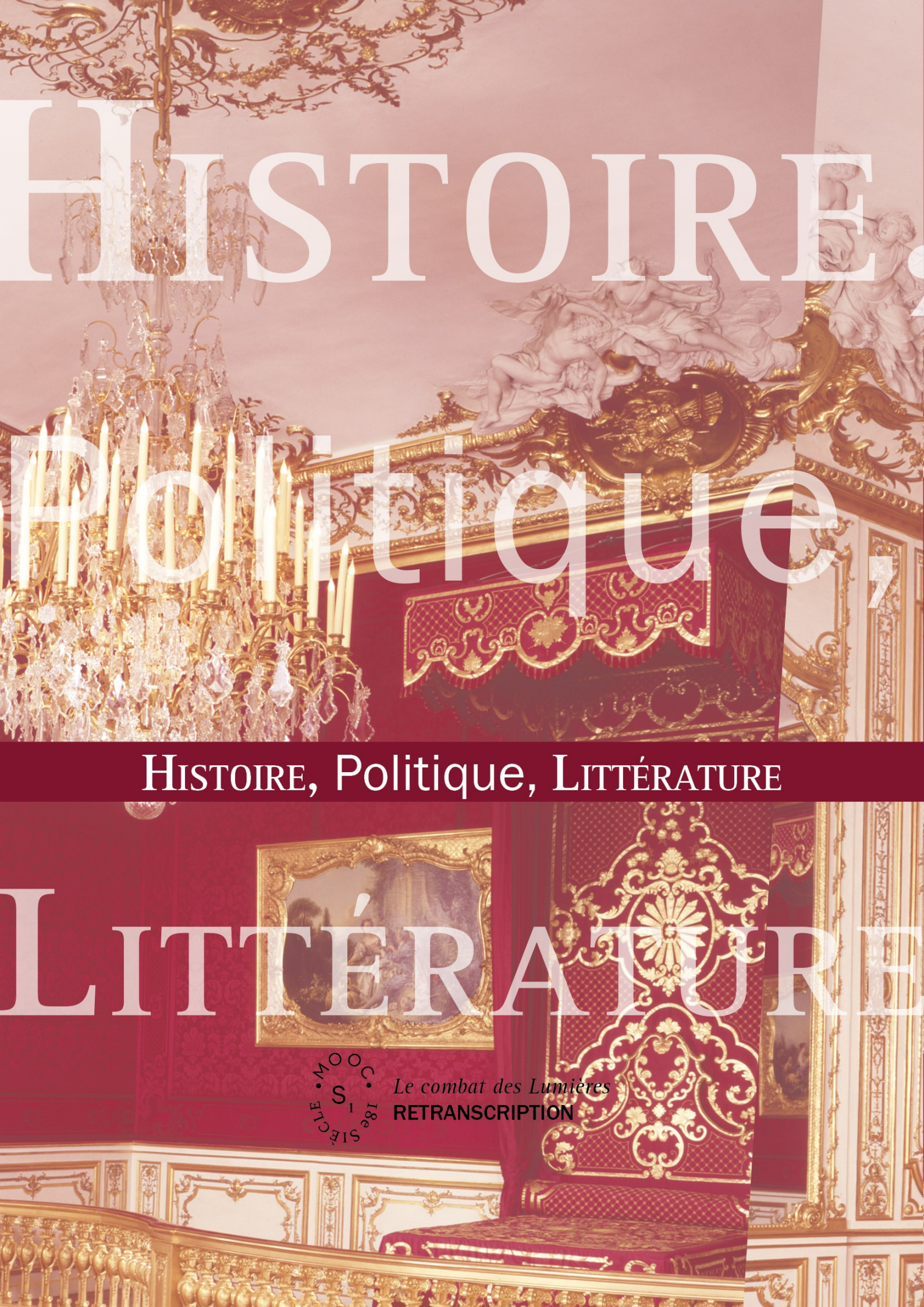

Histoire, Politique, Littérature

MOOC • 18e SIÈCLE • S1

Le combat des Lumières

RETRANSCRIPTION

INTRODUCTION

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

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Introduction – What is Enlightenment?

What is Enlightenment? In a famous text published in 1783, philosopher Immanuel Kant gives an answer to this question that reads like an assessment, 32 years after the publication of the first volume of the *Encyclopaedia* guided by Diderot and D'Alembert. "Enlightenment, he says, is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity." The immaturity in question is a child's one, the one who needs a master to tell him what to think, a leader to tell him what to do, a priest to tell him which God he must adore and which moral principles he must follow.

Reaching the age of majority is achieving a degree of autonomy that allows thinking and acting for oneself. This autonomy implies the use of one's own logic and endeavour to absorb the wisdom it has at its disposal for this logic to be informed, for one's thought to be free and one's will to be enlightened in its choices. This emancipation, which is the true maturity, is not straightforward. It is much more comfortable to be a minor, to let others think and decide for us, to never question our own prejudices, to remain in quiet ignorance rather than to work towards enlightened freedom.

Enlightenment isn't a state of being, it's a fight. It is the Enlightenment struggle, a path to freedom, an effort to reach and help everyone else reach intellectual maturity. It will be our guiding theme throughout this introduction to the history of literature and of 18th ideas' MOOC.

Part 1 – An 18th-century-ist MOOC

Over the weeks of this MOOC we will witness a desire for emancipation from the old framework, sometimes expressed aesthetically, sometimes through ideological struggles, and often both, inextricably linked.

In the 18th century, places where good society and well-known writers met to exchange freely were called salons, often instigated by women interested in literature and who had a significant role in promoting intellectual life.

Since we are hosted in the salons of the Soubise's hotel, a beautiful mansion built in the 18th century in the heart of the Marais and now part of the National Archives, we put each week of this MOOC in a different salon, which will allow us to address different themes in literature, thought and history. I will do a more detailed presentation at the end of this first week.

Part 2 – Historical setting

First, however, it was important to leave room for history in this first salon, because the Enlightenment is a European phenomenon, but it did not develop in the same manner or with the same chronology in different European countries. In England, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Portugal, the historical, political, religious, economic and cultural contexts are considerably different and so literature and ideas do not develop in the same way, do not spread in the same way and both this development and this diffusion have different stakes as well.

In France, since it is essentially an introduction to French literature that is involved here, the 17th century with the reign of Louis XIV, ending in 1715, bequeaths to the 18th century a geographical and institutional framework that is one of a centralised state, a government form which is an absolute monarchy and a single religion, because since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, France is in theory entirely Catholic.

Therefore, we will first offer you a quick historical reminder of the three great reigns of the 18th century: the end of Louis XIV's reign, Louis XV's reign, which began with the important period of the Regency because Louis XV was only a child when he became king, and finally Louis XVI's reign.

Finally, the last years of the century, from the 1789 Revolution onwards, are the ones that really change history, a captivating time that sees the transition from an old world to a new world.

Throughout this whole period, several issues travel through the century and are crucial to understand how the French Enlightenment's ideas developed and spread. That is what we will study in the second part of this week.

The 18th century is marked by religious conflicts. First because the Protestant question has not quite disappeared, even if Protestantism is banned, but also and above all because within the Catholic Church, an internal conflict about what is called "Jansenism" has significant impacts on French society. The 18th century is also marked by economic hardships. Louis XIV's reign leaves a never-ending crisis, and absolute monarchy is constantly torn between upholding old frameworks and a desire for reform. Economy, and this is new, comes under debate and would even wish to be considered as a new science. Finally, the Enlightenment does not develop in a bubble. It needs readers; it needs books. The absolute monarchy has built a system that both encourages writers and the so-called "library", that is, publishing, and at the same time, in a somewhat contradictory way, tries to control them by implementing a censorship policy. And it is necessary to clarify these elements to understand in which frameworks writers produce their works.

In the third and last part of this week, to literarily conclude this inevitably more historical content, we will study, with the help of three major works, how writers took charge of their immediate political history, in their works and each in their own way. And for our three examples, how these works are critical readings of Louis XIV's reign. We will start with Fenelon's *Adventures of Telemachus*, a pioneering work published in 1699 and read by many throughout the 18th century, and Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, which satirically records the end of Louis XIV's reign and the Regency, and finally the *Memoirs* of the Duke de Saint-Simon, the memorialist par excellence, so to speak, who we often forget is fully an 18th-century writer because of the place he grants to the story of Louis XIV's reign.

