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Mara van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xvi + 319pp. Tables, figures, appendix, bibliography, index. \$110.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-19-876926-2.

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In what is surely a landmark contribution to Bayle studies, Mara van der Lugt offers an ambitious and original interpretation of the structure and contents of Pierre Bayle's most complex and enigmatic work--the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. There has been a recent upsurge in scholarship on Bayle by historians and philosophers, but van der Lugt's detailed study offers the best existing contextual analysis of the most elusive work of perhaps the most enigmatic thinker of the early Enlightenment. By combining a meticulous examination of the substance of the *Dictionnaire* with an analysis of its unique structure and textual features, van der Lugt takes the reader on a journey through what she rightly terms "Bayle's Labyrinth" (p. 15). Although this odyssey does not ultimately lead to definitive answers about the philosopher of Rotterdam's views on the relationship between faith and reason or about his fundamental religious convictions, van der Lugt's nuanced analysis reveals the complex strategies that Bayle deployed in deliberately presenting his readers with alternative avenues for interpreting his text.

As the author rightly points out in her introduction, Bayle scholars have been largely divided into two interpretive camps. The first group draws on the Enlightenment interpretations of Bayle and emphasizes the subversive nature of his texts, particularly in matters of religion, presenting him as a dissimulating rationalist and atheist who used philosophical skepticism to expose the internal contradictions of Christian theology. The second camp, led by the revisionist scholarship of Élisabeth Labrousse and reinforced by the work of Richard Popkin and Ruth Whelan, situates Bayle in the context of his debates within the Huguenot Refuge and emphasizes his fideism and his calls for placing supernatural faith above natural reason. While the fideist reading of Bayle had become widely accepted by the 1990s, Antony McKenna and Gianluca Mori have recently defended the original heterodox interpretation. Mori's careful interpretations have aimed to demonstrate that Bayle presented atheism as a viable theological position.[1]

Van der Lugt correctly observes that the interpretive divide over Bayle's ultimate intentions has led scholars to approach his works with a set of pre-established assumptions and a predetermined "interpretive avenue" (p. 9). By analyzing the *Dictionnaire* and Bayle's other texts in this way, philosophers and historians have tended to seek out textual evidence that confirms their views and to disregard passages that might prove problematic for their interpretations of the puzzling thinker. Van der Lugt's study attempts to avoid the self-fulfilling pitfalls of such readings by approaching the *Dictionnaire* without specific presuppositions about where Bayle stood on particular philosophical questions. She analyzes the ways in which the text's "contents and structure are intertwined" and places the composition of the first and second editions of the work in the context of Bayle's heated debates with his arch-nemesis Pierre Jurieu (p. 7). The author insists that a proper understanding of the *Dictionnaire* requires that it "be placed within the immediate context of its production in the 1690s" and that "the

mechanics of the work as a whole” along with “its structural and stylistic particularities” be taken into account (p. 68). While van der Lugt examines the formal aspects of the *Dictionnaire*, she goes well beyond H. H. M. van Lieshout’s *The Making of Pierre Bayle’s Dictionnaire historique et critique* (2001)—an erudite and useful work that bypasses the text’s philosophical contents, focusing on its material aspects and its production.[2] Van der Lugt examines how the structural features of the dictionary played a part in communicating some of Bayle’s most controversial ideas about the problem of evil, the extent and limits of free expression in the Republic of Letters, and the relationship between faith and reason. By combining “a bird’s eye view of the work as a whole” with close readings of specific articles, her approach allows for a re-reading of Bayle’s multidimensional work with a fresh set of interpretive lenses (p. 9).

The extensive volume of Bayle’s writings, the changing nature of his views, and the plurality of voices present in his texts have all contributed to making him an enigma to his contemporaries and to modern scholars alike.[3] The incompatibility between the fideist and the subversive interpretations of Bayle has led scholars such as Thomas Lennon to suggest that it is best to read the philosopher of Rotterdam by deploying Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of “polyphony” and “dialogic speech.” Instead of seeking a fixed and consistent interpretation of Bayle’s philosophical positions—as one would do in examining the “monologic” works of René Descartes or Nicolas Malebranche—Lennon has argued for an analytical approach that dissociates the author from any of the individual voices present in his texts and allows for an open-ended conversation along with a plurality of possible readings.[4] Lennon’s interpretive strategy informs van der Lugt’s method, although she modifies it in several significant ways. While both scholars emphasize the polyphonic structure of Bayle’s text, van der Lugt questions Lennon’s comparison of Bayle with Fyodor Dostoevsky (to whose characters Bakhtin had applied such a reading) and disputes the assumption that Bayle held no firm philosophical views. She points to the “important imbalance between Bayle’s voices” and insists that “heterodox voices,” which often represent “the devil’s advocate,” tend to receive a greater “degree of autonomy” than their heterodox counterparts (pp. 65–66). Van der Lugt meticulously demonstrates the complex and frequently shifting roles played by different voices in the *Dictionnaire’s* articles. This approach is especially illuminating when applied to Bayle’s continued discussion of the problem of evil. The book navigates through the complex and shifting patterns of and explains the important functions played by the voices of fictional and real “guests,” such as Cotta, Epicurus, and Zoroaster, among numerous others (p. 48).

