

IN THE KINGDOM OF SHADOWS: SECRECY AND TRANSPARENCY IN EIGHTEENTH-
CENTURY FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

Nicole Bauer: *In the Kingdom of Shadows: Secrecy and Transparency in Eighteenth-century France*
(Under the direction of Jay M. Smith)

This dissertation explores how the idea of secrecy took on a radically new meaning in the eighteenth century. The government and elites had long been seen as possessors of secrets, but what emerged in the eighteenth century was the idea that elites kept secrets illegitimately. By the eve of the French Revolution, writers voicing concerns about corruption saw secrecy as part and parcel of despotism, and this shift went hand in hand with the rise of the idea of government transparency. At century's end, transparency had come to be seen as the cure-all for social ills. The emergence of the idea of transparency as a desired quality in a regime, however, was not inevitable or predetermined; it was not simply a development characteristic of what scholars like to call modernity. Rather, the emphasis placed on government transparency, especially the mania for transparency that we see in eighteenth-century France, was a result of a convergence of several factors.

Rising nationalism and worries about hidden influences helped the Jansenists, a French Catholic sect with a Manichaeian worldview, heap suspicion onto the Jesuits, a religious order loyal to the pope in Rome that was often portrayed as secretive and steeped in intrigue. Changing notions of the individual led to new ideas about personal responsibility and honor; where secrecy once sheltered and protected family honor, openness and honesty were now the safeguards of *personal* honor. Furthermore, a traditionally secretive state did nothing to counteract rumors of

fictional abuses both in the courts and the prisons. All of these factors led to the emergence of the fledgling and often thorny issue of government transparency.

To my parents

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INTRODUCTION

Where there is secrecy, there is fear. Or so Gérard Vincent surmises in an essay on secrecy in the history of private life. For centuries, families, governments and individuals have been motivated by their fear of shame or humiliation to keep an incident like a crime--or the person who committed it--secret. Fear of public condemnation, fear of ridicule, or fear of reprisals have been strong incentives to keep supposedly shameful individuals and their acts undisclosed and unmentioned.

In his long meditation on secrecy, however, Vincent does not dwell on fear alone. He sees a connection between secrecy and power wherein those who possess power use secrecy to maintain it, or they use secrecy to project the illusion of power. Thirdly, Vincent believes that secrets fascinate, hence the interest in and conspiracy theories about the free masons, for example.¹ In many ways, the three observations that Vincent makes about secrecy—fear, power and fascination—trace the narrative arc of this project and the story of secrecy more broadly in the early modern period. In the summer of 1790, a year after the storming of the Bastille, the French press reported that so many cadavers were being found in the ruins of the fortress that the accumulation of remains was beginning to get in the way of demolition work. Workers were being bribed by curious onlookers, eager for a glimpse of the long-hidden victims of the despotism of the royal regime. Speeches were given to commemorate the dead who had been killed in secret but were now finally honored in public. This event and the curiosity it garnered

¹ Gérard Vincent, “A History of Secrets?” *A History of Private Life, Vol. V*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

reflected both fear of secrecy and the association of secrecy with power by the time of the Revolution. Ordinary people and the journalists who wrote for them feared the putative horrors of a despotic regime, interpreted those cadavers as a sign of unchecked, despotic power, and also revealed an undeniable fascination and hunger for spine-chilling tales.

In this dissertation, I look at the strange and unexpected path secrecy took in eighteenth-century French culture, and the surprising forces that led to the emergence of the notion of government transparency. By the French Revolution, the drive for transparency was a defining feature of the political culture. Countless scholars, including Lynn Hunt, Timothy Tackett, and Thomas Kaiser to name only a few, have documented the culture of transparency during the Revolution, especially the Terror: the fear of secrecy, the paranoia about conspiracies, and the obsession with false patriots who had hidden motives. As Marisa Linton has noted, most of the politicians arrested and executed during the Terror had been accused of secret subversion.² There has been little consensus, however, on how transparency took on the force that it did by the end of the eighteenth century. Historians have cited the revolutionary generation's education, one steeped in Antiquity and the ancient Roman fear of conspiracies and emphasis on virtue; or Rousseau's influence and push for sentimentality and authenticity. Since the Renaissance,

