

**François Rosset**

University of Lausanne, Switzerland  
e-mail: [francois.rosset@unil.ch](mailto:francois.rosset@unil.ch)  
ORCID: 0000-0002-3654-4320

## HOW TO STUDY LITERARY CULTURE IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT?

### Abstract

It has long been known which books were read most widely throughout enlightened Europe and to which intellectual authorities particular social groups referred. After the long history of research about the 18th century, modernity has also inherited various research habits consisting mainly of constant verification of the recognised hierarchy of authors, publications, and actors of intellectual life.

However, the question remains: how to study this *literary culture* in given continent areas? Speaking of *literary culture*, we mean the prevailing patterns in the reception, evaluation, assimilation and imitation of literature, information and evaluation channels, local conditions that have a decisive influence on choices and opinions.

The author proposes to speak about this matter based on the recently completed work on literary culture in French-speaking Switzerland in the 18th century. Despite its specificity and evident provincialism, this example provides material for a general, theoretical and methodological reflection: is it worth researching production from the second (and further) shelf? If so, how should this material be approached? What does it tell us about the evaluation procedures? The article presents and analyses these issues.

**Keywords:** literary culture, Switzerland, Europe, canon, plurality.

Researchers usually approach the concept of literary culture from the sociological perspective, analysing mechanisms that solidify — deeply divided at a given moment and within a given context — procedures of internalisation and value judgements of literature. Results of studies in this manner provide information about practices related to literature functioning in a given environment. However, they also let us determine general conclusions about society's reception, circulation, and assessment of works.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> One example of such approach is the book written by the prominent researcher of French classicism Alain Viala, titled *La culture littéraire*, Paris, 2009.

In these contemplations, let us think about these issues from a slightly different perspective — in a sense, more empirical and documentary — while building upon the results of original studies on the conditions and realities of the production and reception of literature in a specific and unique environment of French-speaking Switzerland in the times of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>2</sup> Remarks arising from these studies are of a decidedly more methodological nature rather than theoretical.

First, however, below are several essential pieces of information about the properties of this environment at the time. In contrast to the cultural metropolis (Paris), Switzerland is presented in the 18th century as a typical periphery. However, this is not just a geographical periphery (because, in principle, all French provinces located away from Paris are such peripheries) but, speaking more generally, a cultural one: political units like cantons or cities that are autonomous yet connected to the confederation through various agreements (such as Geneva) have old republican traditions that are characterised by, among other things, an almost complete lack of court culture in which positions determine everything, honours, one's image, commands of capricious fashion, dominant patterns in behaviour, taste, and art, and the will of the ruler, which is not always predictable and transparent. Furthermore, economically and politically leading territories are strongly marked by Protestantism (of the Calvinistic or Lutheran variety), with its characteristic promotion of morality and virtue, discretion in expressing affections, modesty in external appearance, reliability in work and other forms of individual commitment, social discipline, and — what is particularly important — spreading alphabetism as far as possible. Since the late 16th century, the dominant faith has contributed to the arrival of many Huguenots who were persecuted in France. Typically, they were educated, brave, resilient and resourceful people, including many intellectuals of the first class. Another peculiar condition of life in these territories is the shape of the landscape, with larger or smaller mountains standing practically all around, limiting the horizon from all sides and thus

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. F. Rosset, *L'enclos des Lumières. Essai sur la culture littéraire en Suisse romande au XVIIIe siècle*, Geneva, 2017. Similar studies have been carried out in other cultural areas, e.g., the following publications: R. McLean, R. Young, K. Simpson (eds), *The Scottish Enlightenment and Literary Culture*, Lanham, 2016; B. Becker-Cantarino (ed.), *German Literature of the Eighteenth Century. The Enlightenment and Sensibility*, Rochester, 2005; P. Weber, *Literarische und politische Öffentlichkeit. Studien zur Berliner Aufklärung*, Berlin, 2006; F. Portinari, *Le regole del gioco: saggi sulla cultura letteraria del Settecento*, Cesario di Lecce, 1999; A. Mattone, P. Sanna, *Settecento sardo e cultura europea. Lumi, società, istituzioni nella crisi dell'Antico Regime*, Milano, 2007; Jerzy Snopek, *Prowincja oświecena. Kultura literacka Ziemi Krakowskiej w dobie Oświecenia: 1750–1815*, Warszawa, 1992.

