

VOLTAIRE AND THE AFFAIR OF THE BOTTLE CONJUROR:
THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE REVIEW OF *TRISTRAM SHANDY*
IN THE *GAZETTE LITTÉRAIRE DE L'EUROPE* (20 MARCH 1765)

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In volume 5 of the *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe*, in the issue dated 20 March 1765, there appeared a review of the recently published volumes 7 and 8 of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.¹ Under the direction of the abbé François Arnaud and J.-B.-A. Suard, the *Gazette littéraire* was printed weekly for only two years, from March 1764 until March 1766, and had as its mission to publicise and discuss events and publications in the arts and sciences across Europe.² Like the majority of the reviews and analytical articles in the *Gazette littéraire*, the review of *Tristram Shandy* was published anonymously; when it appeared in English translation in *The London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post* of 16-18 April 1765, the editors referred only to the 'ingenious Authors of the *Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe*'.³ Since 1765, however, the review of *Tristram Shandy* has repeatedly surfaced in connection with Voltaire in scholarship concerning his participation in the *Gazette littéraire* and his views on Laurence Sterne.

The full extent of Voltaire's contributions to the short-lived *Gazette littéraire* was not immediately perceived by editors of his *Œuvres*. The Kehl edition included only five articles from the *Gazette littéraire* in volume 49 (*Mélanges littéraires* III); Voltaire inserted one article into the entry 'Somnabules' (1771) of the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, and all editions before Moland therefore print it as part of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* rather than group it with

¹ *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe*, 8 vol. (Paris, Imprimerie de la Gazette de France, aux Galeries du Louvre, 1764-1765, BV1445), vol. 5, pp. 39-43. The full text of the article as it appeared in the *Gazette littéraire* is reproduced in the Appendix below, with modernised spelling and capitalisation.

² 'Gazette littéraire de l'Europe 1 (1764-1766)', in *Dictionnaire des journaux (1600-1789)*, ed. by Jean Sgard (Paris, Oxford, Universitas, Voltaire Foundation, 1991), pp. 571-72.

³ 'An Account of the two last Volumes of the Life of TRISTRAM SHANDY', *The London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post* 17, no. 1299 (16-18 April 1765), p. 373, Gale Document Number Z2000605842.

the other articles from the *Gazette littéraire*. In volume 43 of the 1819-1825 edition of Voltaire's *Œuvres complètes*, however, Jean Clogenson added another 18 articles to the corpus of Voltaire's contributions to the periodical; Clogenson included in the edition articles dating from March through November 1764 only, although he suspected that Voltaire continued writing occasionally for the *Gazette littéraire* after that period. Explaining his reasons for attributing to Voltaire a review of Charles Churchill's *Poems* in the *Gazette littéraire* of 18 April 1764, Clogenson nonetheless remarked, 'Je serais encore porté à le croire auteur d'un article sur Tristram Shandy, qui est au tome V, page 39 de la *Gazette littéraire*, article que j'exclus cependant, ainsi que plusieurs autres, dans la crainte de me tromper'.⁴ Beuchot, however, disagreed with Clogenson, and Moland followed Beuchot's recommendation, merely reprinting Clogenson's footnote with the following response from Beuchot: 'D'après la manière dont Voltaire en parle dans le premier de ses *Articles extraits du Journal de politique et de littérature*, il ne doit pas être l'auteur de l'article sur Sterne inséré au tome V de la *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe*'.⁵

The question of how the 1765 review relates to Voltaire's attitude toward Sterne has given rise to more recent discussions. In his 1974 article 'Voltaire and the novel: Sterne', Ahmad Gunny gives a full account of Voltaire's explicit mentions of Sterne; Gunny expresses the strong suspicion that the 1765 review is Voltaire's, but he does not definitively attribute it to him.⁶ Having first mentioned Sterne in a letter to Algarotti of September 1760,⁷ Voltaire next speaks of Sterne in the very article on Churchill's poems annotated by Clogenson. Commenting on the oddity of an Anglican theologian like Churchill writing a satire of actors, Voltaire compares Churchill and his *Rosciad* to Sterne and *Tristram Shandy*: 'Le révérend M. Sterne, chanoine d'York, débuta ainsi par le roman plus gai que décent de *Tristram Shandy*'.⁸ Gunny points out that the phrase 'plus gai que décent' is echoed by the assertion in the review of March 1765 that Sterne is 'aussi gai, et souvent aussi peu décent' as Rabelais.⁹ Moreover, the textual parallels are, contrary to Beuchot's opinion, even more remarkable between the 1765 review in the *Gazette littéraire* and Voltaire's review of Frénais's translation of *Tristram Shandy* published later, in 1777, in the *Journal de politique et de littérature*. Gunny mentions, for example, the matching comparisons with