² See David Andress, *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution* (London: Little, Brown, 2005); Bronislaw Baczko, *Comment sortir de la Terreur: Thermidor et Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); Antoine de Baecque, *La Révolution terrorisée* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017); Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton, eds., *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Barry Coward and Julian Swann, eds., *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004). Jean-François Fayard, *La Justice révolutionnaire: chronique de la terreur* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1987); Hugh Gough, *The Terror in the French Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Idem., *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Jean-Clément Martin, *La Terreur: vérités et légendes* (Paris: Éditions Perrins, 2017); R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941); Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Jean-Marc Varaut, *La Terreur judiciaire: la Révolution contre les droits de l'homme* (Paris: Perrin, 1993); Sophie Wahnich, *In Defense of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

though, anyone who was well-educated was exposed to classical humanism and so these ideas do not apply merely to the revolutionary generation. Furthermore, conspiracies and fear of conspiracies punctuated the early modern period.

Some point to the Scientific Revolution which introduced a “knowledge culture” which privileged openness and the sharing of information over secrecy, while others simply understand the development of government transparency as the natural outcome of the rise of the public sphere and other conditions of what is now considered modernity.³ Sociologist Georg Simmel, acknowledged the culture of transparency in the modern period, but argued that secrecy was necessary in large societies because individuals needed “realms of unknowns.” Full transparency would make it impossible to cope successfully in a social environment. He also believed that the way money was exchanged in a capitalist society made secrecy indispensable and created a system where silence could be “bought,” though he added that for his contemporaries in the late nineteenth century, the culture of honesty and transparency made lies even more devastating.⁴ None of these explanations alone, however, suffices to explain the intensity of the obsession with transparency that marked the period of the Revolution. Rather, the emphasis placed on government transparency, especially the mania for transparency that we see in the French Revolution, was a result of a convergence of several factors, an unanticipated outcome of

³ See Jay Caplan, *Postal Culture in Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016); Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: l'opinion publique au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); Lisa Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1990); Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800*, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: the causes célèbres of prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Timothy McCall, Sean Roberts, and Giancarlo Fiorenza, eds. *Visual Cultures of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*, (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2013); James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jon Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁴ See Georg Simmel, *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*, eds. and trans. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs, and Matthew Kanjirathinkal (Boston: Brill, 2009). 104.

developments as disparate (but interconnected) as religious conflicts, new gender identities, changing ideas of honor, police practices, and political events.

Secrets, even on the part of the government, had not always been something suspect and frightening. As Arlette Farge demonstrated in her study of *lettres de cachet* (secret orders for immediate arrest), the Crown aided in the preservation of secrets, and families gladly solicited this aid when they wished to have troublesome members quietly put away to prevent scandal and preserve their honor.⁵ Secrecy was thus linked to honor--and to the fear of shame and social condemnation--an important theme in my dissertation. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, then, secrecy did not bear the negative connotation that it took on at century's end because of the way honor, especially family honor, was understood.

It is also clear that in the eighteenth century both those who condemned secrecy and those who defended it saw a connection between secrecy and power. The practices of the monarchy were arguably less despotic than they had been in the past, and yet its official policy of secrecy in matters of governance maintained this image of the powerful, invasive state, even as the regime weakened. Traditionally, secrets were a kind of currency both in diplomacy and in the power brokering that took place in the royal court. For individuals, it was a sign of finesse and social agility *not* to be too transparent, not to show one's emotions, especially at court.⁶

Attitudes towards power and secrecy began to change halfway through the century due in part to changing understanding of the connection between honor and secrecy, new ideas of individual responsibility, and later to an emerging idea of masculinity that linked being

⁵ See Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le Désordre des familles: lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

⁶ In a recent biography of Louis XVI, John Hardman explains that Louis XVI had difficulty communicating with the revolutionaries, many of whom were of his own generation and who valued transparency, because he had been trained by men of the previous generation who had instructed him never to reveal too much of himself, to be the opposite of transparent. See John Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

masculine to transparency. As many began to critique the practice of *lettres de cachet*, they brought into question the idea of an individual's crime affecting the family's honor. The notion of individual responsibility bucked against that of collective honor and shame, thus rendering secrecy—and the need to hide the individual's crime to save the collective—obsolete as a tool in securing honor. To add to that, a new understanding of masculinity and the public sphere was shaped by the ideas of patriotism, Rousseau's fear of artifice, and the apotheosis of reason.⁷ Transparency was a quality of the new masculinity of the younger generation, and an important way to be honorable. At the same time, secrecy came to be cast as a sign of weakness, a means of hiding dishonor and sinister dealings. There is some evidence that secrecy was feminized as well. Writers or those who felt short-changed by the downward flow of power and privileges began to critique the woman who exercised a degree of power in this system, the royal mistress, Mme. de Pompadour. As the idea of the separate private and public spheres began to crystallize, these attacks on Pompadour likely reflected a fear of women who supposedly wielded power illegitimately and covertly.

