

# A SOCIOBIBLIOGRAPHIC STUDY OF

## *L' H O M M E M A C H I N E .*

**Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Leiden : Elie Luzac, fils, 1748.**

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### **SUMMARY**

This research work is an inquiry into the lives and works of two of the most celebrated figures of the city of Leiden during the Enlightenment. The paper aims at showing how and to what extent Julien Offray de La Mettrie through his *L' homme machine* (1748) and Elie Luzac, the publisher of that same book marked the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century enlightened philosophy. I first endeavoured to study the physical features of that pamphlet, which keeps the original feel-and-smell of a typical mid-18<sup>th</sup> century book. Then I highlighted the exceptional lives of the two figures of French origins from their infancy to their death, including their oeuvre. Finally, I studied the blind hostility and animosity that *L'homme machine* provoked among the clergy, scholars and secular authorities of Leiden and of Europe as well as their consequences.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Initially published in 1747 and reprinted in 1748 together with its refutation -*L'homme plus que machine*-, *L'homme machine* was not received with enthusiasm by the theologians, philosophers and other citizens of the Republic of letters to whom it was intended. This philosophical and anti-religious pamphlet has the particularity of not only having involved two exceptional Leiden scholars, Julien Offray de La Mettrie and Elie Luzac both of French origin, but also having raised an unprecedented international protest and fury from scholars and thinkers of the Enlightenment.

This work comprises three major parts, notably a bibliographic study which includes reference bibliography, descriptive and analytical bibliography; the biographies of La Mettrie and Luzac; and the reception of *L' homme machine* by the reading community.

## **I. BIBLIOGRAPHIC STUDY OF *L'HOMME MACHINE***

### **I.1. Reference bibliography.**

**Author:** Julien Offray de La Mettrie

**Title :** *L'homme machine*

**Publisher:** Elie Luzac, fils.

**Year of publication:** 1748

**Place of publication :** Leiden

**Language :** French

**Number pages :** 109 (excluding *L'homme plus que machine*)

**Size :** 14cm x 8cm

**Format :** 12°

**Collection:** 10 A-D12 E6 [F]1

**Fingerprints:** a1 \*2 asi : a2 \*7 \$to - b1 A s : b2 E5 me

**Genre:** Philosophical pamphlet

**Annotation:** *L'homme machine* is exceptional not only because of its anti-religious and materialistic philosophy but also because of its original physical appearance that it kept along centuries. La Mettrie's arguments against Descartes and Locke, among others, become tastier when they are read from their original carrier, which gives the reader a sentiment of physically being in those good old times.

**Locations :** Leiden University Library (GM) ; Magazijn 5 ; 449 G 14: 1; Dutch Royal Library (KB), the Hague: 1138 E 8:1

## **I.2. Descriptive, analytical bibliography**

### ***I.2.A. Title page facsimile.***

[*centre*]<sup>1</sup> L'HOMME/ [*bold*] MACHINE/ [*double lead*][*small, italics*] Est-ce là ce Raion de l'Essence Suprême./ [*centre*] Que l'on nous paint si lumineux ?/ Est-ce là cet Esprit survivant à nous même ?/ Il naît avec nos sens, croit, s'affoiblit/ [*centre*] Comme eux./Helas ! il périra de même./[*right*]VOLTAIRE./[*centre*]double ruler/ [*centre*] À LEIDE,/ DE L'IMP. D'ELIE LUZAC, FILS/ [*centre*] MDCCXLVIII,/

### ***I.2.B. Binding***

The book under consideration has a hard vellum binding covered with a slight layer of red-brown marbled paper. Five vellum chains that hold the quires together and fix the cover can be seen from outside. The binding is still original, that is, no restoration work has been done on it.

### ***I.2.C. Paper***

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<sup>1</sup> The indications enclosed in [ ] shows the position of words on the page or the form in which words appear.

The *L'homme machine* volume is made up of very slight, fragile and brownish sheets of paper. The white spots on B3v (p. 30), B4r (p. 31) and other pages, suggest that the paper was once white and got brownish along the years and centuries. They all present chains but, as observed above, only the first sheet has a watermark which is not easily decipherable since it can partly be seen. This makes it difficult to trace the origin of this paper.

#### ***1.2.D. Ornaments, illustrations***

*L'Homme machine* is very soberly ornamented. Different black-and-white flower-like ornaments are placed on the upper part of \*2r and of the first page of each of the three major parts, namely the 'Avertissement de l'Imprimeur', the dedication 'A Monsieur Haller...' and the body of the book *L'homme machine*.

In addition, the first letter of each of the three parts is in bigger font and bold and framed with a black-and-white flower-like ornament.

No illustrations such as engravings or wood cuts are used.

#### ***1.2.E. Types, fonts, cases***

Two types can be seen throughout *L'homme machine*. These are 'roman' and 'italic'. Also, both upper and lower cases are frequently used.

