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The Most Popular Authors of Enlightenment France

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Who were the most frequently read authors in late Enlightenment France? The question looks beguiling simple, but has proved surprisingly difficult to answer. Indeed, it seems unlikely that it can be answered from a single source or method, especially as most large-scale surveys have to use book production, book sales, book ownership or book borrowings as proxies for the actual act of reading. By bringing together the findings of the most ambitious large-scale historical bibliometric projects, each of which used different sources and methods, this article hopes, at very least, to identify the authors whose books were circulating and being “consumed” in largest numbers. An emphasis on authors rather than texts is helpful here, since it encourages analyses based on the broad genres and literary currents to which an author contributed, rather than the distinctive contribution of an individual text. An author-based approach also aggregates individual works into larger bodies of work, allowing a more systemic or representative view: lists of top ten authors generally embrace a significantly larger proportion of literary output than lists of top ten books. Finally, it permits a focus on the authors themselves, and specifically, in this article, to ask whether the most popular authors in late Enlightenment France were, like writers of modern bestsellers, generally fashionable or topical authors, whose readers desired to stay up to date with reading trends.¹

Bibliometric surveys of French reading tastes under the old regime can be traced back to Daniel Mornet, and computationally based studies to the path-breaking work of François Furet and his collaborators, which is only now being superseded.² Indeed, Mornet is generally taken as the starting point for bibliometric surveys of old regime France. In a seminal article published just before the First World War, Mornet gave an account of the holdings of Enlightenment authors in 500 Parisian private libraries, as described in catalogues from the period 1750–80.³ This contained some surprises – in particular Mornet reported that the Jacobin Bible, Rousseau’s *Du Contrat social*, was almost entirely absent from his survey, whilst remarking the unexpected prevalence, at the top of his table, of Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* together with Voltaire’s epic historical poem *Le Henriade*.⁴ Equally

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¹ On functions of modern bestsellers, see Miller, “The Bestseller List”.

² Mornet, “Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées”.

³ Ibid..

⁴ Ibid., 467.

surprising, perhaps, Mornet's survey reported relatively few religious works. When he attempted to classify books in his survey using the five umbrella categories of the Parisian booksellers' taxonomic system, *Théologie* accounted for less than 10 percent, and similarly low numbers were recorded for *Droit* and *Science et Arts*. In contrast, *Histoire* accounted for around half of all titles and *Belles-Lettres* over a quarter. These striking statistical findings are problematized by the fact that Mornet left 42 percent of copies of books in his sample libraries unclassified.

Later scholarship has pointed to various issues with surveying libraries in search of bestsellers or reading tastes.⁵ Private library catalogues are usually built up over many years; contain many older items; typically reflect the tastes of wealthy bibliophiles, collectors or aristocrats who may not have actually read the books they owned; and having generally been produced for book sales, only contain items thought saleable.⁶ None of this invalidates library evidence *per se*, rather it needs to be considered in tandem with other evidence. Further, Alicia Montoya argues that Mornet's wealthy Parisian bibliophiles were atypical. If Mornet had used the catalogues of provincial, or smaller, private libraries, he might have reached very different conclusions.⁷ Drawing on a pan-European database survey of medium-sized sales catalogues larger than Mornet's sample, Montoya has the data to back this up. Her ERC-funded MEDiate project has recorded more than half a million items in all, mostly from French, British and Dutch sales catalogues from across the long eighteenth century.⁸ This article will discuss her best-selling authors shortly.

Montoya's project is one of a new generation of digital bibliometric projects which collectively have the power to effect a paradigm shift in understanding of both literary production and dissemination and of reading habits in the French Enlightenment. Findings from the digital resources created by four leading projects in this space will be discussed below. However, before doing so, it is worth observing that computationally-based studies of the dissemination of print in the Enlightenment have an illustrious history, dating back to the path-breaking work of François Furet and his collaborators, which is only now being surpassed.⁹ Using the punch-card technology of the 1960s, the results of their coding of datasets such as publishing licences issued by the central government fed into a remarkable two-volume set of essays published as *Livre et Société* in 1965 and 1970.

Furet and his collaborators offered a perhaps overly reductive hierarchical and teleological view of publishing and its impact. In an opening essay entitled "La Librairie du royaume de France au 18^e siècle", Furet insisted that the *siècle des Lumières* should be seen as a long struggle between the forces of intellectual innovation and conservatism. Drawing on a digitally-empowered study of licenses for new works listed in the registers of *permissions publiques* and *permissions tacites*, which as he noted were issued mainly for new works and to Parisian publishers, Furet detected a century-long trend towards titles associated with the *sciences et arts* and away from religious editions. This appeared to reflect the triumph of enlightenment and increasing desacralization as the French revolution approached. In this model, the real action was happening in Paris and, to a lesser extent, Lyon, as well as foreign centres of high-brow academic or radical Enlightenment publishing, notably Amsterdam, London, Geneva. By contrast, the provincial press limited itself to publishing a conservative

⁵ The MEDiate project ranks Rousseau 30th among all authors found in a selection of catalogues dating from the period 1790–1830. The MEDiate project's website, <https://mediate18.nl/> (accessed Sept. 26, 2022).

⁶ Jagersma, "Dutch Printed Private Library Sales Catalogues", 87.

⁷ Montoya, "Mornet Reloaded". I am grateful to the author for permission to use material from this chapter, which was still unpublished at the time this article went to press.

⁸ On the MEDiate project, see <https://mediate18.nl/> (accessed Sept. 26, 2022).

⁹ The results of the digital project are written up in Furet, *Livre et société*.

mix of local interest works, schoolbooks, liturgical works and, for peasant readers, religious fare and the cheap chapbooks colloquially known as the *bibliothèque bleue*.

Furet's view of provincial publishing was reinforced in a chapter by Julien Brancolini and Marie-Thérèse Boussy which explored editions published under the *permission simple* licence introduced in 1778. Helpfully, the *permission simple* registers also included authorized print-runs for each work, and since licences were only granted for reprintings of works with an established marketability, the *permission simple* registers provided clear insights into which works were sure-fire sellers in provincial towns. Many of these were religious works, which proved to be much more prevalent in the *permission simple* licence data than in the libraries of Mornet's metropolitan elite. However, Brancolini and Boussy's most impressive argument and main conclusion – underpinned by a striking set of maps – insisted on a correlation between centers of production and distribution of religious books in the pre-revolutionary decade and areas of enduring political conservatism in the authors' own day.¹⁰ Thus paradoxically, *Livre et société* simultaneously acknowledged significant volumes of religious works and relegated them to a secondary and declining importance when juxtaposed against progressive, desacralizing, Enlightenment works. Had they succeeded in quantifying the output of both types of book, they might have reached different conclusions. Exploring best-selling authors through subsequent digital outputs offers one way of attempting this.