Religious conflict was also central to the push for transparency in eighteenth-century France. The Jesuits, a religious order with close ties to the monarchy, were targeted by those who believed that they were secretly pulling the strings in the central and local governments. The Jansenists, a sect within French Catholicism who were the avowed enemies of the Jesuits, were in this period beginning to propound the merits of “divulging” hidden truths, using a religious language of light and darkness.⁸ Soon, the campaign against anti-patriotic “conspirators” led to

⁷ See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁸ See Dale Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). See also Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France, 1580-1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Monique Cottret, *Jansénismes et Lumières: pour un autre XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998); William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to*

the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1764 from France. In the decades that followed, accusations of corruption behind closed doors at court all heightened concerns over a secretive yet intrusive state.

By the time of the Revolution, the reigning belief was that everything had to be brought to light; the public was to be ever vigilant and keep its eye on a government that could easily and surreptitiously slide into despotism, given the chance. In a book that was written in 1774 and then re-published in France in 1793, Jean-Paul Marat wrote that it was important to “open the entrails of wickedness” to battle a secretive, despotic regime that pried into the secrets of its citizens, who were only “safe in obscurity.” Marat’s concerns nevertheless revealed a cultural ambivalence towards transparency. The fascination and respect for privacy and private places, and the residual attraction to those same dark places which might cause terror—Gothic literature emerged in the last quarter of the century--were two sides of the same phenomenon. The Bastille represented all the ills of the former regime to these writers, and in the 1780s, dark tales and legends abounded of the innocent victims of *lettres de cachet*, and clandestine deaths. As the century progressed, secrecy had come to be a reason for suspicion rather than a form of protection, and I argue that this is because of the longer trends in France of state centralization and surveillance, and the burst of political and cultural activity from the 1760s on: the shifting connection between honor and secrecy, the campaign against the Jesuits, the cultural fear of

the French Revolution (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); B. Robert Kreiser, *Miracles, Convulsions, and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Eighteenth-century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Jason T. Kuznicki, “Scandal and Disclosure in the Old Regime” (PhD dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 2006); John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France, Vols. 1 and 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Ephraim Radner, *Spirit and Nature: the Saint-Médard Miracles in Eighteenth-Century Jansenism* (New York: Crossroad Publications, 2002); David A. Selby, *Tocqueville, Jansenism, and the Necessity of the Political in a Democratic Age: Building a Republic for the Moderns* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015); Brian Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640-1799* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

artifice and concealment, and the growth of nationalism. All of these factors led to the emergence of the fledgling and often thorny issue of government transparency.

The chapters in this dissertation progress in a more or less chronological fashion. This story begins in the early eighteenth century and follows the winding path that led to the emergence of the idea of government transparency on the eve of the French Revolution. The project concludes with the demolition of the Bastille in 1790 and the rumors, stories and reports circulating at the time which focused on the human remains that were found there and the implications these unknown victims bore for a new government that would ideally be transparent and accountable to citizens. In chapter 1, I focus on *lettres de cachet*, especially those requested by families to have one of their members incarcerated, and pay close attention to the language of these requests and their frequency from the first decades of the century to the 1750s when their use began to taper off. The practice of *lettres de cachet*, especially early in the eighteenth century, revealed how French men and women saw secrecy as an indispensable tool in avoiding shame and dishonor. Secrets could also be a source of power, or at least, could create the illusion of power. The second chapter explores the *secret du roi*, Louis XV's secret network of spies and ambassadors whose existence was kept secret from everyone at court, including his ministers of foreign affairs. Having multiple sources of information was at the outset a good strategy for creating policies and amassing as complete a knowledge as possible of international politics, but rivalries and envy between those at court who were suspected of being part of the *secret du roi*, and those who found themselves excluded, led to disastrous predicaments which sometimes spiraled out of the king's control. Often the efforts of the *secret du roi* went counter to the kingdom's official policies, which confused many both within and without France, and on a few occasions it appeared that the king preferred to maintain secrecy even if it was counter-

productive and even if it meant that those who were loyal to him were left vulnerable. Instead of using secrecy to maintain and project power, his secretive tendencies left him appearing weak, unwilling to reveal everything because of his vulnerabilities, not his strengths.