Happy listening and reading!

THE END OF LOUIS XIV'S REIGN AND THE REGENCY

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

Part 1 – Louis XIV's personal reign (1661-1715)

To understand the 18th century, we can't simply start in 1701, since there is obviously a political continuity that does not change with the calendar. Louis XIV's reign, straddling the 17th and 18th centuries, from 1661 to 1715, was very brilliant both politically and culturally and had a lasting influence throughout Europe. His reign marks the entire French 18th century, which refers to it as the "Century of Louis XIV", to use the title of the book Voltaire devotes to him, both as a reference and as a foil. A reference and a foil, because this reign of Louis XIV is an unprecedented political experience, absolutism the French way, and because it leaves an economic, cultural and ideological heritage with which all the 18th century will have to debate.

Louis XIV's personal rule lasts 54 years, which is very long. After the brilliant beginnings and the permanent installation of the Court at Versailles, in 1682, the end of the reign, marked by the influence of Madame de Maintenon, is darkened by religious persecution and intellectual censorship.

In 1685, Louis XIV revokes the Edict of Nantes and abolishes the liberties enjoyed by the Protestants since Henry IV, which results in the exile of many families and the very harsh repression of those who remain in France. Even within the Catholic Church, all thoughts that deviate from the religious line recognised by the power in place are repressed; Jansenism, Quietism, etc.

Louis XIV's absolutism, the policy by which the king reduces the powers of anyone who might oppose him, notably the nobility and parliaments, is accentuated. The many wars in which the Sun King engages himself contribute to the kingdom's ruin and the financing of his prestige policy by taxation makes the poorest people's economic situation very complicated and difficult. For example, in 1709 a harsh winter causes a great famine.

But this dark period is also a great moment of intellectual bubbling that sees the development of often-new forms of bold critical thought that will feed Enlightenment writers. Fontenelle thus publishes his *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* in 1686, which portrays, in the style of a gallant conversation, a marchioness and a philosopher conversing on Cartesian world's system. Pierre Bayle starts publishing his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* in 1695, paving the way for the Encyclopaedists generation. Lastly, in 1699, Fenelon's *Adventures of Telemachus* comes out, all at once a great fiction inspired by ancient epics, a great educational novel, a model of poetic prose and, above all, a work of political philosophy condemning all of Louis XIV's politics faults.

Part 2 – The Regency (1715-1723)

In 1715, after the death of Louis XIV, his great-grandson inherits the crown. The great-grandson, now named Louis XV, is only five years old at that time. Until he is old enough to reign, Philippe d'Orléans becomes the regent. After the dark years of the end of Louis XIV's reign, it feels like a relief.

On a political level, the regent gives back to the Parliament some of the powers lost under the previous regime and provides for the various intermediary bodies, the nobility in particular, thus giving a temporary sense of moderation to the French monarchy absolutism.

On an intellectual level, we know the regent was interested in libertine thought and his power is characterised first by a much greater permissiveness in the circulation of ideas and works of literature. Exchanges with England and Holland, a great place for intellectual innovation since the middle of the 17th century, are multiplying.

On a cultural level, it is like a party after the dark years of the end of Louis XIV's reign. The regent's tastes become the official tastes. He loves theatre, and he brings back in 1716 the Italian actors who had been driven out under the previous reign. He likes opera. He is interested in new painters influenced by Italy and Holland.

In short, it is the beginning of what has been called the "Rocaille age", of which Watteau's painting, with his "gallant feasts", could be like a kind of emblem. We will recall that *The Embarkation for Cythera,* his reception piece to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, dates from 1717.

But that time is also characterised by difficult economic circumstances, Louis XIV having left to his successors a highly indebted State. John Law proposes in 1716 to create a Royal Bank, which issues paper money, a novelty, against gold. Then he creates the Company of the Occident, which became the French East India Company in 1719.

It is a moment of intense speculation and, if we use today's language, a kind of speculative bubble. A lot of money is flowing. People dream of large and quick profits but unfortunately on too weak foundations. John Law is appointed Controller-General of Finance in 1720, which is like today's Minister for the Economy and Finance. But that same year, the system collapses. The shares prices fall, the bank can no longer reimburse paper money holders wanting to withdraw their gold, and there is an intense financial panic. John Law is forced to go into exile hastily, leaving many people reduced to total ruin.

On a literary level it is a wonderful time, which testifies to the liberation from previous constraints and an appetite for critical and joyful speech. The most remarkable testimonies of the period are in Lesage's *Gil Blas*, published between 1715 and 1735. It is a picaresque-inspired novel in which the sympathetic hero recounts his journey through all layers of Spanish society. Also worthy of mention is Robert Challe's *Illustres françaises* in 1713, which features a group of characters who tell their skilfully intertwined stories. And above all, it is necessary to name Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, in 1721. It is a collection of polyphonic letters with a double narrative weave: on the one hand, the main characters, two Persians exiles, Usbek and Rica, are astonished by what they discover of Parisian life and, on the other hand, the seraglio's novel, which recounts the havoc wreaked in Usbek's harem by time and space distancing. Above all it is a harsh assessment of Louis XIV's reign and of the first years of the regency.

THE REIGN OF LOUIS XV

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

Introduction – The reign of Louis XV

Louis XV's reign is very long since it extends from 1723 to 1774. In terms of intellectual history, it is the time of the Enlightenment's development, set during a relatively stable 50-year political framework. French monarchy is then marked by a certain number of constant features which are as many sources of internal tensions: conservative political absolutism on the one hand and desire for modernisation of the State on the other hand; affirmation of the uniqueness of the Catholic faith on one side, reminding us that it isn't a secular state, and support for the sciences, arts and letters, including sometimes evolutions incompatible with too severe religious orthodoxy, on the other side.

Part 1 – 1723-1743

In 1723, when the regent dies, Louis XV is declared of the age of majority, but he quickly passes over the reins of power to his preceptor, Cardinal de Fleury, whose long ministry from 1726 to 1743 marks a relatively stable period in the kingdom's history. Fleury restores order to the nation's finances thanks to more favourable economic circumstances. His rule is authoritarian and severely represses Jansenists and the parliamentary opposition, which is linked to them. He monitors Protestants and generally tries to control publications more firmly than the regency did. A remarkable and significant episode of one of these attempts to win back control is what has been called the "proscription of novels".

In 1738 and perhaps as early as 1737, Chancellor d'Aguesseau, under the influence of an anti-novel campaign led by the Jesuits, decides to refuse to most of the texts that appear to be novels the authorization necessary to publication, which translates into them being immediately published abroad, in Switzerland, England and Holland.

It is certain that this novel proscription is also a reaction to an unprecedented expansion of the novel genre, both quantitatively, meeting a growing public demand for reading, and in terms of literary innovation. And that is where lie difficulties, because this rise marks the spread of a secular, worldly morality, which escapes the control of spiritual directors and educators that traditionally are the clergy. Hence their concerns about what they perceive as a hazardous movement of secularisation of morals and an out-of-control diffusion of norms of life that escape their Magisterium.

It is in the thirties that Marivaux's great novels, such as *The Life of Marianne* and *Le Paysan Parvenu*, are published, and that appear Crébillon's novels, like *Tanzaï et Néadarné, Strayings of the Heart and Mind* or the delightful *Sopha*. It is in the thirties that the great novels of the Abbot Prevost come out, like *Memoirs of a Man of Honour*, which is a tale in eight volumes, the last volume having become Abbot Prevost's most famous work, *Manon Lescaut*. But he also publishes in those same years *The English Philosopher or History of Mr. Cleveland, natural son of Cromwell,* which probably is his most famous novel at the time, and *The Dean of Coleraine* where he invents a form of family saga.

Part 2 – 1743-1757

After Fleury's death in 1743, Louis XV, emulating his great-grandfather Louis XIV, decides to rule alone. He relies on the advices of Madame de Pompadour, who favours the demands of the financial community and protects philosophers. In a famous portrait by Quentin Latour, she is depicted with Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* and the *Encyclopaedia*, which is a way to publicly display her support for the Enlightenment.

