

## *A French Parnassus for the Danes: Knowledge, gossip, and eroticism in La Beaumelle's handwritten gazettes in Copenhagen*

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*Abstract:* Benefitting from a taste for everything French in the Danish-Norwegian absolute monarchy, La Beaumelle circulated in Copenhagen news and ideas from the French Enlightenment in a handwritten journal which content has never been studied before. The ideas and rhetorical strategies of his journalistic input are analysed and contextualised in the Danish political agenda and in the larger frame of the circulation of semi-private news and the intellectual history of the Enlightenment. Brilliant and irreverent, the author discussed moderate and subversive ideas along with much gossip from Paris. This article is the first study of the content of the *Gazette* and connects intellectual networks and the history of the press, by focusing on the relationship between French thinkers and the kingdom of Denmark-Norway.

*Keywords:* Handwritten newspapers; French Enlightenment; Denmark-Norway; Transmission of Knowledge; Intellectual History; Cultural Exchanges.

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Upon his arrival in Copenhagen, Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle (1726–1773) was thrilled:<sup>1</sup>

Combien le Nord ne fait-il pas honte aux provinces méridionales par son zèle pour l'art royal et son attention à le faire fleurir. Heureux les peuples qui habitent de telles contrées, les avantages dont ils jouissent les dédommagent bien de l'âpreté du climat !<sup>2</sup>

His enthusiasm would not last long, but during his stay in the kingdom of Denmark-Norway (1747–1751), he published newspapers in French in which he circulated the latest news from Paris along with ideas from the French thinkers. In this article, I will explore La Beaumelle's journalistic input and discuss the rhetorical strategies by which it was communicated, mostly focusing on the handwritten journal he produced for a selected Danish audience, *La Gazette de la cour, de la ville et du Parnasse*, a periodical which content has never been studied before.<sup>3</sup> The only surviving copy of *La Gazette* is preserved in the private archives of La Beaumelle's family. The collection preserves both the *Nouvelles*, written in Paris by Laurent's brother, Jean Angliviel, and the *Gazette* written in Copenhagen by Laurent. It contains 76 issues for a total of 255 pages, of which 34 issues of the *Nouvelles* and 43 issues of the *Gazette*. Sometimes both the *Nouvelles* and the corresponding *Gazette* are preserved, sometimes it is just one or the other. Some issues of the *Gazette* have been numbered and the last preserved number is 69. Generally, issues comprised four pages, but occasionally they had as few as three, or as many as eight. The *Nouvelles* cover the period from 27 November 1750 to 17 June 1752; and the *Gazettes* from 15 February 1750 to 1 October 1751. Usually two issues appeared per week, but this could also be irregular: sometimes we find three, sometimes gaps

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Hubert Angliviel de La Beaumelle who generously shared with me the *gazettes* preserved in the family archive. Hubert Bost and Claude Lauriol have provided me with precious comments and have shared invaluable sources with me: they shall here be thanked for their generosity and our constructive exchanges. My gratitude goes to my colleagues Jesper Jakobsen, Frank Ejby Poulsen, Lars Cyril Nørgaard and Paul M. Babinski along with the anonymous reviewers of this journal and the editor Johannes Ljungberg. Translations are mine unless otherwise stated. I retain the original spelling of the sources, except for the following modifications: in French I have tacitly changed 'j' to 'i' and 'u' to 'v', capitalization, accents, diereses, and cedillas have been modernised; in Danish, capitalization according to eighteenth-century norms has been retained. Square brackets have been used to rectify errors.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Grenier to Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle, 16 January 1748, quoted in *Correspondance générale de La Beaumelle, 1726–1773*, ed. by Hubert Bost, Claude Lauriol, Hubert Angliviel de La Beaumelle (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005–), vol. 2, LB 427.

<sup>3</sup> In his thorough study on La Beaumelle, Lauriol only briefly describes the *Gazette*, *La Beaumelle: Un protestant cévenol entre Montesquieu et Voltaire* (Genève: Droz, 1978), pp. 231–33.

between issues as long as two weeks.<sup>4</sup> *La Gazette* is structured in paragraphs discussing French literature, philosophy and politics. La Beaumelle's favourite topics were Parisian gossip, anticlericalism, and eroticism. He intersperses serious criticism of ideas and religion with recurring anecdotes about actresses, aristocrats, and priests, in which he lambasts with delight his targets.

*La Gazette* (1750–1752) will be compared with his more famous printed journal, *La spectatrice danoise* (1748–1750).<sup>5</sup> These two journals were among the very first examples to circulate controversial ideas on moral, political, and social issues in Copenhagen in the epicentre of an absolute monarchy of strong Lutheran obedience. The handwritten press was a powerful tool to circulate more or less subversive ideas of the Enlightenment. Advocating freedom of thought and opinion, along with gender equality and sexual freedom, relentlessly targeting the clergy, Enlightened thinkers disseminated their ideas through periodicals. More or less clandestine newspapers circulated everywhere in Europe. What is fascinating with La Beaumelle in Copenhagen is the freedom with which he defends moderate thinkers but sometimes also verges towards more subversive thinking, circulating these newspapers at the centre of the Danish absolute power. Similar in content, *La Gazette* and *La spectatrice danoise* differ in tone: the former is more intimate and alternates serious ideas with the latest gossip from Paris and Versailles, along with erotic texts or songs. Irreverent and brilliant, La Beaumelle found the perfect tone to seduce his enlightened Danish public. Flattering Danish aristocratic aspirations to elite French culture, he bypassed Lutheran censors by reaching directly to the royal family and the aristocracy.

### *Frenchness in the north*

The northern periphery rarely appears on the map of studies of intellectual history and the Enlightenment. Scandinavia has been neglected in recent scholarship, just as it was during the eighteenth century, even though northern monarchies were strategically, politically, and economically important on the European map.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> A partial copy survives at the Royal Library of Copenhagen. Once in the possession of Johan Ludvig Holstein, Lensgreve til Ledreborg (1694–1763), the collection contains 62 gazettes from 22 February to 1 October 1751.

<sup>5</sup> For a recent critical edition: *La spectatrice danoise de La Beaumelle*, ed. by Klaus-Dieter Ertler, Elisabeth Hobisch, Ellen Krefing (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020). [Crossref](#). I worked with the original printed edition.