In the third chapter, I look at the connections between nationalism, religion and government transparency. Rising nationalism and worries about hidden influences helped the Jansenists, a French Catholic sect with a Manichaean worldview, heap suspicion onto the Jesuits, a religious order loyal to the pope in Rome that was often portrayed as secretive and foreign. The Jansenists were the avowed enemies of the Jesuits and they often critiqued the decadence of the royal court, with which they often associated the Jesuits. As Dale Van Kley brilliantly demonstrated, it was not the *philosophes* and the forces of dechristianization that led to the Jesuits' downfall, it was the Jansenists who orchestrated it with their mastery of the tools of marshalling public opinion.⁹ The Jansenists accomplished their task through the use of pamphlets, open letters, publicity stunts, and underground newspapers. With a strong sense of martyrdom, the Jansenists began to propound the merits of “divulging” hidden truths and battling secret corruption using imagery heavily borrowed from Scripture. It was the 1760s campaign against anti-patriotic “conspirators” that ultimately led to the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1764 from France. The Jesuits saw their schools closed one by one and finally their order suppressed in France as they were accused of secretly being more loyal to Rome than to the French Crown, thus lacking true patriotism in an era of burgeoning nationalism. What began as a religious conflict had serious implications for politics as the Jansenist literature against the Jesuits helped bolster the push for transparency in the government as well as the negative attitudes towards secrecy. Their most successful attacks against the Jesuits were those which portrayed the

⁹ See Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765*.

religious order's supposed secrecy as inextricably entwined with its foreign origin and foreign fealty.

To add to that, the traditionally secretive eighteenth-century French state did nothing to counteract rumors of fictional abuses both in the courts and the prisons. The growing rumors about these putative abuses, which were never officially addressed by the Crown, added weight to the idea that government secrecy shielded corruption and even terrible abuses of power, which is the focus of the fourth chapter. (In the reign of Louis XVI, the government initiated some efforts of reform such as improving hygiene and even visiting prisoners and listening to complaints, but the more horrifying rumors of secret executions or torture were never formally dispelled, and secrecy remained the order of the day in the running of state prisons.) The Paris police, who had jurisdiction over the prisons of the city and carried out arrests by *lettres de cachet*, did their utmost to shroud everything in secrecy, especially within the prisons, since they believed that this level of secrecy helped maintain order and avoid rumors running rampant.¹⁰ The secrecy surrounding the prisons, however, fostered these rumors and was one of many factors that helped lead to the culture of transparency that we see in the Revolution. While the

¹⁰ See Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille: l'édification d'un lieu de mémoire* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012); Marc Chassaingne, *La Lieutenance générale de police de Paris* (Geneva: Slatkine-Megariotis Reprints, 1975); Monique Cottret, *La Bastille à prendre: histoire et mythe de la forteresse royale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986); Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-century Paris* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010); Elise Dutray-Lecoin and Danielle Muzerelle, eds., *La Bastille, ou L'Enfer des vivants: à travers les archives de la Bastille*, (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010); Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Légendes et archives de la Bastille* (Paris: Hachette, 1898); Steven L. Kaplan, "Note sur les commissaires de police de Paris au XVIIIème siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 28: 4 (October 1981): 669-686; Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*, trans. Norbert Schürer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Vincent Milliot, *L'Admirable Police: Tenir Paris au Siècle des Lumières* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2016); W. Gregory Monahan, "*Crottes, Lanternes et Catins*": *the police of Paris, 1667-1789* (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Proquest Dissertation Publishing, 1977).

See also Vincent Denis, *Une Histoire de l'Identité: France, 1715-1815* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2008); Catherine Denys, "The Development of Police Forces in Urban Europe in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Urban History* 36:3 (2010): 332-44; Alan Williams, *The Police of Paris, 1718-1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

police believed that secrecy could help keep public opinion from going to extremes, the shadowy practices of the police only bolstered the growing attitudes of suspicion and fear towards state prisons and the justice system, especially the Bastille.