The concept of desacralization also looms large in Robert Darnton's *Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (1996) and its companion volume, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France, 1769–1789* (1995). These volumes provide an ideal starting point for thinking about best-selling authors, even though they deal only with one small section of the book trade and cover only the final twenty-five years before the French Revolution. Darnton set out to discover the best-selling works of the extensive illegal sector by collating orders for so called *livres philosophiques* or libertine (freethinking) works placed with the Société typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), a large Swiss publisher-wholesaler by a sample of French retail booksellers.¹¹ According to Darnton, the STN sourced and sold from a “floating stock” of books which circulated freely across Europe.¹² For this reason the archives of their trade could be assumed to be representative of French book trade in the late Enlightenment.¹³ Whilst Darnton's discussion centred primarily on specific texts and genres, the most important feature of his work, for present purposes, was his table of best-selling authors, which will be discussed presently.

Forbidden Best-Sellers emphasized the sensational titles that headed Darnton's forbidden bestsellers table, and provided an anthology of three leading works: Pidansat de Mairobert's scandalous biography of Louis XV's mistress, *Anecdotes sur Madame la Comtesse du Barry*; Louis-Sébastien Mercier's utopian fantasy of a morally perfected future, *L'An 2440*, and, somewhat incongruously (since it appeared much further down his table) the materialist pornography of *Thérèse philosophe*, which is usually attributed to the Marquis d'Argens.¹⁴ Closer inspection suggested such an emphasis was valid. If titles published by the STN are excluded because over-represented in his data, his entire top ten was, with the

¹⁰ See Brancolini and Boussy, “La Vie provinciale du livre,” in Furet, *Livre et société*, II, 32–33.

¹¹ Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, does not explain how he selected his sample of French clandestine booksellers, which included “major” and “minor” dealers and a handful of marginal “colporteurs”. However, comparison with the comprehensive survey of surviving STN sales data in the “French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe” (FBTEE-1.0) database revealed that his “sample” was close to comprehensive. The dealers in his sample accounted for almost all of the STN's trade in libertine books to France.

¹² Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, chaps. 1–2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ This anthology comprises the final three chapters of Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*.

exception of *L'An 2440*, comprised of sexually licentious or politically scandalous works.¹⁵ Such books, Darnton asserted, served to desacralize the old regime and sweep it away in a tidal wave of smut.¹⁶

Rank	Author	Copies
1	Voltaire	3,545
2	D'Holbach (& collaborators)	2,903
3	M-F Pidansat de Mairobert – political <i>libelliste</i>	2,425
4	L-S Mercier – novelist, dramatist & essayist	2,199
5	S-N-H Linguet – journalist & anti philosophe	1,038
6	H-J Du Laurens – pornographer	866
7	T. Raynal	620
8	J-J Rousseau	505
9	Helvétius	486
10	Coquereau – political <i>libelliste</i>	477

Figure 1. Darnton's Forbidden Bestselling Authors (those traditionally considered *philosophes* highlighted in red). Note: figures have been adjusted to remove double-counting of *Anecdotes sur Mme du Barry*, which is attributed here only to Mairobert.

Critical readers could be forgiven, however, for wondering if Darnton's list of best-selling authors (fig. 1), told a rather different story, especially once the figures have been adjusted to remove the anomalous double-counting of the *Anecdotes sur Mme Du Barry*, which Darnton's figures attributed both to Mairobert and, rather implausibly, Charles-Claude Théveneau de Morande.¹⁷ Morande, who appears in fifth place in Darnton's original author table, falls well outside the top ten once stripped of orders for the *Anecdotes*.

This leaves an author table that still includes Mairobert and Mercier. However, their sales are less than those of the arch-*philosophe* Voltaire, on account of his prolific output, or indeed the materialist-in-chief d'Holbach "and collaborators". In fact, unlike his table of best-selling books, which, as noted above, was dominated by scandalous and sexually licentious

¹⁵ See Darnton, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature*, 194, where works with STN editions are marked with an asterisk. Five titles are excluded by this method. They are: at no. 3 on the list, d'Holbach's materialist *Système de la nature*; at no. 4 Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*; at no. 5 Raynal's *Histoire philosophique*; at no. 11 Voltaire's *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*; and at no. 13 Mairobert's, *Observateur anglois*. This leaves a top ten headed by *L'An 2440* and the *Anecdotes sur Mme Du Barry*, followed by Mairobert's *Journal historique*, Du Lauren's *Arrétin*, the anonymous *Lettre philosophique*, Coquereau's *Mémoires sur l'abbé Terray*, Voltaire's *Pucelle d'Orléans*, the anonymous *Mémoires de Louis XV*, Clelland's *La Fille de joie* (a French translation of *Fanny Hill*) and d'Argens' *Thérèse philosophe*. STN editions are over-represented because STN clients tended to order from STN catalogues.

¹⁶ See especially Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 246.

¹⁷ Few specialists today would deny that the *Anecdotes* belong to the so-called Mairobert *Corpus*. Confusion in the past arose because Morande wrote, and received a suppression fee, for a different, and by all accounts far more sensational, biography of Du Barry, 3,000 copies of which were burned in a kiln in Marylebone in April 1774. Louis Dutens, *Mémoires d'un voyageur qui se repose*, II, 40, reports that Beaumarchais – who handled the suppression of Morande's pamphlet – assured him that it was very different to the *Anecdotes*. Moreover, the *Anecdotes* themselves claim (326) that Morande's previous pamphlet, the notorious *Gazetier cuirassé*, was "eau rose" in comparison to his biography of Du Barry. Finally, Morande himself, in his *Réplique à Brissot* (1791), regrets that had any copies survived, he could have used them to prove his "patriotism". I have not detected any other instances of inadvertent double-counting in Darnton's entire *Corpus of Clandestine Literature*. Given the complexities of correlation in the analogue era and the difficulties of the source material and decisions around author attribution, the figures provided there seem to have been rigorously compiled and remarkably self-consistent and error free.

works, Darnton's authors' top ten is rather dominated by heavyweights associated with a more traditional, high-brow Enlightenment.