Indeed, we must not, contrary to a cliché that catches on too easily, we must not imagine the philosophers as a force of opposition and resistance to a monarchy that, in return, would systematically persecute them. Inside the French monarchy there are, throughout the 18th century, partisans of philosophers and reforms and, on the other side, partisans of the devout party, more conservative. These two opposing forces, depending on the moment, exert more or less influence.

This period can be seen as the blossoming of French Enlightenment per se, although the term Enlightenment is often used to name the entire 18th century. It is marked by the publication of innovative and important philosophical texts such as Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* in 1746, La Mettrie's *Man a Machine* in 1747, Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* in 1748, Diderot's *Letter on the Blind* in 1749, Rousseau's *Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences* in 1750, and above all the publication of the *Encyclopaedia*'s first volume, under the direction of Diderot and D'Alembert, in 1751.

But in 1757, the assassination attempt on Louis XV by Damiens allows the devout party to win back control and to demand inflexibility towards philosophers, accused of sowing looseness of morals, impiety and revolt against all established authorities. Politically, it is a time of parliamentary agitation, amplified by conflicts between clergy and Jansenists, parliamentarians often being deemed as Jansenists. Royal authority is undermined, forced to make compromises.

From 1756 to 1763, international relations are marked by the ruinous Seven Years' War, which is mishandled and results in the loss of part of the French colonial empire, especially Canada.

Part 3 – 1757-1774

The Duke of Choiseul governs from 1758 to 1770. He works to reconstitute the army and the fleet. He is considered favourable towards philosophers, and he gets in the good books of Jansenist parliamentarians by expelling Jesuits from France in 1763, which does not prevent the parliamentarians from regularly demonstrating their resistance to the power's demands, in particular concerning taxes. From 1770 to 1774, Maupeou, Terray and Aiguillon brutally reform the parliamentary system, eliminating venal offices, providing free justice and undertaking restoration of the nation's finances.

Louis XV's death ends the too long reign of a king who has become unpopular. On a literary level, the major names that dominated his reign, in addition to those already mentioned, are those of Voltaire, whose prestige and fruitfulness in all genres really marks the whole period. Voltaire composes theatre, philosophy, poetry, history, novels, tales, etc. Voltaire's intellectual influence, through his correspondence, his debates, his campaigns for tolerance and better justice, makes him a fundamental reference for the next generation.

The second major name is that of Rousseau, whose works are in an original and critical position in relation to the Enlightenment, and Rousseau will immediately experience considerable successes both for his philosophical work like the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* in 1755, *Emile* in 1762 or *The Social Contract,* still in 1762, and in literature, since its novel *Julie or the New Heloise*, in 1761, is an unparalleled success.

LOUIS XVI'S REIGN AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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Part 1 – Louis XVI's reign (1774-1789)

After Louis XV's long reign, the beginning of Louis XVI's reign raises the hope of philosophers who wish the French monarchy to finally manage to reform and transform society in the directions they have been pointing to for years: administration of justice, taxation, economy, religious tolerance, a better division of powers and the softening of a range of privileges inhibiting society evolution. And indeed, at the beginning of the reign, Turgot, Controller-General of finances, launches a tax reform and a series of economic innovations aiming to foster creation of wealth and free flow of goods, especially wheat. He also abolishes the corvée and the corporations.

Broadly speaking, it may be noted that Louis XVI's reign promotes a series of important political, social and judicial reforms: abolition of serfdom in the seigneurial system in 1779, suppression of the corvée in 1787, an edict granting a civil status to Protestants, still in 1787, or the abolition of torture in legal inquiries in 1788. But this ambitious program of reform of the monarchy goes against the interests of many important groups. Turgot is dismissed in 1776, replaced by Necker who will in turn be dismissed in 1781. And in the meantime, economic circumstances are becoming increasingly difficult. As a result, riots take place in the lower classes. There are the Canut revolts in Lyon in 1786, and more importantly many agrarian riots throughout France in 1789.

But it is striking to see that the king himself is challenged, mainly through his family. Book historians such as Robert Darnton have shown that many illegal pamphlets circulate, halfway between pornography and political denunciation, featuring Marie-Antoinette and her entourage and peddling scandalous rumours.

Power also comes up against obstacles in its very exercise. The Assembly of Notables refuses the program of the Controller-General of Finances from 1783 to 1787. To calm the situation, Louis XVI convenes the Estates General on May 5, 1789. On June 17, the Third Estate proclaims itself National Assembly. On July 9, a National Constituent Assembly is formed. On July 14, as we all know, is the Storming of the Bastille.

On a literary level, it is at that time that Enlightenment's great authors pass away, like Voltaire and Rousseau in 1778 or Diderot in 1784. A significant part of Diderot's work, like *Jacques the Fatalist*, *Rameau's Nephew*, or *D'Alembert's Dream*, will only be known posthumously. A new generation is born, and create a continuity with the previous generation. In theatre, the "serious genre" drama theorised by Diderot will infuse Beaumarchais' comedies, such as *The Barber of Seville* in 1775 or *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1784. Epistolary novels popularised by the success of Rousseau's *New Heloise* become a dominant form that will reach some kind of peak with Laclos' *Dangerous Liaisons* in 1782.

It is also a time marked by an appetite for pathos and sentimental outpourings, a neoclassical aesthetic celebrating a return to ancient forms and a desire for exotic horizons. The immediate success of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* in 1788 is a testament to these trends and aspirations. The revolutionary period is so eventful that it cannot be summed up in a few lines.

Part 2 – The revolutionary period (1789-1799)

Let's just recall a few significant dates. August 4, 1789, abolition of privileges; August 26, *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*; July 14, 1790, Festival of the Federation; September 21, 1792, abolition of monarchy and Proclamation of the Republic; January 21, 1793, execution of Louis XVI. The Reign of Terror led by the Committee of Public Safety in 1793-1794, ends with the fall of Robespierre on July 27, 1794. The Directory replaces the Committee of Public Safety on October 26, 1795, and Brumaire 18 of Year VIII, that is to say on November 10, 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte takes absolute power and becomes First Consul.

The importance of literary production has long been underestimated for these years of political turmoil. But the period of the Revolution and the First French Empire has experienced a surge of interest in recent years and has been dubbed “the Enlightenment’s Turn”. It is a particularly interesting time because its authors are living through a tipping point in history, the world they knew having disappeared to give way to a fairly different society.

For example, Sade starts writing one of his great novels, *Aline and Valcour*, while he is imprisoned in the Bastille before the Revolution and only publishes it in 1795, after the Reign of Terror. Casanova writes his *Story of My Life* in the Castle of Dux’s library, telling the story of a world that has already totally disappeared. The violence of history and its extraordinary turnarounds are reflected in their works and give pause for thought to thinkers and writers alike.

The emigrant nobility especially finds in the events inspiration for meditation and novelistic scenarii. Examples are Chateaubriand and his *Historical, Political, and Moral Essay on Revolutions, Ancient and Modern* in 1797, or Sénac de Meilhan with his beautiful *Émigré*, still in 1797. And above all Germaine de Staël, daughter of Necker, who was minister of Louis XVI. Germaine de Staël writes, from the exile Napoleon keeps her under because she opposes him, an important work of fiction, political and even literary reflections. Let's only name *On Literature Considered in its Relationships to Social Institutions* in 1800 or the famous *Of Germany* in 1813.

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN THE 18th CENTURY

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French literature, Paris Nanterre University

Monique COTTRET, Professor emeritus in History, Paris Nanterre University

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Part 1 – Protestants and the "new Catholics" in the 18th century

CD: A full range of religious tensions marks 18th century in France. We asked Monique Cottret, professor at Paris Nanterre University and specialist in 18th century history, to help us take stock on this aspect of the Age of Enlightenment. Good morning Monique Cottret. First, let's remember that the abolition of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685 asserted the French Kingdom's Catholic unity by removing every official acknowledged existence of Protestants. Does this mean that the Protestant issue was settled in the 18th century?