<sup>6</sup> John Christian Laursen, 'Voltaire, Christian VII and Freedom of the Press', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 6 (2002), 331–48, Marie-Christine Skuncke, 'Un Prince suédois auteur français: L'éducation de Gustave III, 1756–1762', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 296 (1993), 123–63, Charlotta Wolff, 'The Swedish Aristocracy and the French

Including the north in studies on the circulation of enlightened ideas is crucial not only for the local history of the kingdom of Denmark-Norway, but also because it sheds a new light on the rest of Europe and allows us to overcome narrow national perspectives. The perception and collective imagination of the north drastically changed in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The inspiration for this change was the theory of climate set out in Montesquieu's *LEsprit des lois*. Montesquieu saw the south to be pleasant and beautiful, but also as threatening to soften the morals and ethics of its inhabitants, whereas the north, with its harsh and cold climate, strengthened its inhabitants both morally and physically, making them more inclined towards freedom. However, culture and ideas were still considered the prerogative of France. The myth of France and Frenchness represented an ideal that most European courts were eager to import, in order to emulate a cosmopolitan image of power and culture associated with France and the court of Versailles. Everything French was avidly sought after and imitated from Portugal to Scandinavia or Russia, be it fashion, cuisine and wine, philosophy, language or the visual and performing arts. The diaspora of French thinkers, cooks, or artists had been crucial for the construction of a European stage based on French culture.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of a 'French Europe' has rightly been questioned.<sup>9</sup>

La Beaumelle and Montesquieu were both puzzled—and they were not alone—by the abrupt but peaceful shift from elective to absolute monarchy in Denmark in 1660.<sup>10</sup> The Danish Enlightenment coexisted with an absolute monarchy and censorship conducted by the Lutheran clergy. At the same time, under Frederik V (1746–1766) and even more so Christian VII (1766–1808), who suffered from severe dementia, the government was almost entirely led by ministers who were enlightened aristocrats. Even though he was born a commoner (and later ennobled

Enlightenment circa 1740–1780', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 30: 3–4 (2005), 259–70. [Crossref](#); Wolff, *Vänskap och makt: Den svenska politiska eliten och upplysningstidens Frankrike* (Helsingfors: Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2005). [Crossref](#).

<sup>7</sup> *Figures du Nord: Scandinavie, Groenland, Sibérie, perceptions et représentations des espaces septentrionaux du Moyen Age au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Éric Schnakenbourg (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012). [Crossref](#); *Northbound: Travels, Encounters, and Constructions, 1700–1830*, ed. by Karen Klitgård Povlsen (Aarhus: Aarhus Univ. Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Bellamy, 'Les professionnels de bouche français dans la Suède gustavienne (1750–1820)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, *Le mythe de l'Europe française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Autrement, 2007); Rahul Markovits, 'L'« Europe française », une domination culturelle ? Kaunitz et le théâtre français à Vienne au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 67: 3 (2012), 717–51. [Crossref](#).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bregnsbo, Kurt Villads Jensen, *Den danske imperium: Storhed og fald* (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 2005); Lauriol, *Études sur La Beaumelle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), pp. 301–18.

as a count), the most famous of these ministers was undoubtedly Johann Friedrich Struensee, the German physician of the mad king, the queen's lover and de facto regent of Denmark. He introduced enlightened reforms at a frenetic pace in the early 1770s, perhaps most notably making Denmark-Norway the first country in the world to introduce unrestricted freedom of the press, stunning the whole Republic of Letters.<sup>11</sup> The announcement was greeted with stupor and enthusiasm among the philosophers, prompting Voltaire to write an encomiastic letter to the king, whom he misleadingly thought to be responsible for it. Struensee's reforms deeply affected the whole country across all social classes and represented a real threat to the absolute monarchy. Unsurprisingly, it led to Struensee's arrest and execution in 1772. In contrast to the turmoil of the Struensee era, La Beaumelle adopted a more cautious approach by circulating his *Gazette* in a confidential and restricted manner.

### *Public and semi-private press in Denmark-Norway*

Publishing newspapers and periodicals became common all over Europe in the late seventeenth century and the news played an important part of sociability in urban life.<sup>12</sup> It was also a powerful tool and the ideal means to disseminate more or less subversive ideas of the Enlightenment and shape public opinion. In Denmark-Norway, the first newspapers appeared in the mid-seventeenth century and were closely based on German sources.<sup>13</sup> Published monthly from 1666 to 1677, *Den danske Mercurius* was the first newspaper in Danish, based on the French model of the versified gazette, *La muze historique*.<sup>14</sup> Anders Bording, author of the Danish version, wrote both national and international news and wove factual journalism together with commentaries and moral discussions. However, in 1701, Frederik

<sup>11</sup> Henrik Horstbøll, Ulrik Langen, Frederik Stjernfelt, *Grov Konfækt: tre vilde år med trykkefrihed 1770-73* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Munk, *Conflict and Enlightenment: Print and Political Culture in Europe, 1635-1795* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), p. 48. [Crossref](#).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Matthias Stolpe, *Dagspressen i Danmark, dens Vilkaar og Personer indtil Midten af det attende Aarhundrede*, 4 vols (Copenhagen: Samfundet til den danske literaturs fremme, 1878-1882); Paul Ries, 'The Politics of Information in Seventeenth-Century Scandinavia', in *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Brendan Dooley, Sabrina Baron (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 237-72. [Crossref](#).

<sup>14</sup> René Herval, 'Un grand journaliste au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Jean Loret', *Revue de l'Université Laval*, 20: 10 (1966), 934-53; Hubert Carrier, *La Presse de la Fronde (1648-1653): Les mazarinades* (Genève: Droz, 1989-1991), vol. 2, pp. 115-17; Krefting, 'News versus Opinion: The State, the Press, and the Northern Enlightenment', in *Travelling Chronicles: News and Newspapers from the Early Modern Period to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Siv Gøril Brandtzæg, Paul Goring, Christine Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 299-318: 304-05. [Crossref](#).

IV introduced an emendation of the censorship law, prohibiting opinion pieces in the news. Interestingly, journalists were advised to only deal with news, ‘som refereris at skulde virkeligen sig have tildraget’ and not opinion defined as ‘raisonnements, eller andris discourses over det som passerer, desligeste unyttige gisninger’ on the facts.<sup>15</sup> The relatively bustling press of the seventeenth century gave way to more restricted and submissive newspapers. After 1720, the publication of newspapers grew quickly; several learned journals were published, discussing new ideas, technology, and knowledge. The first newspaper published in French was *La Gazette de Copenhague*, an adaptation of *La Gazette d’Amsterdam*. It appeared in 1719 and was renamed *Les Nouvelles de divers endroits* the year after.<sup>16</sup> It consisted of reports from major European cities, obviously with a strong focus on Paris, but also a pronounced interest towards the Northern countries (Sweden, Finland, and Russia). Contrarily to La Beaumelle’s periodicals, this journal was typical of the French European gazettes.<sup>17</sup> Written by many hands, from many different places, the traditional gazettes contained reports from correspondents in various European cities, along with being a tribune for official propaganda.

Handwritten gazettes furnished social elites with exclusive news about other social elites.<sup>18</sup> They were a luxury for people interested in gossip and court society (especially Versailles), but also Enlightenment literature and philosophy. Subscription was a sign of distinction and conferred a sense of membership to the cultural elite. The tone of these gazettes evokes the intimacy of private correspondence and created an aura of exclusivity, even though they were sometimes produced in hundreds of copies. They often resembled transcribed conversation, recounting insider information, gossip, political discourse and more or less subversive ideas in the form of a semi-private press. Their production was closely associated

<sup>15</sup> News ‘which refers to what really happened’ and opinion ‘reasoning or other discourses about what happened, such as useless conjectures’, Stolpe, *Dagspressen*, vol. 1, 348–55: 353, Krefting, ‘News versus Opinion’, p. 305–07.