⁴ *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. J. Clogenson, 66 vol. (Paris, Antoine-Augustin Renouard, 1821), vol.43, p.342, note.

⁵ M, vol.25, p.167.

⁶ A. Gunny, 'Voltaire and the novel: Sterne', *SVEC* 124 (1974), pp.153-54.

⁷ D9227.

⁸ M, vol.25, p.167.

⁹ Gunny, p.154.

Rabelais and the *Satyre Ménippée* of 1594, the continued emphasis on Sterne's 'digressions' and 'bouffonneries', and the repeated assertion that Sterne's aim in writing so many nonsensical volumes was to amuse himself 'aux dépens de l'Angleterre'.¹⁰ In a long footnote, Gunny adds that Voltaire devotes two whole paragraphs of his 1777 article to a close paraphrase of the *Gazette littéraire* review, and that he heaps on the 'journaliste français' who authored it '[t]oo much praise [...] for him not to be Voltaire himself.'¹¹

In her study of the reception of Sterne in France, however, Lana Asfour does not even entertain the possibility that Voltaire could have authored the review in the *Gazette littéraire* of 1765. She attributes the review unambiguously to the editor of the *Gazette littéraire*, J.-B.-A. Suard, despite the fact that the biography of Suard which she cites, Alfred C. Hunter's *J.-B.-A. Suard: un introducteur de la littérature anglaise en France*, does not make Suard the author of the review. Rather, Hunter lists it without attribution amongst the articles on English topics published in the journals Suard edited.¹² Asfour seems puzzled by the contradictions in Suard's view of Sterne that the article seems to demonstrate: 'Despite this unflattering view of *Tristram Shandy*, Suard nevertheless met, conversed with and seemed to appreciate Sterne'.¹³ She quotes at length the reviewer's comparison of *Tristram Shandy* with 'a confidence trick', that of the 'charlatan anglais' in the third paragraph of the review.¹⁴ She does not mention the fact that Voltaire's article of 1777 quotes 'Suard's' review; even Gunny does not comment on Voltaire's choice of passages to extract from the article by the 'journaliste français', namely the anecdote about the 'charlatan'. Although she does not state her reasons for her attribution explicitly, Asfour seems to have based her conclusions on the quote from Sterne labeling Frenchmen as 'pièces de monnaie dont l'empreinte est effacée par le frottement', which appears in the fifth paragraph of the 1765 review. The review predates by three years the publication of this quote in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*; Asfour believes that Suard may have witnessed the real exchange during Sterne's visit to Paris and recorded it in the review.¹⁵ The presence of this quote would seem to rule out Voltaire's authorship of the review, as he could not have been in Paris to witness the event himself.

¹⁰ Gunny, p.154.

¹¹ Gunny, p.153, note 15.

¹² A. C. Hunter, *J.-B.-A. Suard: un introducteur de la littérature anglaise en France* (Paris, Champion, 1925), p.59.

¹³ L. Asfour, *Laurence Sterne in France* (London, Continuum, 2008), p.139, note 58.

¹⁴ Asfour, p.22.

¹⁵ Asfour, p.34.

There is nonetheless sufficient evidence to conclude that Voltaire did in fact write at least the major part of the review of *Tristram Shandy* in the *Gazette littéraire* of 20 March 1765.