Furthermore, one of the reasons rumors of abuse in prisons sprouted up and grew so rapidly was the Jansenists. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, many Jansenists were imprisoned in the Bastille and elsewhere for disseminating illegal pamphlets and printing their underground newspaper. These pamphleteers were quick to publish stories of horrors in French prisons which were often printed abroad to spread the “Black legend” of the Bastille and other prisons, operating as anti-French propaganda, often in Protestant countries. Many of these pamphlets were then smuggled back into France. In the fifth chapter, I perform a case study of one Jansenist who was imprisoned from the 1760s until the Revolution. He was imprisoned for defaming and accusing several prominent individuals of being involved in a “famine plot,” a scheme to hoard grain in times of famine in order to sell it at exorbitant prices.¹¹ He was a zealous Jansenist, obsessed with the idea of transparency which was bolstered by his interpretations of Scripture. Thus, his religious fixation on transparency and truth easily translated to political convictions, and he fervently believed that government transparency was the solution to all kinds of abuses from those in power. Because of his religious zeal and frenetic demands for freedom, his jailors considered him a madman, and he would not have been released

¹¹ The famine plot was a popular conspiracy theory in eighteenth-century France. See Cynthia Bouton, *The Flour War: Gender, Class and Community in late Ancien Regime French Society* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Steven A. Kaplan, *The Famine Plot Persuasion in Eighteenth-century France* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1982); Idem., *Le Pain, le peuple et le roi: la bataille du libéralisme sous Louis XV* (Paris: Perrin, 1986); E.P. Thompson, Florence Gauthier, and Guy-Robert Ikni, eds., *La Guerre du blé au XVIIIème siècle: la critique populaire contre le libéralisme économique au XVIIIème siècle* (Montreuil: Editions de la Passion, 1988).

For works on rumor, see Graham, *If the King Only Knew*, 2000; Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

were it not for the outbreak of the Revolution. His ideas and fixation on transparency and conspiracies, however, presaged the political culture of the Revolution and the Terror.

Finally, in the last chapter I return to the legends surrounding the Bastille and answer the question of why stories of horrors and abuses in prisons were so popular with the reading public. By the 1780s, the pervading mood and cultural attitude was one that favored transparency, that saw it as an aspect of good governance, as a sign of patriotism and masculinity, and as an overall good. Secrecy, in contrast, was no longer a safeguard of honor but rather a tool of the cowardly or corrupt. Nevertheless the hunger for spine-tingling tales of terror in the Bastille revealed not only the dominant rejection of secrecy and opacity, but also a fascination and repressed desire or pleasure in seeking what was hidden from view. I show that these stories of secret abuses in state prisons had much in common with the Gothic genre of literature, which was thriving in the late eighteenth century. Though it was less acceptable to use secrecy to hide something shameful, to mask a fear of dishonor; and though the positive connection between secrecy and power had lost its force; what emerged was that fascination with secrecy and the appeal of grim, Gothic tales. That fascination and the popularity of the Gothic revealed a wider cultural malaise, the unspoken or implicit feeling of unease, loss of mystery, and vulnerability that total transparency brought about.

The imperative for government transparency began to replace the imperative for secrecy, though this shift was hardly quick or clean. Thinkers found themselves at the crossroads of pre-modern honor and modern transparency and accountability, though these concepts remained conflicted and intertwined. Honor was still of supreme importance in the eyes of the public even if its meaning had evolved. In demolishing the Bastille and finding those cadavers, the people

had in a sense violated the monarchy's honor, but honor had become less a matter of hiding something from view, and more a matter of having nothing to hide.

CHAPTER I: A MATTER OF HONOR: *LETTRES DE CACHET* AND THE USES OF SECRECY

By the eve of the Revolution, writers voicing concerns about corruption saw secrecy as part and parcel of despotism. Everything had to be brought to light; the public was to be ever vigilant and keep its eye on a government that could easily and surreptitiously slide into despotism, given the chance. The practices of the absolute monarchy were arguably less despotic than they had been in the past, and yet its official policy of secrecy in matters of governance maintained this image of the powerful, invasive state, even as the regime weakened.

From the 1760s on, essays, books like the Comte de Mirabeau's *Des lettres de cachet*, and anonymous pamphlets condemned *lettres de cachet* (secret orders for arrest without due process) as tools and emblems of a despotic, secretive government in desperate need of reform. In the first half of the century, though, as Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault demonstrated in their study of *lettres de cachet*, the Crown aided in the preservation of secrets, and families gladly solicited this aid when they wished to have troublesome members quietly put away to prevent scandal and preserve their honor.¹ In fact, the vast majority of *lettres de cachet* issued in the Old Regime were the result of a request, not handed down by the king or his ministers. Secrecy was thus often an imperative of honor; it was a necessary tool in preserving the good reputation and social credit of a family, whether from the laboring classes or the highest echelons of society. The evidence shows that people of all walks of life were very concerned for their honor and

