

INTRODUCTION: ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS IN THE EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT

In February 1755 the following obituary, composed by Lord Chesterfield, was published in the *London Evening-Post*:

Died at Paris, M. de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu ... esteemed through all the Nations of Europe, where his Work ... had extended itself, by numerous Editions, and Translations into several Languages, but mostly by his own Country, which he endeavoured, successfully, to free from many Prejudices and Errors, both Civil and Ecclesiastical ... he is, and ought to be revered by us, whose Constitution he thought the best that Reason could have, and that Human Passions could admit of.¹

Chesterfield here articulates what is now a widely held view among political and intellectual historians. From the eighteenth century to the present day, commentators on both sides of the Channel have recognized the special status enjoyed by England and the English in Montesquieu's thought and writing.² Yet whilst the influence of the English constitutional model on Montesquieu's political philosophy is well attested, there has to date been no general study that considers the author's relations with England in the context of his work as a whole.

Montesquieu famously extolled the benefits of England's balanced constitution in his best-known work, *L'Esprit des lois* (1748). Since its publication, this text has been taken as providing conclusive proof of the author's admiration for English culture and institutions. Consequently, scholars investigating the connection between Montesquieu and England have rarely looked further than *L'Esprit des lois* when seeking evidence to substantiate their claims. A case in point is Joseph Dedieu, whose study of Montesquieu's use of English sources in *L'Esprit des lois* is still, over a century after its publication, considered the authoritative work on the subject.³ In his enumeration of Montesquieu's source-texts, Dedieu presents the author as a more or less passive receptor of English ideas. This view also dominates in J. B. Sturges's anecdotal account of Montesquieu's experiences as a traveller in England in 1729–31.⁴ More recently, however, Robert Shackleton's well-known biography of Montesquieu has revealed that the author was engaged in a dynamic dialogue with English intellectuals and states-

men for much of his life; thus hinting at a relationship that goes far beyond the pages of *L'Esprit des lois*.⁵

The present study will explore the broader dimensions of this relationship by evaluating the impact of the ideas and ideals of the English Enlightenment on Montesquieu's whole body of work. This will include the *Lettres persanes* (1721), the *Considérations sur les ... Romains* (1734), *L'Esprit des lois* (1748) and the *Essai sur le goût* (c. 1753–5), along with the private travel journals written by the author during his visit to England (1729–31). These works bear witness to the significant progress of Enlightenment thought in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This has recently been highlighted by Jonathan Israel, whose history of Enlightenment ideas foregrounds what he terms the 'early Enlightenment' (1680–1750) as a crucial period of change. Israel's chronological framework thus focuses attention on Montesquieu's lifetime (1689–1755) as 'the most decisively formative period of the Enlightenment'.⁶ This is just one of the recent developments in the intellectual history of the Enlightenment that can shed new light on Montesquieu's relations with England, and which will be explored in more detail in this introduction. The methodology employed in this study, namely, the exploration of each of Montesquieu's major works in turn within a chronological framework, is designed to allow the texts' links with an evolving historical context to emerge. One aspect of this context is of particular importance to this study: the evolution of Anglo–French relations during Montesquieu's lifetime, which corresponds to the eventful years between the Glorious Revolution and the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. Significantly, this study takes not only a contextual but also a comparative approach. As well as addressing Montesquieu's deployment of English sources and ideas, the reception of Montesquieu's work in England is also explored here in detail for the first time.

This contextual and comparative approach is rooted in recent developments in the intellectual history of the Enlightenment. In the last few years the work of Jonathan Israel and John Robertson, among others, has drawn attention to the complex dynamics in the transmission and reception of ideas across national borders in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁷ This tendency is not new, owing much to Paul Hazard's classic analysis of Europe's period of intellectual 'crisis' (1680–1715).⁸ Nevertheless, it marks an important departure from previous studies by Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton and Keith Michael Baker, which concentrate on intellectual and cultural developments in France after 1750 and tend to define the Enlightenment as the ideological prelude to the French Revolution.⁹ While influential and fruitful in many respects, this interpretation reduces Montesquieu to a thinker with only a posthumous involvement in the elaboration of enlightened ideas. While many important ideas did of course take shape in the second half of the eighteenth century, the

early Enlightenment is now increasingly recognized as a time of ‘philosophical revolution.’¹⁰ This is an invitation to re-examine Montesquieu’s status as an active participant in the debates and controversies which acted as a crucible for Enlightenment thought up to the 1750s.