Firstly, limiting the dates of Voltaire's participation in the *Gazette littéraire* to March through November 1764 is clearly erroneous. The *Gazette littéraire* of 9 January 1765 included a letter entitled 'Lettre de M. de Voltaire aux auteurs de la *Gazette littéraire*' and dated 24 December 1764, but the decision made by previous editors of Voltaire's works, including Besterman, to place this small journalistic work amongst the correspondence has prevented scholars from taking it into account.¹⁶ Moreover, just after the review of *Tristram Shandy* was published in March 1765, Voltaire became involved in defending the *Gazette littéraire* against an attack by the archbishop of Paris. Around 2 April 1765, Voltaire sent the abbé Morellet's response to this attack, the *Observations sur une dénonciation de la Gazette littéraire*, to his personal publisher Gabriel Cramer to be printed;¹⁷ Voltaire himself was widely believed to have authored the *Observations*.¹⁸ He therefore was still showing great interest in the periodical at this time, so there is no reason to believe he would not have continued through March 1765 his practice of sending reviews, often unannounced and unsolicited in his correspondence, to the *Gazette*, via his frequent correspondent, the comte d'Argental.

The key piece of evidence pointing to Voltaire as the author of the review can be found in the text itself. As stated above, in his 1777 article in the *Journal de politique et de littérature*, Voltaire praises the 1765 review and its author, who 'rendit une exacte justice à ce livre', *Tristram Shandy*. He devotes an entire paragraph to retelling the anecdote which appears in the third paragraph of the 1765 review: 'Cette aventure, disait le journaliste français, ressemble beaucoup à celle de ce charlatan anglais qui annonça dans Londres qu'il se mettrait dans une bouteille de deux pintes, sur le grand théâtre de Haymarket, et qui emporta l'argent des spectateurs en laissant la bouteille vide. Elle n'était pas plus vide que la *Vie de Tristram Shandy*.'¹⁹ A little detail of phrasing, the reference to 'ce charlatan anglais' rather than 'un charlatan anglais', suggests that Voltaire was already familiar with this anecdote before it appeared in the *Gazette littéraire* of 20 March 1765. And indeed he was: Voltaire had already told the same anecdote with almost identical wording three years before, in the *Histoire d'Elisabeth Canning et de Jean Calas* of 1762. The section 'D'Elisabeth Canning' concludes

¹⁶ D12255.

¹⁷ D12520.

¹⁸ See, for example, a letter by the duc de Praslin, protector of the *Gazette littéraire* (19 May 1765), D12605.

¹⁹ *OCV*, vol.80c (2009), p.38.

by comparing the London public's shame at having believed Miss Canning's false testimony to its embarrassment 'lorsqu'un charlatan proposa de se mettre dans une bouteille de deux pintes, et que deux mille personnes étant venues à ce spectacle, il emporta leur argent, et leur laissa sa bouteille.'²⁰

In early March 1765, Voltaire had good reason to revisit this particular text: a new edition of the *Histoire d'Elisabeth Canning et de Jean Calas* was assembled and published precisely in March 1765.²¹ Moreover, the Calas affair was being settled once and for all at this time. On 8 March 1765, Voltaire wrote to Damilaville that 'on juge les Calas, et le généreux Élie veut encore défendre l'innocence des Sirven'; as Besterman notes, on the next day, 9 March, Jean Calas and his family were finally rehabilitated.²² The Calas were therefore on Voltaire's mind as he communicated with Mme Calas about the case²³ and as he stepped up his efforts on behalf of the Sirven family. It is perfectly possible that, in reviewing the *Histoire d'Elisabeth Canning* for republication and for use in his polemics, Voltaire decided to reuse the anecdote of the bottle in a review of *Tristram Shandy* which he dashed off as a bit of fodder for the *Gazette littéraire*. As Nicholas Cronk has observed, Voltaire makes frequent use of self-citation, often referring to himself in the third person with none-too-subtle hints of praise. This characteristic of his writing creates an echo effect, allowing passages reused in new contexts to gain new meanings even as they reinforce for the reader Voltaire's single, consistent set of messages.²⁴

The anecdote of the Bottle Conjuror, for example, which in the review of *Tristram Shandy* seems to have merely literary implications, nonetheless has closer ties to Voltaire's core thought on superstition and religious toleration than immediately meets the eye. The 'Affair of the Bottle Conjuror' occurred in January 1749: London newspapers announced that on 16 January a conjuror would perform a feat in which 'he presents you with a common wine-bottle [which is] placed on a table in the middle of the stage, and he (without any equivocation) goes into it in sight of all the spectators'. The account of this event in *The London Magazine or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* of January 1749 explains why such a large audience was interested in the event: 'Many enemies to a late celebrated book, concerning the ceasing of miracles, are greatly

²⁰ OCV, vol.56B (2000), p.355. According to Besterman's note to D'Alembert's reaction to the *Histoire d'Elisabeth Canning*, in which D'Alembert labels this 'plaisanterie' 'un peu déplacée', Voltaire later removed the anecdote from this text (D10697).

