

TWO MANUSCRIPTS OF *LA PUCELLE* IN THE
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

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The *OCV* critical edition of *La Pucelle*, produced by Jerom Vercruysse and published in 1970, lists no fewer than 31 manuscripts. These are divided into two groups: those which are of importance for our understanding of the genesis of the manuscript poem (of these, J. Vercruysse details and collates nine examples in all); and those produced in the wake of printed editions which are principally interesting as evidence of the text's (semi-clandestine) diffusion. Inevitably, additional manuscripts have come to light since 1970, and these are, equally inevitably, of varying importance. Christopher Todd has indicated the existence and location of two other manuscripts.¹ The purpose of this note is to describe briefly two further manuscripts of *La Pucelle* that have been acquired in recent years by the New York Public Library, as part of the Martin J. Gross collection.²

1. The first manuscript has 319 pages, quarto, and is written in an unidentified hand. It is a careful copy of the Cramer 1762 edition, so although undated, we may date it to 1762 or later. This manuscript is not therefore of interest concerning the genesis of the poem, but it is certainly noteworthy as testimony to the manuscript circulation of the work. Even after the appearance of "authorised" printed editions of the poem, there were still apparently readers and collectors who sought out manuscript copies, perhaps because of the scarcity of the printed editions, and perhaps also because some

1 In his review of J. Vercruysse's edition, *Modern Language Review*, 67 (1972), pp. 897-899.

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readers thought of *La Pucelle* as an essentially clandestine manuscript work and preferred to read it in manuscript.

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2. The second manuscript has 333 pages, quarto, and is also in an unidentified hand. It is undated, but we may date it to 1755 or earlier. The manuscript was apparently acquired by an English collector in the mid-nineteenth century, and we read on a front endpaper: "Rare manuscript formerly the property of Mr. de Voltaire, who presented it to one of the Royal Princes, before it was printed." It is hard to know how much credence to give this note, but in any case this manuscript appears to add significantly to our understanding of the poem's genesis. I hope to describe it in detail in a forthcoming article; the following observations are preliminary and provisional. In his edition, J. Vercruysse accords particular importance to a manuscript in the hand of Mme Denis, containing the text of twelve cantos, designated as "D" in his list of manuscripts. The NYPL manuscript is close to "D" in many places but is more complete. It contains the text of fifteen cantos, corresponding broadly to the earliest pirated editions of 1755. There are a number of unique readings, and in particular the text of the ninth canto (which becomes the eleventh in the final version) is significantly more complete than that of "D". It would seem likely that this manuscript was made after "D" and before the appearance of the printed editions of 1755 – those versions which Duclos, speaking on behalf of the Académie française, supportively described as "*les éditions furtives et défigurées*".³ The evidence of Voltaire's correspondence shows that he was active during the summer of 1755 in sending out "corrected" versions of his poem in fifteen cantos.⁴ As J. Vercruysse remarks, Voltaire "*a fourni nombre de versions correctes mais manuscrites à ses intimes en 1755 au moment où les textes douteux se multipliaient*".⁵ Thus Voltaire writes to the duc de Richelieu, telling him about the attempts of the printer Grasset to blackmail him over *La Pucelle*: "*J'ai cru dans ces circonstances devoir vous envoyer, aussi bien qu'à Mme de Pompadour et à M. le duc de La Vallière, mon véritable ouvrage, qui est à la vérité très libre, mais qui n'est, ni ne peut être rempli de pareilles horreurs*" (31 July 1755, D 6366). In September 1755, Voltaire informed d'Argental of the "*six mille copies manuscrites répandues dans Paris d'un ouvrage tout falsifié et qui me fait grand tort*" (D 6505) – this figure may be a pardonable exaggeration, but it is clear that a large number of copies were by then in circulation. The most reliable account of what was

3 *Journal encyclopédique*, t. 1 (1 January 1756), pp. 61. Duclos' comments are made in the context of a carefully orchestrated campaign: see D 6579 and D 6643.

4 See *OCV*, t. 7, pp. 78-80.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 33.

clearly a confused situation is provided by Charles Collé, who puts the figure at around two thousand:

*C'est ce mois-ci [octobre 1755] que se sont répandues à Paris peut-être deux mille copies manuscrites de La Pucelle de Voltaire. Les uns en ont douze chants, d'autres quatorze et quinze ; quelques-uns dix-neuf ; personne n'a ce poème entier. Quelques défenses rigoureuses que M. de Malesherbes ait faites pour prévenir l'impression d'une de ces copies, je ne crois guère possible que l'avidité de quelque écumeur de littérature y tienne. [...] La plus grande partie de ces copies est défigurée, les chants y sont confondus, transposés ; les fautes de copiste y fourmillent ; il y a des vers qui manquent ; beaucoup qui ne peuvent pas être de Voltaire, tant ils sont mauvais. J'en ai vu quatorze chants ; il y a des détails qui sont bien de la touche de Voltaire, dans son bon temps. [...] Voltaire a envoyé lui-même à Thieriot quatorze chants de La Pucelle, en se plaignant que beaucoup de gens ont des copies de son manuscrit, qui lui a été, dit-il, dérobé il y a quelques années. On sent, par ce préliminaire, qu'il va faire imprimer cet ouvrage, et qu'on ne l'aura qu'après cinq ou six éditions, à peu près dans l'état où il peut et où il compte le donner. Il y a à parier qu'il le fera imprimer cet hiver, s'il ne l'est pas déjà.*⁶

The NYPL manuscript seems to be a good example, perhaps the best that has so far come to light, of “*mon véritable ouvrage*,” that is, of the type of “authorised” manuscript of *La Pucelle* that Voltaire issued (“published”) at the time of the Grasset affair and the appearance of the first unauthorised printed editions.

6 Collé, *Journal et mémoires*, 3 vols, ed. H. Bonhomme, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1868, Vol. 2, pp. 34-36. See OCV, Vol. 7, pp. 76-77.