favouring the sense of separateness within specified boundaries. Thus, for the French-speaking Swiss, Paris is — on the one hand — the capital of language and culture, which determines and imposes norms and models, a centre that fascinates and attracts. On the other hand, however, it is perceived as an emblem of otherness, towards which one feels detachment or even aversion, carefulness, sometimes to the point of fear, a paradoxical complex of moral superiority and cultural inferiority. All this is perfectly reflected in the letters written by Saint-Preux to Julie from Paris in the second volume of the famous *Julie, or the New Heloise* by J. J. Rousseau (1761), an unrivalled best-selling novel of its time in entire Europe.

Let us return now to the idea of *literary culture*, proposing — for these reflections — the simplest possible definition, explaining subsequently in the following monologue each of its parts. Literary culture is then: *a type of literary heritage, domestic or not (in the 18th century, it was typically European), internalised by a given society, which generates practices and imposes writing attitudes.*

### **What society are we discussing?**

Naturally, one can only talk about the part of society that uses the written language. In this context, individual societies of Europe are unequal, but we must add that literary culture does not concern only *littérateurs*. Indeed, it turns out that even very poorly alphabetised people have contact with certain forms of literature, like oral literature, or literature that is read aloud, as well as popular audiences of village fair theatres, or even servants listening in on home theatre plays in elite communities. Nonetheless, the fact remains that today, we cannot find traces of such practices.

We should immediately know that the social group that encounters literature is much broader than the classically listed group of authors and readers of printed works. Let us add here that when we talk about the written word and the practice of writing, we need the studies to include all types of writing, not just what we typically qualify as “literature” and add the adjective “great.” Most written documents of this period do not qualify as such “literature”. These are notes of all kinds, private or public chronicles, journals, ego-documents in the broadest sense, correspondence, reflections, fragments of books, inventories, minutes of meetings of various associations, speeches, sermons, prescriptions, meteorological diaries, logogriphs and other language games. Indeed, it turns out that each document of this type contains direct or indirect traces of the author’s or the supposed recipient’s contact with “literature”.

Such a society should be, however, differentiated. After all, we are not talking about society as an abstract concept but about a specific social group living in conditions that determine its nature. Geography is the first such condition. We do not think similarly, do not evoke the same images and figures, do not tell the same fairy tales if we live surrounded by natural barriers or permanently situated in front of a wide-open landscape, an almost infinite horizon, like in eastern Poland, or by the sea or ocean, on an island, or in the heart of a great continent, up or down, in a small, isolated community, or a big city. In each situation, the eye is accustomed to slightly different dimensions and forms, and the imagination is fed different images and associations, the sense of identity and discourse that expresses it are based on different parameters. The physical context of human life is also associated with a climate that sets the rhythm of our daily lives, imposes customs and shapes mentality, and directly impacts human activities, methods of survival or development, or the economy. Folk art and its elite varieties are born in such conditions. Naturally, we can refer to idealistic definitions of beauty that assume a universal dimension, but we actually see that art takes a definite form in countless varieties rooted in separate contexts. Literary culture is always between consciously or unconsciously adopted truths and universal patterns and their varieties. It is a space of dialogue between opposing and complementary dimensions, often difficult and turbulent, completely unconscious or even silent.

Another significant issue determining the properties of a given community is language. Polish researchers of the Enlightenment know this very well, standing in front of multilingual domestic documentation dominated by French, not quite rare remnants of Latin, and Polish, which had not yet been stabilised uniformly, not to mention Yiddish or regional subdialects, or non-Polish supradialects practised domestically in various communities in the Republic of Poland. We know that the choice of a given idiom in literature is not just a matter of language but depends primarily on various conditions of the statement. The choice of French is a status determinant for Polish aristocrats, while, e.g. for Doctor Samuel Tissot, it is, inversely, a way to popularise medical knowledge outside the chosen population of readers of scientific literature, still predominantly written in Latin.<sup>3</sup> Language is also the background of disputes of