²¹ OCV, vol.56B, p.342.

²² D12445.

²³ Voltaire sent three letters to Anne Rose Calas in March 1765: D12460, D12469, and D12506.

²⁴ N. Cronk, 'Voltaire autoplagaire', in *Copier/Coller. Écriture et réécriture chez Voltaire*, ed. O. Ferret, G. Goggi and C. Volpilhac-Augier (Pisa, PLUS, 2007), pp.13, 24-25.

disappointed by the conjuror's non-appearance in the bottle; they imagining, that his jumping into it would have been the most convincing proof possible, that miracles are not yet ceased.'²⁵ The 'late celebrated book' is presumably Conyers Middleton's *A free inquiry into the miraculous powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church*, which had recently been published and was being widely discussed in London in January 1749.²⁶ Fifteen years later, Voltaire was using the *Gazette littéraire* as a forum for vaunting Middleton: on 9 May 1764 he published there, anonymously as usual, a review of a new edition of Middleton's works, including Middleton's 'traité célèbre sur les Miracles' which claimed that 'le don des miracles a commencé à s'affaiblir dès le second siècle'.²⁷ This edition was never printed and may have been invented by Voltaire as an excuse to publicise Middleton. The link with Middleton suggests that Voltaire was so taken with the story of the Bottle Conjuror because it provided further evidence of the blindness induced by religious fanaticism and superstition.

It is not so big a leap from an attack on superstition to an attack on religious persecution, from the Bottle Conjuror to the Calas. Voltaire's reading of *Tristram Shandy* similarly does not stray far from this set of ideas. In his copy of *Tristram Shandy*, Voltaire marked two passages which he then mentioned in the article 'Conscience' of the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*: 'un mémoire présenté à la Sorbonne par un chirurgien qui demande la permission de baptiser les enfants dans le ventre de leurs mères, au moyen d'une canule' (vol.1, ch.20 of *Tristram Shandy*), and the Sermon on conscience (vol.2, ch.17).²⁸ Ahmad Gunny points out that 'the question of conscience as such appears to be a *trompe l'œil*' in Voltaire's use of *Tristram Shandy* as a rhetorical weapon in the 1770s: Voltaire was really interested in 'the attack on French theologians' and in the conclusion of the sermon, with its 'devastating attack on the Roman Catholic religion' and the Inquisition.²⁹ Rabelais, with whom Voltaire compares Sterne, offers a parallel example of Voltaire aligning his literary opinions with his polemical purposes. In the late 1750s, Voltaire had been looking more favourably on Rabelais, citing the French writer's attacks on Voltaire's favourite targets. In a letter of 1759, for example, Voltaire explains to Mme du Deffand why he suddenly is willing

²⁵ *The London Magazine or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, vol.28 (London, Baldwin, 1749), pp.34-35. This journal is not in BV, but it is an oft-cited account of the Bottle Conjuror.

²⁶ Middleton's book is reviewed in the same issue of the *Intelligencer* in which the account of the Bottle Conjuror appears, pp.17-21.

²⁷ *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe*, vol.1, pp.281-82.

²⁸ *OCV*, vol.40 (2009), p.195. Special thanks to Gillian Pink for sharing the marginalia and her draft notes for *OCV*, vol.144, forthcoming 2014, pp.24-30.

²⁹ Gunny, pp.156, 158.

to recommend Rabelais as a worthy literary entertainment: ‘comme j’ai plus approfondi toutes les choses dont il [Rabelais] se moque, j’avoue qu’aux bassesses près, dont il est trop rempli, une bonne partie de son livre m’a fait un plaisir extrême.’³⁰ If the review of 1765 is attributed to Voltaire, it becomes clear that he already at that time saw *Tristram Shandy* as an opportunity to fight established religion: not only did it give him a chance to publicise another literary work by a churchman filled with indecent satire aimed at the Catholic Church, but simultaneously he also found a way to link Sterne’s novel indirectly with the case against modern-day miracles and other superstitions.