MC: No, there is only "new Catholics", but everyone knows that they generally are really bad Catholics. They do everything to flee sacraments, and that's a problem because without the sacrament of baptism, there's no official existence, without the sacrament of marriage, weddings aren't legal, the spouses are only cohabitants and their children are bastards. When it comes to death, Protestants usually manage to die brutally and so avoid confession, viaticum and everything surrounding death from a Catholic perspective.

Fairly soon, however, political authorities sought a solution. Using the opportunity of Protestants' fragility, because they live almost clandestinely, Catholics relatives try to steal their property. As the century goes by, more and more magistrates hesitate to give them a satisfactory outcome. Remarriage affairs are causing even more problems. In a Protestant couple, if one of the spouses converts in a sincere conversion to Catholicism, they are theoretically perfectly free to marry once more in their new religion, the first union having no legal existence.

Yet again, as of 1750, in many cases, magistrates require compensations for the spouse whom they regard as abandoned. Magistrates are, nonetheless, profoundly good Catholics, but they consider that family and property are values that should also be defended. The idea of a necessary civil tolerance is arising. It is not a question of returning to an Edict of Nantes, which organised the coexistence of two religions and authorised the liberty of Protestant worship, even if it was in more limited conditions than Catholic worship, but to confer a legal existence to the Protestant minority.

This movement precedes the large Calas and Sirven cases, mobilising the opinion in favour of Protestants. But Church authorities criticise this spirit of tolerance. And if persecutions stopped, one has to wait until the end of the century and the 1787's Edict of Toleration for civil tolerance to impose itself, sometimes arduously.

Part 2 – Jansenists and Enlightenment

CD: On the other hand, the Catholic Church itself is marked by an internal dispute that impacts the entire society. Monique Cottret, you are the author of a *Jansenism's History*. What is Jansenism?

MC: The 18th century brings out religious conflicts that have been underestimated for a long time. Jansenism appears in the 18th century, it is a stringent sensibility within Catholicism. While Humanism asserted a certain kind of self-confidence in mankind, a new theology supported especially by Jesuits minimises the weight of the original sin and leaves a certain liberty to mankind to participate in its salvation.

It's against this theology that Jansenism reacts. Man, for the Jansenists, is so corrupted by the original sin that he is incapable of distinguishing good from evil. He can only be saved by divine grace. The word "Jansenist" comes from Jansenius, bishop of Ypres who wrote *Augustinus,* a treatise defending St Augustine's teaching. Jansenists reject the name that designates them. They consider themselves true Catholics, friends of St Augustin, defenders of the truth. In the 18th, these influences run through French society, join Gallicanism and are in charge of political demands.

CD: You have published, a few years ago, a book entitled *Jansenism and Enlightenment.* What is the relationship between those two terms? How does Jansenism mark the 18th century French society?

MC: Jansenists willingly throw the anathema against those who they call the "new philosophers", that is to say anti-Christians philosophers. They are the first to denounce *The Spirit of the Laws,* and they play a significant role in the order for arrest emitted by the Parliament of Paris against Rousseau. They especially despise *Emile,* a treatise on the nature of education that ignores the original sin. But as they defend rights of conscience and enliven the resistance to a monarchy that has become absolute, they necessarily come across other dissenting movements of the century, joining them or preceding them depending on the circumstances. Fighting against the Jesuits, they showcase the political criticism of the Society of Jesus, suspected of favourable opinion towards tyrannicide and demanding a blind and total submission from its members to its general and supreme pontiff.

Philosophers come and join them in this battle. Against Maupeou and his coup d'état, they promote with the philosophers (except Voltaire), a more paternal vision of the monarchy providing a place for the Parliament. They were themselves victims of sacrament refusals and threatened to be buried outside of consecrated ground, thus they are among the first to advocate for civil tolerance towards Protestants.

Perhaps more fundamentally, they are located in the vast Historicism movement that seeks legitimation in the past. While, as Sieyès would say, the nobility is lost in francophone forests to find warrior ancestors to justify these privileges, Jansenists are building a primitive, poor, fraternal, heroic and democratic church model. Apostles and martyrs join the good savages to denounce luxury excesses and opulence misdeeds. A good number of Jansenists will join the Revolution fairly quickly.

Part 3 – A decline in faith?

CD: Adversaries of the Enlightenment, Jesuits and Jansenists alike never stop warning the public and the authorities against faith decline. Could we say that there is indeed a movement of dechristianisation over the course of the 18th century?

MC: Confrontations within the Catholic Church are brutal in the 18th century. Jansenists, or those accused of being Jansenists, are very numerous in the prison's State. The public does not understand this repression. Many Catholics who aren't necessarily Jansenists want to pull back from the Church but not necessarily from Christianity. Sacraments refusals were crucial because the Catholic Church maintains a privileged relationship with the dead. The idea of clerics threatening the dying is perfectly unbearable to the living.

However, is there really a decline in Christian faith? I would say that there rather is a form of dechristianisation and a transition to private manifestations of faith. Year two's violent dechristianisation generates an important resistance. The religious issue has a significant impact during Revolution. All this prompts to caution on the matter of the Enlightenment dechristianisation.

CD: Monique Cottret, thank you very much.

Economic issues in 18th century France

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French literature, Paris Nanterre University

Arnault SKORNICKI, Senior lecturer of political sciences, Paris Nanterre University

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Part 1 – Economic issues in the 18th century

CD: Good morning Arnault Skornicki, you are a Doctor of Political Science and teach at Paris Nanterre University. You have published a book entitled *L'Economiste, la Cour et la Patrie, L'Economie politique dans la France des Lumières* published by CNRS Editions in 2011. The 18th century, from Louis XIV's death to the Revolution, is marked by recurring economic problems. What are they? How can they be explained? And are they related to the form of government in place?

AS: First, it must be emphasised that the 18th century is a century of economic expansion in Europe and particularly in France, which affects the working classes and has transformed ordinary consumption patterns, with the improvement of material comfort, furniture and access to sustenance. Some historians go so far as to speak of a Consumption Revolution that would have preceded the Industrial Revolution. The development of non-aristocratic luxury, not ostentatious but a luxury of comfort, was spotted by several contemporaneous observers. The so-called "absolute" monarchy has undoubtedly played a role in this economic success by encouraging and protecting manufactures and by guaranteeing a high quality of manufactured products.

This is the positive aspect of Colbertism; we must be careful not to believe that a system of privileges necessarily contradicts economic development. For example, the manufactures inspector's corps could be accused of exercising pernickety control, restraining entrepreneurs' freedom. But it has also helped unifying the national market by establishing common quality standards and guaranteeing the reputation of excellence of the French industry. In this sense, the privileges and corporations of which the monarchy was the guarantor weren't only a handicap to the economy. And contrary to a certain liberal historiography, this system of privileges and corporations would have been a specific avenue of development.

Results are more mixed about agriculture. Nevertheless, increase in yields and productivity is undeniable throughout the 18th century and there aren't any more famines like the ones that could be seen under Louis XIV. On the whole, Enlightenment's France is a major economic force by virtue of its size, soil variety, quality of its industry, extent of its colonial trade and also thanks to its highly qualified engineers and its scientific and technical expertise, as evidenced by the proliferation of learned societies, particularly in the fields of agriculture and traditional arts and crafts, technology and industry.

However, a couple of reservations must be brought up. On the one hand, the economic and political rise of the United Kingdom, which dangerously threatens the formerly dominant economic position of France in Europe. This island nation that is the United Kingdom, or the British Isles, was not only much smaller than France, which it still is, but was also much less populated at the time. The serious defeat of the Seven Years' War, 1756-1763, caused the Kingdom of France to lose most of its overseas colonies to the British and this divested it of a significant resource.

On the other hand, the last quarter of the 18th century sees a certain economic downturn in France: stagnating prices, lower wages, increased unemployment. And above all, the monarchy has never managed to fully address the central economic issue of the Ancient Regime, which I would recall was a massively agricultural economy, namely food crises, recurring famines that periodically provoke

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riots. Economic crises, riots and increased inequalities form the background of the pre-revolutionary period.

Part 2 – Emergence of the economic science

CD: The 18th century also sees the appearance of a certain type of scholarly discourse on economics. How to describe and explain the genesis of this economic science and who are its actors?