<sup>16</sup> Munck, *Conflict and Enlightenment*, p. 173; *Dictionnaire des journaux 1600–1789* (Voltaire Foundation), <<http://dictionnaire-journaux.gazettes18c.fr/journal/0506a-gazette-de-copenhague>> ed. by Philippe Régnier [accessed 4 June 2020].

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Rétat, Jeanne-Marie Métivier, *Les gazettes européennes de langue française: Répertoire* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2002); Henri Duranton, Claude Labrosse, Pierre Rétat, eds., *Les gazettes européennes de langue française (XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l’université de Saint-Étienne, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> François Moureau, *De bonne main: La communication manuscrite au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Oxford: Universitas and Voltaire Foundation, 1993); Robert Darnton, *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2011); Heiko Droste, Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, ‘Handwritten Newspapers: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Social Practice’, in *Handwritten Newspapers: An Alternative Medium during the Early Modern and Modern Periods*, ed. by Heiko Droste, Kirsti Salmi-Niklander (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2019), pp. 7–26. [Crossref](#).

with salons and coffee houses, and the forms of sociability and collaborative literary practices fostered in these new social spaces. News was often first ‘published’ through recitation in the salons, then written down and circulated in manuscripts among the members.<sup>19</sup>

### *A Freethinker Calvinist in a Lutheran Monarchy*

As Claude Lauriol states in his seminal biography from 1978, La Beaumelle has long been ignored, shunned, or even denigrated by French scholarship.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, if he once attracted the attention of Danish scholars, that interest mostly disappeared after the 1930s, to be picked up again only recently.<sup>21</sup> Born in a mixed religious family, he converted to Protestantism and moved to Geneva, where he studied theology and was initiated as a Freemason. A passionate Enlightened thinker and a convinced Calvinist, he freely discussed religious and philosophical subjects, simultaneously defending the reformed faith against deists and materialists and ferociously attacking the clergy. He arrived in Copenhagen at the age of 21, where he would make a name for himself both at the Danish court and in the Republic of Letters. It is no surprise that La Beaumelle arrived in Denmark a year after the passing of the extremely pietist Christian VI, who had imposed a

<sup>19</sup> Claude Dulong, ‘From Conversation to Creation’, in *A History of Women in the West, vol. 3: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. by Natalie Zemon Davis, Georges Duby, Arlette Farge, Michelle Perrot (Cambridge: Belknap, 1993), pp. 410–13, Karen Klitgaard-Povlsen, ‘Mellan hovkultur och vardagsrum’, in *Nordisk Kvinnolitteraturhistoria 2. Faderns huset: 1800-talet* (Höganäs: Wiken, 1993), pp. 16–22.

<sup>20</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, 2–11 for the state of the art. See also the ongoing edition of La Beaumelle’s correspondence, edited by Lauriol: *La Beaumelle and Études sur La Beaumelle, Correspondance générale de La Beaumelle*, Régnier, *Dictionnaire des journeaux*.

<sup>21</sup> Stolpe, *Dagspressen*, vol. 4, pp. 128, 244–51, Julius Clausen, ‘Franske literater i København på Frederik den femtes tid’, *Historiske tidsskrift*, 7 no. 1 (1897–99), 2–58; Julius Paludan, *Fransk-engelsk indflydelse paa Danmarks litteraturhistorie i Holbergs tidsalder*, (Copenhagen: Nationale Forfatteres Forlag, 1913); Hakon Stangerup, *Romanen i Danmark i det attende Aarhundrede: En komparativ Undersøgelse* (Copenhagen: Levin, 1936), pp. 99–115. More recently, Jens Engberg, *Magten og kulturen: Dansk kulturpolitik, 1750-1900* (Copenhagen: Gads, 2005), vol. 1, pp. 59–64, 169–78, Øystein Rian, *Sensuren i Danmark-Norge: Vilkårerne for offentlige ytringer 1536-1814* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2014); Laursen, ‘Censorship in the Nordic Countries ca. 1750–1890: Transformations in Law, Theory, and Practice’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 3 (2005), 100–17. [Crossref](#), Krefting, ‘Feminine Forkledninger: La Spectatrice danoise i 1700-tallets tidsskriftshistorie’, in *Opplysningens Tidsskrifter: Norske og danske periodiske publikasjoner på 1700-tallet*, ed. by Eivind Tjønneland (Bergen: Fakkforlaget, 2008), pp. 37–60; Krefting, ‘Panegyrikk, spectator-litteratur og offentlighet under det dansk-norske eneveldet’, *Norsk Litteraturvitenskapelig Tidsskrift*, 19:2 (2016), pp. 94–106. [Crossref](#), Krefting, ‘News vs Opinion’; Ertler, Hobish, Krefting, *La spectatrice danoise*.

ban on dance, theatre and any other form of entertainment. His dissolute successor Frederik V, a womaniser and an alcoholic, left his ministers launch a new cultural policy, led by the influent ministers Adam Gottlob Moltke (1710–1792) and Johann Hartwig von Bernstorff (1712–1772), who recruited La Beaumelle. More than fifty years after the disastrous publication by Robert Molesworth, strongly disparaging the Danish absolute monarchy and the country as a whole, the ministers decided to restore the image of the kingdom at a European level by hiring a talented and ambitious French writer, who would provide a more positive view of the country and its government, a task never completed by La Beaumelle.<sup>22</sup> First a tutor to the eldest son of Count Carl Christian von Gram (1703–1780), Grand Master of the King's Hunt, he then became the first royal professor of French belles-lettres at the University of Copenhagen in 1751. A Calvinist in a Lutheran country, without any knowledge of German nor Danish, he had close contacts with the French community in Copenhagen, counting approximately four hundred persons, in particular the pastors Pierre-Paul Eyraud (1716–1783) and Jean-Ferdinand Mourier (1692–1754) from the French Reformed Church of Copenhagen. He was a regular visitor to the salon of Madame Mazar (Sophie Renée Roques, 1717–1789), daughter of a pastor from Geneva. The count of Gyldenstein, Jean Henri Huguétan (1654–1749), director of the Danish East India company, was one of his patrons.<sup>23</sup> His first successful publications appeared during his time in Denmark, *L'Asiatique tolérant, Traité à l'usage de Zéokinizul, roi des Kofrans surnommé le chéri* (1748), *Mes Pensées ou Le Qu'en dira-t-on* (1751) and his defence of Montesquieu, *Suite de la Défense de L'Esprit des lois* (1751). In Berlin in 1752, he started his epic quarrel with Voltaire. Back in Paris, he was sent to the Bastille for a few months in 1753. In Amsterdam in 1755, he published his *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Mme de Maintenon*, for which he was again thrown in the Bastille for a whole year. He was then forced to exile to Languedoc, where he got involved in the case against Jean Calas. Back in the graces of Versailles, he was appointed at the *Bibliothèque royale* by Louis XV in 1771 and died two years later.

### *A female spectator*

For his first journalistic undertaking in Copenhagen, La Beaumelle took inspiration from the popular 'spectator' type, initiated in London in 1709 by Joseph

<sup>22</sup> Roger Molesworth, *An Account of Denmark as it was in the Year 1692* (London: Goodwin, 1694). Henrik Horstbøll, 'Mellem despoti og demokrati: Den schweiziske forbindelse, Roger, Mallet og Reverdil om den danske enevælde', *Fund og forskning i det kongelige biblioteks samlinger*, 42:2 (2003), 153–76. [Crossref](#).

