

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

Periodically proclaimed dead or irrelevant, the Enlightenment nevertheless continues to challenge us. The current special issue—*Les Lumières, au passé et à présent*—provides examples of the diversity of critical approaches to a multifaceted literary and cultural period whose social ramifications and unfinished debates are still very much with us. As illustrated by the nine articles in this issue, the historical phenomenon known as *Aufklärung*, Enlightenment, or *Lumières*, while customarily typified by certain widely-shared ideals or values (in particular, a renewed critical outlook, based on philosophical reason, toward established tradition), was also characterized by internal ideological dissensions within the multiplicity of its intellectual movements. The fact that there is no homogeneous or monolithic Enlightenment, no clear or linear narrative of progress and emancipation, makes the process of seeking to understand the complexities of the Enlightenment period—in the case of this special issue, more specifically the eighteenth century in France—more interesting and especially more relevant to our own historical juncture.

In the first article, “Literary Women, Reason, and the Fiction of Enlightenment,” Heidi Bostic (Baylor University) provides a much-needed and, dare I say it, enlightening corrective to the conventional perception of Enlightenment as a preponderantly male endeavor, especially in regards to one of the period’s main keywords: reason. As Bostic argues, taking eighteenth-century female authors seriously, as full participants in Enlightenment, or as producers of reason, does not only broaden the literary canon of the period, but also helps us redefine Enlightenment as a current, unfinished project.

The second article, “Decoding *The Maiden of Tonnerre*: Translating Gender from the Eighteenth Century,” by Roland A. Champagne (Trinity University), is devoted to one of the most original and fascinating characters of the eighteenth century. Known as the Chevalier d’Éon, he chose to live the latter part of his life as a woman, producing an autobiography that seems to announce our present-day critical reevaluations regarding traditional gender norms and roles.

In the third article, “Michel Foucault’s Defamiliarizing View of the Enlightenment,” Karlis Racevskis (Ohio State University) offers a close reading of the genealogy of liberalism developed by perhaps the most astute among the critics generally categorized as post-modern. Foucault’s genealogical method, which remains controversial, has the undeniable merit of leading to a reassessment, arising from an analysis of patterns of power and authority in our own day, of the values and debates bequeathed to us by Enlightenment.

In article four, “Peering into the Mosque: Enlightenment Views of Islam,” Zakaria Fatih (University of Maryland, Baltimore County) examines how Voltaire and Rousseau, in particular, represented Islam—often, though by no means uniformly, in positive terms. As Fatih suggests, we can learn from eighteenth-century writers’ attempts and missteps at understanding other cultures.

Article five, “Blueprint of Technical Professions: Changing Conceptions of Work and Education in Eighteenth-Century France,” by Lars Erickson (University of Rhode Island), is devoted to the emerging importance of professional training as a public good or a societal imperative. The concept that education can contribute to economic productivity seems to be

a legacy of the Enlightenment (one wonders, in passing, why so many of today's politicians have trouble grasping this concept).

Articles six and seven are devoted to the theater (especially during the Revolutionary period), a cultural production and social phenomenon whose importance is often understated in historical accounts of the eighteenth century. In "Le théâtre n'existe pas, ou comment réconcilier le passé, le présent et l'avenir de la Révolution française sur scène?," Sophie Delahaye (Washburn University) analyzes how some playwrights responded though their work onstage to the broader political upheavals of their day. In "L'abbé Gouttes et le curé du *Couvent ou les vœux forcés* d'Olympe de Gouges (1790)," Audrey Viguier (University of Florida) examines the confrontation between established religious institutions and the emerging quest for women's rights in a play by the author of the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*.

In article eight, "Male Models: *Galanterie* and *Libertinage* in La Fayette and Laclos," Russell Ganim (University of Iowa) offers comparative readings of Madame de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* and Choderlos de Laclos's *Les liaisons dangereuses*, thereby clarifying the evolution of literary portrayals, from the seventeenth-century *galant* to the eighteenth-century *libertin*.

The last article, "Exit Voltaire, Enter Marivaux: Abdellatif Kechiche on the Legacy of the Enlightenment," by Louisa Shea (Ohio State University), brings us to representations of eighteenth-century authors in present-day cinematic production. Through her analyses of two *films de banlieue*, Shea contrasts the inherited image of Voltaire as a French Republican icon with the less canonical status of Marivaux, whose more ludic use of language is perhaps easier for a new generation to appropriate.

It has been a pleasure to participate in the development of this final issue of volume 85 of the *French Review*. In closing, I would like to thank the Assistant Editors of this special issue, Christopher Coski (Ohio University) and Jack Iverson (Whitman College), who, with great dedication and professionalism, successfully dealt with a heavy workload and with very tight deadlines.

Edward Ousselin, Editor in Chief