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. forewords to numerous papers by Tissot where the question of purpose of a given text is always analysed against the background of the language used. E.g., *Avis au peuple sur sa santé* (1761; translated into Polish as *Rada dla społeczeństwa względem zdrowia jego*, 1785), as the first treatise of social medicine in modern history, had to be written in a language available to the supposed recipient. On the other hand, the medical and moral work *L'onanisme* (1760) is a French translation prepared by the author

a political and philosophical nature (in a sense given by Rousseau for these two fields taken together) in an era when the so-called “national consciousnesses” are being born, which is evidenced by, e.g. sharp critiques of Bodmer and Breitinger, ardent defenders of German culture, against succumbing to the dominant French models. Many documents, not only scientific, provide evidence that the attitude toward the practised language seems to be a ubiquitous topic when the writer asks themselves the most straightforward questions about the very fact of writing. Novels in letters are often a kind of practice dealing with these topics, when authors attempt to give each character an appropriate style, or even variety of language, according to the determined personality and origin of a given character. Of course, the more a given culture is marked with centralism and strong normativity, the more often this topic materialises as a manifestation of peripheral communities, frustrated by the lack of recognition of their separateness.

The specified collective of writers should be analysed compared to the political system where it lives. We treat writing under a strong monarchy with an effective control and censorship apparatus, with clearly defined aesthetic expectations of the ruler, differently than writing in a small republic where everyone knows the governing representatives of the people almost personally, or in small states (e.g., German or Italian) where the regulation of literature depends mainly on the will and whim of the currently ruling prince. In monarchies, the figure of the king is continuously presented in works of literature in this or other forms as a personification of a good-natured patriarchal ruler or as a ruthless tyrant, like a proto-figure generating potentially infinite varieties of a metaphorical nature. However, when reaching for a pen, citizens of a republic will practically always consider their position and responsibility for state order and the correct behaviour of other citizens. They will write about this directly or not, but it will always be the imposed starting point when writing.

The weight of faith was already mentioned with the example of Switzerland. Indeed, there were few areas in 18th-century Europe with unified faith. Even Catholicism differs significantly in its impact on the production and reception of “literature” if we observe its influence on the communal consciousness and the production and reception of literature in Spain, Austria, France, and Poland. It is just as challenging to use the single concept of Protestantism to merge English Puritanism and Pietism of the Moravian Church or Calvin’s confessional state and independent

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himself after the publication of the original titled *Tentamen de morbis ex manustupratione* (1758); in the foreword, Tissot acknowledges that he had encountered difficulties when translating words and sentences that could sound completely obscene in the vernacular language and have completely different effects in the reader than intended.

Lutheran communities. Nevertheless, inevitably, the cultural reality of the time remains strictly tied to the varieties of faith and cult, which is often forgotten when one treats the Enlightenment as one great field of battle between Catholic obscurantism and radical materialism. Studying grassroots phenomena of literary culture provides an entirely different image of reality: faith and religion remain ubiquitous as the basis of worldviews, either to defend its authority or question it, regain the right to a faith different from the dominant ones, comment on relationships between dogmas and the political order, conduct anthropological contemplations concerning the developing subjectivism. In essence, regardless of the attitudes of individual authors toward religion, it should be treated as one of the most critical determinants of a given society in general, particularly in practices recorded in it concerning literature.

The type of regular activity of writers and readers also contributes to defining the nature of a given community. Outside big cities, where acts of an economic nature are very varied, most inhabited areas in Europe live by the rhythm of agricultural activities. This rhythm is not identical in regions with vineyards, grain-producing areas, or places dominated by pastures and cattle raising. Everywhere, however, life encompasses periods of activities and seasons of rest, when one can think about entertainment, including writing or reading; festivals are organised where harvest ends, or cows return from summer mountain pastures; activity everywhere, including thinking and flights of imagination, maintains strict ties with the type of economic activity, regardless of whether one is a lord of his lands or an ordinary peasant. Cities also generate their imagery, professional and social types, specific narrative threads and mythology, reflecting the conditions and realities of the economic parameter of life. What do people do in a community? This question also must be answered in order to define the studied community.

