# The Revolutionary Temper

## *Paris, 1748–1789*

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# The Revolutionary Temper

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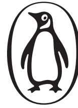


First published in the United States of America
by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2023
First published in Great Britain by Allen Lane 2023
001

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–713–99656–2

www.greenpenguin.co.uk

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*To Susan*

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# Paris, 1776

Place Vendôme

Bourse

Place Louis XV

Rue Saint Honoré

Rue de Richelieu

Palais Royal

Jardins des Tuileries

Comédie française

Les Halles

Seine River

Palais des Tuileries

Louvre

Pont Neuf

Place Dauphine

Couvent des Grands-Augusti

Palais du Luxembourg

Jardin du Luxembourg

0 ¼ ½ mi

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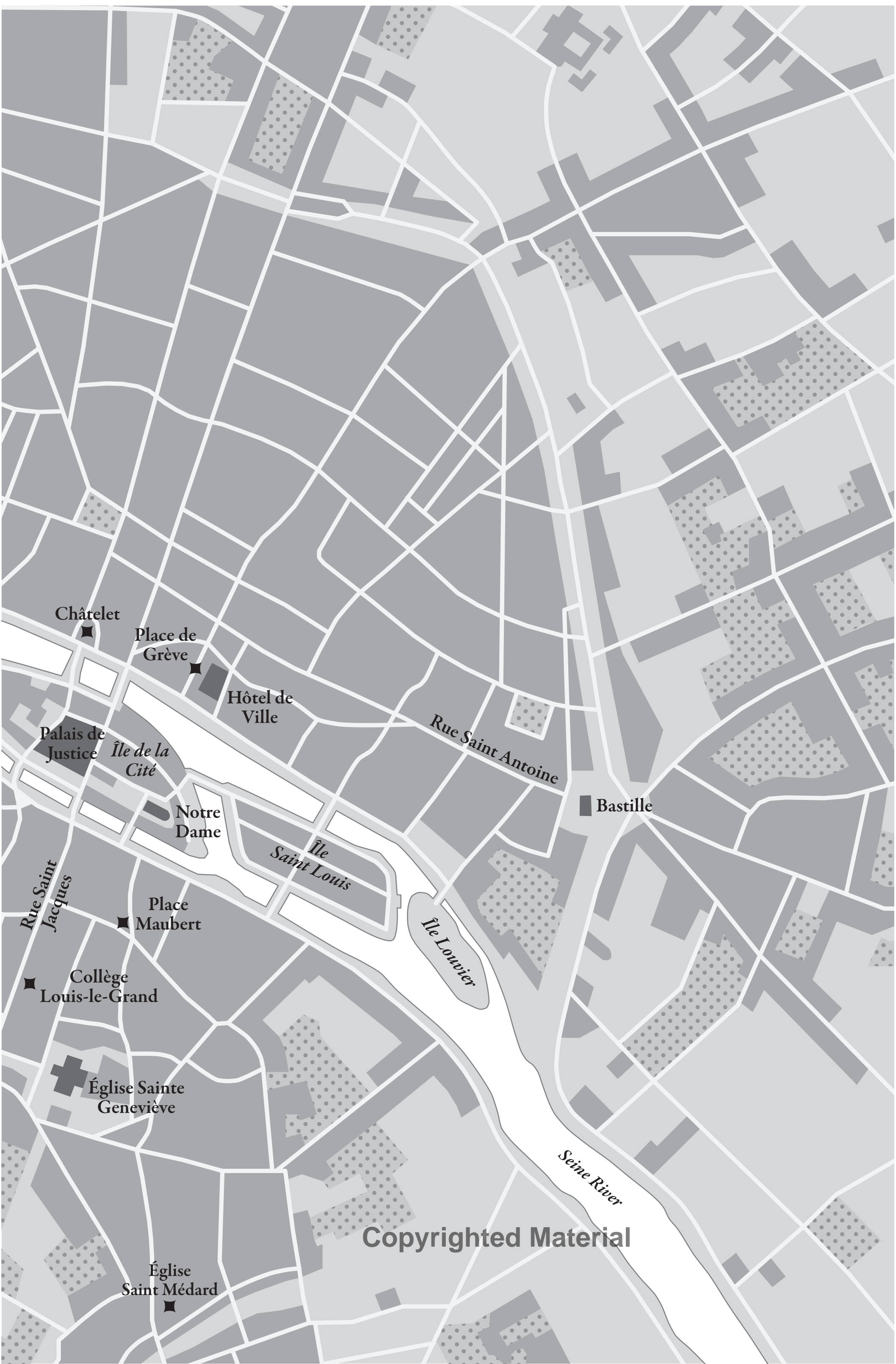

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To live over other people's lives is nothing unless we live over their perceptions, live over the growth, the change, the varying intensities of the same—since it was by these things they themselves lived.

—Henry James as cited in Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life*

*Il semble que certaines réalités transcendantes émettent autour d'elles des rayons auxquelles la foule est sensible. C'est ainsi que, par exemple, quand un événement se produit, quand à la frontière une armée est en danger, ou battue, ou victorieuse, les nouvelles assez obscures qu'on reçoit et d'où l'homme cultivé ne sait pas tirer grand'chose, excitent dans la foule une émotion qui le surprend et dans laquelle, une fois que les experts l'ont mis au courant de la véritable situation miilitaire, il reconnaît la perception par le peuple de cette "aura" qui entoure les grands événements et qui peut être visible à des centaines de kilomètres.*

It seems that certain transcendent realities emit from themselves beams of light that are picked up by the crowd. Thus it is, for example, that when an event occurs, when at the border an army is in danger, or is defeated, or wins a victory, the rather obscure news that one receives and that a cultivated man can't make much sense of, arouses in the crowd an emotion that surprises him and in which, once the experts have made him aware of the actual military situation, he recognizes the perception by the common people of that "aura" which surrounds great events and which can be visible at a distance of hundreds of kilometers.

—Marcel Proust, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*

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# INTRODUCTION

## AN EARLY INFORMATION SOCIETY AND COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

Events do not come naked into the world. They come clothed—in attitudes, assumptions, values, memories of the past, anticipations of the future, hopes and fears, and many other emotions. To understand events, it is necessary to describe the perceptions that accompany them, for the two are inseparable. This book tells the story of how Parisians experienced the sequence of events that extended from the end of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748) to the taking of the Bastille in 1789.

"Event history" has been deprecated for decades by professional historians—the leaders of the "Annales school" in France dismissed it as a thin veneer covering the deep structures of the past—but it is undergoing a revival, and it can be reworked, I believe, not simply as a record of what happened but as a way to understand how people made sense of happenings.[1] Their responses provide clues to public opinion, which has often been studied by historians, and also to something deeper: collective consciousness.

That something, I admit, is difficult to pin down with words. Social scientists frequently use related terms such as mentality, worldview, climate of opinion, and Zeitgeist, although, as explained below, "collective consciousness" emerged long ago in the work of Durkheim as a favorite concept among sociologists. I have adapted it under another name, "rev-

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olutionary temper," to characterize the way Parisians responded to the events that swept through their lives from 1748 to 1789. By "temper," I mean a frame of mind fixed by experience in a manner that is analogous to the "tempering" of steel by a process of heating and cooling.[2]

Paris underwent many changes during the eighteenth century, in its population, geography, and physical appearance. Thanks to research by a new generation of social and economic historians, we now can trace accompanying changes in Parisians' everyday surroundings, even of their diet, dress, furniture, shopping habits, amusements, and reading. Although the living conditions colored their general outlook on life, their sense of the direction taken in public affairs did not derive directly from their environment or their books. It developed in response to the news they received. I hope to allow for the influence of socioeconomic conditions and literature, but I will concentrate on the flow of information at street level—on the reports of events and of reactions to events as conveyed by the contemporary media.

So much happened during the four decades before the Revolution that, to avoid drowning the reader in detail, I have had to be selective. Rather than narrating an uninterrupted sequence, I have chosen four especially dense periods (1748–1754, 1762–1764, 1770–1775, 1781–1786) and then have concentrated on events from 1787 up to the storming of the Bastille. The narrative is meant to show how Parisians apprehended the course of events in a way that made them ready to take the great leap into a revolution in 1789.

I have limited the story to Paris, although much of it applies to the rest of France.[3] To wander through the provinces would be to lose the narrative thread in an overabundance of detail. Paris itself was a complex world, composed of many neighborhoods, each with its own identity, and an enormous, expanding population, differentiated by endless degrees of wealth and status. Intermixing increased in the second half of the century, when haberdashery in secondhand finery made it difficult to read "quality" by dress, and plebeians rubbed shoulders with patricians in theaters and public gardens. Yet Parisians retained an acute awareness of social standing, and they consistently differentiated between the "little people" (*le menu peuple*, *les petites gens*) at the bottom of society and *les grands* at the top. *Les grands* had access to Versailles: hence the expression "*la*

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*cour et la ville*," which indicated the connection between court and capital reserved for the great. For most Parisians, especially the "little people," Versailles was an alien world, and politics was the king's business, transacted in his name by ministers, courtiers, and power brokers among *les grands*. Yet word about the power plays leaked from Versailles, and it converged with all sorts of other news in the information system of Paris. In order to follow the ebb and flow of information among ordinary Parisians, I will avoid recounting events such as ministerial intrigues that took place beyond their range of vision, except insofar as they were reworked as rumors in salons, cafés, wineshops, street corners, and marketplaces.