Besides Voltaire and d'Holbach, and arguably Mercier (a Rousseauist social commentator), Darnton's best-selling author table lists four other Enlightenment figures. They comprise Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Helvétius; the arch-anti-*philosophe* and journalist Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet; and Thomas Raynal (and collaborators!), whose *Histoire philosophique des Deux-Indes* was – according to Jonathan Israel – “the book that sparked a global revolution”.¹⁸ True, Darnton's top ten is rounded out by two unexpected names – Coquereau, author of a single piece of Maupeouana, the *Mémoires de l'abbé Terray* (1776), and Henri-Joseph Du Laurens, putative author of several pornographic works.¹⁹ However, it is the *philosophes* and their high-brow rivals who dominate.

Moreover, Darnton's clandestine author table presents a roll call of fashionable writers, whether as *philosophes*, political journalists and pamphleteering *libellistes*, novelists, and a pornographer. As a group, they seem very much to fit the modern image of the best-selling author: many of them even enjoyed an early form of celebrity status.²⁰ This group includes several of the most significant figures associated with the later French Enlightenment. But does Darnton's view of leading Enlightenment writers as *philosophes*, *libellistes* and pornographers hold good beyond the illegal books ordered from a single *neuchâtelois maison d'édition*?

Readers familiar with the debates around Darnton's work will probably be expecting an answer in the negative. For *French History and Civilization* has across the past dozen years been a venue in which the present author's French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe (FBTEE) project has levelled many of its most significant critiques of Darnton's *œuvre*.²¹ These critiques have, for example, eroded Darnton's foundational methodological premise that the STN drew on a “floating stock” of books drawn from across Europe, an assumption that was never very credible given logistical difficulties and time lags around stock movements.²² Instead the STN sold mainly Swiss printings, and Swiss production appears to have been very different to that of French language publishers in Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium.²³ Moreover, two-thirds of the books the STN sold were their own editions, which, as Darnton himself acknowledged, are thus heavily over-represented in STN data. Further, by plotting STN sales over time, charting the periods Darnton's booksellers were corresponding with the STN, and graphing consignments of confiscated books originating in Switzerland, the FBTEE project has established that the STN's clandestine trade with France dried up after 1778.²⁴

Equally, the FBTEE evidence has helped to establish that “libertine books” comprised only a small part of the illegal book market. By cross-referencing historical bibliometric sources, it revealed that they comprised only about ten percent of the clandestine or quasi-

¹⁸ Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 414.

¹⁹ Erotic and pornographic works attributed to Du Laurens include *L'Arrétin moderne*; *Compère Mathieu*; *Imirce ou la fille de la nature*; *Je suis pucelle, histoire véritable*; *Le porte-feuille d'un philosophe, ou Mélange de pièces philosophiques, politiques, critiques, satyriques et galantes*; and the erotic poems *La chandelle d'Arras* and *Le balai*.

²⁰ On eighteenth-century celebrity, see especially Lilti, *Figures publiques*.

²¹ For the literature on FBTEE, see especially Burrows, *Enlightenment Bestsellers* and other works cited in this paper; Curran, *Selling Enlightenment* and “Beyond the Forbidden Bestsellers”; Seaward, “Censorship through Co-operation” and “The Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN) and the Politics of the Book Trade”.

²² On this point, see especially Curran, *Selling Enlightenment*, esp. 50–52. Confirmatory evidence is presented in Burrows, “The Geography and Control of the Clandestine Book Trade”.

²³ This argument is made most forcefully in Curran, *Selling Enlightenment*, 28, 83–96.

²⁴ On this point, see Burrows, “The Geography and Control of the Clandestine Book Trade”; Burrows, *Enlightenment Bestsellers*, chap. 9. See also Burrows and Curran, “How Swiss was the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel?”

legal sector, or at most five percent of all books entering circulation.²⁵ The vast bulk of clandestinely traded books were, as Figure 1 shows, “piracies” of licit titles, the most popular of which could in many cases be produced from 1777 under the new *Permission simple* license, or editions which despite the appearance of illegality, were in fact licensed under a *Permission tacite*, which required them to appear under a false and usually foreign imprint. Beyond this lay a further category: innocuous works which never bothered to seek a *permission* so were technically illegal, but they do not appear in Figure 1 as reliable bibliometric data is lacking.²⁶ Furthermore, as well as being statistically marginal, Darnton’s category of “libertine works” or *livres philosophiques* is a capacious category: the vast bulk were relatively innocuous, for example, risqué poetry, or fairly mainstream Enlightenment works.²⁷

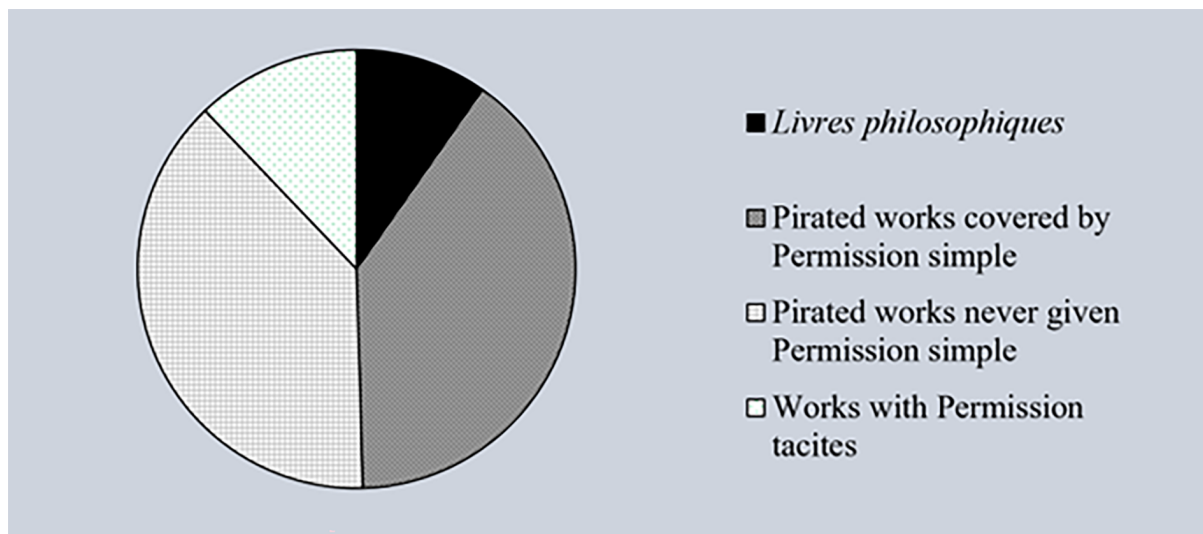


Figure 2. The structure of the French illegal and quasi-legal book trade, 1769–89 (excluding unlicensed innocuous works)