Reacting against another recent strain of scholarship that has sought to examine the separate preoccupations of the plural ‘enlightenments’ taking place in different nations, both Israel and Robertson are keen to stress that these debates and controversies transcended national borders.¹¹ In a European context at least, Enlightenment thinkers could claim commonality with the concerns of fellow intellectuals in other nations, and frequently saw themselves as communicating with a broad readership within the international Republic of Letters. Even Roy Porter, whose work epitomizes the study of Enlightenment thought in different national contexts, acknowledges the trans-national movement of people and texts as being of fundamental importance to the history of ideas in this period.¹² To examine Montesquieu’s relationship with the ideas and ideals of the English Enlightenment is therefore to study one aspect of the multi-dimensional networks of influence, diffusion, reception, assimilation and appropriation of ideas that characterized the European Enlightenment.

Current interpretations of the Enlightenment have evolved in part in response to the critique of Enlightenment thought initiated by Horkheimer and Adorno in the mid-twentieth century and continued by postmodernist commentators.¹³ Faced with accusations that Enlightenment secular rationalism had ultimately become a source of domination and oppression, intellectual historians of the period have sought to reassess and rehabilitate the movement. Where Montesquieu is concerned, those aspects of his work perceived as more obviously radical and modern – such as his condemnation of slavery and theorization of cultural diversity – have been brought to the fore.¹⁴ This is all to the good providing that, as Daniel Brewer has argued, the rest of Montesquieu’s thought is not branded ‘archaic’ and ‘conservative’ as a result.¹⁵ Overall, the reaction to postmodernism has had the positive effect of reconfiguring the Enlightenment as a vibrant, powerful, trans-national force for change.¹⁶ Traditional understandings of Enlightenment thought have also been significantly broadened. Where scholars such as Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay had depicted a largely franco-centric phenomenon embodied in the works of a small group of *philosophes*,¹⁷ the Enlightenment is now understood as extending beyond the borders of particular nations and is associated with a wide range of intellectual interests, pursued in differing cultural contexts, involving diverse social groups and diffused through a variety of media.¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, who was one of the first thinkers to challenge Horkheimer and Adorno’s indictment of the Enlightenment, has been an influential proponent of this view.

Rewriting the history of the Enlightenment in terms of the evolution of the ‘public sphere’, Habermas created a compelling narrative. He describes how in

Europe from the late seventeenth century onwards there emerged an arena of rational, critical debate on all matters relating to society and the state. Existing in concrete terms in the shape of the coffee-houses, clubs and societies that grew up as the royal courts' domination of social intercourse began to decline, the free, rational debate that characterized the public sphere was reflected in the pages of the press, pamphlets and other printed media as well as in the works of well-known literary figures. The wide circulation of such publications increased awareness of intellectual and political developments among the general population.¹⁹ The great revolution of the eighteenth century was the transformation, as William Outhwaite puts it, of the 'reading public' into a 'political public'.²⁰ Having cut their teeth on the discussion of literature and other cultural products, private citizens began collectively to demand that state decisions be taken according to rational, transparent criteria. This would lead to the demise of arbitrary, absolutist governments in Europe.²¹ There has been widespread debate as to the validity and scope of Habermas's theories, but it is undeniable that his narrative of the transformation of the public sphere has definitively changed the way in which scholars discuss the circulation of texts and ideas within the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters.²²