I have relied primarily on diaries, correspondence, gazettes, and informal newssheets known as *nouvelles à la main*. Each has its limitations, and none provides a clear window into the past. In recounting events, the sources often describe how Parisians in general reacted to them, but there were no Parisians-in-general. Remarks about what "tout Paris" was saying usually were limited to a well-informed elite. The "on" in references to "*on dit*"—a common way of describing general opinion—did not usually extend deep into the world of artisans and shopkeepers; and when the talk referred explicitly to the common people, it often revealed more about the observers than the observed. There is no unmediated view of collective consciousness, which must be understood by inferences and interpretive leaps, supported by all the available evidence strung out over an adequate stretch of time.

While acknowledging the difficulties in this approach to history, I would like to emphasize its strengths. The sources about the flow of information in eighteenth-century Paris are extraordinarily rich. We can reconstruct conversations in cafés, pick up news in underground gazettes, listen to the running commentary of street songs, and visualize power as it was displayed in processions and festivals. We often say that we live in an age of information, as if this were something new. Yet every period of history is an age of information, each in its own way, and in the eighteenth century, Paris was saturated with information transmitted by a multimedia system peculiar to its time and place.[4]

Consider the Tree of Cracow, a large chestnut tree in the northern part of the garden in the Palais-Royal at the heart of Paris. Every day, "*nouvellistes de bouche*" (oral newsmongers) gathered under it to exchange the lat-

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est news by word of mouth. Ambassadors reportedly sent agents to pick up information or implant it, while ordinary people stopped by to satisfy their curiosity. "Craque" in slang meant false news, and the tree's branches supposedly made a cracking sound whenever a *nouvelliste* got things blatantly wrong.[5] Some of the listeners scribbled notes about the latest reports and declaimed from them to groups that gathered in other meeting places—the nearby Café du Caveau and Café de Foy, certain benches in the Luxembourg Gardens and the gardens of the Tuileries, wineshops, dinner tables, and salons. Tucked in sleeves and waistcoat pockets, the notes were confiscated by the police when they frisked prisoners in the Bastille. They can still be seen in the Bastille archives, fragments of the information that stirred up talk two and a half centuries ago. The conversations themselves can be followed, café by café, in reports by police spies, which were often written in dialogue form.

Other kinds of newsmongers transformed the notes into "*nouvelles à la main*" or manuscript newsletters, which circulated "*sous le manteau*" (under the cloak). At least thirty-one *nouvellistes* produced gazettes of this kind during the last decades of the Ancien Régime. Although they were illegal, the police knew all about them, frequently vetted them, and even produced bulletins of their own, so insatiable was the demand for information in a society that lacked modern newspapers—that is, printed periodicals with reports about politics and public affairs. France's first daily, the *Journal de Paris*, did not appear until 1777. It was heavily censored and contained nothing that would upset anyone in the government or church while the official *Gazette de France*, produced for many years by the ministry for foreign affairs, carried little more than notices issued by the powers in Versailles.

For local information, Parisians consulted a newssheet, *Annonces, affiches et avis divers*, which carried advertisements and short articles on all sorts of nonpolitical subjects.[6] For international news, they read French-language newspapers printed in the Low Countries, the Rhineland, and Avignon, which then was a papal enclave in the Comtat Venaissin. The foreign journals circulated widely, especially during the forty years after 1745, when their number increased from fifteen to eighty-two.[7] Although effectively censored (the police could cut off their distribution through the mail), they contained a great deal of news from around the world, includ-

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ing the revolutionary colonies of America; and their Parisian correspondents often wrote extensive dispatches.[8]

The information system of the Ancien Régime blended news from oral, manuscript, and printed sources. How this happened is illustrated best by the salon of Marie-Anne Doublet, a group known as "*la paroisse*" (the parish) that met every Saturday in Mme Doublet's apartment in the Marais district. To prepare for the meeting, one of her valets went around the servants' quarters of the neighborhood gathering gossip. He entered the information in two registers kept for the salon, one for news that seemed reliable, the other for dubious rumors. As the "parishioners" arrived, they consulted the registers, added reports of their own, and then gathered around a table for discussion and supper. Servants later made digests of the news that the group deemed credible. Copies circulated for sale, and copies of the copies spread in widening circles throughout France and much of Europe. A version first appeared in print in 1777 and was extended in edition after edition to thirty-six volumes by 1789 under the title *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France*. The authorities knew all about the activities of the parish and at one point threatened to shut Mme Doublet up in a convent. Yet her primitive newsroom survived, and it left its mark on the news it produced—worldly, gossipy, spiced with witticisms about actresses and men about town, full of reviews of plays, books, and art exhibits, sympathetic to the Voltairean strain of the Enlightenment, and in political matters slanted in favor of the Parlement of Paris.[9]

While news and information of all kinds derived from word of mouth, Parisians inhabited a world where media overlapped and intersected. No boundaries separated communication by sounds and sights, whether in talk, writing, printing, or images. Rumor, for example, shaded off from casual gossip to seditious *bruits publics* (public noises). The extent of the variations can be gauged from the terminology of the time: *commérage*, *potin*, *ragot*, *on dit*, *rumeur, murmure*, *tapage*, *bruit public*. Witticisms took many forms such as the *bon mot*, *épigramme*, and *pont neuf*; and after being improvised in a verbal exchange, they often appeared in print. The manner and the tone of the exchanges inflected their meaning and effectiveness. Ridicule was a powerful weapon, as indicated by common remarks about the importance of getting laughter on one's side ("*mettre les rieurs de son côté*").

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So was sentiment. In fact, the growth of *sensiblerie* during the second half of the century was accompanied by a shift in rhetoric. Just as Rousseau challenged the dominance of Voltaire, laughter gave way to tears. The change in tone showed up especially in court cases that attracted so much attention that they became "affairs," as in the Calas Affair, the Diamond Necklace Affair, and the Kornmann Affair, which stirred passions and spread them through a broad public.

An element of theatricality pervaded the arguments of lawyers and of talk in general, whenever it attracted a crowd. Individuals declaimed pamphlets at street corners and read them aloud in cafés. On occasion, the readings turned into performances with elaborate scenarios: After being read to an audience, a pro-government tract was sometimes put on trial, accused of a crime, condemned, and burned. Messages were conveyed by all sorts of gestures and even by clothing. Well-dressed men sometimes sported buttons on their waistcoats with images about current events, and women wore bonnets that evoked the themes of pamphlets. During the American Revolution, society ladies had elaborate coiffures "à la Philadelphie" and "à l'Indépendance."

Words also traveled by means of music. Nearly all Parisians carried in their heads a common repertory of tunes, at least a dozen, I have calculated. Nearly everyone could hum favorites such as "Les Pendus" ("The Hanged") and "Réveillez-vous belle endormie" ("Wake Up Beautiful Sleeper"). Every week and nearly every day, a wit, sometimes someone from the lower classes, composed a new verse to an old tune, making fun of a public figure or commenting on a current event. Collectors copied the latest songs into scrapbooks known as *chansonniers*. The eighteenth-century Chansonnier Clairambault in the Bibliothèque nationale de France runs to fifty-eight volumes. A *chansonnier* in the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris contains 641 songs and poems in thirteen thick volumes merely for the period 1745–1752. Singers with fiddles or hurdy-gurdies begged for pennies in the streets, and artisans often sung at work—as Charles-Simon Favart did while kneading dough in his father's pastry shop before he was discovered and became the best-known author of comic operas.[10]

The most popular songs, attributed to fictitious authors such as "Belhumeur, chanteur de Paris" ("Good Humor, Parisian Singer") and "Bap-

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tiste dit le divertissant" ("Baptiste, Known as the Amuser"), were printed as pamphlets, sometimes with their musical annotation. The music can also be identified from contemporary "keys." Therefore, one can recover something of the sound along with the words of street songs. Although they covered all kinds of subjects, especially drink and love, the songs conveyed so much information about current events that they functioned as oral newspapers. They were powerful enough in 1749 to precipitate the fall of the Maurepas ministry.

Some oral performances were known as publications. After all the major wars—in 1749, 1763, and 1783—peace was "published" by an enormous parade with drums and trumpets, which marched through the entire city and stopped at appointed places, where a herald read out a royal proclamation declaring the end of hostilities. Performances in general conveyed messages to Parisians, because the church and the state paraded themselves before the public on feast days and celebrations such as royal weddings. Royal funerals and "entrées" into Paris provided a way of acting out the importance of *les grands*. They required careful preparation, and they often went wrong. The misperformance of a ceremony meant to demonstrate dignity and power undermined the public respect for authority. Parisians sometimes took the staging of ceremonies into their own hands, drawing on patterns of riotous behavior familiar from the carnivals of Mardi Gras. At critical moments, they protested by dressing up straw men to imitate ministers, paraded the mannequins through the streets, staged mock trials, and burned them. In 1788 the bonfires led to rioting that nearly turned into a popular uprising.

