

LN101 Languages and Cultures Across Boundaries

Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*: Seminar 1

Primary Reading:

- Introduction to the Penguin Classics translation by Christopher Betts
 - Letters 1-45, pp. 41-100.
1. Using a range of Internet search tools, find out some key facts about Montesquieu and the influence of his thought in modern Europe. Write a paragraph summarising your findings. Focus in particular on the political philosophy outlined in *The Spirit of Laws* (1748). Hint: don't just use Wikipedia or you will have the same information as everyone else. Try to cast your net a little wider.
 2. Find out about the meaning of 'Enlightenment' in Europe, and the importance of the following:
 - i. Freethinking
 - ii. Voltaire
 - iii. The first French Encyclopedia
 - iv. Anti-clericalism
 3. Find brief definitions and explanations of the following terms, and make a note of them:
 - i. Harem
 - ii. Eunuch
 - iii. Seraglio
 - iv. Salon
 4. Close reading:

Read and annotate letters 11-14 (the Troglodytes); 17 (moral relativism); 45 (the alchemist).

It may help you to keep in mind the following points when making notes:

- Who is speaking or writing to whom?
- Use of direct discourse or reported speech
- Other characters that appear in the letter
- Use of irony/satire
- Use of vocabulary
- Use of allegory
- What is particularly 'modern' about the subject under discussion (e.g. universal truths?)
- The theme of progressive enlightenment