If the article so clearly fits into Voltaire’s usual polemical programme and into his other expressed views of Sterne, how does one account for the sudden change of tone which occurs in the last two paragraphs of the article and which clearly convinced Beuchot that the article was not Voltaire’s? In the fifth paragraph Voltaire’s sharp wit is unexpectedly replaced by the language of ‘sensibilité’, and a quote from Sterne appears which Voltaire was unlikely to have heard. The sixth paragraph not only is made up almost entirely of a lengthy translation from chapter 1 of volume 7, the likes of which Voltaire rarely inserted into his articles for the *Gazette littéraire*, but it also contradicts a statement made earlier in the article. In the fourth paragraph, Voltaire states that it is ‘très difficile de donner même une légère idée de ce livre extraordinaire’, but following the lengthy extract in the sixth paragraph, the review concludes that this quote is, in fact, quite entirely sufficient to give the reader ‘une idée du ton de l’ouvrage et de la manière de l’auteur’. Although in the absence of manuscript evidence it is impossible to know how this review was composed, it is possible to conjecture that, in fact, Suard did have a hand in its composition. Voltaire sent the *Gazette littéraire* a very short review which concluded, at the end of the fourth paragraph, with the slightly modified version of Sterne’s statement from volume 8, chapter 2, of *Tristram Shandy*, concerning the best method of beginning a book. Dissatisfied with Voltaire’s somewhat harsh and quite distinctive view of the novel, Suard then added his own account of Sterne in order to make the review more openly favorable toward his English friend. When Voltaire had originally arranged to contribute to the *Gazette littéraire*, he had given his permission, probably as a mere conventional courtesy, to the duc de Praslin, Suard, and any staff members to modify the extracts he sent: ‘je vous [...] enverrai des extraits très fidèles, que vous ferez rectifier à Paris, et auxquels les auteurs que vous employez à Paris donneront le tour et le ton convenable’.³¹ In this particular case, at least, Suard seems to have decided to take Voltaire at his word.

³⁰ D8533.

³¹ D11221.

The story of this review thus provides insights into both Voltaire's views of Sterne's novel and his practices as a journalist. Even what seems to be nothing but a short literary distraction is inseparable from Voltaire's broader propagandistic programme, to the extent that an editor like Suard may very well have found it necessary to soften Voltaire's rhetoric and reconvert the review from a miniature polemical pamphlet back into a mere announcement of a literary curiosity. While Voltaire, in his letter to the duc de Praslin, assumes the possibility of joint authorship, especially in the press, his readers and editors, then as now, overlooked this possibility and were therefore fooled by Voltaire's game of covert self-quotation in 1777. While Voltaire surely did not appreciate additions made to his texts, the possibility of co-authorship must be taken into account in questions of attribution, alongside Voltaire's entire arsenal of tricks for concealing his identity and at the same time ostentatiously publicising his opinions. The example of the 1765 review of *Tristram Shandy* demonstrates how attention to the particularities of eighteenth-century notions of authorship and co-authorship can elucidate certain questions involved in the difficult task of defining Voltaire's corpus.

APPENDIX

« The Life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, etc. »
LA VIE ET LES OPINIONS de Tristram Shandy, Tomes VII et VIII.
A Londres, chez Becket et de Hondt, 1765.³²

Voici une continuation d'un des ouvrages les plus bizarres qui aient jamais paru dans aucune langue. C'est une espèce de roman bouffon écrit à peu près dans le goût de *Pantagruel* et de la *Satyre Ménippée* ; l'auteur n'est cependant ni aussi savant (1)³³ que Rabelais ni aussi satirique : mais il est aussi gai, et souvent aussi peu décent. Il est bon de remarquer que nous devons à des ecclésiastiques les trois livres que nous nommons ici. L'historien de *Tristram Shandy* est M. Sterne, prébendaire d'Yorck. Il donna en 1762 les deux premiers volumes de son ouvrage qui a fait d'abord une fortune prodigieuse et lui en a valu une assez honnête.