AS: Indeed, economic science is booming all over Europe and especially in France. It is measurable in the explosion of publications on agriculture, trade, finance, taxation and so on. Another new development, it claims more and more to be a modern science, that is to say a clear and experimental knowledge that could even be calculable, although major disagreements on the epistemological definition of the science still remain among Enlightenment's economists.

Of course, this reflects Europe's very considerable economic growth in the 18th century, which we spoke about. Trade interests are increasingly part of politics, and States are in demand for new economic expertise. The economy is therefore becoming increasingly important in the French government's political agenda, as well as among men of letters and scholars.

But it is not only linked to this economic boom but also to a different type of development, the cultural boom which is the Enlightenment itself. They worked on establishing a "moral and political science", in the words of a contemporaneous physiocrat, a social science inspired by nature sciences, based on observations and simple principles, such as interest.

To name a few important French economists in the first half of the 18th century, we have Boisguilbert, Dutot, Cantillon, and Melon, for example. In the second half of the 18th century, there are outright schools established with a declared scientific ambition. I am thinking of Gournay's group, Vincent de Gournay being a very important member of the economic administration under Louis XV. And I am also thinking of the well-known Physiocrats, under the patronage of Dr. Quesnay.

All this peaks with the appointment of Turgot as Controller-General of Finances. Turgot was close to not only physiocrats but also to Gournay and to the Encyclopaedists, therefore at the heart of the French Enlightenment, and appointed to the general control of finances in 1774 by Louis XVI himself.

Part 3 – Political application of economic theories

CD: These theoreticians of the emerging economic science, does the power listen to them? Does this new science of economics really have any political applications?

AS: It would be an exaggeration to say that Louis XV, Louis XVI or their governments were under the influence of economists. Their social importance cannot be compared to the role that economists currently play in government fields in France and around the world. Firstly, because Ancient Regime's France is an aristocratic society in which men of letters and scholars are most often servants, obliged to the great, at least when they do find a job with them or with the royal administration. Secondly because the royal administration was far from entirely agreeing with the view of physiocrats and Gournay's disciples.

On the other hand, it is quite true that the Enlightenment monarchy experimented with liberalisation and economic policies very innovative at the time, and this twice, first in 1763-64 with unprecedented measures for a free wheat trade, wheat trade being the essential market then, measures concerning not only internal trade but also export, and measures to which several economists participated. The second time was under the ministry of Turgot in 1774-76, with measures of liberalisation of the internal wheat trade and the notorious six edicts, of which the most famous concerns the abolition of the corvée and of corporations.

I would add that Turgot's successor, Necker, although he was very critical of liberalism, was, nonetheless, an economist just like Turgot or the Physiocrats. My last example, du Pont de Nemours, was a prominent physiocrat and a close adviser to one of Louis XVI's key minister at the very end of the Ancient Regime called Calonne, and du Pont worked on an important free trade treaty with the United Kingdom in 1786.

We can therefore rightly consider that political economy has been promoted by the monarchy of the Ancient Regime, the Enlightenment's monarchy, because it offered a pack of new and stimulating solutions to a monarchy in crisis facing recurring problems and recurring contradictions. And the rulers essentially took their pick of what they needed in this pack, with more or less success since they certainly have failed to forestall the Revolution.

CD: Arnault Skornicki, thank you very much for this summary of 18th century economy.

CD: Thank you.

READERS, CENSORSHIP AND THE PUBLIC MIND

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

Ariane REVEL, Doctor of philosophy, Paris-Est Créteil University

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Part 1 – Readers

CD: As part of this presentation on the history of 18th century literature and ideas, with the Enlightenment's fight as guiding theme, we must focus on the concrete conditions of the dissemination of texts and ideas. Ariane Revel, the most significant factor thereupon is it not the rise in readers' number?

AR: The number of readers increases indeed, but mainly what changes is the way people read. Print consumption increases throughout the 18th century, and possession of books is rising in all strata of society. But there are also many ways to access a book without having to buy it. Alongside persisting old practices, such as reading aloud or lending of books between individuals, new institutions promote the circulation of printed materials. Reading rooms allow, in exchange for a rather expensive fee, access to recent publications. For a lower fee, you can rent a book. Finally, public libraries proliferate. These transformations go hand in hand with a shift from a so-called "intensive" reading to a so-called "extensive" reading. Whereas before one would repeatedly read a few books, especially in lower classes where people would often possess saints' biographies or an almanac to read and re-read, most often out loud, now people start reading more books. This change is significant because reading is becoming more and more related to print production.

CD: Then, what precisely do these readers read?

AR: First, they do not all read the same thing. Depending on the background people come from or the occupation they exercise, they don't have the same readings. However, there are two general trends. On the one hand, religious literature loses its centrality. On the other hand, readings tend to diversify. Thus, in the nobility and in some of the bourgeoisie, the works related to religion recede in favour of the belles-lettres, in particular history but also novels. There are also more books related to science and the arts. For the lower classes, cheap collections like the Blue Library make ancient texts accessible, sometimes shortening or summarising them.

Part 2 – Censorship

CD: To publish under absolute monarchy is to publish in a censorship system. How does censorship work in France and what subjects are receiving particular attention from this censorship?

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AR: In these regimes, censorship is often exercised through several authorities. First, royal censorship is exercised preliminarily. A censor, qualified in the field of the work in question, decides whether or not to grant it a privilege, called permission. Sometimes the book does not get a privilege but is still tolerated. It is then called a "tacit permission".

Censorship may also make the authorization of a work conditional on the deletion or modification of certain passages. After its publication, other institutions can still condemn a book. The Parliament of Paris has this power, but also the Sorbonne and theologians, who carefully examine it to see if it does not infringe on religion. Censorship seeks to identify those who could undermine the monarchy's three great pillars: The King, the Church and morality. But obviously appreciating what constitutes an attack on one of these pillars, or not, is problematic because is not self-evident.

Throughout the century, and especially in the second half of the 18th century, there are heated debates about how censorship should work. For example, how can one identify a dangerous book? Can a work be banned because it is suspected that it could be harmful?

People also wonder about how they can ban books effectively. Indeed, censorship feeds an underground network and books are sometimes all the more sought after if they are illicit. If censored texts circulate anyway, what is the point of prohibiting them? Diderot, in his *Lettre sur le commerce de la librairie*, underlines the paradoxes of censorship. It draws attention to banned books and, additionally, hurts authors' remuneration because they then become vulnerable to the counterfeits proliferating in the underground trade.

Part 3 – Secularisation and the public mind

CD: When historians of ideas speak of the 18th century and the diffusion of Enlightenment, they often point to two elements: the creation of what may be called public opinion and what we call a secularisation process. How can we describe these two movements, and can we consider that they go hand in hand?

These are two major milestones in the political culture evolution of the end of the Ancient Regime and they both have to do with the way we determine what is authoritative. Previously, what was called "public opinion" was mostly related to the reputation and public esteem of an individual. In the middle of the 18th century, the term becomes politicized. Public opinion is an instance that renders judgments and must be considered in the way a country is governed. As of today, explaining exactly what it is and where it comes from is difficult. For example, when the government seeks to keep abreast of public opinion, they want the opinion of their subjects, what is being said, feelings expressed towards the king that are not always rational, etc.

But on the other hand, at the same time, philosophers but also lawyers, for example, start referring to public opinion as if it was an authority, a tribunal of reason, able to soundly judge a legal case or a political action. They recognize the weight of what is said and thought among people who have no direct political power. This emergence can be linked to the secularization process that marks the century, meaning authorities hitherto considered sacred lose their hold. As religious authority declines, public opinion becomes a new point of reference for what is true and just. And what is interesting is that it adds value to the advent of a shared logic, in accordance with Enlightenment ideals.

CD: Ariane Revel, thank you very much for this summary enlightening us on the concrete conditions of the French Enlightenment's development.

AR: Thank you.

THE ADVENTURES OF TELEMACHUS BY FENELON

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

Part 1 – Fenelon and his function as preceptor

Born in 1651 and deceased in 1715, Fenelon did not have the slightest vocation for writing novels. He was primarily a clergyman and, at the end of the 17th century, clergymen were not supposed to be writing novels, a genre deemed morally questionable. He is a clergyman of very high intellectual quality whose interests go coherently towards theology or even mysticism, philosophy and politics but also towards education. And this is the way he enters literature.

