



PROJECT MUSE®

Afterword

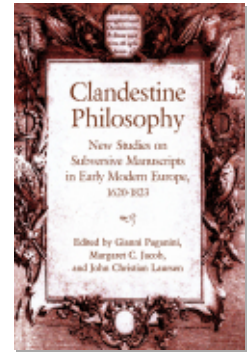
Published by

Laursen, John Christian, et al.

Clandestine Philosophy: New Studies on Subversive Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe, 1620-1823.

University of Toronto Press, 2020.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/109085>.



➔ For additional information about this book
<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/109085>

Afterword

JOHN CHRISTIAN LAURSEN

The chapters in this book have explored numerous heterodox clandestine philosophical manuscripts in their diverse contexts in Europe from 1620 to 1822. The history of this philosophical literature serves as a complement to the histories of philosophy and of subversive ideas that have concentrated on the main printed works. It turns out that significant philosophical and even scientific work was taking place underground, in the manuscripts that were written and circulated in this period. They were usually underground because they were subversive of church or state or both. This afterword situates this body of philosophical manuscripts in its context of other sorts of manuscript and print publication and of other reasons for clandestinity.

One thing we can emphasize here is the heterogeneity of the manuscripts and of their *fortuna*. Some were written for the exclusive use of the author, some just for friends, some were clearly written for narrow circles of elite intellectuals, some for a wider public, some for posterity perhaps conceived in decades or centuries. Some were short and some were very long. Some were occasional pieces, dashed off in a few days or weeks, some represented years of hard work, and some were the product of a lifetime of reflection. Some were quite original, and others were pastiches of other people's ideas. Some were written entirely as an intellectual or moral exercise, and some were written as potboilers for the growing market in subversive literature. Some of the authors were well aware that wealthy and influential people like Queen Christina of Sweden, Prince Eugene of Savoy, and Count Otto Thott of the Danish court had authorized agents all over Europe to purchase clandestine manuscripts for them. Some even repackaged subversive manuscripts with new titles to sell them again to the same careless buyers.

The authors were a wide range, too. Some were state officials, some churchmen, some private intellectuals, and some are unknown to us. Some were urban, some lived in small villages or country towns. Some wrote only manuscripts, and some wrote both published works and clandestine manuscripts. Some of the manuscripts were published almost immediately, some were published decades after being written and circulating in manuscript, some took centuries to appear in print, and some have never been printed. We have found them across Europe, and suspect that some may be found on other continents.

The variety is almost endless. Some of the manuscripts were quite philosophical, but others were rather superficial. If it may be asserted that the manuscripts that dealt with sexuality were not directly philosophical, it may be answered that the personal and pornographic have always been political and philosophical in their impact and implications. Even the superficial manuscripts could have an impact in making fun of church, state, traditions, and any other authorities.

And this is, in fact, one of the main things that ties the manuscripts together. They are all critical of something. An anodyne encomium to nature or celebration of a person would not count as a clandestine heterodox manuscript, even if it had a bit of philosophy in it. There has to be, at least *prima facie*, a reason why they were circulated clandestinely. And that was almost always some element of subversion, of threat to someone in a position to retaliate. If we may follow up on the theme of diversity, multiplicity, variety in the manuscripts, we see that as a whole they also promote diversity, multiplicity, and variety in social and intellectual life. As it has been felicitously put, many of them reject the “monos” of monogamy, monotheism, and monarchy. Some of the manuscripts explored some of the variety that may be found in sexuality, including polygamy. No one has yet identified the precise limits of the sexual heterogeneity found in the manuscripts taken together: we need to know how far the authors of this *corpus* were willing to go, and what their limits were. As for religion, many of the manuscripts reveal toleration of plurality, and a few even argue for atheism. There are paradoxes such as that Spinoza, the great philosophical monist who would brook no multiplicity of truths, actually encouraged multiplicity in interpretations of religion. Is it tolerant or is it intolerant to insist, as he did, that everyone agree with a list of religious truths, but then allow everyone to interpret them their own way?¹ Something similar can be said for the rejection of monarchy: was it complete, or were they just rejecting particular monarchies or forms of monarchy? When they promoted republicanism, was this a