##### ***1.2.H.i. Roman, Italic***

All the original words of La Mettrie and on which no particular emphasis is put, are in roman. Within the text in roman, quotes are given in italics. For instance, on \*3v, one can read Corneille's '*à vaincre sans péril on triomphe sans gloire*' not in quotation marks but in italics. In the same vein, book titles are given in italics for the same reasons as above. For example on A2r-v (pp3-4): '...l'auteur du *Spectacle de la nature*' with the last four words in italics.

Also, foreign (especially Latin) words are presented in italics. An example can be seen on \*3v with the term '*incognito*'. Moreover, the whole dedication to Monsieur Haller and all footnotes are in italics. The reason is most probably that much emphasis is put on this part or that the publisher wanted the reader to differentiate between preliminaries and footnotes on the one hand and the text body on the other hand.

##### ***1.2.H.ii. Upper and lower case***

Most of the book is naturally in lower case. However, particular words are presented in upper case. The first word(s) of the paragraph is/are in upper case. For instance, on D3r (p.77), one sees 'JE ne m'étendrai pas...'; on C7r (p. 61) 'QUI fait d'ailleurs...'.  
*L'homme machine* has a considerable number of abbreviations and symbols whose motivation was most likely the will to economise paper. The title page itself has "IMP." which stands for

#### ***1.2.F. Abbreviations, special signs***

*L'homme machine* has a considerable number of abbreviations and symbols whose motivation was most likely the will to economise paper. The title page itself has "IMP." which stands for

“IMPRIMERIE”. Also, abbreviations such as 1<sup>o</sup> , 2<sup>o</sup> are used on page 23 to make “primo” and “secundo” shorter.

Beside abbreviations, signs like the ampersand (&) are repeatedly used to replace the conjunction ‘et’ (and). One reads on A1v (p.2): ‘DESCARTES & les cartésiens’ and on A2r (p.3): ‘la nature & la révélation’.

Moreover, a cross-like sign (†) and asterisks (\*) are used to indicate footnotes. Examples can be seen on pages 20, 27 and 77.

## II. BIOGRAPHIES

### II.1. Julien Offray de La Mettrie : physician and philosopher



Fig. 1 Julien Offray de La Mettrie  
(C) <http://www.lsr-projekt.de/lm.html#lm>

Julien Offray de La Mettrie, son of Julien sieur de La Mettrie and Marie Gaudron, was born on 19 December 1709 in Saint-Malo, France. La Mettrie got married in November 1739 with Marie-Louise Dréano, a widow, but this marriage was not a happy one. He subsequently led a nomadic life, living twice in Leiden and then in Berlin, where he untimely died at the age of 43. His mysterious death – allegedly provoked by over-eating and over-drinking - raised many questions and provoked jubilation among his many adversaries.

#### II.1.A. Childhood and schooling

Born in a well-to-do bourgeoisie family, La Mettrie attended the best schools of his time. He studied philosophy, theology and medicine and was known not only to have had much genius and winning all the prizes of eloquence,<sup>2</sup> but also to have been a noisy, drunkard and debauched boy.<sup>3</sup> La Mettrie became medical doctor in 1734 . Because of enmity between him and his colleagues and ‘finding his medical education wanting’,<sup>4</sup> he went to study in Leiden under Hermann Boerhaave, a physician of considerable international repute. During his Leiden sojourn ‘the master [Boerhaave] was worthy of the scholar and the scholar soon made himself worthy of the master’.<sup>5</sup> La Mettrie returned to France in 1735.

#### II.1.B. Hermann Boerhaave’s Influence

La Mettrie’s 1734-1735 stay in Leiden was determining for the rest of his medical and philosophical career, especially because of his encounter with Hermann Boerhaave, the

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<sup>2</sup> Frederic the Great, *Eulogy on Julien Offray de la Mettrie*, in *Man a Machine*, (La Salle, 1912) p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Lemée, *Une figure peu connue: Offray de la Mettrie (1709-1751). Médecin, Philosophe, Polémiste*, (Saint-Servan, 1902), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Wellman, *La Mettrie : Medicine, Philosophy, and Enlightenment*, (Duke, 1992),p.34

<sup>5</sup> Frederic the Great, *Eulogy*, p. 4.

greatest teacher in the eighteenth century<sup>6</sup> the theories of whom modern medicine is based. To understand La Mettrie's subsequent complex of superiority vis-à-vis his former French lecturers and colleagues, a brief study of Boerhaave as a historic figure, accompanied by his decisive influence on La Mettrie, proves necessary.