Finally, one should pay particular attention to images and narratives concerning a given studied community. Extending the ancient poetry of the "nature of nations", statements about the nature of individual nations and societies flourished in the 18th century. Reports by people travelling throughout Europe and the world multiply profusely; descriptions in encyclopaedias, other compendia, and novels and theatre increasingly often base the characterisation of presented figures on social and national origins. Descriptions, definitions, clichés and stereotypes, and occasionally even elaborate legends are about each nation and culturally unified community. They are being made simultaneously on the outside and inside a given community. Looking from a distance, ideologically, axiologically and poetically coherent discourses about foreigners arise under the influence of true or supposedly true self-interest. At the same



time, the foreigner himself, looking for a coherent narrative to define his own identity, develops a series of narrative sequences (motives, images, characters), as well as full stories about himself, which ultimately make up his own specific mythology. Literary culture is, naturally, strongly marked by these materials with dual origins (external and internal) and dual nature, like an image and a mirror. Clearly, not every text refers to this national iconology and not every text enriches it, but every writer and reader is — willingly or not — touched and included by the discourses that shape this iconology and circulate it in a broader or narrower space. Moreover, the researcher finds the most legible parts in these discourses that enable them to determine their chosen subject.

### **What is *literary heritage*?**

The simplest answer to this quest could be as follows: literary heritage is that which is read, i.e., that which successfully passes the test of arriving from production to reception. It is, however, difficult to document in a truly plausible manner. There are indeed newspapers and magazines containing detailed reviews in every region of Enlightenment Europe. We can also determine the success of each publication by listing the number of subsequent issues within a specified period, which is already not entirely plausible because of the common practice of unofficial or even illegal issues, which is difficult to calculate. Catalogues of public and private libraries and various reading rooms also provide essential data on the existence of different publications. It is all, nonetheless, insufficient because we still cannot touch the entire issue of actual practices related to reading: Who reads it? What do they make of it? How do they rate what they read or heard? What traces of reading remain within the reader? We should search for answers to such a question in other sources, i.e., writing of a private nature that was typically never published. Admittedly, we know many published memoirs in each country; however, the most significant part of ego-documents remains in better or poorer preserved manuscripts. Moreover, it primarily concerns letters and diaries of regular (not prominent) people whose testimony is most interesting when the goal is to cast light on the literary consciousness, not of elites but the collective, in a complete form as possible.

Nonetheless, the most important thing is not to know what is read, but its utility and what remains of reading, what is recreated in this way or another, and the dominant trends. To be able to prove it, we need to list many sources which, in effect, tell us: What are the preferred genres (in this context, it is also interesting to study the repertoire of home theatres or look in the registries of public reading rooms, where information

about the number of lent books was preserved)? In what proportion are domestic and foreign works read and, if foreign, are they translated or not? Furthermore, what is a given society's approach toward the prevailing debates and disputes on literature (like the continuous, subsequent episodes of *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*)? On which general axiological principles do they base their choices, opinions, and judgements?

The last question is crucial because it illuminates the issue of literary culture from a slightly broader perspective, demonstrating that it is not limited to the aesthetic dimensions of literature but also refers to political, social, moral and worldview models and values.

Once more, we can invoke the example of Switzerland to provide these general observations with a more concrete outline. The studied material demonstrates a solid foundation of faith and belief that it is necessary to maintain moral principles in individuals and collectives. Consequently, each piece of literature that questions these principles or vividly presents immoral actions and violence is accepted cautiously. Aversion is also felt toward innovation that knocks down the established genre order, e.g., the *drame bourgeois*, and forms that primarily express the desire to shine in a company, like domestic and commemorative poetry. In general, all phenomena that place style over substance are viewed as inadequate or even harmful. These were, for instance, the convictions of Marie Huber, a Genevan author of numerous theological and moral works who published a book with a slightly different profile in 1753 titled *Réduction du Spectateur anglais à ce qu'il renferme de meilleur, de plus utile et de plus agréable. Avec nombre d'insertions dans le texte, des additions considérables et quantité de notes*. As the title suggests, it is the selection and translation of the most appropriate (according to M. Huber) parts of the famous *Spectator* by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. What is this appropriateness? According to the author of the Genevan publication, the English writer's body of work contains many valuable texts, but they need to be purged, leaving only that which is worthy of morally educating the reader:

Le bon [y est] enchâssé et comme noyé dans une infinité de bagatelles, de contes surannés, d'intrigues amoureuses, de détails insipides, de coteries imaginaires, et ce qu'il y a de pis, de peintures séduisantes, des expressions libres et tout à fait grossières, dignes du langage des halles. [...] Quelle conclusion tirer du mélange étonnant ou de la bigarrure qui règne dans cet ouvrage? Une conclusion toute naturelle, c'est qu'on rendrait un vrai service au public, et surtout à la jeunesse, de faire une *séparation*, ou pour mieux dire un *retranchement* de tout ce qui désas-sortit au but de l'auteur.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Addison, *Réduction du Spectateur anglais à ce qu'il renferme de meilleur, de plus utile et de plus agréable. Avec nombre d'insertions dans le texte, des additions*



Similar statements can be found in numerous different texts, like in forewords to (quite frequently produced) novels, in newspapers and magazines, correspondence, philosophical and moral treatises and sermons, as well as in the Protestant encyclopaedia titled *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon*, among other places, in articles devoted to literary topics.<sup>5</sup>

### **What is the *internalisation* of literary heritage?**

The example of Marie Huber's reduction of *Spectator* demonstrates rather clearly what types of operation can be done on foreign texts in order to adapt them to the new context of reception while expressing the conviction that they are better that way. Translating activity is very enlightening in this respect. We know that there was very significant freedom for the principles governing the work of translators in the 18th century. They were almost always executing not translations but adaptations for the targeted reader; occasionally, they even took advantage of their position to produce texts different from the original. In-depth analysis of translations is always a source of valuable information on the particularism of a given community. Even more persuasive in this context are selections of fragments or summaries printed in various periodicals.

However, the internalisation processes are not limited to the question of language. They also occur in the stratified social space, where we can observe how works, models, and value judgment patterns seep from the level of elites to the "grassroots" communities. As an example of these phenomena, we can present the memoirs of a simple person from the Swiss Jura who was born a peasant, received a very cursory education, and subsequently became: a pedlar, a rural teacher that could hardly

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*considérables et quantité de notes. Par l'auteur des XIV lettres*, Amsterdam, 1753, p. v and viii: "The good things that are there are, in a way, melded with uncountable bagatelles, stories from another time, love intrigues, uninteresting details, imagined coteries and — what's worse — deceiving images, dissolute and wholly crude expressions, worthy of a marketplace. [...] What conclusion do we take from the strange mixture this piece overflows with? A completely natural conclusion is that we would do a good deed for the public, and particularly for the youth, by *separating* or, strictly speaking, *removing* everything that does not fit with the author's own intentions".

<sup>5</sup> This encyclopedia — published in Yverdon in 1771–1777 under the direction of Fortunato Bartolomeo de Felice, a former Franciscan friar from Naples, converted to Protestantism in Bern — is an adaptation of the Parisian encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert, with many articles corrected, completed or written from scratch in order to correct statements that were not divided in the community of pastors and the vast majority of Swiss intellectuals. This undertaking is the most complete example of differences in worldview that differentiate the Enlightenment promoted in Switzerland from views spread by Parisian Philosophers.

write, a lackey at a wealthy house in Paris, a notary after returning to his village, and finally a trader. His memoirs have been preserved in the form of a manuscript prepared with the utmost diligence to make its collected pages look like an actual book, including the title page, meticulously imitating the patterns of printed volumes. The text opens with a statement to the reader written in verse, although its author, Jean-Henry Jaquerez, admits in it that he is no author and cannot write at all; he continuously has serious issues with orthography, punctuation and other conventions of the written language: “Avis au lecteur: Considère cher amy lecteur / Que je ne suis point un auteur / Que jay écrit pour mamuser, / Mes malheur mes prosperité. / Je ny ai point mis lhorthographe / Car je ne connaît point cet art / Chevront bisse accent virgule / Les points finale non je le jure / Ne sont point dans mon écriture.”<sup>6</sup> In his memoirs, Jaquerez often alludes to various literary characters (like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza), specific pieces (like Fables of Aesop and La Fontaine), or individual authors (like Pibrac or Boileau). However, most interesting are his statements of a meta-writing nature in which the author comments on his disorderly manner of writing compared to the established models of diary discourse.

