

CONCLUSION

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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

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.