Born at Voorhout , Boerhaave (1668-1738) studied theology and philosophy at Leiden University. He did not achieve his dream of becoming a minister like his father, because he was suspected of being a Spinozist, which was incompatible with a clerical career. He then turned to medicine, but 'instead of enrolling in a degree program he undertook an extensive, systematic, independent study of medical writers, attended public dissections, and dissected animals'.<sup>7</sup>

Boerhaave earned his degree in 1693 and started a 37-year-long brilliant academic career in medicine, botany and chemistry at Leiden University, where he attracted students from all over Europe and the New World. These students, among whom La Mettrie, were to play a decisive role in the medical reforms in their home countries. They had all adhered to their famous master's 'modern system of clinical instruction, which is the basis of contemporary Western medical education'.<sup>8</sup>

La Mettrie's audacity to criticise the poor French medical education and his attempt at bringing Boerhaave's innovative theories to France were the origin of the animosity and jealousy from other French physicians. In 1746, La Mettrie crossed the Rubicon and attacked frontally the Paris faculty of medicine, the country's most prestigious medical school which he had attended between 1727-1731. In his most successful satirical work, *La Faculté vengée*(1746), he accused the faculty of supporting incompetent practitioners,<sup>9</sup> which was more than an affront to the whole French scholarly community.

### ***II.1.C. Exile***

La Mettrie returned to Leiden after the French Parliament had ordered the burning of his scandalous and offending *La Politique du Médecin de Machiavel* (1746). This pamphlet satirised his fellow physicians who subsequently formed a united front to settle their scores with him. He later wrote that 'to avoid the blows struck with fury, I chose to run away to the place that trained me'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Wellman, *La Mettrie*, p. 62

<sup>7</sup> Wellman , *La Mettrie*, p. 61

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p.62

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p.55

<sup>10</sup> Lemée, *Une figure peu connue*, p. 28. Quote from *Ouvrage de Pénélope*\_(1748) in *Une figure peu connue* ' Pour éviter des coups porter avec furie, je m'exilai par goût au lieu qui me forma'.

His stay in Leiden lasted only two years and was not a quiet one. His *L'homme machine* (Leiden, 1747) caused him the greatest troubles especially from the churchmen, Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans all together. Besides, Paris physicians grabbed the occasion to strike another blow. They asked their Leiden colleagues to ban La Mettrie, which they did. It was time to leave for a safer place. King Frederic the Great of Prussia, who invited La Mettrie to Berlin, wrote that 'the title of philosopher and the reputation of being unfortunate were enough to procure for La Mettrie a refuge in Prussia with a pension from the king'.<sup>11</sup> He even appointed him to the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin.

#### **II.1.D. Philosophic career**

La Mettrie was primarily a physician until he caught a violent fever while taking part in the Fribourg siege as military surgeon in 1744. He began to reflect about the effects of that disease on himself. King Frederic the Great described this particular and crucial period as follows:

*For a philosopher an illness is a school of physiology; he believed that he could clearly see that thought is but a consequence of the organisation of the machine, and that the disturbance of the springs has considerable influence on that part of us which the metaphysicians call soul.*<sup>12</sup>

This was the beginning of his philosophic career that would rather make enemies both among philosophers and the medical corps. From that time on, he used Boerhaave's medical theory for his own discussion of the philosophy of nature.<sup>13</sup>

#### **II.1.E. Oeuvre**

La Mettrie wrote numerous books and pamphlets on subjects relating especially to medical sciences and philosophy, and very often both subjects were combined in one work. He began writing while still on the school bench but all these early works cannot be traced. Here is a non-exhaustive list of the most known of his works:

*Système des maladies vénériennes* (year?); *Le Traite du Vertige* (1734); *Oeuvres de Médecine* (year ?); *Traité du vertige* (1737); *Vie de Boerhaave* (1740); *Observation de Médecine pratique* (1740); *Traité de la petite vérole avec la manière de guérir cette maladie* (1740); *St Côme vengé ou critique du traité d'Astruc* (1744); *Histoire naturelle de l'Ame* (1745); *La Politique du Médecin de Machiavel* (1746); *La Faculté vengée* (1746); *Ouvrage de Pénélope* (1748); *L'homme plante* (year?); *Les Animaux plus que machine* (year?); *L'Homme machine*

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<sup>11</sup> Frederic the Great, *Eulogy*, pp 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6

<sup>13</sup> Wellman, *La Mettrie*, p. 7.

(1748); *Mémoire sur la dysenterie* (1750); *Les Charlatans démasqués* (1762); *Œuvres philosophiques* (1774).

## II.2. Elie Luzac: bookseller, writer and lawyer.



Fig.2. Portrait of Elie Luzac in Leiden Municipal Museum.  
©uitgeverij VANTILT

Elie Luzac jr. was born on 19 October 1721 in Noordwijk. The son of Elie Luzac sr. and Anne-Marie Cabrolle, he is known as an enlightened philosopher, lawyer and above all as bookseller, a profession that still combined printing, publishing and book selling in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He belongs to the third generation of a Leiden Huguenot family. At least three Luzacs, that is Luzac jr. and his two uncles Johan and Etienne, were involved in the book trade in Leiden in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The two uncles were to become famous, the former as bookseller, the latter as chief editor of the *Gazette de Leyde*, a paper that achieved international fame. The two prosperous brothers would help their less fortunate step-brother Elie Luzac sr – Luzac jr’s father –by for instance taking care of his children’s education. Elie Luzac jr. died on 11 May 1796 in Leiden and left behind him a rich oeuvre both by his quill and by his press.