If the STN was not a representative dealer, and libertine books represented only a small part of the trade, does Darnton’s author list reflect either best-selling clandestine authors or the most popular Enlightenment authors more generally? This essay will address this question in two inter-connected ways. First, by ranking *philosophes* on Darnton’s list against four large-scale digital surveys of books circulating in late eighteenth-century France. Collectively these surveys include the three largest and best-funded digital bibliometric projects dealing with the dissemination of French books in the period, together with a more modest survey which supplements and provides a means to validate the findings of other projects by offering edition counts of a wide selection of major Enlightenment titles. All these projects use different means to try to measure and discover the dissemination of print in the late eighteenth century, but each has particular biases due to the nature of their source data and means of measurement. Aggregating and comparing all these different surveys gives the most rounded picture yet of trends in French print culture, its dissemination and

²⁵ See Burrows, *Enlightenment Bestsellers*, 124–25.

²⁶ The MPCE data on Parisian customs confiscations is nevertheless suggestive on this point. Almost half of all book suspensions itemized in the confiscation registers were for *nouveautés* or (much less frequently) inadequate permissions or lapsed *privilèges*. Such suspensions significantly outnumbered the combined total for prohibited and pirated works. The data concerning the reasons for and resolutions of these confiscations will be analysed in a future publication.

²⁷ The nature of the books circulating in the clandestine trade is unpacked in Burrows, *Enlightenment Bestsellers*, chap. 9.

consumption in the final years of the old regime. Furthermore, this comparison will also indicate commonalities between these surveys, and consequently what degree of confidence can be placed in them individually and collectively. The insights this provides will assist with a second-level question – which authors' works were the most read or, to be more precise, most prevalent in pre-revolutionary France?

The first of these surveys, the FBTEE project, draws on the same archive as Darnton, the sales of the STN's *marchandise générale* to France, as recorded in the FBTEE database (also referred to here as the FBTEE-1.0 database). To find these, the FBTEE-1.0 data was filtered to include only French sales. Then all editions published by the STN were also removed because, as had been the case in Darnton's work, too, they were over-represented in the FBTEE data. This was important, because whereas Darnton had argued that the STN's sales and publishing strategy were broadly representative of a wider pan-European trade, FBTEE has, as noted above, established definitively that this was not the case.²⁸ Once STN editions are removed, the remaining dataset is still almost twice as large as Darnton's.²⁹

Second, this article considers incidence of authors appearing in private library catalogues as recorded by Alicia Montoya's MEDIATE project. This data records only the presence of an author in a library. It does not count the number of their titles held. The data is drawn from French private library catalogues (usually sale catalogues) and because it is presented in twenty-year blocks, this article uses MEDIATE's statistics for library catalogues printed between 1790 and 1830. These dates may appear anomalous, but, as noted above, private libraries are generally assembled over several decades, and there are thus typically time lags between acquisition and cataloguing, which usually took place after the owner's death. Thus although many of the catalogues from the period under consideration contained post-1789 editions, most contained large numbers of earlier printings.³⁰ Equally, libraries sold in the two decades prior to 1789 will often pre-date the publication of works that most interest us. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, focus on catalogues published at a slightly later period thus gives better insights into the later Enlightenment.

The third survey is the most complex. It measures the incidence of books by a given author appearing in eighteen thousand book trade event records gathered in the "Mapping Print, Charting Enlightenment" (MPCE) project database. This project is sometimes also referred to here as the FBTEE-2.0 project, since it is a follow-on to the original FBTEE umbrella project and extends its database.³¹ This data brings together four disparate datasets, ranging in size from around 1,700 to 10,000 records. From smallest to largest, they are the records of licensed print runs of popular works under the *permission simple* licence; counterfeit works declared, stamped and legalized in the *estampillage* exercise of 1778–81; book confiscations at Parisian customs from 1770 to 1790; and stock sales of bankrupt and deceased Parisian dealers.³² The original purpose of the MPCE project was to try to

²⁸ This is the central argument of Curran, *Selling Enlightenment* and is reinforced by its companion volume, Burrows, *Enlightenment Bestsellers*.

²⁹ The data was drawn from the FBTEE-1.0 database at <http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/> (accessed Sept. 28, 2022). Darnton's survey included orders for 28,212 book from the STN, mine contained 52,409. The full search can be replicated using the following link: http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/interface/rank.php?t=author&n=all&e=rawsales&p=France&pa=on&d1=01&m1=01&y1=1769&d2=31&m2=12&y2=1794&g=C18_sovereign_territory&d=table.

³⁰ Discussions of Montoya project: Montoya, "Enlightenment? What Enlightenment?"; Montoya, "Mornet Reloaded".

³¹ It should be noted that due to ongoing editing in the MPCE database, which identified editions lacking authors, some rankings and figures in this article have been adjusted since the paper was given at the George Rudé Seminar. None of these adjustments affected the overall interpretation given here, and the top 15 MPCE authors remained the same following these adjustments.

³² The main archival records from which the datasets were built are: Paris, BnF, MS Fr. 21,831-4 (*estampillage* records); MS Fr 22,018- 19 (*permission simple* registers); MS Fr. 21,823-4 and 22,037 (stock sales); MS Fr.

contextualize the FBTEE data, by understanding the wider French book trade using sources covering every aspect of the trade, including some of those studied already by Furet's team. The MPCE datasets cover all areas of the trade: the metropolitan and the provincial; the clandestine, the tolerated and the privileged; and they record books published in France and abroad.³³

Finally, this essay considers evidence drawn from edition counts for French editions (only) of a broad selection of major Enlightenment works prepared by Gary Kates and a team of students in "The Enlightenment Books Project at Pomona".³⁴ The database of this research is now available online. Counts have only been included for editions published in the French language between 1770 and 1789. This subset currently lists 3,307 editions of 250 works from the 9,314 editions of 278 works in all European languages listed across the entire database.³⁵

Figure 3 compares the best-selling *philosophes* as recorded in each of the datasets under discussion. Authors are listed in rank order. Note that Darnton's listing of his top twenty-three authors includes only six traditionally considered *philosophes*. Authors whose names appear more than once are color-coded.