Where relations between Montesquieu and England are concerned, Habermas's insights can provide interesting starting points for enquiry. Firstly, as Margaret Jacob has stressed, the public sphere must be seen as a trans-national phenomenon which developed throughout Europe and encouraged communication between nations.²³ Habermas significantly contrasts the speed and scope of its evolution in England and France. Studying what he terms 'the model case of British development' Habermas maintains that the public sphere first emerged in England following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, whereas its mechanisms were not functioning in France before 1750.²⁴ Although certain aspects of this argument are now being questioned, there is broad agreement that the political and cultural structures supporting the public sphere first emerged in England in the late 1600s and on the continent during the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁵ As a result, during this period free, rational, critical debate was seen throughout Europe as an English prerogative. In the context of Montesquieu's work, the emphasis placed on the original 'Englishness' of the public sphere is highly suggestive. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the civil and clerical authorities of absolutist France imposed strict regulations in order to stifle public debate on controversial political, social and religious issues. In contrast, following the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 a comparative lack of censorship allowed English writers and journalists to criticize state policy more openly. The books and periodicals produced in England at this time were intended not only to influence opinion but to involve the reading public in debates on subjects such as civil liberties, the separation of powers, patriotism

and ministerial corruption. As England was the only nation in Europe where these questions were being discussed openly on a daily basis, the freedoms of the public sphere were recognised by many as being uniquely English.²⁶ It is therefore interesting to examine whether this association is reflected in the way in which England and the English are represented in Montesquieu's works.

Whilst Habermas's original account of the transformation of the public sphere was underpinned by a Marxist framework, scholars have subsequently argued that the development of open, critical debate in England cannot simply be attributed to economic factors such as the precocious expansion of the nation's capitalist market. In David Zaret's view, it was in reaction to the bloody conflicts of the mid-seventeenth century that a desire to discuss religious and other issues freely and rationally grew up in English intellectual circles. This combined with the advances of the scientific revolution to produce 'critical habits of thought based on appeals to public reason, which subsequently became conflated with specifically political issues.'²⁷ Zaret identifies a connection between the emergence of the English public sphere, the scientific pursuit of reason, an opposition to religious dogmatism and a readiness to think critically and rationally about politics. This nexus is particularly relevant in the context of Montesquieu's work. Similarly, Keith Michael Baker does not give undue weight to economic factors in his discussion of the public sphere in *ancien régime* France. He places emphasis instead on the increasing struggle for legislative supremacy between the Crown and the *parlements*.²⁸ Baker claims that a public engaged in critical political debate evolved in France during the first half of the eighteenth century, and that by the 1750s those in favour of the reform of France's absolutist regime were already openly exchanging views on matters of policy and the practice of government. In other words, during the time that Montesquieu was writing, the public sphere grew and strengthened in England, and a similar evolution began in France. Could Montesquieu have played a role in this development? He is certainly singled out by Habermas as one of the first French Enlightenment thinkers to engage the public in political debate.²⁹ This suggests a need to assess Montesquieu's contribution to the emergence of an English-style public sphere – an arena of scientifically-inspired rational debate on politics and religion – in eighteenth-century France.

When examining the influence of English thought and writing on Montesquieu's works and his reciprocal impact within an English context, the author should be seen as a participant in an evolving public sphere in which ideas circulated freely in a variety of media. Previously, the analysis of Montesquieu's sources has been conducted by identifying in his works the presence of ideas seemingly taken from canonical texts of the English Enlightenment. This has proved a valuable exercise, but one which underestimates the complex dynamics of the circulation of ideas in the eighteenth century. Habermas's study of the public

sphere has stimulated analyses of all areas of early modern print culture and the press, as well as social and intellectual networks of influence.³⁰ The necessity of examining closely the context in which ideas were received and interpreted, as well as the means and ends of their transmission, is now better understood. To take one relevant example, England's status as a tolerant, Protestant state was recognized by the French Huguenots forced to leave France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Exiled Huguenot journalists such as Jean Le Clerc and Henri Basnage de Beauval settled in the Netherlands and produced periodicals aimed at a French-speaking audience, looking to England for inspiration when it came to content. Their publications were instrumental in promoting English Enlightenment ideas to a French readership.³¹ This makes it apposite to broaden the range of Montesquieu's potential source materials to include items from both francophone Huguenot journals and English publications with a European circulation, such as the *Spectator*.³² Where all sources are concerned, the aim of this study will be to contextualize Montesquieu's encounter with the ideas and ideals of the English Enlightenment, and to understand the mechanisms by which they are re-deployed in his own works.