¹ See Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le Désordre des familles: lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

reputation, and they believed that the state should have a hand in seeing to that honor—at least before the political and cultural changes of the 1760s—while maintaining the utmost secrecy.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when *lettres de cachet* came into common use, though their heyday was between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century. Certainly after 1700 police records of secret arrests are far more abundant, partly because the police began to keep better records and because the lieutenant general of police at the beginning of the century, the Marquis d'Argenson, believed he saw a decline of morals in the first decades of the eighteenth century and wished to contain the supposed spread of rot as much as possible. As Michel Rey has argued, it was not only the perceived moral decay of society in the beginning of the eighteenth century and during the Regency that drove the police and ordinary citizens to resort to *lettres de cachet*, it was also the gradual incursion of the state into what had earlier been the domain of the Church. More and more, the police and ordinary citizens interpreted vices such as lechery and indecency as forms of disorder rather than sins.² The police, as agents of the state charged with stamping out disorder, thus played a larger role in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in familial disputes in which the Church might have intervened in earlier times. In the eighteenth century, parents of disobedient children and masters of unruly servants, those who were meant to maintain order in their households, expected the state to aid them in that goal.

These families usually wrote requests for *lettres de cachet* in an urgent tone, calling for immediate action and almost always speaking of potential damage to the family that the offending member would incur *in the future*—damage not yet done, or which was only beginning, but which definitely would take place if said individual was not locked away at once—and also often remaining vague as to the shameful acts committed. Thus, writers of

² Michel Rey, “Police and Sodomy in Eighteenth-Century Paris: From Sin to Disorder” *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, eds. Kent Gerard, Gert Hekma (New York: Haworth Press, 1989) 520-543.

requests for imprisonment invited and included the police in imagining the horrors that might take place if a wicked family member was left unchecked. This strategy also emphasized the duty of the state in policing moral behavior, enforcing the patriarchal family order, and preserving families' honor through secrecy. Secrecy, then, was one of the most important tools in maintaining order, and nothing could be worse in the eyes of those requesting arrests than total transparency. The Abbé Theru, a cleric living in Paris in the 1720s, took it upon himself to voluntarily spy for the police, keeping a look-out for those in his neighborhood of morally questionable behavior. For this abbé, keeping such behavior and those who perpetrated it out of sight was a moral imperative, since, as he wrote, "great disorders" would result if one spared the "corruptors," because then "all kinds of people will take off their masks, believing that everything is permitted..."³ Revealing all of the immorality taking place would only serve, as many believed, to aggravate the situation and help depravity spread, especially to the young.

For example, requests throughout the first half of the eighteenth century were filled with injunctions for immediate arrest so as to avoid damage to a family's "honor and credit" since if the black sheep in the family was not arrested, the consequences would be "something to be feared."⁴ A baker who requested that his son be put away referred to him as "a debauched libertine" and added that "as there is reason to fear that he will only become worse and dishonor [the family] through some act of libertinage, [the baker] has turned to your authority so that you can accord him a letter from the king in order to arrest [his son]..."⁵ He requested that his son be placed in the prison Fort l'Evêque, but if that was too expensive, he could be placed in the

³ Rey, 134.

⁴ Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 11786, *Dossier de prisonniers 1752*.

⁵ BA, MS 11786, *Dossier de prisonniers August 1752*.

madhouse, Bicêtre. (Families often paid for the upkeep of the imprisoned individual as long as they could afford it.) Similarly, two brothers who were merchants requested to have their debauched nephew arrested so that the police could “take the necessary measures to halt the course of his debauchery [and] save the family’s honor...”⁶ Another family wrote that their son “was showing signs of the worst inclinations which could endanger the family’s honor,” and a woman who had her son put away wrote that “he exposes his family daily to the possibility of dishonor...”⁷ The police always investigated discreetly, and spoke to others in the neighborhood to verify the claims of the family. Then they would write a report to the chief of police, often making a statement such as the following: “The complaints of...are well-founded, and what they impute conforms to the truth,”⁸ and they would begin making plans for the arrest, usually collaborating with the family to capture the unsuspecting black sheep. Everyone knew that this was the general procedure, and so families often gathered testimonies from neighbors or respectable individuals who knew the family to deliver as a packet to the police. One neighbor, for example, seconded the woman’s claims about her son, writing that “one cannot sequester him from society too soon, so as to avoid dishonor for the family,” and an Oratorian priest wrote that the woman’s son had worked for the Oratorians as a kitchen boy and had “committed several dishonorable deeds, both for him and his family, which could become serious...”⁹ The police did eventually investigate thoroughly and discovered what exactly the black sheep in the family was guilty of, but requests still adhered to the usual format of urgent request and vague allusion to the crime. Sometimes the police inspectors and commissioners, while they knew exactly which

⁶ BA, MS 11786, *Dossier de prisonniers August 1752*

⁷ BA, MS 11874, *Dossier de prisonniers 1754*.

