comme il [La Beaumelle] le dit très bien, je n'ai consulté pendant vingt ans que des gens qui ont mal vu. (*Supp.*, 1256)

The admission of both the pyrrhonism of history and the impossibility of omniscience gives an indication of how the historian's voice in Voltaire's writing could dismiss, out

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[361] See Ch. 1.
[362] [c. 15 February 1742]. Voltaire to the *Journal des savants*. D2593.
[363] Diderot, *Jacques le fataliste*, p. 517.

of hand, contemporary historians' fears about their own inadequacies in relation to the chosen historical subject matter, the reluctant admission of reliance on other sources, the allowance for a margin of error, the question of the truth and the problem of having to feign omniscience or ignore its difficulties.

Free from the impossible pursuit of perfect knowledge, the main themes associated with a discussion of *vérité* in Voltaire's historical writing are quite specific. In *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, the historian's voice is critical of other historians, of inaccurate sources and of very unlikely anecdotes being inserted into history. But, in choosing to research and write history, the historian's voice has, ultimately, to address the question of factual truth. Traditional history, as in Grimarest's history, was frequently content to correlate two stories from opposing camps as a method of deducing *la vérité* and, on occasion, Voltaire's historian follows Grimarest's idea of checking if two opposing sides can agree on the same facts.[364] The following set of rules is set out, using two arch-enemies as examples:

> Nous n'admettons pour vérités historiques que celles qui sont garanties. Quand des contemporains comme le cardinal de Retz et le duc de La Rochefoucauld, ennemis l'un de l'autre, confirment le même fait dans leurs mémoires, ce fait est indubitable; quand ils se contredisent, il faut douter: ce qui n'est point vraisemblable ne doit point être cru, à moins que plusieurs contemporains dignes de foi ne déposent unanimement. (*SL*, 889-890)

In this or in some other manner, historical facts must be proved accurate. Nonetheless, there appear to be lower thresholds for proof of veracity in some stories than in others in the histories.

In *Histoire de Charles XII*, the historian permits a colourful tale to feature in the

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[364] See Ch. 1 of this thesis.

text. It is that of M. Villelongue who gets a message to the Grand-Seigneur, having disguised himself and acted the fool to deceive the numerous guards. More entertaining is the fact that it transpires that the Grand-Seigneur then disguised himself as a *janissaire* to give Villelongue a personal audience. Von Proschwitz comments that elements of this tale were contested by other *témoins* but that the historian includes it for narrative value, while admitting the conflict of opinion:

> Je suis obligé de dire que M. de Villelongue et plusieurs Suédois m'ont assuré que la simple lettre présentée au sultan au nom du roi, avait causé tous ces grands changements à la Porte; mais M. de Fierville m'a, de son côté, assuré tout le contraire. (*HC*, 472)

This admission then allows the historian's voice to discuss the complex problem of conflicting reports and incredible stories, 'point vraisemblable' or 'peu croyable', which he frequently encounters in his research. What follows is a prescription for the modus operandi of historians who meet such contradictions in future:

> J'ai trouvé quelquefois de pareilles contrariétés dans les mémoires que l'on m'a confiés. En ce cas, tout ce que doit faire un historien, c'est de conter ingénument le fait, sans vouloir pénétrer les motifs; et de se borner à dire précisément ce qu'il sait, au lieu de deviner ce qu'il ne sait pas. (*HC*, 472)

This is one of the first occasions on which the voice of the historian lays out a manifesto for other historians on matters relating to the problems of historiography. His advice is practical and not dogmatic, although by advising that the historian should just document facts in a naïve manner, it side-steps the question of locating the *true* facts and over-simplifies the problem of what a historian may know and what he may have to recreate, hypothesise or invent. 'Conter ingénument le fait', is general advice for other historians but elsewhere, the historian's voice in Voltaire shows that the historian is clearly alive to problems of interpretation of *le fait*.

The problem of conflicting truths does not disappear. Voltaire displays awareness of differences of opinion and of biased witness accounts and the historian's voice discusses this topic further in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* in connection with rumours and public opinion. The historian's voice acknowledges that a story can come into common circulation as truth and in time be recorded as history, an early articulation of the dictum of Hitler's propaganda chief, Goebbels 'a lie told over and over again becomes a truth'.[365] However, it is quite scathing about such practice when the rumour is completely unlikely or contradictory and this voice tries to goad readers into logical consideration of the situation for themselves:

> Presque tous les historiens ont assuré que le duc de la Feuillade ne voulait point prendre Turin: ils prétendent qu'il avait juré à madame la duchesse de Bourgogne de respecter la capitale de son père; ils débitent que cette princesse engagea Mme de Maintenon à faire prendre toutes les mesures qui furent le salut de cette ville. Il est vrai que presque tous les officiers de cette armée en ont été longtemps persuadés; mais c'était un de ces bruits populaires qui décréditent le jugement des nouvellistes, et qui déshonorent les histoires. Il eût été d'ailleurs bien contradictoire que le même général eût voulu manquer Turin et prendre le duc de Savoie. (*SL*, 935)

Never one to lose such an opportunity, the historian uses it for many purposes: to be able to discredit other historians generally; to provide evidence that a myth is false; to be the one to provide proof of the actual truth; to pour scorn on any particular historian who reported such a common tale as truth. Once again, it is clear that Voltaire's historical text is not concerned exclusively with the past, but deals with the problems of historiography and with a multitude of other issues. The logical, step-by-step exposition of the *truth* is done with considerable relish. Use of the verb *prétendre* gives

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[365] Goebbels's dictum quoted in J. Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), II, 1268.

the first indication, followed by the admission that rumour held the story to be true and crowned by the scathing, *d'ailleurs*, attack on historians who would have accepted such a contradiction into their work. On another occasion, the same kind of criticism is levelled and two proofs are provided to find public opinion wrong on all counts:

> Premièrement, il n'est pas vrai qu'un prince, petit-fils d'un souverain, demeure le sujet d'un autre prince pour être né dans ses États; secondement, il est encore moins vrai, que le prince Eugène, vicaire général de l'Empire, pût se dire sujet du roi de France. (*SL*, 882)

In different circumstances again, the historian's voice is equally likely to evoke beliefs commonly held, by 'tout le monde', as proof of agreed *truths*:

> Je ne dirai autre chose de cette bataille que ce qui fut avoué de tout le monde. (*SL*, 863)

The use of degrees of truth, such as 'moins vrai' is a clear indicator of the historian's very unusual approach to truth in history, logical but somewhat indulgent and pragmatic.

On another occasion, by using a succession of rhetorical questions, the historian ensures that the reader will at least take the question of partisanship and bias into account when reconsidering events:

> Marlborough attaque. Il avait affaire à des ennemis rangés en bataille comme il les eût voulu poster lui-même pour les vaincre. Voilà ce que toute la France a dit, et l'histoire est en partie le récit des opinions des hommes: mais ne devait-on pas dire aussi que les troupes des alliés étaient mieux disciplinées, que leur confiance en leur chef et en leurs succès passés leur inspirait plus d'audace? N'y eut-il pas des régiments français qui firent mal leur devoir? Et les bataillons les plus inébranlables au feu ne font-ils pas la destinée des États? (*SL*, 840)

The admission that history is formed, at least in part, from the 'opinions des hommes', is one which further illuminates Voltaire's approach to *vérité* and is a prologue to the later definition of history as 'le récit des faits donnés pour vrais'.[366] *Les faits* have

[366] Voltaire, 'Histoire'.

already been shown to be more malleable than an initial interpretation of historical *facts* might suggest and the historian is very aware that partiality and subjectivity can come between the witness and the event. In commenting on the dubious quality of the *Mémoires* of the abbé de Choisy, the historian notes that a bias of any nature, however local or personal, 'l'intérêt particulier', may colour the event recounted:

> On ne peut trop s'étonner que l'abbé de Choisy ait censuré ces établissements dans ses *Mémoires*, qu'il fait lire avec défiance. [...] On sait combien l'intérêt particulier fascine les yeux et rétrécit l'esprit; je ne dis pas seulement l'intérêt d'un commerçant, mais d'une compagnie, mais d'une ville. (*SL*, 966)

There are further ambiguities with regard to truth, near truth and the appearance of truth. The historian's voice is sharpest when an alleged truth can be proved to be false, but is compelled to admit defeat in the face of uncertain truth. As is seen in the discussion of the uncertainty of *les faits*, this voice recommends that, in such cases, the historian should report without comment. In the case of Mme de Maintenon's letters - an episode already examined for the historian's textual control and unusual approach to subject matter - accuracy is allowed to equate to authenticity, although the historian queries the exact nature of both. Following his own advice, the historian doubts first, although he comes down in favour of the likely veracity of the letters, as he did with the Villelongue tale. The historian's voice is dogmatic in raising questions of theory, especially if this includes discussion of 'likely' truth. At times, it may even appear quite lax in the censorship of questionable anecdotes, particularly if they illuminate the history, but its articulated theories cover such eventualities.[367] 'Vrai' appears to come in all shapes and sizes within the text, ranging from *très vrai* to *moins vrai* and *pas vrai*.

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[367] The effect of such flexible practices and unusual historical discourse is the focus of the second half of this thesis.

A further strand in the historian's view of truth in history may be gleaned from the first of two passages entitled *Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*. Without undermining his own authority in any way, the historian's voice has indicated in a very definite fashion that certain knowledge is impossible to obtain. This was a more daring position than that of contemporary historians who did not suggest such a thing in writing, although, as historians, they must have had some opinion on this matter. Textually, they become absolutists in search of *the* truth, while Voltaire assesses each situation in turn for a degree of truth which is reasonable by his own standards. In *Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*, the historian emphasizes the fable-like quality of ancient history, declaring that its marvels are simply invented. Once again, he warns the reader and the historian to beware of untrustworthy witnesses and of popular myths and to narrate them as such, 'un bruit populaire ne doit se rapporter que comme un bruit' (*Pyrr*, 572):

> Croyez, qu'il y a eu des imbéciles et des fripons, qui ont attesté ce qu'ils n'ont point vu. (*Pyrr*, 568)
>
> Je ne crois pas même les témoins oculaires, quand ils me disent des choses que le sens commun désavoue. (*Pyrr*, 570)

The historian advocates a healthy scepticism and employs subtle irony to suggest the gullibility, and hence to cast doubt on the credibility, of other historians. He cites Mézeray and P. Daniel who attribute a peace treaty between Edward III and Philippe de Valois to a hailstorm. The historian's voice is suitably sensible and practical in the face of such an unlikely supposition. Pragmatically, it scotches the myth as being without the necessary proof and belonging to the realm of 'bruit populaire':

> Les conquérants ne sont pas si dévots, et ne font point la paix pour de la pluie. (*Pyrr*, 572)

Advocacy of scepticism by the historian's voice provides another element of the modus operandi for other historians to add to their rulebook of historiography. Using the first

person plural indicates that the historian wishes both to include his contemporaries and to set a precedent:

> Refusons notre créance à tout historien ancien et moderne, qui nous rapporte des choses contraires à la nature, et à la trempe du coeur humain. (*Pyrr*, 573)
>
> Défions-nous aussi de tout ce qui paraît exagéré. (*Pyrr*, 572)

On the one hand, the historian wishes to establish publicly his sharp critical awareness and also to impose rules for historiography. On the other hand, he must defend and promote his own work of history and, in so doing, appears to adopt the sales pitch of his contemporaries:

> Il n'en est pas ainsi de l'*Histoire de Charles XII*. Je peux assurer que si jamais l'histoire a mérité la créance du lecteur, c'est celle-ci. (*Pyrr*, 576)

There is still a great difference between Voltaire and his contemporaries. He presents his work as well-researched and worthy of attention rather than as *the* truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Yet, he consistently emphasises his search to present *a* truth from his chosen perspective, 'cette vérité', an ambiguity which became the very inspiration of his *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*:

> Je n'ai eu nulle affection particulière et la vérité a été mon seul objet; non cette vérité de détails qui ne caractérisent rien, qui n'apprennent rien, qui ne sont bons à rien; mais cette vérité qui développe le génie du maître, de la cour et de la nation. (*Supp.*, 1274)

This denotes a considerable shift away from dogged insistence on *The* real truth . While still advocating a strict method of historiography in order to earn the 'créance' of the reader, it opens up the boundaries of history in many ways to allow a subversive or, at the very least, polemical reading of the material presented.

Cognisant of various shades and levels of truth, Voltaire is also aware of the contentious nature of truth and especially truths which are unpleasant for the living. His insistence on recording unflattering elements of the truth is a recurring theme in his correspondence, and it manifests itself as an issue within the early work *Discours sur l'histoire de Charles XII*.[368] The historian, who is also satirist and *philosophe*, adopts a severe stance from the very beginning, insisting on high morals and showing no mercy for those in high or public office, despite the dangers involved in divulging unpalatable truths:

> Si quelque prince et quelque ministre trouvaient dans cet ouvrage des vérités désagréables, qu'ils se souviennent qu'étant hommes publics, ils doivent compte au public de leurs actions: que c'est à ce prix qu'ils achètent leur grandeur: que l'histoire est un témoin, et non un flatteur: et que le seul moyen d'obliger les hommes à dire du bien de nous, c'est d'en faire.[369]

By taking the high moral ground, the historian simultaneously seeks to establish a certain reputation for criticism, based on judgement rather than political or religious partiality, and hopes that this will enable him to record unflattering truth with impunity. Such an independent stance was to cost the writer dearly in the form of exile for most of his life.

When composing *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* Voltaire was very concerned with pitching his history in a fashion that would be acceptable to more people, even if it would inevitably offend the monarchy. By 1739, the future Frederick II of Prussia was urging him to finish the second half of the work and, in a letter to that monarch, Voltaire demonstrates his awareness that the truth must be presented with care:

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[368] Voltaire was not alone in articulating this difficulty. Limiers addresses it in the theoretical preface to *Histoire du règne de Louis XIV*, p. [12]. 'Il est difficile à un Historien de dire exactement toutes les véritez, quand il y a encore des personnes vivantes qui peuvent s'y trouver intéressées.'

[369] *Discours...*, p. 155.

> Je tâcherai de l'éclaircir avec un ménagement qui n'ôtera rien à la vérité, mais qui ne la rendra pas odieuse.[370]

This illustrates once again that *vérité* is of the utmost importance to the historian even if it is his own selective *vérité*, based on his very individual world-view, which would emerge from the text of history despite the potentially negative implications of a concentration on *les faits*. Although eager to present his own opinions and interpretation of history, the historian also wants to make them digestible and acceptable to a wide public. The two need not be entirely incompatible, although a degree of inevitable conflict is apparent in the toning-down of his presentation of the truth as described in a letter to the comte d'Argental:

> Ne vous effrayez point de l'article de Rome, on le corrigera, il sera très décent sans rien perdre de sa vérité.[371]

Closer to the publication date of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire seems even more determined to publish, even though he openly accepts that the reigning monarch will never attach his official seal to the work because it contains passages about Louis XV's predecessor which Voltaire feels compelled to publish, in the name of truth:

> Le temps de Louis 14 est trop près de nos jours pour qu'on veuille sceller du sceau du roy régnant tout ce que la vérité oblige de dire de son prédécesseur.[372]

Evident from this, and other letters, is the fact that Voltaire always knew that the truths which he presented in his histories were sensitive, polemical and potentially offensive to Louis XV. Hence, the historian refers to rather contentious truths as, 'vérités

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[370] 18 de janvier [1739]. Voltaire to Frederick, crown prince of Prussia. D1793.
[371] 14 [February 1739]. Voltaire to comte d'Argental. D1877.
[372] 26 juin 1751. Voltaire to Michel Lambert. D4494.

désagréables', the ones which would never be officially recognised. Just as in the 'article de Rome', he admits the overriding delicacy of some matters:

> Je crois que toutes les véritez sont glorieuses pour Louis 14, mais peut-être en a t'il de délicates, qu'on permettra, plutôt qu'on ne les autorisera.[373]

It is no wonder that Voltaire was reluctant to publish this work, as he was loath to be ill-received, once again, by the disapproving and censorious figures of French authority. In a letter to the comte d'Argental, the historian admits being worried about the reaction to his imminent work on Louis XIV:

> J'espère que le siècle de Louis 14 ramènera les gens sérieux, et n'éloignera pas de moy ceux qui aiment les arts et leur patrie [...] je m'étudieray surtout à ne rendre jamais la vérité odieuse et dangereuse.[374]

Yet, at no time would Voltaire resign himself to deleting truths in order to make protagonists and society look pretty. His principled pride is palpable throughout the work and is also expressed in a letter to Everard Fawkener, whom he asks to help with distribution of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* in England:

> You may presume it is writ with truth and not without liberty. J have been oblig'd to print in *Berlin* at my own expense.[375]

In a final bid for official recognition for his history, Voltaire had written to Richelieu in August 1750, reasserting his claim to the right to be France's historiographer, arguing that critical distance combined with impunity are the two healthiest and most essential factors for a successful, true history of France:

> L'histoire d'ailleurs exige une vérité si libre, qu'un historiographe de France ne peut écrire que hors de France [...] moi j'ai fait le Siècle de Louis XIV pour la France.[376]

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[373] 26 juin 1751. Voltaire to Michel Lambert. D4494.
[374] 4 may [1751]. Voltaire to Charles Augustin Feriol, comte d'Argental. D4458.
[375] 27 juillet 1751. Voltaire to Everard Fawkener. D4529.
[376] c. 31 August 1750. Voltaire to Louis Armand François Du Plessis, duc de Richelieu. D4206.

While his tone is confident, he is adamant that truths be told:

> Il faut pourtant ou renoncer à l'histoire ou ne rien suprimer des faits.[377]

His insistence was in vain. The historian who made a plea for a factual truth had previously presented truths which were too dangerous and politically sensitive.

Voltaire's concept of the truth is fundamental to every aspect of his history, from the authority with which he delivers it, to the angle from which he chooses to depict his chosen subject matter. Nothing is incidental or conventional and the threat perceived by the monarchy meant that his truths were automatically ranked, not only as contentious, but as unacceptable. However, as R. Darnton has shown, the lack of official seal worked wonders for the circulation of a book, ensuring that it reach a wider and more critical audience than usual.[378] Had the historian censored his version of the truth, the history of Louis XIV might have become another in the succession of staid litanies of battles. Presenting a new view on truth at least guaranteed that the reader would search for more than mere historical facts and would be more amenable to seeking out some of the many subtexts in the work.

The historian, using a didactic tone, criticises other historians for infusing history with fictitious facts, 'ceux-là donnent à l'histoire les couleurs du roman' (*Supp.*, 1256). Yet, he is the first to admit that history has its origins in the Homeric epic and in the fabulous and that successful history is a fusion of history and story. He highlights the close link between the narrating of history and the characteristics of a good story:

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[377] 3I aoust 1751. Voltaire to Richelieu. D4561.
[378] R. Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Régime* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

> Les véritez que j'en raconte, sont mêlées, comme toutes les autres vérités, d'un peu de fabuleux.[379]

Although it might be suspected that so many manipulations and variations of the truth could undermine the reader's confidence, close study reveals that the discussion of truth by the historian's voice is persuasive through its persistence. The voice permits different shades of truth, absent from contemporary histories, and acknowledges that, although the historian must aspire to a high degree of factual truth, the history must also strive to entertain and persuade through potentially *moins vrai*, story-like qualities.[380]

## READERS AND THE ENUNCIATED AIMS OF THE HISTORIAN

*Si l'on veut chercher le dessein de l'auteur, on ne le peut bien découvrir que dans le dessein de l'ouvrage.*[381]

The historian's relationship with his readers is inextricably linked with Voltaire's problems of censorship. Prior to publication of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, he expresses fears about the provision of a truth which may not be palatable to the authorities, 'J'ai tâché d'écrire en sage, je crains que des fous ne me jugent'.[382] However, as already seen in his proposal of artistic history, his plan for a new history still hinges on the question of influencing his reader, the discerning public of his day, of whom he is constantly aware:

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[379] 17 Janvier 1740. Voltaire to comte de Schulenbourg. D. See *Histoire de Charles XII*, p. 630.

[380] Amongst contemporary historians, Reboulet is notable for his adoption of Voltaire's own view of several degrees and constituents of *vérité*. In his preface to *Histoire du règne de Louis XIV*, Reboulet quotes Voltaire, suggesting that, 'l'Historien n'est pas obligé de dire toute vérité', p. vii. How Voltaire the historian achieves a balance in the tension between the two aspirations of truthful history and entertaining story will constitute the focus of the second half of this thesis.

[381] Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois* in *Oeuvres complètes*, II, 227-994, Preface.

> Je m'adresse [...] au public, juge souverain des ouvrages et des hommes. Ce public déteste l'opresseur, se moque de l'absurde, plaint le malheureux, et aime la vérité.[383]

This discerning reading public is obviously the object of the historian's attentions when he refers to 'le lecteur', or 'ceux qui pourront lire cet ouvrage', or when he addresses the reader as 'vous' (*SL*, 616, 722, 754):

> Vous avez déjà vu que [...]. Vous savez déjà que ce qui paraît neuf n'est qu'une redite. (*SL*, 754)

Even more impressive is the attention which the historian pays to the diversity of people within the 'vous' addressed. This distinguishing of many different readers is apparent through the regular use of impersonal phrases which guide the less able reader through the texts, steering both reaction and opinion.[384] The less sophisticated reader is also assisted by statements such as 'qu'il faut lire avec défiance', or by an address, any of which allow the historian to insert every kind of detailed information into the text, on the pretext of informing the reader (*SL*, 966):

> L'imagination est effrayée du détail des préparatifs de ce siège: les lecteurs qui ne sont point à portée d'entrer dans ces discussions seront peut-être bien aises de trouver ici quel fut cet immense et inutile appareil. (*SL*, 841)

In mentioning the less able reader and indicating that this particular historian has readers in mind, the artifice of history is underlined and it is seen as a selective, individual creation which is neither exhaustive in its coverage nor perfect in its *truth*. The historian's method of writing for different readerships has the effect of engaging many readers in the text and generating a feeling of personal involvement. Drawing the reader in by using tones of complicity marks out a relationship which is more complex than

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[382] c. 31 August 1750. Voltaire to Louis Armand François Du Plessis, duc de Richelieu. D4206.
[383] *Lettre à Monsieur Roques* in *Oeuvres historiques*, p. 1228.
[384] See Ch. 5.

one composed of a simple voice of authority and a passive reader. That relationship is intrinsic to the reasons why, how and for whom the historian wrote these histories.

A prevalent message in both historiography and histories is that history is being written because it is *utile* for the transmission of an enlightened philosophy of the progress of civilisation. As was the case for contemporary historians, *utile* and *utilité* are concepts which recur throughout Voltaire's works, sometimes insinuated, sometimes explicit, but always present:[385]

> Les anecdotes les plus utiles et les plus précieuses sont les écrits secrets que laissent les grands princes... (*SL*, 890)
>
> Ces petites miniatures se conservent une génération ou deux, ou périssent ensuite pour jamais. On néglige cependant pour elles des connaissances d'une utilité plus sensible et plus durable.[386]
>
> Cette histoire [ancienne] n'est peut-être utile que [...] par de grands événements qui font le sujet perpétuel de nos tableaux, de nos poèmes, de nos conversations.[387]
>
> Mais on n'a pas été déterminé seulement à donner cette vie par la pensée que cette lecture pourrait être utile à quelques princes, si ce livre leur tombe par hasard entre les mains.[388]

*Utilité* is at the basis for Voltaire's particular selection, organisation and presentation of historical events, varying with the targeted readership and with the people under discussion, whether those from 'une génération ou deux', the *nous* of 'nos conversations' and 'quelques princes', or 'Louis 14'.

Amongst references to the reader in these histories, there is an explicit concern with the readers of posterity - evocative of Pellisson's similar concern - which addresses the needs, interests and attention-span of the future reader, depicted as being more

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[385] Rousseau chooses to quote contemporaries on the purpose and use of history. There is little variation from historical prefatory writing examined. Rousseau, J-J., Avant Propos to *Chronologie universelle* in *Oeuvres complètes*, V, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 486-531, (pp. 487-492).
[386] *Nouvelles considérations...*, p. 47.
[387] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[388] *Discours...*, p. 153.

critical, demanding and selective than contemporaries. Thus, the historian's voice makes his own task more difficult by adding another category to the throng of readers to be pleased, but in so doing, can further impress the contemporary reader by the historian's concern and resultant prowess:

> On se propose un plus grand objet. On veut essayer de peindre à la postérité non les actions d'un seul homme, mais l'esprit des hommes dans le siècle le plus éclairé qui fut jamais. (*SL*, 616)
>
> Ces dispositions de l'Angleterre, et de la Hollande, pour mettre, s'il se pouvait, sur le trône d'Espagne l'archiduc Charles, fils de l'empereur, ou du moins pour résister aux Bourbons, méritent peut-être l'attention de tous les siècles. (*SL*, 810)
>
> Cette démangeaison de transmettre à la postérité des détails inutiles [...] Ils s'imaginent que la postérité verra tout cela avec les mêmes yeux.[389]

The constant references to posterity suggest that the historian takes pride in his historical work and takes care to ensure that it will endure the tests of time. Most historians wish to inform their contemporary readers of the details of actual events and to instruct them in issues of morality. Others adopt a didactic tone so that contemporaries might learn from former (historical) mistakes and be inspired by successes and extraordinary events, but Voltaire also addresses the *future* reader: this linking of posterity and instruction is particularly evident in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*:

> On se propose de montrer ce qu'ils ont été sous Louis XIV et l'on souhaite que la postérité de ce monarque et celle de ses peuples, également animées d'une heureuse émulation, s'efforcent de surpasser leurs ancêtres. (*SL*, 619)

This clearly depicts the historian as viewing the compilation of history as part of his duty to record for current and future readers matters which would lead them to appreciate great men, great acts and great centuries. The historian's deliberate address

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[389] *Discours...*, p. 152.

to posterity may be further separated into the concurrent urge to inform and the ambition to instruct.

## Enunciated Aims of the Historian

Like his contemporaries, the single most common group of references to the historian's aims in Voltaire's text can be linked with instruction. These are often tagged by such obviously instructive terms or verbs as *apprendre*, *savoir*, *instruire*, *connaître*:

> Voilà l'histoire qu'il faut que tout le monde sache. [..] Tout nous regarde, tout est fait pour nous.[390]
>
> Mais après avoir lu trois ou quatre mille descriptions de batailles, et la teneur de quelques centaines de traités, j'ai trouvé que je n'étais guère plus instruit au fond. Je n'apprenais là que des événements.[391]
>
> On néglige cependant pour [les anecdotes] des connaissances d'une utilité plus sensible et plus durable.[392]
>
> On saurait ainsi l'histoire des hommes, au lieu de savoir une faible partie de l'histoire des rois et des cours.[393]
>
> Ma principale idée est de connaître autant que je pourrai les moeurs des hommes & les révolutions de l'esprit humain.[394]

The aim to instruct can be concerned with a didactic pronouncement, a moral influence or promotion of an enlightened philosophy. The first, the didactic aim, risks being dogmatic and is pedantic, full of advice for historian and reader alike. It follows in the great tradition of Machiavelli who, writing on the utility of history, noted that:

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[390] *Remarques...*, p. 46.
[391] *Nouvelles considérations...*, p. 47.
[392] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[393] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[394] *Nouveau plan d'une histoire de l'esprit humain*, in *Mercure de France*, p. 5.

> If any lesson is useful to the citizens who govern republics it is that which demonstrates the cause of the hatreds and the factions of a city in order that these men may preserve unity through the wisdom gained from the sufferings of others.[395]

Such didactic intentions reveal enormous confidence, unlike contemporary histories:

> Il faut toujours, lorsqu'on lit une histoire, songer au temps où l'auteur a écrit.[396]

Such an unequivocal statement of self-referentiality contradicts the historian's earlier aspiration to both objectivity and impartiality, no matter how strongly he may protest to the contrary, but it complements his doubts about the existence of the *actual* truth. Yet, the presence of both assertions within the one historian's voice is just an initial indication of a wealth of contradictions and contrasts which underpin Voltaire's histories.[397]

The second, or moral, element of instruction is of paramount importance to the historian and is one which closely echoes his contemporaries. The *Histoire de Charles XII* is to have a moral influence on kings and this moral intent is for the good of mankind:

> L'histoire des plus grands princes est souvent le récit des fautes des hommes. (*SL*, 723)
>
> Certainement il n'y a point de souverain qui, en lisant la vie de Charles XII, ne doive être guéri de la folie des conquêtes.[398]
>
> Sa vie doit apprendre aux rois combien un gouvernement pacifique et heureux est au-dessus de tant de gloire. (*HC*, 542)
>
> Un homme mûr, qui a des affaires sérieuses, ne répète point les contes de sa nourrice.[399]

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[395] Machiavelli, N., *Florentine Histories*, trans. by L. Banfield & H. C. Mansfield, Jr (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 6.
[396] *Discours...*, p. 154.
[397] See Ch. 6.
[398] *Discours...*, p. 153.
[399] *Remarques...*, p. 44/5.

> Cette histoire [ancienne] n'est peut-être utile que de la même manière dont l'est la fable: par de grands événements qui font le sujet perpétuel de nos tableaux, de nos poèmes, de nos conversations, et dont on tire des traits de morale.[400]

> [Louis 14] ne lut jamais, et s'il avait lu, s'il avoit sçu l'histoire, vous auriez moins de français à Berlin, votre royaume ne se seroit pas enrichi en 1686 des dépouilles du sien, il auroit moins écouté le jésuite le Tellier, il auroit etc.[401]

The third element of the aim to instruct seeks to address an enlightened audience on enlightened topics with the aim of conveying an enlightenment message. This particular aspect of the historian's voice is a novel one:

> Ce qui manque d'ordinaire à ceux qui compilent l'histoire, c'est l'esprit philosophique.[402]

> L'histoire d'ailleurs exige une vérité si libre, qu'un historiographe de France ne peut écrire hors de France [...] moi j'ai fait le Siècle de Louis XIV pour la France.[403]

> J'espère que le siècle de Louis 14 ramènera les gens sérieux, et n'éloignera pas de moy ceux qui aiment les arts et leur patrie.[404]

The gulf between the theory and practice of contemporary historians might suggest a similar conflict of opinion between the historian's aims as expressed in Voltaire's historiography and his actual history.[405] However, one of the more particular characteristics of the historian's voice, whether writing history or historiography, is his addressing the same, interested, fictional audience. Seizing on this permanent audience, the historian will further be seen to manage inclusion of a general philosophy of life within his history, a feature which reflects his aims as enunciated in both history and historiography. Very few contemporary historians had an enlightenment message to convey and very few *philosophes*, other than Voltaire, chose near-contemporary history

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[400] *Nouvelles considérations*, p. 49.
[401] [c. 15 janvier 1737]. Voltaire to Frederick, crown prince of Prussia. D1255.
[402] *Remarques...*, p. 43.
[403] c. 31 August 1750. Voltaire to Louis Armand François Du Plessis, duc de Richelieu. D4206.
[404] 4 may [1751]. Voltaire to Charles Augustin Feriol, comte d'Argental. D4458.
[405] See Chs. 1 & 2 of this thesis.

as a means of conveying that message to the enlightened reader, or to 'quiconque veut lire l'histoire en citoyen et en philosophe'.[406]

## CONCLUSION

Analysis of the many different elements of the historian's voice in Voltaire's early historical and historiographical works has revealed its establishment of authoritative, authorial control over the text. The presence of this voice within the actual historical text, as opposed to purely within strictly theoretical prefatory writing is not found in traditional histories and is particular to Voltaire. The voice is an especially dominant feature which exudes considerable confidence when broaching questions of historiography. Unlike his contemporaries, Voltaire has a vision of history which goes far beyond the usual depictions of kings and battles. Theoretically, this vision allows him to reject petty, exhaustive details in history and to choose his own, wider perspective in defining the framework of his project. Whilst contemporaries emphasised clarity rather than style, in Voltaire, the historian conceives history as a work of art. The artist aims neither to depict absolutely every angle of any topic nor to capture character in pen-portraits, a practice which he argues to be as untenable in history as in life.

The historian's voice insists on a reasonable degree of truth in history. As certain knowledge is impossible to obtain, one must settle for the most satisfactory version available. To this end, all stories must be well-researched, based on *les faits* and

[406] *Nouvelles considérations...*, p. 48.

checked twice, but they must also entertain. This unusual, perspicacious theory unites Voltaire's insistence on serious, accurate historical research with his fundamental desire to impress and include the reader in his vision of the *story* of history. Knowing that the general reader will not persevere if made to suffer, the historian advocates short, sharp and entertaining histories. The historian also insists on the universal nature of his histories which, he assures the reader, are of a quality to last for posterity. As well as effectively providing a rule-book on historiography, the instruction must be didactic, moral and enlightened in its task of being *utile* whilst still informing and influencing the reader.

Although the precise emphasis of the historian's voice varies according to whether the work is historical or historiographical, there is an evident homogeneity of voice which means that no aspect of authority, subject choice, artistry, truth or aims as expressed in one medium would differ greatly from its expression in the other. Yet, aspects of this historian's voice - such as the over-confident, commanding voice of control, the scathing irony and the cajoling tone of persuasion - stem more from the realm of *story* and fictional rhetoric than from factual *history*. It remains to be assessed whether the practice of writing history respects the theory as articulated by the historian's voice. On a theoretical level, Voltaire advocates a theory of historiography which appears completely different from that of his contemporaries, not least because it is transmitted through the unusual and clever use of the all-pervasive historian's voice.

# STORY VOICES

## SECTION TWO

*On peut tout accepter dans une histoire authentique, l'auteur a moins de liberté dans un récit de fiction. Il doit se soucier de la vraisemblance.*

Du Plaisir, *Sentiments sur les lettres et sur l'histoire avec des scrupules sur le style*

# PREFACE TO SECTION II

Voltaire's theory of history is unique, innovative and remarkably different from the theory of contemporary historians. While a gulf exists between declared intentions and actual practice of contemporaries, it must be assessed to what extent Voltaire's histories reveal a similar disparity. The combination of *history* and *story* to which Voltaire aspires in his theory of historiography demands precise identification. The blend may best be encompassed within the term *literariness* of history, which suggests that alongside *history*, non-historical elements and *story* features are included. Section II of this thesis focuses on the difference between Voltaire's historical theory and practice, on more unusual or striking aspects of *story* and on their combination with, and effect on, Voltaire's *history*.

# VOLTAIRE: HI*STORICAL* NARRATIVES

The historian's voice enunciates theories on history which are resolute. In theory, history must neither be hagiographic, lengthy nor solely concerned with wars and conquests; it must be authoritative, factually correct and well-researched, whilst aspiring towards a reasonable degree of truth; the style, whether artistic or theatrical, is of paramount importance and must be appealing; ultimately, history must communicate with the reader in order to provoke reflection and to inform. In practice, to achieve such aspirations, the content, tone and method of telling the *story* of history must be radically altered from contemporary practice.