These modes of communication did not require a high rate of literacy to be effective. Yet most Parisians, including the great majority of adult males, could read fairly well, and they read their way around the city, deciphering posters, commercial notices, signs, and graffiti. Their exposure to printed matter varied enormously, as did the act of reading itself. Everyone encountered posters, which could be crude, handwritten messages or printed manifestoes. If attached to walls with enough pressure and powerful glue, they could leave a readable impression after being removed by the police. All Parisians could understand the message of prints, whether or not they could read the captions. Workshops along the rue Saint Jacques churned out engravings of public figures, events such as

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sea battles, and facetious episodes known as "canards." The semiliterate also took in texts through their ears, because reading was often done aloud before groups in cafés, salons, and settings known as "lieux publics." These public places included the gardens of the Palais-Royal, the Tuileries, and the Luxembourg Palace, where Parisians liked to stroll and, as mentioned, *nouvellistes* held forth. The Palais-Royal was also a "*lieu privilégié*"—that is, an area under the autonomous jurisdiction of its owner, the Duc d'Orléans—so the police could not raid its bookstalls and cafés without clearance from its *gouverneur*. Peddlers hawked all kinds of printed material—government edicts, judicial memoirs (*factums*), pamphlets, chapbooks, and engravings—everywhere in the city. They kept Parisians informed about the latest publications by their cries—and also by the *way* they cried: if they were peddling best sellers, they belted out their sales pitch; if they were distributing decrees about new taxes, they barely raised their voices, because crowds sometimes vented their anger at the government by beating up the peddlers who hawked its edicts.

The raucous side of the information system flared up during crises and did not stifle everyday activities such as silent reading by isolated individuals. Many Parisians frequented the well-appointed bookshops of the Latin Quarter, bought books in popular genres such as travel and history, and read them quietly at home. By 1765, the most important works of the Enlightenment had appeared, and they were generally tolerated by the authorities, unless they advocated atheism or attacked the monarchy. The government secretly protected the sale of Diderot's *Encyclopédie* in its relatively inexpensive quarto editions during the late 1770s, and they reached a broad public of lawyers, doctors, administrative officials, and landowners. Nothing suggests that the state had abandoned its official values, as expressed, for example, by the oath Louis XVI took during his coronation in 1775. (He swore to exterminate heretics and to uphold the Orders of the Holy Ghost and of Saint Louis, but in 1787 he would agree to granting civil rights to Calvinists.) The last great Enlightenment tract, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* by Guillaume-Thomas Raynal (with large contributions by Diderot), was condemned and burned in 1781. But the increased toleration of unorthodox works indicates the extent to which the regime accommodated new ideas, and the diffusion of the books shows that those

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ideas penetrated deeply into the upper and middle strata of society. They won many adherents among the elite whose privileges they challenged. "*Tout Paris*" turned out to celebrate Voltaire when he returned to the city in 1778 after many years of exile. His apotheosis confirms that his crusade against "*l'infâme*" (religious bigotry, intolerance, and injustice) had won the sympathy of Parisians in general.[11]

Although the history of books provides plenty of surmises about attitudes and values among the reading public, it does not open up a way for arguments that lead directly from the publishing of books to their sales, reading, and absorption in the consciousness of readers. Yet research on the illegal sector of the book trade offers insights into the way books "took," because it shows how they were imbedded in the surrounding information system. Prohibited books were known in the underground trade as "*livres philosophiques*"—and to the police as "*marrons*" (chestnuts) or simply "*mauvais livres*." They contained a good deal of philosophy, especially the atheistic variety developed in the circle of the Baron d'Holbach, along with pornography and seditious libel. The best sellers in this sector were "*libelles*"—scandalous attacks on ministers, royal mistresses, and the king himself. They proliferated in many periods of French history, notably the uprisings of 1648–1653 known as the Fronde and the Regency of 1715–1723, and they were especially popular during the 1770s and 1780s. "*Libelles*" often looked imposing, as in the case of the four-volume *Vie privée de Louis XV*, which can be read as a detailed history of France from 1715 to 1774; but if examined closely, they can be seen to be composed of episodes, known at the time as anecdotes, which were combined to form a narrative. The same anecdote, often word for word, appears in several works, because the authors lifted material from one another and from common sources like gossip and *nouvelles à la main*. More than plagiarism, the libelling was a matter of rampant intertextuality, in which the basic unit was not the book but the anecdote—that is, a nugget of information that could be moved around and inserted wherever it would fit. Anecdotes traveled so widely that they became lodged in many imaginations.[12]

Not all "*livres philosophiques*" were built in this manner, nor did books in general conform to the same structure, but most of them contained ingredients derived from other segments of the information system, whether oral, written, or printed. Different media reinforced each other

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and sent ripples through every sector of the Parisian population. Although we cannot trace all the messages, we can follow them well enough to see how the system functioned. In recounting events and the perception of events, therefore, this book is meant to reveal the way an early information society operated.

Although the information often took the form of factual reports, the facts were infused with meaning—not morals attached to stories but implicit ways of making sense of the subject. For example, Siméon-Prosper Hardy, a middle-class bookseller, frequently recorded the price of bread, which was the basis of most Parisians' diets, in his diary. Sometimes he merely jotted down the current price, but in April 1775 he noted a sequence of price increases, which constituted a warning about hunger among the "little people." They understood the increases as a violation of a norm—a just price of 8 or 9 sous for a four-pound loaf—and they responded, as Hardy observed, with "*murmures*" and even riots, which were known as "*émotions populaires*." In fact, Paris exploded in an "*émotion*" on May 3, 1775, when rioters sacked nearly every bakery in the city. Steven Kaplan, the preeminent authority on the bread question, argues that the obsession with dearth belonged to a collective "subsistence consciousness."[13]

Current historians often use such phrases, including "the collective imaginary" and "the collective memory."[14] The usage derives, directly or indirectly, from efforts by sociologists and anthropologists to explain how we make our way in a world that is already organized and invested with meaning independently of our existence. Without pretending to offer a discourse on method, I should make explicit some of the connections between their theories and the kind of history I am attempting to write.

Emile Durkheim defined collective consciousness as "the totality of the beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of the same society," and he emphasized its existence as "a fixed system that has a life of its own."[15] That view, which prioritizes the social over the individual realm of experience, helps to account for the collective "*murmures*" and "*émotions*" mentioned by Hardy. Durkheim also used a complementary notion of "*sensibilité collective*," yet his abstract formulations do not convey the immediacy and emotional power of such experience.

Durkheim's rival, Gabriel Tarde, tried to show how common sentiments actually operate by discussing the example of reading. In late

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nineteenth-century Paris, he noted, readers often consulted newspapers in cafés, where they became available at about the same time every day. The readers, like the newspapers, favored different political parties, yet they had a sense that others, whatever their opinions, were reading at the same time, and therefore they were conscious of participating in a collective experience.[16] Benedict Anderson applied a similar argument to the development of nationalism in colonial societies. By reading books and especially newspapers, individuals felt united with persons they had never seen in an "imagined community," which underlay the transformation of a colonial state into a national state.[17] I believe that Parisian readers, despite their different opinions about particular issues, developed a similar sense of community, which they identified as a nation, by 1789. The feeling of participation in a common experience extended far beyond the experience of reading and even the limits of literacy. Virtually everyone in Paris shared the shock of the police kidnappings and riots of 1750; deplored the slaughter provoked by the attempt to celebrate the dauphin's wedding to Marie-Antoinette in 1770; and marveled at the first balloon flights in 1783–1784.

Parisians also shared an implicit sense of reality that lay behind those events. Sociologists have found it difficult to evoke this collective sentiment, which they sometimes describe as the social construction of reality. But by close study of social interaction, Erving Goffman shows how it can occur. In any encounter, he argues, we play roles, both as actors and audience, and this improvised behavior follows an implicit script, which determines what is actually going on, whether it is ordering a meal in a restaurant or participating in a political rally. "My aim," he explained in *Frame Analysis*, "is to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events."[18] I find that Goffman's concept of dramaturgy works as a way to interpret the violent events of 1788, which were staged and performed according to a common frame of meaning.[19]

Max Weber made the social dimension of meaning the focus of his sociology. He used a complex German term, *Sinnzusammenhang* (the hanging together of meaning), to express the fundamental character of culture[20]—which the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, put aptly in English: "Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal

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suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." Although that approach does not involve a specific methodology, it entails teasing out meaning in concrete cases, as the "natives" construed it; and in practice, it leads to the study of events. Geertz quotes Weber: "Events are not just there and happen, but they have a meaning and happen because of that meaning."[21]

For my part, I am convinced by Weber's argument filtered through Geertz. It is compatible with the work of other anthropologists such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas—and also with the cultural history developed by Jacob Burckhardt, Johan Huizinga, and Lucien Febvre, who taught by example rather than by theory. With their help, I think it possible to show how the French Revolution happened—not by tracing a clear line of causality, but by narrating events in such a way as to describe the emergence of a revolutionary temper that was ready to destroy one world and construct another.