Strikingly, the same names recur repeatedly across lists and Voltaire heads every column. The top five names on the MEDIANTE list all appear among the top seven authors on the FBTEE, MPCE and Kates lists. The MPCE list and Kates' list match on six out of seven names. Indeed, if Diderot and d'Argens are ignored as interloped, the Kates and MPCE lists share the same three names in the top tier (Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau) and their second tier (Marmontel, Raynal and Fénelon). In the middle of the table, Darnton aside, Montesquieu ranks third in three out of four surveys.

21,933-21,934 (confiscation registers). The confiscation registers were further cross-referenced and verified against the Customs Registers (MS Fr. 21,914-21,926) and register of confiscated works at MS Fr. 21,935 and the *permission tacite* registers (principally MS 21,981, 21,984 and 21,987). The MPCE (FBTEE-2.0) database also contains repurposed and updated STN data and an inventory of (mostly but not invariably highly illegal) books impounded in the Bastille, but neither is included in the MPCE figures given here, as tending to distort the analysis and overlapping with other statistical datasets that are discussed (e.g. FBTEE-1.0).

³³ As the MPCE project and FBTEE-2.0 database represent a continuation of the French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe project and expansion of its FBTEE database (FBTEE-1.0), the scholarship overlaps. The most notable outputs from the MPCE phase include Burrows and Roe, *Digitizing Enlightenment* (which contains several chapters relating to FBTEE/MPCE); Burrows *et al.*, "Stationers, Papetiers and the Supply Networks of a Swiss Publisher"; Burrows *et al.*, "Mapping Print, Connecting Cultures"; Burrows, *Enlightenment Bestsellers*; Burrows, "Cicero, Voltaire and the Bible"; Burrows, "Charmet and the Book Police"; Burrows, "Geography and Control"; Burrows, "The Common Cosmopolitan Reading Culture"; Burrows, "Revision and Omission"; Burrows, "Forgotten Best-Sellers"; and Burrows, "БИБЛИОМЕТРИЯ, ПОПУЛЯРНОЕ ЧТЕНИЕ И ЛИТЕРАТУРНОЕ ПОЛЕ ИЗДАТЕЛЯ ЭПОХИ ПРОСВЕЩЕНИЯ (Bibliometrics, Popular Reading, and the Literary Field of an Enlightenment Publisher)."

³⁴ See the website for "The Enlightenment Books Project at Pomona College: A Bibliographical Checklist of Eighteenth-Century Editions", <https://kates.itg.pomona.edu/books/analytics.php?type=all> (accessed Sept. 26, 2022). Since the current paper was given at the George Rudé Seminar in July 2022, Kates's team has added over 100 titles and several thousand editions to their data, drawing on recent Enlightenment scholarship to round out their survey of important works. As a result, the figures in this paper have been significantly revised, though their impact on the rankings discussed was relatively minor and did not impact the general interpretation. The database helped define the books explored by Kates in *The Books that Made the European Enlightenment*.

³⁵ There are some glitches in Kates's data, which needs to be processed with vigilance. In particular, numbers for Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* have been hand-calculated from data he provides (because they were curiously absent from Kates's decadal tables at the time of writing).

Darnton – French libertine book orders to STN, 1769–89	Burrows – FBTEE – STN Marchandise générale 1769–89	Burrows – MPCE – 1769– 1789 booktrade events	Montoya – Private Libraries 1790–1830 (MEDIATE)	Kates – (French edition count 1770– 1789)
Voltaire	Voltaire	Voltaire	Voltaire	Voltaire
D’Holbach &c	D’Holbach	D’Argens	Fénelon	Rousseau
Raynal	Marmontel	Montesquieu	Montesquieu	Montesquieu
Rousseau	Montesquieu	Rousseau	Marmontel	Fénelon
Helvétius	Fénelon	Marmontel	Rousseau	Diderot
D’Argens	Rousseau	Raynal	Buffon	Raynal
	Saint-Lambert	Fénelon	Diderot	Marmontel

Figure 3. Best-selling *philosophes* in recent surveys

The STN datasets published by FBTEE (which cover every title sold by the STN) and Darnton (covering only orders for illegal titles) also correlate quite strongly. D’Holbach scores highly on both (primarily in Darnton’s case because the STN published an early edition of the *Système de la nature*). But given his focus is illegal works, Darnton’s clustering of *philosophes* Voltaire, d’Holbach, Rousseau and Helvétius and Raynal seems broadly in line with the other surveys.

The correlation with Kates’s edition counts is particularly strong. All five of Darnton’s clandestine best-selling authors appear in Kates’s top eight *philosophes*, since d’Holbach ranks eighth in his survey. (Kates’s other leading *philosophes* are Marmontel, Montesquieu and finally Fénelon, whose works generally do not qualify for inclusion in Darnton’s survey).³⁶ Meanwhile, the FBTEE data matches Kates, MPCE and MEDIATE on five out of seven top authors: it might however, like Darnton’s list, be considered an outlier because of the order of author rankings, and this, it might be assumed, reflects the particularities of the STN’s trade.³⁷

One apparent anomaly across lists is the instability of Fénelon’s ranking. However, this is an outcome of different methodologies. The rankings are based on only one book, *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, that was immensely popular; running to twice as many editions in Kates’s survey across the entire eighteenth century than any other title.³⁸ As a result, Fénelon scores particularly highly on presence in libraries (MEDIATE), and lower in surveys which count each of his titles separately.

Thus, all considered there is a remarkable congruence not only between rankings across the MPCE events, MEDIATE and Kates datasets, but also the two surveys based on the STN data. Given this congruence, it seems fair to conclude that between 1770 and 1789, Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu were, in that order, probably the three most read *philosophes*. They were followed probably (though the order is now less clear) by Marmontel, Fénelon and Raynal. Also, significantly, in Kates’s sample, Voltaire’s *Histoire de Charles XII* and his smutty satire on Joan of Arc, *La pucelle d’Orléans*, both outstripped his more philosophical works such as *Candide* and *Questions sur l’Encyclopédie*. This

³⁶ Intriguingly, all 10 of Darnton’s clandestine authors also make it into the top 150 places of MPCE’s all authors table, though in some cases exclusively on the basis of customs confiscations.

³⁷ On the specifics of the STN’s trade as a Swiss publishing house, see Curran, *Selling Enlightenment*; and Burrows, *Enlightenment Bestsellers*, *passim*. See also Burrows and Curran, “How Swiss was the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel?”