Because at age 38, Fenelon becomes a tutor to the Duke of Burgundy, that is to say Le Petit Dauphin, that is to say the grandson of Louis XIV, who should become, in theory, one day, King of France. I can tell you right now that this is not how things will turn out. In reality, Louis XIV reigns for so long that he survives both his eldest son, Le Grand Dauphin and his grandson, the Duke of Burgundy. And so, in 1715, when Louis XIV dies, his great-grandson becomes heir to the throne. But obviously we are not there yet. So, Fenelon is responsible for educating the future King of France. Which is quite the mission. And so, it's for his pupil that Fenelon begins writing a series of educational fictions like fables or dialogues of the dead featuring famous people.

The crowning achievement of this education by fiction venture is a text, *The Adventures of Telemachus*. Probably written around the year 1694, *The Adventures of Telemachus* is published for the first time without Fenelon's knowledge in 1699 as he, having displeased Louis XIV, is demoted back to his bishopric in Cambrai. There is a hint of scandal in this text because Fenelon is very opposed to Louis XIV's policy of prestige and in particular to his appetite for war. And he presents through fiction the superiority of a true Christian policy based on peace, agriculture and trade.

Part 2 – Fenelon's work: *The Adventures of Telemachus*

Fenelon's book is related to Homer's *Odyssey*, since Fenelon imagines Telemachus, who is Ulysses' son, adventures from the time he goes in search of his father, whom he has not heard from for years, at the end of the fourth book of Homer's *Odyssey*, and the moment when he finds him in book 10, when Ulysses returns to Ithaca to re-take the throne. There is in Homer's text a narrative gap that Fenelon tries to fill in by recounting the parallel adventures of Ulysses' son. Under the guidance of the wise Mentor, who is in reality the goddess Athena, Telemachus travels, visits various cities and meets different rulers. His adventures allow the presentation of politic models and counter-models, to reflect on what is good governance and to describe with the help of fiction the experiences which shape a good king and warn him against the pitfalls of the title, which are pride, bad counsellors, excessiveness of passions, etc.

It is quite paradoxical to think that this classic was first and foremost a book intended for the education of one child, even if he was not a regular child. There already was, before Fenelon, a whole tradition of educational treatises and texts for the education of monarchs. The future king must be well versed in classical culture and its antique ties. He must be taught notions of politics drawn from famous examples. He must reflect upon the duties of his office. He must receive values of Christian morality and there is a bit of all that in Telemachus.

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The cultural initiation part of it is obvious, from one of Homer's markings, which is a tour of Greek and Latin mythology. Fenelon uses chosen pieces, which are so many memories and rewrites, not only of Homer but also of Virgil or Ovid. It is a mosaic of quotations and classic literary references which would exhaust us if we had to find where they all are from. And yet, this beautiful visit through ancient culture comes from such a forced cultural integration that it results in a story that is at once completely artificial, a bit like the mythological star of the Palace of Versailles since it is art of the same aesthetic, and at the same time absolutely fluid.

It is also, and primarily, a political philosophy and a work about morality. Telemachus and Mentor meet kings devoured by ambition, poorly advised or burning through the excesses of their passions, and they can reflect on the harmful consequences of a bad government. Telemachus and Mentor also visit countries where a good sovereign ensures peace and prosperity in his kingdom by promoting trade and agriculture, for example.

At the end of the story, Telemachus witnesses the reforms implemented by Mentor on Salento's Kingdom. Mentor puts an end to the war with the neighbours, renounces his ostentatious luxury policy, which ruins the country in taxes, and protects both agriculture and useful arts. It is a kind of vicarious experience readying Telemachus for his future duties as ruler of Ithaca and through him, simultaneously, this book readies the Duke of Burgundy, who is supposed to read it, for his future duties as King of France.

It is, as we can see, a book quite unique in its kind, which will be much imitated but doesn't really have any antecedents. When it is published, contemporaries do not know how to label it. Some people emphasise its beautiful writing and poetry and some are indignant, as Bossuet is, that a clergyman indulges in such literary complacency. People see the ancient epic reference but also the more contemporary literary ones, such as pastoralism, the fable or even the novel.

By contemporaneous standards it would have been difficult to call it a novel because the term was still pejorative. The novel was seen as a kind of sub-literature. But it is also because according to its classical definition, the novel is an amorous love fiction written in prose. Here there is fiction written in prose, but love does not have a central place, because even if it is present, since it is a question of educating a young man, he must also be warned against the excessive charms of this passion.

Essentially, Fenelon unintentionally invents, by combining different existing things, what will become a literary genre, namely the educational novel. It is also the first major text that is a critical review of Louis XIV's reign, while his reign is not even finished yet, which shows us that it is a time of unprecedented cultural radiance, of greatness of France in Europe, but that it also has a reverse side. The regime's luxury and its conquest wars have produced a situation of unprecedented economic crisis and absolutism crushes all forms of counter powers.

The Enlightenment, which soon forgets the true Christian dimension of Fenelon's message, recognises itself fully in the values conveyed in *Telemachus*. The book very quickly becomes a classic which will be read, quoted, imitated and even parodied during the whole 18th century.

MONTESQUIEU'S *PERSIAN LETTERS*

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

Introduction

Like Fenelon's *Adventures of Telemachus*, Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* achieved the feat of becoming a classic, one of those timeless texts still quoted in anthologies, whose citations are known to all and whose character names, Usbek and Rica, exist independently of the work that bears them. A work that has become timeless, when it was first a book written just because, a satirical book discussing contemporary time and a great political reflection book on immediate history, that of the end of Louis XIV's reign and the Regency.

Published in 1721, the *Persian Letters* is indeed a text that skilfully intertwines exotic fictional elements and a chronicle of the decade that just passed. Both stories, the main character's personal story and the kingdom's public history, are steering towards a catastrophe, Law's bankruptcy and what it means for the hopes of renewal placed in the Regency.

Part 1 – Montesquieu and the *Persian Letters*

Montesquieu was born in 1689, died in 1755 and therefore is still a relatively young man in 1721, but has already had time to grow up and study law, which will enrich his thought. He had time to stay in Paris, reflecting on history and the economy. The book he publishes anonymously in Amsterdam, let's recall that there is no freedom of the press in France, is described as an epistolary fiction.

The text is a collection of letters written by two Persians in exile in France and by their correspondents. The main character, Usbek, is forced to leave Persia due to political circumstances. He leaves his harem behind, in the hands of his terrible eunuchs, and goes to Paris with his young friend Rica. Their letters bear witness, first, to their astonishment as strangers to the French way of life. That is the satirical dimension of the book. A stranger's gaze allows us to see ourselves with the eyes of another, enabling us to be astonished at what we are most used to. To talk about our everyday realities with an exotic vocabulary brings out its strangeness. For example, clergymen are referred to as dervishes who have taken vows of obedience, poverty and chastity and do not respect any of the three.

The point of view of a stranger makes it possible to be astonished by the trend of gaming, women's coquetry, street congestion and onlookers' inquisitiveness. We can find there the very brilliant legacy of a mockery tradition of which the 17th century has a few examples, like La Bruyère's *Caractères*.

Part 2 – The *Persian Letters'* political dimension

There is also an important political dimension in the *Persian Letters*, which is seen both in the satire and the serious dissertations. Even if it is strictly fictional, the novel often sardonically mirrors reality to let us ponder on the exercise of power. The Persians arrive in Paris in 1712, and their letters are a testament to Parisian life up until 1720. It is, therefore, immediate political history that all readers in 1721 would have freshly remembered and that they can re-read, appraising the controversial interpretation in Montesquieu's writing. We are witnessing the very last years of Louis XIV's reign, darkened by the despotic tendency of absolute monarchy, by religious intolerance and by a deep economic crisis. And we observe the evident relief welcoming the news of the king's death in 1715.

Above all, the reader can enjoy a harsh and willingly caricatured chronicle, which is the real excitement of the text, of almost contemporaneous events: the speculative frenzy that seized Paris and the Court under Law's system and the bankruptcy that soon followed in 1720. Montesquieu morally condemns the frenzied speculation, an unstable time ripe with reversal of situations that sees valet fathers making a fortune and marrying their daughters to ruined noblemen, for example.