backward-looking Roman republicanism, a Christian republicanism, or some forward-looking republicanism that has yet to be described in the scholarly literature? If monarchy is rejected, is that in favour of polyarchy or anarchy? Small groups of what seem to be anarchists, known as the Levellers, existed in England during the Civil War. Did any of their ideas and practices make it into clandestine philosophical manuscripts? We still do not know the limits of the political pluralism and heterogeneity of the clandestine manuscripts.

Clandestine and Heterodox Print

Many scholars have studied the clandestine printed literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some of which circulated underground because it might or did draw the ire of church and state authorities. So, for example, Robert Darnton has studied what he calls “the literary underground of the Old Regime” and “the forbidden bestsellers of pre-revolutionary France.”² Many of the texts he studied owed their notoriety to pornography, not philosophy. But his idea of the “corpus of clandestine literature in France, 1769–1789” is almost entirely printed materials.³ His specialty is “publishing and sedition,” not the unpublished but sometimes widely circulated seditious manuscripts we have studied here.⁴ There is no doubt that, as he puts it, state censorship “shaped literature” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but he does not consider the manuscript literature at any length, and that is what we have done here.⁵

Other genres of printed literature could be heterodox and clandestine and subject to censorship and repression just as much as our manuscripts. Simon Dickie has studied the forgotten comic literature of the eighteenth century. He found a vast *corpus* of comic novels, jestbooks, farces, and cartoons subversive of church, state, and everything else, but most of it was printed, not manuscript, and again, not very philosophical like our texts.⁶

Other Types of Manuscripts

Clandestine and heterodox philosophical manuscripts were only a subset of all manuscripts in this period. Until the invention of the printing press, of course, all writings circulated in manuscript form. The invention of the printing press by no means obliterated the continuing practice of circulating manuscripts. Harold Love provided a survey of what he

called “scribal publication in seventeenth-century England” that made the point that many seventeenth-century English poets such as Donne, Corbett, Marvell, Philips, Traherne, and Rochester wrote primarily for manuscript transmission.⁷ Other manuscripts in circulation included newsletters, weekly accounts of what was going on at court, and reports of the speeches in Parliament, often in multiple manuscripts.⁸ These were not, of course, the philosophical manuscripts we have considered in this volume. Love’s later work on satire demonstrated that printed texts and manuscripts often existed side by side, and were clandestine because of the explosive nature of their contents, but again, they were not philosophical manuscripts.⁹

The sheer numbers of manuscripts in the period are impressive. Peter Beal provided an index in four volumes of the sorts of literary manuscripts that were circulating in England in the years 1450 to 1700.¹⁰ Presumably similar numbers could be found in French, German, Latin, and maybe other languages. If the number of manuscripts is smaller in some of the less widespread languages that does not necessarily mean they were less important for their populations.

Manuscript publication was sometimes used by women because of cultural norms that discouraged them from appearing in the masculine print sphere. But recent work has brought out the point that there were many other reasons why a woman might publish in manuscript even though she could have published in print.¹¹ As George Justice pointed out, scribal publication remained, even as late as the end of the eighteenth century, a viable “alternative mode of publication” alongside print.¹² It has been pointed out that manuscripts could acquire the cachet of exclusivity and elite forbidden pleasure that public print could not provide.¹³

Beyond the Core Languages

The final section of this volume consists of chapters on the reception or afterlife of the heterodox clandestine literature in Spain in the early nineteenth century. One special dimension of this section is the point that Spain may have been one of the last places anyone would have looked for heterodox literature, famous as it was for the Inquisition and monarchic government. But it turns out that given porous borders, inefficient policing, and education and travel abroad, a surprising amount of subversive literature came in during the eighteenth century, mostly from France.¹⁴ And there were plenty of people who were eager to take

advantage of what has been called the “liberal Triennium” from 1820 to 1823 in which *de facto* freedom of the press existed because of a number of political contingencies, including the Napoleonic invasion and its aftermath.