<sup>23</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, pp. 113–16.



Addison and Richard Steele's *The Spectator*. A Danish version had been published in Copenhagen from May 1744 to May 1745 by the Danish author Jørgen Riis (1717–1749), *Den danske Spectator samt Sande- og Gransknings-Mand*. Satiric and radical, Riis ferociously attacked the morality and manners of Danish society, along with its vices and folly. He was especially ruthless with the clergy and the nobility. Riis was a precursor, fighting prejudice, preconceived opinions, and ignorance with indignation. A month later, he launched a poetic weekly newspaper, *Den danske Anti-Spectator eller en for alle imod den danske Sandeman*, supposedly written by his opponents to criticize his own *Spectator* with the same ferocious and merciless tone.<sup>24</sup> La Beaumelle launched his own version, *La spectatrice danoise ou l'Aspasie moderne*, in September 1748. His original idea was to use a female spectator as his mouthpiece, Aspasie, instead of its usual male counterpart.<sup>25</sup> A supposedly female author occupies a 'marginal and ambiguous position', advocating women's right to use reason.<sup>26</sup> Writing as a French male disguised as a seemingly naïve Danish girl subjugated by everything French was a literary trick that allowed La Beaumelle to gag her and speak in her place. Under the pretense of promoting a fake female writer, La Beaumelle actually did exactly the opposite. There is a double form of conquest made by the author: a man dominating (in writing) a young woman and French culture overpowering Danish culture. According to Lauriol, La Beaumelle found a subversive tone, witty and light, that delighted and challenged the Danes. He knew exactly how to match the representation the Danes had about a Frenchman: southern, brilliant, irreverent and audacious. He was clever enough to understand how to please them by playing on French frivolity in opposition to the solemn German and Danish morals they were used to. At first, he was celebrated among the court's aristocracy. His relations with the most famous philosophes, notably Montesquieu, proved to the king that he had made a good choice in recruiting him as a young but valuable and recognized writer in the Republic of Letters. La Beaumelle created an enduring fascination for everything French in Copenhagen: ideas, but also books, roquefort and the French fortified wine ratafia.<sup>27</sup>

Alternating satire and philosophy in *La spectatrice danoise*, he published scathing and contemptuous descriptions of the Danes: he criticized their spirit of lack-

<sup>24</sup> Stolpe, *Dagspressen*, vol. 4, pp. 175–229, Sven H. Rossel, *Mellem Holberg og Ewald 1730–1766* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1975), Christian Kirchoff-Larsen, *Den danske presses historie*, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaards Forlag, 1942), vol. 1, Eiliv Vinje, 'Den Danske Spectator (1744–1745)', in *Opplysningens Tidsskrifter*, pp. 15–36.

<sup>25</sup> The first female spectator appeared in France between 1728–1729, *La Spectatrice*, ed. by Alexis Lévrier (Reims: Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Lévrier, *La Spectatrice*, pp. 9, 225.

<sup>27</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, p. 237.

eyism, their mania for titles of nobility or royal favours.<sup>28</sup> Danish society was ferociously described in a fictional piece supposedly written by a nobleman from Jutland.<sup>29</sup> 'On parla, mais de manière si bruyante, que je crus être avec une troupe de François. [...] L'homme de guerre parla fillette, l'homme de cour guerre.'<sup>30</sup> Copenhageners are presented as failed French socialites who lack both conversational skills and esprit, making it an immensely boring city.

Il me tarde d'être loin des courtisans artificieux, des petits-maître bruyans, des Pharaonites et des quadrilleurs. Quant à l'esprit, [...] je ne puis mieux le comparer qu'à un feu d'artifice, qui, une fois allumé, s'élève, serpente, pétille, voltige et finit par se réduire en fumée.<sup>31</sup>

La Beaumelle considered that the state of the arts and sciences in Denmark was cruelly deficient compared to more enlightened southern countries, affirming that the country could easily distinguish itself in something, since so far it has done so in nothing.<sup>32</sup> Remarkably, La Beaumelle sometimes broach highly controversial and clandestine ideas, for example the struggle between deism and Christianity in his *Reflexion sur l'incrédulité*.<sup>33</sup> Without taking sides, the *Spectatrice* both affirm that religion can be an illusion but an illusion inciting to virtue; whereas, the deists should not be condemned and no man can be punished for thinking, even if it an error.<sup>34</sup> Pierre Bayle had the highest influence in Copenhagen, owing above all to Otto Manderup, count of Rantzau (1719–1768) and Valdemar Hermann, count of Schmettau (1719–1785), both protectors of La Beaumelle. The latter wrote to his brother: 'On estime ici beaucoup le profond savoir et le génie transcendant de Bayle, mais la prétraille le croit fort dangereux'.<sup>35</sup> *La spectatrice danoise* also contains fake letters from offended readers (military and actresses) who consider themselves abused by the publication.<sup>36</sup> Some essays stigmatizing the Danish court's mores caused a great stir and many courtiers complained to the king.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, pp. 401–14.

<sup>29</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, 249–56, 281–91.

<sup>30</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, p. 251.

<sup>31</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, pp. 254–55.

<sup>32</sup> 'Nous pouvons, par exemple, nous rendre illustres plus facilement que ne le peut un François, un Anglois, parce que les routes de l'héroïsme, les chemins de la perfection ne sont pas battus en Dannemark comme en France et en Angleterre.' *La spectatrice* I, 495–96.

<sup>33</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, pp. 465–81.

<sup>34</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, pp. 468–70.

<sup>35</sup> *Correspondance*, vol. 2, LB 427.

<sup>36</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, pp. 145–52, 361–68.

<sup>37</sup> *La spectatrice*, I, pp. 337–60, Krefting, 'Panegyrikk', pp. 94–106.

Frederik V sided with La Beaumelle, pleased by his disrespectful boldness, arguing that the 'le génie d'un auteur ne doit jamais être contraint'.<sup>38</sup> The monarch was undoubtedly delighted to keep the courtiers in check.

### *A French Parnassus for the Danes*

After the success of *La spectatrice danoise*, La Beaumelle launched the handwritten journal *Gazette de la ville, de la cour et du Parnasse* in November 1750 in Copenhagen with a different scope, more or less the same content, but with an even more provocative tone. He had previously sent private handwritten news from Paris to the count of Schmettau; the latter circulated it among the court, where it was met with great pleasure. During his stay in Paris (from 3 June to 14 November 1750), he created a successful network of philosophers and publishers, frequenting the Café Procope, a famous coffee house for debating Enlightenment ideas, where he became acquainted with the abbot of Méhégan, Diderot, Buffon, Voltaire and became a protégé of Montesquieu.