⁸ BA, MS 11874, *Dossier de prisonniers 1754*.

⁹ BA, MS 11874, *Dossier de prisonniers 1754*.

offense they were discussing, used abbreviations or euphemisms rather than referring to the crime or deviant behavior explicitly. Thus, even in their reports they maintained a protocol of discretion and secrecy.

Farge and Foucault argued that, for those requesting *lettres de cachet*, confinement of a black sheep erased the stain of dishonor, and entailed the goal of repentance not punishment. This notion of repentance or correction rather than punishment helps explain the legal murkiness of the use of *lettres de cachet*. Those arrested by *lettres de cachet* were placed under a cover of secrecy that in effect made them invisible to the eyes of the law, protected from rigorous and shameful public punishments but denied any defense or trial. For magistrates and jurists of early modern France, many of whom made use of *lettres de cachet* themselves, these royal orders served as a “prophylaxis for families” and were perceived as a social defense, not as a punishment.¹⁰ Thus, when those contesting *lettres de cachet* began to articulate their arguments, they usually did not focus on the legality of the practice. Rather, they attacked the notion of collective honor and guilt. Puzzled by the sudden drop in the rates of arrest requests in the 1760s, Farge and Foucault surmised that families might have requested *lettres de cachet* less and less frequently because individual liberties began to take on new importance as part of Enlightenment values. The historian, Brian Strayer, for his part, attributes the drop in frequency to changes in family values and the rise of public opinion, creating a “disequilibrium” between old practices and new Enlightenment ideals.¹¹ In the Old Regime, asserts Strayer, what counted was the family, not the individual. Parents and others requesting *lettres de cachet* emphasized family

¹⁰ Richard Mowery Andrews, *Law, Magistracy, and Crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 270, 293.

¹¹ Brian Strayer, *Lettres de cachet and Social Control in the Ancien Regime: 1659-1789* (PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1987), 36.

honor because every member was responsible for every other member; both guilt and honor were collective.

The Comte de Mirabeau, (a victim of a *lettre de cachet*), wrote a long diatribe against the practice where he explicitly attacked the notion of collective honor and guilt, which I will explore later in this chapter. Mirabeau's explanation for the shift in public opinion against *lettres de cachet*, consonant with the arguments of Farge, Foucault and Strayer, was the growing cognizance of the rights of the individual vis-à-vis the group (family, parish, community) in France, and the erosion of the link between the individual and the group which once created collective guilt. This is certainly a trend that we can see in the dwindling of cases after the 1760s and in growing resistance to the practice from those who fell victim to it. Many felt that the public should decide a case of morality rather than an authority figure, especially after the 1760s.¹² Moreover, as the state became more bureaucratized, more invasive and more watchful of its subjects, the notion of the private individual as an entity separate from the state or a collective emerged, as Foucault and more recently Vincent Denis have argued.¹³ As we will see in the cases in this chapter, individuals who lost their freedom began to assert their right to privacy as a defense against the intrusions of their families and the state. 1784 saw the famous *circulaire* of the Baron de Breteuil, a letter sent to all intendants in France putting limits on terms of imprisonment by *lettres de cachet* and going so far as to state that family honor was not a sufficient reason to arrest an individual, and that marital issues should be solved in the courts and

¹² See Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The causes célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); also, Suzanne Desan and Jeffrey Merrick, eds., *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2009).

¹³ See Vincent Denis, *Une histoire de l'identité: France, 1715-1815* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2008).

not by secret order.¹⁴ Privacy, it seemed, was a matter of the rights of the individual while secrecy had been a tool of families to control their members.

Lettres de cachet used to be looked upon as an instrument of mercy and even relief since they spared both the family and the disgraced individual the humiliation of a trial and public punishment. By the eve of the Revolution, they were seen as one of the most odious practices of the Old Regime. Exploring all of the factors which led to such cultural shifts will be the subject of subsequent chapters, but in this chapter I argue that the documents surrounding *lettres de cachet* reveal that preserving the family's honor was a concern of people of all backgrounds, and that secrecy, far from being cast as sinister or veiling corruption, was honor's most vital tool.