Similar work should be undertaken for all of the countries in Europe. We do not know enough about the reception, even decades later, of this literature in all of the countries outside the hotbeds of France, Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands. For example, we know that Spinoza’s books and some Spinozana were held in the library of one the members of the Danish Privy Cabinet, Count Otto Thott.¹⁵ Printed material from the period is largely abusive of Spinoza. But there may have been Spinozistic and other heterodox manuscripts circulating as well. This is one of the many open questions about the clandestine material in countries outside the central four mentioned above.

We should also look to other continents. For example, there was an Enlightenment expressed in printed texts in Nueva Granada (now Colombia).¹⁶ Other work has foregrounded the development of subversive social and political concepts such as “Republic” and “Revolution” in the printed press in a dozen Latin American countries from 1750 to 1870.¹⁷ This work should be supplemented by a search for manuscripts. We need to ask: did any of the clandestine literature circulate there? It could be imports, translations, or home-grown heterodoxy.

Modern Editions and Scholarship

There is an excellent series in French of modern editions of clandestine texts such as by Fontenelle, César Chesneau Du Marsais, and Abraham Gaultier edited by Antony McKenna and published by the Voltaire Foundation at Oxford.¹⁸ Unfortunately, it has ceased publication. Fortunately, McKenna continues to edit a series with Honoré Champion in Paris that includes editions of clandestine manuscripts from time to time; it has now grown to more than seventy volumes.¹⁹ In German there are two series edited by Winfried Schröder.²⁰ We need more such series to bring many of these manuscripts to wider attention. More translations of the French, German, and Latin texts into English would be an excellent idea.

As of 2017 perhaps the most important means of accessing some of the philosophical manuscripts is the collection of PDFs made available as “L’Inventaire des manuscrits philosophiques clandestins (IMPC)” at the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris: <https://www.bibliotheque-mazarine.fr/impc>. We can hope that more and more manuscripts will be made

available in the near future. That will not obviate, but rather encourage, the translation into other languages of many of these manuscripts.

The latest scholarly discoveries may be found in the two periodicals dedicated to the area, *La lettre clandestine* (1992–present) and *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIIe siècle* (1996–present). Note that these are published in French, but the materials explored in this volume suggest that there should be much more attention to this area in journals published in English, German, Spanish, and other languages. New work is coming out all the time that adds to our understanding of the interplay of clandestine manuscripts and culture.²¹

The history of philosophy, the history of political ideas, the history of sexuality, the history of modernity, the history of atheism, and the history of many other things cannot be written adequately without reference to the manuscript tradition underlying the print culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is too much evidence that the writers of the printed texts read and thought about these manuscripts to dismiss them. The very fact that many well-known printed works circulated in manuscript for decades before being published suggests that we need to know more about their pre-print-publication impact. The essays in this volume should provide a good starting place for further work.

NOTES

- 1 See J.C. Laursen, “Spinoza et les ‘mensonges officieux’ dans les manuscrits clandestins. Une question et un programme de recherché,” *La Lettre clandestine*, 26, 2018, 81–98.
- 2 Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Darnton, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).
- 3 Robert Darnton, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France, 1769–1789* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).
- 4 Robert Darnton, *Edition et sédition: L’univers de la littérature clandestine au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).
- 5 Robert Darnton, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).
- 6 Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- 7 Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 4.