For the *Gazette*, his brother Jean compiled four weekly pages from French newspapers unknown in Copenhagen such as *Courrier d'Avignon*, *Gazette de France*, *Mémoires de Trévoux*, *Mercur de France*, *Journal de Verdun*, and sent them to Copenhagen.<sup>39</sup> La Beaumelle then had them copied, sometimes staying extremely faithful to the original version, sometimes with modifications and often with omissions. He sorted the news, tightened the text and emended it to make it more critical and intense.<sup>40</sup> Its diffusion was intentionally limited to 35 subscribers, following the advice of count Rantzau.<sup>41</sup> Restricting the *Gazette* to a selected inner circle was meant to give those involved a sense of privilege and direct access to exclusive news directly from Paris. And it worked: among the subscribers were the royal family, several ministers and aristocrats, along with the upper-class French community and foreign envoys from England, France, Prussia, and Russia.<sup>42</sup> Contrarily to the printed newspapers that needed a privilege—granted by the Lutheran Church in Denmark-Norway—the *nouvelles à la main* escaped this policy and were more independent. It facilitated the process that the Danish censorship was mostly worried about printed texts in Danish, German and Norwegian, because they could reach a wider and less educated audience than the elite reading French.

<sup>38</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, p. 158.

<sup>39</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, p. 231.

<sup>40</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, pp. 231-32.

<sup>41</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, p. 231.

<sup>42</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, p. 231.

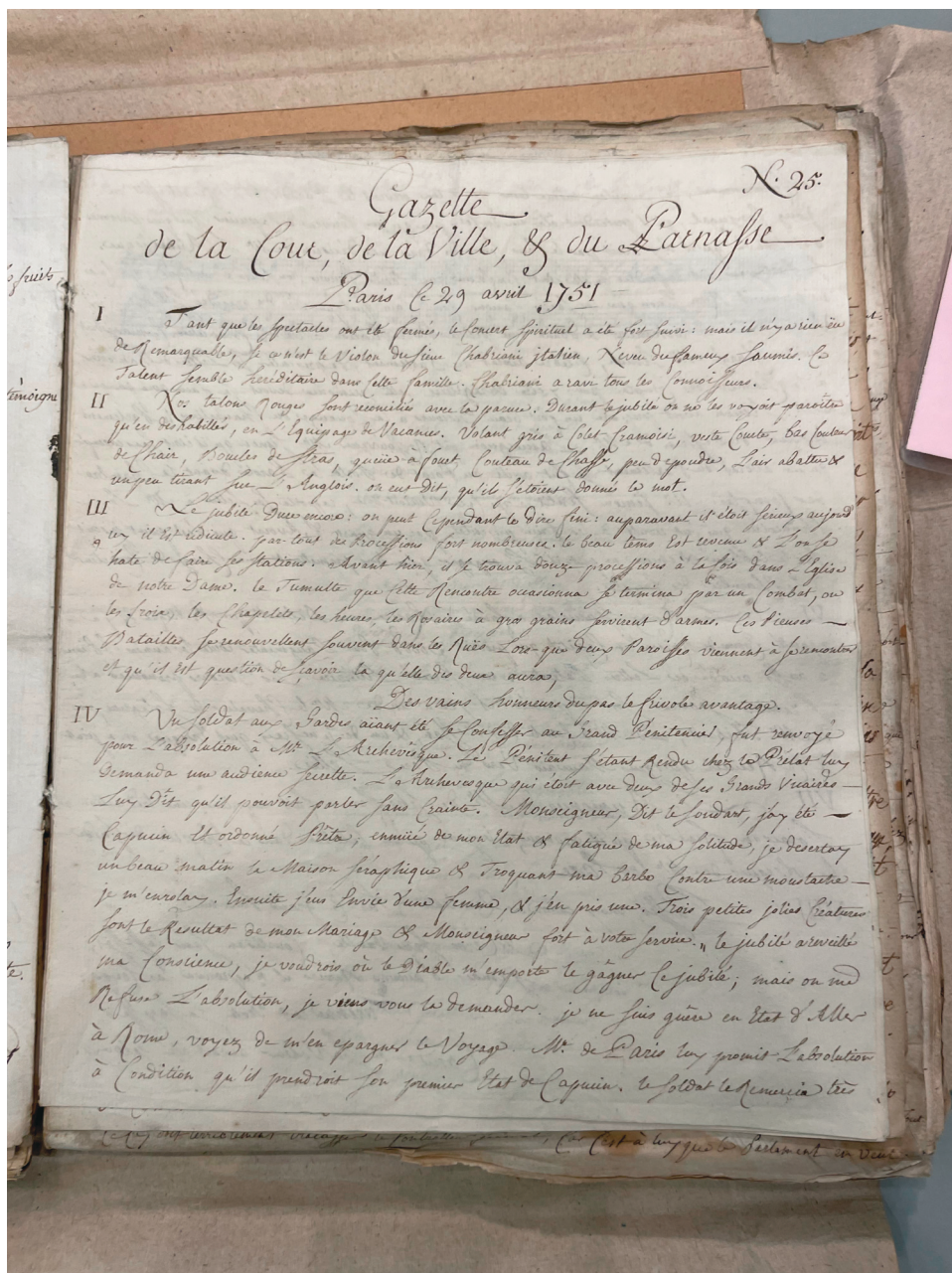


Fig. 1: Gazette number 25, 29 April 1751: title and anecdotes about concerts, fashion, and religion (with permission of the Royal Danish Library, Ledborg 357 kvart: La Gazette de la cour, de la ville et du Parnasse (c. 1700-1763, p. 1)