In expounding a new theory of history, Voltaire proposes to free the historical text from its traditional confines and to introduce new material and a new focus. Uniquely placing great emphasis on both artistry and appeal of history, presumably the manner of telling this new *story* (a term rich with both literary and fictional implications) of history will be of utmost importance in the final historical composition. Proposing a pleasing and entertaining narrative further suggests that non-historical features may appear in (factual) history, thus potentially placing the historical subject within the realm of a (fictional) story. Therefore, Voltaire's history must be examined within the history/story framework best embodied by the contemporary duality of the term *histoire.*[407] Moving the focus from *history*, analysis must now be made of significant *story* features within Voltaire's historical narrative.

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[407] See Introduction to this thesis.

The historian's voice in Voltaire was shown to be a persuasive and omnipresent voice of history, assuming and maintaining tight control over both theory and presentation of the selected historical subject. Central to the initial examination of *story* voices in the historical narrative is a consideration of features which are associated with the construction of a narrative: implicit/explicit narratorial intervention and the manipulation of response through the structuring and presentation of material. These features constitute a distinctive background for the recounting of fact (history) in a narrative (story) form. Attention will be given to some of the many story voices which, alongside that of the historian, form part of the complex narrative of Voltaire's histories. In progressing from *history* voices, which focus on theoretical questions of history, the historian and historiography, to *story* voices, which both form and narrate history, a particular focus will be on identification of those elements which combine to form the *literariness* of the historical narrative. This quality is often mentioned but is, as yet, meagrely explored by critics.

## HISTORICAL COMPOSITION

In evaluating the *story* features within the historical narrative, the initial task must be to identify the nature and function of the underlying structural framework. Unlike contemporary historians, Voltaire's theories reject history as a mere chronological account of monarchical wars. Study of the textual organisation of his

historical narrative will permit an evaluation of the relation of *historical* structure to distinctive *storical* features.

The observation that *Histoire de Charles XII* reads more like a novel than like history is not a new one.[408] Writing on historiography, the abbé de Mably is highly critical of the entertaining voice and the story-like narrative in Voltaire's histories, arguing that there is a discrepancy between style and subject matter. This is concurrent with contemporary historians' rejection of style as irrelevant in a serious work of historical research:

> M. de Voltaire est le premier qui ait voulu y transporter les grâces de la gaieté et de la plaisanterie; mais parler sur ce ton de tout ce qu'il y a de plus important et quelquefois de plus malheureux pour les hommes, c'est manquer de goût, c'est manquer de jugement.[409]

L. Gossman has more recently suggested that it is this artistic quality, more usually a feature of the novel, which accounts, in part, for the literary success of *Histoire de Charles XII*.[410] However, his broad assessment does not examine the precise nature of the attraction. Additionally, it might be proposed that it is the chosen combination of composition and artistry within this history which explains both the contemporary and lasting appeal of the work.

The structure of *Histoire de Charles XII* is organised with an appropriately military precision, somewhat akin to the planning of a modern detective novel.[411] The

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[408] See Introduction to this thesis.
[409] Mably, G.B., abbé de, *De la manière d'écrire l'histoire* (Paris: Fayard, Corpus des oeuvres de philosophie en langue française, 1988), p. 385.
[410] Gossman, p. 694ff.
[411] Interestingly, Rivière emphasises the 'classical structure' of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, heralding it as the mature history when compared with the 'large numbers of digressions which appear superfluous' in the 'rococo' *Histoire de Charles XII*. Rather than constituting a constructive comparison, this appears to be primarily an attempt to accentuate the merits of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. See Rivière, p. 353.

entire history of eight books spans eighteen years of war. Every second chapter represents a climax in Charles XII's career and in these odd-number chapters, the Battle of Narva, the Battle of Pultava, the siege and capture of Charles XII and the monarch's death all take place. Moreover, the last three events occur towards the end of the respective chapters, thus maintaining interest and suspense. The account of the first campaign of Charles XII is a brief, comprehensive piece of narration which is covered in the space of five paragraphs whilst the dramatic battle of Pultava is resolved in eleven. The first lines of the second, fourth and sixth books either contain premonitions or significant pieces of information which influence and affect the reading of the following episodes. The sheer speed with which war episodes are recounted within the history echoes the initial speed of Charles XII in achieving his goal and the sudden and dramatic nature of his decline. The very organisation of this early history is evidently designed to appeal to a large number of readers through the brevity and simplicity of its form.

Further manifestations of orderly, yet appealing, narrative divisions in this history also involve the sense of speed and movement achieved within the text as a direct result of the event-oriented story focus. The method of narration is, by contrast, paced and calm. For the modern reader this mirrors a cinematographic account. The battle of Narva, for example, is a speedy campaign which becomes like a motion picture in the text, spanning the entire gamut of good cinema frames and including elements of suspense, alarm, fear, drama (the king receives a bullet in the neck) and terror. The camera shows a sequence of frames from the wider battle to one specific fight, the collapse of the bridge, soldiers drowning and the surrender. The scene is an epic battle

setting wherein the shock elements are reported neutrally to achieve fuller impact. As in cinema, the angles of depiction decree that a very subjective presentation of the entire event is given: the camera-man is strictly in charge of the history put on display.[412] Unlike contemporary histories which attempt to be exhaustive in their lengthy and detailed coverage of battles, Voltaire's histories are short, pithy and rigorously selective.

Another literary technique is apparent in the structure of this text. While his contemporaries focus almost exclusively on the figure of Charles XII as hero, Voltaire's history adds another dimension which changes the entire focus and interpretation of the history.[413] The narrative structure of *Histoire de Charles XII* is strikingly bi-polar in nature, rich in oppositions and torn between its focus on the eponymous hero Charles XII and on his adversary Peter the Great.[414] This structural double focus on Charles XII and Peter the Great within *Histoire de Charles XII* has historical and literary classical precedents in famous mythical twins such as Castor and (Pollux) Polydeuces, Heraklos and Iphitis, Romulus and Remus. In mythology, one twin is always stronger and more special than the other, and so recourse to such precedents presages the defeat of one of the two potential heroes in *Histoire de Charles XII.* Other classical precedents of oppositions manifesting a dual tendency include Sophocles' tragedies *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Philoctetes.* In the first two plays, Oedipus's two daughters and his two sons represent opposing views, as do Odysseus and Philoctetes in

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[412] Modern cinema openly reveals this manipulation of reality with the title and content of the recent film, a comedy directed by B. Levinson, 'Wag the Dog' (1997). Here, in order to increase presidential popularity and to distract from bad press and sexual scandals, media and populace are manipulated to believe in a fictional war and victory. The invention of war and manipulation of history triggers the desired and predictable emotions and vote-swings in favour of the president. Hence the image of the tail wagging the dog.

[413] The importance of this opposition for characterisation is examined below. The reason for it is perhaps hinted at by Lebois where he notes that 'Voltaire est curieux des individus hors série'. Lebois, p. 302.

[414] See bi-polarity in conjunction with characterisation below.

*Philoctetes*. In the latter case, figures of two are used to typify differing values. That these may relate to principle or to morals, is illustrated by the famous conflict between family loyalty and the law in *Antigone*.[415] Already, by changing the traditional mono focus to a dual one, the *Histoire de Charles XII* is challenging preconceived ideas. The historical text's potential is further extended through its duality which offers not only the surface, narrative voice but also a multiplicity of subtexts, or other narrative voices.

Climactic episodes are not prolonged in *Histoire de Charles XII* and, in contrast to contemporary history, the most exciting culminating passages are of short duration. In these instances, the linking narrative is also exciting although it is less concise. The combination of episode and linkage constitutes a continuum interspersed with the occasional more traumatic moment and in proceeding thus, the narrative succeeds in imitating life and story-telling alike. The order imposed on historical reality through this careful structuring of history displays many narrative features which have roots in the realm of story. The duality of the narrative structure also suggests considerable possibilities of subtext within this history, thus inviting an ironic reading of the text, whether in its narrative of battle or observance of peace. The irony implicit in the very structure of the history may also be identified in the voices of observation and of criticism, explored in the investigation of anecdote.

Pivotal issues deriving directly from the duality in *Histoire de Charles XII* include the balances of history or story, hero or rival, reality or fiction, the actual or the imaginary. These bi-polar focuses also have classical precedents in the works of historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides, where textual 'debate' is a common stylistic device taking the form of pairs of antithetical speeches, expounding opposing

[415] Further internal echoes of classical structures will be explored in the 'heroic formula' in Ch. 6.

philosophies and policies. In *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, a similar type of implicit exchange takes place between Voltaire and ancient historians and writers. It opens up the textual space, offering the modern history endless possibilities for argument, contradiction, postulation of alternatives and implied questioning of morals, politics and principles. The precise nature of these subtexts requires exploration and their configuration will emerge as the various voices are identified.

A further example of the narrative choice of binary structure to emphasise stark comparisons occurs in *Histoire de Charles XII* where Turkish hospitality is praised in contradistinction to the hypocritical diplomatic relations of other nations. Thus, the narrative emphasis that, when the grand-vizir goes to war, he imprisons the Russian ambassador in the 'château des Sept-Tours' and so, a nation which is widely reputed for meticulous observation of lavish hospitality codes violates the sole law of diplomatic immunity which other much less hospitable nations observe. The use of 'sacré' highlights the ironic critical comment that most nations, observing the rule purely on a superficial level for ambassadors, simply could not equal the Turkish welcome:

> Observateurs de l'hospitalité en tout le reste, ils violent en cela le droit le plus sacré des nations. (*HC*, 400)

This is a typical instance of the intervention of an ironic observation into history permitted and encouraged by the binary structure. As is frequently the case in these histories, whilst the surface history narrates events, the ironic subtext introduces and comments on a more important issue.

A structural duality is also evident where the historical narrative vacillates between the Swedish monarch's successes and his defeats, his rise and fall, between the

surface narrative and the ironic subtexts. Similarly, the sublime and the ridiculous coexist side by side within this history in such a way that the ironic effect cannot be missed, as in Peter the Great's feebly disguised excuse for invasion of Riga:

> Il alléguait pour raison de la guerre, qu'on ne lui avait pas rendu assez d'honneurs, lorsqu'il avait passé *incognito* à Riga; et qu'on avait vendu les vivres trop cher à ses ambassadeurs. C'étaient là les griefs pour lesquels il ravageait l'Ingrie avec quatre-vingt mille hommes. (*HC*, 209)

The selective and purposeful narration of history not only allows space for entertaining narrative and anecdotes but establishes a pattern of historical narrative which weaves in and out of these and other *story* features. In such a structure, prolepsis is an extremely convenient literary tool for a history such as *Histoire de Charles XII* which recounts a series of wars carried out by a determined and seemingly invincible monarch. The quasi-cinematographic frame of Charles XII watching a prisoner of war being led off to live and die in Stockholm is a pointed allusion to a future event in the text and invites a reading of the text as an exciting, and significant, narrative. This prisoner is also a symbol of fleeting fortune on which Charles XII, almost involuntarily, reflects when he articulates an eerie premonition of his own fate. This is emphasised by the use of reported speech in this proleptic anecdote:[416]

> Le roi ne put s'empêcher, en le voyant partir, de faire tout haut devant ses officiers une réflexion naturelle sur l'étrange destinée d'un prince asiatique, né au pied du mont Caucase, qui allait vivre captif parmi les glaces de la Suède. *C'est*, dit-il, *comme si j'étais un jour prisonnier chez les Tartares de Crimée*. (*HC*, 219) [Italics in original]

That vision becomes a reality four chapters later with the actual seizure of the king as prisoner, but not before the reader has been alerted by another proleptic anecdote to the possibility of a siege. The material description is that of Charles XII having a fortified

[416] See Ch. 5 for analysis of the use of direct speech in history.

house built, a precaution presented as being strictly out of character for the normally frugal king:

> Il fit bâtir en cet endroit une large maison de pierre, capable en un besoin de soutenir quelques heures un assaut. Il la meubla même magnifiquement contre sa coutume, pour imposer plus de respect aux Turcs. (*HC*, 419)

This anecdote is a clever *story* ploy as its neutral narrative tone prepares the readers for the complicated intrigues which are to follow and for their culmination in the siege of the king's house by the Turkish army and the 'Tartares de Crimée' who featured in an earlier premonition. *Histoire de Charles XII* may be an 'early' work, but its exposition of the *story* of the history of Charles XII is told in a narrative fashion far from the tradition of other historical accounts.

Where duality is the predominant structural feature of *Histoire de Charles XII*, of more evident, but equally strategic, value in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is the deliberate break imposed by the positioning of 'particularités et anecdotes' regarding Louis XIV as a markedly separate section after the main bulk of historical war accounts. This permits the historical narrative to soar to new heights after the decline and death of the old, fanatical monarch. The anecdotes, a new and deliberate development in structural technique of history, serve as a distraction from the decline of the first section of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and introduce the subsequent sections of the work which also boast quite diverse focuses. This innovative use of anecdotes in history will be considered below. In *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, textual duality, so apparent in the earlier history, is an integral part of the history's binary division wherein the historical subject is infused with narrative subtexts.

It may be concluded that among contemporary histories the unique shape of Voltaire's historical texts draws the reader's attention to their structure, composition and internal organisation. Despite an apparently chronological structure, narrative duality in *Histoire de Charles XII* engenders structural divisions which specialise in suspense or cliff-hanger chapter endings. This duality, with precedents in both classical history and literature, opens the text to permit a multiplicity of *story* elements which deliver the subtexts of the two histories. *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is more evidently conceived in a dual and unique fashion, heralding history with a new focus, as emphasised by Voltaire. Alongside these dual structures are cinematographic views and proleptic anecdotes, which also orientate the reader by hinting at events yet to come. It remains to be seen in what way the *story* elements introduced by these narrative structures permit characterisation and anecdote to further contribute to the unusual *literariness* of composition of Voltaire's history.

## CONSTITUENT VOICES OF HISTORICAL CHARACTERISATION

*Tout homme est formé par son siècle: bien peu s'élèvent au-dessus des moeurs du temps.*[417]

The idea of portrait painting in history is clearly and categorically rejected in both Voltaire's history and historiography by the historian's voice, which emphasises the ephemeral nature of a character portrait and the impossibility of framing the chaos of one person within a single pen sketch.[418] Contemporary historians were found to

[417] Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs* in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. L. Moland, 12, (p. 66).
[418] See Ch. 2.

paint puppet-like, idealised, moralistic and contrived portraits of the monarchs. This dismissal of portrait painting and descriptions of physical features in history is both a reaction against the historian's contemporaries and a movement towards a new theory of historiography. The historian claims to focus on the progress of society within a work of 'social' history and to lessen the importance of the individual in history. However, since *Histoire de Charles XII* is a history which focuses predominantly on the main protagonists and - as critics are eager to emphasise - as the general tone of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is that of a history permeated by great admiration for the eponymous monarch, there would appear to be contradictions inherent in the task of characterisation of Charles XII and Louis XIV in Voltaire's histories.[419]

**Henri IV**

Voltaire's techniques of characterisation of monarchs in history prior to the histories of Charles XII and Louis XIV, such as in the history of Henri IV, may be used as a benchmark. The 1727 *Essay on the civil wars of France*, published by Voltaire in English for an English audience, was intended as an advertisement for his *La Henriade*. As is the trend and tendency in advertising and promotions, the images, language and characters are sharp, superficial and striking. The figures populating this early history feature as stock characters, puppets and caricatures. The contemporary French critic and translator Granet sums up Voltaire's depiction of Jacques Clément, the monk-fanatic who assassinates King Henri III:

[419] Discussion of the term 'hero' is deliberately omitted from this section as it is a very broad area of study, one which is the sole focus of a thesis on Voltaire currently in preparation in the US. See also R.

> M. de V. peint ce moine comme un homme d'une piété farouche et d'un esprit noir et mélancolique, qui porté à cet assassinat par les clameurs des prêtres, crut faire une action louable.[420]

Neither facial features nor further physical details are provided, yet the image is clearer than any detailed physical or psychoanalytical character portrait. With *noir*, *mélancolique* and the hysteria of *clameurs*, the history conjures up a religious fanatic, one of Voltaire's more diabolical and irrational characters, a recurring figure which may be traced through his works almost like a leitmotif. In contrast to this dark, irrational, fanatical monk, Henri IV is, predictably, presented in balanced, glowing terms:

> He prov'd as clement in the Victory as he was terrible in the Battle.[421]

But Henri is not just any old handsome, Herculean hero. He is specifically chosen to represent Enlightenment, as one who has shaken off the shackles of religion.[422] The narrative historian evidently agrees wholeheartedly with Henri IV's decision to change religion in order to take the crown. This decision is presented as reflecting the monarch's recognition of the ephemeral nature of power, a political pragmatism and disdain for the conniving corruption of so-called religious institutions:

> What his Valour and his Magnanimity could never bring about, was easily obtain'd by going to Mass, and by receiving Absolution from the Pope.[423]

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Pomeau, 'Voltaire et le héros' in Revue des sciences humaines 64, (1951), 345-351.

[420] Voltaire, *An essay on the civil wars of France/ Essai sur les guerres civiles de France*, ed. R. Waller, in *The English Essays of 1727* in *OC, 3B* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996), Appendix to *Essai sur les guerres civiles de France*, trans. Granet, p. 115.

[421] Voltaire, *An essay on the civil wars of France*, p. 75.

[422] Diaz emphasises Voltaire's qualification that Henri IV represents more the modern politician than the classical soldier-hero: 'Enrico IV era stato un politico moderno, e non un «eroe» antiquato, quali Gustavo Adolfo o Carlo XII'. [Henry IV was rather a modern politician than an antiquated 'hero', like Gustavus Adolphus or Charles XII] *Voltaire storico*, p. 48 [My trans.].

[423] Voltaire, *An essay on the civil wars of France*, p. 80.

In this early example of Voltaire's historical characterisation, no picture portraits are offered. The narrative voices providing the character depiction are overtly moralistic and didactic, especially on questions of religious tolerance.

**Charles XII**

Voltaire's Charles XII is a young, vibrant, energetic, enthusiastic character who personifies conqueror and warrior as well as hero-king and leader, in the fashion of Henri IV. Due to the particular treatment of time in *Histoire de Charles XII*, Charles XII appears relatively unchanged within the text from start to finish, despite the reality of having waged war for eighteen years. This textual deception, a distinctive feature of Voltaire's structural design of history, leaves the reader with the impression of a monarch who perversely becomes more dogged with each battle, rather than older and wiser with experience. It also further emphasises the king's growing self-delusion as he focuses on the memory of former successes, not far distant in the text, but long past in temporal reality.

A prediction of the eventual confrontation between Charles XII and his rival Peter the Great resonates from the many instances of structural duality which present a bi-polarity of narrative design, already examined. One scene is arguably the culmination of this structure and the single most striking example of the dual focus of *Histoire de Charles XII*. It occurs on the occasion of the Battle of Pultava where the future of Charles XII is, literally, in the balance. However, instead of narrating the course of the war and details of losses on both sides, the narrator chooses to depict the

character strengths and weaknesses of both kings as being the deciding factor on this occasion.[424] Thus, when the two potentates, Charles XII and Peter the Great, come head-to-head in battle, it is a battle of relative personal qualities and prowess of the equally-matched heroes rather than the conventional historical battle between two armies. The energy, will and enthusiasm of the Swedish monarch is pitted against the energy, determination and planning of the Russian. Both kings display admirable qualities, and are weighed up in terms of character, fame, achievements, motivation, magnanimity, moderation and renown. But, as it is a 'bataille décisive', there must be one victor. The balance in the passage reflects the dual focus of the entire narrative. The qualities which eventually win, just tipping the balance in favour of Charles XII's rival, reflect the preferences of the contemporary *philosophes*. This is evident in the choice of a weighted vocabulary which ranges through *illustre*, *glorieux*, *la gloire*, *ses intérêts*, *grandeur d'âme*, *magnanime*, *barbare*, *terrible...admirable*, *excès*, *invincible*, and *grand*. Peter the Great only barely wins the battles of words, systems, régimes and of ideas. The passage itself is one of the most dynamic climaxes of all of Voltaire's histories and one of the most striking uses of characterisation without the use of physical portraits:

> Ce fut le 8 juillet de l'année 1709 que se donna cette bataille décisive de Pultava, entre les deux plus singuliers monarques qui fussent alors dans le monde: Charles XII illustre par neuf années de victoires, Pierre Alexiowits par neuf années de peines, prises pour former des troupes égales aux troupes suédoises: l'un glorieux d'avoir donné des Etats, l'autre d'avoir civilisé les siens: Charles aimant les dangers, et ne combattant que pour la gloire: Alexiowits ne fuyant point le péril, et ne faisant la guerre que pour ses intérêts: le monarque suédois libéral par grandeur d'âme, le Moscovite ne donnant jamais que par quelque vue: celui-là d'une sobrieté et d'une continence sans exemple, d'un naturel magnanime, et qui n'avait été barbare qu'une fois; celui-ci n'ayant pas dépouillé la rudesse de son éducation et de son pays, aussi terrible à ses sujets

[424] Diaz writes about the strategic opposition of the two diametrically opposed kings: 'Il parallelo con Pietro il Grande era quindi dettato dalle cose stesse, a gettare la luce di una precisa valutazione su due tipi completamente diversi di azione storica,' [The parallel with Peter the Great was thus suggested by the facts themselves, by a precise evaluation throwing light on two completely different types of historical deeds.] *Voltaire storico*, p. 92 [My trans.].

> qu'admirable aux étrangers, et trop adonné à des excès qui ont même abrégé ses jours. Charles avait le titre d'*invincible*, qu'un moment pouvait lui ôter; les nations avaient déjà donné à Pierre Alexiowits le nom de *grand*, qu'une défaite ne pouvait lui faire perdre, parce qu'il ne le devait pas à des victoires. (*HC*, 349-350) [Underlining not in original]

The suspense and perfect balance cleverly prevent the reader from identifying the victor until the very end and only then is it clearly seen which system is given primacy within the history. This suspense is a typical feature of the narrative design of *Histoire de Charles XII* and, like the characterisation, it supports the broader narrative attitude to both protagonists in a work which appears to give equal weight to both rival kings.[425] In direct contrast to the mono-focus of traditional historians, this binary presentation reflects the history's quest to dispute the standard, common format of contemporary historical works.

Another feature of textual characterisation in *Histoire de Charles XII* is the use of leitmotifs which recur throughout the history. The eponymous hero, Charles XII, is cast in the mould of an active warmonger, one who does not hesitate or depend excessively on religion, but who is a quick-thinking and resolute king, albeit one who knows little about life off the battlefield. Captured in the phrase, 'la vivacité de Charles', his energy and vitality, however rash at times, bound from the page and are conveyed to the reader in terms of perpetual motion (*HC*, 204). The leitmotif of Charles racing single-handedly after the enemy is so common that it occurs in almost every attacking sequence, 'le roi présent partout' (*HC*, 506). This sheds light both on the

[425] As Diaz notes, the 'controstoria' [counter-story] consists in the shared focus of the history: 'un rapporto di valori precisamente inverso a quello che il titolo del libro e certi suoi iniziali toni da panegirico avevano potuto far presumere.' [A significance in direct opposition to that which the book's title and some of its initial eulogistic tone would have given to understand.] *Voltaire storico*, p. 80; p. 92 [My trans.].

king's blinkered, dogged mentality and on his stunted mental growth, character traits already suggested by the above exploration of time divisions in this history:

> Charles XII impatient de ne pas aborder assez près, ni assez tôt, se jette de sa chaloupe dans la mer. (*HC*, 203)
> Charles ne tarda pas à les poursuivre. (*HC*, 327)
> Charles n'attendit pas, pour les attaquer, que le reste de son infanterie fût arrivé; il se jette dans l'eau à la tête de ses gardes à pied; il traverse la rivière et le marais. (*HC*, 326)
> Charles monta à cheval; et, tout fatigué qu'il était, il poursuivit les Russes pendant deux lieues. (*HC*, 330)
> Charles chassait devant lui les Moscovites jusqu'au fond de la Lithuanie. (*HC*, 280)

The rather critical Mably criticises that depiction of Charles XII in *De la manière d'écrire l'histoire*, commenting rather bluntly that:

> Le héros agira sans savoir pourquoi, et l'historien marchera comme un fou à la suite d'un fou.[426]

Contrary to this opinion, it can be argued that a historical text is quite successful when its deliberate manipulation of a motif leaves the reader with the image of Charles XII running from one end of Europe to the other, conquering and challenging, left, right and centre.[427] Then, when the monarch suffers a preliminary defeat at the hands of his great rival Pierre le Grand so that his movement is momentarily arrested, he undergoes an imposed period of rest in Turkey. This defeat and enforced rest results in complete lethargy. The change in mental and physical state is depicted in the history, not through picture portraits, but by a string of verbs which contrast sharply with the action verbs previously used. The verbs of inaction highlight the passive nature of Charles' existence in Turkey while his enemies attack all his territories:

> Tandis que Charles XII faisait dépendre sa destinée des volontés des vizirs, qu'il recevait des bienfaits et des affronts d'une puissance étrangère, qu'il faisait présenter des placets au sultan, qu'il subsistait de ses libéralités dans un désert, tous ses ennemis réveillés attaquaient ses états.

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[426] Mably, p. 356.
[427] This depiction of Charles XII reflects Voltaire's fond attitude towards the eponymous hero of his work, an attitude summarised by Diaz as 'un certo calore di simpatia'. [A certain warm empathy.] *Voltaire storico*, p, 91 [My trans.].

(*HC*, 387-8)

Once back on the warpath, Charles XII regains his vitality and only untimely death halts his progress. Not only is the period of immobility a reminder of his vulnerability, and thus it serves a proleptic purpose in the history, but the motif of perpetual motion in history is a method of representing the hubris of a typical hero of epic or tragedy. Charles XII displays hubris in over-stretching his human capabilities (continuous warmongering), ignores the warnings of the gods (exile in Bender) and, inevitably, will meet his nemesis (death at Frederichshal).

Other facets of Charles XII's character are conveyed through the use of different textual leitmotifs. The monarch's love of travelling *incognito* becomes a recurrent motif. It reveals an infantile, playful streak, whether on the occasion where he wishes to arrive in Sweden unannounced or where, on his way out of Poland, he is unable to resist a surprise visit to King Augustus. Another motif which shows a peculiar quirk of this idiosyncratic king is the fact that, although he spoke perfect French, he insisted on conversing in Latin with a French envoy, '(car il ne voulait jamais parler français)' (*HC*, 203). All these motifs concern external events which combine to transmit a certain image of the monarch to the reader, without any superfluous physical details. The clearly individualised depiction of Charles XII stems primarily from the will to entertain and to inform, while the movement away from the physical reduces the significance of individual monarchs. One of the inherent ambiguities of Voltaire's histories, the consistent rejection of the traditional, physical representations in history, is both an early expression of Voltaire's theme of the insignificance of humanity (one widely used

in the puppet figures of the *contes*) and an attempt to transcend traditional hagiographic history.

Anecdotes provide further subtle details of the monarch's character in *Histoire de Charles XII*, as well as appealing to a wide contemporary readership of historical novels. Whether symbolic, proleptic or allegorical in purpose, the anecdotes related to Charles XII's character are also particularly illustrative of the force driving the monarch from an early age. This determined character streak is again shown to have an idiosyncratic aspect to it, neatly summed up by the digressive anecdote which shows the young king as he hunts bear in Sweden, on the eve of setting out on his eighteen-year long war campaign. His method of hunting is described as both new and dangerous. His fearless manner of bear-hunting serves as a forecast of things to come but the Russian bear will be a great deal bigger, stronger and better armed.[428] His determined perseverance against the odds presages the king's future good luck and his superior attitude in war and in battles. The anecdote is full of symbols and allusions to future valour and victories which the reader is invited to trace:

> Il faisait cette chasse d'une manière aussi nouvelle que dangereuse [...] un ours d'une grandeur démesurée vint droit au roi, qui le terrassa après une longue lutte à l'aide du filet et de son bâton. (*HC*, 200)

Coming directly after the account of the outbreak of hostilities in Livonia, the passage is replete with symbolism related to the subsequent campaigns undertaken by Charles XII. The battle of Narva, which is the first Swedish encounter with the troops of Peter the

[428] Voltaire is not the first to use the figurative image of the Russian bear, which, in literature, dates back to 1605: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, III. iv. 100, 'Approach thou like the rugged Russian Beare'. *OED*, Bear.

Great, appears as a textual replay of the king's early hunting experience.

A later anecdote featuring the fury of the Swedish monarch is a passage which not only reveals another aspect of Charles XII's character but also unveils an element of the narrative's attitude towards the main protagonist of this history. At the time of the 'Affaire du Pruth', Charles XII's main desire was to return to the battlefield and his expressed wish was to go to war against the Russians. On his arrival at the Turkish army camp, he finds that a treaty has already been signed and is so furious that he storms directly into the tent of the grand-vizir Baltagi. The text conveys the king's extreme anger:

> Avec un visage enflammé ...
> ...insiste le roi en colère. (*HC*, 415)

The ensuing exchange between the Turk and the Swede is swift and effective. Reconstruction of the encounter between two powerful men is made more immediate by the anecdote's verbatim account. There is a repetition of 'colère' and the following phrases:

> Le roi, outré de colère...
> Le Turc, poussé à bout... (*HC*, 415-6)

Both men are acidly polite. The king is furious about the Treaty and the fact that Baltagi did not exploit his opportunity to take the czar prisoner. The Turk wins the war of words by his verbal dart at the King of Sweden who has not been home for over a decade, 'Il ne faut pas que tous les rois soient hors de chez eux' (*HC*, 416). Charles lacks the verbal agility to retort and is depicted as glaring at the Turk before stretching out his spur and deliberately ripping the ruler's robes, in a childish, despairing gesture:

> Il se jeta sur un sopha, et regardant le vizir d'un air plein de colère et de mépris, il étendit sa jambe vers lui, et embarrassant exprès son éperon dans la robe du Turc, il la lui déchira, se

> releva sur-le-champ, remonta à cheval, et remonta à Bender, le désespoir dans le coeur. (*HC*, 416)

While Charles XII is apparently a great and victorious warrior for much of the history, it is the use of words such as 'exprès' and 'mépris' which paint a very different portrait of a young and inarticulate king. The irony which pervades the entire anecdote suggests the existence of a deeper scepticism regarding Charles XII throughout the entire history. That scepticism is evident primarily in the Swedish monarch's unusual sharing of centre stage with his rival Peter the Great. This dualism undermines contemporary expectations and is reminiscent of the author's unusual interpretation of *vérité*. By providing a work of history which is neither uniquely focused on the eponymous hero nor plainly hagiographic, Voltaire serves up a different reading of history, a conception which traditional historians zealously refused to consider.

Many of the anecdotes in the text concern external events which reflect the inner reactions of Charles XII. For example, as the monarch's luck diminishes, his growing distress becomes more prominent in the narrative. On the eve of his defeat at Pultava, Charles XII learns of the death of his sister, la duchesse de Holstein. The reader is informed that the king was not only very fond of her but had corresponded with her throughout his war travels. In a subtle manner, the narrative balances the hubris, success, fearlessness, fortune and happiness of the monarch who has, to date, been victorious, with the unhappiness, sensitivity, vulnerability and inevitable nemesis presaged by the monarch's impotence in the face of the death of a close female-figure. There is a foretaste of the monarch's increasing vulnerability and of his final fall in the ironic observation that Charles would not have felt the loss so much had he been winning:

> Il avait toujours eu pour elle beaucoup de tendresse; il fut d'autant plus affligé de sa perte, que commençant alors à devenir malheureux, il en devenait un peu plus sensible. (*HC*, 341)

Charles XII is also depicted as a lone horseman of the apocalypse, or a figure who symbolises and brings about death wherever he goes. When he falls during the battle of Pultava, twenty-four men rush to rescue him. Twenty-two fall and two horses are killed beneath him as he flees the battle-scene. The narrative initially introduces this theme with an anecdote about the king's first battle which begins with an attack on the Danes. While approaching to attack, the king jumps from his ship and wades to shore. His foolhardy naïvety in battle is a disarming trait, one which prefigures the character of Fabrice at the battle of Waterloo.[429] Guilelessly, he asks his Major General the meaning of the whistling sound at his ears. Upon learning that it is the sound of bullets, he declares that henceforth musket fire will be music to his ears. Ironically, it is like the trumpet of death because his men drop dead all around him:

> Le roi, qui n'avait jamais entendu de sa vie de mousqueterie chargée à balle, demanda au major général Stuard qui se trouva auprès de lui, ce que c'était que ce petit sifflement qu'il entendait à ses oreilles? [...] Dans le même moment le major, qui expliquait le bruit des mousquetades, en reçut une dans l'épaule; et un lieutenant tomba mort à l'autre côté du roi. (*HC*, 204)

This anecdote displays the writer's attitude to the futility and waste of war as well as the irony which permeates the historical text. The symbolic anecdote which portrays Charles XII as a figure of death not only develops the characterisation of the monarch but also highlights other issues in the text, through the voice of the ironic observer, without being overtly dogmatic or didactic. These anecdotes are extensions of the motifs already identified and they have the same purpose, that of illuminating

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[429] In Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Fabrice not only arrives in a naïve manner on to the scene of battle at Waterloo but innocently wonders for a long time whether he actually took part in the famous battle or not, Bk. II, Ch. 16.

interesting aspects of the monarch's character traits. This particular narrative usage of both motifs and anecdotes is protean and more evocative than the narratorial portraiture, conclusive characterisation or the eulogistic summaries of contemporary historians.

Just as it uses proleptic anecdotes, *Histoire de Charles XII* uses leitmotifs in a proleptic manner within the text, in interpreting the monarch's character and for conveying evidence of interior weaknesses or character flaws. The depiction of Charles XII is never that of a monochrome, flawless hero. Where character flaws are to be depicted, the narrative technique in Voltaire's history does not differ substantially from that of the more subtle amongst his contemporaries. For instance, when Limiers describes the mock siege of Compiègne in his history of Louis XIV, he uses an extremely ironic tone which intimates that, in Limiers's opinion, the king was responsible neither for his war obsession, nor for his many, lengthy and ill-advised wars which resulted from this, because of an innate weakness of character.[430] A similar motivation may be imputed to Voltaire's linking of Charles XII and the game of chess. Voltaire was no stranger to games of any nature and through the portrayal of the monarch playing chess, an insight is afforded into a character flaw of the Swedish king and the historian's attitude to his historical protagonist.[431]

The chess motif is anticipatory. When writing the history of Charles XII, the narrator is 'playing' with two kings, Peter the Great and Charles XII. *Histoire de*

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[430] See Ch. 2.

[431] Voltaire's familiarity with war-games is well documented by R. Pomeau in his article 'Le jeu de Voltaire écrivain' in *Le jeu au XVIIIe siècle*, Colloque d'Aix-en-Provence (1971) (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1976), pp. 175-6; see also Huber's portrait of *Voltaire jouant aux échecs avec le P. Adam* in Hermitage Museum, Saint-Petersburg.

*Charles XII* is a very structured chessboard recounting various crises or matches, from victory for Charles XII at Narva, to defeat at Pultava; from stalemate and retreat into exile in Turkey, to the deciding match in Norway. The actual record of the life of Charles XII shows the king's early defeat and untimely death on the battlefield at Frederichshal in Norway, but in Voltaire's history, the historian is obliged to accommodate this conclusion within his story, a prime example of the tension between fiction and history, invention and reality within this history.