Montesquieu's analysis of this historical time sees the monarchy's transformation reaching a climax. To him, monarchy must be based on the safety of property, on landholding legacy, on the persistence of lineages. And what he fathoms is that the monarchy has turned into despotism where even what seemed the most stable is subjected to the whims of the prince and his minister, whose discourses are nothing but air.

In letter 142, Law is portrayed as a huckster, son of Aeolus, the god of wind, who takes the money of the good inhabitants of Betica, that is to say of France, in exchange for skins full of wind before disappearing in the air, leaving the ruined population in inexpressible dismay.

Part 3 – The *Persian Letters'* novelistic dimension

Finally, the *Persian Letters* also include a novelistic dimension where exotic fiction, with its erotic and dramatic fantasy, holds a significant place. This is what we call a "seraglio novel". As Usbek's absence lengthens, his harem's discipline comes undone, despite the eunuch's supervision. Usbek, in Paris and green with jealousy, gets news of what is happening with a long delay, due to the slowness of mail circulation. Remotely, he tries to restore despotic order in his harem by relying on the violent action of the eunuchs. But it is in vain and the last letters of the compilation recount the collapse of the seraglio.

In the last letter, almost like the parody of a drama, Roxane, his favourite, reveals to him that she has cheated on him, that she has always hated him and announces that she will commit suicide after having poisoned the eunuchs guarding the seraglio. This devastating ending, in the throes of passion and in an oriental setting is eminently novelistic. But at the same time, it is to be related to the catastrophic description of France's economic collapse, like a metaphor inviting the readers to reflect on despotism, on the risks of giving all the power to one single person, and on their damaging impacts.

SAINT-SIMON AND HIS *MEMOIRS*

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

Marc HERSANT, Professor in French Literature, Sorbonne-Nouvelle University

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Part 1 – Saint-Simon, An 18th-century writer?

CD: Good morning Marc Hersant, you teach at Paris 3 Sorbonne-Nouvelle University. You recently published a biography of Saint-Simon that received an award from the French Academy, and you like to remind people that Saint-Simon, against the common belief associating him with the 17th century, Saint-Simon truly is an 18th-century writer.

MH: Good morning Colas Duflo. Yes, firstly because he literally was. He wrote his *Memoirs* between 1739 and 1750, around the time Voltaire wrote *The Age of Louis XIV*. We wouldn't place in the 19th century a writer who wrote his main work, the only one his name is associated with, in the 40s of the 20th century? It all comes from a confusion between his work's universe and the time of its writing.

Saint-Simon is associated with Louis XIV like Racine or La Fontaine is, but when he begins his main work, the *Persian Letters* have already been published for 18 years, *Letters on the English* for a few years already and when he finishes it, Rousseau is about to write his first speech, which is a bit strange for a 17th-century writer. And not to mention the countless references in his work to the historical present, he speaks of Voltaire twice, condescendingly, and he personally knew, and we could say was friendly with, Montesquieu. If his work seems anachronistic, it is in full awareness of the Enlightenment and if it is not current, it is because of the violent rejection of a historical present that he knows all too well.

Part 2 – Introduction to Saint-Simon's *Memoirs*

CD: What are the *Memoirs*?

MH: Strange question, since it's hard to sum them up in a few words. First off, Saint-Simon's *Memoirs* are one of the most astonishing writing adventures in our history. A single man, without immediate target audience, fills thousands of pages, working for himself and for a very potential posterity, of an unparalleled resurgence of both individual and collective past. Then, a strange and fascinating mosaic of very different texts, between historical chronicles, autobiographies, etiquette dissertations, vast genealogical presentations, giant portraits gallery, large scenes recreated by memory and dream, and many adrenaline rushes spawning an explosive style. And the *Memoirs* are a whole universe. The book's indexes are hundreds of pages longs, where thousands of characters of all available styles teem, from most trivial to most exquisite, from Rabelais to Bossuet.

CD: What overview does Saint-Simon give of Louis XIV's reign?

MH: Negative, violent, passionate and at the same time tender and complex, because Saint-Simon is the adversary par excellence of absolutism and of the humiliation the nobility suffers. But at the same time, Saint-Simon lived for a long time very close to the king, hoping for a glance, a word. Therefore, when it comes to Louis XIV he is caught in a storm of contradictory feelings. And what is surprising is that this unrestrained bias, instead of erasing the king's reality, conveys the truest possible image of it.

CD: In 1715, when Louis XIV dies, Louis XV was a child. There is then a Regency period and Saint-Simon is quite close to the regent, the Duke of Orleans. What testimony does he give of this particular time in history?

MH: Cynical, because he considers the Regency as a period of decadence, pushing further down a country already messed-up by Louis XIV. Saint-Simon tried to influence the regent, in vain, and helplessly witnessed his rivals' triumph, especially Dubois', whom he draws a diabolical image of in his *Memoirs*. But what prevails despite everything is the pair he forms with his friend the regent, that he defends despite all his mistakes, and who does whatever he wants but who has for him an affection as deep as ironic. This male duo is as unforgettable, in its own way, as those of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza or Don Juan and Sganarelle

Part 3 – Saint-Simon, a contemporary of Montesquieu and Voltaire

CD: We said at the beginning that Saint-Simon is a contemporary of Montesquieu and Voltaire, who also wrote about Louis XIV's reign and the Regency. Are there any common features to these authors and where do they stand out?

MH: Saint-Simon is not completely impervious to the Enlightenment spirit and in particular his positions on religion are tolerant. He condemns the Edict of Nantes revocation with force in his *Memoirs*, with sentences that most Enlightenment's writers, I am especially thinking of Voltaire, would have signed with their name with enthusiasm. I already said that Montesquieu liked him, and we can only imagine the ineffable charm of their conversations. But at the same time Saint-Simon lived through a negative time, completely foreign to that of the Enlightenment. To him everything true and everything good belongs to an irrevocably lost past. Historical time reacts like an acid, disfiguring the myth supposed to coincide with the truth that haunts the writer.

CD: To the reader discovering them, these *Memoirs* can appear daunting, at nearly 8,000 pages. What charm did you find there that brought you to give it years of your life? And where would you recommend starting, if one wanted to discover this writer?

MH: Indeed, anthologies can be misleading. The best one probably is François Raviez' for La Pochothèque because it is the most faithful to the work and its continuity. But we can't study an ocean by looking at three fishes under a magnifying glass. You have to dive into it. I would therefore

encourage an adventurous reader to go through a whole year of *Memoirs*. It is the only way, if you do not want to read everything, to apprehend the work's authentic rhythm and to let yourself be caught up in its dynamic. I personally have a weakness for the year 1709, which is an uninterrupted succession of wonders that perfectly justifies the famous comparison made by Proust between the *Memoirs* and *The Arabian Nights*. Because the *Memoirs* are very good at producing stories that can leave the most jaded reader speechless. A template life intended for an infinity of real lives. If one day I have a bit of time, I will make a pocket edition of year 1709 but who, having finished the year 1709, would not rush to the following one?

CD: Marc Hersant, thank you very much.

MH: Thank you Colas Duflo.

CONCLUSION

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French literature, Paris Nanterre University

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When we study the historical and political framework in which literature unfolds in 18th century France, as we did during this first salon introducing us to the 18th century, we are struck by one thing, especially if we think about what is happening at the same time in other European countries like England or Holland. We are struck by the contrast between on one side, an absolute monarchy that stubbornly safeguards the old frameworks by controlling as much as possible discourses that could affect politics, religion or morals, and on the other side the joyful freedom expressed in published works, the desire for knowledge growing through society, expressing itself through the trend of dictionaries, travel stories and scientific popularisation works, the appetite for emancipation from old moral ideas and stagnant styles.

It is in this tension between fixed frameworks and a society already moving forwards that the French Enlightenment is developed. They constantly play with the limit between what can be said and what must be hinted to the reader, with nostalgia for the Great Century and a desire for novelty in all areas, with their celebration of experimental science and knowledge diffusion and worship of our freely beautiful and good nature, inventing both the idea of progress and perfectibility and the anxiety of a history that would distance us from ourselves.