³⁸ Kates’s database lists 421 editions of *Les aventures de Télémaque* compared to 208 of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and 216 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in second and third place on his list. See <https://kates.itg.pomona.edu/books/analytics.php?type=all> (accessed Sept. 27, 2022).

appears to support Mornet's contention that Voltaire was more appreciated as poet, historian and dramatist than as *philosophe*.³⁹

Given that different surveys using different techniques produced such similar and congruent results, it seems fair to ask what else those surveys included. Did Kates's survey, for example, find evidence for the radical smut – whether pure pornography or political *libelles* – by which Darnton set such store?

The answer is a qualified “yes”, for although they do not quite make Kates's top ten French authors, one *libelliste* from those Kates surveyed ranked eleventh, and a pornographer ranked fourteenth. The pornographer – if attributions are correct – was Du Laurens, putative author of three works and twenty editions in Kates's sample.⁴⁰ The *libelliste* was Pidansat de Mairobert, for whom Kates lists twenty-eight editions of four titles.⁴¹ These were Darnton's top *libelliste* and pornographer, too. Such an observation may be circular, to some extent, since Kates used Darnton's *œuvre* to compile the master-list of titles for his project. Nevertheless, the presence of other “libertine” authors and texts in both surveys seems to confirm the significance of both Du Laurens and Mairobert.

Author	Titles in survey	1770–79	1780–89	Total
Voltaire	17	188	89	277
Rousseau	7	33	61	174
Montesquieu	4	45	38	83
Fénelon	1	25	36	61
Diderot	9	40	15	55
Tissot	2	30	19	49
Raynal	1	29	11	40
Marmontel	2	22	16	38
D'Holbach	6	27	7	34
Helvétius	2	16	12	28

Figure 4. French edition counts for top French authors in Kates's sample (1770–89)

Finally, having established confidence that multiple methods produce broadly similar rankings, it is time to consider the top performing authors according to the MPCE and MEDIANTE databases. The two measures give rather different results. Here are the event counts for MPCE's top fifteen authors (fig. 5).

This list is interesting in several respects. First, it seems to validate traditional historiography's insistence on the primacy of Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu among Enlightenment authors, though the presence of the marquis d'Argens due to his prominence

³⁹ Mornet, “Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées”, 464.

⁴⁰ *Chandelle d'Arras* (five editions), *Arretin moderne* (seven editions) and *Compère Mathieu* (eleven editions). The FBTEE-2.0 database contains other works by du Laurens that were not included in Kates's sample. See above note 19.

⁴¹ His score comprises the *Anecdotes* (ten editions), *Maupoeuana* (nine editions), *Espion anglois* (five editions) and *Journal historique de la révolution opérée par M. de Maupeou* (four editions), as well (though Kates does not attribute these to Mairobert) as some volumes of the so-called *Mémoires secrets* de Bachaumont (eight editions according to Kates's team, but possibly some double counting). The degree of Mairobert's actual involvement in the confection of the *Mémoires secrets* is open to debate and will be discussed in a future article by Damien Tricoire, Simon Dagenais and myself.

in the Parisian stock sale and confiscation data is intriguing.⁴² Second, the prevalence of religious writers is striking – they comprise three of the top four authors: the table-topping collective identity the “*Bible*”; Jacques Coret; and Thomas à Kempis.⁴³ In sixth place, Denis-Xavier Clément was also a writer of devotional works, as was tenth-placed Pierre Hubert Humbert.⁴⁴ Two other writers on the list were also divines, though Fleury’s works extended beyond the narrowly religious into domains such as history and law, both public and ecclesiastical, whilst the abbé Prévost, whose clerical status was intermittent, is best known as a novelist, author of works such as *Le Philosophe anglois, ou histoire de Monsieur Cleveland, fils naturel de Cromwell*, *Le Doyen De Killerine*, and, of course, *L’Histoire du chevalier des Grieux, et de Manon Lescaut*.⁴⁵

MPCE Events by Dataset	Permissions Simples n=1,767	Estampillage n=2,770	Stock Sales n=10,186	Confiscations n=3,659	Total n = 18,797
Bible	87	77	169	6	339
Voltaire	24	40	48	189	301
Thomas à Kempis	47	85	24	10	166
Jacques Coret	66	89	2	4	161
Jean Racine	7	11	97	4	119
Denis-Xavier Clément	81	30	3	2	116
François Bertrand Barrême	38	30	42	2	112
Jean-Baptiste Boyer, Marquis d'Argens	0	1	74	22	97

⁴² The following works in the FBTEE-2.0 database are attributed to Jean-Baptiste Boyer, marquis d’Argens: *Critique du siècle, ou lettre sur divers sujets*; *Lettres cabalistiques*; *Mémoires secrets de la république des lettres, ou le Théâtre de la vérité*; *Philosophie du bon sens*; *Thérèse philosophe*; *Lettres d’un sauvage dépaycé*; as well as *Timée de Locres en grec et en français avec des dissertations sur les principales questions de la métaphysique, de la physique, & de la morale des anciens*; and compilations of d’Argen’s works *Œuvres de M. le marquis d’Argens*; and *Esprit du marquis d’Argens*.

⁴³ Jacques Coret was the nominal author of the best-selling *Ange conducteur*, although editions varied greatly in content, so not all material in most versions stemmed from him. Thomas à Kempis was the author of the Renaissance masterpiece and perennial Christian bestseller *The Imitation of Christ*, which after the *Bible* is the second best-selling Christian work of all time.

⁴⁴ Denis-Xavier Clément was author of the *Journée du chrétien sanctifiée par la prière et méditation*, an enormously popular pious work; the *Exercices de l’âme, pour se disposer aux sacrements de pénitence et d’eucharistie*; *Maximes pour se conduire dans le monde*; *Méditations sur la passion de Jésus Christ*; and a collection of Sermons. Pierre-Hubert Humbert’s two most important works in the FBTEE-2.0 database are *Instructions chrétiennes pour les jeunes gens* and *Pensées sur les plus importantes vérités de la religion et sur les principaux devoirs du christianisme*, but it also has some information on his *Sermons* and *Exercices de la vie chrétienne*.