It is evident that Montesquieu's relations with England form part of a wider cross-Channel intellectual and cultural dialogue in the age of Enlightenment. The two nations had of course been involved in similar exchanges for centuries previously, but with the emergence of the public sphere the traffic of ideas intensified its flow.³³ The work of Gabriel Bonno and Georges Ascoli remains the reference for those studying Anglo-French cultural relations in this period.³⁴ Both Bonno and Ascoli sought to explain the origins of *anglomanie*, the fascination for all things English (particularly English novels) which developed in pre-revolutionary France.³⁵ Subsequent scholarship has however revealed the inadequacy of this term to express the complex fluctuations in Anglo-French cultural relations during the eighteenth century. Edmond Dziembowski prefers to discuss the 'anglophilia' of the French political classes whilst Jonathan Israel, quoting the French *philosophe* D'Alembert, talks of the '*anglicisme*' of French intellectuals.³⁶ Richard Whatmore, meanwhile, significantly emphasizes that the French response to English ideas – as indeed England's response to France – was more frequently characterized by phobia than mania in the eighteenth century.³⁷ This is certainly the impression given by more general studies of Anglo-French relations in this period, which highlight the troubled geopolitical situation and the socioeconomic rivalry that divided the two nations.³⁸

Clearly, the remarkable nature of the connection between Montesquieu and England cannot be appreciated unless seen against the backdrop of the evolution in relations between England and France during the author's lifetime (1689–1755). 1689, the year of Montesquieu's birth, is seen as marking a watershed in the interaction between the two nations. On the one hand the

beginning of what historians have termed the Second Hundred Years' War (1689–1815), saw animosity between England and France reach new heights.³⁹ On the other, the Bill of Rights signed in England the same year established the nation's exceptional status as a modern parliamentary democracy where a national representative assembly could act to guarantee the liberties of citizens.⁴⁰ Edmond Dziembowski remarks that for French observers of the Glorious Revolution 'the coincidence between this event and England's international revival was decisive'.⁴¹ In contrast to England, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries France endured financial crisis and military defeat, leading to international decline. This combined with the growth of political opposition in France to create conditions that encouraged some French intellectuals to look to England as a model of liberty, tolerance and successful government. However, this always represented a minority view. From Montesquieu's birth in the year following the Glorious Revolution, to his death on the eve of the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, England was generally viewed with fear, suspicion and hostility by his compatriots. In this context, it is important to reflect on whether Montesquieu's work confirmed or questioned conventional conceptions of the relationship between England and France, and how contemporary events determined the impact of his ideas.

One important reason for avoiding terms such as *anglomanie* when describing Anglo-French relations in the eighteenth century is that they depict a one-sided relationship. It is far more fruitful to envisage a process of intellectual cross-fertilisation, whereby the influence of English thinking overseas was counterbalanced by the reciprocal uptake of ideas emanating from France.⁴² To investigate Montesquieu's relations with England is to acknowledge the reality of a two-way traffic in ideas across the Channel in the Enlightenment period.⁴³ By examining each of Montesquieu's major works in turn, the present study reveals his continuous engagement with English thought and writing throughout his career as an author. Alongside the social and political theories of Hobbes and Locke, Montesquieu interacts on a textual and ideological level with thinkers such as Harrington, Sidney, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Developments in English Enlightenment historiography had a marked impact on Montesquieu's writing, and his work can also be linked to essays that appeared in Addison and Steele's *Spectator* (1711–14) and Bolingbroke's *Craftsman* (1726–37), works that are singled out by Habermas as incarnating the aims and values of the English public sphere.⁴⁴ Whilst previous studies of Montesquieu's reception in an English context have concentrated on the way isolated writers developed his ideas in the late eighteenth century,⁴⁵ relations between Montesquieu and England are here envisaged as a mutual exchange of ideas during the author's lifetime. To examine this question in detail, a significant part of this study will be given over to following the dialogue between Montesquieu and his English readership, car-

ried out directly through correspondence, or indirectly through the reception, imitation, translation and adaptation of his work in an English context.