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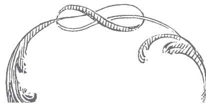
PART ONE

# *The Mid-Century Crisis, 1748–1754*



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# 1

# War and Peace

GLOBAL EVENTS touched daily life in eighteenth-century Paris only glancingly and on rare occasions. What little we know from sources like diaries and police archives suggests that most people went about their business without much concern for international affairs, yet they shared a general awareness of changes in the outside world. The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740–1748, offers an opportunity to study the way news about war and peace reached Parisians and how they made sense of it. Although the history of the war is too complex to be discussed here, the flow of information can be understood by examining two related events: the Battle of Lawfeld, which was the last major engagement of the war, and the proclamation of the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, which brought the war to an end.[1]

The battle took place at the village of Lawfeld near Maastricht on the morning of July 2, 1747. News of it first came in the form of two notes from Louis XV, who had witnessed the fighting from the headquarters of the French commander, the *maréchal* Maurice de Saxe. By 12:30 in the afternoon, the French had driven the main force of the Allies (British, Hanoverians, Hessians, and Dutch under the command of the Duke of Cumberland, George II's youngest son) from the village. Soon afterward, Louis dictated the notes from conquered territory, and a page galloped off with them to Versailles. In the first note, consisting of only a few sentences, he informed the dauphin of a French victory. He occupied the very

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spot where Cumberland had commanded the enemy troops a few hours earlier, he said, and concluded by mocking Cumberland's boast that he would eat his boots if he did not defeat the French: "I think this duke is most upset. I don't know what he will eat now."[2] Louis addressed the second note to the queen, adopting a more formal tone: "The Day of the Virgin [the Day of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, July 2] has been most favorable for us. The heretics have been struck by all our blows. I have just won a complete victory against my enemies."[3] The notes arrived in Versailles at two o'clock in the morning on July 5, and copies of them were circulating in Paris a few days later.

Messages from the army arrived soon afterward. The first, also dated July 2, contained a sixteen-page list of casualties—officers sabered, shot, trampled, and mauled—and it was but the first of several lists that circulated, each one looking less triumphant than its predecessors. A series of reports, somewhat confused and contradictory, recounted details of the fighting. One, dated July 3 and sent by courier from the nearby camp of Tongres, described two unsuccessful assaults on the main enemy battalions followed by a third, which forced Cumberland to retreat from the village amidst "horrible carnage." Yet the enemy retired in excellent order, it noted, and the estimate of casualties was about the same on both sides—7,000 to 8,000 killed and 5,000 wounded. A second report, dashed off on July 5, confirmed that account. A third, undated, went into more detail, stressing Saxe's masterful command; and a fourth revealed that the enemy had regrouped in such a strong position outside Maastricht that the summer campaign could not be continued, although the French would lay siege to Bergen op Zoom.[4]

An official account of the battle, printed with a royal privilege and dated July 13, construed it as a glorious victory commanded by the king. By then Parisians knew that the *maréchal* de Saxe, not Louis XV, had directed the attack, and they had reason to be skeptical of the casualty report—10,000 lost by the Allies, 5,000 by the French—because the French-language gazettes published outside France were beginning to arrive, and they told a different story. As the Dutch Republic had abandoned its neutral stance and sided with Britain in 1747, the *Gazette d'Amsterdam* treated the French as the enemy. In its first dispatches on Lawfeld, it stressed the severity of the French losses and the strong position of the

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Allied forces under the protective cannon of Maastricht, without indicating who had won the battle. Its Paris correspondent sent word that the French claimed a victory, but later articles cast that in doubt—and how, in fact, were victory and defeat to be determined? The French had occupied the battlefield, the *Gazette* acknowledged, but according to some measurements, they had not won the battle. The English reported 4,000 killed and wounded as opposed to 10,000 of the French. The Allies had captured nine flags and seven standards, the French only two standards. The count of captured cannon and drums also favored the Allies, who, moreover, occupied such a favorable position that they blocked the French advance and threatened to counterattack at any moment. Seen from Amsterdam, the result of the battle was ambiguous, and in some ways it looked as though the Allies had prevailed.[5]

Police spies noted that the foreign gazettes were widely read in Paris and that some Parisians—those with enough money and leisure to frequent cafés—had doubts about the government's claim of victory.[6] The police took great pains to keep track of public opinion. They also tried to influence it by distributing bulletins about the progress of the war in cafés and by subsidizing their own gazetteers.[7] But the café talk drew on other sources, not only Dutch journals but letters from individuals located near the action. The first letters about Lawfeld arrived on July 11, and they indicated that the French had lost twice as many men as the Allies. That was a heavy price to pay for occupying the battlefield, according to the police reports on the café conversations: "That is to say that according to them [café commentators], we won the battlefield and they won the battle."[8] The Parisian barrister Edmond-Jean-François Barbier wrote in his journal in July, "The court and the town have not been happy with this engagement, whose result is only a battlefield that cost more than six thousand men."[9]

The difficulty of determining who won the Battle of Lawfeld applied on a larger scale to the entire war. Parisians paid special attention to the fighting north of France's border in the Austrian Netherlands. It conformed to warfare of the kind that had prevailed under Louis XIV—that is, sieges of fortresses and fortified cities combined with occasional, large-scale battles. The sieges required months of digging trenches and undermining redoubts until at last the enemy could be overwhelmed by an attack or forced to capitulate. The *batailles rangées* pitted densely packed rows of

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troops on both sides. Muskets took a long time to load (a soldier had to tear open a cartridge with his teeth, pour some powder in the pan of the flintlock, pour the rest down the barrel followed by a bullet, and tamp the bullet down with a ramrod before he could pull the trigger), and they had little accuracy (they could rarely hit a target at a distance of a hundred yards). Therefore, a line of musketeers in tight formation fired all at once at their officer's command in the general direction of the enemy, reloaded while a line behind them fired, and advanced until ordered to stop and fire another volley. Then, when they closed in on the enemy, they charged with their bayonets and tried to win in hand-to-hand combat (the *mêlée*) or to force a retreat. It was this kind of fighting that made the French win (or lose) at Lawfeld and that produced such heavy casualties.

*Nouvellistes* under the Tree of Cracow in the Palais-Royal and at certain benches in the Luxembourg and Tuileries gardens discussed these tactics, claiming to have inside information from witnesses or military sources. They traced battle lines on the ground with their canes and debated questions of strategy on a continental scale. One self-appointed expert was known as the "abbé Thirty Thousand Men," because he constantly argued that the French could take London if they shipped 30,000 troops across the Channel.[10] Others held forth about troop movements in Italy and Germany. For the most part, however, the *nouvellistes* concentrated on campaigns in the Low Countries. The lines they drew in the dirt illustrated the advance of the main French forces under the *maréchal* de Saxe, year after year, fortress after fortress: Menin, Ypres, the great victory at Fontenoy (May 11, 1745), Tournai, Ghent, Oudenarde, Bruges, Dendermonde, Antwerp, the Battle of Rocoux (another victory, October 11, 1746), Liège, the Battle of Lawfeld (July 2, 1747), and Bergen op Zoom. By the end of the summer campaign in 1747, Saxe had conquered the Austrian Netherlands and seemed to have a clear road into the Dutch Republic. To those who followed the news in Paris, it made a gripping story, which raised the possibility of winning territory that Louis XIV had failed to conquer during nearly fifty years of fighting.

Yet Saxe's campaigns occurred in only one sector, barely one hundred miles wide, in a series of conflicts that stretched over much of the globe, involved a dozen sovereign states, and extended from 1740 to 1748. "The War of the Austrian Succession," as it came to be called, was a misnomer

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for a struggle that can be considered a world war—perhaps the first world war, unless the War of the Spanish Succession, 1701–1715, deserves that title. The dynastic aspect remained important, of course, and contemporaries talked about the fighting as if it pitted Louis of France and Frederick of Prussia against Maria Theresa of Austria and George of England along with their assorted allies.[11] The personalization of the warfare made it seem comprehensible, as if it were a great game played on a chessboard the size of Europe, but that view looked archaic if seen from the perspective of the action on the high seas and colonies. In North and South America, the Atlantic and Pacific, the Mediterranean and Caribbean, the English Channel and the coast of India, fleets, convoys, and privateers waged constant battles. In the end, especially after the second Battle of Finisterre (October 14, 1747), the British established naval supremacy, laying the basis of a colonial and commercial empire.

Reports of the overseas warfare appeared in the gazettes, and café sophisticates discussed them, but most Parisians, if they followed foreign affairs at all, concentrated on the fighting nearby in the Low Countries, where Saxe scored his victories. They were appalled, therefore, as soon as they learned about the preliminaries to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, to discover that Louis XV had agreed to return everything France had won at such expense and suffering. In exchange, he received virtually nothing. He got back Louisbourg, a fortress on Cape Breton Island, while he surrendered Madras, a greater prize, to the British. To ordinary Parisians with an uncertain grasp of geography, the global readjustment in the balance of power, insofar as they were aware of it, mattered less than the sacrifice of the fortresses in Flanders.[12]

Most Parisians, moreover, experienced the war as hardship inflicted on their daily lives in the form of increased taxes, scarcer goods, and higher prices. The *dixième*, a special tax levied since 1741 to support the war, fell on virtually all revenue, although the clergy negotiated an exemption (it paid a sizeable *don gratuit* or free gift to the Crown in order to maintain its privileges).[13] Salaries were exempt; so, laborers did not suffer directly, but the *dixième* was a bitter blow to rentiers, merchants, artisans, and shopkeepers. Heavy tariffs were levied on consumer goods that entered Paris, and surtaxes were added to the tariffs in March 1745, October 1747, and March 1748, when the head tax (*capitation*) was also increased. Mean-

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while, prices had risen, particularly on bread. In March 1748, Barbier noted in his journal, "Everything necessary to sustain life, food, wood, candles, upkeep, is generally unaffordable."[14]