The dilemma which faced the author was how to intimate to the reader the fact that when two great kings with two full armies of pawns come face to face, the result may not be stalemate but the final defeat of one hero, a defeat rendered more likely by a tragic character flaw in one king. The narrative needed a significant omen which would convey to the reader that, due to an innate weakness, the hero of the history might possibly lose on the chessboard of war.

The chess motif at times of crisis is a literary feature which marks Charles' exile and his enforced leisure at Bender and it recurs at particularly tense moments. Where he notes that the King of Sweden has a fixation with constant movement of the king figure and that figure alone, the narrator further prepares the reader for defeat and capture of his king hero. The narrative records of Charles XII that, 'Pour tout amusement il jouait quelquefois aux échecs', but, in exile in Bender, Charles XII is barricaded into the living quarters of his house (*HC*, 376). The fierce warrior tartars have surrounded the house, yelling 'demirbash', or 'tête de fer' at the king. Calmly, Charles begins to play a game of chess:

> Il se mit à jouer aux échecs tranquillement avec son favori Grothusen, comme si tout eût été dans une sécurité profonde. (*HC*, 440)

Like Charles, barricaded in his house, the king on the chessboard can move only one square at a time and has restricted choice of manoeuvre, few escape options, little chance for a broad vision and is doomed to lose in the end. Just as the anecdotes guide the reader to an appropriate response, the choice of the chess king, as a symbol for the monarch, leads the reader not only to expect the monarch's defeat, but also to criticise him for his blinkered and unenlightened vision.

The etymology of the word *chess* has its origins in the Persian word *shah*, meaning *king*. The purpose of the game might be summarised as being to protect, defend and ultimately save the king from attack while cornering the opponent's king. Zweig writes rather scathingly of this, 'Vers ce but ridicule: acculer un roi de bois dans l'angle d'une planchette!'[432] It is significant that the king is one of the least mobile pieces on the chessboard. The pawns, rooks, bishops, knights and the much more manoeuvrable queen must all combine to defend and protect the king whilst attempting to place the other king in check. Any obstinate player who insists on playing by only moving the king is doomed to lose the game of chess.

Charles is captured after the barricade but circumstances lead to stalemate, and the king once again avoids checkmate, living to meet another challenge on the chessboard of war. Using chess as an analogy, the narrator hints once again at the inevitable nemesis or fall of the warrior king Charles and he does not mince his words:

> Si les petites choses peignent les hommes, il est permis de rapporter qu'il faisait toujours marcher le roi à ce jeu, il s'en servait plus que des autres pièces, et par là il perdait toutes les parties.
>
> (*HC*, 376-7)

[432] Zweig, S., *Le Joueur d'échecs* (Paris: Bibliothèque cosmopolite Stock, 1994), p. 33.

Indeed, Charles eventually does 'perd [...] toutes les parties'. His short-sighted chess moves reflect not a global view but a narrow one and an excessive individualism, both of which lead the king to defeat, his inevitable nemesis. The motif of chess is yet another method of depicting different elements of the king's character without having recourse to picture portraits. It is singularly effective as it combines entertainment in the text with the sophistication of the different layers and levels of meaning. In sum, characterisation in *Histoire de Charles XII* is conveyed through a combination of factors, from the narrative structure of the text to the use of motifs and anecdotes which highlight details of particular character traits and which also show the monarch's reactions and motivation.

When personalities are not painted and stock characterisation is rejected, the reader's own expectations of history are suddenly undermined and questioned and matters seem less certain than they had previously appeared. In *Histoire de Charles XII* the reader is challenged by characterisation conveyed through a combination of narrative structural design, of motifs and of anecdotes and by Charles XII having to share the history with his rival Peter the Great, a practice unique among contemporary historians. The innovation and modernity of the subsequent history, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, resides in its being one of the first conscious attempts at a social history. The text substitutes exciting accounts of social or contemporary persons, trends and ideas for the traditional character sketch or royal hagiography of contemporary historians. Detailed physical description is replaced by anecdotes of the monarch's private life.[433]

[433] See Introducing Anecdote into History below.

From the outset, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* vigorously protests that it is not a history of Louis XIV, but rather a history of that monarch's *siècle*, or of the times in which Louis reigned and an assessment of the changes which occurred therein, echoing Montesquieu's 'j'ai cherché à en prendre l'esprit'.[434] This is summarised in the well-known policy statement:

> On veut essayer de peindre à la postérité, non les actions d'un seul homme, mais l'esprit des hommes dans le siècle le plus éclairé qui fut jamais. (*SL*, 616)

Despite this, it might be expected that a characterisation of Louis XIV would be presented. As in Voltaire's histories of Henry IV and Charles XII, the same rather unique approach to characterisation, devoid of detailed, pretty character portraits is employed. The depiction of Louis XIV on his wedding day is typical in simply noting neutrally that the king's finery embellished his natural handsome features:

> Le roi [...] paré de tout ce qui avait pu ajouter à sa beauté mâle et héroïque qui arrêtait tous les regards. (*SL*, 894)

As in *Histoire de Charles XII*, history side-steps and avoids direct description of character, facial features or physical detail. The boots, eyelashes and pretty pictures of his contemporaries are excluded from Voltaire's history in order to draw attention to the important messages of a wider, more erudite interpretation of history. The historian would not have wished his readers to be distracted by Marie Mancini's green earrings or low-cut bodices.

The rejection of the physical in both histories, in tandem with a proliferation of subtexts and textual irony, underlines Voltaire's sharp awareness of the puniness of humanity. In the histories, all of these unusual features of characterisation are

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[434] Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, Preface.

connected to the greater plan of developing a social and universal history which would transcend human insignificance and survive for posterity. The historian's world view is both global and energetic and he is eager to direct the reader towards a similar viewpoint.

## INTRODUCING ANECDOTES INTO HISTORY

*Les anecdotes sont un champ resserré où l'on glane après la vaste moisson de l'histoire.* (*SL*, 889)

This harvest metaphor, the image of gleaning all scraps of detail and coveted snippets of private information left behind after the great harvest of history, introduces the idea of historical anecdotes in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. While the image is found at the beginning of four chapters uniquely devoted to *Particularités et anecdotes du règne de Louis XIV* in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, both this and the earlier history feature the use of anecdotes, whether proleptic, descriptive or purely entertaining. Although anecdotes often appear in the form of digressions, they reflect a contemporary preference for brevity and serve to illustrate additional areas which could never be included in detail in such short works of history.[435] The anecdote - the brief, personal, often amusing account of an individual or an event - was the height of fashion in popular, contemporary literature. This is evident from the proliferation of *histoires secrètes* or 'secret' histories, full of anecdotes and allegedly factual private information about public figures. However, the *histoires secrètes* were in a category separate from serious

[435] In his rather antiquated style, the historian Geffroy notes that the most remarkable feature of Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* is its brevity: 'Comme cette brièveté est précise, élégante, lumineuse et non pas rigide ni obscure'. Geffroy, p. 367.

works of history, as they were usually clearly fictional, even when they involved the private lives of historical figures. What must be assessed is how far Voltaire's project for private anecdotes in history differentiates it from the historical novel. It is possible that a hint may be found in a later novel, *Jacques le fataliste*, where Diderot punctuates the text with a series of stories, anecdotes and fables of varied length, most of which deal with cases of unusual behaviour leading to consideration of some type of moral or philosophical problem.[436] Does Voltaire prescribe a similar function for historical anecdotes or does he merely provide anecdotal reading as fodder for the strong contemporary popular interest in foreign affairs?[437] The anecdote is predominantly associated with fictional forms and private information whilst history allegedly dealt with reportage of weightier, factual, public matters such as war and battles. In a *literary* device such as the anecdote, maintaining the thin line between fact and fiction, history and story could be problematical. Such relationships, and the use to which Voltaire puts the anecdote, may emerge in an examination of the nature and scope of anecdotes and their interaction with the other voices heard from within the narrative of Voltaire's history. Even if the anecdote were to serve no secondary purpose, it could be considered one of the most clearly *story*-like features in Voltaire's histories, both by constituting a self-contained, complete narrative and by creating a literary 'illusion' by

[436] Episodic anecdotes in *Jacques le fataliste* include those concerning Mme de la Pommeraye and the abbé Hudson, both of whom manage to thwart destiny.

[437] This interest was not shared by Dr Johnson. He was so irritated by the obsession of Mrs Thrale's mother with foreign affairs that, as Ingrams writes, 'he began to write in the newspapers about imaginary battles between the Russians and the Turks. When Mrs Salusbury discovered the deception she was furious and they were not reconciled for several years'. See R. Ingrams, ed., *Dr Johnson by Mrs Thrale* (London: Chatto & Windus/The Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 131.

imitating fictional narrative.[438] Analysis of this *story* feature may reveal a multiplicity of manifestations and functions.

In the 'vaste moisson de l'histoire', anecdotes are clearly not the main crop. Their apparent purpose in historical narrative can be assumed to be that of providing entertainment through their curiosity value. Yet, in the 1756 edition of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire added six short explanatory paragraphs to chapters XXV-XXVIII at the beginning of the section devoted solely to anecdotes, a degree of attention which suggests functions in excess of entertainment. This addition expresses a perceived need to defend his unusual section on anecdotes within a 'serious' work of history. In his defence, the narrator displays a deep awareness of the strong degree of popular interest in the private lives of public figures. He vindicates his satisfaction of this desire by claiming the need to provide accurate, true and entertaining personal details of the monarch, rather than merely adding to innumerable collections of anecdotes concerning Louis XIV, a genre referred to as 'l'histoire anecdotique de Louis XIV' and more often based on fiction rather than on history.[439] The justification for such exceptional inclusion of anecdotes in history, is that it further illuminates the greatness of the monarch and his times:

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[438] Barthes would consider such extra details in narrative as creating an 'illusion' if they seem functionally useless, which he called 'l'effet de réel': 'Les «détails inutiles» semblent donc inévitables: tout récit, du moins tout récit occidental de type courant, en possède quelques-uns'. R. Barthes, *L'Effet de réel* in *Oeuvres complètes de Barthes, II 1966-1973*, ed. E. Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 474-479, (p. 480).

[439] In Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*, the comte Mosca boosts the prince of Parma's pride which has been dented by the Duchesse Sanseverina, until the moment where he believes that 'l'histoire anecdotique de Louis XIV n'avait pas de page plus belle que celle qu'il venait de fournir à ses historiens futurs', Bk II, Ch. 14. The implication is that anecdotes about Louis XIV were fictive creations, just as the prince of Parma's self-constructed image is a fiction.

> Louis XIV mit dans sa cour, comme dans son règne, tant d'éclat et de magnificence, que les moindres détails de sa vie semblent intéresser la postérité, ainsi qu'ils étaient l'objet de la curiosité de toutes les cours de l'Europe et de tous les contemporains. (*SL*, 890)

That defence also highlights the innovative, deliberate inclusion of both the public and the private spheres in Voltaire's histories.

The contemporary definition of anecdote was not a uniform or universally agreed one. Voltaire defines anecdotes as, 'petits détails longtemps cachés', a rendition which echoes the definition in S. Johnson's *Dictionary*, 'Something yet unpublished, secret history'.[440] Both of these definitions of *anecdotes* are devoid of the prescriptive or judgmental element provided by the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* which understands anecdotes more in the sense of 'insider' stories, even hinting at salacious details, not hitherto brought to light, primarily about the secret and private lives of monarchs:

> Des Mémoires qui n'ont point paru au jour, et qui n'y devroient point paroître, parce qu'on y parle, ou avec trop de liberté, ou avec trop de sincérité, des moeurs, et de la conduite des personnes de premier rang.[441]

Whilst the Trévoux definition refers mainly to the memoirs of courtesans, the historical narrator in Voltaire's history places strict emphasis on his source being none other than the writings of the monarch himself and hence, a genuine source of illustrations of the monarch's many extraordinary qualities. Such a defence of essentially subjective texts quite counteracts the historian's theoretical discussions on the elusive *vérité* of history. Yet, focusing on the king's memoirs, permits those anecdotes to be deemed both 'utiles' and 'précieuses' and this qualification forms the basis of textual justification for inclusion of anecdotes in history:

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[440] Johnson, S., *Dictionary* (London: [n. pub.], 1755).
[441] *Dictionnaire de Trévoux [Dictionnaire universel françois et latin]* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1721).

> Les anecdotes les plus utiles et les plus précieuses sont les écrits secrets que laissent les grands princes, quand la candeur de leur âme se manifeste dans ces monuments; tels sont ceux que je rapporte de Louis XIV. (*SL*, 890)

That description post-dates the main bulk of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (forming part of the passage added in 1756) and so may be said to constitute a persuasive defence of anecdotes as a separate constituent within a work of history. In keeping with the status and nature of history, anecdotes come with an alleged guarantee of being well-researched, entirely factual and not even partly fictional. The *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*'s earlier definition also emphasises another feature of anecdotes, one which had attractions for Voltaire, the sensational journalist. This is the use of salacious or private details which allows the historian an opportunity for criticism or condemnation, either directly in the anecdote itself or through its wider implications. Although no direct mention of secondary functions is made by the narrator regarding historical anecdote, such functions must be explored.

In considering the nature and contribution of anecdote, the narrative voice also draws attention to 'le nom d'*anecdote*' and refers to the classical examples of Plutarch and Procopius. The historian appropriates the mantle of classical authority by allowing the narrator to stress the Greek origins of the word, meaning precisely, *unpublished.* Examples of classical biographers, who wrote history based extensively on private anecdote, are used by the narrator in support of a more elaborated definition of the historical anecdote as one which must neither subjugate a 'vérité historique' to strictly moral purposes nor contradict public history already in existence. Of the two classical writers mentioned, the narrator is more severely critical of Procopius's work. Voltaire's

phrase 'une satire, dictée par la vengeance' evokes images of the recently-published *Voltairiana* (1748, 1749), the collection which incorporated Desfontaines's *Voltairomanie* (1738) and aimed many violent personal attacks against Voltaire's own character and attitude. The latter satirical work, which included many *-ana* against which Voltaire had been given scant opportunity for self-defence, may have been a catalyst for the historian's purposeful attempt to position himself above hearsay and gossip. To this end, the narrator emphasises that any historical anecdotes are to be strictly researched and must not include accounts of domestic details, personal weaknesses or the erroneous memoirs of contemporaries. The *unpublished* material, or the anecdote, must not be the vehicle for fiction or gossip to enter the serious, historical text. Instead, it must be interpreted as unpublished or unofficial or even hitherto unnoticed details which simply do not form part of the traditional, archival history whose function is to provide litanies of battles, strategies and diplomatic activities. Voltaire's definition of historical anecdotes represents an attempt to salvage the genre from fiction and satire and to re-integrate it into history.

Part of the appeal apparent in many of Voltaire's works, from *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton mis à la porté de tout le monde* to histories such as *Histoire de Charles XII* or *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, derives from their relative brevity and conciseness.[442] The narrative delivers a succinct *story* account using memorable images, particularly in anecdotes of varying lengths. The attraction of the anecdote is inseparable from the narrative style of his histories and is an integral part of the

[442] Menant employs the term 'économique', with regard to Voltaire's *contes*. In Voltaire, *Contes en Vers et en Prose*, I, p. xxvii.

storytelling method used. This skill was already apparent in Voltaire's earlier writing, for example, in the famous anecdote of Newton's apple, first told in the *Lettres philosophiques*. Coupled with his distinctive succinctness is a display of his skill in assessing a complicated, specialist text, whether scientific, philosophical, or historical, in order to present its key message in an attractive, accessible, popular or anecdotal form. Voltaire is equally successful in re-writing and reducing to pithy extracts contemporary works - like his *Extrait des sentiments de Jean Meslier*, deemed 'un trésor'[443] - which circulated as clandestine philosophical manuscripts.[444] Accessibility and brevity are key elements in all of these texts and G. Artigas-Menant writes of this process:

> La tactique éditoriale est la même [pour toutes les oeuvres philosophiques clandestines réduites par Voltaire], il s'agit d'un «trésor» de format réduit, facile à imprimer en quelques jours.[445]

The anecdotal voice recounts stories which have different functions and degrees of significance within the historical text. Both the usage of anecdotes and the efficacy of their integration into the historical narrative, appear to contribute towards brevity and accessibility and deserve closer analysis.

In *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, the reader is reminded that personal matters and anecdotes will be dealt with in the section on anecdotes:

> La vie privée de Louis XIV, les particularités de sa cour et de son règne tiendront une grande place. (*SL*, 620)

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[443] 16 février [1762]. Voltaire to Charles Augustin Feriol, comte d'Argental, and Jeanne Grâce Bosc Du Bouchet, comtesse d'Argental. D10333.
[444] Voltaire, *Extrait des sentiments de Jean Meslier* in *Mélanges*, 455-501.
[445] Artigas-Menant, G., 'De l'austérité au sourire: Voltaire et les manuscrits philosophiques clandestins' in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Jacques Van Den Heuvel* (Paris: Champion, *forthcoming*).

> Nous verrons dans les chapitres résérvés à la vie privée et aux anecdotes comment mourut Louis XIV, au milieu des cabales odieuses de son confesseur, et des plus méprisables querelles théologiques qui aient jamais troublé des esprits ignorants et inquiets. (*SL*, 888)

It might be expected that the historian would reserve all anecdotes for inclusion solely in this section.[446] However, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is interspersed with explanations and digressions in the form of entertaining anecdotes, although slightly less dramatic in nature and fewer in number than in *Histoire de Charles XII*. The narrative style is entertaining and informative, whilst anecdotes embroider events with personal detail which better illustrates the situation, background or person in question, such as in the case of Cromwell. The text's ambiguous attitude to Cromwell combines both his success as a leader and his 'barbarie', a conflicting representation embodied in the phrase, 'cet usurpateur digne de régner' (*SL*, 671). However, it is the short anecdotal portrait of how he had the Portuguese ambassador's brother hanged, which delivers ultimate judgement on the man.

In both histories, anecdotes in the main historical narrative are interwoven with observations or critical comment by the narrator so that, as the entertaining voice beguiles, an observing, critical voice may offer a secondary, proleptic meaning (Charles XII and chess) or an alternative reading (Cromwell). These are voices through which lessons in morality or in principles could be expounded. The alternative voice provides

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[446] Anecdotes were carefully selected for inclusion in history and Voltaire wrote to correspondents specifically demanding anecdotes on various topics other than the private life of Louis XIV: 'Quand je vous ay demandé des anecdotes sur le siècle de Louis 14, c'est moins sur sa personne que sur les arts qui ont fleuri de son temps'. Voltaire to Nicolas-Claude Thieriot, [c.15 July 1735.] D893.

commentary on topics as varied as war, personal behaviour, morals or religion. For example, in order to emphasise the extreme nature of the emergency created by a civil war, the text focuses attention on two anecdotes and an accompanying explanation that a mere list of victorious heroes and political intrigues cannot suffice to recapture the real horror of historical events:

> La plupart de nos historiens n'étalent à leurs lecteurs que ces combats et ces prodiges de courage et de politique; mais qui saurait quels ressorts honteux il fallait faire jouer, dans quelles misères on était obligé de plonger les peuples, et à quelles bassesses on était réduit, verrait la gloire des héros de ce temps-là avec plus de pitié que d'admiration. (*SL*, 663)

Other textual illustrations of extreme behaviour which follow include that of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld commanding a hanging in revenge for the beheading of a gentleman from the other faction. The narrative entertains but the critical voice within the anecdote adopts a tone of wry irony:

> Et ce duc de La Rochefoucauld passe pourtant pour un philosophe. Toutes ces horreurs étaient bientôt oubliées pour les grands intérêts des chefs de parti. (*SL*, 663)

This prompts reflection on the part of the reader who is asked to judge the Duc de La Rochefoucauld (as earlier, Cromwell) and to question received wisdom and general perceptions. Ultimately, anecdotes involve the calling into question of preconceived ideas, such as the nature of truth or the futility of war.

Continuing the anti-war theme, this critical voice comments on politics within history and provides a witty criticism of civil war which grafts easily onto the entertaining anecdotal voice. This is evident in the sharp depiction of the king's cousin, Mademoiselle, who is recorded as firing the Bastille cannon herself to disperse all obstacles in the way of bringing in the wounded. Thus, war is again linked with

destruction as she is, metaphorically, shot down in the king's estimation and loses all hope of ever becoming queen:

> Et le cardinal Mazarin, qui savait l'extrême envie qu'avait Mademoiselle d'épouser une tête couronnée, dit alors: «Ce canon-là vient de tuer son mari.» (*SL*, 663)

Historical and political mistakes are often illustrated through ironic comments in anecdotes about great or famous people. In one discriminating comment on the particularly cruel nature of civil wars, the critical voice depicts the queen of Spain throwing a most un-regal tantrum while the rest of Europe draws up and dissolves treaties deciding the future of her country:

> Quand ce nouvel affront fut connu à la cour de Madrid, le roi fut sur le point de succomber à sa douleur; et la reine, sa femme, fut transportée d'une si vive colère qu'elle brisa les meubles de son appartement, et surtout les glaces et les autres ornements qui venaient de France: tant les passions sont les mêmes dans tous les rangs! (*SL*, 798)

While this civil war anecdote cedes priority to a voice which engages in more general observations on human nature and behaviour, on other occasions, a politicised, critical voice emphasises the futility of war and, specifically, the hypocrisy of civil war and the politics surrounding it. The two voices of criticism and of observation are intermeshed in the commentary on civil war and in the observation regarding Queen Mary's treatment of her brother. Irony can be considered an ever-present feature of both voices. For example, the observer voice is quick to note, with irony, that disputes between monarchs break all the rules of decency observed by private individuals:

> S'il y a quelque justice sur la terre, il n'appartient pas à la fille et au gendre du roi Jacques de le chasser de sa maison. Cette action serait horrible entre des particuliers; l'intérêt des peuples semble établir une autre morale pour les princes. (*SL*, 786)

Grafted onto the historical anecdotes, this voice of observation echoes Saint-Réal's theoretical comments on learning from the private mistakes of public figures. However,

Saint-Réal is interested in novel rather than history and, unlike Voltaire, does not value political history:

> Il arrive quelque chose de pareil dans les bons esprits, en lisant l'Histoire comme il la faut lire, c'est-à-dire en y considérant les Grands par ce qu'ils ont de plus personnel et de plus séparé de leur qualité, par les illusions de leur esprit et les faiblesses de leur coeur, par le détail de leur intérieur, leur vie secrète et domestique, [...] et non point par leur bonne ou mauvaise Politique, qui ne regarde que les Grands comme eux.[447]

The difference between Saint-Réal's practice and the observer voice in Voltaire's history is that the first author is interested in models of moral behaviour above criticism of state policy, while the latter draws an inexorable link between bad monarchical behaviour and bad global and state policy.

The demonstration of the futility of war in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* also appears throughout *Histoire de Charles XII* where many anecdotes have an allegorical quality in addition to their proleptic nature. Somewhat evocative of the Troglodytes who are used as an allegory on government and on virtue in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, one anecdotal voice in *Histoire de Charles XII* offers the entertaining tale of belligerent Zaporozhye Cossacks, or 'des Zaporaviens, le plus étrange peuple qui soit sur la terre'(*HC*, 345). To earn such a superlative, these people really must be very different indeed and the critical voice ensures that they are represented in a significantly symbolic way. As analogies are drawn between the Zaporozhye way of life and the unnatural life of war, the similarity between them and the Swedish army becomes apparent. Just as the Swedish army recruits from home, leaving no one to work the land, the *Zaporaviens* are depicted as having no place for women and as stealing children from the surrounding countryside to be indoctrinated and trained in their way of war. In the

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[447] Saint-Réal, *Don Carlos*, p. 15.

winter, they sleep in groups of up to five hundred men, just as the Swedish army does on the march. They fear nothing and live freely, facing death almost as bravely and as purposefully as does Charles XII. The use of *intrépidité* further underlines the irony in the analogy:

> Ils affrontent la mort pour le plus léger butin avec la même intrépidité que Charles XII la bravait pour donner des couronnes. (*HC*, 345)

The criticism of this unnatural warmongering people implicitly extends to the warmonger Charles XII, whose extended absence is shown to have weakened Sweden in numerous ways.

Voices of observation and criticism also emerge from within anecdotes to examine questions of religious dispute. In an anecdote prefaced by the introductory phrase, 'la vanité de la politique', the dying Queen Anne recalls the son of James II, described as 'ce frère dont elle avait mis la tête à prix malgré elle.' The queen offers him the throne if he renounces Catholicism:

> S'il avait voulu renoncer à la religion romaine qu'on regarde en Angleterre et chez tous les protestants comme la mère de la tyrannie, elle l'aurait fait désigner pour son successeur. (*SL*, 887)

This example of Protestant sectarianism is echoed in an equal but opposite example about Catholics. Religious disputes are criticised, to show the prejudice of both parties in their demonising of each other and their surprise at any humanity on the part of the other side. This anecdote recounts how le comte Peterborough saved Barcelona's citizens from rout and pillage by Germans, Catalans and locals and then honourably withdrew from the city as promised. The observer voice depicts the amazement of the Spaniards at such magnanimity on the part of heretics:

> Les Espagnols étaient confondus de voir tant de magnanimité dans les Anglais que la populace avait pris pour des barbares impitoyables, parce qu'ils étaient hérétiques. (*SL*, 838)

For Voltaire, the opportunity to expose religious prejudice seems too good to exclude from history because a similar example surfaces in the anecdote about the queen of Portugal who seeks approval from the pope to re-marry. The critical voice makes the point that a monarch, queen of her own country, should surely be in charge of her own private life and should not have to refer to the pope, a figure frequently and clearly depicted in this history as being merely the monarch of another state:

> Elle obtint de Rome une bulle pour épouser son beau-frère. Il n'est pas étonnant que Rome ait accordé cette bulle; mais il l'est que des personnes toutes-puissantes en aient besoin. (*SL*, 706)

The anecdote presents one aspect of the queen's character, allowing the critical voice to interject with an extensive musing on the worldly power of popes, before the narrative voice intervenes to dismiss the anecdote as a textual digression, interesting only for its 'singularité'. This is a prime example of the interweaving of different voices within the one narrative anecdote. It can be clearly inferred that the primary aim of this anecdote is to provide an opportunity for the critical voice to reflect on the 'bad habit' involved in religious practices:

> Il y a toujours deux poids et deux mesures pour tous les droits des rois et des peuples; et ces deux mesures étaient au Vatican depuis que les papes influèrent sur les affaires de l'Europe. Il serait impossible de comprendre comment tant de nations avaient laissé une si étrange autorité au pontife de Rome, si l'on ne savait combien l'usage a de force. (*SL*, 706)

As there are 'deux poids et deux mesures' for kings and for the people, so each anecdote in history can also be read on at least two levels and hence can be seen to exist for at least two reasons. While ostensibly in the text to entertain the reader, the selected anecdotes also serve other purposes, whether that of commentary on family politics, the

futility of war, the hypocrisy of civil war politics, demonstration of religious prejudice or reflection on the degree of 'bad habit' involved in religious practice.

As a naturally digressive form when included in history, the anecdote provides an ideal forum for the ironic, observer voice or the critical voice to draw a conclusion from a short, neat digression, before either continuing or returning to the more mainstream historical narrative. One of the passages most often cited from *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is the episode wherein Queen Anne chooses Mme Masham over the duchesse de Marlborough and, in choosing a new 'favourite', changes the entire direction of English politics and history. The import of this story is summarised with style:

> Quelques paires de gants d'une façon singulière qu'elle refusa à la reine, une jatte d'eau qu'elle laissa tomber en sa présence, par une méprise affectée, sur la robe de Mme Masham, changèrent la face de l'Europe. (*SL*, 871)

This anecdote is just one amongst several which call into question any notion of unconnected events of history, whilst giving an insight into how Voltaire views history and historical forces.[448] That the occurrence of one small event may determine a second, is to suggest a certain tendency towards causation and many of the anecdotes recounted provide evidence of such causation in Voltaire's history.[449] This feature is particularly apparent in the chapters on anecdotes in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* although not so much in evidence within the greater historical narrative in either *Histoire de Charles XII* or *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*.

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[448] Many similar examples of causation conveyed through anecdote exist in Voltaire's histories, such as where Russia's modernisation is attributed to one pivotal figure figure, a Genevan called Le Fort: 'et sans ce Genevois la Russie serait peut-être encore barbare'. *Anecdotes sur le Czar Pierre le Grand* in *Oeuvres historiques*, pp. 321-388, (p. 323).

[449] In his article on causation in Voltaire's history, or 'les petites causes', Brumfitt notes that causation is just one, minor element of Voltaire's history and that it is not linked with the 'doigt de Dieu' of early moralistes but with a rational and social source. J.H. Brumfitt, 'Cleopatra's Nose and Enlightenment Historiography' in *Women and society in Eighteenth-Century France: Essays in Honour of J. S. Spink*, ed. E. Jacobs et al (London: The Athlone Press, 1979), pp. 183-194.

## ***Particularités et anecdotes sur le règne de Louis XIV.***

Aware of the historian's innovation in the use of anecdotes and of the particular significance thus accruing to the historical anecdote, it is necessary to examine the section devoted exclusively to anecdotes in the chapters entitled 'particularités et anecdotes du règne de Louis XIV'. If the definition of anecdotes in the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* seemed wholly insufficient for the use of anecdotes in Voltaire's histories, the definition by H. Grothe in his work *Anekdote* may be more apt. Grothe considers the particular interest provided by historical anecdotes or 'geschichtliche Anekdote', to be an essential ingredient of a history of any major figure:

> Die Anekdote ist ein Kind der Geschichte. Mit Prokop, Herodot u.a. hat es begonnen. Spätere Historienschreiber, Männer und Frauen, die ihre Lebensrückblicke, ihre Erinnerungen, ihre Tagebücher oder ihre Briefwechsel sammelten, sichteten oder herausgaben bezw. herausgeben liessen, haben stets dazu beigetragen, dass Geschichte und Anekdote innig verbunden geblieben sind. Das gilt sowohl für einzelne, bedeutsame Szenen aus Geschichtsabfolgen wie auch für das Verhalten von Persönlichkeiten, deren Charakter oder Lebensart blitzartig an einer Anekdote verdeutlicht werden konnte und kann, aber es gilt ebenso sehr für unerhörtes und mitteilenswertes Darstellen von menschlichem Verhalter überhaupt.[450]
>
> [Anecdotes are the offspring of history. It all began with Procopius, Herodotus and the like. Later writers of history, whether men or women, who collected, sorted, edited and, in particular, permitted the editing of their diaries, correspondence, memoirs and memories, continued to strengthen the close link between history and anecdotes. This link includes single, significant scenes from historical events. It also includes the study of the behaviour of personalities whose character or way of life can be immediately illuminated through a simple anecdote. However, it is especially valid for hitherto unknown and valuable depictions of human behaviour.]

In the light of that assertion of an inseparable link between history and anecdote, it is opportune to analyse the section on anecdotes in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. It must also be considered whether there exists a marked theoretical difference between anecdotes in a work of history and anecdotes about historical figures, such as those found in *Anecdotes*

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[450] Grothe, H., *Anekdote* (Stuttgart : J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971), p. 87 [My translation].

*littéraires* by the abbé de Raynal. In his work, Raynal writes a series of anecdotes, primarily about the literary figures of the seventeenth century. In the *Avertissement du libraire* of this work, he identifies the emphasis as:

> C'est moins le talent que le caractère qui rend intéressante la vie des hommes.[451]

However, just because they recount tales of incidents in the lives of historically famous figures who wrote literature, that does not make these worthy of place in a serious work of history. Raynal's anecdotes lack verisimilitude, appear to be of dubious origin and their didactic and dogmatic tone is highly moralistic. In contrast, the narrator in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* defines his theoretical project for anecdotes much more subtly than does Raynal and herein lies the distinction between simple anecdotes about historical figures and anecdote in a work of history.

The historian in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* reiterates his claim that he caters for popular demand by providing anecdotes and that, since the Ancients and Augustus, this demand has always existed where a leader is truly great. Once these classical precedents have been established and some extra degree of authority obtained for the unusual project of historical anecdotes, the text launches into a litany of Louis XIV's first loves. It is the second section of this history which gradually demonstrates precisely why Louis XIV and his century merited such rare, high praise. As the text generally insists, greatness is not merely in a title, a sentiment which would be echoed by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, 'En un mot, la grande puissance seule ne fera jamais un

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[451] Raynal, G-T., *Anecdotes littéraires ou histoire de ce qui est arrivé de plus singulier, & de plus intéressant aux Ecrivains François, depuis le renouvellement des Lettres sous François I jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Durand, Pissot, 1750), Tome I, Avertissement du Libraire, p. iv.

grand homme.[452] Voltaire declared that the sections devoted to anecdotes could be considered as the dash of colour added to give the entire picture better definition.[453] Within *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, the chapters on anecdotes illustrate the background of the life and times of Louis XIV. A multi-faceted Louis is depicted in the roles of man, husband, lover, servant and worshipper of pomp and luxury and then, in turn, as lonely, religious, fallible and mortal. This revealing picture shows the coexistence of trappings of supreme power with the unease of one who could not trust even his closest friends:

> Le roi, trompé dans ses choix, dit qu'il avait cherché des amis, et qu'il n'avait trouvé que des intrigants. (*SL*, 914)

There is the public Louis XIV, the man who set the fashions from one end of Europe to the next, and his private life, with its backdrop of betrayals, mistresses and striking luxuries. Just as in a historical novel, the concentration is on anecdotes revealing the private life of the historical figure but, these anecdotes are founded, for the most part, on fact or on hearsay, whereas a historical novel is fictionally based.

In highlighting the advances of society and the arts flourishing under Louis XIV, the anecdotes draw another essential parallel, in the comparison between Louis XIV and Louis XV. Although later writers were sufficiently generous or servile to equate the two 'siècles', this was not the case in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*.[454] As Brumfitt notes, the comparisons are accentuated by the author in a way which is far from innocent, 'emphasising the achievement of the age of Louis XIV' and so, forcing an inevitable parallel:

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[452] Saint-Pierre, C. abbé de, *Annales politiques* (Londres: [n. pub.], 1757), p. 501.
[453] 15 mars 1751, Voltaire to Charles Augustin Feriol, comte d'Argental, from Potsdam, D4420.
[454] A typical example is the anonymous *Dialogue entre le siècle de Louis XIV et le siècle de Louis XV* (La Haye: 1751), p. 160. 'Il sort de ces deux [17e+ 18e] Siècles une lumière ravissante qui donne le plus beau lustre à l'Univers'.

Contrasting it with the artistic decadence and political inertia of the France of Louis XV.[455]

It is not surprising to find that what features under the broad heading of *particularités et anecdotes* does not include the dogmatic type of moralistic anecdote favoured by the abbé Raynal. The readership targeted by historical anecdotes may be a populist one, but the innocence of the text is deceptive. The entertaining voice introduces historical anecdotes about a mixture of issues, each barely cloaking the critical voice which comments on extremely varied topics. These include the French people, cardinals, excess, corruption and political irony (Ch. XXV); tyranny and the Carmelites, hypocrisy, love, poison, superstition, injustice and rumour (XXVI); published letters, lessons and reiterated justifications of the separate section on anecdotes (XXVII); the old Louis XIV declining in personal sadness and religious fanaticism (XXVIII). In each case a judgement is conveyed, through the voices of observation and criticism.