Another example illuminates the relationship between the practices of private writing and the learned models recorded in literature. It concerns the correspondence of a particular lady from the region of Valais (i.e., the valley of Rhône), Julie Odet, who wrote touching love letters to her husband, who spent most of his time in French garrisons as a hired officer. Julie misses her husband but does not hide certain anxiety resulting from her awareness of her inferiority in the skill of writing letters and, primarily, the ability to behave in company. She imagines her husband surrounded by dangerously swanky women. She writes about her feelings and worries, invoking Mmes de Sévigné and de Beaumont, the highest authorities in the field of the epistolary form. “Mais! non jamais je n’exprimerois le sentiment comme je le sent et je né vois dans les sévigné et les beaumont que la peinture du sentiment qui est dans mon cœur ... tu abite un pay [la France] ou elle [les femmes] son douée d’un génie bien plus vif que celles de ce pays, aussi toute doivent savoir communiquer à leurs écrit ce feu dont leur esprit et plaint ... je suis bien

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Henry Jaquerez, *Les mémoires du petit henry qui contiennent tous ce qui s’est passé depuis sa naissance jusqu’a son second voÿage de paris et les différentes aventures qu’il luy sont arivez*, tomes 1 et 2, 1742, Archive of the former bishopric of Basel in Porrentruy, Ref. No. 87 J. I see no point in translating this fragment whose meaning (briefly mentioned above the quote) demonstrates its paradoxical nature only when combined with its form, which is easily noticeable to anyone who has come into contact with norms of written French.

sure qu'elle[!] ont plus d'avantage que moi et dumoins si elle n'aime pas mieu, elle savent mieu le dire."<sup>7</sup> This example demonstrates that when developing the concept of *Julie, or the New Heloise*, Rousseau wanted to approach his compatriots' actual language and other practices as closely as possible. Which is where the annotation comes from, appearing in the very beginning of the famous novel in letters: "il [le lecteur] doit se dire d'avance que ceux qui les [les lettres] écrivent ne sont pas des Français, des beaux-esprits, des académiciens, des philosophes ; mais des provinciaux, des étrangers, des solitaires."<sup>8</sup> A space opens between the true Julie Odet and the fictional Julie d'Etange (protagonist of *Julie, or the New Heloise*), where the determinants of literary culture can be most clearly seen, from the experience of reality to the projection into the world of imagination and language.

### **What *literary practices* do we have in mind?**

The answer to this question results directly from what has been demonstrated so far. Thus, we only must briefly list the most basic forms of writing that can exhibit the nature of literary culture in each area.

- Private writing crystallises in all forms of ego-documents: diaries and journals, memoirs, notebooks, summaries and compendia of books, travelogues, invoices and other texts of an economic nature, moral exercises in the form of confessions, loose reflections and dreams. Not just direct references to pieces of literature and authors are worthy of attention there — also the very method of writing that demonstrates rhetorical and linguistic proficiency, as well as the stock of repeated sentences and formulas.
- Official chronicles that can be kept in families or written by officials as a summary of public life in a town or state. They typically contain very interesting information about events of a cultural, popular (like

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<sup>7</sup> Julie Odet's letter of 9 November 1773, Canton Archive of Valais, Ref. No. Odet 2 P 363/16. Here, the greatest value of the document also lies in its form; the meaning can be translated as follows, without recreating its peculiar and substantial orthographic and syntactic flaws: "No, I would never express my feelings as I feel them and as demonstrated by the likes of Sévigné or Beaumont; I'm only able to give shape to the feelings that lie inside my heart. [...] you live in a country [France] where they [women] possess a much livelier genius than here, therefore it's likely that all of them can endow their letters with this flame that fills them [...] I am certain that they have more gifts that I do; at least, even if they do not love better, they can express it better."

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, Paris, 1964, p. 6: "The reader must say to himself in advance that those who wrote these letters are not French, not sophisticates, not academicians nor philosophers but rather provincials, foreigners, recluses." [not checked in English version].

street and village fair shows) or elitist (concerts, visits of important figures) nature which require a permit or special police supervision.