Chapter 1 explores the representation of England and the deployment of English Enlightenment ideas in the *Lettres persanes*. This involves addressing the question of how ideas from and connected with England were diffused in France in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, prior to the publication of Montesquieu's first work in 1721. The importance of the Huguenot periodical press as a vector of enlightened opinion conveying English ideas to a francophone audience is highlighted. When the *Lettres persanes* appeared, England and France were enjoying an uneasy peace following an extended period of conflict encompassing the Nine Years' War (1689–97) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13). In wartime France, the circulation of hostile propaganda had reinforced the stereotypical image of England as a chaotic, uncivilized and extremist state, popularized in the mid-seventeenth-century. Significantly, the letters concerning England and the English in the *Lettres persanes* reveal that Montesquieu seeks to challenge this image. He depicts England in a manner that emphasizes the positive effects of increased popular involvement in the political process, thus indirectly indicting the French absolutist system of government. The work as a whole echoes Shaftesbury and Addison's call for a new form of open, rational communication between equals in a social sphere free from courtly influence. Locke and Shaftesbury's stipulation that this open, rational communication should be extended to the discussion of religious issues is also upheld in the *Lettres persanes*, whilst the Persians' experience of Europe functions as a demonstration of Locke's theories regarding the acquisition of knowledge, and the conflict between reason and prejudice.

Montesquieu's *Voyages en Europe*, the record of his Grand Tour (1728–31), form the initial focus of Chapter 2. This text reveals the extent to which Montesquieu's experiences as traveller and travel writer were informed by the ideas of the English Enlightenment. In particular, the influence of Lockean philosophy is observable in the method the author employs to survey and record the world around him. Montesquieu's Grand Tour can be seen not only as a prolonged empirical experiment but also as a search for political liberty, which he eventually locates in his final destination, England. Montesquieu's stay in England (1729–31) allowed him to observe the success of the *Lettres persanes*, translated into English in 1722 and frequently re-edited thereafter. The first full-length English version of the *Lettres persanes*, George Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian in England to his Friend at Ispahan* (1735), is relatively well known. However, other, earlier English responses to Montesquieu have been largely overlooked. This study examines for the first time a series of imitation 'Persian Letters' published in the English press from 1727 onwards. Both Montesquieu's own impressions of England recorded in the early 1730s, and the English imi-

tations of his work published in the same period, reflect the growing tensions surrounding the collapse of the Anglo–French alliance in 1731. This reveals the complexity of cross-cultural intellectual relations in the age of Enlightenment; an era characterized by cosmopolitanism on the one hand, and increased international rivalry on the other.

Chapter 3 considers the *Considérations sur les ... Romains* (1734) as Montesquieu's response to this climate of international rivalry. At a time when both England and France cited the Roman precedent to justify their claims to cultural and territorial supremacy in Europe and beyond, Montesquieu questions the applicability of the Roman example to early modern European nations. Rather than taking the traditional critical view of the *Considérations* as a defective history of Rome, this study sees the text as offering a commentary on the geopolitical situation of the 1730s. In the *Considérations* Montesquieu proposes a new social and political model to replace that of Rome. Comments relating directly or indirectly to English politics and society punctuate the text, and show Montesquieu intervening in contemporary debates relevant to audiences in both England and France. The comparison of the *Considérations* with previous histories of Rome by the likes of Bossuet and Saint-Évremond reveals both the influence of trends in English historical writing on Montesquieu's work and the extent to which he seeks to challenge conventional wisdom regarding England, Rome, and France's cultural superiority. An examination of the different English translations of the text sheds new light on the way in which the *Considérations* were also used to challenge or correct opinions circulating within the English public sphere.