The defence of Fouquet, 'cet infortuné', imprisoned for embezzlement, redounds to the detriment of the image of Louis XIV. The unconventional, moral logic vouchsafed is that Fouquet's contemporaries were as guilty as he was in matters financial and therefore that it was purely bad luck and the monarch's envious streak which placed him in prison (*SL*, 902). The reader is presented with a check list of Fouquet's supporters from 'l'illustre Mme de Sévigné, Pellisson, Gourville, Mlle Scudéri' to 'plusieurs gens de lettres' who inveigh against his hypocritical persecutors with Colbert at their head and followed by Le Tellier, Séguier and others (*SL*, 889-900). The voice of criticism seizes the opportunity to draw a parallel between Fouquet's guilt

[455] Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian*, p. 48.

and that of Mazarin, but only to judge and acquit Fouquet in the text and to find Mazarin guilty. The occasion is used for a revisionist view of history but also for further condemnation of hypocrisy through the unflattering depiction of the king's envious streak. It also suggests a degree of impartial appraisal, as whilst both monarchs are duly criticised, hypocritical authority is condemned outright. Here again, the entertaining, narrating façade of anecdotes links with the voices of observation and critical commentary.

From the details of court life to the monarch's glorious entry into Paris with his new queen and the mystery of the man in the iron mask, all is presented, with a mixture of curiosity and awe, as a 'good read' and textual, *story*, entertainment. The anecdote of the man in the iron mask is prefaced by narrator's comment that most historians either ignored or chose to overlook this great and extraordinary historical event. The importance is underlined of including in history the details of such a state secret. In reality, this anecdote emphasises the existence of two truths, two histories, two realities and two answers. Although no explicit assertion is made about the suspicion of regal blood behind the iron mask, the last anecdote of the entire section allows this to be implied by focusing on a parallel situation. This is the tale of Mme de Maintenon's visit to a convent in order to disabuse a girl of her claim to regal blood. In a clever conclusion, the question is resolved for the reader by the girl's alleged, arrogant retort:

> «Madame, lui dit cette personne, la peine que prend une dame de votre élévation, de venir exprès ici me dire que je ne suis pas fille du roi, me persuade que je le suis.» (*SL*, 963)

This anecdote comes from an apparently plausible source (le couvent de Moret) although no names are mentioned (cette personne). In so much as it both relates to the question of the man in the iron mask and intrigues the reader with questions of Louis

XIV's illegitimate children, it is simultaneously a source of entertainment and of critical commentary. The anecdotes in this section fulfil a polemical role in history while retaining all their appealing features. By concluding the section on anecdotes with a standard literary tale suggesting intrigue, the author further underlines his more populist target readership.

Other anecdotes lead towards a recurring discussion of reality, truth, history and 'romans' by the internal narrator. In one such case, the anecdotal voice describes the court of the young Louis XIV at Versailles, 'un séjour délicieux', as having an 'air de grandeur', which eclipses all others in Europe (*SL*, 906; 907). Superlatives no longer suffice to capture the magical quality of an era which attracts exceptional talents and throws up extraordinary characters like the duc de Guise, who is depicted as a figure from courtly romances of old. Here, the anecdotal narrative turns to images and analogies in fiction and romance to present an actuality which exceeds the normal bounds of real experience. In keeping with their extraordinary characters, le grand Condé and the duc de Guise are referred to as 'les héros de l'histoire et de la fable' (*SL*, 905). Similarly, festivities must far surpass any inventions of novelists:

> Ces fêtes, si supérieures à celles qu'on invente dans les romans, durèrent sept jours. (*SL*, 907)

Thus, a novelistic quality of the period is employed in the narrative focus on personal and court anecdotes related to Louis XIV, but one beyond even the most innovative creations of novelists. While the enthusiasm of the anecdotes recounting Louis XIV's youth is in fine balance with the 'triste' nature of his subsequent decline, the anecdotes still maintain their entertaining tone to deflect from this negative end. The voices of observation and criticism are there to comment on the details of this section on

anecdotes and, in turn, this leaves the entertaining anecdotal voice to deliver the final verdict on Louis XIV's reign and allows the tone to be a positive and persuasive one.

From the perspective of narrative style and textual organisation of history, the anecdotal voice is connected to voices of entertainment, observation and criticism, keeping readers informed and inviting them to interpret signs and hints which are mirrored in the history. Moreover, it is the very tight and organised structure of *Histoire de Charles XII* and the unusual composition of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* which guarantee the success and influence of the anecdotal voice within a narrative which tends towards story and philosophy rather than history.

The need to justify the unusual inclusion of anecdotes in a serious history continues to resurface, as in the assertion that every detail relating to Louis XIV is of potential interest and that a serious historian should provide a true version, rather than have the anecdotes unreliably presented by a less scrupulous writer. Such justification provides the narrator with the freedom to include all sorts of material on allegedly historical grounds:

> Je croirais même que ces intrigues de cour, étrangères à l'Etat, ne devraient point entrer dans l'histoire, si le grand siècle de Louis XIV ne rendait tout intéressant, et si le voile de ces mystères n'avait été levé par tant d'historiens qui, pour la plupart, les ont défigurés. (*SL*, 929)

The result is a group of chapters which deliver a mixture like liquorice allsorts, with anecdotes composed of many different shapes and colours. The unusual historical practice of indulging in the techniques of a fictional genre, and especially one which verges on gossip and hearsay, is further defended within the text by repeated recourse to

emphasis on historical accuracy. This is covertly achieved by the storyteller's entertaining tone and overtly through the constant textual justifications for the innovative development. One such defence even appears at the very end of the section reserved for anecdotes:

> Tant de détails pourraient rebuter un philosophe; mais la curiosité, cette faiblesse si commune aux hommes, cesse presque d'en être une, quand elle a pour objet des temps et des hommes qui attirent les regards de la postérité. (*SL*, 963)

In sum, there is a wide gulf between Raynal's historical anecdotes and Voltaire's anecdotes in history, because of the latter's insistence on primary historical sources and his rationale for their inclusion in history. In Voltaire's histories, an entertaining, narrative façade of anecdotes links with the voices of observation and criticism to convey commentary, structure and characterisation in a pithy and appealing form.

## CONCLUSION

At the outset of this chapter, the narrative design of history was found to make significant use of duality in telling the *story* of history. This feature is most evident in *Histoire de Charles XII*'s bi-polar focus on two great monarchs. The dualism may be read as an attempt to encapsulate many different opinions and extant versions of history in one vision of reality within a single narrative.[456] In addressing issues of truth, deception and multi-faceted reality, this duality invites reflection on wider issues and alerts the reader to the coexistence of surface text and subtext within each history.

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[456] Noting a similar duality in Voltaire's *contes*, Starobinski writes: 'Car la réalité est toujours double - comme [Voltaire] nous le fait entendre sans relâche dans ses contes'. J. Starobinski, 'Voltaire et le malheur des hommes' in Genève-Lettres, Guide des Écrivains, 6 (déc. 1978), 15-32, (p. 32).

Voices of observation and criticism speak and advise on diverse subjects other than history and, with some more explicit than others, irony emerges from the subtext. This duality was further facilitated in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* through the history's conception as a social history rather than as a traditional mono-focus royal hagiography.

In the study of characterisation, history was again seen to address wider issues rather than merely providing traditional, detailed physical portraits of the protagonists. Instead, elements of characterisation were cleverly conveyed through literary features such as proleptic or symbolic motifs and anecdotes. The separate section on anecdotes in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* shows a further development both of the use of motifs and of the pervasive character dualities found in *Histoire de Charles XII.*

All of these features of structure, characterisation and anecdote are subtle, literary stylistic elements, not normally found in traditional, contemporary history. Superficially, they entertain the reader. However, they also draw attention to the *story* of Voltaire's history and to literary devices such as the presence of different voices within and beneath the official historical text. As well as highlighting and constituting a part of the literary, 'story-like' quality of Voltaire's history, these voices alert the more attentive reader to the subtleties of history and steer the uncircumspect towards an authorial viewpoint, even if this entails the inspiration of doubt. In addition, the literary devices provide space for many other voices, some of which will be apparent in the study of *je* in the historical narrative. The unusual combination of *historical* anecdote and *storical* characterisation is a prime constituent of the *literariness* of Voltaire's histories.

# *JE* VOLTAIRE: NARRATIVE VOICES

*Car JE est un autre [...]*
*la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, ou vient d'un bond sur la scène.*[457]

Both the layers and nuances in the historian's voice, engaged in historiographical comment, and the complexity of some *story* voices, such as those associated with characterisation and anecdote, portray Voltaire's texts as anything but monologic or mono-thematic.[458] The complex composition of the texts requires dissection to reveal the functions of those other voices, complementary *story* voices, especially the more obvious ones tagged with *je*, which are audible beneath and within the historical narrative proper.[459]

Wherever the historian's voice comments on history or historiography, regardless of the subject under scrutiny, the homogeneity of focus of this voice allows its identification throughout the text. The actual *story* of history is commented upon by voices of writer, author, polemicist, public figure, narrator, editor, contemporaries and others. These *story* voices introduce non-historical material, themes, comments, philosophies and stories into the narrative of history. Recurring and emerging from within Voltaire's texts with clarity and recognisable individual consistency (if not

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[457] Rimbaud, A., Correspondence in *Oeuvres complètes de Rimbaud* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1963), p. 270, A Paul Demeny, 15 mai 1871.

[458] 'Monologic' is a term used by Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) wherein Dostoevsky's dialogic or polyphonic interplay of characters is contrasted with the monologic subordination of characters to the single viewpoint of the author in Tolstoy. The examination in this thesis of Voltaire's production of polytonal history bears no relation to such dialogic criticism. See Bakhtin, M., *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* ed. and trans. C. Emerson, intro. W.C. Booth (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[459] This assumes that a historical narrative -in the traditional sense- is primarily focused on the chosen historical subject and on the development and consequences of historical events.

necessarily a collective homogeneity) their degree of urgency and irony varies according to issue and tone.

The studied use of personal pronouns in the text and the associated, untagged voices of irony and insinuation suggest more than artless repetition. Both *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* show a high incidence of personal pronouns such as *je*, *nous* and *on*.[460] The insertion of *je* in contemporary traditional histories is not uncommon but is invariably associated with an attempt by the author to exert authority over the text, or with exposition of his personal views. Amongst contemporaries, this tendency was most obviously displayed by Larrey. In Voltaire's history, however, personal pronouns feature throughout the text in varying tones, with historiographical, personal, polemical and contemporary notes. These pronouns demand further examination to assess the extent to which they represent different voices, or result in a distinctive, polytonal narrative texture in the histories.

With no one single theme or tone, with different narrative voices and with Voltaire as master composer of all the historical pieces, it must be both acknowledged that this historical writing is no eighteenth-century homophonic composition, and anticipated that the voices may not always be entirely harmonious. The focus of this chapter will be on the textual effect of Voltaire's uses of *je* and other personal pronouns in history.

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[460] In his article, Lebois broaches the subject of *je* in the historical text, but instead of analysing *je* in order to isolate the many different tones and personae which it embodies, he limits his analysis to opposing the voices of narrator and *je* which represent one single, proud Voltaire: 'Au souci du narrateur de prouver qu'il dit vrai, s'ajoute la coquetterie légitime de François-Marie, fils de François Arouet, notaire, et futur historiographe de Louis XV, de montrer ses nobles relations'. Lebois, p. 299.

## Historiographical Voices: *Je* of Direct Speech.

An unusual historiographical voice must be considered in any examination of alternative and unexpected voices in Voltaire's histories: the *je* of direct speech pronounced by historical protagonists is an incongruity in terms of the historian's theories of history and of the modernity of the text, which argued against all uses of direct speech. Numerous instances of the *je* of direct speech occur in both *Histoire de Charles XII* and in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and the speakers include Charles XII and Louis XIV. Many of those monarchs' memorable utterances were recorded in contemporary diaries and letters and Voltaire quotes Mme de Sévigné, Mme de la Fayette or Mme de Maintenon, amongst others, as his sources for such direct quotations (e.g. *HC*, 130, 217, 219, 220; *SL*, 743, 803, 807, 871). The historian also draws on genuine documents, including treaties, for direct speech and unusual thought, deliberately choosing to quote those who represent enlightened ideas, such as Christine, Queen of Sweden, Lescaro, doge de Gênes and Leopold, the duc de Lorraine (*HC*, 677; *SL*, 756, 791). Direct speech is also used to highlight the damage caused to the duc d'Orléans by an ill-advised remark made by Dr Boudin. The doctor is quoted as saying that he understands nothing of the measles epidemic sweeping Paris and the court at the time. As a result of his remarks, the public believed that the duke was guilty of administering poison (*SL*, 945). The quotation serves to draw attention to the doctor's foolishness, to undermine blind faith in doctors' knowledge, to condemn public hysteria and to vindicate the wronged duc d'Orléans.

The historian might be accused merely of copying contemporary practice when he places words in the mouths of his protagonists for convenience and effect, regardless

of veracity. More serious might be the accusation of double standards, since the editor's voice in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* criticises other authors for such practices. In a footnote, the page previous to the Boudin episode, the editor demands to know on what basis the author of *Mémoires de madame de Maintenon* has the audacity to quote madame la duchesse de Bourgogne speaking to her nephew, or to quote Louis XIV and various princes and ministers as if he had heard them speak (*SL*, 944).[461] The editor's charge of fabricated quotations seems rather audacious in the course of a work wherein the author also quotes directly from monarchs and other dignitaries. The oral nature of contemporary society was such as to allow the circulation, and consequent inclusion in history, of likely or well-known quotes from great people. Although the historian's voice has already denigrated the practice, it obviously suited the historian to accuse another author of blatantly incorrect use of direct speech, while embellishing his own text, regardless of the inconsistency. The atemporal authority of the historian's voice is too absolute to be shaken by such minor, specific inconsistencies, yet the incongruity is clear. That apparent contradiction is one of many which undermine any suggestion of harmony between voices.

This historiographical *je* of direct speech is one of the *story* voices which aim to entertain through appealing narrative. It is a clear example of the discrepancy and contradiction, juxtaposition and contrast apparent between the theory and practice of historiography in Voltaire.

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[461] See Editor's Voice below.

## Historiographical Voices: *Je* of Narrative Design

*En tant que le narrateur peut à tout instant intervenir* comme tel *dans le récit, toute narration est, par définition, virtuellement faite à la première personne.*[462]

In addition to the unusual methods of characterisation in *Histoire de Charles XII* and the innovative insertion of anecdotes in history in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, a further distinctive aspect of narrative design which is particular to Voltaire is apparent in both histories, that is, use of *je* to control the design and direction of the text.[463] This *je* of narrative design is a historiographical voice which polices the sequence of events and flags changes in theme or focus. Closely linked to the theoretical historian's discussion of control, the tone of this *je* presents the *story* and brooks no dissent, privileging its own ersatz authority with an emphatic use of the personal pronoun *je*:

> Voici ce que je sais de véritable sur cet événement. (*HC*, 271)

It also intervenes in history, whether as *je, nous*, or *on*, to define the boundaries of thematic focus, avoiding digression or overlap within sections by steering the text with sign-posts such as:

> Nous verrons dans les chapitres réservés à la vie privée et aux anecdotes comment mourut Louis XIV... (*SL*, 888)
>
> Mais je considère ici l'état où il laissa l'Europe. (*SL*, 888)
>
> On parlera de ces fanatiques dans le chapitre de la religion. (*SL*, 828)

The organisational aspect of this *je* of narrative design, while acknowledging the existence of an infinite amount of material which could be included in the work, draws the readers' attention to exclusions and barriers, both of which form part of the anatomy

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[462] Genette, *Figures III*, p. 252.
[463] See Ch. 4.

of history. In drawing attention to the artificial boundaries of a work of history, space is provided for unusual inclusions, which are in turn highlighted by the *je* of narrative design. Whilst the historian's voice addressed the theories of inclusion, exclusion and design, this historiographical voice is directly related to the specific practice of steering the reader through a history which also contains much non-historical material. Typical examples of this voice which draw attention to material which is not strictly historical, are the following which occur in reference to Molière and to a decision on textual exclusion:

> Je ne parle ici que de ce service rendu [par Molière] à son siècle: on sait assez ses autres merites. (*SL*, 1012)
>
> Je voudrais ici pouvoir rendre justice à tous les grands hommes qui ont comme lui [Newton] illustré leur patrie dans le dernier siècle. (*SL*, 1022)

Both of these last statements underline the almost arbitrary, unconnected selection of material in this historical work. This in turn, draws attention to the artificial, inconclusive nature of any work of history, or history as a construct. However, contemporary historians did not view their work from this wide angle, nor would they have allowed such an assertion of the arbitrariness of subject, content and focus to be articulated, or even suggested, within their texts. The same voice of narrative design invariably adopts a conversational tone whether explaining a particular change of focus, returning from a digression or giving textual directions:

> N'ayant pas voulu rompre le fil des affaires d'Angleterre, je me ramène à ce qui se passait dans le continent. (*SL*, 771)

In combination with the historian's voice which theorises on control, this *je* marks the introduction to *story* sections and to anecdotes, 'Il m'a confirmé toutes les particularités que je vais raconter' (*HC*, 172). Going beyond the strictly theoretical programme of the

historian's voice, the *je* of narrative design provides space for explanation, either of historiography or of the background of the text. The explanation frequently has a brusque tone. In one such example, the *je* of narrative design assumes the role of the text controller, in charge of presenting the idea that anecdotes are suitable and useful material in history:

> Les anecdotes les plus utiles et les plus précieuses sont les écrits secrets que laissent les grands princes, quand la candeur de leur âme se manifeste dans ces monuments; tels sont ceux que je rapporte de Louis XIV. (*SL*, 890)

Within the continuum of the history, this historiographical *je* often works in tandem with other narrative voices, and with the historian's theoretical voice, creating an atmosphere of narrative complicity. This occurs especially where the narrative offers textual asides and parentheses and where the tone is one of collusion with the reader, such as in the following parenthesis where the narrator confides extra information to the reader-collaborator, '(car il ne voulait jamais parler français)' (*HC*, 203). It is this untagged voice of narrative fraternity which is the more apparently neutral element of the text, partly because it is subtly invisible, providing explanations without drawing attention to their origins.

Often occurring in an anonymous or impersonal form, this tone of narrative complicity frequently accompanies the narrative design *je*. That *je* is a marker at the beginning, the ending and at the boundaries of the history, and is frequently intertwined with historiographical comments and organisation of the text. In the following examples it is this *je* of narrative design which imparts an explanation, 'j'ai appelé' or maps the history's composition for the reader, 'j'ai fixé'. Its personal element is closely linked to apparently neutral, 'historical' explanations which are highly subjective ones.

These last are examples of narrative complicity and are asserted as facts, using persuasive conjunctions or linkages such as, 'parce que', 'encore parce que' and 'c'est en effet':

> J'ai appelé ce siècle celui de Louis XIV non seulement parce que ce monarque a protégé les arts beaucoup plus que tous les rois ses contemporains ensemble, mais encore parce qu'il a vu renouveler trois fois toutes les générations des princes de l'Europe. (*SL*, 1022)

> J'ai fixé cette époque à quelques années avant Louis XIV, et à quelques années après lui : c'est en effet dans cet espace de temps que l'esprit humain a fait les plus grands progrès. (*SL*, 1022)

In this case, the *je* of narrative design provides clear narrative direction and, in tandem with it, the chosen subject is defined in a seemingly neutral but firm manner. These historiographical voices may be considered a *story* voice in history because they contribute to the establishment of a closer relationship with the reader, rather than just addressing theoretical historical matters, and because they facilitate the expansion of the historical text to include *storical* features. Clearly, they corroborate the historian's theoretical voice already examined. Far from neutral in chosen content, historiographical voices combine to seize the opportunity to present a novel definition of historical subject and to laud the most wonderful of all possible centuries.

## Personal Voices: *Je* of Arouet-le-jeune

One common manifestation of *je* within the history is the temporal, biographically defined voice of Voltaire historian in person who, as practising historian, cites his conversations and correspondence with eminent people as historical sources. Initially, this personal *je* represents the young man of society who, to distinguish his aspirant status, may be designated as 'Arouet-le-jeune'. Arouet may have already

assumed the pseudonym Voltaire but his youthful eagerness and ambition to be regarded as an important figure (with acquaintances in princely and ambassadorial circles) show through this personal *je* more than would be the case in the mature and sophisticated Voltaire, later to be correspondent of Frederick II of Prussia and Catherine II of Russia. Arouet is anxious to establish due rank and importance for himself in society and much of this eagerness animates the hand of the young author of *Histoire de Charles XII.* Amongst examples of this ambition is the voice which recalls a conversation with the son of Augustus II, king of Poland. The comment is introduced with 'voici', the voice of narrative design already encountered. The prince imparts the 'noeud secret de cet événement' to the young writer in person, who in turn, by referring to the private revelation as an honour, emphasised through the repetition of 'me', underlines the fact that this intimacy is not within the reach of every historian:

> Voici le noeud secret de cet événement, selon ce que le maréchal de Saxe fils du roi Auguste m'a fait honneur de me dire. (*HC*, 285) [underlining not in original]

The same voice implies similar, exclusive access to knowledge and information with regard to Stanislas, king of Poland. The importance of such rare but essential access for a historian is underlined by the emphatic reiteration of 'me':

> Le roi de Pologne, Stanislas, qui m'a fait l'honneur de m'apprendre la plupart de ces particularités, m'a confirmé aussi, que... (*HC*, 466-7) [underlining not in original]

This young man of society reiterates, with feigned nonchalance, the fact that he met and conversed with Stanislas Leczinsky, king of Poland and father of the future Queen of France. The actual textual phrasing suggests that, on this occasion, he may merely have been in the king's company as the monarch was recounting the tale:

> C'est ce que je lui ai entendu conter. (*HC*, 271)

Nonetheless, the implication is that the young writer has eminent and royal acquaintances. Not only does this augment the credibility of the historian, it also greatly inflates the image of the young Arouet as a personage at ease in high society. Apparently quite casually, Arouet refers to his contacts, both verbal and written, with many eminent sources, from the général Fierville to comte de Villelongue and from Stanislas, roi de Pologne to comte Poniatowski. This *je* voice also underlines his acquaintance with a certain Fonseca, described by Poniatowski himself as a renegade, but whom, as Von Proschwitz notes, the historian chooses to quote and to shower with distinctions:[464]

> Le comte Poniatowski m'a dit lui-même, et m'a écrit...
>
> Le médecin Fonseca Portugais, juif établi à Constantinople, homme savant et délié, capable d'affaires, et le seul philosophe peut-être de sa nation [...] Je l'ai fort connu à Paris; il m'a confirmé toutes les particularités que je vais raconter. (*HC*, 373)

In England, the same *je*, or man of high society, makes the acquaintance of, amongst others, the Duchess of Marlborough and Lord Bolingbroke. He refers to the Duke of Marlborough and to Robinson 'ministre d'Angleterre' with an ease that intimates some familiarity and which also re-emphasises that Arouet frequents the company of dukes, envoys and ambassadors:

> Ces particularités m'ont été confirmées par madame la duchesse de Marlborough. (*HC*, 312)
>
> C'est ce que cet ambassadeur m'a raconté. (*HC*, 512)

Just as in *Histoire de Charles XII*, Arouet *je* fuses with the historian's voice in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* to draw attention to the quality of his historical sources and contacts, using the first person pronoun *me*:

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[464] Von Proschwitz, fn. 7, p. 373.

> Ceux qui l'ont bien connu m'ont dit que... (*SL*, 831)

However, in the later history, Arouet is slightly more mature in age and in experience. With years and growing status, there is less evidence of a young Arouet who feels the need to make constant reference to society people. Instead, reference is only made to famous names as sources when a fact or element of the history is in question, as in the case of the alleged poisoning of the Queen of Spain, or in the question of whether or not Fouquet was released from gaol before his death:

> Je demandai à Mme la duchesse de Saint-Pierre, qui arrivait d'Espagne, s'il était vrai que ces trois personnes fussent mortes avec la reine; elle me donna des attestations que toutes trois avaient survécu longtemps à leur maîtresse. (*SL*, 928)

> La comtesse de Vaux , sa belle-fille, m'avait déjà confirmé ce fait; cependant on croit le contraire dans sa famille. (*SL*, 901)

One type of reference from Arouet *je* persists in both histories. That is his pride in a special English connection, found, for example, in 'Milord Orkney m'a dit...' (*SL*, 833). This connection will merit further discussion.

The development of the Arouet *je* voice from the blusterer of *Histoire de Charles XII* to the more subtle, historical researcher *je* of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, is particularly noteworthy. The earlier *je* initially registers a need to establish himself in society by proving position through connections, while the later *je* is the Voltaire who has already been forced to relinquish the court title of *historiographe du roi.* Furthermore, he has shed the need to be considered according to title or rank or connection. Although not always flagged by *je*, this is the voice of the proud Arouet who would wish to vaunt his own independence and his own position, despite the lack of title. Indeed, later in the same history, he writes rather ironically and self-referentially of the futile and transient nature of titles:

> Les titres ne servent de rien pour la postérité: le nom d'un homme qui a fait de grandes choses impose plus de respect que toutes les épithètes. (*SL*, 748)

The tone is defiant but so superficially neutral that it could easily be overlooked. However, irony flows easily from the writer who is now much more secure in the status he has attained. This appears in the voice of the confident Arouet who, through his numerous exiles, now stands slightly outside society, whether philosophically or in physical distance. It is striking that, from the beginning, Arouet *je* adopts an independent voice which speaks in the aristocratic tone which he believes appropriate to him.[465] This lifelong conviction is reminiscent of Marivaux's fictional Marianne who is similarly convinced of her blue blood, with parallel lack of grounds.[466] The process of development of Arouet-le-jeune into Voltaire the independent crusader could be said to be represented by this *je*. The voice belongs to one who was sufficiently aristocratic to adopt a cause, whether with épée or pen in hand, and to defend it and his ideas to the very last. This voice is more recently depicted in the celebrated image of Voltaire brandishing a philosophical pen in place of an aristocratic sword.[467]

## Personal Voices: The English *je*

Voltaire's serial exiles and his sense of physical and imposed marginality are features of his life which pervade his writing. In this connection, England was one of his favourite foils for France. Hence, it is not in the least surprising to find English

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[465] 8 juin [1744]. Voltaire to Louis François Armand du Plessis, duc de Richelieu. D2989. 'le bâtard de Rochebrune'. See also M. Wachs, 'Voltaire's claim to illegitimacy: an overlooked document', *SVEC*, 302 (1992), 1-5.

[466] Marivaux, *La vie de Marianne* [I-IV, 1731] (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1978).

[467] Drawing by Savignac for the exhibition poster of 'Voltaire: un homme, un siècle', at the Bibliothèque nationale de Paris, 1979.

references throughout *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and a personalised English *je* in the text. The references by Arouet *je* to Bolingbroke, Robinson, Marlborough, Orkney and others have already been noted. In the earlier history, reference is made to contacts and sources such as Fabrice, whom Voltaire met while in England.[468] The English *je* exploits to the full these various acquaintances and his English experience in general, to which references are made when least expected, either to make a contemporary comparison favouring England and the English, or to flaunt his knowledge (e.g. *SL*, 763; 823; 987; 993). It is worth noting that one of the great men cited by the English *je* as being above the frivolity of titles is none other than an Englishman, the Duke of Marlborough, whose widow Voltaire visited at Blenheim Palace during his English exile (*SL*, 834).

Abundant references are made, particularly in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, to the English alternatives which made such an impression on the young Voltaire. These form an important part of the critical contemporary dimension of the history. It is even, most irreverently, suggested that the English seriously challenge Louis XIV for dominance of the century which, he suggests, could also be called 'le siècle des Anglais' (*SL*, 998). Considerable familiarity with English society and customs is paraded on numerous occasions as, for example, when the English *je* dons his 'English gentleman' persona to recount that the French writer Saint-Évremond chose to live contentedly in London rather than return to his homeland. The English *je* insinuates that, based on his own positive personal experience of England, he approves of this choice. This English *je* connects with Saint-Évremond through a mutual friend:

> Le marquis de Miremond son ami, me disait autrefois à Londres... (*SL*, 902)

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[468] Von Proschwitz, Intro., p. 21.

The voice echoes that of Arouet *je*, with more serious implication added by the English connection to a flagrantly dissident, anti-French *je*. As such, this voices marks the start of the indirectly critical dimension of the text. The voice further reminds the reader of the writer's own exile and perhaps of his vociferous approval of English society, already emphatically asserted in Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*. It might be strongly suspected that the English *je* wishes to extol the virtues of living 'en homme libre et philosophe' in England, as Saint-Évremond chose to do (*SL*, 902). The underlying suggestion is that this is a liberty frequently not possible in France, either in Voltaire's day or before it.

While Arouet *je* and English *je* can be separated out, it is possible to trace a link between these personal *je* voices and an expansion of the themes of independence and alternative within Voltaire's histories. Initially apparent in *Histoire de Charles XII* as the urge to establish the emerging writer as a member of the highest echelons of society, it is evident that by the time of composition of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, extra elements of pride and conviction have entered the text. Arouet thrives in a locus, whether Sweden or England, which was not France. This emerges from the growing complexity and importance of commentary which intimates criticism of contemporary France. As the writer develops his individual tone and position, it is also worth noting that each *je* is completely unapologetic. In keeping with Voltaire's aristocratic pretensions and with the liberty which he enjoyed in England, his texts, unlike those of the rather slavish Grimarest, never apologise for choosing kings as their subject matter. In this sense, such personal voices are perfectly in keeping with the authoritative and authorial control asserted in prefatorial and theoretical declarations. The combination of personal voices

of Arouet *je* and the English *je* present a confident and rather formidable front of aplomb and individuality.

## Contemporary Voices: Campaigning *je*

As is already evident, contemporary references abound in the histories. This copiousness would suggest that one of the primary motives for writing history is, in the Machiavellian manner, not simply to reconstruct or recount the past but to instruct contemporary society and to inspire improved governance of society or country. Thus, the writer Voltaire chooses the medium of recent history as a forum for commentary on, and criticism of, the present. Not only does this explain the personal, self-referential voice, but it also underlines the strong similarities between the historical text and circumstances of the eighteenth century which were familiar to readers. The criticisms therein centre on facets of contemporary life which were displeasing and of great importance to the writer.

The final chapters in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* focus on religious disputes and on corruption within, and power struggles between, institutional religions. As this is one of the issues on which Voltaire *philosophe* had very strong opinions, it is not surprising that the tone and presentation of the chapters differ sharply from the rest of the work of history, as Voltaire gradually becomes an increasingly active and vocal advocate of

'tolérance'.[469] Although it is not yet the hour of the focused *écrasez l'infâme* campaign, the undertones both of the deist and the admirer of freedom and tolerance, already apparent in the early *Lettres philosophiques*, become more eloquent and defiant here, constituting a very passionate voice within the text. As the tone becomes gradually both more disgusted and more heated, the campaigning *je*, here advocating religious tolerance, bursts through the text. Although it predates the social campaigner and future advocate of tolerance, this contemporary, personal voice may be closely linked to Voltaire, insofar as it heavily satirises religious institutions. That defiant voice steers the narrative of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and earlier, *Histoire de Charles XII*, in new, different ways.

The campaigning *je* is a curious, musing, incredulous and satirical voice which is like a metamorphosis of the earlier, gentler, ironic voices. Having already established that fanaticism is based on financial or power interests, this *je* attempts to rationalise the type of people who become fanatical religious leaders. Fusing with the tones of the historian researcher, the campaigner recalls a conversation with the maréchal de Villars in which the latter spoke about the great power of one young fanatical leader who used religion as a useful aid and also as an excuse for his megalomaniacal quest for authority and absolute power over his followers:

> J'ai entendu souvent de la bouche du maréchal de Villars qu'il avait demandé à ce jeune homme comment il pouvait, à son âge, avoir eu tant d'autorité sur des hommes si féroces et si indisciplinables. Il répondit que, quand on lui désobéissait, sa prophétesse, qu'on appelait *la grande Marie*, était sur-le-champ inspirée, et condamnait à mort les réfractaires, qu'on tuait sans raisonner. Ayant fait depuis la même question à Cavalier, j'en eus la même réponse. (*SL*, 1061)

[469] Cheymol writes that tolerance is the biggest single motivating factor behind enlightenment history, especially Voltaire's history: 'Historien par vocation, tolérant par instinct, même s'il est intolérant parfois par tempérament, Voltaire incarne dans son oeuvre la solidarité de l'histoire et de la tolérance.' Although this is an important element of Voltaire's history, it is certainly not the sole interest or motivating force, as Cheynol appears to suggest. G. Cheymol, 'Tolérance et histoire à l'aube des Lumières' in *L'Histoire au Dix-Huitième Siecle*, Colloque d'Aix-en-Provence (1975) (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1980), pp. 203-211, (p. 207).

The followers are deemed to be 'fanatiques' and the climate in France at the time is described as one conducive to 'ces excès du fanatisme...' (*SL*, 1063). The historian having checked the story with Cavalier, the campaigning *je* juxtaposes religion with 'sans raisonner' and is forced to accede to condemnation of religious followers. Furthermore, an ironic addition echoing the earlier (milder) tones of the English *je* and exiled author, notes that such excesses could not have occurred in England or in Germany because, unlike in France, enlightenment and religious tolerance existed in those two countries where, 'la philosophie commençait à dominer'.