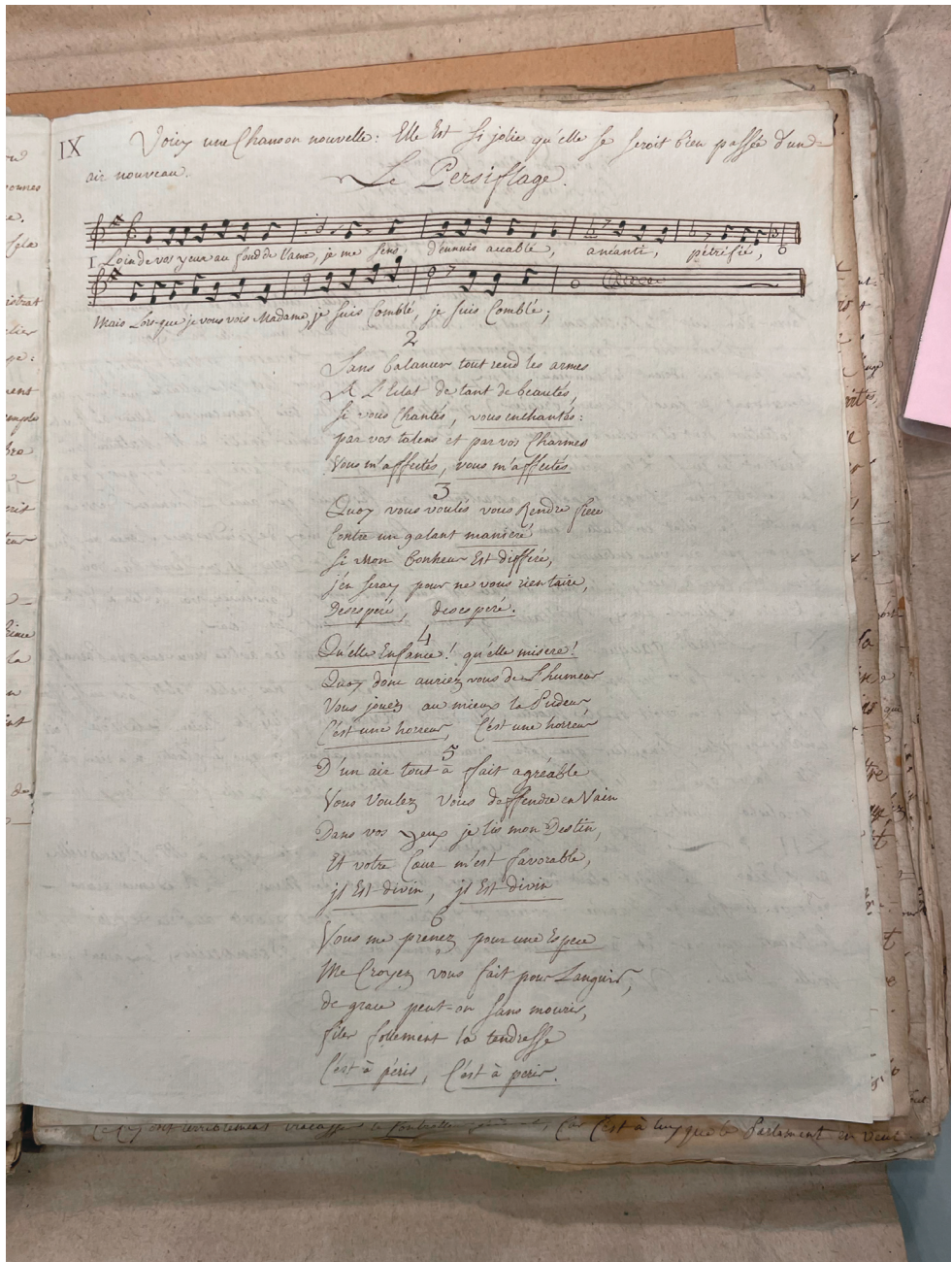


Fig. 2: Gazette number 25, 29 April 1751: tune and lyrics of a popular song “Le persiflage” (with permission of the Royal Danish Library, Ledreborg 357 kvart; La Gazette de la cour, de la ville et du Parnasse (c. 1700-1763, p. 3)

La Beaumelle had a talent for picking up on the Danish taste for anything linked to France and French culture. According to him, the connoisseurs wanted brilliance; they were not overly interested in theatre, only in the actresses' affairs. Gossip about the court of Versailles was the most sought-after news. He recommended his brother to write with 'beaucoup de bons mots, des contes joliment écrits, de la vivacité dans les analyses, de l'ironie dans les critiques'.<sup>43</sup> He also advised him to plagiarise: 'Puissez dans le Mercure et les journaux, mais du court et du joli'.<sup>44</sup>

All the news is fictively presented as if it were written directly in Paris, each number starting with a mention such as 'Gazette de la cour, de la ville et du Parnasse, Paris [followed by a date, for instance:] ce 22 février 1751'. Thereby, La Beaumelle carefully concealed his rewriting process. His scope was clearly to have his selected readers believe they had direct access to Parisian culture, as if it had been reported from the horse's mouth. Let us now take a closer look at gossip, eroticism and anticlericalism in the *Gazette*, on one hand, because they were La Beaumelle's favorite topics and, on the other one, because they represent interesting strategies for divulging ideas.

### *Curiosity: gossip and philosophy*

The columns in the *Gazette* regularly hinted at gossip with 'on dit que' or 'on parle beaucoup de'. For instance, on 3 March 1751, commenting on a new publication, *Histoire du camouflet, souverain potentat de l'Empire d'Equivopolis*, he stated: 'On dit que l'auteur a voulu tourner en ridicule un certain langage qui s'introduit à la cour et qui roule sur les équivoques'.<sup>45</sup> He did not appreciate the book and attacked it sarcastically: 'Comme on sçait que pour estre bien veu [i.e. vu], il faut faire des sottises, on s' imagine que pour estre lu, il faut en écrire aussy', adding that 'Le bon sens et le goût ne sauroient être plus cruellement maltraités. [...] La plume me tombe des mains'.<sup>46</sup>

In the same issue, he evoked a highly subversive text: 'On parle beaucoup d'un livre extrêmement hardi, *Le monde, son origine et son antiquité*, première partie, *De l'âme et de son immortalité*, seconde partie'.<sup>47</sup> The printer of this book had been sentenced to the pillory and La Beaumelle explained that he had tried to no avail to find the book, because the copies had been seized by the French police. But he is confident that he might find a copy that he will present to his readers 'dès

<sup>43</sup> *Correspondance*, vol. 4, LB 785, Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, p. 232.

<sup>44</sup> *Correspondance*, vol 4, LB 850.

<sup>45</sup> *Gazette*, 3 March 1751.

<sup>46</sup> *Gazette*, 3 March 1751.

<sup>47</sup> *Gazette*, 3 March 1751.

que cette grande allarme aura cessé'.<sup>48</sup> La Beaumelle advertised this controversial publication, with the intuition that his enlightened audience would be curious and would attempt to obtain a copy from him. Published anonymously, the first part of the book had been written by Jean-Frédéric Bernard (1683?–1744) and Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud (1675–1760) and the second one by Mirabaud with collaborations from César Chesneau Du Marsais (1676–1756) and Jean-Baptiste Le Mascrier (1697–1760). This clandestine text did not leave much of a trace in history, like most of the other radical writings, but its various authors were all exponents of radical ideas, in this case a discussion of the materialist character of ancient philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Two of the other authors, Mirabaud and Du Marsais, were both writers of clandestine philosophy and members of the deistic coterie, le Club de l'Entresol, whose members counted Montesquieu, Bolingbroke, the marquis d'Argenson and Ramsay.<sup>50</sup>

Another example illustrates La Beaumelle's strategy of tailoring Parisian ideas for Danish readers. After denigrating the Comédie-française for the miserable quality of the theatre plays, slandering the Dauphin and the clergy, and accusing Voltaire of being a diamond thief with great delight, he finished the 15 February 1751 issue with a review of *Lettres critiques sur les divers écrits de nos jours, contraires à la religion et aux mœurs*.<sup>51</sup> There he dismissed the author's reflections as 'triviales', as well as his style 'égaié par des portraits un peu malins'.<sup>52</sup> However, the review is just a pretense to explore other works, such as *La Fable des abeilles*, *Les Lettres persanes*, *L'Essai de philosophie morale*, *les Réflexions critiques des Pensées de Pascal*, *Les Pensées philosophiques*, *Les Mœurs*, *La Lettre sur les aveugles* and *Les Caractères*. In a two-page digression, he distills key ideas from some radical thinkers: Bernard Mandeville's defense of private vices to foster public benefits in the *Fable of the Bees* (1714) and Anthony Collins's rejection of revelation and defense of the law of nature. He evokes Diderot's philosophical exploration of beauty and blindness in

<sup>48</sup> *Gazette*, 3 March 1751.

