

**FOUGERET DE MONTBRON:  
ROCOCO, LIBERTINISM, ENLIGHTENMENT**

*This article explores the issues of relations between Rococo and Enlightenment cultures as well as evolution of sexuality in XVIIIth century. The author researches a process of constructing of female sexuality in XVIII century European literatures. A key figure of this research is French writer Fougeret de Montbrond and his libertine novel of education "Margot la Ravodeuse", where appears the first character of grisette as hero of erotic narrative. Same protagonists appear simultaneously in John Cleland's "Funny Hill" and Samuel Richardson's "Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady", what testifies an genesis of demand for textual erotics.*

**Key words:** Fougeret de Montbrond, Rococo, Enlightenment, body, sexuality

XVIIIth century was a crossroad of a few cultural epochs, some of which are nowadays considered ideologically and aesthetically opposite. One of the key oppositional points was a discrepancy between the Enlightenment commonly perceived as set of progressivism ideas, and culture of Rococo, the later to be regarded as hedonistic escapism professed mostly by French courtiers. Yet numerous recent researches of XVIIIth century intellectual and artistic life give us another view of Enlightenment, within a paradigm of which the idea of Rococo would have been interpreted as but one of Enlightenment derivatives, had Rococo not been a phenomenon much earlier than was Enlightenment itself. A thorough study of early Enlightenment works reveal how close sometimes Rocaille and Enlightenment ideas were, an affinity, deepened with employment of the same genres of fairy tales, novels of education or fictional correspondences. The essential discrepancy between Enlightenment and Rococo is that Enlightenment is constituted by personalities and their ideas whereas Rococo expressed its ideas and values in artistic style. But if to conduct a survey of Enlightenment literary heritage, we can find out how many XVIIIth century writers, later identified as those of Enlightenment, commenced their literary work from Rocaille compositions and evolutioned gradually from cheerful erotic fairy tales to treatises about human thinking, economy politics, international relations, and even serious political critique. So did not only Voltaire, Montesquieu, or Diderot, but a lot more of other minor writers.

A question appears what was of common in Rococo and Enlightenment ideas, if the latter was so seamlessly deriving from the first? Erotics and gallant adventures, omnipresent in Rococo literature, reflect a genesis of a new type of personality, a figure impossible to imagine in XVIIIth century – a libertine. And if erotic motives gradually disappear in Enlightenment literary heritage, a libertine with his particular mentality stays as a character of the age till the beginning of a French revolution. So our second question is why libertinism is an attitude essential for such ideologically opposite phenomena as Rococo and Enlightenment.

To obtain the answers for these questions we address to literary heritage of Foucheret de Montbron, one of the authors presumptive of sensational and scandalous erotic novel of education “Therese the Philosopher” (1748), which was frequently attributed even to marquis de Sade. “Therese the Philosopher” contains a chief motto of the epoch: “Libertinism and philosophy constitute happiness for a clever person. One chooses libertinism due to his taste, and philosophy due to his wit”. [2; 82].

Foucheret de Montbrond, (1706-1760) belongs to the most popular men of letters in XVIIIth century France, yet nowadays he is practically forgotten. His creative development is remarkably representative in aspect of transition from erotic Rocaille plots to purely Enlightened scope. His first composition is a response to Claude Crébillon’s novel “Sofa” (1742), an ultimate expression of Rococo mentality. Montbrond in his turn wrote that same year “A Couch or a couch of a color of flame” which had been supposed to be a true parody but appeared to be an affectionate imitation. The story is about a gentilhomme, who did not succeed to satisfy sexually an old ugly fairy, and was punished for that being transformed into a couch with an ability to bring the transformation back only in case the same situation will take place on this same couch. [8; c. 3]. Both stories develop on oriental background and are told from the tacit observer’s point of view. Yet these are not but gallant stories. Actually Rococo was not the very first epoch where a genre of fantasy was employed into fictional literature, but it developed a new attitude to the fantasy itself. If XVIIIth precious novels used fantasy for it’s own sake and did not have a coherent plot, in Rococo fantasy is applied as background and decoration for entertaining action.

Another pivotal innovation is change of the place of action. Rococo adopted from previous novels topoi of voyage, full of adventures and widely used this motive. Nevertheless, in a process of its stylistic development a place of action stabilized. To illustrate, in Crébillon-son's novels the whole action takes place whether on one single spot like at the chimney place or transition of protagonists is limited to a few particular places without detailed description of them. That emphasizes a striking difference from the Enlightenment literature tendencies, where a hero travels constantly and acquires his experience from his encounters with various personages. On the other hand, late Enlightenment also acquired topography of closed space as place for education, and this space is bedroom or sitting room.