It is particularly opportune that the campaigning *je* should emerge at a point in the text of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* where the suppression of fanaticism is being considered as one of the direct consequences of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The negative effects of the 1685 revocation provide a recurring motif in this history, a convenient symbol of a religion which poisons government. This is particularly common in the chapters on government and finance. In chastising Louis XIV for his strategic error, the ironic comment is made that France would be richer if the Protestant, skilled workers had not been hunted out and if tolerance had prevailed. This spectre, the motif of the revocation of the edict of Nantes, casts its shadow across the text of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The threat persists as the textual economic expert, against a backdrop of splendour, fun and gaiety, dispassionately describes some of the damage it caused to society. The campaigner comments using the more neutral *on*, constituting a source of contemporary observation and criticism:

> 1685, année mémorable par la révocation de l'édit de Nantes. On voyait alors des scènes bien différentes: d'un côté, le désespoir et la fuite d'une partie de la nation; de l'autre, de nouvelles

> fêtes à Versailles; Trianon et Marly bâtis; la nature forcée dans tous ces lieux de délices, et des jardins où l'art était épuisé. (*SL*, 930-1)

With customary irony, the observation is made that any religious persecutions carried out before the final revocation of the edict of Nantes, 'l'édifice qui était déjà miné de toutes parts', took place far from Paris so as not to disturb the regal festivities (*SL*, 1054). The great exodus of 'une partie de la nation' which fled after the revocation included some of the most skilled craftsmen in France. The loss caused to the entire nation is emphasised by the campaigner's praise for skilled French artisans followed by depiction of these artisans fleeing abroad with their trades, skills and secrets:

> Mais les calvinistes, qui avaient le secret du fer-blanc et de l'acier, emportèrent, en 1686, ce secret avec eux, et firent partager cet avantage et beaucoup d'autres à des nations étrangères. (*SL*, 968)

The obvious implication is that France lost wonderful assets, due to an unwarranted, destructive and unenlightened policy of religious intolerance under Louis XIV. Through use of irony and the language of economics, it is suggested that Louis XIV was obsessed by a chimera, that is, by the idea of the conversion of the masses to one religious belief:

> S'il n'eût pas cru qu'il suffisait de sa volonté pour faire changer de religion à un million d'hommes, la France n'eût pas perdu tant de citoyens. (*SL*, 979)

The recurring motif of the edict of Nantes can be interpreted as a quiet, general warning to kings not to waste precious manpower or resources. Since its effects could still be felt in Voltaire's contemporary France, the criticism is current and biting, its irony adding to more widespread calls in contemporary literature for greater tolerance. The observation that the exodus of a skilled body of the population was as dreadful as the very religious intolerance itself is echoed in many of Voltaire's other works, as it was in

the works of his contemporaries. The criticism in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is as ostensibly innocent as that in the fictional narrative, *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, where Diderot subtly criticises the end of Louis XIV's reign in the Kanoglou episode, depicting the exodus with bittersweet irony:

> Pour comble de bonheur, Kanoglou se laissa persuader par des fanatiques, qu'il était de la dernière importance que tous ses sujets lui ressemblassent [...] et il en chassa du Congo plus de deux millions qui n'avaient point cet uniforme, ou qui refusèrent de le contrefaire.[470]

Similarly, in the fictional *Lettres persanes*, Montesquieu also satirises the detrimental effect which the revocation had on French society, noting:

> Il ne restait à la dévotion qu'un second coup à faire: c'étoit de ruiner l'industrie: moyennant quoi, l'Empire tomboit de lui-même, et, avec lui, par une suite nécessaire, cette même religion qu'on voulait rendre si florissante.[471]

It is clear that Voltaire is far from alone in his criticism of a revocation which demonstrated religious intolerance and had economic and social consequences. However, it is unusual that such strong contemporary criticisms, more usual in contemporary fictional and philosophical works, should permeate history in such a reasoned and economically focused exposition. Traditional historians either supported or condemned the revocation according to their religious affiliations. It is equally unusual that such a strong campaigning voice advocating religious and social tolerance should appear in a work of history which aimed to avoid the censors' attention, particularly as *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* was intended, at least initially, to gain acceptance by contemporary authorities.

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[470] Diderot, D., *Les Bijoux indiscrets* in *Oeuvres de Diderot*, pp. 1-234, (p. 213-4).
[471] Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* in *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 129-372, Lettre LXXXV, (p. 259).

One of the hallmarks of the ironic method of dealing with religious affairs or disputes is the technique employed by the campaigning *je*, that of cleverly reducing matters to questions of power, money or territory. This lies behind the very logical economic assessment of the detrimental effects of the revocation of the edict of Nantes which is carried out within the historical narrative. This expansion of history by relating it to matters financial and universal, this broader vision, is one of Voltaire's persistent and urgent focuses, a tendency noted by Cassirer:

> For it is Voltaire's intention to raise history above the 'all-too-human', the accidental and merely personal. [...] It is not the sequence of events which interests Voltaire, but the progress of civilisation and the inner relationship of its various elements.[472]

Pervasive irony is particularly effective in the histories. Although not directly tagged with *je*, it emanates from a fount of contemporary commentary, criticism, scepticism and observation and is discernible from the tone and attitude of the text. Through irony, the small and the petty are exposed, as in institutional religious bickering over sleeves and commas. Such matters are reflected as ephemeral, in opposition to history which should be global. Through contemplation of the greater expanse of humanity, the campaigning *je* advocates a wider view of history. In focusing on petty details, it shows that intolerance is the antithesis of universality and progress.

In the section on religious disputes in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, the irony in general comments is confirmed and underlined by the acidic campaigning *je*. Although contrary to the proclaimed universal, detached and august historiographical *je* which introduces a new project of history, the campaigning *je* nonetheless constitutes a most

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[472] Cassirer, E., *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 216.

effective way of concluding and sealing the author's arguments for religious tolerance.

## Contemporary Voices: *On*, *Nous*, Editor Voices

Among the literary devices which contribute to the special texture of Voltaire's historical text may be included the many extensions of *je*, already seen under the guise of *on* and *nous*, and also an editor's voice, which may be either a new voice or an extension of the historiographical voice already identified. For various reasons, these voices fall under the rubric of contemporary voices.

In both histories, the device of *on* is used to reflect general public opinion, or common belief, and this constitutes the most frequent use of *on* as a voice in the text. The voice of general public opinion often predicts the most likely outcome of a situation, and, curiously, is invariably found to be incorrect, thus giving more depth to the text and forcing the reader to reconsider both common perceptions and the historical events which actually occurred. This technique is quite common in Voltaire's histories. It is widely used to introduce what is apparently certain and is believed by most people. This renders the subsequent change, interpretation or actual outcome more dramatic, as the following instances suggest:

> On croyait qu'elle [Léopold] tiendroit quinze jours à cause des fortifications que le roi Auguste y avait faites. Le conquérant l'investit le 5 septembre, et le lendemain le prit d'assaut. (*HC*, 270)
>
> Avec toutes ses forces on ne douta pas qu'il dût détrôner le czar. (*HC*, 321)
>
> On crut très sérieusement procéder en règle en mettant ce même prix à l'assassinat d'un cardinal premier ministre. (*SL*, 658)

> On fut encore plus surpris de le [Louis XIV qui prend le pouvoir] voir persévérer [...] sa résolution prise une fois, il la maintint jusqu'au dernier moment de sa vie. (*SL*, 687)
>
> On pensa que c'étaient là les motifs secrets de cette paix de Rysvick [ ...] Cette idée si vraisemblable n'est pas vraie. (*SL*, 788)

This use of *on* includes the metaphorical prodding of the reader to question apparent truths by demonstrating that appearances can be deceptive. Once again, this returns to the question of *vérité* and the overturning of the idea of actual, immutable, historical fact.

At times, the historian's voice will ingeniously associate itself with the reader, speaking as one by using the term *on*, either as a preface to including some information in the text, or in anticipation of the reader's doubts regarding an inclusion, or purely as a cover for making an observation on the tastes of the reading public:

> On est plus avide, surtout en France, de savoir les particularités de sa cour que les évolutions de quelques autres États. (*SL*, 890)

In these instances, the historian's voice no longer purely considers theoretical questions of historiography but adopts a deceptive chameleon-like form of complicity.

In many cases, the *on* voices correspond directly to some of the *je* voices already considered and could be seen as extensions or variations of these voices. One such example is the historiographical *on* which comments on the structure of the history, echoing the *je* of narrative design. Another is the historiographical *on* which discusses the content and direction of the work at the beginning of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and which mirrors the theoretical *on* that discusses the project of Charles XII in the *Discours sur l'histoire de Charles XII.* Initially, this latter voice insists that the work is not just

another fictive history about Charles XII and, subsequently, is eager to affirm that the author is not writing yet another biographical or anecdotal account of Louis XIV:[473]

> Ce n'est pas seulement la vie de Louis XIV qu'on prétend écrire; on se propose un plus grand objet. (*SL*, 616)

This same *on* is also concerned with the narrative design and the very different nature of this later history. It reflects the voice of the historiographer who addresses contemporary and future readers of the work, constantly drawing their attention to the difference of his project:

> On croit necessaire de dire à ceux qui pourront lire cet ouvrage qu'ils doivent se souvenir que ce n'est point ici une simple relation de campagnes, mais plutôt une histoire des moeurs des hommes. (*SL*, 723)

> On ne s'attachera, dans cette histoire, qu'à ce qui mérite l'attention de tous les temps, à ce qui peut peindre le génie et les moeurs des hommes, à ce qui peut servir d'instruction et conseiller l'amour de la vertu, des arts et de la patrie. (*SL*, 620)

> On n'entreprendra ici d'examiner si le Cardinal Mazarin a été un grand ministre ou non: c'est à ses actions de parler et à la postérité de juger. (*SL*, 685)

On occasion, *on* probes the readers even further, directly addressing either their suspected incredulity or their ignorance and then providing enlightenment for them on some subject. This is a further manifestation of the combination of authoritative and didactic tones and concerns in the histories:

> On ne croirait pas que les souverains eussent obligation aux philosophes. Cependant ... (*SL*, 1001)

Alongside each *je*, there is both this collective *on* and the untagged, deceptively neutral, statement. Such duplication of *je* voices underlines the double-ness in the histories, where messages and philosophies are received in 'stereo' at several levels in the text.

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[473] *Discours...*, p. 55.

From within this labyrinth of interwoven narrative voices emerge various different *nous*. While relatively infrequent in *Histoire de Charles XII*, *nous* provides *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* with yet more vocal variations. On occasion, *nous* can be an annex of *je*, reflecting the aspiration of embracing the reader and of encouraging the wider reading public to think more laterally. The *nous* involves the reader in thoughts which closely reflect the personal beliefs and ideas of the writer. Thus, the reader is drafted into the writer's revolt against religious figures assuming temporal power, is assumed to share Voltaire's own personal horror of growing old, being insignificant and forgotten, that awful fate of so many unknown writers and artists, 'jeté à la voirie, et partageant ainsi le sort, qui l'avait indigné, d'Adrienne le Couvreur':[474]

> Les esprits étaient surtout révoltés contre le jésuite le Tellier. Rien ne nous irrite plus qu'un religieux devenu puissant. Son pouvoir nous paraît une violation de ses voeux. (*SL*, 1082)
>
> Nous l'avons vu [le comte de Lauzun] mourir fort âgé et fort oublié. (*SL*, 918)

Where comments on religion or war are connected with *nous*, the voice is deeply ironic. There is an appearance of purposely avoiding *je* and of hiding behind *nous*, in order to appear superficially neutral or detached. Here *nous* does not necessarily include *je*, or even the wise reader, and is even more ironic. *Nous* is often introduced to reflect the more eccentric habits of mankind and, later, to show the foibles of humanity in a quite ironic light. *Nous* proceeds to comment on matters ranging from religious disputes to the folly of war:

> Nous appelons ceux de ce parti du nom général de protestants, quoiqu'ils soient divisés en luthériens, calvinistes et autres, qui se haïssent entre eux presque autant qu'ils haïssent Rome. (*SL*, 622)

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[474] Roche, R., *Avant-propos* à *Voltaire en sa correspondance: ses combats, Vol. IV* (Bordeaux: L'Escampette, 1997), p. 8.

> Nous nous épuisons d'hommes et d'argent pour aller détruire aux extrémités de l'Asie et de l'Amérique. Les Indiens [...] nous regardent comme des ennemis de la nature humaine, qui accourent du bout du monde pour les égorger, et pour se détruire ensuite eux-mêmes. (*SL*, 784)

From *nous* implying *I* and *nous* referring to 'others', *nous* then expands more fully to mean *nous, the French* and further grows to depict *nous, humanity*, finally drawing the reader into the text. On occasion, the same use is made of *on*, where the voice of the historical narrator, through observations such as the following, invites the reader to identify with the writer as a Frenchman:

> On les [Condé et Turenne] admirait dans leurs retraites comme dans leurs victoires, dans leur bonne conduite et dans leurs fautes mêmes, qu'ils savaient toujours réparer. (*SL*, 673)
>
> Il en résulte que nous devons en France l'opéra et la comédie à deux cardinaux. (*SL*, 895)
>
> Nous avons eu des historiens, mais point de Tite-Live. (*SL*, 1009)
>
> C'est principalement dans la sculpture que nous avons excellé. (*SL*, 1020)

This *nous* of pride-in-being-French is at odds with Eurocentrism and contradicts the proposed more universal vision of mankind in the same histories.

On occasion, *nous* can be seen as an effort to create a distance between the text and *je*, in contrast to *je* which has often been connected with many different personal aspects of Voltaire. The gulf created by *nous* helps the reader to identify with the author as a French man, sharing the same points of reference and cultural background. From this perspective, *on* and *nous* are more than variants on the essential *je* voices, they are actually persuasive textual voices which attempt to reach and to influence the more sceptical reader, using an alternative all-embracing approach. *Nous* identifies more easily with things French, rather than European or global, through an eagerness to persuade the reader, but this introduces a further discrepancy between theory and practice in Voltaire's history.

Many voices of commentary, often tagged by *je, on* or *nous*, co-exist in Voltaire's histories. They range widely from the *story*, narrator's voice, 'Ce que je raconte ici paraîtra peut-être peu croyable' (*HC*, 228), to the untagged, well-informed, almost didactic voice of complicity who adds, 'car tel est l'usage chez les Turcs' (*HC*, 170). A different voice of commentary in the text is that of the editor whose voice stands outside the *story* of history being narrated. The editor has already been seen to be in theoretical conflict with the *story* practice of using direct speech within the historical narrative.[475] This voice may often be distinguished due to its temporal dimension. It frequently comments on the history with hindsight or retrospectively, sometimes to confirm proof of sources but often to criticise critics who have dared to question an idea or fact within the work. It is in the editor's textual variations and the notes to the texts of *Histoire de Charles* XII and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* that the incensed voice of the wronged Voltaire can be so easily recognised. So different to the cool, confident assertions of historical authority, this is a haughty *on* which does not react well to criticism and which responds sharply to unknown or unremarkable critics such as Nordberg or La Beaumelle, whose names would have remained in relative obscurity were it not, as Rivière notes in his thesis, for Voltaire's vehement reaction against them.[476]

In *Histoire de Charles XII*, the editor's voice retorts in a defensive, arrogant and scathing manner to Nordberg's criticism of his quoting Charles XII's Latin shout. The voice notes that not only was the critic not present when Charles XII's house at Bender

[475] See Historiographical Voices : Direct Speech *Je* of Protagonists above.
[476] Rivière, Ch II.

was besieged, but that in any case he could not have understood as he knew no Latin (*HC*, 455). Similarly, although some of the first footnotes in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* merely quote textual sources, the longest amongst them launches into an extended correction of La Beaumelle's allegedly false anecdotes and additions. These are referred to disparagingly by a deceptively neutral *on* voice as, 'des notes aussi scandaleuses que fausses' (*SL*, 678). The editor's haughty *je*, reminiscent of the tone assumed by the young Arouet *je*, later enters the footnotes and the tone is defensive and arrogant, but heated. With a contemporary note, it often evokes the personal experience of the well-travelled Voltaire:

> L'auteur, qui dans sa jeunesse eut l'honneur de le [le maréchal duc de Villeroi] voir souvent, a droit d'assurer que c'était là son caractère. (*SL*, 815)

> Je ne me souviens point d'y avoir vu ces paroles: elles ne sont ni dans le caractère ni dans le style de Guillaume. (*SL*, 808)

When not defending his territory, the editor's voice, through the medium of footnotes, also echoes or continues the theoretical voice of the prefaces and historiographical works. To this extent, the voice forms part of the contemporary discussion and programme of historiography, highlighting primary issues such as *vérité*. The editorial voice can therefore be considered as an additional theoretical voice which directly voices its approval of the text presented, whilst displaying a contemporary force in its commentary:

> On voit par ces témoignages avec quelle exactitude l'auteur du *Siècle de Louis XIV* a cherché la vérité, et avec quelle candeur il l'a dite. (*SL*, 806)

*On*, *nous* and the editor's voice underline the fusion of both *history* and *story* in Voltaire's histories, highlighting elements which are not directly addressed in the writer's theoretical historiographical writing. The wider didactic element within these

voices constitutes a faithful adherence to the enunciated views of the historian. However, the various voices, whether *on*, *nous* or the editor, are not always in harmony, or even related, and thus may also contradict each another as well as the historian's theories, providing conflicting strands of *story*, philosophy and comment, none of which is necessarily strictly related to the *history* of Charles XII or Louis XIV.

## Contemporary Voices: The Immediate *je*...

*We constantly reinterpret our history, revise it, remake it, and refake it, in the interests of our desired present.*[477]

The very contemporary nature of Voltaire's histories becomes steadily more apparent with examination of the many facets of the 'contemporary voice'. Having already encountered the contemporary, personal voices of young Arouet who had personal experience of the end of the reign of Louis XIV, it does not come as a surprise to find that many passages of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* are firmly rooted a few decades later, in the present tense of Voltaire's day.[478] Van den Heuvel has already noted that Voltaire's historical texts also reflect the movements of his real life, as where he suggests that Voltaire's fall from grace with Frederick II of Prussia is embodied in the observation in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* that, 'L'Allemagne devint un gouffre qui engloutissait le sang et l'argent de la France'.[479] Even more explicit, the word

[477] From newspaper article, 'There is something we can learn from 1798', by Prof. J. J. Lee (Prof. of Irish History, University College, Cork) in Sunday Tribune, 28 June 1998.
[478] Among the critics who draw this analogy, A. Adam suggests that Voltaire relished the opportunity to juxtapose the two reigns: 'Qui sait même s'il ne lui plaisait pas d'écrire un ouvrage qui, en faisant l'éloge du règne précédent, tournerait à la honte du gouvernement actuel'. See A. Adam, Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, ed. A. Adam (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), Preface.
[479] Van den Heuvel, J., *Voltaire dans ses contes* (Paris: A. Colin, 1967), p. 252.

'aujourd'hui' and other specific references to the time in which the author is writing appear frequently in both histories. This indicates the contemporary writer's strong desire to alert his readers to the potential parallels between past and present, to the relevance of the past for better assessment of the present.

Certain examples serve to recall the 'recent' nature of the subject of both histories and the fact that Voltaire himself remembers many of the events recounted from his own childhood and youth. Most of these references occur in chapters XXIX and XXX of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, a section which deals with the management of a country and which includes references to issues of taxation, economics and the climate in France during and after the reign of Louis XIV. The urgent relevance to the time of writing is evident, so it is not surprising that indirect references to Louis XV abound where Voltaire the economist waxes lyrical on economics. He proffers advice in this field and strongly promotes the benefits of healthy commercial activity, to which the English *je* consistently testifies.[480] Thus, the contemporary eighteenth-century voice of je-ici-maintenant enters the text, alerting the reader of 'aujourd'hui' to obvious and concealed textual parallels between past and present:

> **Aujourd'hui** [...] la baïonnette effraye plus qu'elle ne tue, et l'épée est devenue absolument inutile à l'infanterie. (*SL*, 827)
>
> Nous sentons **aujourd'hui** tout ce que le ministre Colbert fit pour le bien du royaume... (*SL*, 966)
>
> Cent fois moins de duels **aujourd'hui** que du temps de Louis XIII. (*SL*, 973)
>
> On s'aperçoit **aujourd'hui** [...] que la politesse a gagné toutes les conditions. (*SL*, 981)
>
> Il y en avait environ douze cents en 1730, de la manière dont on compte **aujourd'hui**. (*SL*, 994)

[480] Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, X, 'Sur le commerce'.

> Il n'y en avait pas pour quatre cents millions de notre monnaie d'**aujourd'hui**, en 1690... (*SL*, 994)

> Il n'en coûte guère plus **aujourd'hui** pour être agréablement logé, qu'il n'en coûtait pour l'être mal sous Henri IV. (*SL*, 994)

> **Aujourd'hui** l'industrie a ouvert mille chemins qu'on ne connaissait pas il y a cent ans. (*SL*, 997) [Bold not in original]

While not always as blatant as the above comparisons, the most remarkable features of this voice remain the links which are forged between the day of writing and the historical events recounted. Some are flagged by markers such as *depuis*, *souvent...quelquefois*, *jusqu'à nos jours*, *autrefois...maintenant* (*HC*, 96; 261; *SL*, 621; 707), and insinuate unfavourable comparisons with the contemporary reign of Louis XV, such as the criticism of the neglect of stud farms to supply the nation's cavalry:

> Ressource importante, depuis trop négligée. (*SL*, 973)

Many of these comparisons are drawn in an even more subtle way, through consistent textual references to the day of writing or the 'today' of the author. From *Histoire de Charles XII* to *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, the use of the present tense often provides a discreet link between the history recounted and its relation to Voltaire's time, by presenting an easily identifiable form of textual dialogue in the shape of clear past-present textual parallels in many different contexts:

> Il lui [au Czar] manquait d'avoir vu cette nation célèbre, qui est depuis plus de cent ans censurée, enviée et imitée par tous ses voisins. (*HC*, 261)

> Sa veuve, encore vivante. (*HC*, 141)

> Stralsund, ville devenue fameuse en Europe par le siège qu'y soutint le roi de Suède, est la plus forte place de la Poméranie. (*HC*, 248)

> Quelques paires de gants [...] une jatte d'eau [...] changèrent la face de l'Europe. (*SL*, 891)

> On voit, par ce seul coup d'oeil, quel changements Louis XIV fit dans l'État : changements utiles, puisqu'ils subsistent. (*SL*, 977)

> Loin de faire oublier Saint-Cyr, il en fait souvenir : c'est l'art de faire du bien qui s'est perfectionné. (*SL*, 971)

Many of these present-tense, contemporary references refer to urban and geographical parallels. However, as the history recounted is relatively recent history, the suspicion remains that the modern reader, more distant from the two historical periods, could be more acutely aware of the eighteenth-century insertions and comparisons than contemporaries actually were. Nonetheless, the comparisons drawn remain influential for the contemporary reader and controversial insofar as they often address polemical issues freely inserted within the historical text.

The immediate, contemporary writer assumes various guises in history, including that of a close identification with his French compatriots and readers, in reflection of common reactions and attitudes. This *je* spans the entire gamut from the critical to the empathetic. The voice is frequently that of a French writer who is witness to changes seen from the time of his youth and who, later in the eighteenth century, still enjoys or suffers their effects. It is as if the voice has prefaced each of his comments with 'We the French', in the memory of the cold winter of 1709, or about lack of news of a bedraggled Swedish army just before the battle of Pultava, or in the expression of opinions commonly held, or in the evocation of contemporary Versailles. Similarly, 'You the French' can be understood as the immediate addressees in the criticism of the French public's reaction to the visit of the Czar to Paris, a criticism which echoes other textual comments such as the earlier epigrammatic observation, 'Paris, cette ville immense pleine d'un peuple oisif' (*SL*, 774):

> Le mémorable hiver de 1709, plus terrible encore sur ces frontières de l'Europe, que nous ne l'avons senti en France.... (*HC*, 340)

> Cette armée, auparavant si florissante, était réduite à vingt-quatre mille hommes prêts à mourir de faim. On ne recevait plus de nouvelles de la Suède. (*HC*, 340)

> Mais trop de Français ne virent en lui que les dehors grossiers que sa mauvaise éducation lui avait laissés. (*HC*, 529)

> Vous avez deja vu que ... vous savez que ce qui paraît neuf n'est souvent qu'une redite. (*SL*, 754)

> Une de ces énormes fautes dont le ministère ne s'est corrigé que dans nos derniers temps. (*SL*, 988)

A similar personal, contemporary *je* voice of the eighteenth century evokes the childhood of the young Voltaire who has personally witnessed, as his readers may have done, some of the events in Paris which he now records as history, 'Je me souviens d'avoir vu...' (*SL*, 876), or 'dans ma jeunesse ...' (*SL*, 966-7). On occasion, as when writing in defence of the memory of Colbert, this voice quotes and refutes gossip or defamatory anecdotes which he had heard in his youth:

> [La réponse grossière d'un marchand à Colbert] était encore citée avec complaisance dans ma jeunesse. (*SL*, 967)

These occasions become an opportunity for the criticism of the narrow-mindedness of the contemporary population and for praising the 'esprit philosophique' which has evolved in his own time. A similar equilibrium is reached in the text of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, where Louis XIV is eulogised and Louis XV praised. Although Louis XV is usually found to be a pale shadow of his predecessor, the current monarch is not only praised on one occasion for his architectural prowess but is also explicitly named in the text. In this instance, the stunning features of architecture commissioned by Louis XIV are first listed, such as the *Louvre, une ville à Versailles, Trianon, Marly, l'Observatoire* and the *canal du Languedoc*. Subsequently, the voice praises Louis XV's attempts to rival these successes with the imminent building of the *École Militaire* and the anticipation that it might replace and surpass the *Saint-Cyr* of Louis XIV (*SL*, 971).

This reference achieves the desired effect of drawing the reader's attention to the constant comparison of the two monarchs, to the use of Louis XV as an obvious textual foil for Louis XIV and to the criticism of society under Louis XV which, while persistent, is not totally condemnatory.

The same contemporary or immediate *je*, echoing the personal English-*je* already seen, again uses England as a foil for France of the day, making comparisons between the two countries which inevitably tilt in favour of the former, 'comme chez les Anglais' (*SL*, 993). As in the *Lettres philosophiques*, England is depicted as an alternative, better model and this allows further opportunity for inherent contemporary criticism. Paris emerges from the pages of history as a city which compares favourably with Rome or Athens in their heyday and as a compulsory stop on a traveller's itinerary. Unlike London which is deemed to be free, Paris is ultimately judged as a hostile city which exiles its most worthy citizens:

> Si quelques natifs en sortent, ce sont ceux qui, appelés ailleurs par leur talens, sont un témoignage honorable à leur pays; ou c'est le rebut de la nation, qui essaye de profiter de la considération qu'elle inspire; ou bien ce sont des émigrants qui préfèrent leur religion à leur patrie, et qui vont ailleurs chercher la misère ou la fortune, à l'exemple de leurs pères chassés de France par la fatale injure faite aux cendres du grand Henri IV, lorsqu'on anéantit sa loi perpétuelle appelée *l'Édit de Nantes*. (*SL*, 982)

From the deep irony and bitterness in the above passage, it can only be presumed that the writer counts himself amongst the first group, while deeply regretting the plight of the last.

The combination of so many different elements in the immediate *je* and in the contemporary voice of criticism means that, consistently, Voltaire's historical texts have one foot in the present and one in the past. The concomitant layers of comparison

provided by the combination of *je*, *on*, *nous* and the editor's voice, whether in the history or its appendices, are clear examples of the non-historical issues introduced into these histories. The editor's voice provides such ephemeral judgements that it blatantly contradicts the stated aspiration to write for posterity. Nor do all of the *on* or *nous* voices tell the same story, with the same degree of passion, or address the same reader. These voices resound in the history, highlighting its immediate, contemporary concerns. The didactic element contained within contemporary criticism is consistent with the aspiration to inform and to inspire reflection through the reading of history. Nonetheless, the more minor, petty contemporary criticisms are a contradiction of prefatorial claims for a universal history. Moreover, the variable content of these temporal voices is a source of inherent discord and further contradiction within the text.

## Polemical Voices: *Je* and Ironic Commentary

The plurality of voices in Voltaire's histories informs the reader and inspires reflection on a variety of non-historical, often polemical, issues, but in case these methods should not suffice, the narrative also contains a persuasive running commentary. It is through this narrative channel, more often ironic than subtle, that much of the histories' vast store of wisdom, influence and comment is communicated to even the least attentive of readers.

Where textual commentary guides opinion in the surrounding narrative, irony is the powerful weapon through which many of the strongest observations, jibes,

aphorisms and comments appear in the text. Terms such as *idolâtre, gloire* and *honneur* may be interpreted both on a surface level in history and on an ironic level. They often appear deeply ironic in the context of the author's other works, ideas, campaigns and of the *philosophes'* general abhorrence of, and opposition to, both war and systematic religions.

Used in connection with military defeat, the word *gloire* suggests a subtext replete with irony.[481] The narrative declaires that the Czar may have lost ten thousand men in five battles waged against the Swedish general Lewenhaupt, but the ironic voice adds that he enjoyed the *gloire* of defeating the Swedish troops. Conversely, Levenhaupt had the *gloire* of disputing victory for three days, losing many thousands of men, but not as many as the czar, and he returns with the *honneur* of a solid defence and without actually having been routed in the end:

> Il vint donc au camp de son maître avec l'honneur de s'être si bien défendu, mais n'amenant avec lui ni munitions ni armée. (*HC*, 339)

Whilst an ironic critical narrative would emerge in full force many years later within some of Voltaire's philosophical *contes*, the earlier historical narrative is rarely free of irony.

On occasion, commentary is used as a prelude to discussion or explanation. Readers are again reminded of the subjective nature of history and of the absence of one historical *story*:

> J'ose appeler encore cette longue guerre une guerre civile. (*SL*, 885)
>
> Quand j'appelle cette entreprise criminelle, je n'examine pas si la nation [...] avait tort ou raison [...] je dis seulement que... (*SL*, 786)

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[481] Gearhart, S., *The Open Boundary of History and Fiction* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1984), p. 51.

Later, the *je* of narrative commentary intervenes in support of Louis XIV, exemplary because he separates affairs of state and of the heart:

> Rien ne prouve mieux, ce me semble, que Louis XIV avait une âme aussi grande que sensible. (*SL*, 929)

For the public, advice is provided concerning the deaths of kings which, too often, are erroneously presumed to be assassinations:

> Je ne puis me défendre de parler ici d'une calomnie renouvelée trop souvent à la mort des princes, que les hommes malins et crédules prétendent toujours avoir été ou empoisonnés ou assassinés. (*HC*, 545)

Like many other self-referential subtexts, this particularly eager advice and defence of the regal cause evince a palpable authorial identification with the problem of persecution.

On other occasions, the commentator *je* is the source of light entertainment rather than of influential or educational comment:

> Je ne sais par quelle fatalité ceux qui ont porté le nom de Merci ont toujours été aussi malheureux qu'estimés. (*SL*, 865)

The emphasis on entertainment is strengthened though commentary which accentuates the *story* aspects of anecdotes. The historical myth of the man in the iron mask has great narrative potential, evidently intriguing by its mystery, and the episode is fully exploited, presented as, 'un événement qui n'a point d'exemple' (*SL*, 895). The commentator *je* marks the extraordinary happenings with exclamations of surprise and intrigue, concluding with:

> Et je ne connais point de fait ni plus extraordinaire ni mieux constaté. (*SL*, 897)

The passage is presented as a fascinating one, with suggestion of suspicion and plot coming from 'extraordinaire'. It is guaranteed to capture the attention and curiosity of any reader through the combination of the persuasive commentator *je*, the repeated use of words which invoke secrets, suspense and mystery, such as *étrange, secret, prisonnier inconnu, masqué, extraordinaire*, and the use of additional comments, which inveigle the reader into questioning the event:

> Ce qui redouble l'étonnement, c'est que...
>
> Ce prisonnier l'était sans doute; car voici ce qui arriva... (*SL*, 896)

Such comments provoke curiosity through prompts and assertions which may be traced to the historian's unique blend of *history*, facts, *story*, secrecy and a multiplicity of *vérités*.

Truisms, epigrams or aphorisms within the text provide a subtly concealed form of internal narrative commentary. These forms are more common in *Histoire de Charles XII* than in the later history. During a textual discussion concerning Poland and King Augustus's war against Sweden, the opinion that Poland was singularly unimpressed by its king's belligerence implies a criticism of France's own wars and of a lack of national freedom. This echoes the habitual anti-war stance of the philosopher Voltaire and is reflected in the pithy aphorism:

> On trompe difficilement une nation libre sur ses vrais intérêts. (*HC*, 235)

Sweeping impersonal truisms are also interspersed through the histories, often in pontifications on religion or war:

> Mais ce n'est pas le nombre des morts, c'est l'épouvante de ceux qui survivent qui fait perdre les batailles. (*HC*, 217)

These anonymous embellishments interrupt the text to provide comment on all sorts of topics from beauty to monarchs. They even guide the reader in relation to the deciphering of physiognomy, as in the following passage which prescribes the reader's response to a literary character reflecting contentment:

> Stanislas avait une physionomie heureuse, pleine de hardiesse et de douceur, avec un air de probité et de franchise, qui de tous les avantages extérieurs est le plus grand, et qui donne plus de poids aux paroles, que l'éloquence même. (*HC*, 264)

Throughout both *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, narrative comments are also conveyed through the use of impersonal phrases. They habitually assume one of the following forms marking the beginning of a section, paragraph or sentence:

| | |
|---|---|
| Il n'est pas inutile de savoir... | (*HC*, 474) |
| Il est à croire que.... | (*HC*, 480) |
| Il est étonnant que... | (*SL*, 658) |
| Il est très rare que... | (*SL*, 734) |
| Il est certain que... | (*SL*, 842; 868) |
| Il est vrai que... | (*SL*, 842 |
| Il faut observer que... | (*SL*, 893) |
| Il est étonnant, mais il est vrai que... | (*SL*, 992) |

The very frequency with which the impersonal phrase occurs in the histories, often in conjunction with topics dear to the author, warns that much of the text is intended to be highly influential and that it is through this method that the writer seeks to guide the reader in his thoughts and beliefs. In the following sequence, the topic under review is a defence of a necessary, strong and enlightening relationship between sovereigns and philosophers. Beginning with an observation tagged with the seemingly neutral *on*, the

argument is steered and proven through the series of impersonal phrases, a structure which also mirrors the discursive and inquiring nature of philosophy itself:

> On ne croirait pas que les souverains eussent obligation aux philosophes. Cependant il est vrai que.... Il est vrai de dire que.... Il faut avouer que... (*SL*, 1001)

Many of the recurrent, polemical commentaries already highlighted by voices such as the personal *je* or contemporary *je* are further fortified by interjections from the commentator's voice. This voice is one which clarifies specific points in an attempt to evaluate past events, rather than to simply report them. Almost imperceptible insertions occur in the form of narrative asides or parentheses, such as in the comment on the famine of 1698, 'la misère du peuple, en 1698, misère toujours exagérée' (*SL*, 937). Alongside *history*, the narrative offers *story* through observations which are designed to influence. The fleeting observation of 'tout un peuple, idolâtre de ce qui est nouveau' is steeped in a dismissive attitude towards the people, 'la canaille'. This may seem inconsistent, coming from the pen of the future patriarch who would rebuild the village church at Ferney for the peasants while simultaneously campaigning against religious infamy, but it typifies the contradictions in Voltaire (*HC*, 172).