Peace did not bring immediate relief. By May 1748, Parisians knew the fighting had stopped, and the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, signed on October 18, 1748, formally brought the war to an end; but the king did not proclaim peace until nine months later. The proclamation, like many events under the Ancien Régime, was a theatrical affair acted out in the streets of Paris in a ceremony called "*la publication de la paix*"—publication being understood in the contemporary sense of "rendering public" or making something generally known.[15]

At dawn on February 12, 1749, cannonades from the Invalides, the Bastille, and the château de Vincennes summoned magistrates and guildsmen to assemble at the Hôtel de Ville dressed in their finest costumes and accompanied by drummers and flag bearers.[16] They formed a cortege led by detachments of soldiers, some on horse, some on foot, interspersed by drummers and fife players. Next came several rows of magistrates and a large corps of musicians, carrying drums, fifes, trumpets, bugles, cymbals, oboes, and other wind instruments. At the heart of the procession, on magnificent horses, rode the Roi d'armes, a court official, and six royal heralds in livery and plumed hats. The lieutenant general of police and the prévôt des marchands (Paris's chief municipal official) followed, outfitted in splendid uniforms, mounted on horses draped in velvet cloth with gold braiding, and accompanied by six lackeys wearing specially designed livery. After them marched a long cavalcade of municipal officers and guildsmen in two columns arranged by rank as ordained by a decree. A troop from the Watch (*guet à pied* and *guet à cheval*) brought up the rear, making a procession of eight hundred persons in all.

The cortege paraded through the city and stopped at thirteen appointed places, including the Halles, the Place Maubert, and other locations where the common people gathered. At each stop, fanfares alerted the neighborhood, and the musicians played. The Roi d'armes ordered a herald to read out the royal proclamation of the peace—not the text of the treaty, which ran to seventy-nine pages, but a declaration that hostilities had ceased and that safe travel and commerce were assured among the subjects of the former belligerents. Then a soldier summoned the people in the street to

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shout *Vive le roi*, and the cortege moved on to the next stop. After a long day of parading, the participants retired to a feast in the Hôtel de Ville set off by fanfares and cannonades.

On the following day, all shops were closed and a Te Deum was celebrated in Notre Dame. An "illumination générale" lit up Paris that evening. Every house was required to display a *lampion*, and candles burned in many windows. At eight in the evening, a fireworks display dazzled an enormous crowd crammed into the Place de Grève. When the spectators began to disperse, however, they got blocked in a bottleneck, panicked, and stampeded. A dozen persons were crushed to death. Despite this disaster, large groups piled into a dance hall built specially for the occasion on the Quai Pelletier near the Hôtel de Ville. Two orchestras played; wine flowed from four fountains; and sausages, cuts of turkey, mutton, and bread were distributed, all of it free and intended primarily for "the little people." Dancing, drinking, and eating also took place at twenty-five other sites scattered through the city. For two days and nights, Parisians gave themselves over to celebrating the peace, but what did they make of it?

The most revealing commentary occurs in Barbier's journal. During the parade, he noted, many people refused to cry *Vive le roi*. "The common people in general are not happy with this peace, which, however, they badly needed," he explained. "It is reported that in les Halles, the market women say, when they quarrel with each other, 'You are as stupid as the peace.' "[17] Police spies picked up similar remarks. And the Marquis d'Argenson noted in his journal that the peace celebrations had backfired because so many people were trampled to death during the fireworks. Parisians blamed the tragedy on the government: "People revert to superstition and prophesies as pagans used to do. They say, 'What is augured by such a peace, which was celebrated with such general horrors?' "[18]

The global conflict left no happy memories among Parisians in 1748, because the tide in the flow of information had turned against the government. Parisians did not enjoy any satisfaction at having won the war after the fighting stopped; and they sensed that they had lost the peace, despite the cannonading, parading, Te Deums, fireworks, dancing, and free wine and food offered them at the time of its "publication." In fact, the very notions of winning and losing got lost in the fog of war, and the year ended in an atmosphere of discontent.

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## 2

# A Prince Is Mugged by Order of the King

In addition to restoring the balance of power throughout Europe, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle was intended to solve a diplomatic problem embodied by a person: Charles Edward Stuart, later known as "Bonnie Prince Charlie" and already a legend among Parisians in 1748 as the most intrepid and dashing of the many royal personages occupying or claiming thrones. The throne he claimed was that of Great Britain, which, he maintained, belonged by right of succession to his father, known in France as Jacques III and in Britain as the Pretender. As the first-born heir to his father, he demanded to be acknowledged as the Prince of Wales and not, as the Britons put it, the Young Pretender. Parisians called him "le Prince Édouard" and celebrated him, both as a man-about-town and as the champion of a lost cause, who had dared against impossible odds to attempt the conquest of their English enemy in 1745. He posed a problem for the restoration of peace, because he refused to leave France.[1]

The treaty committed Louis XV to recognize the Hanoverian line as the legitimate rulers of Great Britain and therefore bound him to expel Prince Édouard from France, where he had been given asylum. To Parisians, or at least those who followed the rise and fall of monarchs, that provision was outrageous. The prince's grandfather, James II of England and Ireland (also James VII of Scotland), had taken refuge in France after being

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driven out of his kingdom by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Louis XIV had treated him with full honors as a fellow monarch, residing with his court in the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye. To be sure, France had recognized the Hanoverians in 1718 as part of the settlement following the wars of Louis XIV, but it supported Prince Édouard's attempt to restore the Stuart line by invading Scotland in July 1745.

Parisians followed news of the invasion as best they could from the French gazettes published in the Netherlands and whatever they could pick up in cafés and salons. Judging from the entries in Barbier's journal, they found the story riveting. Édouard set out with two ships, lost one, and landed in Scotland with only seven supporters. Two months later he had established himself with a force of 17,000 men in Edinburgh and had proclaimed his father king of Scotland and Ireland. Barbier expected the father to abdicate, so Édouard would become king; and in December, when his army was reported to be within thirty leagues (ninety miles) of London, it looked as if George II was doomed. A long silence followed. Word arrived that the Duke of Cumberland had left Flanders with 12,000 troops in a desperate attempt to save the Crown, and this diversion made it possible for the *maréchal* de Saxe to take Brussels on February 23, 1746. For several months Parisians struggled to sort out contradictory reports—some had Édouard retreating to the Highlands; some claimed relief was on its way from France; some even anticipated a Jacobite revolt in London. Finally, on May 17, Paris learned of a disaster: Cumberland had crushed Édouard's forces on April 16 at Culloden, near Inverness.

For the next three months, various "*bruits*" (rumors) spread tales of spectacular episodes. Édouard was reported to be hiding in the Highlands and dashing from island to island in the Hebrides, just beyond the reach of his pursuers, sometimes alone, sometimes in disguise, and saved time and again by humble folk who refused to be tempted by the reward of 30,000 pounds placed on his head. He escaped at last on a small French frigate, and on October 28 he appeared to tremendous applause in the royal box of the Paris Opera. Although he had failed to conquer Britain, Barbier noted, Édouard had won the hearts of Parisians by his heroism, suffering, and "bravura." "The public will be unhappy if this prince is sacrificed."[2]

Yet the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle did sacrifice him. It could not do otherwise, because peace could not be restored unless France recognized

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the Hanoverian succession. Louis XV did what he could to soften the blow. According to the gazettes, he met privately with Édouard, offered advice about stoically accepting fate, and presented a gift of a table service worth 300,000 L. (At that time a semiskilled worker usually made one livre a day; the livre, which was the main unit of currency, is abbreviated here as L.; it contained 20 sous, and each sous was worth 12 deniers.) Édouard, however, would not be moved, although his father, who had retired to Rome, ordered him to submit to the peace settlement. In July 1748, Édouard produced a manifesto asserting that his father, as James III, was still king of Britain. All the events since 1688 made no difference, he claimed, speaking as "Régent de la Grande Bretagne," because the passage of time had no bearing on legitimacy and the fundamental constitution of the state. The Paris police managed to confiscate the manifesto in the printer's shop and to keep their intervention secret, because they worried about provoking a reaction among Édouard's many supporters in Paris. But a second edition soon appeared, and the police learned that it had been read aloud in the café de Viseux, rue Mazarine, where it was available to everyone on the counter. In August 1748, as the diplomats neared agreement on the final terms of the treaty in Aix-la-Chapelle, Édouard had a notice printed and pinned to their doors, warning them to avoid any settlement that would violate his right to the throne of Great Britain.[3]

According to the gazettes that circulated in Paris, the French foreign minister, in the name of the king, requested Édouard to leave France in November. The prince refused, and then the king sent the Duc de Gesvres, a friend of Édouard's and an important Court official, to make a personal appeal. According to rumors that spread through Paris, Édouard told the duke that he always carried two loaded pistols in his pockets. If anyone arrived with an order for his expulsion, he would shoot that person with the first pistol and kill himself with the second. The Dutch gazettes reported that Louis would have to resort to violence, and Parisians prepared themselves for a dramatic "event." Meanwhile, Édouard cut quite a figure in Paris, along with a retinue of Scottish and English Jacobites who had survived the adventure of 1745. He appeared every day in theaters or at the Opera, and strolled conspicuously in the Tuileries gardens, much to the Parisians' delight and perhaps, as some suspected, because he was courting popular support that could be turned against Versailles.