Ces deux tomes piquèrent la curiosité des lecteurs ; on crut y voir une satire fine et gaie où le sage se cachait sous le masque de la folie. Le sage a publié quatre autres volumes qu'on a lus avec avidité, et on a été surpris de n'y rien comprendre. Les lecteurs attendaient toujours quelque chose et croyaient que s'ils n'entendaient rien c'était leur faute ; ceux qui cherchent finesse à tout découvraient un sens profond dans des bouffonneries qui n'en avaient aucun. Enfin, on finit par s'apercevoir que M. Sterne s'était diverti aux dépens du public et que son ouvrage était à peu près une énigme qui n'avait point de mot.

Cette aventure ressemble beaucoup à celle de la bouteille de deux pintes dans laquelle un charlatan anglais promit, il y a quelques années, qu'il entrerait publiquement sur le théâtre de Haymarket. Le charlatan emporta l'argent des spectateurs et leur laissa la bouteille vide sur la table. Elle n'était pas plus vide que la vie de *Tristram Shandy*, surtout dans les deux volumes nouveaux que nous annonçons.

Il est très difficile de donner même une légère idée de ce livre extraordinaire. Le Shandy dont on annonce la vie est à peine né dans le quatrième volume, et l'on n'en parle même pas dans les deux derniers. Tout se passe en digressions.

³² *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe*, vol.5, p.39-43.

³³ Voltaire's note: 'Je suis bien résolu, dit-il, à ne lire de ma vie aucun autre livre que le mien.'

L'auteur met la main à la plume sans savoir ce qu'il va dire, et continue souvent sans se ressouvenir de ce qu'il a dit. « Je suis bien sûr, dit-il, que si ma méthode d'écrire n'est pas la meilleure, elle est du moins la plus religieuse ; car je commence par écrire la première phrase, et je m'abandonne à la Providence pour le reste. »

Ce qui mérite d'être remarqué dans cet ouvrage, c'est un caractère aimable et constant de philanthropie. On y trouve plusieurs traits d'une sensibilité tendre et vraie qui ne s'allie pas ordinairement avec la bouffonnerie ; en écrivant toutes les folies qui se présentent à son imagination, l'auteur ne s'est pas permis une satire personnelle. On a vu quelque temps M. Sterne à Paris, et sa personne ressemblait parfaitement à son livre. On lui demandait s'il n'avait pas trouvé en France quelque caractère original dont il pût faire usage dans son roman. *Non*, répondit-il, *les hommes y sont comme ces pièces de monnaie dont l'empreinte est effacée par le frottement.*

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Il était venu en France pour sa santé ; et son état, quoique déplorable, n'altérait point sa gaieté. « Je n'ai jamais manqué de courage », dit-il au commencement du septième volume ; « avançant gaiement dans le sentier de la vie, j'en ai supporté tous les fardeaux, hors l'inquiétude. Dans aucun moment de mon existence, la confiance ne m'a abandonné ; mon imagination n'a jamais teint de noir les objets qui s'offraient à moi ; dans le plus grand danger, mon horizon se dorait encore des couleurs de l'espérance ; et lorsque la mort est venue frapper à ma porte je lui ai dit de revenir, et avec un ton si gai de nonchaloir et d'indifférence qu'elle a cru s'être trompée et s'en est retournée. “Tu l'as échappé belle, Tristram ! me dit Eugene ; oui, répondis-je, mais comment faire maintenant que cette fille de p... a découvert ma demeure ? Tu dis bien, son vrai nom, répliqua Eugene, car c'est par le péché qu'elle est entrée dans ce monde. Eh ! que m'importe par où elle y est venue, m'écriai-je, pourvu qu'elle ne se presse pas de m'en faire sortir ! car j'ai encore quarante volumes à écrire, et quarante mille choses à dire et à faire que personne au monde que moi ne peut ni dire ni faire.” Il me prend fantaisie, pendant que mes deux jambes d'araignée peuvent encore me soutenir, de me dérober par la fuite aux importunités de ce vilain monstre ; s'il s'avise de me suivre je lui ferai faire plus de chemin qu'il n'imagine, car je galoperai sans regarder derrière moi jusqu'au bords de la Garonne, et si je le sens encore à mes trousses, je courrai jusqu'au Vésuve, de là à Joppé, de Joppé au bout du monde, où, s'il me suit encore, je prie Dieu qu'il se casse le cou. » Cette citation suffit pour donner une idée du ton de l'ouvrage et de la manière de l'auteur.