⁴⁵ Fleury’s works in the FBTEE-2.0 database include his celebrated *Histoire ecclésiastique*; various versions and abridgements of his *Catechisme historique contenant en abrégé l’histoire sainte et la doctrine chrétienne par demandes et réponses*; his *Discours sur l’histoire ecclésiastique*; two legal works, *Institution au droit ecclésiastique* and the posthumously published *Droit public de France*; three related works entitled *Mœurs des israélites et des chrétiens*, *Mœurs des israélites et des romains* and *Essais historiques et critiques sur les juifs anciens et modernes; ou Supplément aux mœurs des israélites*; a *Traité du choix de la méthode des études*; and sets of collected works under the titles *Opusculs de M. l’Abbé Fleury* and *Supplément aux Opusculs de M. l’Abbé Fleury*.

Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont	1	39	38	5	83
Pierre-Hubert Humbert	42	33	0	0	75
Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles	5	21	42	6	74
Claude Fleury	26	29	5	7	67
Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu	1	11	50	5	67
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	1	8	15	42	66
Claude-Prospér Jolyot de Crébillon, fils	1	7	43	14	65

Figure 5. Event counts for top authors in MPCE database, 1769–90. $n = 18,232$
(*Philosophes* highlighted in red)

Equally notable, as Figure 6 shows, the youngest nine authors on the list belonged to a generation born between 1687 and 1712. Four more were born in a single decade between 1631 and 1640. Furthermore, less than half of these authors were alive in 1770, at the start of the period under discussion here, and none lived to see the French Revolution. The last survivor among them, Madame Le Prince de Beaumont, died in 1780.

MPCE author (ranked by # of events)	Birth	Death
Bible	n/a	Last bk 1 st century CE
Voltaire	1694	1778
Thomas à Kempis	c. 1380	1471
Jacques Coret	1631	1721
Jean Racine	1639	1699
Denis-Xavier Clément	1706	1770
François Bertrand Barrême	1638	1703
Jean-Baptiste Boyer, Marquis d'Argens	1703	1771
Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont	1711	1780
Pierre-Hubert Humbert	1687	1778
Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles	1697	1763
Claude Fleury	1640	1723
Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu	1689	1755
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	1712	1778
Claude-Prospér Jolyot de Crébillon, fils	1707	1777

Figure 6. Author birth and death dates for MPCE sample

Five authors clustered at the top of the list wrote before the dawn of the eighteenth century: the *Bible* is the work of known and unknown ancient writers; Thomas à Kempis wrote in the mid-fifteenth century; whilst Barrême, Racine and Coret all produced their key works in the late seventeenth century. The same is also true of Fleury. Montesquieu and Prévost both produced their most important works in the first half of the eighteenth century. Even those still living in 1770 (who other than Voltaire are clustered towards the bottom of the table) mostly had their most productive days well behind them.

Thus the MPCE data suggests that the most popular authors of the 1770s and particularly the 1780s do not reflect the most recent reading fashions nor the cutting edge of the high or radical enlightenments. Instead, with the exception of the “*Bible*” and Thomas à Kempis, they were all men and one woman born and/or raised in the reign of Louis XIV. In the eighteenth century, clearly, the post-publication afterlife of books and authors was very drawn out, and readers tended to be more backward than forward looking. This becomes even more evident in the MEDiate data.

The MEDiate data revealed a prevalence of classical authors (see fig. 7). This was not evident in MPCE, which ranked just seven classical authors in the top 100, all of them in the middle to lower echelons.⁴⁶ The MEDiate team has not yet published their country-by-country data, which in any case will be quite thin, since it has only 500 catalogues from multiple countries (mostly Dutch, British and French) drawn from across the long eighteenth century.

Rank	1791–1810	1811–30
1	<i>Bible</i>	<i>Bible</i>
2	Virgil	Ovid
3	Ovid	Virgil
4	Horace	Horace
5	Voltaire	Voltaire
6	Cicero	Milton
7	Fénelon	Fénelon
8	Homer	Tacitus
9	Cervantes	Cicero
10	Marmontel	Homer
11	Addison	Terence
12	Terence	Plutarch
13	Tacitus	La Fontaine
14	Erasmus	Grotius

Figure 7. Top-ranked authors in private libraries surveyed in MEDiate database, by presence in collections, 1790–1830. (Classical authors highlighted in red, French in purple)

As a result, for present purposes it is best to rely on their full range of catalogues covering the years 1791–1830. In both twenty-year time bands within this period, classical authors dominate the MEDiate tables, with Ovid, Virgil and Horace all outranking Voltaire, despite his international appeal. With the Bible topping the list, and Renaissance humanists Erasmus and Grotius, who had one foot in the classical camp, also present, this leaves little space for contemporary authors. However, other religious authors are missing.

So why does MEDiate data not show religious authors and MPCE data not pick up the classical authors? Does this imply flawed approaches? Not at all. MPCE may not have picked up the classical authors because many of the classical works in MEDiate were probably second hand, a sector of the book trade which David McKitterick suggests has always outnumbered the trade in new books.⁴⁷ However, MPCE events datasets relate

⁴⁶ These classical authors (with ranks) were Horace (46), Ovid (=48), Cicero and Hippocrates (=57), Virgil and Plutarch (=61), Sophocles (=90). Although three of these authors do not feature in the 1790–1830 MEDiate top-ranking authors, the presence of Horace, Ovid, Virgil and Cicero near the top of the MPCE and MEDiate classical author rankings is instructive. A slightly different order, and significantly higher rankings, emerge when copies are substituted for events in the MPCE tables: for these rankings, see below.

⁴⁷ McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books*, 20.

primarily to new books. Equally, some classical items may have been schoolbooks, produced in large print runs for predictable local consumption. These, too, will tend not to show in the MPCE sources, which focus on books trading over distances between suppliers or sitting in inventory.⁴⁸ The exception is the *Permission simple* events data concerning print-runs: such entries are small in number but involved significant quantities of books, including Latin titles that were almost certainly schoolbooks.

Conversely, religious authors did not individually feature in the MEDIANE tables because their books were produced for denominational use, and France, Britain and the Netherlands each had a different dominant denomination. Equally, many of the religious editions captured in the MPCE data were cheap, flimsy, small-format books for devotional use. They may not have featured in most library catalogues for several reasons: most had little resale value and some fell apart through use. Others, as devotional objects, were kept apart from their owners' libraries. Other genres of works may be similarly under-represented in the MEDIANE data because stored separately and intended for everyday use. Such genres include cookbooks, self-help manuals and accounting texts such as Barrême's *Le Livre de comptes faits*, which features prominently in MPCE. Rather than proving a problem with their respective methods, the discrepancies between MEDIANE and MPCE data reinforce this article's opening assertions about the need to balance multiple sources.