The first chapter offers an original roadmap for navigating the labyrinth of the *Dictionnaire*. Those unfamiliar with the unique structure of this work might find this part particularly interesting, because it explains the “dual structure of the body text” and shows how Bayle deployed the Remarks that supplemented the main parts of the entries in his articles as “a licence to digress and a licence to express” (p. 23). Indeed, it is in the Remarks that Bayle’s readers encountered the most interesting and controversial passages. Van der Lugt carefully examines the four kinds of “marginal intervention” in the *Dictionnaire*: bibliographical citations, short quotations, marginal comments, and cross-references (pp. 29–30). She devotes the greatest attention to the cross-references, showing how they allowed Bayle “to approach any given subject from different angles and in different contexts throughout the dictionary, and to continue arguments and discussions across a variety of articles” (p. 32). The author deploys this insight in her interpretive journey through the *Dictionnaire*. Using helpful diagrams throughout the book, she demonstrates the links between articles in different parts of the work, explains how Bayle’s arguments unfold if one follows them across the different cross-references, and shows the crucial importance of the margins in interpreting Bayle’s complex work.

Van der Lugt rightly notes that the *Dictionnaire* was neither an exhaustive source of information nor a “systematic compendium of knowledge,” as one would encounter in an encyclopedia (p. 28). Nevertheless, I would argue that Bayle’s *Dictionnaire* can be regarded as an intellectual inspiration for Diderot’s and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* in terms of both its form and its content. The combination of philosophical and theological controversy with learned erudition proved to be a formula for lasting

popularity. The example of the *Dictionnaire* showed that provocative content could go quite far if it were imbedded in a compilation of useful encyclopedic information: one could simultaneously enlighten the public and expose it to subversive and heterodox ideas. Bayle's citations and cross-references also provided a set of textual tools that allowed for a mobilization of the margins that is clearly present in the *Encyclopédie*.

A large part of van der Lugt's narrative revolves around the conflict between Bayle and Jurieu in the Huguenot Refuge in Rotterdam. She reveals how the evolving debates between the two intellectual leaders of the French Huguenot community informed numerous articles in the *Dictionnaire*. Bayle resorted to both direct and indirect attacks against Jurieu, who had accused him of holding heretical and even atheist views and was responsible for Bayle's dismissal from his teaching position at the École Illustre. The second chapter details Bayle's views on the rules and principles that should govern the Republic of Letters. Van der Lugt explains how Jurieu's defamatory accusations thwarted Bayle's ideal of "an extremely free intellectual sphere" and shaped his views on the limits of free expression (p. 116). The third chapter outlines the polemic between the two Huguenots regarding the legitimacy of King Louis XIV, showing how Bayle's commentaries on zeal, enthusiasm, and intolerance in the articles "Comenius" and "Mahomet," among others, were aimed at Jurieu's millenarian calls for a holy war against the Catholic monarch. In opposition to Jurieu, Bayle called for a peace and continued obedience to the Sun King, seeking to undermine "the traditional Catholic claim that Protestants were inherently seditious" (p. 142).

The debates regarding war, religious toleration, and the relationship between faith and reason seem to pit the "extremists," the "intolerants," and the "orthodox," against the "moderates," the "tolerants," and the "*rationaux*" in the Dutch Refuge (p. 152). While Bayle sided with the latter group on the first two questions, his support for Jurieu's fideist stance complicates this dichotomy. In the last two chapters, van der Lugt examines Bayle's elusive position on how the faculties of faith and reason should approach complex theological questions, particularly the problem of evil. She explores Bayle's shift from a rationalist outlook in the 1680s—when, in works like the *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jésus Christ, Contrains-les d'entrer* (1686), he had argued that the contents of scripture had to be reconciled with right reason—towards an increasingly fideist perspective by the 1690s and 1700s. In a curious apologetic move, Bayle appeared to equate his own views with those of his bitter rival Jurieu, and he became involved in debates about the proper relationship between faith and reason with the *rationaux* Jean Le Clerc, Isaac Jaquelot, and Jacques Bernard. Van der Lugt demonstrates how the different voices of the *Dictionnaire* appeared to question the possibility of both reconciling the notion of an omnipotent and benevolent God with the reality of physical and moral evil and squaring the doctrine of original sin with divine foreknowledge. Although Bayle had explicitly claimed that reason should submit itself to faith in numerous articles, van der Lugt complicates the fideist reading by showing how he implicitly argued that "the believer has to accept that there *is* a rational solution to the problem of evil, but that it has to be consciously rejected, in order for faith to be saved" (p. 179). These issues seem to lead Bayle to conclude that philosophy and the gospel appear irreconcilable—a position that becomes even clearer, according to van der Lugt, if one takes into account the *Éclaircissements* inserted at the end of the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*.