It's not by chance that Fougere de Montbrond translated in 1751 into French John Cleland's "Fanny Hill", renaming it into "A Girl of Joy" a pornographic novel of education, published in 1748. Despite its voluptuousness, it's uncommon to Rococo even to call the things by their true names, as for its aesthetics is majorly built on relishing the erotic hints, as Claude Crébillon did. Even in direct reference of sexual action it is never properly described. Nevertheless, the forties of XVIIIth century give us a phenomenon of pornography, a demand on which grew with every next decade. What is remarkable is that was frequently written either in form of short stories or implemented in novels. That same year de Montbrond created a masterpiece of French erotic literature – Margot la Ravaudeuse, published in 1750-1753, written in 1748 presumptively – Margot the Darner, where a new type of erotic hero came out. The protagonist of this tale is what would be later known as grisette. A young worker girl, sleeping in the same bed with her parents, entertains interest to sexual relations. She acquires a lover and escapes from home after her mother scolds her for bad behavior. In a city garden she makes acquaintance with a lady who turned to be a procuress. The protagonist is not that naïve and she is perfectly aware what kind of job is to be offered also as disguises a true reason why had she been escaped from home. Moreover, a pimp says simply that it is nothing to blame in profession. The seductress brings reasonable arguments how silly it is to do a dirty penny work starving having all qualities to earn more. Margot is totally different from Fanny – she is voluptuous and courageous. Moreover, Fanny Hill has a set of features of a

noble courtesan – John Cleland emphasized her innocence and naivety before getting to a brothel, invented a true passionate lover whom she gave her virginity to, and his protagonist even blames her housemaid for her promiscuity. [5]. If Funny Hill succeeded in defending herself from her very first client's sexual assaults, Margot in that same situation suffered perverted sex and hides extra tips money that client gave her, from her mistress. When Margot than was got into prison for illegal prostitution, she applied immediately to that very same ex-client, and being released, was so happy, that was ready to sacrifice him her other fifty virginites. [4]. Taking into account the fact, that Funny Hill's translation had been accomplished the same year Margot was written, we can suppose that Foucheret de Montbrond was strongly disagree with Cleland's attitude and wrote "Margot..." as his another response on popular book. There is a significant difference in description of feminine sexuality in English and French literature of this time. In 1748<sup>th</sup> appeared "Clarissa or a History of a Young Lady" by Samuel Richardson, a true literary sensation written in sentimentalist genre. After her seductor's vain wooing the main heroine was eventually raped by him. That is a total stylistic break with sentimentalist canons, but it corresponds entirely to John Cleland's and Foucheret de Montbrond's literary worlds. Yet Clarissa neither becomes a courtesan nor commits suicide. She ultimately discards her rapper's marriage proposal and tells him after the rape her soul being higher than Robert Lowelace's one. [6]. In my opinion, the interesting feature there is that it is practically a single case in XVIIIth century fictional literature when a woman exercises not only a right of consent, but as well a right of marriage denial. Such an unprecedented case attests a peak of evolution of feminine sexuality in ideology of Enlightenment.

This brief analysis of several compositions rose an issue of a concept of body and sexuality in fictional literature of Rococo and Enlightenment. As we can see, libertine attitude is common for these both stylistic directions. And both Rococo and Enlightenment apparently promote emancipation of sexuality and feminine sexuality particularly. It is needed to be mentioned that erotic plots had not been uncommon for European literature, but authors of XVIth century always used them in comical contexts. Rococo farewells with a concept of passionate love, which had been do

intrinsic classicist and Baroque literature. Some philologists argue it happened so because in Rococo emotional coldness was professed, [3; c. 301], yet the citations from Rococo novels give us another explanation of that: "I did not suffer long, as for a strong emotion could not last long..." [10; c. 157]. And such a novelty is really special, as for emotional transience had not been and would not for a long time be particular for European mentality. Baroque required hyperbolized emotion, classicism employed strong feelings depicted majestically, Enlightenment in its own turn gave birth to sentimentalism and encouraged description of enthusiasm and joy. Yet Rococo cultivated moderate emotions and evanescent impressions, as short, as its novelistic affairs were. Rococo also invented a female character, not particular for literature of Enlightenment, and it's a character of aged woman preceptor. It is a woman who instructs a boy a subtle science of love and court relations. But I assume such a character is peculiar for mature Rococo exclusively, as we can observe such plots in Claude Crébillon, Louvet de Couvray, Charles Pinot Duclos and Choderlos de Laclos' writings. At the same time it's entirely incorrect an assumption that in Rococo appreciated but mature women whereas innocent girls were regarded as boring anomaly. [3; c. 313]. Contrary to that, both Rococo and sentimentalism cultivate a young hero, who receives his or her sexual, emotional and intellectual apprenticeship whether from the elder on in a process of journey. A favorite protagonist of early Rococo is a young girl, frequently the one from working class, a character, adored even in non-erotic plots, which presumably developed from characters of prompt servants from picaresque novels. But a servant and grisette are different. The later is an embodiment of Paris, a poor flower girl, a laundress or actress, who meets a noble wealthy man and transforms for some time into lady from refined society. If to make reference, that a carnival was a key aesthetic notion of early Rococo, a parallel with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of essential role of carnival in culture is to obvious not to draw it. Such young female heroes are widely represented in numerous pieces by Pierre de Marivot. Though even he would later divert from depiction of his ingenues and grisettes in his late novel "Paisan parvenu" for the sake of a story of making a gentilhomme of a rural boy by a woman of quality.