<sup>49</sup> Pierre Rézat, 'Érudition et philosophie: Mirabaud et l'Antiquité', in *Le Matérialisme du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et la littérature clandestine*, ed. by Olivier Bloch (Paris: Vrin, 1982), pp. 91–100; Georg Gross, 'Textkritik in der französischen Aufklärungsliteratur: Mirabaud, Dumarsais, Le Mascrier', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Wilhelm-Pieck-Universität Rostock*, 6:2 (1956–1957), 237–50; *Clandestine Philosophy: New Studies on Subversive Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe, 1620–1823* ed. by Gianni Paganini, Margaret C. Jacob, John Christian Laursen (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2020). [Crossref](#); Alan Charles Kors, *Naturalism and Unbelief in France, 1650–1729* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016). [Crossref](#).

<sup>50</sup> Nick Childs, *A Political Academy in Paris 1724–1731: The Entresol and Its Members* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Written by Louis Charpentier and otherwise unknown, this publication did not leave traces in history, apart from the copy preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>52</sup> *Gazette*, 15 février 1751.

his *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749) and the feminist thinker Madeleine de Puisieux's attack on religion in *Les Caractères* (1750). François-Vincent Toussaint's scandalous proposition that morality can be freed from religion in *Les Mœurs* (1748) is never discussed directly but La Beaumelle mentions the title and the author, in a cautious reference to the idea that marriage is a legal, not a religious matter. Spinoza's name is discreetly evoked. More moderate thinkers also appear: Montesquieu's defense of suicide and denunciation of the clerical celibacy in *Les Lettres persanes* and Voltaire's opposition to fanaticism and religion in his comments to Pascal's *Pensées*. La Beaumelle finishes by dismissing the reviewed work and its author as entirely unrelated with these Enlightenment ideas, which are 'comme vous le voyez très intéressantes', in contrast to the author of the *Lettres critiques* as: 'un de ces hommes contemplatifs que les choses d'ici-bas ne regardent plus'. He carefully avoids outright judgment, but there could be no doubt where La Beaumelle stood. The *Gazette* was a celebration of elite society and a discrete champion of French Enlightenment ideals in Denmark-Norway.

By intermingling wit with subversion, he introduced his Lutheran readers in Copenhagen to both French culture and Enlightenment ideas. A form of intimacy emerges between author and readers, resulting from the sharing of gossip and the jesting tone of his writing, reminiscent of conversations rather than formal writing. The happy few were given direct access to and—or so was the trick meant to be—a privileged glance at debates and wit coming directly from Paris. Under the guise of French lightness, it was also an opportunity to share the latest enlightened ideas. Undoubtedly, his highly educated audience was well aware of these subversive tactics and was just as eager to read about them as it was to read the latest Parisian gossip. As Lauriol has noted, Schmettau was an avid reader of French radical Enlightenment ideas. La Beaumelle procured for him Diderot's *La Lettre sur les aveugles* and Schmettau himself published radical deistic works.<sup>53</sup>

### *Titillating the Danes: eroticism and libertinism*

To remain true to the plan La Beaumelle presented to his brother, he wrote anecdotes about French actresses, for instance the story of an Englishman who was madly in love with Mlle Coraline, one of the leading actresses of the Comédie-Italienne. He gave Coraline an extremely expensive watch with two large diamonds and 'on eut le soir même le bonheur d'un tête-à-tête avec la Coraline et le plaisir de l'électriser'.<sup>54</sup> The next day, she convinced her official lover 'à titre de

<sup>53</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, pp. 116, 234.

<sup>54</sup> *Gazette*, 8 March 1751.



bardot', M. de Malboissière, fermier général, to buy the watch from her for two thousand crowns.<sup>55</sup> La Beaumelle concluded:

Il est naturel qu'un publicain paye triple les plaisirs; mais ce qui n'est pas séant, c'est que la Coraline ait fait présent de ce bijou à son greluchon, qui s'est hâté de répandre cette histoire. Ainsi vit-on chez nous autres François.<sup>56</sup>

Such gossip was meant to give a taste of French libertinism to the Danes, but also to conform to the stereotypes associated with the image of France culture in the north. The clichés are further reinforced because they concern female actresses, who were automatically associated with scandalous courtesans. Enticing men by performing on stage, often in roles charged with eroticism, they were among the favourite targets of both conservative moralists and misogynist admirers.

In a tone of ribaldry, he copied a confiscated poem, *Les reclusières de Vénus*, a daring description of a brothel, interspersed with anticlerical and irreverent stanzas: 'Les nombreux écus, / Que les dévots présentent à Vénus, / Pris des appas et des chaudes caresses, / Qu'à chaque instant prodiguent les prêtresses.'<sup>57</sup> The association of convents with brothels, or priestesses with prostitutes, was indeed a classic literary device in erotic literature. Finally, he mentioned a play: 'Scirop au cul ou l'heureuse délivrance, tragédie. C'est ici une polissonerie dans le goût du Pot de chambre cassé; icy à dire, une critique de nos pièces modernes, mais, bon Dieu, quelle critique!<sup>58</sup> This play can be traced to an anonymous publication, attributed to Charles-François Racot de Grandval, actor at the Comédie-italienne. The subtitle of the play is *tragédie heroï-merdifique* and it is written in the *poissard* genre, a literary style imitating the mores and language of the *poissardes*, female fishsellers at the market. It became a prodigious success in the second half of the eighteenth century among French aristocrats, who tried to imitate the accent and the language heard in popular markets or in disreputable taverns, with a bawdy fascination for bluntness and baseness, along with a taste for debasing themselves.

La Beaumelle was not just titillating his Danish readers by circulating anecdotes or songs confirming French stereotypes associated with sexuality and libertinism. Taking rhetorical strategies into account, it is important to note that such use of eroticism, obscenity, and vulgarity was inscribed in a broader radical discourse on freedom and a salutary transparency in the use of crude language

<sup>55</sup> *Gazette*, 8 March 1751.

<sup>56</sup> *Gazette*, 8 March 1751.

<sup>57</sup> *Gazette*, 8 March 1751.

<sup>58</sup> *Gazette*, 17 June 1752.

and explicit eroticism to open a debate on sexuality and the place of women in society.<sup>59</sup> Libertines enjoyed being disreputable citizens, as dissidents of all kinds, sexual, intellectual, and political.<sup>60</sup> By mid-eighteenth century, the libertinism of the body was equated with the libertinism of the mind as a form of knowledge, or as Diderot put it: 'Mes pensées ce sont mes catins'.<sup>61</sup> For his Lutheran audience in Copenhagen, La Beaumelle did not promote radical feminism but only enticed them with frivolous and erotic gossip or literature.

*Anticlericalism: philosophy against superstition*

La Beaumelle's most critical stance was reserved for the clergy, especially the French Jesuits and Jansenists, who both were his favourite targets. In the February and March issues of the *Gazette*, he repeatedly mentions what he calls 'L'Affaire du clergé' that is, the controversy surrounding Voltaire's publication of *La Voix du sage et du peuple* (1750). In this polemical pamphlet, Voltaire supported the 1749 fiscal reform of J. B. Machault d'Arnouville, general inspector of finances. Until then, the Church's possessions and wealth were not taxable, and the clergy settled for some free gifts (*dons gratuits*). Machault proposed to introduce an annual five percent regular tax on all income, a tax against which the clergy fought ferociously. In his pamphlet, Voltaire urged the government to establish its authority over the church but Louis XV's power and prestige were extremely dependent on the church's support. The king ultimately transferred Machault, censored *La Voix du sage* and abolished the tax reform.<sup>62</sup> Between 1751 and 1753, echoing Voltaire, a popular literature emerged, with all kinds of new voices denouncing oppression and inequality by the clergy.