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At 5 o'clock on December 10, soon after he descended from his carriage to attend a performance at the Opera, Prince Édouard was accosted by a major of the Gardes Françaises, who informed him that the king had ordered his arrest. Instantly, six soldiers, disguised as civilians, surrounded him. According to reports that circulated soon afterward, two of them grabbed his arms, and the others seized his legs, lifting him off the ground. While holding him in the air, they bound his arms to his body with silk ropes in order to prevent him from using his pistols. They carried him to an adjoining courtyard, removed the two pistols and his sword, then dispatched him in a carriage to the dungeon of Vincennes. A detachment of Gardes and the Mounted Watch *(guet à cheval),* which had been waiting nearby in the Place des Victoires, accompanied the carriage, and soldiers stationed all along the route held their muskets ready, bayonets attached. Three companions of the prince who had accompanied him to the Opera were taken to the Bastille. Another detachment of the Gardes Françaises surrounded the town house that served as the prince's headquarters. They arrested thirty-three of his other retainers who also disappeared into the Bastille. More than a thousand soldiers participated in the operation. Everything was prepared carefully in advance and took place rapidly in order to avoid provoking a riot by Édouard's many admirers.[4]

After five days of confinement in the dungeon, Édouard left for an unknown destination. An official escort took him as far as Pont de Beauvoisin at the border with Savoy, and then the prince disappeared. Some of the more savvy gossips known as "*politiques*" asserted he would set up court in Fribourg, Switzerland; others placed him in Rome or in Avignon, which was papal territory, but everyone agreed that he would have to take up residence outside France. In January 1749 he was given a hero's reception in Avignon; he was later spotted in Venice; and he eventually settled in Rome, fading from the limelight, as Parisians shifted their attention to other subjects, including a rhinoceros, the first ever seen in France, which was exhibited at the foire Saint-Germain in March 1749.

In the winter of 1748–1749, however, Édouard was the talk of the town, despite the orders of the police, who told café owners to stifle conversations about him. Half of Paris wept over his unhappy fate, according to the *Courrier d'Avignon*. Parisians went over every detail of his arrest and expulsion, venting resentment at the heavy hand of Louis XV. The king

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had reneged on a sacred commitment, they complained. He had failed to send the support that would have made the difference between victory and defeat in Scotland. Then, after profiting from the diversion created by the Scottish uprising, he had caved in to the demands of the enemy in the peace negotiations and had executed them with a brutality unworthy of a monarch. Édouard in defeat was more of a king than Louis in victory.

That theme stood out in a flood of poems, songs, epigrams, and prints that contrasted Édouard's heroism with Louis's fecklessness.[5] For example,

| | |
|---|---|
| O Louis! Vos sujets de douleur abattus, | *O Louis! Your subjects crushed with pain,* |
| Respectent Édouard captif et sans couronne: | *Respect Édouard as a captive without a crown:* |
| Il est roi dans les fers, qu'êtes vous sur le trône? | *He is a king in chains, what are you on the throne?* |

Édouard's expulsion epitomized the disaster of the peace settlement, according to several poems:

> Peuple jadis si fier, aujourd'hui si servile,
> Des princes malheureux vous n'êtes plus l'asile.
> Vos ennemis vaincus aux champs de Fontenoy
> A leurs propres vainqueurs ont imposé la loi.
>
> *(You people once so proud, today so servile, / No longer are you the refuge of unhappy princes. / Your enemies, defeated on the field of Fontenoy, / Now impose the law on their own conquerors.)*

In a more popular vein, a burlesque poster pretended to be an order by George II commanding Louis, his obedient servant, to deliver Édouard to the pope. The savagery of Édouard's expulsion made it seem especially outrageous, and it demonstrated how Louis had debased himself by letting George II dictate the terms of the peace.[6]

This message made the complexities of the peace settlement intelligible to Parisians who did not follow international relations closely. It reduced foreign affairs to personal antagonisms: George vs. Louis vs. Édouard.

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Even to the more sophisticated—the "politiques" and café regulars—Louis XV's behavior appeared in a new light, influenced by other personal circumstances. Louis had acquired the title of "le Bien-Aimé" in 1744, when all of France prayed for his recovery from a dangerous illness near the front lines in Metz and then rejoiced when he survived and returned in good health to Versailles. But that high point in the public's affection for him declined as the war inflicted increasing hardship in the daily life of Parisians. On the few occasions when he appeared in Paris, the people refused to cry *Vive le roi* (Long live the king). Normally, when he traveled from Versailles to the château of Compiègne and his favorite hunting grounds, he stopped in Paris near the Porte Saint Denis to receive a salute from the Gardes Françaises and to greet his subjects, while cannon boomed from Vincennes, the Bastille, and the Invalides. In August 1749, however, he avoided this traditional ceremony, and he did so again in June 1750, touching off rumors among Parisians. Did he fear he might provoke a riot by the discontented? they wondered. Or did he want to demonstrate his scorn for their refusal to express devotion? Louis's visits to Paris then became increasingly rare. When he came to attend a mass at Notre Dame in November 1751, he was met with a stony silence in the streets. By then he had had a road built so that he could make a detour around Paris when he traveled to Compiègne.[7]

The growing hostility of Parisians to the king fed on the taxes and the economic suffering imposed on them by the war, but it had another, more insidious source. From 1732 until 1744, Louis had taken as his mistress three (some said four) of the daughters of the Marquis de Nesle, one after another. Although the French had long ago grown accustomed to royal mistresses and acknowledged the *maîtresse en titre* as a fixture in the court, they considered sex with sisters as a form of incest. Moreover, Louis himself viewed his extramarital relations as sinful, although he pursued them as avidly as his hunting, and he admitted his sins to his confessor. The confessor would not grant him absolution unless he renounced adultery, and without absolution Louis could not take communion. Although he dismissed the Duchesse de Châteauroux, the youngest of the de Nesle sisters, for a few weeks after his illness in 1744, Louis soon took up with her again and in 1745, after she had died, moved on to Madame de Pompadour.

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By then, his unshriven state had become notorious. Although he

attended mass, he no longer took communion, and he therefore lacked the necessary grace to administer the royal touch. By touching subjects who suffered from scrofula, French kings were believed to cure the disease known as *le mal du roi* (the King's Evil). They supposedly acquired this power through the religious rites at their coronation, and they traditionally exercised it after Easter mass by touching the sick lined up in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre. Having failed to *faire ses Pâques* (take communion on Easter), Louis had lost this sacred power.[8]

The loss affected all his subjects, not merely those with scrofula. In 1750, the French hoped the pope would declare a Jubilé or period of collective penitence and remission of sins, which usually occurred once every twenty-five years. But word had spread that the Jubilé would be canceled as a punishment inflicted on all of them for the king's exclusion from the sacrement of communion. One *nouvelliste* published a letter from a correspondent who vilified Louis for depriving his people of the Jubilé: "It is monstruous that all of France should be deprived of it, because the king, by his own fault, is not in a state to receive this grace [holy communion]."[9] The general resentment was expressed in some of the crudest poems:

| | |
|---|---|
| Louis le mal-aimé | *Louis the badly loved,* |
| Fais ton Jubilé, | *Make your Jubilé,* |
| Quitte ta putain | *Give up your whore [Mme de Pompadour]* |
| Et donne-nous du pain.[10] | *And give us bread.* |

This was strong stuff, and it circulated among the common people. Although the police rarely identified the authors of the poems, in one case they discovered that an attack on the king had been written by a Madame Dubois, the wife of an obscure shopkeeper. She began her verse by expressing consternation about the Jubilé:

| | |
|---|---|
| Nous n'aurons point de Jubilé. | *We won't have a Jubilé.* |
| Le peuple en est alarmé. | *The people are alarmed about it.* |

And ended with a crude reference to the king's sexual sins:

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Le pape en est ému, l'Église s'en offense.
Mais ce monarque aveuglé,
Se croyant dans l'indépendance
Rit du Saint Père et f—[fout] en liberté.[11]

*The pope is moved, the Church offended,*
*But this blinded monarch,*
*Believing himself independent,*
*Laughs at the Holy Father and fucks in liberty.*

In fact, Pope Benedict XIV promulgated a bull extending a Jubilé to all Catholics in 1751, and the rites began to be celebrated in Paris on March 29. By then, however, the sacred character of Louis's kingship had been damaged. In 1749, the Marquis d'Argenson noted that a miscarriage of the dauphine was seen by the common people as God's punishment for the king's sins,[12] and a police spy reported the following conversation in a wigmaker's shop:

> This officer [Jules-Alexis Bernard] while visiting the wigmaker Gaujoux, recited in the presence of M. d'Azémard, an invalided officer, a written attack on the king, which accused His Majesty of allowing himself to be led by ignorant and incapable ministers and of having made a shameful and dishonorable peace that gave up all the conquered territory. . . . [Also] that the king, who had consorted with the three sisters, scandalised his people by his conduct and would bring upon himself all sorts of misfortune if he did not mend his ways, . . . [and] that the king had not taken Easter communion and would bring upon the kingdom the curse of the Lord.

The abduction of Prince Édouard marked a turning point in the relations between Parisians and the king. It belonged to the general discontent with the war and the peace. Parisians reacted by withholding cries of *Vive le roi*, and Louis responded by avoiding Paris altogether. At the same time, his inability to take communion sapped his sacramental power. He lost his royal touch, and in losing it, he lost contact with the people of Paris.