- Home theatre. It is potentially an immensely important phenomenon where people not only actualise works of diverse nature in a specific context: antique classics, but primarily modern ones, theatre that is contemporarily written and played in large capitals, domestic productions, occasionally purely commemorative ones, sometimes exhibiting true artistic ambitions. Performances facilitate an arbitrary treatment of this rich material; unfortunately, it is challenging to find good documents that would serve as evidence. Typically, we only know the titles of staged plays, which is still not without significance. We can draw some quite interesting conclusions from this, e.g., about the attitudes of amateur actors (admittedly, almost always belonging to the elites of a given society) to the repertoire, i.e., also to the canon imposed by the capital.
- Magazines. In times of a spectacular multiplication and expansion of newspapers and magazines, there is practically no region in Europe where numerous, often ephemeral, yet occasionally persistent publications of this type were created. They printed texts by people of varied social and economic statuses; however, they usually did not sign their contributions, whether opinion-forming articles, reviews, translations, summaries, local news, poetry, stories, puzzles. The materials we have emit a kind of a voice of a well-harmonised choir that ultimately represents the environment in which and for which it performs. Magazines are also engaging for the functioning of literature in the economic space. They are risky enterprises where people invest either completely *pro bono publico* or hope to reap profits. Their example can teach us much about the status of literature in the context of the burgeoning modern capitalism and the effects of its dependence on the principles of the market.
- Printing activity. Often related to the publication and popularisation of magazines, the activity of printers was impressive in most European regions. Naturally, regions and countries are not equal because supervision over this profession tends to be harsh in strongly centralised states. At the same time, republics, free cities and small principalities offer printer-publishers privileged terms and their activity, even though the bulk of production is intended for other countries, does not remain without influence on the local intellectual and literary life.
- Minutes of association meetings. The Enlightenment is also the time of enormous growth of diverse social and civil organisations throughout the continent, including economic associations (popularising

modern management methods and using them usually as a narrative to describe political and philosophical issues), charity organisations (often not only interventionist but also expressing educational ambitions in the spirit of morality) and scientific societies (bringing news, discoveries, inventions, debates and controversies for the provinces). They also include literary associations, where “literature” is treated in the most general sense, and *belles-lettres* typically does not hold the central spot in this extensive field. Some of these organisations functioned strictly, under the authority of adopted rules, each meeting subject to a detailed summary. These documents are a true blessing for a researcher who can thus easily travel in time, almost participating in discussions that are nearly 300 years old, in which literature is never the only topic of interest, but co-constitutes the background of each speech and each debate.

- Translations. We have already discussed the importance of translations. We should only add that various people, usually anonymous, did translations. A significant role in this activity was played by women, who often transitioned from such a service to foreign texts to independent writing in a whole light. There are also essential conclusions to be drawn from the analysis of the selection of translated texts, knowing that the translator — even if hiding behind anonymity — always has the ambition to publish their work in print, while the printer-publisher or director of a periodical wants to earn money. Thus, both parties count on success while considering the supposed expectations of reader-customers; therefore, their choices can be seen as a reliable indicator of tastes prevailing in their community.
- *Belles-lettres*. Even if we ended up relativising the position of *belles-lettres* in comparison to the entire writing field, the fullest expression of the prevailing literary culture could be naturally found in literary pieces, short stories, novels, theatrical plays, and poetry. However, we must forget textbook messages about the canon or set hierarchies and pay equal attention to each text, even the naivest. We know that the dominant tone of the period in each context is not reflected the best in masterpieces but second-class and lower products. These pieces often present a reliable picture of contemporary times in this same context. They can occasionally conduct an unequal but honest dialogue with an exceptional piece. The author’s genius infuses the typical components of the narrative and emotions with a universal dimension. That is what happened to *Julie, or the New Heloise*, in contrast to dozens of local novels written at the time in the region where the village of Clarens near Lake Léman became, under the authority of Rousseau, the capital of sentimental and philosophical

expectations of Europe. Nonetheless, the case of this work is not isolated. Indeed, in every country, in each culturally cohesive community, we can find similar examples that allow us to understand what produced the masterpiece. Examples that, like the masterpiece, carry signs of cultural conditions and the expression of the most general human ups and downs, tensions, misfortunes, and hopes.