Turkey and the East are often used as a foil for apparently civilised Europe. The tone is heavily ironic when referring to the Moldavians who deserted the Russian army because they found the Christians too inhumane:

> Ils redoutaient les chrétiens, et surtout les Moscovites, qui les avaient toujours traités avec inhumanité. (*HC*, 191)

In like manner, it is emphasised that, during Charles' exile in Turkey, the locals accepted him as a Muslim due to his abstinence and attendance at public prayer twice a

day (*HC*, 174). Commentary also reflects on western prejudice and religious intolerance by referring disparagingly to those who considered grand-vizir Numan Couprougli to be an upright man, despite being a Turk:

> Ce nouveau vizir était tel que les chrétiens mal instruits ont peine à se figurer un Turc: homme d'une vertu inflexible, scrupuleux observateur de la loi, il opposait souvent la justice aux volontés du sultan. (*HC*, 178)

The lack of freedom in society is highlighted in the mockery of the public's blind welcome for a new king, suggesting that this is naïve folly:

> Tout le monde criait pour la liberté et la justice, mais on ne savait pas ce que c'était que d'être libre et juste. (*HC*, 102; 65)

Wherever war dominates the text, an ironic comment is bound to intervene, such as where the commentator *je* remarks:

> Depuis les anciens Romains je ne connais aucune nation qui se soit enrichie par des victoires. (*SL*, 989)

After the battle of Pultava where the Swedish soldiers chose to flee the battlefield, it is observed, 'mais... l'amour de la vie l'emporta sur l'intrépidité' (*HC*, 167). This is similar in style to the comment made that violence breeds violence, 'une barbarie qui surpasse la leur' (*SL*, 1060), found prefacing the ironic term 'boucherie héroïque' in *Candide*.[482] It is emphasised that where the Turkish grand-vizir goes to war, he takes the unusual step of placing the Russian ambassador in prison, thus violating the only 'sacré' law that other, less hospitable nations respect (*HC*, 187). Thus, the histories criticise war relations between countries and the analogous hypocrisy of peacetime diplomatic relations.

On the death of Charles XII, the commentator undertakes a digressive textual

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[482] Voltaire, *Candide, ou l'optimisme* in *Contes en Vers et en Prose*, I, 230-320, (p. 235).

discussion on that monarch's exact position on Lutheranism. The choice of religious focus is not unusual in Voltaire, although the dogged persistence with which Charles XII's rejection of Lutheranism is discussed, through insertion of the opinion of narrative commentator *je*, shows that this was an important component of the writer's conclusive defence and final approval of the hero monarch. Alongside reportage of actual historical events, the commentator *je* is determined to prove that Charles XII rejected Lutheranism and cites various sources, from La Motraye and Fabrice to le comte de Croissy, as proof. Finally, it is argued that the rejection did not necessarily stem from Charles XII's conversation with Leibnitz, as was often claimed:

> Je ne crois pas que Charles XII puisa, comme on me l'avait dit, de l'indifférence pour le luthéranisme dans la conversation de ce philosophe, qui n'eut jamais l'honneur de l'entretenir qu'un quart d'heure. (*HC*, 544)

Within the textual sequence of *history*, this parallel discussion of Charles XII's religious scepticism is initiated and conducted by the commentator *je*. The urgency with which the detail is pursued is apparent in the later approval given to Peter the Great's similar religious scepticism (*HC*, 544-5).

The ironic focus on religious institutions and practices becomes more severe in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, emphasising the degree of evaluation, rather than factual establishment, of the past in Voltaire's history. From the gentle teasing and scepticism of *Histoire de Charles XII*, the tone sharpens through the later history, gradually becoming more insistent and irate. Narrative commentary is critical of any papal interference in the political state, 'de la soumission à une puissance étrangère' (*SL*, 1037). A comparison is drawn between the pope, who is depicted as a religious figurehead in a political position, 'le fantôme de l'infaillibilité' and actual power, or 'le

pouvoir réel attaché à ce fantôme' (*SL*, 1039). Describing the position of pope as both weak and powerful, superfluous and political, religious and secular, the ambiguities are encapsulated in the following:

> Prêter serment à un autre qu'à son souverain est un crime de lèse-majesté dans un laïque; c'est dans le cloître, un acte de religion. (*SL*, 627)

Commentary on religious matters and practices in terms which are both secular and political becomes the hallmark of commentary on religious affairs. Thus, approval is given to the intelligent, abdicated Queen of Sweden, Christine, who is described as having converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism, while remaining suitably 'indifférente pour l'une et pour l'autre' (*SL*, 678). Conversely, James II of England is depicted as having wrought havoc on his country because of wishing to establish Catholicism as the sole religion, regarded by 'royalistes républicains' as 'la religion de l'esclavage' (*SL*, 671). Connections are continually established between religion and power or money, such as when, without textual comment, Pellisson is depicted buying converts (*SL*, 1051). The commentary feigns bewilderment in the incident of the Queen of Portugal who, having imprisoned her husband with a great display of independence and strength, then sought a papal bull for permission to marry his brother (*SL*, 706). With unmasked irony, this is portrayed as political power bowing to religious pressure.

The implication for the reader is that any educated and logical thinker would reject such institutionalised religion and this anticipates Voltaire's campaigns for tolerance. All these non-historical elements, which constitute the unusual *literariness* in Voltaire's history, combine to guide and persuade the reader towards the authorial interpretation and vision of the story of history.

In the sections entitled 'affaires ecclésiastiques, disputes mémorables', those chapters of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* which are devoted entirely to religion, the tone of ironic commentary becomes overtly peremptory and intransigent. While constantly trying to rise above the chaos depicted, the commentator becomes involved in both the historical and contemporary elements of these chapters. The text is riddled with ironic comments and opinions, often presented in a reductionist form which tends to ridicule the issues under discussion. More than ever, the history is shown to have a specific didactic and instructive purpose. Questioning the widely accepted impulse to convert Eastern peoples to Christianity, readers are prompted to wonder why this unhealthy obsession is peculiar only to us *Europeans*, 'cette maladie des prosélytes est une maladie particulière à nos climats' (*SL*, 1109). The use of 'climats' not only echoes Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*,[483] but also reminds the reader of one of Voltaire's visions of universal history, his dream of demonstrating that Europe and Christianity are models which are far from perfect or ideal and that the East offers alternatives which are often preferable to the familiar structures. In relation to the liberties granted to the *Eglise Gallicane*, it is commented that the very word 'libertés' denotes a certain enslavement and suggested that 'droits' would perhaps be a more acceptable term (*SL*, 1033).

The tone increases in fury and indignation as religious atrocities are detailed and religious houses ridiculed, as they had been in the *Lettres philosophiques* through the image of petty arguments over insignificant details, 'la forme de leur manche et de leur

[483] Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, Livre XIV, 474-489, 'Des lois dans le rapport qu'elles ont avec la nature du climat'.

capuchon'.[484] In a scathing manner, theological arguments and great decisions are depicted as depending, sometimes, on the positioning of a comma and thus emerges an authorial demonstration of causation in history:

> Les docteurs de Louvain furent très empêchés en recevant la bulle: il y avait surtout une phrase, dans laquelle une virgule mise à une place ou à une autre condamnait ou tolérait quelques opinions de Michel Baïus. L'université députa à Rome pour savoir du saint-père où il fallait mettre la virgule. La cour de Rome, qui avait d'autres affaires, envoya pour toute réponse à ces Flamands un exemplaire de la bulle dans lequel il n'y avait point de virgule de tout. (*SL*, 1065)

It was suggested in *L'Ingénu* that the corruption of Jansenists was indistinguishable from that of Jesuits. In this history, Jesuit corruption under Louis XIV is criticised. Such activity was only uncovered in Voltaire's day, long after its occurrence. With customary irony, the different factions are reduced to their particular rules or dress, as was done so effectively in the satirical *Zadig* (1748).[485]

It is emphasised that on one occasion, king Louis XIV shows more moderation than two deviant bishops, 'deux hommes qui se piquaient de sainteté', or than the pope who supports their cause despite being ideologically opposed to their Jansenist tendencies. Hypocrisy and dissimulation are portrayed by the employment of a simple, repetitive structure and the outwardly innocent adjectives 'vertueux et opiniâtre'. The conjunction of these two adjectives adds particular force to the irony:

> Tous deux étaient suspects de jansénisme. Ils avaient eu contre eux le pape Innocent X. Mais, quand ils se déclarèrent contre les prétentions du roi, ils eurent pour eux Innocent XI, Odescalchi; ce pape, vertueux et opiniâtre comme eux, prit entièrement leur parti. (*SL*, 1035-6)

Fighting between religious factions is consistently shown in an ironic light, with an

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[484] Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, XIII, 'Sur M. Locke', p. 42.
[485] Voltaire, *Zadig* in *Contes en Vers et en Prose*, I, 113-178.

approach which verges on the reductionist, as where paganism becomes a simplistic aphorism:

> La religion des païens ne consistait que dans la morale et dans les fêtes. (*SL*, 1041)

Attributing religious wars to man's 'esprit dogmatique', the conclusion is that the taste of power, not fanaticism, corrupts man. Rome's foundation stone is stated to be 'un Etat dans l'Etat' or 'une république cachée au milieu de l'empire' and so, on any sacred pretext, revolt could become a duty and religious wars would ensue:

> Ainsi les uns deviennent persécuteurs, les autres rebelles, en attestant Dieu des deux cotés. (*SL*, 1042)

Irony is especially evident in analysis of religious corruption and in its condemnation. Yet, this is just one focus of the irony which pervades both works of history. By questioning issues rather than merely presenting historical facts, irony draws attention to a myriad of non-historical commentaries and prompts the reader to examine other levels within the history. Not overtly signalled in prefatory writing, ironic commentary is an essential tool which is manipulated not only in conjunction with observations on religious tolerance, but by every other voice, level and tone involved in telling and commenting the *story* of history in order to engage and influence the reader.

It is not surprising that narrative comment and ironic persuasion form an inherent part of Voltaire's historiography. The degree to which they are used varies according to the importance of the topic under discussion or the strength of authorial interest in a particular argument. The narrative commentator *je* is often associated with vital themes such as tolerance, progress, war, truth or religion. The ubiquitous nature of

the impersonal phrase form further reflects the tight authorial control over the history, despite any superficial appearance to the contrary. It shows an overwhelming desire to influence the entire interpretation and reading of the history. The introduction of truisms and aphorisms into the text is yet another form of persuasion, intended to guide the thoughts and beliefs of the reader although it is markedly less discursive than the other two forms. As is clear from evidence of all-pervasive irony, these are just some of many methods of narrative influence and reader manipulation. Such vocal interference, directly related to prefatorial assertions of authorial and authoritative control, and underlying each of the various forms of narrative commentary, reveals the unresisted authorial urge to comment on historical events, their background and consequences, and to influence, direct and persuade the reader.

## CONCLUSION

*Voltaire était fort sensible aux voix ...*[486]

A plurality of internal voices, many of which are *story* voices, is discernible within the intricate ensemble of Voltaire's historical narrative. Detailed examination of *je*, *on*, and *nous* voices as well as voices not tagged with personal pronouns, revealed the historiographical *je* of narrative design and the fictional *je* of direct speech; the personal *je* of Arouet-le-jeune and the English *je*; the vociferous, very contemporary campaigning *je*, the extensions of various aspects of *on* and *nous*, the variable editor's voice and the contemporary immediate *je*. Such a proliferation of different *je* voices has

[486] Magnan, A., 'Voix' in *Inventaire Voltaire*, ed. J. Goulemot, A. Magnan and D. Masseau (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 1386.

the effect of drawing the reader's attention to non-historical aspects of the text. Weaving through these voices is an ironic running commentary designed to introduce a polemical tone which further influences and challenges the reader. While most of the individual voices are not strictly faithful to the stated aspirations of the voice of Voltaire historiographer, the broader, universal perspective which they give to the histories is true to Voltaire's theories on the utility of history and on its didactic purpose. Distinctively, these particular *story* voices establish a relationship of complicity between the text and the reader, with every *je*, *on* and *nous* including the readers in some way, inviting them into a private realm of mutual comprehension and collusive agreement. It is a pact of textual *literariness* more flavoured with irony and polemic than it is laden with matters historical.

When *history* voices combine with the wide range of contrasting and individual *story* voices, the historical narrative displays a range of voices which are not necessarily in harmony. This literary technique has a counterpart in polytonality, a form used in twentieth-century experimental composition but prefigured by sixteenth- and eighteenth-century usage. Mere decades after Voltaire, Mozart would employ the polytonal composition format in *A Musical Joke* (1787), to encompass simultaneous musical contradiction and discord. Similarly, Voltaire's histories are texts which embrace many keys or tones and the interjection of unrelated and inharmonious voices. His are texts which explore and develop themes like melodies within the history although with each different voice traceable through the text as a separate entity. The modern concept of polytonality ideally fits Voltaire's eighteenth-century practice, his presentation of a variety of issues, tones, arguments and moods which introduce

contradictions and ambiguities into history, as in the chapters of *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*.

# FINGERPRINTS ON THE NARRATIVE

*Art is not a mirror, but a crystal. It creates its own shapes and forms.*
Oscar Wilde.

Voltaire's histories were edited, re-edited and translated throughout the eighteenth century and beyond (*HC*, 85-137; *SL*, 1662-3). The attraction of these histories for a broad range of contemporary readers, who could approach the histories at many different levels, may be attributed to the presence of a myriad different voices composing the polytonal narrative. These voices vary from the *history* voices of historian and historiographer, to *story* voices emerging through characterisation and anecdote, and from the personal, polemical, historical and contemporary voices behind the tags of *je, on, nous* to the many other anonymous, untagged, textual, narrative voices.

Both the contemporary voices and the narrative *storical* features held particular appeal for readers who could identify easily with such familiar elements. Thus, the historian took care to embellish the text with traits including clear echoes of literary style and philosophical musings, which stem from the work of earlier and contemporary authors. Specific features have been chosen for special study: firstly, the 'heroic formula' form, echoing Homer, emphasises the precise and deliberately structured composition of Voltaire's histories and links them to classical epic tradition. Secondly, close textual study reveals interaction with a recent philosophical work by Rousseau, further emphasising the contemporary context of Voltaire's histories. In bearing such fingerprints of former and current authors, the historical text shows its engagements with those authors as well as with the more curious contemporary reader.

## HEROIC FORMULA

*Arma virumque cano...*[487]

In Voltaire's histories, whilst the theory espoused by the historian's voice develops an innovative type of history, in practice, history moves forward while simultaneously reinforcing links with past traditions, as if to reassure the reader and to further challenge contemporary perceptions of what history might become. Although the primary material and exposition are innovative, a great emphasis is also placed on familiar, classical structure and composition.

Voltaire's classical education, absorption and interest is quite apparent in the variety of classical sources liberally quoted in his correspondence.[488] It is also evident in the vast quantity of classical texts listed in the catalogue of Voltaire's private library.[489] There was also widespread interest generally in the classics and neo-classical trends during his own and the previous century. Moreover, it is possible that some of Voltaire's first contacts with historical texts would have been through his school work on the classical historians, even if very little formal training was provided by the Jesuits in the art of history. As R. Pomeau notes, 'Peu d'histoire et de géographie, peu de mathématiques; aucun enseignement des sciences, ni des langues vivantes'.[490] Like many eighteenth-century students, Voltaire's Greek would not have been nearly as strong as his Latin but the Delphin editions of Greek authors translated into Latin would

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[487] Virgil, *Aeneid* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1972), Bk. 1, p. 1. [I sing of warfare and of a hero.]
[488] Voltaire, Index of Quotations in Correspondence, LI, 1029-1092.
[489] Alexeev, M. P., ed., *Bibliothèque de Voltaire: catalogue des livres* (Moscow-Leningrad: Editions de l'Académie des Sciences de l'URSS, 1961).
[490] Pomeau, R., 'Le collège' in *D'Arouet à Voltaire 1694-1734* in *Voltaire en son temps I*, gen. ed. R. Pomeau (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1985), p. 27.

have permitted an equal familiarity with both Greek and Latin historians and historiographers. The intellectual baggage of a bright Jesuit student of the time would automatically have included knowledge of Homeric epic and some familiarity with historiographical traditions which originated with the Greeks Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon and were taken up by Latin historians from Polybius, Caesar, Sallust, Livy and Tacitus to the biographers Nepos, Plutarch and Suetonius. Thus, it is fair to presume that Voltaire would have seen the origins of history as being firmly rooted in Ancient Greece and in the literary Homeric lays. His own interest in epic need not be documented, although it is worth noting that the epic poem *La Henriade* was the author's first historical creation. Here, the link between history, story, epic and fiction has already been drawn by the author. The importance of the classical tradition for Voltaire and his contemporaries is indisputable although contemporary historians shy away from incorporating *story*, *fiction* and *epic* aspects into history.

Up to this point, the focus on narrative style and story voices has stressed Voltaire's tendency towards *literariness* in his composition of history. What might be called history's first incarnation, the Homeric lays, also constituted a *literary* phenomenon. The *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* have more to do with *story* than *history*, a quality also encapsulated in the duality of the French term *histoire* already discussed. These terms which convey ambiguity or uncertainty underline the non-antiquarian beginnings of history and its first manifestations.[491]

Developing the connection of classical, epic history with literariness, M. Grant warns that the classical historical tradition is full of misinformation and needs to be

[491] Bury expresses this when he writes: 'The early Greeks possessed a literature which was equivalent to history for them and was accepted with unreserved credence - their epic poems'. Bury, p. 2.

treated with suspicion by the modern reader.[492] Voltaire's histories, products of an Enlightenment environment, are not founded on myth and, without actually being antiquarian or scientific in the modern sense, are more thoroughly researched histories than those of the classical historians. Nonetheless, as already noted in the discussion of anecdote and duality, Voltaire justifies some of his stylistic and narrative innovations by reference to the classics.[493] Referring to the earliest histories and their lack of adherence to time-sequences, Bury notes, 'This interest in history was practical, not antiquarian'.[494] A reflection of this classical and more fictional manipulation of time, where history instructs rather than merely records, is a stylistic feature already noted in the composition of *Histoire de Charles XII.* These features which would today be considered *literary*, in the style of novels, and whose presence in modern history might be criticised as being fictional and unnecessary, if not undesirable, were included by Voltaire using the precedent of classical authority.

Amongst the more conspicuous narrative features of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, are the tones of a classical, epic voice, manifested in the predominance of what shall be termed the 'heroic formula'.[495] This convention has a 'three plus one' format. In Homeric epic poetry, the formula was used to demonstrate something which had met with failure three times and which, on the fourth occasion, either met with success or a

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[492] Grant, Intro., p. 3.
[493] See Ch. 4 of this thesis.
[494] Bury, p. 2.
[495] Term taken from M.C. McCallum-Barry, Dept. of Classics, University College, Cork. (Personal correspondence, July 5, 1996).

change in situation. This 'three plus one' motif is particularly powerful in the *Iliad*, as leading up to and preparing for the death of the hero Hector, slain by the other hero Achilles. *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* both reveal echoes of this classical, epic motif, found in the 'heroic formula' in Voltaire's histories. It remains to be explored how close the link between the Homeric motif and its modern formula is, how great an impact the formula has on the histories and what implications it has for reading Voltaire's new type of history.

Before examining the precise manifestation of the 'heroic formula' in Voltaire's history, its literary antecedent in Homer must be examined, in particular by recalling five specific instances of the motif in the *Iliad*. Firstly, in Book V, 'Diomedes fights the gods', Diomedes is shown in a murderous fury, leaping at Aeneas and thrice Apollo 'thrust his bright shield back'. On the fourth occasion, the gods shout at Diomedes, or Tydeides, warning him not to attempt to equal the gods :

> Three times he leapt at him in his murderous fury, and thrice Apollo thrust his bright shield back. But when he charged like a demon for the fourth time, the Archer-god checked him with a terrible shout: 'Think Tydeides, and give way! Do not aspire to be the equal of the gods. The immortals are not made of the same stuff as men that walk on the ground. (*Iliad*, 104)[496]

This is a warning against hubris which leads inevitably to defeat and nemesis.

Two other instances of the 'heroic formula' occur in connection with Patroclus, in Book XVI, 'Patroclus fights and dies' and Book XVIII, 'Armour for Achilles'. In the first, Achilles' friend Patroclus dons the former's armour (the hero is sulking) and leads Achilles' men into battle to save the Greek ships. Like the god of war, Patroclus

[496] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by E.V. Rieu (London: Penguin 1950), p. 104.

charges three times but when he charges like a demon a fourth time, his vizored helmet falls off and Hector kills him.

> Three times he charged with a terrific cry, like the wild god of War, and every time he killed nine men. But when he leapt like a demon for the fourth time - alas Patroclus!- the end came into sight. (*Iliad*, 313)

Patroclus' death is the catalyst which brings Achilles back into battle for the Greeks and his return is a turning point for them. Meanwhile, Hector captures Achilles' armour from the corpse of Patroclus, forcing the Achaians to struggle to rescue the body. The anxiety over a hero's corpse is another important motif in the *Iliad*, illustrated here through the 'heroic motif':

> Three times illustrious Hector, coming up behind and shouting for his men's support, seized its feet and tried to drag it back [...] In fact Hector would have hurled it away and covered himself with glory, if Iris of the Whirlwind Feet had not come down in hot haste from Olympus to tell Achilles to prepare for battle. (*Iliad*, 341)

Thus, the gods intervene and eventually Achilles and the Greeks will manage to recover Patroclus' body.

In Book XXI 'Achilles fights the river', in a prelude to the death of Hector, Asteropaeus tries three times to drag Achilles' spear out of the bank where it is stuck. He shifts it a little but on his fourth attempt, Achilles kills him with his sword:

> Three times, in his efforts to retrieve his spear, he shifted it a little, but every time he had to give up the struggle. He tried again, this time to bend and break the ashen shaft of Peleus, but before he could do so, Achilles was upon him and killed him with his sword. (*Iliad*, 384)

That incident prefaces the most famous example of the 'heroic formula', in Book XXII, 'The death of Hector'. In it, Achilles chases Hector, circling three times around the walls of Troy. Hector flees from Achilles and at the fourth circle of the walls of

Troy, Zeus raises his balances and Phoebus Apollo deserts Hector. Athene, who supports Achilles, urges Hector to fight and he is killed by Achilles:

> However, when they reached the Springs for the fourth time, the Father held out his golden scales, and putting sentence of death in either pan, on one side for Achilles, on the other for horse-taming Hector, he raised the balance by the middle of the beam. The beam came down on Hector's side, spelling his doom. He was a dead man. (*Iliad*, 402)

Each of the illustrations of the 'heroic formula' marks an important incident or moral message in *The Iliad.* Whether demonstrating that hubris engenders nemesis or predicting and marking the deaths of two great heroes (Patroclus and Hector) from opposing sides, the motif is used at crucial points in the epic and stylistically knits together the key strategic events. This motif may be intricately linked both to the main action of the epic and to the moral and ethical lessons to be derived from the history. It now remains to measure the extent to which use of the 'heroic formula' motif by an eighteenth-century historian reflects that of Homer.

Among contemporaries, use of the 'heroic formula'is unique to Voltaire's histories. However, the narrative feature is used in various different forms. The precise form found in *The Iliad*, provoking an effect of ritual combined with suspense, occurs in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* either in conjunction with the action of heroes or in situations of war, such as in the following two examples of le grand Condé, and those of Montecuculli and the battle of Blenheim:

> Le prince l'entoura et l'attaqua trois fois. A peine victorieux, il arrêta le carnage. (*SL*, 638)
>
> Il voulait, après trois attaques meurtrières, en hasarder encore une quatrième. (*SL*, 733)
>
> Montecuculli, retenu par l'habileté du général français trois mois entiers au delà du Rhin, passa ce fleuve dès qu'il sut qu'il n'avait plus Turenne à craindre. (*SL*, 735)

> La cavalerie française trois fois ralliée et trois fois poussée [...] Au moment que le général [le maréchal de Tallard] était pris, le prince Eugène, trois fois repoussé, gagnait enfin l'avantage. (*SL*, 831-2)

In the last quotation, which is from the dramatic account of the French defeat at Blenheim, there is duplicate use of the 'three plus one' formula, again reinforcing the suggestion that its presence at decisive or crucial events in this history is far from accidental. The examples given are clearly reminiscent of Homer's use of the 'heroic formula' either in conjunction with heroes or at decisive or strategic moments in the action of war. Use of the motif reinforces narrative suspense within a familiar heroic framework.

Such a conscious strategy and technique illustrates the epic nature of the historian's vision and anticipates a certain judgement of characters by the reader. In placing the historical protagonist firmly within the boundaries of epic, characterisation develops according to heroic rules, as for example in the case of Charles XII, where hubris is followed by nemesis. It will be remembered that Voltaire accused Charles XII of the same hubris that causes Diomedes' downfall.[497] In depicting Charles XII in the role of a classical hero, emphasis is put on the readers' wider knowledge of fictional stories. This fictional background, so familiar to the average reader, invites a broad, more universal reading and interpretation of history. Compared to traditional history's narrow focus on individual historical events, Voltaire's works aim to provoke responses on a wider scale. To this end, fictional parallels immediately broaden the frame of reference of the history. Subsequently, this *story* frame again widens to include contemporary criticism.

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[497] See Ch. 4, Characterisation.

In *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, it is not just a question of isolated incidents, the 'heroic formula' informs the very structure of the history. The introductory chapter is meticulously constructed in a crescendo of three great ages of enlightenment leading up to the presentation of a fourth, 'le siècle le plus éclairé qui fut jamais', or the century of Louis XIV. This organisational view of history is very particular to Voltaire, highlighting the importance in his work of the epic motif, chosen to lie at the very core of his history. Less concerned with balance, style or the effect of suspense which the motif affords Voltaire's texts, traditional historians do not introduce the 'heroic formula'into their writing of history. In *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, it is a question of progression from the first three centuries to a fourth which is not only different but better, therefore surpassing all three. The formula could further be interpreted as the fourth age being the result of the first three attempts to create a fully enlightened century with the fourth century presented as a culmination of all the previous efforts. It is without equal before or after:

> Enrichi des découvertes des trois autres, il [le siècle de Louis XIV] a plus fait en certain genres que les trois ensemble. (*SL*, 617)

Moreover, the idea that only four enlightened historical periods have ever existed as worthy examples for posterity is itself initially introduced through a different use of the heroic formula, a structural one highlighted by the threefold succession of *tous* and *toutes*, and resolved by *mais*:

> Tous les temps ont produit des héros et des politiques : tous les peuples ont éprouvé des révolutions : toutes les histoires sont presque égales pour qui ne veut mettre que des faits dans sa mémoire. Mais quiconque pense, et, ce qui est encore plus rare, quiconque a du goût, ne compte que quatre siècles dans l'histoire du monde. (*SL*, 616)

These two methods of using the heroic formula recur throughout *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* with a frequency which suggests a great deal more than chance.

Another example of the 'three plus one' figure, and one more frequently used by Voltaire than the form in the *Iliad*, involves a much more subtle expansion of the original Homeric form. In this format, the figure may feature a group of three things, possibly states, events or parts of speech, and the resolution is completed by, for example, an expansion, explanation or development. The most common illustration of this form is the trio of adjectives or adverbs with either a decision, a change or an explanatory emphasis afterwards. This is a structure which is both a stylistically creative way of leading up to a resolution and an effective means of maintaining a wider link with an epic, or fictional, framework. It can be seen in the following examples which refer to Louis XIV, to the Emperor Leopold's son and to 'l'héritier présomptif de la couronne' of England:

> Tout ambitieux, tout puissant et tout irrité qu'il était, il détourna l'orage qui allait s'élever de tous les côtés de l'Europe. Il proposa lui-même la paix. (*SL*, 704)

> C'était son fils aîné Joseph, vif, fier, emporté, et qui cependant ne fut pas plus grand guerrier que son père. (*SL*, 846)

> Ce prince [...] était pieux, juste et philosophe. Il était fait pour commander à des sages. (*SL*, 852)

Here the motif is used to emphasise a remarkable feature of each leader's character, and is reserved for important, regal figures. The use of the 'three plus one' motif for an explanatory purpose appears in the following sample quotations and in each, the fourth element provides an explanation of the first three:

> L'or, l'intrigue et la terreur, qui lui avaient ouvert les portes de tant de villes, préparèrent l'entrée de Louvois dans Strasbourg. (*SL*, 749)

> Ces partages imaginaires, ces intrigues, ces querelles, tout cela n'était qu'un intérêt personnel. La nation espagnole était comptée pour rien; on ne la consultait pas; on ne lui demandait pas quel roi elle voulait. (*SL*, 798)

> Cette double témérité perdit à la fois et l'armée et la flotte : une partie des vaisseaux fut brisée par la tempête; une autre prise par les Anglais à l'abordage, après une résistance admirable; une autre brûlée sur les côtes d'Espagne. Depuis ce jour on ne vit plus de grandes flottes françaises... (*SL*, 837)

That particular form also occurs throughout the concluding chapters of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* where it has a predominantly emphatic rôle (*SL*, p. 1087).

Finally, the triple use of 'quoique' or 'soit que' before a fourth and final resolution to draw attention to the fourth element of the equation exemplifies the same epic formula, or the 'three plus one' motif:

> De même, quoiqu'on lui [Turenne] eût reproché sa défection dans les guerres de la Fronde, quoiqu'à l'âge de près de soixante ans l'amour lui eût fait révéler le secret de l'état, quoiqu'il eût exercé dans le Palatinat des cruautés qui ne semblaient pas nécessaires, il conserva la réputation d'un homme de bien, sage et modéré, parce que ses vertus et ses grands talents, qui n'étaient qu'à lui, devaient faire oublier des faiblesses et des fautes qui lui étaient communes avec tant d'autres hommes. (*SL*, 735) [underlining not in original]

> [Charles d'Autriche] baisa ce qui restait de ces cadavres, soit qu'en cela il suivît l'exemple de quelques anciens rois d'Espagne, soit qu'il voulût s'accoutumer aux horreurs de la mort, soit qu'une secrète superstition lui fît croire que l'ouverture de ces tombes retarderaient l'heure où il devait être porté dans la sienne [...] Ce roi laissa au duc d'Anjou, petit-fils de Louis XIV, tous ses Etats, sans connaître ce qu'il lui laissait. (*SL*, 802) [underlining not in original]

Each of the examples given shows the use of the motif to illustrate unusual qualities in both Turenne and Charles d'Autriche on the occasion of their deaths and in each case, the opportunity is seized to emphasise negative aspects of their characters. Such use of the motif, catching the eye of the more attentive reader, invites a reading of history where the author takes the liberty to present biased information as he chooses. The content is more *storical* than historical and more prescriptive than analytical.

The historian's use of the heroic motif is not exclusive to *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. In *Histoire de Charles XII*, it may seem to be a trivial use to employ it to draw attention to a praiseworthy frugality in the king's lodgings:

> Le roi toujours plus mal logé, plus mal servi, et plus simplement vêtu que le moindre officier de son armée, disait que son palais était le quartier de Piper. (*HC*, 322)

Yet, by drawing attention to the king's rather Spartan ménage, the precautions taken to build a fortified and impressive fort at Bender will be seen later to assume an important premonitory rôle in the text. As in the case of the other history, the motif is reserved for important occasions and for the character of important figures. However, whilst the epic voice is indeed present in the earlier history, duality is a stronger feature and the 'heroic formula' is not yet fully expanded or exploited as it would be in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* where it lies at the very foundation of the structural interpretation of Louis XIV's century as the most impressive of the four great periods of history.

It is evident that the inclusion of the 'three plus one' motif in Voltaire's histories is far from accidental. Reserved for use on more important or strategically significant occasions and for greater impact of presentation, it forms the structure at the very basis of the justification for writing a history about the century of Louis XIV, which appears in the introductory chapter to *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The fact that this chapter was written after the rest of the history shows the care with which the motif is employed in history and that its insertion is for a specific purpose.

Voltaire not only uses the 'heroic formula' at this structural level, but also expands its use, in a literal manner and in a more liberal way. The epic voice functions in multiple ways, drawing links between history and story, prose and epic poetry,

Voltaire and Homer, and between the history and the reader who can either recognise the classical allusion within the stylistic motif and appreciate its implications, or simply detect its emphatic quality within the narrative.

Part of the importance of the motif is that the link it creates between characterisation and epic frees the historical text by drawing it away from mere events and into the wider, more creative realm of *story*. Reliant on contemporary recognition of ancient history as epic, this is consistent with the fusion of other *history* and *story* voices already examined. Likewise, the epic vision of character further alters the entire reading of history: the classic link fuses with proleptic anecdotes to forecast the fall of Charles XII to his nemesis.

With a fictional device such as this motif, the reader seeks resolution and decisions in the fourth element of the equation. History is not normally a forum for such definite answers and philosophies. Yet Voltaire successfully manipulates the medium with the epic voice and these nearly axiomatic, 'fourth', resolutions are prime channels for disseminating the author's philosophies. By carefully grounding his histories as a continuation of ancient tradition, the historian gives added credibility to his projects for future history and justifies his innovative reinterpretations of traditional historiography. Drawing on a wealth of familiarity with classical literature, the 'heroic' motif thus reveals an epic voice in history, one which strengthens the narrative through its appropriation of the mantle of epic authority.

## ECHOES OF CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Another of the apparent contradictions in Voltaire's histories lies in the coexistence of the epic voice, with links in classical writing, and a contemporary voice of debate, with concerns firmly connected to the moment of writing. Voltaire as a contemporary writer was most sensitive to both criticism and parody. From the 'brevets de la calotte' of his youth to the 'cacouacs' of the 1750s, Voltaire was constantly defending himself against lambasting from his fellow writers. He often retaliated in kind, such as with his series of 'Les Quand' against Lefranc de Pompignan.[498] According to the author's own theories of historiography, history should, on the surface, be largely reserved for matters erudite, universal and of lasting importance and this is certainly suggested by epic overtones. However, Voltaire the engaged, polemical writer might be tempted to let practice deviate from theory and hence it is not surprising to find a contemporary, polemical voice within the historical narrative. This polemical voice becomes entwined with contemporary debate, whether literary or philosophical, merging with the irony which underlies the surface history. Despite the historical framework, the polemical voice manifests itself as a phenomenon of active critical exchange.

Contemporary exchange is manifested in different ways. In their respective theses on *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, both Felix and Rivière establish that Voltaire not only relied heavily on his historical sources but that he often

[498] Voltaire, *Les Quand... Les Ah!Ah!* in *Mélanges*, pp. 369-376.

lifted entire passages verbatim from these sources and placed them in his own text.[499] Most of these passages remained unacknowledged and this could be considered a form of intertextuality - or possibly even theft - rather than actual active intertextual literary exchange. This borrowed voice is one which would have passed unnoticed at the time, apart from a handful of readers or historians who might have identified the appropriation.

Another contemporary exchange is apparent where Voltaire appends a lengthy *Catalogue des écrivains français* at the end of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The editor selects authors from the reign of Louis XIV for inclusion or exclusion and registers decisive comments on each. In theory, the *Catalogue* would provide a summary of great and famous deceased writers deemed worthy of being recorded for posterity in such a learned and serious forum as history. In reality, not only is the *Catalogue* almost contemporary in nature and opinion but it is written with the same ironic flair that would be expected from the supposed author of the *Brevet d'agrégation dans le régiment de la Calotte pour le Sr Camusat*.[500] Most of the entries display a certain degree of irony, in the omissions as much as in what is included. La Rochefoucauld merits a glorious one-line entry, 'Ses *Mémoires* sont lus, et on sait par coeur ses *Pensées*', and Pascal in his *Pensées* is merely accused of 'l'air despotique et méprisant dont il débute'. In contrast, the recently deceased Mme du Châtelet earns a proud entry

[499] See Felix, Chs. IV & VI; Rivière, Ch. III. Both authors show extensive borrowings of passages of history by Voltaire, many of which were paraphrased and others of which remain as in the original.