- 8 Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England*, 10–14.
- 9 Harold Love, *English Clandestine Satire, 1660–1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 10 Peter Beal, *Index of Literary Manuscripts, 1450–1700*, 4 vols (London: Bowker and Mansell, 1980–93). See also Beal, *In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and Their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
- 11 See George Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds, *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 12 George Justice, "Introduction" to Justice and Tinker, eds, *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas*, 15.
- 13 See J.C. Laursen, "The Politics of a Publishing Event," in *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Freethought in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. S. Berti, F. Charles-Daubert, and R. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996), 273–96.
- 14 J.C. Laursen, "When Can You Think Something?," *Daimon. Revista Internacional de Filosofía* 58, 2013, 179–84.
- 15 See J.C. Laursen and Henrik Horstbøll, "Spinoza in Denmark: An Unknown Painting of Spinoza and the Spinoza Collection of Count Otto Thott," *Studia Spinozana* 15, 1999 [2006], 249–64.
- 16 See Renán Silva, *La Ilustración en el virreinato de la Nueva Granada* (Medellín: La Carreta, 2005); Renán Silva, *Nuevas perspectivas de análisis sobre el Papel Periódico de Santafé de Bogotá, 1791–1797* (Medellín: La Carreta, 2015).
- 17 Javier Fernandez Sebastián, ed., *Diccionario político y social del mundo iberoamericano*, vol. 1: *La era de las revoluciones, 1750–1850*, and vol. 2: *Conceptos políticos fundamentales, 1770–1870* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2009, 2014).
- 18 It consisted of Abraham Gaultier, *Parité de la vie et de la mort*, ed. O. Bloch (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993); Simon Tyssot de Patot, *Voyages et aventures de Jacques Massé*, ed. A. Rosenberg (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993); Guillaume Lamy, *Discours anatomiques + Explication mécanique et physique des fonctions de l'âme sensitive*, ed. A. Minerbi Belgrado (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996); *De l'examen de la religion*, attributable à Jean Lévesque de Burigny, éd. S. Landucci (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996); *Traité de la liberté, Des Miracles, Des Oracles, La Fausseté des miracles des deux Testaments*, ed. A. Niderst (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1997); Fontenelle, *Histoire des Ajaoiëns*, ed. H.-G. Funke (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998); César Chesneau Du Marsais, *Doutes sur la religion, ou Examen de la religion dont on cherche l'éclaircissement de bonne foi*, ed. G. Mori (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998); Le "Traité des trois imposteurs" et "L'Esprit de Spinoza," ed. F. Charles-Daubert (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999); John

Locke, *Que la religion chrétienne est très raisonnable, Discours sur les miracles, Essai sur la nécessité d'expliquer les Epîtres de St Paul, La Vie de Cost*, ed. H. Bouchilloux and M.-C. Pitassi (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999). Another Voltaire Foundation series in English that also ceased publication included John Toland, *Nazarenus*, ed. Justin Champion (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999).

- 19 The catalogue for the series “Libre pensée et littérature clandestine” can be found at https://www.honorechampion.com/img/cms/pdf_catalog/2017_libre_pensee_et_litterature_clandestine.pdf.
- 20 “Freydenker der europäischen Aufklärung”: Johann Georg Wachter, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb (1699)*, ed. W. Schröder (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995); Johann Georg Wachter, *De primordiis Christiana religionis (1703/1717)*, ed. W. Schröder (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995); Georg Schade, *Die unwandelbare und ewige Religion (1760)*, ed. M. Mulsow (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1999); [César Chesneau Du Marsais], *Die wahre Religion oder die Religionsprüfung (1747)*, ed. G. Mori (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2003); Balthasar Bekker, *Die bezauberte Welt (1693)*, ed. Wiep Van Bunge (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1997). “Philosophisches Clandestina”: Theodor Ludwig Lau, ed. Martin Pott (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1992); Friedrich Wilhelm Stosch (1648–1704), ed. W. Schröder (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1992); Gabriel Wagner (1660–1717), ed. S. Wollgast (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1997); Matthias Knutzen, ed. W. Schröder (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2010); [Johann Joachim Müller (1661–1733)], *De Tribus Impostoribus*, ed. W. Schröder (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1999).
- 21 See, for example, Jacopo Agnesina, *The Philosophy of Anthony Collins: Free Thought and Atheism* (Paris: Champion, 2018).