### II.2.A. Childhood and schooling

Despite his stiff and sombre character,<sup>14</sup> Luzac jr. successfully completed his studies and matriculated at the Faculty of Law in Leiden in 1738. There he simultaneously attended classes in physics, mathematics, astronomy, metaphysics and ethics<sup>15</sup>. Years after completing his studies, Luzac jr. defended his dissertation despite the university’s decision to forbid him from studying further in Leiden in reaction to his earlier controversial and self-published book *Disquisitio politico-moralis* (1749). Luzac had already been involved in the book trade since the age of 14 when he went to work with his uncle Johan. At the age of 21 he was already running his own printing shop in Leiden where he was still a student.<sup>16</sup>

### II. 2. B. Professional and political Life

It is believed that more than 20,000 pages went through Luzac jr.’s printing press during his 1742-1796 bookselling career.<sup>17</sup> This success was essentially due to the national and international networks that he had built to support his business. He also expanded his business to Göttingen, a recently founded university town in Germany. Between 1774-1791 he associated himself with Hendrik van Damme. Furthermore, after obtaining his doctorate in

<sup>14</sup>Rietje van Vliet, *Elie Luzac (1721-1796): Boekverkoper van de Verlichting* (Nijmegen: 2005), p. 26: “een stug en somber kind”

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 27

<sup>16</sup> E.H. Kossmann, *Verlicht Conservatisme: over Elie Luzac*, (Groningen, 1966), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Rietje van Vliet, *Elie Luzac (1721-1796)*, p. 9.

Law in 1759, Elie Luzac jr. became very active in the judicial life of Leiden and other cities. He defended many legal cases as a lawyer but also worked as a prosecutor and legal adviser.

Elie Luzac jr.'s political opinions during the 1780s Batavian agitation and revolution were unambiguous but risky. He was one of the forefront men among the Orangists, who fought his ideological war mainly with his quill and consequently was much demonised and molested by his opponents.<sup>18</sup>

### **II. 2.C. Œuvre**

Luzac jr.'s oeuvre, both by his quill and by his press had to do with his favourite themes, namely freedom of expression and of faith, human luck, people's wellbeing and natural law.<sup>19</sup> Although he publicly recognised his weaknesses in Latin,<sup>20</sup> Luzac wrote in that language beside the better mastered French and Dutch languages.

**Œuvre as Printer** : Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'homme machine*, (1748); Christian, *Institutions du droit de la nature et des gens*(1772); Elie Luzac jr, *Disquisitio politico-moralis* (1749); Elie Luzac jr, *Specimen juris inauguralis de modo extra ordinem procederendi in causis criminalibus*(1759).

**Œuvre as Writer** : *L'homme plus que machine*(1748) *Disquisitio politico-moralis*(1749); *Essai sur la liberté de produire ses sentiments* (1749); *Specimen juris inaugurales de modo extra ordinem procederendi in causis criminalibus*(1759); *Le Bonheur ou nouveau système de jurisprudence naturelle* (1753); *Du droit naturel, civil et politique, en forme d'entretiens* (year ?); *Consilium de edenda Abilfedae historica arabica*.(year ?).

### **II.3. La Mettrie-Luzac Relationship**

La Mettrie and Elie Luzac met for the first time fortuitously. Their first encounter in May 1747 had not been planned in advance. La Mettrie, who was spending his second year in exile in Leiden, was looking for a publisher for his book which at the time was still entitled *Essais sur l'homme*. He first offered the manuscript to Johan Luzac. It is when he rejected the manuscript that La Mettrie went to Johan's nephew, Elie Luzac, who accepted the manuscript on the condition that it would be improved.<sup>21</sup>

It is rather surprising that Elie Luzac immediately put so much confidence in this new comer. Van Vliet writes that 'without any distrust he [Luzac] authorised La Mettrie to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 21 'Luzac was een van de voormanen van de orangisten, voerde zijn ideologische strijd echter voornamelijk met een veer in de hand, en werd door zijn tegenstanders gedemoniseerd en gemolesteerd'

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 15

<sup>20</sup> E.H. Kossmann, *Verlicht Conservatisme*, p. 7 'Latijn schreef hij echter niet graag want hij vreesde dat zijn stijl 'blesseroit les oreilles délicates de ceux qui dans cette langue ne veulent souffrir que de la pureté et de la précision''.

<sup>21</sup> Van Vliet, p. 68

supervise the printing process and make corrections'.<sup>22</sup> Thus, from the beginning the relationship between the two scholars was based on mutual trust before any other consideration.

Furthermore, Elie Luzac never involved himself in the early stages of the production process. Not only did he entrust almost every thing to La Mettrie but also he obliged him to finance the production himself. He nevertheless offered to lend most of the required amount- another sign of confidence- because he did not want to run any risk with such an uncertain pamphlet. This made La Mettrie the author, the printing supervisor, the corrector and financier of his own book.

