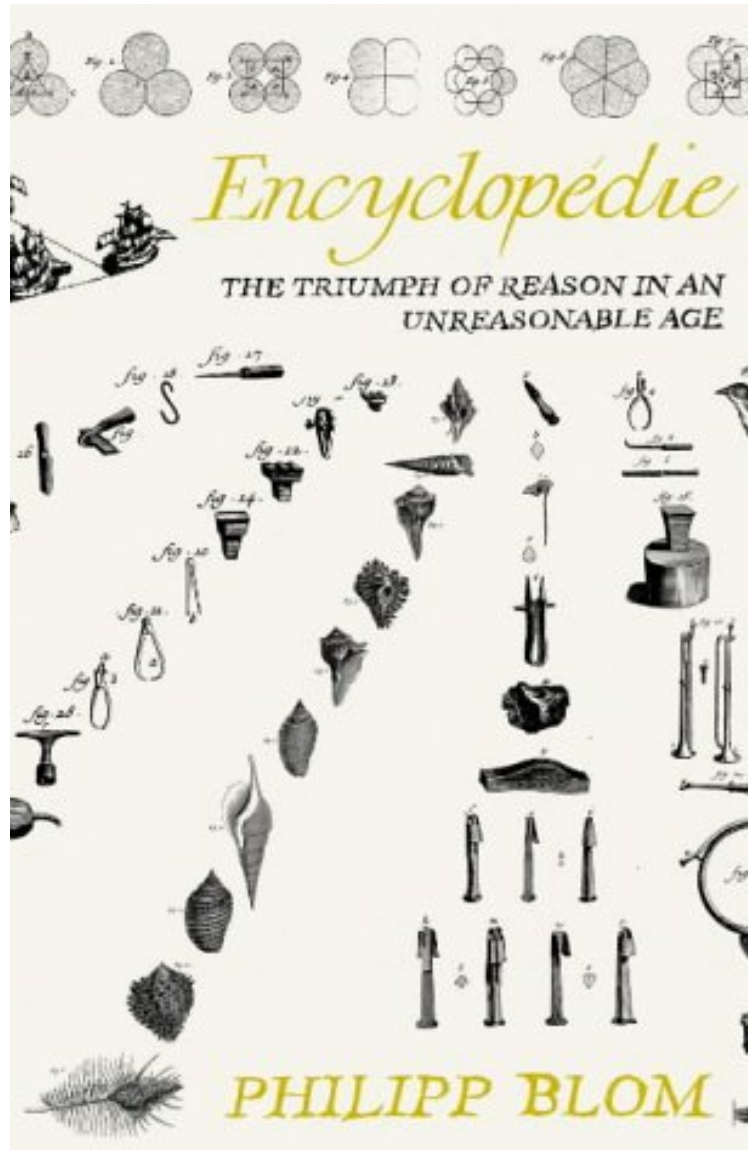


# Encyclopedie

Philipp Blom

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**Philipp Blom : Encyclopedie** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Encyclopedie:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A sparkling readBy Ralph BlumenauMost of the French Encyclopaedists were men of sparkle and wit, and Philipp Blom's book shares these qualities. We get an excellent account of the historical background, of the contents and subversive nature and outlook of the Encyclopedie, of the immense task of compiling its 17 volumes of texts and 11 of plates over a period of 19 years, of the trials and

tribulations it encountered at the hands of the authorities, but above all of the main characters associated with it, especially the lovable Diderot and the less than lovable Rousseau, but also d'Alembert (so much more arrogant than his charming portrait by Quentin de la Tour would suggest), the Chevalier de Jaucourt (three different figures are given on different pages for the number of articles he contributed), Helvtius, and many others. Like the Encyclopedie itself, this book about it contains many digressions which are only thinly connected with the work itself, but as these are almost all entertaining, one cannot really complain. They are mostly about the lives of men and women who moved in the circle of the Encyclopaedists even if they were not direct contributors to the work. Blom does, however, dedicate no fewer than 12 pages to the story of Damien's attempt in 1757 on the life of Louis XV and the ghoulish details of his torture and execution - all on the specious grounds that, in reaction to this event, the Encyclopaedia was banned two years later: Blom makes it clear that there were far more immediate reasons for the Encyclopaedia being suppressed. Each chapter has at its beginning one of the plates that illustrated the great work, and there is just the niggle that there is no key to the figures or to the little letters labelling the parts of the images. The book was republished in 2005 under the title "Enlightening the World". You can google an excellent review by the American specialist Raymond Birn in H-France Review Vol.6, and this points out a rather alarming number of factual inaccuracies. Had I not read this, I would have given the book five stars.

The story of one of the most revolutionary books in history -- the Encyclopedie and the young men who risked everything to write it. In 1777 a group of young men produced a book that aimed to tear the world apart and rebuild it. It filled 27 volumes and contained 72,000 articles, 16,500 pages and 17 million words. The Encyclopedie was so dangerous and subversive that it was banned by the Pope and was seen as one of the causes of the French Revolution. The writers included some of the greatest minds of the age: Denis Diderot, the editor, who had come to Paris to become a Jesuit but found the joys of the city too enticing; d'Alembert, one of the leading mathematicians of the 18th century; Rousseau, the father of Romanticism and Voltaire, the author of CANDIDE. During the sixteen years it took to write, compile and produce all twenty seven volumes, the writers had to defy the authorities and faced exile, jail and censorship, as well as numerous internal falling outs and philosophical differences. Yet, in the end, they produced a book that would act as a bomb that exploded at the centre of civilisation and changed the world forever.