Certain scholars argue as well Rococo authors did occupy themselves but with erotic art, what is totally untrue. From fifties onwards Fougere de Montbrond wrote various compositions which corresponded entirely to Enlightenment topics, circulating more and more in French society of that time. His next writer's attempt belongs to a genre of travelogue and bears an ambitious title of "Cosmopolite or a Citizen of the World", where the author claims that a man who knows his country only resembles an owner of a huge book, who read but a single page from it. [9]. Towards the end of fifties the writer abandoned light poetry and composing of erotic tales, but dedicated his last two works to the problem of Agglomeration. One of the few clear watersheds between Enlightened and Rococo discourses is an international scope. A sympathy and interest to England appears in 1680<sup>th</sup> according to Pierre Chaunu and would persist till the end of XVIIIth century. What is noteworthy, Chaunu dates an introduction of Enlightenment in France as well by 1680. [1; c. 7]. Whether it is a coincidence or Chaunu intentionally draw a parallel between these two dates, it is unknown. Yet England is represented as a Enlightened mental vector together with Russia (since 1770<sup>th</sup>), Germany (since 1750<sup>th</sup>) and Low Countries, whereas Spain and Italy become excluded from XVIIIth century sociocultural priorities.[1; c. 49]. Such a situation is true for Enlightenment thinkers, however Rococo artists give a second a waving particularly to Italian and Spanish adoptions and influences. Italian comic theater and music, carnival motives in painting and theater are omnipresent in French rococo since its very first clear manifestation in 1710<sup>th</sup> till the end of the century. On the other hand, Spanish tendency of picaresque novel was entirely assimilated by Rocaille literature, although the whole genre was not fully absorbed by Rococo.

Treatises concerning cultural and political relations of France and England demonstrate us absolutely different side of this libertine's mentality. The writer who discarded all sexual taboos and moral limitations does not seem to be displeased with the political system of society he had been criticized so much in his previous works. If a discourse shifts to international prestige of France, it's political system is absolutely perfect in comparison with English strata disarray, where a nobleman could be confused with a lowbrow due to the same garments and manners. According to him, monarchy guards France from chaos, and France is superior to England in its

military capacities. But the most striking point in Montbron's criticism of the Englishmen is their accusation in promiscuity and prevention that in their blind fascination with everything English Frenchmen adopt from them but their vices instead of their virtues. [7; c. 29].

It is not clear then what was Fougeret de Montbrond's true attitude to power and authorities. On the one hand, he wrote: "The great are great only due to our pettiness; in our view they are surpassed only blind and cowardly reverence, which is formed by absurd prejudice. Dare look close at them; dare abstract yourself away from the false glare they are surrounded with; – and their prestige will vanish". [2; c. 74]. After such a diatribe it would be quite strange to learn about Fougeret de Montbrond's apparent reverence before Voltaire. The writer wrote a travesty poem "Henriade" in response to Voltaire's one, and his own poem redid almost each verse of the original. Moreover, in his small treatise "A Prevention against Anglomania" de Montbrond expressed his opinion concerning Shakespear, and his opinion is a direct rephrase of the one Voltaire had expressed years ago. [7; c. 35]. What is more, in that same treatise against anglomania de Montbrond showed himself an ardent monarchist, which was quite strange for him, as for he had a few short anti-royal poems, written from a person of a peasant praising ironically a king for everything good he had done to peasants.

Fougeret de Montbrond's literary heritage is unique from the point that was actually a writer of a first rank and his ideas were authentic and interesting. At the same time, most part of his works are feedbacks, responses and parodies on the works of others. His reaction on his mates' books was prompt, yet he did not employ direct literary criticism, but responded by parody. And these parodies resemble more pastiches, or exaggerated stylizations, the fact could be interpreted rather as a token of recognition than of a true critique.

A body was treated like a machine, and the purpose of the machine is to function for those tasks, as it is best designed for. When a protagonist of Margot the Darnier was announced the work she is offered is prostitution, the key argument in favor of it was not her poverty, but her excellent corporal characteristics, what made

her to be destined for that sort of job. [4]. Human body in XVIIIth century suits perfectly for corporal and intellectual pleasures. If Rococo chose the first, Enlightenment put its emphasis on the later one. But sometimes their priorities went vice versa.

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*М. Данченко*

## **ФУЖЕРЕ ДЕ МОНБРОН:**

### **РОКОКО, ЛІБЕРТИНІЗМ ТА ПРОСВІТНИЦТВО**

*Статтю присвячено проблемам співвідношення культур Рококо і Просвітництва, а також дослідженню еволюції сексуальності у XVIII столітті. Автор досліджує процес конструювання жіночої сексуальності у європейських літературах XVIII століття. Ключовою фігурою цього дослідження є французький письменник Фужере де Монброн та його роман виховання “Марго-латальниця”, де вперше з’являється образ гризетки як героїні еротичного нарративу. Ідентичні персонажі з’являються одночасно у “Фанні Хілл” Джона Клеганда та “Кларисі, або Історії Молодої Леді” у Семюеля Річардсона, що засвідчує зародження попиту на текстову еротику.*

**Ключові слова:** Фужере де Монброн, Рококо, Просвітництво, тіло, сексуальність.