Paradoxically, it is precisely this book that established Luzac's name in the Republic of Letters. As Velema writes, the publication of *L'homme machine* 'signalled the arrival on the public scene of Elie Luzac, until then a relatively unknown publisher and student at Leiden University'.<sup>23</sup>

Elie Luzac did concern himself with the distribution of the book and the public indignation about the book. Both the author and the publisher were aware of the danger and the troubles that the book might put them in. For that reason, they took a number of preventive measures, including Luzac's explanatory preface –the *Avertissement de l'Imprimeur*- in which he defended the freedom of expression. He also made it clear that he did not share the content of the book. At the same time, Luzac omitted the author's name to protect La Mettrie.

On his side, La Mettrie had already started thinking about the possibility of being forced to leave the Dutch Republic in case the initial plan –of keeping the book anonymous- would fail. He 'instructed Luzac to forward six copies of *L'homme machine* to the Berlin address of the Marquis d'Argens, in order presumably that Frederick [the Great] might judge for himself how worthy its author was, should the need arise, of being rescued'.<sup>24</sup> His alternative plan was the one to be implemented with the help of Elie Luzac and other friends.

During the "La Mettrie Affair" that followed the publication of *L'homme machine*, Luzac ran all kinds of risks but continued to protect La Mettrie by not revealing his name. His own business was in jeopardy but his position remained unchanged, which shows the extent to which their relations had gone. Even after helping him find his way out of the country, Elie

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 68. "Zonder enige wantrouwen stemde hij er tevens in toe dat La Mettrie het drukproces zou begeleiden en de correcties ter hand zou nemen".

<sup>23</sup> Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism*, p. 6

<sup>24</sup> Vartanian, *La Mettrie's L'homme machine*, p.8

Luzac stayed in touch with La Mettrie<sup>25</sup> and even visited him occasionally and showed interests to his subsequent publications.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, the relationships between the two scholars came to an unexpected end in 1751. By that time Elie Luzac wanted his old loan for the production of *L'homme machine* back. He attempted to get his money via Jean Henri Samuel Formey (1711-1797), his Berlin correspondent and La Mettrie's colleague at the Berlin Academy of Sciences in vain. It is not known why La Mettrie failed to pay but Luzac threatened him with a court case. It never came to that, however, as La Mettrie died the same year.

Finally, the question arises about what brought these two exceptional men together. Firstly, they were both of French origin and had been victims of intolerance in their home country in one way or another, which justified their being in Leiden. Secondly, they had in common the love of and passion for enlightened philosophy beside their professional disciplines. Thirdly, they had studied in Leiden and lived in that same city. Fourthly, they both repeatedly rebelled against established order as they kept writing or printing books on religious and theological taboos. These are some of the elements that can justify why La Mettrie and Luzac were so close to each other despite their divergent viewpoints on important philosophical issues.

### III. *L'HOMME MACHINE* AND ITS AUDIENCE

The initial publication of *L'homme machine* in 1747 was like a bomb that exploded in Leiden and the shrapnel of which reached Berlin, Paris and other parts of Europe. It was intended for a very specific but powerful audience, that is the churchmen, the philosophers, physicians and other citizens of the Republic of Letters. In his preface, Luzac warned the readers, especially theologians, about the anti-religious character of the pamphlet:

*If Religion is not victorious, it is the fault of bad Authors who defend it. Let the good ones take up their quills; let them show that they are well armed; & Theology will overwhelmingly vanquish its so weak Rival.*<sup>27</sup>

The pamphlet, which was immediately added to the list of banned books<sup>28</sup>, provoked an unprecedented indignation, particularly among the clergymen and philosophers and prompted the secular authorities in various countries to take harsh action against La Mettrie.

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<sup>25</sup> Hans Bots and Jan Schillings (eds), *Lettres d'Elie Luzac*, p.39. Luzac used to write La Mettrie through Formey.

<sup>26</sup> Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism*, p. 9

<sup>27</sup> Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'homme machine*, (Leiden : Elie Luzac, 1748) \*3r '*Si la religion n'est pas victorieuse, c'est la faute des mauvais auteurs qui la défendent. Que les bons prennent la plume ; qu'ils se montrent bien armés ; & la Théologie remportera de haute lutte sur une aussi foible Rivale*'.

<sup>28</sup> W.P.C. Knuttel, *Verboden boeken in de Republiek der Vereenigde Nederlanden*, (s-Gravenhage, 1914), p.58.

### III.1. The Church

Despite Luzac's warning, the fury of the churchmen all over Europe soon made itself felt. 'No sooner had the circulation of *L'homme machine* started than its publisher was called before the Walloon Consistory of Leiden. On December 18, 1747, the Consistory declared *L'homme machine* to be a book "filled with the most appalling atheism and libertinism"'.<sup>29</sup>

Luzac was the first to be in trouble since he had put his own name on the title-page as publisher, but not the name of the author. He pretended to have received the manuscript from an anonymous author in Berlin. The Consistory then obliged him to hand over all the copies at his disposal so that they could be burnt and to publicly apologise for having published such a wicked book. He complied but kept some copies that he sold from 1748 onwards.