[500] The 'Brevet d'agrégation dans le régiment de la Calotte pour le Sr Camusat' (1726),occasionally attributed to Voltaire in response to *Brevet pour agréger le Sr A*** de V*** dans le régiment de la Calotte* (1726), attributed to Camusat (1726) [BN ffr. 12654].

praising 'son génie et son éloquence'. Dominant comments include rather personal criticism reflecting the author's current assessment of deceased writers (e.g. *SL*, 1193: Pellisson-Fontanier, 1186: Mézerai, 1205: Saint-Réal) and echoes of contemporary voices already mentioned in the history (e.g. *SL*, 1162: Fontenelle, 1166: Hénault). A typical example of the very contemporary nature of this *Catalogue*, echoing the English *je*, can be appreciated in the author's comment on Montesquieu. His work *De l'Esprit des Lois* is lauded in terms of criteria which are typical of Voltaire, such as its praise of English government, its apt reception in France and its ability to force the reader to think:

> Ce livre est écrit avec autant de liberté que les *Lettres persanes*, et cette liberté n'a pas peu servi au succés [...] Mais, s'il n'instruit pas toujours son lecteur, il le fait toujours penser, et c'est là un très grand mérite. (*SL*, 1187)
>
> Ce qu'il y a de plus singulier, c'est que l'éloge qu'il fait du gouvernement anglais est ce qui a plu davantage en France. (*SL*, 1188)

The current nature of the entry on Montesquieu becomes apparent when compared with later criticism of the author which featured in publications such as *L'A.B.C.*, where the author of *De l'esprit des lois* would be accused of sitting on the fence:

> Il faut souhaiter qu'un si beau génie eut toujours plus cherché à instruire qu'à étonner.[501]

The earlier gentle verdict on Montesquieu delivered in this history underscores the fact that the *Catalogue* relates to opinions and affairs precisely as they stood at the time of writing, or the antithesis of universal, august history announced in the introduction to the history. Contradiction and discrepancy enter the historical text, as whenever there is a disparity between general theories and particular instances of practice in Voltaire's histories. Despite protestations and theoretical aspirations to impartiality and

[501] Voltaire, *L'A.B.C.* (London: Freemann, 1762), p. 18.

objectivity, Voltaire the historian was, rather unsurprisingly, subject to bias and could be so accused in the following, unequivocal defence of his English friend Bolingbroke:

> On a osé imprimer que le lord Bolingbroke, qui rédigea le traité, fit cette omission, gagné par un présent d'un million. On trouve cette lâche calomnie dans l'histoire de Louis XIV, sous le nom de La Martinière; et ce n'est pas la seule qui déshonore cet ouvrage. (*SL*, 883)

Despite the fact that Voltaire himself has already hinted at the more partisan nature of English history in his *Lettres philosophiques*, the historian is openly indignant in the face of such libel.[502] This polemical element in Voltaire's history and the subsequent change of opinion concerning entries in the *Catalogue* are marks of a live, ongoing critical exchange. Representing just one side of that interaction, they are, in a sense, contemporary echoes.

Voltaire's sharp awareness of fellow-writers and his constant participation in contemporary polemic, literary discussion and society's debates stems from what could be considered an idiosyncratic fear of the writer of living and writing in obscurity. This horrific fate is evinced even in one of his last poems, *Adieux à la vie*, where censorship and harassment are considered preferable to living and dying, unknown and unnoticed:

> C'est celui qui ne sait rien craindre
> Qui vit et meurt inconnu.[503]

Hence possibly the author's feverish pursuit of Parisian literary fads and fashions, keeping his literary output closely in tune with *salon* conversation topics and modes of the day, regardless of his place of exile.

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[502] Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, XXII, 'Sur M. Pope', p. 96.
[503] Voltaire, *Adieux à la vie* in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Beuchot, 10, 602-3, (p. 603).

As a result, it comes as no surprise that alongside the condemnation of religious intolerance in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (explored in connection with polemical voices and irony) there is a concomitant defence of luxury, both subjects being echoes of the great religious and social debates of Voltaire's time. Primarily seizing an opportunity to condemn religious intolerance, the historian appends a practical note, emphasising that the abhorrence and condemnation of luxury in the previous century had risen to such an obsessive pitch that, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, some of France's specialist manufacturers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were even further damaged. Recent commentators, including J. Castarède, have shown that this contemporary connection between religious intolerance and the condemnation of *luxe* is a historically valid one:

> Les fossoyeurs du luxe [...] s'appellent Mme de Maintenon, ou en tout cas les inspirateurs de la révocation de l'édit de Nantes qui ont bouté hors de France ces horlogers ou autres experts tisserands.[504]

*Le Siècle de Louis XIV* echoes a wider and more sustained defence of luxury by the *philosophes*, in connecting luxury with commercial benefits. In the fashion of Melon's earlier observation that, 'ce qui étoit luxe pour nos pères est à présent commun', Voltaire's history notes:[505]

> Cet usage, qui a commencé dans Paris, fut bientôt reçu dans toute l'Europe; et, devenu commun, il n'est plus un luxe. (*SL*, 969)

The historian's interpretation of *luxe* echoes that of the *Encylopédie*, which is also a positive, factual one, devoid of threats of religious perdition or of rousseauist condemnation:

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[504] Castarède, J., *Le Luxe* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), p. 29.
[505] Melon, *Essai politique sur le commerce* (Amsterdam: Chez François Changuion, 1736), p. 123.

> C'est l'usage qu'on fait des richesses et de l'industrie pour se procurer une existence agréable.[506]

In similar manner, Montesquieu had already commented on the relativity of luxury in connection with the paradox of fashion, reducing it to a sociological phenomenon in his *De l'esprit des lois*:

> Mais à force de vouloir se distinguer, tout devient égal, et on ne se distingue plus: comme tout le monde veut se faire regarder, on ne remarque personne.[507]

More recently, P. Gaxotte emphasises that luxury became a topical issue particularly towards the middle of the eighteenth century, or precisely when Voltaire was writing *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, 'A partir de 1750, le siècle est emporté par le vertige de la fortune'.[508] It is not surprising then to find the echo of such contemporary debate within the histories. Moreover, the attitude in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* offers no new theory on luxury but rather places current theories and opinions within a practical, historical context. For example, writers such as Melon had already argued that luxury was essential to commerce:

> Le luxe est une somptuosité, que donnent les richesses et la sécurité d'un Gouvernement; c'est une suite nécessaire de toute société bien policée.[509]

The chapters on finance in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* largely reflect both Melon's commercial argument in favour of luxury and the opinion expressed in the earlier *Lettres philosophiques*, although that viewpoint was not universally held. As John Sekora points out (with reference to England), luxury was a convenient target for attack and a focus for blame at every crisis point in the eighteenth century:

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[506] Diderot & D'Alembert, 'Luxe' in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris & New York: Pergamon Press, 1968), II, 709.
[507] Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, Bk VII, p. 334.
[508] Gaxotte, P., *Le Siècle de Louis XV* (Paris: A. Fayard et Cie Editeurs, 1933), p. 434.
[509] Melon, p. 122.

> Luxury arose time and again, for it could account for any unwanted or unforeseen shift in the scales of military, economic, social, political, moral or even literary forces.[510]

Polemical debate on luxury was a topic to which Voltaire loved to return. His *Le Mondain* (1736) had blithely rejected the prospect of a religious after-life in favour of terrestrial jouissance, apparent in the proclamation, 'Le paradis terrestre est où je suis'.[511] Along with *Défense du Mondain* (1736-7) and *Ode sur l'usage de la vie* (1737), the poem displayed a markedly Epicurean love of luxury and well-being, reflecting an attitude which would scandalise Rousseau and prompt his denunciation of luxury as one of the greatest evils in existence in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. In this work, Rousseau addresses the 'célèbre Arouet', gently accusing him of, in his earlier works, selling his soul for luxury, 'notre fausse délicatesse'(*DSA*, 60).[512] In turn, Voltaire would later respond to Rousseau in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), defiantly beginning his article *Luxe* with the following words:

> On a déclamé contre le luxe depuis deux mille ans, en vers et en prose, et on l'a toujours aimé.[513]

*Luxe*, political authority, economics, anti-fanaticism and tolerance are some of the subjects of contemporary debate which permeated the contemporary literature of *philosophes* and which are debated by the polemical voice in Voltaire's history. The histories have a great deal of space for polemical material. Their participation in contemporary debates is further evidence of a wealth of contemporary, non-historical, *story* material in Voltaire's histories.

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[510] Sekora, J., *Luxury: the concept in western thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 66.
[511] Voltaire, *Le Mondain* in *Mélanges*, pp. 203-6, (p. 206).
[512] Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* in *Oeuvres complètes de Rousseau* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), II, 52-68.
[513] Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique* in *OC, 39*, ed. Ch. Mervaud et al (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1994), 'Luxe'.

***Discours sur les sciences et les arts***

Voltaire's sensitivity to contemporary writers and writing is also manifest in the contemporary nature of his histories. There is a resonance of Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) within *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, which suggests more than fleeting allusion. The duality of Voltaire's histories has already been seen to provide the textual space for a multiplicity of voices. Texts and subtexts coexist within the one work of history. The duality of character has literary precedents in ancient writing, just as polemical debate within history has its roots in the works of ancient historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides, where pairs of antithetical speeches expound opposing philosophies or policies. As Rousseau and Voltaire publish their thoughts on science and the arts within two years of each other, and the two writers' arguments are almost directly in conflict, it is very likely that Voltaire is responding in his history to some of the ideas broached by this contemporary and controversial text. Voltaire was well-versed in extended literary answers and exchange, if only from his and others' constant exchanges in contemporary pamphlets and journalistic fora such as the *Mercure de France.*

There is considerable evidence of exchanges between the two writers prior to *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.*[514] Yet, their relationship was an uneven one from the beginning. Rousseau initially empathised with the other, more famous exiled writer, but the feeling

[514] Vaillot, R., 'La Bénédiction du Pape' in *Avec Madame Du Châtelet 1734-1749* in *Voltaire en son temps II* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1988), pp. 239-40. Vaillot underlines that there is no evidence that Voltaire had read Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* before publishing *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.* However, it could be argued that Voltaire was not unaware of the polemic surrounding the work and that he may, nonetheless, have responded to it, although such a response would not be an *intertextual* one.

was not reciprocated. Voltaire would reply to a letter from Rousseau with extreme irony:

> J'ai reçu, monsieur, votre nouveau livre contre le genre humain, je vous en remercie. Vous plairez aux hommes, à qui vous dites leurs vérités, mais vous ne les corrigerez pas.[515]

Despite being ideologically almost diametrically opposed, the chapters on sciences and the arts in Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* will be shown to follow a pattern very similar to Rousseau's first *Discours*, pointing towards a sequence of responses in the history to commentary on similar issues in the earlier *Discours*. Rousseau's praise of the natural and the uncultured differs from the attitudes which Voltaire promotes in his histories and from the enlightened thought which they espouse.

The similarity of structure and composition pattern in both cases is apparent from the beginning, where both authors initially return to the past before dealing in turn with their more immediate present and both assess the damage which the past had inflicted on the subject of their study. In *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, it is noted that the revolutionary progress of the seventeenth century was unexpected after 'la décadence des lettres', a climate which rendered progress so unlikely, '[le] chaos où elle était plongée' (*SL*, 1005). In this history, the chapter *Des sciences* begins:

> Ce siècle heureux, qui vit naître une révolution dans l'esprit humain, n'y semblait pas destiné. (*SL*, 1005)

Rousseau had already launched his work with such images of birth and the unexpected emergence of development from barbarism or nothingness:

> C'est un grand et beau spectacle de voir l'homme sortir en quelque manière du néant.

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[515] Rousseau, J.J., Correspondence, ed. R.A. Leigh, (Genève: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1965-71[I-XV]; Oxford: Taylor Institution, 1975-91 [XVI-L]; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1995 [LI]), Lettre 317, Voltaire to Rousseau, 30 août 1755.

> Dissiper [...] les ténèbres dans lesquelles la nature l'avait enveloppé.
>
> La barbarie des premiers âges. (*DSA*, 53)

Both authors acknowledge the influences of ancient Greece on the development of the arts in the past. While Rousseau identified the influence as a positive one (*DSA*, 53), the polemical voice in Voltaire's history is dubious, listing sorcery, superstition, horoscopes, magicians and magic as hallmarks of the legacy of ancient Greece.

Wistfully, Rousseau proceeds to praise the innocence of pre-scientific life, describing the *commerce des Muses* as a contract he cannot endorse, although he recognises its primary rôle in civilising man (*DSA*, 53). Voltaire, too, sees the arts as introducing order and a predominantly civilising influence into society, although he mocks the resultant uniformity and conformity. He shows Louis XIV to be the great instigator of fads and fashions at court, one who inspired others to copy like puppets. With irony, Voltaire depicts these inadequate imitators as the antithesis of art and totally ludicrous in appearance:

> Ceux d'un ordre inférieur copiaient la hauteur des premiers; et il y en avait enfin, et même en grand nombre, qui poussaient cet air avantageux et cette envie dominante de se faire valoir jusqu'au plus grand ridicule. (*SL*, 1012)

Whilst the *Discours* depicts the arts as a curb on the freedom of mankind on earth, the view of the polemical voice in Voltaire's history is antithetical. Rousseau uses the analogy of slavery for the sciences and the arts in his sketch of draped garlands of flowers adorning solid iron chains. His vocabulary is one of chains, captivity and policing, a vision of the senses being filtered through the sciences and the arts in order to control them by enforced norms, 'une vile et trompeuse uniformité':

> Les sciences, les lettres et les arts, moins despotiques et plus puissants peut-être, étendent des guirlandes de fleurs sur les chaînes de fer dont ils sont chargés, étouffent en eux le sentiment de

> cette liberté originelle pour laquelle ils semblaient être nés, leur font aimer leur esclavage et en forment ce qu'on appelle des peuples policés. (*DSA*, 53)

This theme of falsity and of one's real nature being stifled by social conditioning and the outward forms of politeness is one which recurs almost obsessively in *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*. Rousseau proffers the belief that man's soul is doomed once he learns to dissemble in any way. He stresses that conforming and social politeness inevitably lead to falseness and highlights the social impossibility of honesty:

> Qu'il serait doux de vivre parmi nous, si la contenance extérieure était toujours l'image des dispositions du coeur; si la décence était la vertu; si nos maximes nous servaient de règles; si la véritable philosophie était inséparable du titre de philosophe! (*DSA*, 54)

Although Voltaire partly agrees with Rousseau on questions of false politeness and pomp, the historian is, in contrast, full of praise for progress in the arts. They are depicted as a catalyst which frees the mind and enlightens the spirit, the very antithesis of slavery:

> Tant d'écrivains ont étendu les lumières de l'esprit humain. (*SL*, 1002)
>
> L'Académie des Sciences rendit des services à l'esprit humain. (*SL*, 1002)
>
> [Balzac] charmait l'oreille. (*SL*, 1003)
>
> Un des ouvrages qui contribuèrent le plus à former le goût de la nation, et à lui donner un esprit de justesse et de précision... (*SL*, 1004)
>
> Les grands hommes du siècle passé ont enseigné à penser et à parler. (*SL*, 1015)

Such riposte in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* suggests that the polemical voice in history is responding to many of the arguments which Rousseau addressed in his *Discours*. Not only do they differ in opinion, but their styles are also strikingly dissimilar. Where Rousseau deals with subjects in a hypothetical and more abstract fashion, the historical narrative appears to relish the opportunity of countering with a supply of more concrete, historical examples in order to contradict and undermine the other's argument. Where

the vocabulary of Rousseau's text is less specific and more speculative and deals in generalities and hypothesis, Voltaire's history typically abounds in positive and energetic terms which equate discovery with the passionate excitement of the quest for knowledge: *la raison, le goût, un esprit de justesse et de précision, un mérite, un siècle florissant, une foule d'esprits agréables, un des arts les plus agréables et les plus utiles, la plus grande perfection.* These terms highlight the evident clash of two different and almost diametrically opposed approaches to socio-historical analysis.

Another example of the writers' antithetical philosophies is in their differing reactions to *génie*. Rousseau maintains that people have lost their originality, arguing that self, personality and *génie* are constrained by uniformity:

> Sans cesse on suit des usages, jamais son propre génie. On n'ose plus paraître ce qu'on est. (*DSA*, 54)

Countering Rousseau's pessimistic perception of stunted *génie*, the polemical voice in Voltaire places it alongside 'lumières', thus linking it to an enlightened state of being allegedly brought about by the development of the arts and sciences:

> Les vers furent partout les premiers enfants de génie. (*SL*, 1009)
>
> C'est le privilège du vrai génie, et surtout du génie qui ouvre une carrière, de faire impunément de grandes fautes. (*SL*, 1011)
>
> Dans l'école de ces génies, qui seront les délices et l'instruction des siècles à venir. (*SL*, 1014-5)
>
> Ainsi donc le génie n'a qu'un siècle, après quoi il faut qu'il dégénère. (*SL*, 1017)

One might well wonder at the apparent paradox of there being no more *génies* after the previous century, but this is swiftly linked to the quantity of 'choses médiocres', with the exception of the happy few, 'excellents ouvrages' (*SL*, 1017).

Although they view *génie* in different ways, both writers agree on the importance of monuments in history and of man's inherent sense of being a product of

his ancestors. Yet, Rousseau could only contemplate with horror and shame the prospect of his descendants who will condemn the *moeurs* of the eighteenth century and its progress, which he portrays as destructive for mankind (*DSA*, 67). In contrast, the legacy of Louis XIV is viewed in a positive light in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* where the rebirth of reason is depicted as a phoenix rising from the ashes:

> Et la raison s'éleva enfin sur leurs ruines. (*SL*, 998)

Voltaire's history connects the value of historical monuments with the modern desire for scientific progress, symbolised by the development of *raison* and embodied in the physical monument of an observatory:

> C'est le plus beau monument de l'astronomie, et il suffit pour éterniser ce siècle. (*SL*, 999)

The sum of these links and connections suggests that they are far from purely coincidental. They concretise the gulf which exists between the socio-historical approach of the two writers, clear in each author's concluding tone. In his *Discours*, at the climax of his litany of the horrors resulting from the artifices of the sciences and the arts, Rousseau addresses God, imploring him to restore the natural, imagining future generations cursing their invention:

> «Dieu tout-puissant, toi qui tiens dans tes mains les esprits, délivre-nous des lumières et des funestes arts de nos pères, et rends nous l'ignorance, l'innocence et la pauvreté». (*DSA*, 67)

Rousseau's use of *lumières* in this prayer is deeply ironic, as it implies a rejection of all that the *philosophes* and the Enlightenment stood for in France at the time of writing. In Voltaire's history, the polemical voice teasingly uses an almost antithetical use of *lumières* as it too reaches a climax on this topic. Contrary to that of Rousseau,

Voltaire's conclusion is full of praise and enthusiasm for the progress which had begun in the previous century and was deemed to be complete and flourishing at the time of composition. The following example details just one such area as proof:

> Il arriva à la médecine, comme à la philosophie, d'atteindre à la perfection dont elle est capable en profitant des lumières de nos voisins. (*SL*, 1021)

Echoing his viewpoint in other works such as the *Lettres philosophiques* and *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*, Voltaire's history favours the pen and progress and the promotion of scientific discovery, in response to Rousseau who decides in favour of the passions and of that which is natural. This typical gulf between the two philosophers' approaches principally shows their different attitudes to socio-historical thought. However, it furthermore emphasises the positive drive for scientific and economic progress, the encouragement to attain that 'fourth' resolution - to use the metaphor of the 'heroic' formula - and the use of very concrete symbols of improvement and advancement which emerge in these chapters of Voltaire's history. Thus, in the chapters on the sciences and the arts, the polemical voice in history takes the opportunity to refute Rousseau's arguments in a historical context. It is as if the historian chooses to promote his own sociological paradigm through the convenient and persuasive substantiation offered by historical example. It is likewise clear that a logical, polemical purpose deems this historical framework - which in itself suggests universality and broad vision - as a support to the history's counter argument against Rousseau's outlook. As with the historical epic voice, the contemporary polemical voice within history shows evidence of a wider, more erudite interpretation of social history, connecting it with the historian's vision for both society and progress. Once again, this demonstrates a broadening of historical frames of reference, inviting the

historical text to display the fingerprints of classical and contemporary literature and debate.

## KALEIDOSCOPIC HISTORY

Examination of Voltaire's histories has indicated the extent of the *story* qualities of these historical creations. As well as the story-like narrative tone, *story* voices and *literary* fingerprints of classical or modern authors on the texts are evidence of the *history/story* duality of Voltaire's histories. The analogy of history and art is one traditionally drawn, by critics and author alike, to describe the author's historiography. The changing images and frames of reference in these histories suggest an artistic, textual kaleidoscope in which the reader may discern appealing, ever-changing patterns of various shapes and colours. Viewed in this way, *Histoire de Charles XII* is a work full of images which constantly change shape and focus, whether to feature international wars or the private battles of a king in exile, attack or repose, war camp or harem. Similarly, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* provides a kaleidoscopic vision of history, both through its novel views of a 'social' history and through its unusual structure which facilitates multiple reflections of one historical *siècle*. But does this artistic metaphor capture the polytonal textual essence of Voltaire's histories? Can it encapsulate the movement from *Histoire de Charles XII* to *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and from beginning to end within the latter text? A selection of extracts from the actual pages of history may allow better assessment of the effect of such polytonality on the text itself.

**Battle of Narva**

***Histoire de Charles XII*, Livre second (pp. 213-217).**

Le signal était deux fusées, et le mot en allemand, *avec l'aide de Dieu.* Un officier général lui ayant représenté la grandeur du péril: *Quoi, vous doutez,* dit-il, *qu'avec mes huit mille braves Suédois je ne passe sur le corps à quatre-vingt mille Moscovites*? Un moment après, craignant qu'il n'y eût un peu de fanfaronnade dans ces paroles, il courut lui-même après cet officier: *N'êtes-vous donc pas de mon avis*? Lui dit-il: *n'ai-je pas deux avantages sur les ennemis; l'un que leur cavalerie ne pourra leur servir, et l'autre que le lieu étant resserré, leur grand nombre ne fera que les incommoder? et ainsi je serai réellement plus fort qu'eux.* L'officier n'eut garde d'être d'un autre avis, et on marcha aux Moscovites à midi le 30 novembre 1700.

Dès que le canon des Suédois eut fait brèche aux retranchements, ils s'avancèrent la baïonnette au bout du fusil, ayant au dos une neige furieuse, qui donnait aux visage des ennemis. Les Russes se firent tuer pendant une demi-heure, sans quitter le revers des fossés. Le roi attaquait à la droite du camp, où était le quarter du czar; il espérait le recontrer, ne sachant pas que l'empereur lui-même avait été chercher ces quarante mille hommes, qui devaient arriver dans peu. Aux premières décharges de la mousqueterie ennemie, le roi reçut une balle à la gorge; mais c'était une balle morte, qui s'arrêta dans les plis de sa cravate noire, et qui ne lui fit aucun mal. Son cheval fut tué sous lui. M. de Spaar m'a dit, que le roi sauta légèrement sur un autre cheval, en disant: *ces gens-ci me font faire mes exercices*; et continua de combattre et de donner les ordres avec la même présence d'esprit. Après trois heures de combat, les retranchements furent forcés de tous côtés. Le roi poursuivit la droite des ennemis jusqu'à la rivière de Narva, avec son aile gauche, si l'on peut appeler de ce nom environ quatre mille hommes qui en poursuivaient près de quarante mille. Le pont rompit sous les fuyards; la rivière fut en un moment couverte de morts. Les autres désespérés retournèrent à leur camp, sans savoir où ils allaient: ils trouvèrent quelques baraques, derrière lesquelles ils se mirent. Là ils se défendirent encore, parce qu'ils ne pouvaient pas se sauver; mais enfin leurs généraux Dolgorouky, Gollofin, Fédérowits, vinrent se rendre au roi, et mettre leurs armes à ses pieds. Pendant qu'on les lui présentait, arriva le duc de Croi, général de l'armée, qui venait se rendre lui-même avec trente officers.

Charles reçut tous ces prisonniers d'importance avec une politesse aussi aisée et un air aussi humain, que s'il leur eût fait dans sa cour les honneurs d'une fête. Il ne voulut garder que les généraux. Tous les officiers subalternes et les soldats furent conduits désarmés jusqu'à la rivière de Narva: on leur fournit des bateaux pour la repasser, et pour s'en retourner chez eux. Cependant la nuit s'approchait; la droite des Moscovites se battait encore: les Suédois n'avaient pas perdu six cents hommes: dix-huit mille Moscovites avaient été tués dans leurs retranchements: un grand nombre été noyé: beaucoup avaient passé la rivière; il en restait encore assez dans le camp, pour exterminer jusqu'au dernier Suédois. Mais ce n'est pas le nombre des morts, c'est l'épouvante de ceux qui survivent qui fait perdre les batailles. Le roi profita du peu de jour qui restait, pour saisir l'artillerie ennemie. Il se posta avantageusement entre leur

camp et la ville: là il dormit quelques heures sur la terre enveloppé dans son manteau, en attendant qu'il pût fondre au point du jour sur l'aile gauche des ennemis, qui n'avait point encore été tout à fait rompue. A deux heures du matin, le général Védé, qui commandait cette gauche, ayant su le gracieux accueil que le roi avait fait aux autres généraux, et comment il avait renvoyé tous les officiers subalternes et les soldats, l'envoya supplier de lui accorder la même grâce. Le vainqueur lui fit dire, qu'il n'avait qu'à s'approcher à la tête de ses troupes, et venir mettre bas les armes et les drapeaux devant lui. Ce général parut bientôt après ses Moscovites, qui étaient au nombre d'environ trente mille. Ils marchèrent tête nue, soldats et officiers, à travers moins de sept mille Suédois. Les soldats en passant devant le roi, jetaient à terre leurs fusils et leurs épées; et les officiers portaient à ses pieds les enseignes et le drapeaux. Il fit repasser la rivière à touts cette multitude, sans en retenir un seul soldat prisonnier. S'il les avait gardés, le nombre des prisonniers eût été au moins cinq fois plus grand que celui des vainqueurs.

Since brevity is a hallmark of Voltaire's histories, it is not unusual that the Battle of Narva should be recounted in *Histoire de Charles XII* in the space of three paragraphs, neatly presented as introduction, duration and conclusion. Consistent with the motif of duality which underpins the entire history, the two armies are opposed, initially, in terms of numbers, 8,000 Swedes against 80,000 Russians. This apparent disparity is swiftly dispelled, being interpreted as advantageous for the Swedes, whose agility, luck and calibre are emphasised by heavily positive terms such as, 'braves Suédois', 'deux avantages', 'réellement plus fort qu'eux', 'ayant au dos une neige furieuse, qui donnait au visage des ennemis'. These advantages are further reinforced by portrayal of the confidence afforded by a previously mentioned rout of the advance guard and by the king's natural, if naïve, optimism. In contrast, the Russians are depicted in negative terms as constituting a weighty bulk, captured in the phrase 'leur grand nombre ne fera que les incommoder'. This symbolic positive/negative representation is a recurrent feature of the narrative of this history and works closely in tandem with anecdotal prolepsis. Emphasis of the statistically unlikely nature of the

Swedish victory adds an element of suspense to the narrative, rendering the account more exciting for the reader. Although making it appear unlikely, the text is nonetheless heavily weighted from the very beginning in favour of a Swedish victory and this stance is vindicated in the end. Having chosen to back the underdog, and therefore having won against the odds, the narrator invites the reader to trust the historian's presentation and judgement by presenting him as a successful historical authority with considerable insight.

As well as a characteristic optimism, commonly associated throughout the history with the king at war, the distinctive motif of 'perpetual motion' is once again used to depict Charles XII, 'il courut lui-même après cet officier', 'le roi attaquait', 'le roi poursuivit la droite des ennemis'. This activity is strongly contrasted with the emphasis on Russian passivity, 'Les Russes se firent tuer pendant une demi-heure, sans quitter le revers des fossés'. Among contemporary historians, such consistent depiction through leitmotifs is particular only to Voltaire and is more characteristic of literary than historical writing. In addition, the image of a polyglot Swedish army which gives the signal for attack on the Russians in German, 'le mot, en allemand', recalls the linguistic gymnastics often connected with the Swedish king as European traveller, warmonger and citizen. This, in turn, recalls the European perspective which emanates from the text, another quality particular to Voltaire's historiography. The narrative backdrop of this history is riddled with similar, easily recognisable, recurrent features or leitmotifs, which are just some of the artistic threads weaving through the work of history. It is apt in such a battle scene that the 'heroic formula' should be used to seal defeat of the Russians. Three generals Dolgorouky, Gollofin and Fédérowits are

depicted surrendering to the king. Just as they are being received, the general of the army, duc de Croi, likewise arrives to surrender, thus signalling defeat.

The extract of the Battle of Narva is far from constituting a mere monologic, historical account or a purely entertaining narrative of one army's victory in unlikely circumstances. As well as the choice of focus and the images carefully selected for diffusion, various *history* and *story* voices or comments guiding the reader through the action are also discernible. The spoken voice of Charles XII is heard at the very outset, and during the battle. In theory, the historian's voice preaches against this *je* of direct speech, but, in reality, the *story* narrator cannot bear to suppress it fully. When the king's horse is killed beneath him, the king exclaims nonchalantly, in a tone which is more comic than epic and is rather flippant for mid-battle, '*ces gens-ci me font faire mes exercices*'. This may be the fictional verging on the farcical, but it is an ideal method of showing Charles XII's calm in a crisis, or his ability to joke even when in danger. The opportunity is also seized to remind the reader that this history is a serious one, well researched and founded on witness accounts, 'M. de Spaar m'a dit'. The personal *me* evokes the well-connected young writer Arouet-le-jeune as well as the historian who has checked his material but insists on narrating history in a stylish, entertaining, literary manner. Fact and narrative, *history* and *story* are seamlessly fused.

In the face of the confident, fearless words of the king who is about to launch into a very perilous battle, the cautious interlocutor (*l'officier*) remains silent. The king's rhetorical question, '*N'êtes-vous donc pas de mon avis?*', permits no articulated answer. Instead, the critical voice of the textual commentator responds, with the words, 'il n'eut garde d'être d'un autre avis'. The historian's doubt and caution yield to the

*story* of avid war-mongering. Without voicing any direct criticism of the young king's attitude, the historian, like the *officier*, has nonetheless conveyed his doubts.

This tone of warning, coupled with an inherent distaste for war, resonates throughout the history particularly in the very depiction of Charles XII and his almost inevitable and tragic destiny. Presented as a king who wishes to be a mythical war hero, the textual image nonetheless remains that of a mere mortal playing with death, 'le roi reçut une balle à la gorge; mais c'était une balle morte'. The reader is invited to appreciate the text at both levels, the narrative of a hero and the commentary on the folly of war. In this battle, the king's moves are recounted in a tone of suspense and excitement, but his decisions (such as going into battle in unfavourable circumstances) are presented as foolhardy and dependent on luck rather than on judgement.

The battle of Narva is portrayed as an impressive and unlikely victory for the Swedes, the stuff of exciting narrative. Having depicted the enormity of defeat suffered by the Russians, the historian cannot resist a final reiteration of their losses, closing nonetheless with the ironic observation that Charles XII was not just magnanimous in freeing the Russian soldiers, but pragmatic in the face of being outnumbered in both battle and victory: 'S'il les avait gardés, le nombre des prisonniers eût été au moins cinq fois plus grand que celui des vainqueurs.'

Unlike other contemporary histories which base their entire text around war and battles, the historian of *Histoire de Charles XII* manages to present battle as an anomaly which interrupts and disrupts ordinary life. This commentary is achieved in many different ways. In the battle of Narva it is emphasised both by the brevity of the account and by events being presented as outside actual, real life - no other contemporary

historian would have drawn the analogy that Charles XII was polite, calm and collected as if he were honouring the enemy at a party when he received his prisoners. By emphasising the terms *politesse*, *aisée* and *humain*, the historian implies with irony that war is not only rude and disruptive, but that it is also uncivilised, inhuman. Contemporary historians had no such philosophical appraisals or pacifist qualms. It is this same polemical, contemporary voice of the *philosophe* which criticises the odd, unnatural and inhuman nature of war where battles are not lost according to the number of soldiers killed, but according to the sheer terror of those who survive.[516] This maxim is blurted out by the textual commentator amidst passages of descriptive narrative, and it exudes bitter irony:

> Mais ce n'est pas le nombre des morts, c'est l'épouvante de ceux qui survivent qui fait perdre les batailles.

***Intrigues à la Porte ottomane***

***Histoire de Charles XII*, Livre sixième (pp. 427-8).**

Cette lettre ne fit point encore perdre l'espérance au roi de Suède: il écrivit au sultan, qu'il serait toute sa vie reconnaissant des faveurs dont Sa Hautesse l'avait comblé; mais qu'il croyait le sultan trop juste pour le renvoyer avec la simple escorte d'un camp volant, dans un pays encore inondé des troupes du czar. En effet, l'empereur russe, malgré le premier article de la paix de Pruth, par lequel il s'était engagé à retirer toutes ses troupes de la Pologne, y en avait fait encore passer de nouvelles; et ce qui semble étonnant, c'est que le Grand-Seigneur n'en savait rien.

La mauvaise politique de la Porte, d'avoir toujours par vanité des ambassadeurs des princes chrétiens à Constantinople, et de ne pas entretenir un seul agent dans les cours chrétiennes, fait que ceux-ci pénètrent et conduisent quelquefois les résolutions

[516] This image of human fodder is a recurrent one in Voltaire's histories. In *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, it is linked with the ironic observation: 'Peu importe à un général le nombre des morts, quand il vient à bout de son entreprise.' (*SL*, 829.)

les plus secrètes du sultan, et que le divan est toujours dans une profonde ignorance de ce qui se passe publiquement chez les chrétiens.

Le sultan, enfermé dans son sérail parmi ses femmes et ses eunuques, ne voit que par les yeux de son grand vizir: ce ministre aussi inaccessible que son maître, occupé des intrigues du sérail, et sans correspondence au dehors, est d'ordinaire trompé, ou trompe le sultan, qui le dépose ou le fait étrangler à la première faute, pour en choisir un autre aussi ignorant ou aussi perfide, qui se conduit comme ses prédécesseurs, et qui tombe bientôt comme eux.

Telle est pour l'ordinaire l'inaction et la sécurité profonde de cette cour, que, si les princes chrétiens se liguaient contre elle, leurs flottes seraient aux Dardanelles, et leur armée de terre aux portes d'Andrinople, avant que les Turcs eussent songé à se défendre; mais les divers intérêts qui diviseront toujours la chrétienté, sauveront les Turcs d'une destinée que leur peu de politique et leur ignorance dans la guerre et dans la marine semblent leur préparer aujourd'hui.

The four short paragraphs which comprise this extract are typical of the *other*, digressive concerns which compose the *literariness* of this history. Rather than merely recounting facts, figures, events, dates and the history of Charles XII alone, the narrative commentator renders the work more universally appealing with political and philosophical observations told in an entertaining manner. Yet, whilst cloaking history with *story*, the text becomes strikingly opinionated, never flinching from making blanket judgements such as, 'la mauvaise politique de la Porte'. Entertaining in tone, and non-historical in the traditional sense, the episode of exile amongst the Turks is an opportunity for reflection on more universal themes, with the foreign example serving as foil and alternative for the more familiar French, or western European model.