Having followed van der Lugt through "Bayle's Labyrinth," the reader will certainly appreciate the nuanced arguments and intricate mechanisms deployed in the *Dictionnaire*. However, as the conclusion admits, we come no closer to unwinding the complex web of arguments and counter-arguments marshaled by the text. It remains unclear whether "we are to prioritize his statements of faith, or the many reasons he gives us for doubting religious truth" (p. 248). Indeed, van der Lugt argues, "reading with Bayle" requires "seeking out and cultivating ambiguities, and trying to raise the veil of any text, but it also means avoiding presumption and withdrawing judgment at the last moment" (p. 249). It seems that Bayle purposefully made ambiguity a central feature of the *Dictionnaire* and wanted his readers to have the freedom of choosing among the several possible readings of his complex work.

This novel way of reading the *Dictionnaire* certainly opens new avenues of analysis. Van der Lugt successfully demonstrates how Bayle's arguments appear even more controversial and complex if they are read according to the different signposts offered by his marginal references. She effectively highlights the central role that Jurieu played in the various articles of the *Dictionnaire*, although such a reading also risks approaching the text through a pre-calibrated lens—something the author wants to avoid. Furthermore, it is unclear whether Bayle's contemporaries followed the kind of reading method that van der Lugt proposes. While the diagrams linking different articles are useful in revealing the intricate connections Bayle might have had in mind, it would be interesting to see whether his readers pursued his arguments across the different articles. Indeed, a possible solution to the Bayle enigma might be to avoid picking his brain and to examine the various ways in which eighteenth-century audiences engaged with the *Dictionnaire* and its "multivalent" author.<sup>[5]</sup> Bayle's ultimate intentions may forever remain the subject of debate, but we can determine with relative certainty how his contemporaries read and reacted to his work.

The author also seems to pay insufficient attention to the crucial role that philosophical skepticism played in Bayle's thought. His alleged attempts to promote Pyrrhonism were central to his notorious reputation in the eighteenth century. The complex deployment of different voices in the *Dictionnaire* could be seen as part of Bayle's broader strategy to demonstrate the viability and internal consistency of multiple mutually exclusive perspectives. This is particularly evident in the articles "Pyrrhon," "Leucippe," and "Zénon d'Elée," where Bayle went to great lengths to show that human reason is incapable of providing consistent, certain, and irrefutable accounts of the physical world. The reasons for Bayle's ambiguities become clearer if they are read in the context of his skeptical agenda.

Despite these minor criticisms, this book should be required reading for anyone interested in Pierre Bayle or the Huguenot Refuge. By revealing the many layers of interpretation woven into the *Dictionnaire* and situating it in its immediate historical context, Van der Lugt opens a new methodological path to decoding this complex text. She also masterfully demonstrates why Pierre Bayle should be considered a key thinker in the history of Enlightenment thought. Bayle's unique style and elusive nature might make him a difficult subject for those who seek straightforward answers about where the philosopher of Rotterdam stood on the most crucial questions of his day. However, these aspects of Bayle's writing are also the very attributes that render him a fascinating figure worthy of many further studies.

## NOTES

[1] For Mori's description of his own approach, see Gianluca Mori, *Bayle philosophe* (Paris: Champion, 1999), pp. 13-53; Gianluca Mori, "Interpréter la philosophie de Bayle," in Hubert Bost and P. de Robert eds., *Pierre Bayle, citoyen du monde. De l'enfant du Carla à l'auteur du Dictionnaire* (Paris: Champion, 1999), pp. 303-24; Gianluca Mori, "Persécution et l'art d'écrire: Strauss, Skinner et Pierre Bayle," in Laurent Jaffro, Benoît Frydman, Emmanuel Cattin, and Alain Petit eds., *L'Art d'écrire, politique, philosophie; texte de 1941 et études* (Paris: Vrin, 2001), pp. 197-219.

[2] H. H. M. van Lieshout, *The Making of Pierre Bayle's Dictionnaire historique et critique*, trans. Lynne Richards (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 2001).

[3] For an excellent overview of scholarship on Bayle, see J.B. Shank, Review of *Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), le philosophe de Rotterdam: Philosophy, Religion, and Reception; Selected Papers of the Tercentenary Conference Held at Rotterdam, 7-8 December 2006*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Hans Bots, *H-France Review* 11 (2011): 1-14.

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[4] For more on this method of reading Bayle see, Thomas Lennon, *Reading Bayle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 28-41.

[5] The concept of “multivalent” meanings or paradigms is most powerfully articulated in J. G. A. Pocock’s essay on “Languages and their implications” in his *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), pp. 3-41.

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