De nouvelles voix s'élèvent contre le clergé et font entendre leurs plaintes. Le pauvre qui jusqu'à présent étoit demeuré assis comme Lazare à la porte du riche bénéficié [sic], mêle sa voix à celle du sage, du chrétien, du prêtre, de la femme, du poète, du riche.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Jean-Christophe Abramovici, *Obscénités et classicisme* (Paris: PUF, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> *Romanciers libertins du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Patrick Wald Lasowski (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), pp. xi–xiii, Robert Darnton, 'Philosophical Sex: Pornography in Old Regime France', in *Enlightenment, Passion, Modernity: Historical Essays in European Thought and Culture*, ed. by Mark Micale, Robert Dietle (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 88–112: 98–99.

<sup>61</sup> Denis Diderot, 'Le Neveu de Rameau', in *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 395, Michel Delon, 'J'abandonne mon esprit à tout son libertinage', *Revue de la BnF*, 50:2 (2015), 38–45. [Crossref](#).

<sup>62</sup> *The story of civilization: vol 9, The Age of Voltaire*, ed. by Will Durant, Ariel Durant (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935–1975), pp. 254, 387–88.

<sup>63</sup> *Gazette*, 15 February 1751.

La Beaumelle echoed Voltaire's attack on the esprit de corps of the clergy and his demand for more equality in taxation. Further, La Beaumelle mentioned a refutation of Voltaire's pamphlet:

Le fiel théologique y coule à grand flots. Les épithètes odieuses de déiste, de spinosiste, d'impie, que les Jansénistes donnent de si grand cœur à tous ceux qui n'ont pas leur zèle fanatique y sont libéralement prodiguez. M. de Voltaire rira sans doute de ce pieux emportement.<sup>64</sup>

La Beaumelle condemned the Jansenists as fanatics who smeared their critics as deists and spinozists. He is advocating neither deism nor Spinozism, but his free mention of these controversial terms is nonetheless quite remarkable. These were clandestine topics, most notably in the attack on the idea of divine revelation carried out by the philosophers. As an exiled French Huguenot in a Lutheran kingdom, La Beaumelle fought the clergy on multiple fronts: against the Jansenists and other Catholics in France, and against the Lutheran theologians in Denmark-Norway, especially at the faculty of theology of the University of Copenhagen.<sup>65</sup> He considered the controversy between the church and the deists as a war, fought to advance philosophy against superstition.<sup>66</sup>

### 'Excès d'esprit'

The *Gazette* met with great success and brought La Beaumelle a comfortable income with which he became involved in a trade between France and Denmark. In Paris, he sold books by Holberg and his own *Spectatrice*, along with portraits, tea and pelisses.<sup>67</sup> The choice of items is interesting, especially the pelisses, since they represented coveted tokens of the north, incarnating the French imaginary of Greenlandic or Sami people. In Copenhagen he gave the Danes access to works by Montesquieu, Diderot and Voltaire, along with subscriptions to the *Encyclopédie*.<sup>68</sup>

However, his unrestrained ambition and arrogance created hostilities and jealousy among some Danes, shocked that a very young Frenchman with subversive

<sup>64</sup> *Gazette*, 15 February 1751.

<sup>65</sup> His most ferocious criticism against the Danish theologians appears in *La spectatrice* and *Mes Pensées*, not in the *Gazette*, since the latter focused on French culture.

<sup>66</sup> The *Réflexion sur l'incrédulité* starts with a bellicose statement: 'Il n'y eut jamais de guerre plus intéressante que celle que les déistes ont déclaré depuis un siècle aux Chrétiens', *La spectatrice*, I, p. 465

<sup>67</sup> Lauriol, *Études sur La Beaumelle*, p. 209.

<sup>68</sup> Lauriol, *Études sur La Beaumelle*, p. 234.

ideas, was giving lessons to them.<sup>69</sup> When he did not obtain the position of the Crown Prince's tutor, he settled his scores in *Mes Pensées* and wrote with contempt about the Danes, openly disparaging the king and the court.<sup>70</sup> He worried about his security, sold *Mes Pensées* under the table and was officially disgraced, leaving Denmark definitely in September 1751. His abrupt departure was due to a vendetta by the university Lutheran professors and all those who felt attacked by his reckless and provocative writings. But, as minister Bernstorff put it, it was also because of

la présomption qu'il a de lui-même, la fougue de son esprit, la pétulance de son stile [sic], et son penchant vers le désordre et la débauche [...] il s'est livré à tant d'excès d'esprit, de corps et de langue, que l'on a esté obligé de le renvoyer.<sup>71</sup>

Being a libertine in writing was something that the Danish aristocracy could accept, but pushing the boundaries and actually practicing 'debauchery' was going a step too far.

A literature from the margins, written from and for a peripheral outpost of the Republic of Letters, La Beaumelle's newspapers nonetheless seduced his Danish audience to engage with critical ideas from France. This first study of *La Gazette* has brought to light some of the ideas and rhetorical strategies used to circulate semi-private news in the North by focusing on selected examples dealing with gossip, eroticism and anticlericalism. The most striking feature of the *Gazette* compared to the *Spectatrice* is its intimate tone. In the latter, La Beaumelle does not spare his Danish audience by harshly criticizing the absolute monarchy, Lutheranism, and freely evoking the controversial Freemasonry. However, he discusses less controversial topics like friendship, marriage, vices and virtues, reason, theatre and opera. The tone is more neutral, because the publications was intended for a broader audience, the criticism is toned down and far less vitriolic than in the *Gazette*. Gossip does not have such a prominent place in the *Spectatrice*, substituted by more decorous anecdotes about the Danish society. Because the *Gazette* originated in private letters written by La Beaumelle to count Schmettau and because they had a very restricted circulation, they kept the tone of intimacy linked to private communication. Gossiping is a means to divulge knowledge and focusses on intimacy and secrecy; it originates in private conversations, written down and circulated in a semi-public sphere. La Beaumelle managed for some time to lure the Danes with the promise of information about a culture they were infatuated

<sup>69</sup> Lauriol, *La Beaumelle*, 157-58.

<sup>70</sup> Lauriol, *Études sur La Beaumelle*, pp. 254, 256, 300.

<sup>71</sup> *Bernstorffske Papire*, ed. by Aage Friis, (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1907), vol. 2, p. 309.

with. A powerful tool to divulge extreme ideas, the *Gazette* also undermined authority and doctrines. Erudite newspapers spread new discoveries, ideas and controversies, advocating new and sometimes radical ideals. Philosophical incredulity was pitched against religious and monarchical authoritarianism. Reason was an invaluable tool in the Republic of Letters, but it could also be a dangerous one.

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