Both preceding and following this extract are endless examples of diplomacy, whether promises or treaties, made and broken, to the extent that truth and agreements are seen no longer to hold any real significance. The letter in question is from the sultan Achmet to Charles XII, requesting the king to leave 'notre Sublime Porte' post haste; it appears as an oasis in this diplomatic scenario. Quoted in full in the text, it features as

timely, tangible, historical evidence to substantiate a passage which has all the hallmarks of a fictional cat-and-mouse game of politics, rather than what the reader might have previously understood by international diplomacy. Consistent with the historian's prefatory and ongoing discussions of *vérité* and the constant querying of fact and opinion, this chaotic portrait of government and diplomacy presents to the reader an alternative historical vision which undermines conveniently neat accounts of treaties signed and sealed. The global focus has changed from war to political intrigue and the historian appears to revel in the cabals, disputes, corruption, treachery, alliances and intrigue of the Constantinople court. In contrast to the description of the battlefield of Narva, the striking tone of enthusiasm in this passage might suggest a greater narrative interest in the *story* of politics than in the history of war. Many of the historian's own interpretations of events and their significance are in evidence, such as 'ce qui semble étonnant'. Often articulated without an immediately identifiable source, they are subtly and anonymously conveyed through the voice of a textual commentator, signalled only by linking terms such as the explanatory 'en effet', or the demonstrative 'c'est que', 'fait que' and 'Telle est'. The history scarcely focuses on Charles XII here, but steers into the universal realm of political commentary and the chaos of diplomatic upheaval.

Nor can the historian resist seizing the opportunity to hint at the divided, and hence divisive, nature of Christianity. Attention is drawn with relish to the fact that the Turks are highly vulnerable to an attack by the West, if only 'les princes chrétiens' would join forces against them. However, the ironic commentator notes that Christianity is itself divided by too many other issues, and that this division means that such a concerted attack will never take place, at least not in the 'aujourd'hui' of writing.

Not unusually for these histories, divided Christianity is the target of ironic and exasperated attack by the ever-ready ironic voice of contemporary criticism.

With such details of chaos at court and blind, uninformed rulers, 'la mauvaise politique de la Porte', the temptation might be to draw parallels with contemporary Versailles and to identify warnings aimed at a French court, also choked by intrigues, corruption and cabals. However, this is too specific an allegory and very much a function of modern, retrospective vision. In fact, even if still targeting war, division and Eurocentricity, this passage proffers a higher, more universal view of politics and the philosophy of government. The concluding tone is one of resignation and inevitability in the face of political inertia and predictable lack of change:

> Son grand vizir [..] est d'ordinaire trompé, ou trompe le sultan, qui le dépose ou le fait étrangler à la première faute, pour en choisir un autre aussi ignorant ou aussi perfide, qui se conduit comme ses prédécesseurs, et qui tombe bientôt comme eux.

The diplomatic details are narrated as a *story* which has become a lengthy digression from war time or traditional history. The particular details reflect the general trend, and the concerns - articulated through interventions of polemical and contemporary voices - are universal ones, of doubt, suspicion and distrust at court, of man's inability to learn from mistakes, of the unavoidable repetition of failures and of the wonted pettiness of man. Furthermore, by exposing the entrails of international diplomacy and the falsity of treaties and agreements which are never respected, and by placing them within such a chaotic framework, the ironic commentator is again probing factors such as interpretation, honesty and intention. Thus, rulers are chastised for deception, 'en effet [...] y en avait fait encore passer de nouvelles [troupes]', and religions for hypocrisy, 'les divers intérêts qui diviseront toujours la chrétienté'. The use of the future 'diviseront' is condemnatory and leaves no space for misinterpretation. Historical facts

are questioned in the form of letters, treaties and agreements which are normally reported as historical absolutes and decisive points of reference, but which this historian reveals to be meaningless and insubstantial.

It may be concluded that the tone of passages dealing directly with battles and war is more scathing and ironic, while peace time allows for broader, probing reflection on more universal themes. Within the one history, focus changes constantly from general to specific, from international to local, from public to private, from familiar to foreign, from historical to philosophical and from war to peace. In comparison with other contemporary histories, the texture, concern, tone and voice of every passage of this history can be seen to alter accordingly.

**Battle of Blenheim**

***Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Chapitre XIX (pp. 832-3).**

Sivières, brigadier, qui était posté dans ce village, tente alors un coup hardi; il crie aux officiers d'Artois et de Provence de marcher avec lui: plusieurs officiers même des autres régiments y accourent; ils fondent sur l'ennemi, comme on fait une sortie d'une place assiégée; mais après la sortie, il faut rentrer dans la place. Un de ces officiers, nommé Des-Nonvilles, revint à cheval un moment après dans le village avec milord Orkney du nom d'Hamilton. «Est-ce un Anglais prisonnier que vous nous amenez?» lui dirent les officiers en l'entourant. « Non, messieurs; je suis prisonnier moi-même, et je viens vous dire qu'il n'y a d'autre parti pour vous que de vous rendre prisonniers de guerre. Voilà le comte d'Orkney qui vous offre la capitulation.» Toutes ces vieilles bandes frémirent; Navarre déchira et enterra ses drapeaux; mais enfin il fallut plier sous la nécessité, et cette armée se rendit sans combattre. L'Europe fut étonnée que les meilleures troupes françaises eussent subi en corps cette ignominie; on imputait leur malheur à la lâcheté: mais quelques années après, quatorze mille Suédois, se rendant à discrétion aux Russes, en rase campagne ont justifié les Français.

Telle fut la célèbre bataille qui, en France, a le nom d'Hochstedt; en Allemagne, de Plentheim; et en Angleterre, de Blenheim. Les vainqueurs y eurent près de cinq mille morts et près de huit mille blessés, et le plus grand nombre du côté du prince

Eugène. L'armée française y fut presque entièrement détruite; de soixante mille hommes, si longtemps victorieux, on n'en rassembla pas plus de vingt mille effectifs.

The extract on the battle of Blenheim is another example of the literary touch being applied to historical tableaux in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The occasion is presented as one of the more delicate moments in French history, being the hitherto inconceivable defeat of invincible French troops in the most commonplace of military manoeuvres. As it did for Charles XII, the pendulum swings from great success to great defeat. This movement reflects a very pragmatic view of progress and history, balanced by the voice of the experienced, ironic commentator who turns such wisdom into a maxim, 'mais après la sortie, il faut rentrer dans la place'.

The scene is set with the narrative caution that the manoeuvre is 'un coup hardi'. After this warning, which resounds with the danger of hubris, the actors are dropped in place. To further highlight the drama of the moment, the episode is recounted in the present tense '*tente...crie... accourent... fondent...fait...faut*'. The reader knows that the die is cast when the narrative suddenly returns to the past tense with the return of an officer, 'revint à cheval'. The absurd conversation which ensues, reported in direct speech, is inserted in the attempt to authenticate the reality of such an improbable, but historically real, situation. The mis-identification of prisoner for captor is a narrative trick which ekes out the expectation of victory beyond the actual defeat, thus emphasising the unforeseen, inconceivability of such an end. It also focuses on the surprise and incredulity of the French whose confidence had not envisaged such an outcome, as evident from Sivières's hubris. The use of direct speech here is a precise copy of that used when Charles XII's horse is killed beneath him at Narva and the king

comments nonchalantly on being obliged to do gymnastics. The theory of historiography may have developed but the practice has not necessarily progressed, since the narrative tools used appear to be similar in both histories. Despite contradicting the historian's theories of historiography, direct speech is employed because it is more memorable and immediate; it dramatises the French assumption that they are invulnerable; it also focuses the reader's attention on the odd nature of the scene, prolonging the instant in the text to give it added weight.

Avoiding either triumphalist or defeatist tones, the text depicts the movement from attack to defeat, from advance to retreat, from *sortie* to *rentrer,* evoking the programmed motion of a pendulum and extravagantly suggesting that the victory could have gone either way. A version of the 'three plus one' formula again marks the defeat, with the rising tension of the three stages of attack, '*crie... accourent... fondent*', being followed by the moment of defeat, signalled by 'mais', and coupled with the movement of retreat, 'il faut rentrer dans la place' and an accompanying return to past tense of narration. As in other battle scenes, the element of suspense is exploited to great effect, as in the depiction of the French army confident in the belief that it has won, until informed to the contrary. The defeat is initially portrayed as practically insignificant and expressed gently, in terms of incredulity, seemingly to ease the pain.

However, the narrative pendulum then swings to focus on defeat so that, alongside the superficially tactful depiction, salt is rubbed in the wound by the ironic commentator's choice of such terms as, 'lâcheté' and 'ignominie'. Subsequently, figurative balm is applied through evocation of similar defeat at Pultava. But the total defeat of the Swedish army at Pultava in turn reinforces the enormity of the French

defeat at Blenheim, investing 'justifié' with heavy irony. The incredulous eyes of the whole of Europe are on the army which collapsed, 'se rendit sans combattre'. The battle has not only one name but three, which the historian kindly supplies, as if to depict defeat in triplicate at Hochstedt, Plentheim and Blenheim. No matter how gentle the image, battle is tough and the resultant shame is heightened by the size of a Europe-wide audience. The voice of the *philosophe* pacificist commentator who prefers politics and statesmanship and who pays scant attention to war, lists, manoeuvres or facts may underlie this cruel judgement. Pacificism best deals with a battle through irony and ambiguity. Thus, the narrative simultaneously sports two faces of fate and the pull and tug is both sweet and sour, soothing and inflammatory, potentially victorious but resoundingly defeated.

## Mme de Maintenon's Letters

***Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Chapitre XXVII (p. 935).**

Cependant il est prouvé par les lettres mêmes de Mme de Maintenon qu'elle dut à Mme de Montespan ce léger secours qui la tira de la misère. On se ressouvint d'elle quelques années après, lorsqu'il fallut élever en secret le duc du Maine, que le roi avait eu, en 1670, de la marquise de Montespan. Ce ne fut certainement qu'en 1672 qu'elle fut choisie pour présider à cette éducation secrète; elle dit dans une de ses lettres : «Si les enfants sont au roi, je le veux bien; car je ne me chargerais pas sans scrupule de ceux de Mme de Montespan : ainsi il faut que le roi me l'ordonne; voilà mon dernier mot.» Mme de Montespan n'avait deux enfants qu'en 1672, le duc du Maine et le comte de Vexin : les dates des lettres de Mme de Maintenon, de 1670, dans lesquelles elle parle de ces deux enfants, dont l'un n'était pas encore né, sont donc évidemment fausses; presque toutes les dates de ces lettres imprimées sont erronées. Cette infidelité pourrait donner de violents soupçons sur l'authenticité de ces lettres, si d'ailleurs on n'y reconnaissait pas un caractère de naturel et de vérité qu'il est presque impossible de contrefaire.

Il n'est pas fort important de savoir en quelle année cette dame fut chargée du soin des enfants naturels de Louis XIV; mais l'attention de ces petites vérités fait voir avec quel scrupule on a écrit les faits principaux de cette histoire.

An example of the manipulative element within the historian's voice in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is a passage which begins with the historian's message that what is printed must not necessarily be believed, unless it can be proven to be true. This message is delivered in connection with the letters of Mme de Maintenon. In order to sow doubt in the reader's mind as to the authenticity of the letters, it is first clearly stated that 'les dates des lettres de Mme de Maintenon [...] sont donc évidemment fausses'. Thus, the historian first draws the reader's attention to the fact that the dates of the published editions are all incorrect. The didactic historian intervenes to emphasise his skill as historical sleuth, calculating that the dates of the letters are entirely incorrect. The same voice qualifies this fact by pointing out that the exact date of certain events is not crucial, but that inaccuracies in small matters may reflect a general lack of attention to detail, or a lack of accuracy on a larger scale, 'l'attention de ces petites vérités...'. Whilst providing the historian with the opportunity to wax lyrical on the importance of quality research and his own skill at identifying inconsistencies, this nonetheless tends to suggest that the author may actually have doubted the origins of these letters. In contrast, the historian does not seem to know that these letters are false, although there cannot be certainty on this point as the verb *contrefaire* is used, whilst *impossible* is conveniently qualified by *presque*:

> Presque toutes les dates de ces lettres imprimées sont erronées. Cette infidélité pourrait donner de violents soupçons sur l'authenticité de ces lettres, si d'ailleurs on n'y reconnaissait pas un caractère de naturel et de vérité qu'il est presque impossible de contrefaire. (*SL*, 935)

Ironically, some of them have since been proven to be either complete forgeries or at least partially falsified

The occasion for historiographical didacticism is seized with relish. However, the narrative goes beyond pure historiography to discuss issues of fact and *vérité*. Although the historian has always emphasised the importance of solid historical sources and research, here this prerequisite is juxtaposed with the relative unimportance of some specific facts:

> Il n'est pas fort important de savoir en quelle année cette dame fut chargée du soin des enfants naturels de Louis XIV. (*SL*, 935)

Such a reflection is audacious in the context of contemporary historiography which insisted on the equation of fact, history and truth. Furthermore, it leads the discussion to consideration of the flexibility of *petites vérités*. In highlighting that, at times, actual historical facts are not the most important element of history, the reader is invited to reconsider the entire nature, function and purpose of history. The suggestion is that the facts do not necessarily matter, but that the meaning counts immeasurably.

Once again, historical theory is at odds with what contemporary historians might consider loose, convenient practice, because the text chooses to overlook inconsistencies and to choose the global, *authenticité*, over doubts about specifics, *petites vérités*. In practical terms, it is the importance of *story* which allows the small inaccuracies to be overlooked in the end. The reader is likewise advised to accept the *story* as *history*, on the basis that the general tone of the letters rings true. This is an example of the historian laying down the law on accurate *history*, and then flagrantly flouting it for spurious and self-interested reasons, or the real narrative necessity of providing a good *story*. The *story* exploits the *history*'s position and tone of absolute

authority in order to overlook obvious doubts about the authorship of Mme de Maintenon's letters, just because they are very useful as a source of information and entertainment within the work. More dramatically, history is no longer solely equated to *facts*, but is bound up with the wider interpretation and implication of truth within *story*. In this sense, the historian can be considered both a face and a mask, whilst the narrative is both factual and fictional, or *history* and *story*.

***Écrasez l'infâme***

***Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Chapitre XXXVII (pp. 1082-3).**

Les esprits étaient surtout **révoltés** contre le jésuite Le Tellier. Rien ne nous **irrite** plus qu'un **religieux devenu puissant**. Son pouvoir nous paraît **une violation de ses voeux**; mais s'il **abuse de ce pouvoir, il est en horreur**. Toutes les prisons étaient pleines depuis longtemps de citoyens accusés de jansénisme. On faisait accroire à Louis XIV, trop ignorant dans ces matières, que c'était le devoir d'un roi très chrétien, et qu'il ne pouvait expier ses péchés qu'en persécutant les hérétiques. Ce qu'il y a de plus **honteux**, c'est qu'on portait à ce jésuite Le Tellier les copies des interrogatoires faits à ces infortunés. Jamais on ne **trahit plus lâchement** la justice; jamais **la bassesse** ne sacrifia plus **indignement** au pouvoir. On a retrouvé, en 1768, à la maison professe des jésuites, ces **monuments de leur tyrannie**, après qu'ils ont porté enfin la peine de leurs excès, et qu'ils ont été **chassés** par tous les parlements du royaume, par les voeux de la nation, et enfin par un édit de Louis XV.

(1715) Le Tellier **osa** présumer de son crédit jusqu'à proposer de faire déposer le cardinal de Noailles dans un concile national. Ainsi un religieux **faisait servir à sa vengeance** son roi, son pénitent, et sa religion.

Pour préparer ce concile, dans lequel il s'agissait de déposer un homme devenu l'idole de Paris et de la France par la pureté de ses moeurs, par la douceur de son caractère, et plus encore par la persécution, on détermina Louis XIV à faire enregistrer au parlement une déclaration par laquelle tout évêque qui n'aurait pas reçu la bulle *purement et simplement* serait tenu d'y souscrire, ou qu'il serait poursuivi suivant la rigueur des canons. Le chancelier Voisin, secrétaire d'État de la guerre, **dur et despotique**, avait dressé cet édit. Le procureur général Daguesseau, plus versé que le chancelier Voisin dans les lois du royaume, et ayant alors ce courage d'esprit que donne la jeunesse, refusa absolument de se charger d'une telle pièce. Le premier président de Mesme en remontra au roi les conséquences. On traîna l'affaire en longueur. Le roi était mourant: ces **malheureuses disputes** troublèrent et avancèrent ses derniers

moments. Son **impitoyable confesseur** fatiguait sa faiblesse par des **exhortations continuelles** à consommer un ouvrage qui ne devait pas faire chérir sa mémoire. Les domestiques du roi, indignes, lui refusèrent deux fois l'entrée de la chambre, et enfin ils le conjurèrent de ne point parler au roi de constitution. Ce prince mourut, et tout changea.

Le duc d'Orléans, régent du royaume, ayant renversé d'abord toute la forme du gouvernement de Louis XIV, et ayant substitué des conseils aux bureaux des secrétaires d'État, composa un conseil de conscience dont le cardinal de Noailles fut le président. On exila le jésuite Le Tellier, **chargé de la haine publique, et peu aimé de ses confrères.**

**[bold not in original]**

The tone in the chapters on religious disputes is no longer conciliatory or soothing, even on the surface, and is evidence of the contemporary spirit of this history. This extract appears as a polar opposite to the aspirations of the introductory chapter which advocated the universal over the ephemeral, 'ce qui mérite l'attention de tous les temps' (*SL*, 620). The disconcerting discrepancy between early aspirations (*SL*, I) and later reality (*SL*, XXXVII) is a contradiction which the historian airily attributes to volatile changes in mood and whim:

> Les opinions des hommes dépendent des temps, des lieux et des circonstances. (*SL*, 1092)

Although the passage depicts one facet of 'ce qu'ils ont été sous Louis XIV' (*SL*, 620), the extent of space devoted to this topic and the extreme tone of its treatment suggests that, for this historian, the politics of religious disputes were bigger and more dangerous than war, literature or the sciences.

It is no mere coincidence that Jesuit corruption is addressed in a chapter on Jansenism. As it would be in *L'Ingénu*, the parallel drawn between the two institutions, as with most religious institutions cited in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, equates their corruption, purposely rendering the names Jesuit and Jansenist textually interchangeable. To extricate the history, to some degree, from the fury and indignation

of 1768, the date (1715) is clearly stamped on the ensuing text. Subtlety and tact are jettisoned. Strong levels of negativity already seen to emanate from passages on war, or in the irony used in the face of political inertia and intrigue, pale before the vehemence employed in chronicling the history of religious disputes.

The contemporary polemicist *on* practically seizes the history with a personal memory, 'on a retrouvé, en 1768 [...] ces monuments de leur tyrannie'. This is a comment which post-dates much of the surrounding historical text and which traces its origins to Voltaire who would campaign against intolerance in his *écrasez l'infâme* crusade. The acerbic, contemporary voice of *nous*, while railing against religious infamy and cabals, may expound tolerance, but nonetheless creates its own passionate cabal, recruiting the reader with global terms such as 'les esprits' and an insistent reiteration of *nous*, 'rien ne nous irrite plus... nous paraît', in order to enter textual battle against the practice of religious hypocrites, *on*, 'on faisait accroire... on portait...on ne trahit plus lâchement...'. The tension is eased only with the Jesuits' imposed exile, textually resolved by the distance of *ils*, 'ils ont porté enfin la peine de leurs excès...ils ont été chassés'.

Venom is poured into both the portrayal of Jesuit corruption and the depiction of Le Tellier; the passage is riddled with examples of revolt and fury: *révoltés, irrite, un religieux devenu puissant, une violation de ses voeux, s'il abuse de ce pouvoir, il est en horreur, honteux, trahit plus lâchement, la bassesse, indignement, monuments de leur tyrannie, excès, chassés, osa, faisait servir à son vengeance, dur et despotique, malheureuses disputes, impitoyable confesseur, exhortations continuelles, chargé de la*

*haine publique, et peu aimé de ses confrères*. The sheer acidity of the commentator's tone is uncircumscribed and unequalled in the rest of the historical work.

The whole passage is structured around a crescendo of accusation and disgust, leading up to the frightful condemnation of Le Tellier who badgers the king on his deathbed. The Jesuit is depicted as *impitoyable*, and for whom nothing is sacred, whether *roi*, *pénitent* or *religion*. Such a pitch of fury and indignation comes to an abrupt textual and actual halt with the king's death, calmly reported: 'Ce prince mourut, et tout changea'. The abrupt alteration in tone on defeat of Le Tellier is a textual attempt to depict rationality and control in the face of religious fanaticism. The startling spirit of the passage underlines the urgent narrative message of the dangerous mix of power and religion and the necessity for rational action in the face of current religious corruption.

In all the selected extracts, and especially in this last passage, the absence of neutral material in *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is remarkable. Rather than adopting a purely historical focus, the tone veers towards the political, polemical or unequivocally controversial and vehement. Criticism, especially of religious infamy, is sometimes masked in irony, on occasion tagged, often anonymous, but it is markedly literary in style and persuasive in presentation. The overriding tone is one of unlimited authorial confidence, exemplified by historiographical didacticism or the tone of righteous indignation, and justified or bolstered by constant allusion to historical competence. The enunciated theory of a broad, universal history does not correspond with the reality of the strong expression of personal disgust at specific petty,

religious intrigues, any more than an emphasis on historical accuracy can tally with the inclusion of inaccurate *petites vérités*.

One of the prime examples of the *story* nature of these histories is found in the concluding passages of each and links the themes of justice, tolerance and the later *écrasez l'infâme* campaign. The earlier history ends with a humane, Calas-like, lyrical defence of a wrongly-accused victim (Séquier) and the other with an anti-proselytising, philosophical musing about the absence of church steeples on the Chinese skyline. Neither of these endings represents a typical, strictly historical focus, nor are they directly linked to the particular history, and nor do they either summarise or assess the historical subject presented. Both are obvious demonstrations of the various facets of the lyrical *story* voice which recounts history. Here, in evoking a secular, universal society, the focus on China, as in the *Essai sur les moeurs*, provides an assertive and persuasive opinion in a provocative yet didactic, pleading while pitying, dogmatic and goading tone:

> Mais si Dieu avait voulu que la Chine fût chrétienne, se serait-il contenté de mettre des croix dans l'air? (*SL*, 1109)

## CONCLUSION

In the chosen selection of extracts, the sheer variety of passages, tones, subjects, approaches, voices, methods, narratives, subtexts and fingerprints, reveals the *literariness* of Voltaire's histories and the fact that they offer a great deal more to the reader than do traditional histories. Within each work of history, the variety of local colour and picturesque settings changes dramatically, as evidenced by the stark

difference in texture between the Battle of Narva and exile in Bender, or the Battle of Blenheim, Madame de Maintenon's letters and religious disputes. Whilst battles form part of more traditional historical material, and Voltaire was too attracted by the historical hero to omit them completely, they are not presented here in a traditional manner. Proffering a selection of frames and images, rather than details of battle figures, facts and strategies, the approach is indeed unusual. The *story* of history is told in *Histoire de Charles XII* with the focus on many different tableaux, viewed from varied perspectives. In the separate sections of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, history is deliberately recorded in a rather eclectic and non-sequential manner, as if to challenge the reader's preconceived historiographical ideas. On a broad canvas, the texture and effect of the selection of chosen extracts may well be described as kaleidoscopic, to use an artistic metaphor. Like a kaleidoscope, these histories present a complex pattern of no fixed form, like an optical toy which perfectly projects the constantly changing views and hues of history.

However, in close-up, textual tone and voices, whether classical, historical or contemporary introduce a further depth of complication and intricacy, akin to that of eighteenth-century polytonal music. The kaleidoscope primarily proffers a superficial image which lacks subtlety or depth and does not allow for tone or subtext. As is evident, each chosen extract of history includes other stories, not strictly historical, often presented as philosophical asides or as polemical subtexts within the structuring framework. In the selection of extracts alone, the depiction of a king as a foolish mortal playing with death, of local colour at the Ottoman court, of shame from surprise defeat in battle, of the discussion of the relative *vérité* of sources and of the condemnation of

the Jesuit Le Tellier offer astonishingly diverse loci of personal and polemical discussion and debate. Within each individual tableau, subtexts as varied as the hypocrisy of international diplomatic relations, the historian's reliability and the ironic condemnation of religious bigotry are treated side by side with no apparent incongruity. The fact that the historian's voice exudes great confidence allows these *story* elements to expand and to permeate the text on almost every page. Behind the historical narrative, the *story* regularly becomes more important than the historical framework itself and is clearly discernible through tone, choice of vocabulary, disparaging presentation, reminders of fate, anecdote, prolepsis, heroic formula, leitmotifs, or flagrant commentary.

The contradictions inherent in furnishing kaleidoscopic history are not confined to an unusual approach to subject. Ambiguities and incongruities, discrepancies and inconsistencies also impregnate the historical and *storical* focuses. It is unusual that history should bear the fingerprints of Homeric epic style or become the forum for refutation of a contemporary philosophical essay. The selected extracts reveal conflict between theory and practice, and between historical concerns and *storical* voices which are linked only by the historian's confidence and by the common thread of narrative *story*. Historian and historiographer, theory and practice, history and story, Homer and Rousseau, universality and specificity, neutrality and fanaticism all meet in this history. Their expositions are not always symmetrical, consistent or harmonious, although irony pervades. As already suggested with regard to the subtle combination of *je* voices, the concept of polytonality in musical theory best provides a parallel logic to the complex development taking place in Voltaire's historiography. Thus, in the middle of an ironic

anecdote on fanaticism, it is no surprise to encounter a general philosophical observation or an overt change in opinion. Whilst the extracts analysed exhibit a superficial texture which may be described as kaleidoscopic, the depth of textual contradictions and combined changes, variations and voices point more persuasively towards the parallel of polytonality, where the disconcerting clashes of change and opinion, theory and practice are more amply accommodated.

# CONCLUSION

*L'intérêt que nous croyons prendre au passé n'est donc, en fait, qu'un intérêt pour le présent; en le reliant fermement au passé, nous croyons rendre le présent plus durable, l'arrimer pour l'empêcher de fuir et de devenir lui-même du passé. Comme si, mis au contact du présent, le passé allait par une miraculeuse osmose devenir lui-même présent, et que du même coup le présent fût prémuni contre son propre sort, qui est de devenir du passé.*

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *L'homme nu.*[517]

Critics have mainly tended to focus their research into *Voltaire historian* - to use the phrase coined by Brumfitt's seminal work - along two broad axes, focusing on Voltaire's historical writing either from a more general perspective, in the light of his other writing, or from a purely historical perspective, which tends to assess the historical content for precision of fact, historical accuracy and resultant success of the works. Brumfitt's work traced a preliminary path in an area which imperatively requires new research and fresh analysis. Rarely have critics considered the literary or fictional features of the work in any detail, or read and analysed the history as literature, or for its non-historical content. Yet, there is no reason why history should remain the sole preserve of historians. Nor is there any logic in exclusively examining Voltaire's histories alongside so potentially heterogeneous a body as correspondence, theatre, pamphlets, fictional or philosophical writing. The exploration of *histoire* in this thesis shows that the eighteenth-century use of the term, whether by archival historians, chroniclers, pedants or *philosophes*, requires further study. Such history is a minefield wherein issues of fact, opinion, objectivity, impartiality, fiction and truth may remain

[517] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologies 4: l'Homme nu* (Paris: Plon, 1971), p. 542.

largely unresolved. If History cannot be considered a cohesive genre in the eighteenth-century, what exactly does it connote?

In contrast to recent research, this thesis chose to centre uniquely on the *literariness* of Voltaire's histories, or the unique fusion of history and *story* achieved therein. That Voltaire wrote history because it was one of the 'grands genres' may be granted, although the question why the history is founded in *literariness* may not be resolved here.[518] Close reading of the histories as literary texts was facilitated by comparison with theory and practice of contemporary historiography. Whilst analysis of contemporary histories shows these to be predominantly monotonal and not necessarily susceptible to literary analysis, exploration of the *literariness* of Voltaire's history unearthed voices, echoes and the texture of historical narrative. The fact that such elements are not strictly *historical* detracts in no way from the effectiveness of the work as history. As well as displaying *literariness*, Voltaire's histories are renowned to be serious, very well-researched works, a fact which Voltaire, the theoretical 'historian's voice' and critics alike are often at pains to accentuate.

Reading the *story* of Voltaire's *history* unveils many different textual voices beneath, through and within the *official* history. At a structural level, the very duality of composition of *Histoire de Charles XII* and the innovative visualisation and conception

[518] On the subject of the connection between history and the present, see the conclusion of the 12th Colloque Historique Franco-Allemande on 'Recherche historique au XVIIIe siècle': 'À quoi sert l'histoire? Marc Bloch aurait répondu: «elle sert à justifier le présent». Au XVIIIe siècle, l'histoire a satisfait à cette tâche. Les académies stimulèrent l'étude sur les sources historiques. Regard sur le passé, polémique autour de la politique contemporaine, naissance du patriotisme et, en particulier, du sentiment national, voilà ce que furent les objectifs d'une histoire qui, au XVIIIe siècle, s'est libérée de la rhétorique.' (Conclusion to conference: Rapport sur les discussions, p. 471).

of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* suggest change. Whilst *Histoire de Charles XII* hosts two heroes, the structure of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* is pervaded by a duality which is palpable in the progress from beginning to end, from neutral to personal, and from universal to polemical. Dualism invites contrasts, whether between traditional and ironic, past and present (contemporary) or neutral and polemical. The rejection of traditional historical practices such as hagiographic characterisation and portrait-painting further expands this vision of history, leading to the proliferation of literary techniques such as proleptic or symbolic motifs and anecdotes. The inclusion and expansion of the epic 'heroic formula' in Voltaire's history is evidence of an acute authorial consciousness of the literary, epic and poetic origins of history in its first, story-like, Homeric incarnation.

The combination of so many new elements and literary structures in history creates a narrative texture which is more *storical* than *historical*, while still firmly grounded in the realms of fact and reality, rather than those of fiction and rhetoric. The description of *literariness* of history encompasses the juxtaposition of ambiguities, of all-pervasive irony and of duality in history which is simultaneously concerned with matters historical and contemporary, analytical and polemical, general and personal. Apparent within the multiple uses of *je*, *on* or *nous* in history are distinct historiographical, contemporary, personal and polemical voices. Alongside literary echoes and the fingerprints of contemporary authors involved in social and literary exchanges, these voices establish a relationship of complicity with readers, including them in a private realm of mutual comprehension and collusive agreement with the author. Flagrant and covert references to the contemporary times of the historian also

reinforce the strong polemical element in Voltaire's history. This additional juxtaposition of past and present in history leads to inevitable, controversial, past-present parallels. Like contemporary historians, the historian is didactic, eager to challenge preconceptions, while steering and goading readers towards an authorial viewpoint.

*Story* voices may often contradict *history* voices, such as where universal aspirations are dashed by the pettiness of local ephemeral disputes. Such incongruities contribute to an ironic narrative texture which, in juxtaposing history with literature and philosophy, addresses many issues simultaneously. Critics have preferred to use the metaphor of art to describe both *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The examination of particular extracts confirmed this initial artistic impression, offered by a history which projects a kaleidoscopic image. However, close analysis revealed greater depth, due to textual ambiguities and contradictions, suggesting a unique, polytonal texture.

Arising from the analysis of this thesis, future research might be pursued along two separate but complementary axes. In the first instance, an area of research stems directly from close readings of Voltaire's histories which revealed the author's startling interpretation of *vérité*. As is manifest, *truth* and *liberty* are the two qualities most valued by the historian, a quality which Voltaire associates with England in his correspondence:

> J do presume four or five hundred copies could sell off in yr country. The two things j have at heart, truth and liberty, being still dear to yr countrymen raise in me that expectation.[519]
> [re History of *Lewis the fourteenth*]

[519] 27 july [1751]. Voltaire to Sir Edward Fawkener. D4529.

However, where establishment of factual *vérité* is today sometimes identified as the primary task of the historian, eighteenth-century historians, in vacillating between history and story, struggled with both the concept of *the* truth and its practice and interpretation.[520] Voltaire's attempts to distinguish fact from truth and to introduce varying shades of truth are both liberating and clever, respecting both of his favourite qualities of *truth and liberty*. However, the writing of factual (historical) events within a fictional (narrative) framework posed fundamental structural and ideological problems. A wider study of *vérité* ultimately demands a detailed study of eighteenth-century prefatory notices in historical, philosophical and literary writings as loci of intense interest, debate, insecurity and fiction. As a natural progression from this thesis, the relationship between eighteenth-century prefatory writing and historical (or other) *vérité* is an intriguing area of future research.

Another avenue of research evolving from this thesis would be an extension of the literary and stylistic analysis - evidently restricted here due to the definition of subject - to encompass Voltaire's other historical writing. A similar approach could also be applied to the work of other contemporary *philosophes* who undertook historical works, such as Montesquieu, Duclos, Mably, Raynal and Condorcet, who may be read as direct precursors of Barante, Blanc, Michelet and Thierry.[521] A stylistic examination of these works of history and historiography should, most profitably, be undertaken in

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[520] Veyne, P., *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), Chapitre X: 'Le premier devoir de l'historien est d'établir la vérité et le second est de faire comprendre l'intrigue.'

[521] Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1794); Diderot, *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron* (1782); Duclos, *Histoire de Louis XI* (1745-6), *Considérations sur les moeurs de ce siècle* (1751); Mably, *Parallèle des Romains et des Français par rapport au gouvernement* (1740); *Observations sur l'histoire de France* (1751); Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur et de la décadence des Romains* (1734); *Mémoires secrets sur les règnes de Louis XIV et Louis XV* (1791); Raynal, *Histoire du parlement d'Angleterre* (1748).

tandem with the study of contemporary antiquarian, traditional or less well-known historians, who treat the same historical subjects. Works on nearly-contemporary history are more suited to such analysis than classical or universal histories. If Voltaire's historical writing reflects a general trend in the writing of the *philosophes*, readings of the *literariness* of histories by other authors may likewise reveal non-historical subtexts, including personal, social and political commentary. Similarly, whereas in Voltaire's works such subtextual elements are intended to influence the reader to the same degree as, if not more than, the core account and interpretation of historical events, other historians may demonstrate different passions, focuses and concerns.

So often considered the sole preserve of historians, these histories have rarely been read as literary creations and very little literary consideration has been given to the *literariness* of eighteenth-century historiography to date. The tendency is to dismiss the works as too literary or inaccurate to be read as history, whilst the historical content excludes them from analysis of fiction. This thesis posits that analysis of the *literariness* of history may disclose stylistic patterns linking narrative, subject and motivation. Such close textual reading of style and voice in other contemporary histories could possibly lead to discovery of a progression and a vision in historiographical practice throughout the French eighteenth century. The results of such a literary reading of historical works would naturally lead towards fuller comprehension of prefatory writing, of *literariness* of history and of *vérité* within the *story* of history.

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