

IMAGINING FRANCE: Imagining the Outsider's View in Eighteenth-Century France

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Handout for Seminar 2: *L'INGÉNU* (Voltaire)

Seminar overview

- Warm up: Cultural otherness + the prefaces – class discussion (questions provided last week)
- Mini lecture: Voltaire and the *conte philosophique*; *L'Ingénu* between *conte* and sentimental novel
- Class discussion: see overleaf.

Some other texts by Voltaire

'Contes philosophiques': *Zadig ou la destinée* (1747), *Micromégas* (1752), *Candide* (1759)

Tragedies: *Oedipe* (1718); *Zaïre* (1732); *Sémiramis* (1748)

Philosophical writings: *Lettres philosophiques, ou lettres Anglaises* (1734); *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764)

General resources for literary study:

The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory (Penguin, 4th ed. 1998)

Brewer's Concise Dictionary of Phrase & Fable, ed. by Betty Kirkpatrick (Cassell, 1993 [or more recent edition])

Dictionnaires d'autrefois (website): <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17>

Arthur Pollard, *Satire*, Critical Idiom series (Methuen, 1970)

D. C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, Critical Idiom series (Methuen, 1982)

Some extra background reading:

Colin Jones, *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon* (Penguin, 2003)

Roger Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom* (Bloomsbury, 2005)

CLASS DISCUSSION TOPICS:

(1) L'Ingénu as a cultural outsider

As a Huron, is he given cultural specificity?

What qualities are ascribed to l'Ingénu?

Why and how does l'Ingénu's position as a cultural outsider make him a good observer and judge of French culture?

(2) What other nations/cultures are evoked over the course of the text? (these may be distant chronologically or geographically)

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How are these comparative perspectives used for the purposes of the critique of French attitudes and institutions?

(3) What are the different elements of French culture that are criticised / satirised in this *conte*?

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(4) Using the definitions of 'irony' and 'pathos' (on page 3 opposite), find examples of how these are used in the text to satirise the elements noted in (3) above. Choose one example to present to the class (you might want to analyse Voltaire's use of tone, language, style).

Are there any elements of French culture that are criticised in more than one register or mode in different parts of the text?

Some definitions from the *New OED* (unless indicated otherwise):

"Irony":

- A figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used; usually taking the form of sarcasm or ridicule in which laudatory expressions are used to imply condemnation or contempt [...]
- Dramatic/tragic irony: a literary technique, originally used in Greek tragedy, by which the full significance of a character's words or actions are clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character
- -- ORIGIN: early 16th century (also denoting Socratic irony): via Latin from Greek *eirōneia* 'simulated ignorance', from *eirōn* 'dissembler'

See the *Penguin dictionary of Literary Terms* for fuller account.

"Pathos":

- a quality that evokes pity or sadness
- -- ORIGIN: mid 17th cent.: from Greek *pathos* 'suffering' and *penthos* 'grief'

Howells (in 'The *Péruvienne* and Pathos', p.453):

- 'The insistent representation of emotional suffering, especially in an innocent subject, and the effect on the reader'

"Satire":

- the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose or criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues
- [noun] play, novel, film, or other work which uses satire; a genre of literature characterized by the use of satire
- -- ORIGIN: early 16th cent.: from French, or from Latin *satira*, later form of *satura* 'poetic medley'

Extract from *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*:

- 'The satirist is [...] a self-appointed guardian of standards, ideals and truth; of moral and aesthetic values. He [...] takes it upon himself to correct, censure and ridicule the follies and vices of society, and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm. Thus satire is a kind of protest, a sublimation and refinement of anger and indignation. As Ian Jack has put it very adroitly: 'Satire is born of the instinct to protest; it is protest become art.'

"Naïve":

- [adjective] (of a person or action) showing a lack of experience, wisdom, or judgement;
- (of a person) natural and unaffected (unsophisticated); innocent
- -- ORIGIN: mid 17th century: from French *naïve*, feminine of *naïf*, from Latin *nativus* 'native, natural'

