



The French spirit of freedom, justice and democracy: from Voltaire to Charlie Hebdo



日本語版



フランス語版

Mico Poonosamy, Center for Language Education

The Friends of Voltaire⁽¹⁾ is the anecdotal biography of the 18th-century French writer Voltaire, written by English author Beatrice Hall in 1907. In the book, Hall's appreciation of Voltaire's quintessential conception of freedom of speech, and democratic ideals are expressed in the much-acclaimed sentence: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" (p. 198-199). A virtue that the Western democracies of the post-enlightenment era may have acquired from Voltaire is that censorship, in any way, shape or form, is as tyrannical as it is objectionable.

Thoughts, words, and ideas that are potentially perceived as absurd, useless, provocative, and offensive in a particular space and time context, need not to be muzzled, but understood and debated through the mighty and transparent processes of democracy. Voltaire passed away in 1778, but his ideals of freedom, freedom of speech, reason, as well as his insolent resistance to the divine law of kingship doctrine through the separation of church and state, paved the way for the Revolution of 1789. Voltaire's satirical novel *Candide, ou l'Optimisme*⁽²⁾ (in English Candide: or, Optimism) published in 1759, denounces and challenges the sacredness associated with predeterminism and fate - dogmas used by the French monarchy and nobility since the 16th century to justify their life of privilege and opulence, and to legitimise the unalterably miserable fate of the poor, uneducated, oppressed and starving peasants. In that respect, justice, truth, virtue and power were to remain under the monopoly of religion and monarchy. In his book *L'esprit Des Lois*⁽³⁾ (in English The Spirit of the Laws) published in 1748, French Barron Charles Montesquieu, critically reflecting on his honoured social condition, states that "there is no greater tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of the law and in the name of justice" (p. 46). Justice and truth cannot be self-righteously institutionalised, posits Montesquieu, otherwise they become the disguised instruments of tyranny.

In 1830, French writer Henri Beyle, better known as Stendhal, wrote *Le Rouge et le Noir*⁽⁴⁾ (in English, The Red and the Black). He tells the story of a provincial young man rising the social ladder through talent and ruse. Ambition in the 19th century France was a moral trait that was just beginning to be recognised. The book also grasps the societal unrest, and burgeoning yearning for societal change through the popular monarchy, whereby the ruler is the king or queen of the people instead of the country. The early 1800s were indeed a time when the philosophical and political impetus for socialism were redefining the role and status of the monarch. Powerful revolutionary waves in Europe in 1830 gave rise to the popular monarchy in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland. But as of today, only Belgium is a popular monarchy: Philippe is King of the Belgians, and not the King of Belgium.

More recently, in 1949, French writer, feminist and activist Simone de Beauvoir, wrote *Le Deuxième Sexe*⁽⁵⁾ (in English The Second Sex), in which she validates the woman's rights for sexual emancipation. She challenges her role as a merely beautiful decorative ornament to man's grandeur while being his inferior, financially, socially, morally and intellectually. Allegedly, because of explicit passages on lustful lesbian sex, the Vatican condemned *Le Deuxième Sexe* and added the book in its list of prohibited books (known as Index Librorum Prohibitorum) until the prohibition policy itself was abolished in 1966.

Referring to books in a generic and inclusive term, mention must be made to *Charlie Hebdo*, the contemporary French satirical magazine featuring drawings, and comical and offensive jokes. Provocative, and even profane, caricatures of mainly political and religious figures, earned the magazine hundreds of

lawsuits since it was established in 1992. Influential French political figures publicly criticised Charlie Hebdo's inflammatory editorial lines. But, faithful to the Voltairean spirit, they supported the magazine's right to freedom of speech. But not everyone embraced this right to freedom; Charlie Hebdo has been the target of three terrorist attacks in 2011, 2015, and 2020. 12 people were killed in the second attack in 2015, including publishing director Stéphane Jean-Abel Michel Charbonnier (known as Charb). The world maybe still remembers the slogan "Je suis Charlie" (French for 'I am Charlie') by French art director Joachim Roncin, in support of freedom of speech and resistance to armed threats, and oppression.

The spirit of the 1789 revolution has given meaning and pride to France's exceptionally rich literary heritage over the centuries. It is still very much felt, heard and seen in the cultural, political and intellectual fabric of the French society. For instance, in 2018, harsh economic inequality and rising prices in France triggered *la Révolution des Gilets Jaunes* (In English the Yellow Vests Revolution); weekly protests - sometimes peaceful, sometimes not - shook again a nation in distress. Hundreds of thousands of people would go on the streets to have their voices heard in the face of injustice and oppression. The Revolution is not dead; long live the Revolution!

References

- (1) Hall, E.B. (1906). *Friends of Voltaire*. London: John Murray
- (2) Voltaire. (1959). *Candide, ou l'optimisme*, R. Pomeau éd., Paris: Magnard
- (3) Montesquieu. (2008). *De l'Esprit des lois*. Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot freres, fils et Cie
- (4) Stendhal. (1997). *Le Rouge et le Noir*. Paris: Gallimar
- (5) De Beauvoir, S. L. B. (1949). *Le deuxième sexe*. Paris: Gallimard



東金キャンパス展示「本の福袋」

「本の福袋」の中には、学生アドバイザーと図書館スタッフが選んだ本2冊を詰め合わせました。福袋なので中身は見えません。どんな本が入っているかは借りてからの楽しみ！普段自分では選ばない作家、ジャンルの本と出えるかも。テーマを書いたPOPを参考に選んでください。



紀尾井町
キャンパス

学生選書 '24

「図書室に入れてほしい本/DVD」
11月20日まで投票受付中！

今年の選書委員はJIU/JU両大学から4名が担いました。授業の合間を縫ってまずは候補となる本/DVDを選書し、投票用紙である一覧表を作成、そして完成した投票用紙の掲示を、協力して行いました。

両大学の皆さん、選書委員の活動に添えて、自分が読みたい・見たいと思う本/DVDの欄に、ぜひシールを貼って投票してください。一人何冊という制限はありませんので、興味を惹かれたもの全てに投票してOKです！

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- ◆2号棟入口
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皆さんの声を図書館サービスの充実・向上に活かします。ご意見・ご要望をお寄せください。

回答期間：2024年11月1日
～12月23日

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◆開館カレンダー◆

- 平日 9:00-20:00
- 土曜日 9:00-17:00
- 休館

ただし、紀尾井町キャンパス図書室は、12/24は9:00～17:00開室します。



東金図書館閉館後はネットラウンジをご利用ください(21:00まで開放)。
※休館・開館時間は変更することがあります。詳細は、ホームページ、
X(旧twitter)、ご確認ください。

11月

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12月

日	月	火	水	木	金	土
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