However, classical authors do become visible in the MPCE data once the analysis moves from counting the number of events to consider the number of copies recorded within those events.⁴⁹ Because of the significant discrepancies in the number of books recorded in the different datasets, caution is needed when interpreting these numbers. In particular, the data is skewed towards the popular but legal books for which *permission simple* licences were available, and which record entire print-runs. In addition, events where quantities were not calibrated by number of copies are not captured (this applies predominantly to a subset of the confiscations data, where quantities were not given or were denoted by the containers in which they were found – for example, “*un paquet*”, “*un ballot*”). However, the *estampillage* records generally confirm the popularity of the works in the *permission simple* records, which were by definition works with demand reliable enough that publishers were happy to purchase print licences, often in significant numbers (up to sixty editions in a single decade for popular religious works). Those licences also reveal that religious works and some textbooks tended to be produced with larger print runs than other genres, and this makes religious authors even more dominant when measuring the number of copies in the MPCE events data rather than just counting the number of events (see fig. 8).

⁴⁸ The FBTEE-1.0 database showed that most schoolbooks published by the Société typographique de Neuchâtel circulated locally. However, a minority also traveled over long distances to markets in places like Russia and Poland, which were apparently unable to support large-scale local cheap production. Very few schoolbooks went to intermediate destinations, in marked contrast to most other genres traded by the STN.

⁴⁹ The analysis that follows from this point until the two concluding paragraphs is an update to the paper given at the George Rudé Seminar in July 2022. At that time, the capacity to count copies of books in the database was still under development in the Heurist database platform in which the MPCE / FBTEE-2.0 database is housed.

Rank	Author	<i>Permission simple</i>	<i>Estampillage</i>	Paris stock sales	Parisian confiscations	Totals
1.	Clément, Denis Xavier	189,750	18,774	398	302	209,224
2.	[Bible]	165,000	11,781	5,458	35	182,274
3.	Coret, Jacques	123,700	25,686	11	164	149,561
4.	La Salle, Jean Baptiste de	110,000	1,500			111,500
5.	Humbert, Pierre Hubert	78,600	22,392			100,992
6.	Thomas à Kempis	76,550	20,378	2,728	112	99,768
7.	Barrême, François Bertrand de	80,500	2,602	687	2	83,791
8.	Francis de Sales	51,250	1,621			52,871
9.	Baudrand, Barthélemi	37,400	8,190	1	52	45,643
10.	Fleury, Claude	35,750	6,029	976	52	42,807
11.	Cicero, Marcus Tullius	33,500	17	3		33,520
12.	Gobinet, Charles	22,000	9,874		6	31,880
13.	Liguori, Alfonso Maria de	29,400	2,295		122	31,817
14.	Fontaine, Nicolas	27,800	3,744	7		31,551
15.	Drouas de Broussey, Claude	31,250	14			31,264
16.	Voltaire	22,050	1,690	4,078	2,103	29,921

Figure 8. Number of copies recorded across four MPCE datasets, by author.

The upper levels of Figure 8 are dominated by most of the same list of divines as the MPCE events table, and they are joined by further religious writers, living and dead, such as Jean-Baptiste de Salle (1651–1719), Francis de Sales, Catholic Bishop of Geneva (1567–1622), Barthélemi Baudrand (1701–87), Charles Gobinet (1614–90), (Saint) Alfonso Maria de Ligouri (1696–1787), Nicolas Fontaine (1625–1709), and Claude Drouas de Broussey, Bishop of Toul (1712–73). In total, thirteen of the top sixteen writers as measured by copies in the MPCE events data were religious authors, including the collective [Bible] and Fleury. But the other headline news in this table, apart from the relegation of Voltaire, is the appearance of a single classical author, Cicero.

However, a little further down this ranking table, classical authors suddenly become very notable, occupying eleven places in the top fifty rankings (see fig. 9). Further, the presence of these authors in either three or four of the MPCE datasets confirms their significance and (though their ordering in the rankings differs) is broadly consistent with the MEDATE findings.

MEDIATE ranks classical authors more highly because it is counting their presence predominantly in the libraries of a classically educated, moderately wealthy urban elite. MPCE, by contrast, sounds the whole book market. Thus classical writers should be expected to perform less strongly, since demand for religious literature came from a much wider social range than demand for classical literature, and because most classical writers produced relatively few extant works compared to many eighteenth-century writers. Thus it feels broadly correct that MPCE's top eleven classical writers should chalk up somewhere between 9,013 copies (Tacitus) and 33,520 copies (Cicero) in the MPCE datasets, in contrast to Denis-Xavier Clément's 209,224.⁵⁰

Ranking MPCE copies	Author	# of datasets present
11	Cicero	3
23	Phaedrus	4
25	Vergil	4
26	Salluste	4
28	Livy	4
34	Juvenal	3
36	Horace	4
38	Quintus-Curcius	3
41	Ovid	3
42	Flaccus, Aulus Persius	2
50	Tacitus	4

Figure 9. Presence of classical authors in top 50 authors by # of copies in four MPCE datasets

So, to conclude, in the 1770s and 1780s France's favorite Enlightenment authors remained the canonical writers of the first generation of *philosophes*: Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Fénelon and possibly (though only two datasets support this), d'Argens. However, with the exception of Voltaire, other authors of the same generation seem to have significantly outstripped these writers for sales, particularly devotional authors, but also historians, dramatists, novelists, educationalists, and writers of accounting manuals.

Furthermore, the authors of the most significant texts of the Christian faith, the *Bible* (and its component parts such as psalters and *New Testaments*), as well as the *Imitation of Christ* and other devotional works featured at the very top of the bestseller lists. Moreover, classical, mostly Roman authors, were probably circulating in significant numbers among a surprisingly large educated elite. A more radical and slightly younger generation of *philosophes*, notably Marmontel, Raynal, d'Holbach and Diderot also made a mark, but were less significant in bibliometric terms. The readers of the high Enlightenment thus seem to have been more moderate, more classically read, more religious, and perhaps rather less enlightened than often supposed.

⁵⁰ There are hints of the success of classical authors in the Kates database, too, but as the inclusion of classical authors has been much less systematic than for Enlightenment authors, they have been excluded from the tables. The most notable of these authors are, somewhat unexpectedly (since he does not chart elsewhere), Sophocles (on forty editions of seven plays), Virgil (twenty-nine editions of three works) and Ovid (eleven editions of three works). This ranks Sophocles equal with Raynal in Kates's figures and places Virgil just ahead of Helvétius and Mairobert.

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