L'Esprit des lois (1748), Montesquieu's best-known work, is examined in Chapter 4. This study delves deeper into the famous excerpts from the text where Montesquieu describes England's constitution and the manners, morals and character of the nation's inhabitants. A new understanding of the place of England in *L'Esprit des lois* can be gained through following up Montesquieu's references to Tacitus's *Germania* in his description of England's constitution. This suggests a link between the author's representation of England and other evocations of Germanic races, including the Franks, in *L'Esprit des lois*. Further investigation reveals Montesquieu's sophisticated strategy for convincing the French of the need for political reform by implying that England and France share the same political ancestry, and are hence heirs to the same political legacy. In *L'Esprit des lois*, Montesquieu shows that England's system of government represents both the survival of ancient Germanic liberties and also the modern freedoms of the public sphere. This argument not only addressed contemporary French concerns but also spoke to different parties within England, most notably to those who sought to defend the legitimacy of the Hanoverian dynasty which had recently withstood the threat of Jacobite Rebellion in 1745. Examining English responses to the text affirms Montesquieu's role as an active participant

in the English public sphere. His work was clearly seen as an intervention into both English and French political and cultural debates.

A final chapter explores the possibility that the English influences evident elsewhere in Montesquieu's writing could also have shaped his aesthetic theories, as formulated in the *Essai sur le goût* (c. 1753–55). The *Essai*, destined for publication in the *Encyclopédie*, is best understood in the light of the aesthetic theories elaborated by the *encyclopédistes* and others in the 1750s. At this time, recent translations of the work of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had brought English Enlightenment ideas to the forefront of French discussions of art and taste. The influence of these and other English thinkers is particularly apparent in Montesquieu's discussion of taste as an attribute that is both universal and subjective. To examine the impact of English ideas on the *Essai sur le goût* is also to reassess the text's relation to Montesquieu's work as a whole. The close connection between the political and aesthetic thought of writers such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, suggests that Montesquieu's promotion of universal participation in judgements of taste can finally be linked to the author's political philosophy and his championing of the English constitution. In the concluding section, Montesquieu's posthumous status as an Enlightenment public figure is examined. It emerges that the author's anglophilia was marked out as his defining intellectual characteristic by those who shaped his image for posterity. This is particularly significant given the coincidence between his death in 1755 and the renewal of hostilities between England and France on the eve of the Seven Years' War.

In many ways Montesquieu's relationship with England and with English constitutionalism has become inseparable from his identity as a prominent Enlightenment figure. It features largely in general studies of his political theory;⁴⁶ and in the Anglo-American liberal tradition his theorization of the separation of powers in the English constitution remains a reference point in Western political thought.⁴⁷ This has meant that Montesquieu's connection with England is commonly seen in terms of his political legacy, rather than as a dynamic intellectual exchange during his lifetime.⁴⁸ Yet as Jonathan Israel has argued convincingly, the originality and incomparable impact of Montesquieu's work can only be measured accurately if his work is situated in the context from which it emerged.⁴⁹ This present study thus refocuses attention on the unique nature of the Enlightenment as a movement, rather than on the afterlife of enlightened ideas. Daniel Gordon also suggests that while the Enlightenment is undoubtedly far more than the ideas of a few great philosophers, there is a need to re-contextualize the work of the period's most complex and nuanced authors – including Montesquieu – whose ideas are often misinterpreted by modern commentators.⁵⁰ To examine relations between Montesquieu and England in their contemporary context is therefore to excavate the roots of his thought, and to evaluate his works on their own terms. This is advocated by Quentin Skinner

as the only meaningful approach to intellectual history.⁵¹ It is also to embark on a case study of the productive two-way traffic in texts and ideas across the Channel in the long eighteenth century. Undoubtedly, Montesquieu's deployment of English ideas and ideals in his writing and the reception of his works in England testify to the vibrancy of international intellectual exchanges in the Enlightenment period.

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