### ***What writing attitudes?***

Reading and writing are shaped according to the specific conditions of each context and the writing attitude, i.e., the way the author assumes their role in society and internalises the image assigned to the one assuming this role. Being a writer in a country where institutions such as academies establish hierarchy and distribute awards and distinctions, and in a country where the ruler distributes gratuities according to his whims or political calculations or severely punishes the unruly and where the social structure does not provide any procedures for achieving fame, are different things. In such countries, the writer's position can oscillate between the light and the underworld, and the writer, even if respected, is no more respected than a judge, manager, or trader. Nevertheless, we can find traces of writers' self-reflections everywhere, wondering what models they copy, what are their goals in writing, and generally, who they are when they write. It is communicated in forewords and other paratexts, but also to an equal extent in texts produced by amateurs, often not intended for publication. Therefore, the writer's self-representation is ubiquitous, whether it is a discourse requirement or genre, whether it appears spontaneously under the pen, perhaps even not consciously.

Also, strategies of taking on the writer's role can be conscious, but the range of attitudes is quite broad, from parading publicly as an author whose voice and opinions count in society, e.g., Voltaire, to hiding behind the veil of anonymity. There are servile authors under the protection of the powerful, and others who bravely fight for their ideas, competitors in the rivalry for honours and awards, dilettantes who barely admit that they write. Different models dominate in various communities, but occasional or amateur writers who do not pretend to have the status of an author are the most numerous everywhere. However, they always ask themselves questions about their position in writing, and they provide the clearest and the most confident demonstration of the shape taken by literary culture in each context.



### **Foundations of the methodology**

It is difficult to determine a strict methodological protocol to investigate such a deep topic. The work must take on — as mentioned before — an empirical nature, even more so because we are indeed aware of the fact that we operate based on materials that have been preserved, not knowing which documents, of what nature, and in what numbers have been destroyed or not yet revealed. Therefore, let this set of recommended actions and attitudes serve as a summary of these contemplations:

- Determine the scope and area of the studied literary culture.
- Test parameters and definitions of this area: what constitutes its separateness and nature?
- Collect as many manuscripts (ego-documents) and printed works (paratexts, magazines) as possible.
- Ignore all set genres, aesthetics, and institutional hierarchies.
- Study educational programmes, textbooks, sets of common knowledge.
- Juxtapose data on literature reception and production: the relationship between what is read and what is written.
- Identify dominant threads in the selection of the discussed literature and its assessment and pursue their crystallisation in *loci communes*.
- Juxtapose these literary threads with broader circumstances (geography, political system, faith, education status, economy, inside-outside interaction), try to understand how the attitude toward literature fits in the cultural consciousness in the broader meaning, also becoming a determinant of identity.

### **Final remarks and questions**

The result of this type of study is a more complete, more diverse and comprehensive picture of literature as an area of social practices. They provide a significantly expanded knowledge about actors (and predominantly female actors) of these practices. They also illuminate new mechanisms of creation, circulation, and recording of language elements where social perceptions find a permanent expression in a society in the general sense, especially when connected to the construction and consolidation of awareness of communal identity.

However, a question remains: can such studies concern only relatively small, more easily described societies, or are they possible or even relevant for a larger and more complex subject, like a big and culturally diverse country or even the entire European continent? It is difficult

to answer this question unequivocally, but in the second case, we can postulate that we should collect and juxtapose the results of individual inquiries with similar assumptions. That would undoubtedly reinforce the increasingly common belief that speaking about the Enlightenment in Europe in the plural would be better. Interestingly, in dominant European languages, we use the following words in the singular to denote the 18<sup>th</sup> century from the ideational perspective: *Enlightenment*, *Aufklärung*, *Iluminismo*, *Ilustración*. Only the French term *Les Lumières* appears in the plural, which seems somewhat paradoxical, considering the tradition of studies on *Les Lumières* in France, where the trend to treat the Enlightenment as a cohesive and homogeneous ideational programme spread from Paris by the community of Philosophers has been the dominant one for at least half a century.

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