It is worth noting, as Frederic the Great wrote, that some time in January 1748, when La Mettrie was finally discovered as being the author of *L'homme machine*, 'Calvinists, Catholics and Lutherans...all united again to persecute a philosopher'.<sup>30</sup>

Also, churchmen abroad manifested their indignation. Pierre Roques, a Huguenot minister in Basel, wrote an article in the *Nouvelle Bibliothèque Germanique* as a refutation of *L'homme machine*, which he described as 'the most impious brochure ever to have appeared...a most dangerous tract, filled with atheism...[ which is] a grave crime against both God and human society'.<sup>31</sup>

### III.2. *L'homme plus que machine*

This study was not primarily intended to discuss *L'homme plus que machine*, a philosophical pamphlet authored by Elie Luzac, but since it was a reaction to *L'homme machine*, a brief consideration of it proves necessary.

Following the growing pressure and condemnation raised by *L'homme machine*, Luzac, whose business was suffering from that delicate situation, found it wiser to clarify his position vis-à-vis La Mettrie's materialism. The same year (1747) he began to write a treatise, initially entitled *L'examen de l'homme machine*. in which he rejected, point by point, La Mettrie's materialistic philosophy.

Informed about the imminence of its publication, Mr. Van der Marck, chief police officer of Leiden, who had been assigned to prevent the circulation of *L'homme machine*,

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<sup>29</sup> Wyger R.E.Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism in the Dutch Republic : The political Thought of Elie Luzac (1721-1796)*, (Maastricht, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Frederic the Great, *Eulogy*, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism*, p. 10

asked the permission from Leiden Burgomasters to confiscate Luzac's manuscript. The 1747-1748 notebook of Leiden burgomasters reveals Van der Marck's arguments:

*Because of that refutation, the dangerous sentiments and feelings in the above mentioned booklet [L' homme machine] would again be made public.*<sup>32</sup>

Van der Marck seized the manuscript and this is most probably the reason why Luzac entitled his book *L' homme plus que machine* to eliminate any link with the confiscated manuscript. The book was published in 1748 in the same volume as *L' homme machine*. This time, in addition to the omission of the author's name, he mentioned London as the place of publication. Despite this extra precaution, Leiden scholars and authorities easily recognised his quill and style.<sup>33</sup> E.H. Kossmann suggests that Luzac's style both in French and Dutch was characterised by 'the lack of concern about grammatical precision',<sup>34</sup> which Luzac attributed to haste rather than to habit.<sup>35</sup>

To avoid any further risk, Luzac dedicated his pamphlet 'A MONSIEUR \*\*\*', with the asterisks standing most likely for all those who would come across it, and made it clear that his intention was 'just to convince you, that I am motivated by the most perfect devotion'.<sup>36</sup> He then denied any direct connection between the two pamphlets but acknowledged that 'the noise that *L' homme machine* raised in Holland pushed me to combat Materialism'.<sup>37</sup>

The double volume, the one preserved in the Leiden University library and which is the object of this study, circulated clandestinely and sold very well and very quickly. It became better known than the 1747 edition.

### III.3. Scholars, thinkers

Clearly La Mettrie had only a few friends in the Republic of Letters. He was almost unanimously condemned, rejected and even insulted by most of his colleagues, philosophers as well as physicians. When *L' homme machine* appeared, he had already become the victim of a blind jealousy and this just worsened the situation.

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<sup>32</sup>Regional Archives Leiden, *Notebook of Leiden Burgomasters (November 1747-October 1748)*, archive nr 501A, inventory nr 204, pp.23-4 '...door die refutatatie de quade sentimenten en gevoelens in het bovengenoemde boekje vervat verder worden opgehaalt en aantligt gebracht,...

<sup>33</sup> Van Vliet, Elie Luzac (1721-1796), p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> E.H. Kossmann, *Verlicht Conservatisme*, p.7, '[Luzac gebruikte deze talen] zonder overdreven zorg voor grammaticale precisie...'

<sup>35</sup> Hans Bots and Jan Schillings (eds), *Lettres d'Elie Luzac à Jean Henri Samuel Formey (1748-1770)*, (Paris, 2001), p.34. In his letter to Formey dated 28 November 1748, Luzac wrote about the mistakes in *L'homme plus que machine*: 'J'ai composé cette brochure à la hâte, comme il est aisé de le remarquer en plusieurs endroits'.

<sup>36</sup> Elie Luzac [anonymous] *L' homme plus que machine*, (London : 1748) in <sup>36</sup> Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'homme machine*, (Leiden : Elie Luzac, 1748) \*2r 'je ne désire que les occasions de Vous convaincre, que je suis avec le plus parfait dévouement'.

<sup>37</sup> Elie Luzac [anonymous], *L' homme plus que machine*, [unsigned] 'le bruit que *L'homme machine* a fait en Hollande m'a porté à combattre le Matérialisme, ...'