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# 3

# Songs Bring Down the Government

PARISIANS TOOK THE NEWS in through their ears. They heard it sung in the streets. Every day, wits improvised new words to old tunes, and the messages flew through the air, serving in effect as sung newspapers. Ministers in Versailles and police inspectors in Paris understood the power of songs and kept track of them, for the French state, as the Parisian wit Nicolas Chamfort put it, was "an absolute monarchy tempered by songs."[1] On April 24, 1749, songs brought down the governing ministry: that was the conclusion reached by observers at the time,[2] and it can be taken as an indication of the way sound infused the mental landscape of Parisians in the eighteenth century.

Entire populations share a repertory of tunes attached to lullabies, religious hymns, Christmas carols, ballads, love songs, drinking songs, battle songs—and, today, the pervasive jingles of commercials and popular recordings. In the eighteenth century, as explained in the Introduction, Parisians carried around in their heads a common corpus of tunes, and many of them composed new words to the best-known tunes as a way of making fun of prominent persons or commenting on current events. The music served as a mnemonic device and a medium to spread messages throughout the city, where street singers could be heard everywhere and people commonly sung at social gatherings and at work. Some Parisians scribbled the latest verses on scraps of paper, which were passed around, declaimed, and sung in public places. Collectors cop-

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ied the verses in albums known as *chansonniers*, which contain so many texts that particular songs can be followed as they evolved in response to current events. Contemporaries also produced "keys" with the musical scores to the most popular songs, identified by their titles or first lines. It is possible, therefore, to reconstruct the way the songs sounded—that is, allowing for variations in the mode of singing and irregularities in the survival of the evidence, we can hear, at least approximately, fragments of the past.[3]

Without going into the musicological aspect of this research, one can identify the most common tunes and the words attached to them. The half dozen melodies that appear most frequently in the *chansonniers* during the 1740s are:

"Dirai-je mon Confiteor"
("Shall I say my Confiteor" [a confessional prayer]), also known as "Quand mon amant me fait la cour" ("When my lover courts me")
"Réveillez-vous, belle endormie"
("Awake, beautiful sleeper"), also known as "Quand le péril est agréable" ("When the peril is agreeable")
"Lampons"
("Drink up")
"Les Pantins"
("The Puppets")
"Biribi"
(Biribi, a game of chance)
"La Coquette sans le savoir"
("The Coquette who does not know it")

Each of these tunes carried a string of comments on current events during the mid-century years. The first provides the best example of how the commentary worked.[4] In its conventional form it is a plaintive love song. I have located nine satirical versions of it, each with a refrain that mocks Louis XV as a feckless, clueless ruler:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ah! Le voilà, ah! le voici | *Ah! There he is, ah! here he is* |
| Celui qui n'en a nul souci. | *He who does not have a care.* |

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The first verse attacks the king and Madame de Pompadour:

| | |
|---|---|
| Qu'une bâtarde de catin | *That a bastard strumpet* |
| A la cour se voit avancée, | *Should get ahead in the court,* |
| Que dans l'amour et dans le vin | *That in love or in wine,* |
| Louis cherche une gloire aisée, | *Louis should seek easy glory,* |
| Ah! Le voilà, ah! Le voici | *Ah! There he is, ah! here he is,* |
| Celui qui n'en a nul souci. | *He who does not have a care.* |

The next verses ridiculed the queen, the dauphin, the *maréchal* de Saxe, and the most prominent ministers. Then, as time passed, the song evolved, growing from six to twenty-three verses, which can be dated from notes in the margins and allusions to events such as the peace negotiations at Aix-la-Chapelle, the resistance to the *vingtième* tax, and the notorious cuckolding of the tax farmer La Popelinière by the *maréchal* de Richelieu, who had a secret door built through La Poplinière's town house so he could get access to the wife's bedroom. Each version differs slightly from the others, indicating variations in the process of oral transmission, which extended from August 1747 to February 1749. Taken together, the verses provided a widespread indictment of the people in power and the system itself.

Of course, Parisians had enjoyed making fun of *les grands* for more than a century, and much of the ridicule was produced by the courtiers themselves in the endless battles to gain traction and bring down rivals in Versailles. A contemporary description shows that verse spread from the top down as well as from the bottom up:

> A dastardly courtier puts them [slanderous rumors] into rhyming couplets and, by means of lowly servants, has them planted in market halls and street stands. From the markets they are passed on to artisans, who, in turn, relay them back to the noblemen who had composed them and who, without losing a moment, take off for the Oeil-de-Boeuf [a meeting place in the Palace of Versailles] and whisper to one another in a tone of consummate hypocrisy: "Have you read them? Here they are. They are circulating among the common people of Paris."[5]

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During critical periods such as the four years after the War of the Austrian Succession, these ephemera could inflict serious damage. One song in particular precipitated a fundamental shift of power within the government. The second of the tunes cited above, "Réveillez-vous, belle endormie," also originated as a love song, then turned into a slanderous attack on a duchess, and finally brought down Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, Comte de Maurepas, the most powerful minister in Versailles, on April 24, 1749. Although it created a scandal that shocked and fascinated Parisians, it required some hearing between the lines:[6]

| | |
|---|---|
| Par vos façons nobles et franches, | *By your noble and free manner,* |
| Iris, vous enchantez nos coeurs. | *Iris, you enchant our hearts.* |
| Sur nos pas, vous semez des fleurs, | *On our path you strew flowers,* |
| Mais ce sont des fleurs blanches. | *But they are white flowers.* |

On the evening before the poem began to circulate, Maurepas had attended a dinner in the *petits apartements* of Versailles, where the king often retired to enjoy himself in privacy. Only two persons, Mme de Pompadour and her cousin, Mme d'Estrades, were present in addition to Louis and Maurepas. In a gallant gesture, Mme de Pompadour distributed some white hyacinths, which she had picked herself, to her dinner companions. Far from being lyrical, however, the reference to white flowers (*fleurs blanches*) in the song indicated venereal disease, *flueurs*, in menstrual discharge. The royal mistress, the song said, had given the king VD. Even to a public hardened by obscene songs at the time of the Regency (1715–1723) and the Fronde (1648–1653, the civil war precipitated by the Parlement of Paris and the nobility), this was going too far. The king dismissed Maurepas and exiled him to his country estate.

Maurepas was the prime suspect in the scandal, because he had firsthand knowledge of the hyacinth episode and he frequently distributed songs or even composed them himself. He renewed his supply from reports provided by the Paris police and used it to amuse the king and undermine his enemies. His stock of songs, transcribed into the forty-five volumes of the Chansonnier *Maurepas now* in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, provides a rich source of information about singing as an ingredient of

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politics in the eighteenth century. Well-informed about his passion for songs, contemporaries were convinced that they had caused his downfall. As Barbier put it, "One is absolutely convinced that the poems and the songs that greatly offended the king and that are said to have been sung before him at suppers, are the cause."[7]

Of course, Parisians realized that there was more to this event than the nasty song about Mme de Pompadour. As minister of the navy and of the Maison du roi, which included the Département de Paris and control of the Paris police, Maurepas dominated the government. He had been a minister for twenty-six years (he first entered the government in 1718 at age seventeen) and seemed unmovable. Yet he built his power base around the queen and the dauphin, and did not get on well with royal mistresses, notably Mme de Pompadour, who became aligned with his rival, the Comte d'Argenson, minister of war. According to rumors, Maurepas fostered the spread of the anti-Pompadour songs and poems known as Poissonnades in reference to her unfortunate maiden name, Poisson (fish). If he could demonstrate to the king that Mme de Pompadour was reviled by Parisians, some suspected, he might get Louis to turn her in for a mistress aligned with his own court faction. To cover his trail, Maurepas supposedly attributed the Poissonnades to another of his enemies, the *maréchal* de Richelieu, an ally of d'Argenson and Pompadour. Richelieu discovered the plot and revealed it to the king just as the song about the white flowers began to circulate.

This version of Maurepas's fall owed a great deal to the rumor mill of the court and the baroque character of politics in Versailles. Parisians, who had little contact with that alien world, could not be certain about what lay behind Maurepas's fall, but they knew that songs precipitated it and that the result was a realignment of power. In the subsequent reallocation of ministries, d'Argenson added the Paris Department to his dossier as war minister and therefore gained control of the police reports about the Parisian *bruits*, *on dits*, and *pont neufs* that Maurepas had fed to Louis. He then unleashed a campaign by the police to silence songs, using his new power to consolidate the support of Mme de Pompadour.

Soon after the fall of Maurepas, the police received an order from d'Argenson to arrest the author of a poem. Their only clue was its first line: "Monstre dont la noire furie" ("Monster whose black fury"). The monster

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was Louis XV, and the poem belonged to a surge of new verse attacking the king and Mme de Pompadour. A spy eventually turned up a medical student who possessed a copy of the poem. Under interrogation in the Bastille, he confessed that he had got it from a priest, who was arrested and said he had got it from another priest, who was arrested and said he had got it from a third priest . . . and so on, until the police had filled the Bastille with fourteen suspects, mainly students and young abbés.