Opening 18th-century books, as we are going to do through the different videos of this MOOC, is to come across the jubilant freedom shown in the appetite for discovery, in the capacity to invent and to reinvent the ways of writing and of transmitting knowledge, as well as moral and political ideas.

Conclusion – Presentation of the MOOC's different salons

First, we will go through the hotel of Soubise's princess salon where we will discuss the rise of the novel, which is the literary form that fully developed during the 18th century. We start there on purpose, because it's the freest form. The novel represents a whole new culture for a new audience, a more individualistic culture, which is also more secularised and an undeniable effect of the reading democratisation taking place at that time.

We will then go through the "Petit Cabinet", where we will dedicate a full week to the *Encyclopaedia* under the guidance of Marie Leca-Tsiomis, one of this gigantic work's greatest specialists. The *Encyclopaedia* is the emblematic undertaking of the French Enlightenment, the one that best fits Diderot's slogans, its conductor, who wanted the *Encyclopaedia* to change the common way of thinking. You can appreciate the ambition it shows, the will to change the common way of thinking. As Diderot exclaimed a few years before in *On the interpretation of Nature*: "Let us hasten to make philosophy popular." It could be the Enlightenment's motto.

Back to the belles-lettres, we will meet Fabrice Moulin in the prince's room, who will discuss with his guests 18th-century theatre. Starting from a curious paradox: in the 18th century, theatre probably was one of the most important literary forms. Hundreds of plays have been written, theatres have been built and French theatre has been exported all over Europe. The greatest authors have pondered on theatre and its various elements, from the composition of the play to the actor's performances, and have tried to reinvent it, to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment, or of its opponents, on stage. In short, in the 18th century theatre has an absolutely central place in the cultural and worldly life. And

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yet, our theatres today and our publishers seem to have completely forgotten this vast corpus with the exception of some Marivaux, Beaumarchais and occasionally Voltaire. Let's wager that the glimpse we'll have of this forgotten masterpiece in this salon will make you want to go further.

It will then be time to go through the prince's parlour under the leadership of Alain Sandrier to understand that the Enlightenment's battle is indeed a real fight with its heroic figures, like the emblematic figure of the philosopher, its opponents, the anti-philosophers, its privileged places, the exchange of ideas, the pamphlet, the treaty, its weapons, clandestinity, concealment and irony, its targets to eliminate, despotism and religion. It will be the week of controversial Enlightenment, the one that produced the theoretical achievements that our secular democracy has inherited.

Finally, we will end this 18th-century visit in the "Grand Cabinet" and, guided by Laurence Vanoflen, we will devote the last week of this MOOC to the French Revolution and what we today call "the Enlightenment's turn", that is to say the eventful period initiated in 1789 and which could be extended to 1804 or even 1815, depending on whether the First Empire is included or not. For a long time, literary history has not been much interested in this period, regarding it only as a kind of haphazard transition between Enlightenment and Romanticism. In reality, as soon as we study it for itself, it appears to be a really exciting time during which the actors see the old world topple and a new world being born, without knowing what their particular circumstances and that of the country will be in the months or years to follow. It gives their works a feeling of effervescence, of an encounter with history's violence, and an assessment of the Enlightenment, with all that involves such a review, both the grim and the brilliant.

So this is what we invite you to do in the different salons of this MOOC: to visit with us this century that we love, that is fascinating to us and which is the object of our research and our work. We hope you will find pleasure and knowledge, wisdom and savour. Enjoy your visit.

SALONS' ESTABLISHMENT, DIDEROT AND CRITICISM

Colas DUFLO, Professor in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

Fabrice MOULIN, Lecturer in French Literature, Paris Nanterre University

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CD: Good morning Fabrice Moulin. You are a specialist in the relationship between literature and arts at Paris Nanterre University. It is said that the great painters of the 18th century exhibited at the Salon, what does that mean? What are the Salons? Since when do they exist?

FM: The Salon was the ancestor of our exhibitions and museums, so to speak. At the beginning of the 18th century, after Louis XIV's reign, the Royal Academy of Painting created by Colbert was concerned with promoting its image and valuing French painting, faced by the competition of Italian or Flemish art.

From 1737, on the King Building's Steward initiative, the equivalent of Minister of Culture nowadays, the Academy exhibited the paintings of its main painters regularly. It was quite official. Every artist was invited to present at least two paintings. The event was held every two years at the Louvre Palace, which wasn't a museum yet, and more precisely in the Salon Carré, hence the term of Salon. The Salon lasted several weeks. It opened its doors on the 25th of August, on Saint Louis's day, proof of the image and prestige of the monarchy.

CD: Who were those exhibitions for?

FM: Theoretically, for anybody. Access was free and a large audience was visiting the Salons. High nobility members were seen as well as educated bourgeois or artisans. Furthermore, the Salon was an ideal place of sociability, a meeting place where discussions could be held. The noisy and agitated atmosphere was undoubtedly closer to a marketplace or a fair than to our actual museum halls, where everybody knows that they have to be silent out of respect for the nearly sacred artwork. There was no such thing during the 18th century.

CD: How were the paintings displayed?

FM: There again, a 21st-century visitor would be astonished if he entered the Louvre's Salon by the large stairs. There, 200 paintings were hanged on the entire wall surface, juxtaposed, affixed side by side, to gain space of course. But it was also indicative of a relationship to the painting that is quite different to the one we have now. Nowadays, we cannot expose a painting without isolating it, without considering its uniqueness, as if sacralizing it.

At the Salon, the contiguity of the art works incited comparisons. Diderot was doing so himself. Let's specify that this "upholstering", as it was called, was not randomly done. As we can see it in the drawings of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, it respected the academic hierarchy of paintwork, which put history painting at the top, with large format, like biblical, mythological or historical artworks, then lower there was genre painting, indoor scenes, landscapes and portraits.

Salons were cultural events and therefore were enumerated and written about in critical reports. The most famous ones nowadays are Diderot's. Why did Diderot write his *Salons*?

In 1759, Diderot, who put body and soul into the *Encyclopedia*, was enlisted in this newly forbidden gigantic organization. Maybe he needed a bit of fresh air? Either way, he accepted his friend Melchior Grimm's offer. At the time, Melchior Grimm was directing a journal named "La Correspondance littéraire*",* containing an account of the French cultural life for foreign readers exclusively. It only had a couple of subscribers, but they were Europeans great princes and other crowned heads: Catherine of Russia, Frederick the Great, etc. Grimm, who was not in Paris that year, asked Diderot to write for him the 1759 *Salon*'s reports.

Diderot's texts took the form of letters addressed to Grimm, and through him, to this very special and very select foreign readership. There, Diderot was immune to censorship and could therefore write what he wanted. He accepted and ended up writing the reports of nearly all the Salons until 1781. Year after year, he refined his knowledge of pictorial technique and painters' environment. He put more and more investment and enthusiasm in critical writing. His talent and inventiveness were at their peak with the 1767 Salon, a true masterpiece of the kind.

CD: If I understand it correctly, Diderot wrote for a public that was far away and didn't see the works. Under what conditions did he write?

FM: You are right. The exercise that Diderot was doing was very special. He was supposed to report paintings to a healthy public of collectors who could potentially become buyers. Thus, it was needed to describe the works to them. But the paintings were doubly missing. They were absent for the reader because at the time they had no photography or digitized reproduction. The description had to be precise enough and skillfully led, not to drown the reader's imagination. But the paintings were also absent for Diderot himself, who had to write his reports away from the Salon, once he got home. He was consequently relying on his amazing capability of remembrance and imagination. The result was seizing but the exercise was extremely demanding.

For example, he wrote in 1763: "I am in my study, where I have to picture all those paintings. This restraint is exhausting me". Essentially, I wonder if it was precisely that lack of images, physical images, and reproductions that transfigured the art criticism into a literary and creative work by forcing Diderot to deploy the strength of his imagination. One thing for sure is that without Diderot, neither Baudelaire, nor Zola, nor Claudel would have been able to write art criticism like they did.

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Ce projet est co-financé par le fonds européen de développement régional.


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