Diderot's opinion about La Mettrie, mixed with insult and hatred is perhaps the most representative and the most illustrative. In his doctoral dissertation in medicine (1919), Jean-Marie-Louis-Charles-Joseph Maitre quoted him in the following manner:

*'La Mettrie is an author without judgement' whose mind is troubled and whose ideas are so disconnected that on the same page one assertion that makes sense is jostled by a foolish one and a foolish assertion by the one that makes sense. This despicable author has made himself the apologist of vice.*<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand Voltaire, though personally attacked by La Mettrie, had a different attitude towards his compatriot. He was among those who had a secret hostility but 'remained outwardly his friends'.<sup>39</sup> Voltaire later offered to negotiate for La Mettrie's return home from his exile in Prussia, which was only prevented by La Mettrie's death.

Frederic the Great analysed the attitude of contemporary intellectuals toward La Mettrie as being motivated by jealousy rather than by the content of La Mettrie's writings. He wrote:

*Jealousy has come to be one of the characteristics of men of letters. This feeling incites those who have reputations to oppose the progress of budding geniuses. ...M. La Mettrie, who was advancing in the career of science at a giant's pace, suffered from this jealousy,....*<sup>40</sup>

The same was true for physicians, whose image had been tarnished by La Mettrie and who had been overpowered by their enemy's treatises on various diseases. Frederic the Great explained this saying that 'the old physicians in France rose up against a scholar who affronted them by knowing as much as they'.<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly, Luzac's Berlin correspondent Formey was among those who vehemently protested against *L'homme machine*, its author and its publisher. He reproached Luzac to have 'a false moral heroism which is entirely chimerical if separated from religion'.<sup>42</sup> A theologian, philosopher and journalist of French origin, Formey was on his turn reproached to have an exaggerated inclination to material gain.<sup>43</sup> This explains why he disowned Luzac, with whom he collaborated in book trade to put his own business and reputation on a safer side.

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<sup>38</sup> Diderot quoted by Jean-Marie-Louis-Charles-Joseph Maitre, in his *Un médecin philosophe : De la Mettrie (1705-1751)*, (Paris, 1919), p. 22. 'La Mettrie est un auteur sans jugement' dont la tête est si troublée et les idées sont à tel point déçousues que dans la même page une assertion sensée est heurtée par une assertion folle et une assertion folle par une assertion sensée. Cet auteur méprisabile s'est fait l'apologiste du vice'.

<sup>39</sup> Aram Vartanian, *La Mettrie's L'homme machine: a study in the origins of an idea*, (Princeton, 1960), p. 9

<sup>40</sup> Frederic the Great, *Eulogy*, pp. 4-5

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism* p. 11

<sup>43</sup> Hans Bots and Jan Schillings (eds), *Lettres d'Elie Luzac*, p.12 '...l'on reproché de plusieurs côtés à Formey son penchant trop prononcé pour le gain matériel'.

### III.4. Secular Authorities

The discovery of La Mettrie as the author of *L'homme machine* meant the beginning of new troubles for him. Just like two years earlier when the French Parliament ordered his *Politique du médecin de Machiavel* (1746) to be burnt, the Leiden magistrates and burgomasters ordered legal procedures against the author who ran away to Prussia to escape prosecution. The 1747-1748 notebook of Leiden burgomasters indicates that orders were given by the *Gecommitteerde Raaden* to Leiden police to confiscate all the copies of *L'homme machine*. In the notebook one can read:

*On the same date [22 January 1748] Mr. Van der Marck who is chief police officer of the city [Leiden] informed the Lords Burgomasters that he had received a letter from the Lords [members of] Gecommitteerde Raaden ordering him to collect from the booksellers and specifically from Elias Luzac, who is the printer [of L'homme machine], and get possession of the booklet entitled L'homme machine, and to prosecute the author of that same book.*<sup>44</sup>

It was a disenchantment for La Mettrie who had fled his less tolerant home country to the most tolerant and freest country of the Republic of Letters. He had no other choice but to run to the protector of persecuted philosophers, Frederic the Great, King of Prussia.

### III.5. The Circulation of *L'homme machine*.

*L'homme machine* is said to be 'perhaps the most heartily condemned work'<sup>45</sup> of the Enlightenment. Despite this, the ban-is-advertisement principle applied itself in places where it had been forbidden, while in countries where it was not banned it inundated bookshops.

In the Dutch Republic, the fact of banning and burning copies of *L'homme machine* increased the curiosity of the reading public, who were eager to know the reason of that fierceness. Luzac took advantage of that curiosity to sell clandestinely as many copies as possible 'until finally he deemed it wise to go abroad for a time'.<sup>46</sup>

The same phenomenon took place in France, where authorities simply decided to ignore the book and forbid any review about it in periodicals. As expected, the prohibition encouraged clandestine networks. La Mettrie's philosophy was so consumed in France that 'by 1757 the

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<sup>44</sup> Regional Archives Leiden, *Notebook of Leiden Burgomasters (November 1747-October 1748)*, p. 23 'Den zelve dato heeft de Hr van der Marck Hooft Officier dezer stede aan Hren de Burgermeesteren gecommuniceerd aanschrijving gekregen te hebben van haar D: Mog: de Heeren Gecommitteerde Raaden om bij de boekverkopers, en mee principalijk, bij Elias Luzac, als het zelve gedrukt hebbende, op te halen en magtig te worden zo het boekje geintutileerd *L'homme machine*, en tegen de autheur van 't zelve te procederen..'