Along the way, the police uncovered the trail of five other poems and songs, which had been copied, memorized, declaimed, and sung in various settings, including a lecture room in the Collège du Plessis, where a young professor, Pierre Sigorgne, dictated a poem to his students, who then shared copies with their classmates. Sigorgne was the first professor in the University of Paris to teach Newtonian physics, which he had expounded in a treatise, *Institutions newtoniennes* (1747). One of his students sent a copy of the poem to a friend inside a book, Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles*, an illegal, irreligious tract. Diderot was arrested for writing it in July 1749 at the same time as the police were hunting down the fourteen purveyors of the songs and poems, although he had no connection to them. He was then deep into work as editor of the *Encyclopédie*, whose first volume was due to appear in 1751, and his publishers, who had invested enormous sums in that enterprise, used all the influence they could muster to get him out of prison in the dungeon of Vincennes. The police therefore turned up all sorts of elements that were fermenting in Parisian culture—Newtonianism, Encyclopedism, and libertine freethinking as well as hostility to the king and his mistress—when they dug into the "Affair of the Fourteen," as they called it.

D'Argenson paid no heed to the broader dimension of the case. To him, as he put it in a letter to Nicolas René Berryer, the lieutenant general of police, much of the poetry "seems to me as to you to smell of the pedantry in the Latin quarter."[8] Little abbés and students had no importance because he was after larger game. In other letters to Berryer, he said that he had discussed the affair with the king, who took great interest in it. He urged Berryer to push on with the investigation: "You must not, Monsieur, let loose of the thread since we now have it in our grasp. On the contrary, we must strive to follow it up to its origin, as high as is possible."[9]

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D'Argenson hoped to implicate Maurepas's partisans, who still wielded

influence at the height of the power system and threatened to engineer Maurepas's return. They used songs and poems as weapons in the continuing struggle to dominate the government, and d'Argenson fought back by suppressing the poetry.

The police eventually gave up the hunt. They never found the author of "Monster whose black fury," perhaps because the poem was a collective creation that evolved in the telling rather than the product of a particular individual. After several months in the Bastille, the fourteen were released and sentenced to exile. They had no idea of the machinations that had taken place above their heads, far off in Versailles. Nor did most Parisians. Yet the police repression—a matter of abducting individuals from cafés and breaking into their apartments—aroused a great deal of attention and indignation. Although it could not be mentioned in newspapers, it was treated as an important event in private journals. The Marquis d'Argenson (not to be confused with the Comte d'Argenson, the war minister, who was his brother) noted in his journal that everyone around him had memorized the songs and poems, which he took to be symptomatic of a dangerous divide between the people of Paris and their rulers in Versailles. "I observe in the public and in select company talk that shocks me, an open contempt for the government and a profound discontent with it," he wrote. "Songs and satires are pouring down everywhere."[10]

Although the Affair of the Fourteen turned out to be nothing more than an episode in the endless struggle of court politics, it left a mark in Parisian memories. The abbé Morellet, who had belonged to Sigorgne's entourage as a student, described it in vivid detail fifty years later, and it was depicted as a turning point of Louis XV's reign in a clandestine best seller, *Vie privée de Louis XV*, published in 1781.[11] The songs themselves became absorbed in the general body of contestatory verse that went back to the Fronde, and they covered the entire range of topics that obsessed Parisians in the mid-century years. Many, as mentioned, protested against the treatment of Prince Édouard. Others condemned the peace settlement, the taxes, and the decadence of the court.

Mme de Pompadour provided a favorite target. While some songs derided her appearance (flat chest, yellowish skin, tainted teeth) without

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making political comments, several deplored her power over the ministers and attributed Maurepas's fall to her influence. Thus a Poissonnade composed to the tune of a drinking song and addressed to Maurepas:

| | |
|---|---|
| On dit que Madame Catin, | *It's said that Madam Slut,* |
| Qui vous mène si beau train | *Who leads you by the nose* |
| Et se plaît à la culbute, | *And is pleased by [the ministry's] collapse,* |
| Vous procure cette chute. | *Was the one who caused your fall.* |
| Lampons, lampons, | *Drink up, drink up,* |
| Camarades, lampons.[12] | *Comrades, drink up.* |

Far from challenging the principle of the monarchy, the songs condemned Pompadour for demeaning the majesty of the throne and attacked Louis for being an unworthy monarch:

Elle ordonne, il souscrit, humilié, soumis.
Aux genoux d'une femme on voit tomber Louis.
Et jaloux d'assouvir sa passion brutale,
Il profane à ses pieds la Majesté Royale.[13]

*(She commands, he accepts, humiliated, submissive. / One sees Louis fall to the ground before a woman, / And determined to satisfy his brutal passion, / He profanes the Royal Majesty at her feet.)*

The songs attacked Louis directly as "un roi fainéant, lâche, faible, imbécile"[14] ("a feckless king, lazy, weak, imbecilic"). They conveyed a general feeling of disgust with the reign rather than an ideological message:

| | |
|---|---|
| Les grands seigneurs s'avilissent, | *The great lords are making themselves vile,* |
| Les financiers s'enrichissent, | *The financiers are getting rich,* |
| Tous les Poissons s'agrandissent | *All the Fish are growing big.* |
| C'est le règne des vauriens. | *It's the reign of the good-for-nothings.* |

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Yet some went so far as to threaten regicide:

| | |
|---|---|
| Louis prend garde à ta vie. | *Louis beware of your life.* |
| Il est encore des Ravaillac à Paris.[15] | *There still are Ravaillacs in Paris.* |

(François Ravaillac was the assassin of Henry IV.)

Contemporaries like the Marquis d'Argenson detected sedition in such singing, but they looked back to 1648 rather than forward to 1789. No one could foresee the French Revolution in 1749, and no one today should view the songs as a sound track leading unproblematically to the past. Even if we can sing them ourselves to the tunes of the time, they merely provide clues as to what was in the air in eighteenth-century Paris, not unmediated access to the consciousness of eighteenth-century Parisians. At the very least, however, we can see that Parisians considered songs a power to be reckoned with, powerful enough in 1749 to bring down the government.

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## 4

# Saints Are Sent to Hell

Rarely, if ever, had Parisians witnessed such an outpouring of grief and indignation: A line of mourners, 10,000 strong, stretched across the Latin Quarter from the church of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont to the chapel of the Collège de Beauvais on June 22, 1749. They grieved over the death of Charles Coffin, the former principal of the college, rector of the university, and a devout Jansenist, revered for his piety and considered by some to be a saint. They fumed with anger at the archbishop of Paris, who had issued an order for the dying to be refused the last sacraments unless they produced a certificate attesting to their rejection of Jansenism—or, more precisely as will be explained, that they confessed to a priest who accepted the anti-Jansenist papal bull *Unigenitus*.[1]

Most French Catholics believed that salvation depended on the performance of the last rites. Some (not in Paris but in large parts of the South) belonged to associations of penitents, who rehearsed deathbed scenes so they would be prepared to renounce sin and resist the temptations of the devil at the supreme moment when salvation and damnation hung in the balance. To be denied extreme unction and absolution of sins was, in the eyes of the faithful, to be exposed to the danger of hellfire. The curate in Coffin's parish, Father Bouettin, had obeyed the archbishop's order with ruthless intransigence. By withholding the Viaticum (the eucharist given with extreme unc-

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tion) from Coffin, it could be said that he had barred the way to grace and sent a saint to hell.

The mourners, who included a great many priests, magistrates, and students, were not inclined to take such a simplified view. No one, they knew, could be certain about Coffin's fate in the afterlife, although some priests claimed that his refusal to renounce Jansenism meant he had been damned. But the mourners shared a widespread resentment about the refusal of sacraments, an issue that cut to the heart of Catholicism as a faith lived out in the lives of ordinary Parisians.

Jansenism had gone through several phases since it became attached to the name of Cornelius Jansen, a theologian from Leuven, whose *Augustinus* (1640) reworked the austere, Augustinian strain in Catholicism. Seventeenth-century French Jansenists such as Antoine Arnauld and Pasquier Quesnel developed a dark, tragic vision of the human condition. Man was inherently sinful, they argued, and salvation came through grace, a nearly unattainable infusion of the Holy Spirit that had to be "efficacious" as well as "sufficient," meaning it could not be earned or deserved. They scorned the casuistry of their enemies, the Jesuits, for being soft on sin, while the Jesuits attacked them as heretics, hardly different in their theology from Protestants. Taking their inspiration from Thomas Aquinas (and ultimately from Aristotle), the Jesuits offered a more positive view of the world, which included the frequent practice of confession, absolution, and communion. They participated actively in secular affairs, often as advisors to kings and courtiers. The Jansenists tended to withdraw from the world, sometimes in ascetic communities like the Abbey de Port-Royal outside Paris, from which Pascal launched his *Lettres provinciales* (1656–1657), a devastating attack on Jesuitism. Unlike the Jesuits, they never constituted a separate order, and even refused to be identified as Jansenists, a label that could easily come loose in theological debates.

By the time Pascal's generation had died out, Jansenism had lost its sharp, theological edge and had spread through the lower clergy and professional classes as a general ethos, characterized by austere piety and political activism. The politics were connected with the thirteen parlements of France, particularly the Parlement of Paris, whose area of jurisdiction as a high court covered nearly half the kingdom. Although the parlements

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functioned primarily as appellate courts (*cours souveraines*), they exercised