

SOCIETY AND THE SELF IN EARLY MODERN FRANCE (FR-16)

Spring 2012 – prof. Stefanovska

Office hours : Royce 222 c, Th 1.30-3.30 or by appointment

The tension between the needs of the individual and those of the collective inhere in society. This course examines this fundamental conflict as it was lived and represented in Early Modern French culture, while also bringing to light how different from (or similar to) us were early modern individuals and their understanding of themselves. It focuses on three interrelated domains: 1) the religious understanding of the self or inwardness in relation to the sacred; 2) the political construction of society and the self (absolutism, hierarchy, nobility's power, emerging notion of the nation, etc.); 3. social relations (including concepts of court civility and sociability, the private versus public sphere, family and gender conflicts, etc.). We will focus on the role of religion, politics and sociability in constructing the self and understanding its relation with society in early modern France. We will address these broad historical issues through close textual analysis, emphasizing not only to what is said but how it is said. For example, how are concepts such as civility, or reason, constructed in a text, how do stylistic features such as metaphor and irony, the choice of a genre (letters, fragments, plays, novels) or narrative strategies carry on political criticism that could not be formulated explicitly due to censorship. Or again, how do plot and characters of a Molière's comedy show underlying representations of gender or of sociability? The material will consist of primary historical and literary documents, occasionally paired with contemporary texts by cultural historians, and with images or film excerpts which illustrate the aspects discussed.

Course requirements:

- 2 short impromptu quizzes to check that the material has been read and understood. (20%).
- 1 short essay on an assigned topic of 4-5 pages (20%).
- class presence and participation (including regular postings on the CCLE class forum) 20%. There will be 5 postings required, each due by Sunday 5 p.m. of the week assigned, and the 3 best will be counted.
- a comprehensive final exam (40%).

Please, keep in mind: no late papers or postings will be accepted, and no passing grade will be earned with more than 3 absences, except for documented emergencies. Course materials are: 1. to be bought at the ASUCLA bookstore (Moliere and Montesquieu, also available on line); 2. downloaded at your CCLE site; or, 3. accessible on the web and indicated in your syllabus. You need to print and bring to class the files on the CCLE.

WEEKLY SYLLABUS AND READINGS:

I. THE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIETY, KNOWLEDGE AND THE SELF:

What were the dominant moral and religious values of Catholicism (Counter-Reformation), and Jansenism, as represented in Descartes' or Pascal's views on the self. What was the relationship between science and faith, between self and God, between faith and reason ? How did Molière use the stage to criticize religious hypocrisy?

Week 1: reason, divinity and the self

1- Introduction. Clip from film *Queen Margot* (Patrice Chéreau).

2 - Descartes: *The Discourse on Method* (excerpts).

1st Forum discussion assigned (due Sunday 5 p.m.)

Week 2: baroque sensibilities; Jansenism.

1- Discussion of the film *Queen Margot* (watch it on furnace); Pascal, *Thoughts* (excerpts).

2- Molière: *Tartuffe* (I-IV).

II. THE POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL :

Political absolutism, the court society and the aristocratic ethos, represented and developed through French classicism. Reason and the Reason of State. The Enlightenment critique of political, religious and cultural institutions. The emerging notions of a public sphere in Voltaire and Diderot, and of the man and the citizen in Rousseau.

Week 3: Absolutism and the aristocratic ethos

1- Molière: *Tartuffe* (V);

1 - Louis XIV: *Memoirs for the Instruction of the Dauphin* (find it on the web as a google book by W. Beik, and read pp. 206-211)

2- Corneille, *The Cid* (acts I-II)

2 - Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, transl. by Edmund Jephcott (excerpt)

2d CCLE Assignment

Week 4: Enlightenment and criticism

1 - Voltaire *Philosophical Letters* (Letters: on the English commerce, and on inoculation)

2 - Diderot: *Encyclopedia* (articles: Encyclopedia, Men of Letters, Intolerance, Nobility. [<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/>])

Week 5: A new man and citizen

1 - Rousseau: *Emile* (excerpts)

2 - Rousseau: *The Social Contract* (**MIDTERM ESSAY DUE**)

III. CULTURE AS A SITE OF CONFLICT AND HARMONY:

The French model of noble sociability and its critique. Gender issues, women's status, family structure and conflicts. The fiction of the "Other" and "Oriental despotism" as a tool of political and cultural criticism. Comedy and satire.

Week 6 : the Court society

- 1 - Molière: *The Misanthrope (I-III)*
- 2 – Molière *The Misanthrope (IV-V)*
- 2. - La Bruyère: *Characters* (excerpts)

3d CCLE Assignment

Week 7 : Enlightenment politics and society - comparative satire

- 1 - Montesquieu: *The Persian Letters* (letters 1- 48)
[<http://rbsche.people.wm.edu/teaching/plp/>]
- 2 - (letters 49 – 100)

Week 8: women's status and issues

- 1 - Montesquieu: *The Persian Letters* (letters 101 - 135)
- 2 - ... (letters 135 to 161)

4th CCLE Assignment

IV. ENCOUNTERS WITH THE *OTHER*:

How did travel literature about other parts of the world shape French political, social and cultural self-understanding? How did a new understanding of nature and the "natural man" modify the views of "civilization" and of the individual's role within it? How was the imagined or encountered figure of "the Other" used in literature? And finally: how is early modern France made to play the same role in our culture?

Week 9 : Travels and conflict

- 1 - Montaigne: Of Cannibals (excerpt from *Essays*).
- 2 – Casanova's travels (excerpts from his *Memoirs*).
- 2 - Discussion of film: *Ridicule* (Patrice Leconte) to be watched on furnace.

Week 10: Travels in time

1 - Early modern France in Hollywood: *Marie-Antoinette* (Sophia Coppola) to be watched on furnace.

- 2 - Review (prepare 5 short and 3 long questions)

5th CCLE Assignment.