<sup>45</sup> Vartanian, *La Mettrie's L'homme machine*, p.95.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

homme machine idea had become prevalent enough in France to characterize an entire school of thought'.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike the Dutch Republic and France, Germany never banned *L'homme machine*. The book was said to have had the largest audience especially because of the warm welcome that La Mettrie received in Frederic the Great's court and the provocative dedication to Monsieur Haller, another Boerhaave's student. La Mettrie had claimed familiarity with Haller, who was a celebrity in his country, thereby putting his fame in jeopardy.

## CONCLUSION

The study of *L'homme machine* leads to a number of conclusions which give a general picture of the Enlightenment period, especially the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, as experienced by scholars not only in Leiden but also in the different parts of Europe. It revealed for instance that censorship and intolerance were not totally absent in the Dutch Republic as repeatedly suggested by book scholars. It also showed the least studied side of Enlightenment, namely the conflict and animosity between scholars, who all were thought to be Enlightened, a term that infers tolerance, freedom of expression, opinion and faith.

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<sup>47</sup> Vartanian, *La Mettrie's L'homme machine*, p. 102.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **I. Paratextual study of *L'homme machine***

*L'homme machine* is accompanied by three sorts of paratexts: the preface, the dedication and footnotes.

#### ***I.1. Preface.***

The preface of *L'homme machine* -the *Avertissement de l'Imprimeur*- was written by Elie Luzac, the publisher of the pamphlet. Far from confining itself to the introduction of the book to the reader, which is the traditional aim of the preface, Luzac's 4-page preface rather explained the basic principles of freedom of opinion in which he believed and in the name of which he had taken the risk to print such a controversial and antireligious pamphlet. For instance Luzac asked:

*Why should people be so attentive and alert to suppress the arguments contrary to the ideas of the Divinity & of Religion?...By which means, which hope will the irreligious be confounded forever if people seem to be afraid of them?*<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, Luzac's preface reassured the readers that the irreligious will never prevail, provided that the good authors take their quill to defend Religion. He also wrote that La Mettrie's conclusions should destabilise nobody, since they were only based on hypotheses. Thus, as Luzac wrote, the aim of his preface was 'to prevent any worry'<sup>49</sup>. Later, when the 'La Mettrie affair' broke out, Luzac extended the ideas of the *Avertissement de l'Imprimeur* in his *L'homme plus que machine*.

#### ***I.2. Dedication***

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<sup>48</sup> La Mettrie, *L' homme machine*,\*2r '*Pourquoi être si attentif, & si alerte à supprimer les Arguments contraires aux Idées de la Divinité & de la Religion ?..Quel moien, quelle espérance, de confondre à jamais les irréligionnaires, sin on semble les redouter ?*'

<sup>49</sup> La Mettrie, *L' homme machine*,\*2v '*[Voilà ce que j'ai voulu mettre à la tête de cette petite brochure,] pour prévenir toute inquiétude*'.

La Mettrie opens his dedication to *Monsieur Haller, professeur en médecine à Gottingue* as follows : ‘This is not a dedication; you are far above any praise that I could formulate about you’.<sup>50</sup>

La Mettrie’s lengthy dedication is not a sign of affection like ordinary dedication but rather an attempt to show to the readers that some contemporary scholars of fame shared his philosophical thoughts. Like La Mettrie, Haller had been a student of Boerhaave but they did not know each other as Haller studied at Leiden years before La Mettrie. Despite that, La Mettrie wrongly claimed to be Haller’s disciple and friend.

The German scholarly community was doubly chocked, first by the content of *L’homme machine* itself, second by its provocative dedication that tarnished the image of Haller, ‘a man who, in the eyes of all Europe, was one of the most respected personifications of the fusion of scientific eminence and orthodox piety’.<sup>51</sup>

### ***1.3. Footnotes***

*L’homme machine* has a number of footnotes to elucidate or complement pieces of information given in the main text. As already pointed out in the bibliographic study, they are in smaller font and in italics and are preceded by an asterisk or cross that refers to another asterisk or cross in the main text.

In short, paratexts in *L’homme machine*, especially the preface and the dedication greatly contributed to the global understanding of its content and its reception. While the Luzac’s preface prepared the reader to the controversies raised by La Mettrie and clarified Luzac’s own position vis-à-vis those controversies, La Mettrie’s anonymous and somehow dishonest dedication to Haller gave another dimension to the pamphlet, the one of being allegedly supported by a celebrity.

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<sup>50</sup> La Mettrie, *L’homme machine*, \*4r ‘Ce n’est point ici une Dédicace ; vous êtes fort au-dessus de tous les Eloges que je pourrais vous donner;’

<sup>51</sup> Vartanian, *La Mettrie’s L’homme machine*, p. 104