

<http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article3384>



# Supplementary Letter V

- Persian Letters - Letters -

Date de mise en ligne : mardi 14 avril 2020

---

Copyright © Montesquieu - Tous droits réservés

---

*Usbek to \*\*\** [1]

---

The reign of the late king was so long that the end had caused the beginning to be forgotten. It is fashionable today to be occupied only by the events that took place during his minority, and memoirs of those times are the only thing people are now reading. [2]

Here is the speech that one of the generals of the city of Paris [3] delivered in a war council, and I admit I do understand much of it.

MESSIEURS, although our troops have been repelled with losses, I think it will be easy for us to make up for this failure. I have six stanzas of a song all ready to be released, which, I am confident, will put everything back into balance. I have chosen several very clear voices, which, emerging from the cavity of certain very powerful lungs, will marvelously move the people. They are on a tune which has so far had a quite particular effect.

If that does not suffice, we will bring out a print that will show Mazarin hanged.

Happily for us, he does not speak good French ; and he butchers it so badly that it is not possible for his affairs not to decline. We do not fail to call the attention of the people to the ridiculous tone with which he speaks. A few days ago we identified a grammatical mistake so flagrant that farces of it were acted out on every street corner. [4]

I hope that before a week goes by, the people will make of Mazarin's name a generic word to express all beasts of burden, and those used for draught.

Since our defeat, our music has so furiously vexed him over original sin [5] that in order not to see his partisans reduced by half, he was obliged to dismiss all of his pages.

So take heart ; get your courage back, and be sure that we will make him go back over the mountains followed by our hisses.

*Paris this 4th day of the moon of Chahban 1718*

---

[1] This letter first appeared in edition B (1721).

[2] Among others, those of La Rochefoucauld (1710), Cardinal de Retz (1718), and Mazarin's *Letters* (1693).

[3] Usbek refers to the coadjutor, Paul de Gondi (future Cardinal de Retz), one of the generals of Paris besieged by the royal army, trying to minimize a defeat suffered by Antony during the first Fronde (January 1649). Gondi was one of the first to understand the interest of pamphlets (mazarinades) of all kinds.

## Supplementary Letter V

---

[4] Mazarin's foreign origins was one of the favorite themes of what were called *mazarinades*. According to Retz, Mazarin spoke French poorly, perhaps with the intention of confusing his interlocutors.

[5] This term could refer to any failing that prevents his achieving success (Furetière, 1690), but is also an allusion to his putative homosexuality (also referred to as the "Italian vice").