The Governor's Son

In the 1720s, a nobleman by the name of François Riotte de la Riotterie submitted a request for a *lettre de cachet* for his son, who went by the same name. Like many others requesting the incarceration of a family member, Riotte did his best to describe the urgency and the pain of his situation while remaining somewhat vague as to his son's offenses.

In his formal letter to the police and by extension the king, the aggravated father wrote, "François Riotte...sieur de la Riotterie, ...former governor of the town and chateau of Melun, takes the liberty of representing to Your Majesty that, although he has taken pains in the education of François Riotte, his son, placing him first among the Pages of the former king, Louis XIV, and then in the Musketeers, this son, instead of responding to the good intentions of the supplicant, had contracted considerable debts and thrown himself into debauchery so outrageous that the supplicant and his wife were forced to have him [locked up]. This correction

¹⁴ See René-Marie Rampelberg, *Le ministre de la Maison du Roi, 1783-1788: Baron de Breteuil* (Paris: Economica, 1975), 201.

did not render him more wise, and no sooner had he received his freedom than he began his disorders once again...”¹⁵ This father lamented that once free, his son had abandoned “the paternal abode” to reside in Paris where he had only “augmented” his debauchery, though the father offered no explanation for why his son’s “debauchery” was so offensive and dangerous to the family’s honor. Through another request of his father, the son was sent to the Bastille, and once released, was told to return home, but again he did not remain there. The son returned to Paris “where he continued his dissipations and disorders. It is in such sad circumstances that the supplicant...finds himself forced to do great violence to himself to obtain from Your Majesty permission that this unnatural son be confined...for the rest of his days...in order to avoid the results of his disorders and the dishonor they might bring to his family.”¹⁶ This father thus believed that his son’s behavior was so dangerous and so offensive that he needed to be locked up for life, though he never specified which offense could be so terrible as to warrant that kind of punishment.

François Riotte *père* asked that his son be transferred to a religious community far from Paris and in secret. Away from Paris, his son was less likely to commit the sorts of offenses that he was prone to, there being supposedly fewer temptations in the countryside. Confining his son in the provinces possibly had the added advantage of attracting less attention to the family than being sent to a prison in Paris. His father asked that he be sent to a monastery or abbey “from which he cannot escape” and offered to pay four hundred *livres* a year for his upkeep. The police, for their part, investigated discreetly to see if this man’s claims were verifiable. Because François Riotte was a man of rank, even Cardinal de Fleury, the prime minister, took interest in

¹⁵ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

¹⁶ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

the case and inquired into the details. The chief of police at the time, René Hérault, who had just succeeded to the position after serving as the chief prosecutor and intendant in Tours, explained why François Riotte the father wished to have his son put away. He told the cardinal, “Riotte de la Riotterie [the son] is a well-known creature of infamy. He was arrested by royal order on the seventeenth of January, 1726, because he was connected to Deschauffours and a number of other scoundrels of his ilk.”¹⁷ Deschauffours had been burned at the stake in the 1720s for the crime of sodomy; those connected to him had been imprisoned or exiled from Paris. At least one man hanged himself in the Bastille. In investigating Deschauffours, the police had not only discovered several men guilty of what was considered a serious crime, but also an underground network comprised of hundreds of men, some of them of very high rank, and their secret meeting places. The police planted spies and interrogated servants who had participated in the secret meetings and then escaped, and they eventually composed long, seemingly endless lists of names.

Like François Riotte *père*, the chief of police would not refer to the son’s offense explicitly. In writing to the cardinal, he could confine himself to alluding to another, Duchauffour, and knew that he would be understood. Desiring to spare his son that fate and his family the disgrace and dishonor of Deschauffours’ punishment, the father preferred having his son locked away forever. Continuing his letter to the cardinal, the chief of police wholeheartedly agreed with the appalled and anxious father. When the son was released from the Bastille in 1731 and ordered to return to his province, he disobeyed. “Instead of obeying he remained in Paris and continued his abominations,” wrote Hérault. “He was arrested several times for his disobedience and for several complaints that I received. I even spoke to him several times. And I

¹⁷ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

believe that the only measure left is to lock him up at the hospital and forget him there.”¹⁸

Hérault was following certain conventions of discretion in not alluding to the crimes specifically, especially since he was addressing someone of high rank, but he also probably believed that it was indecent even to refer to indecency explicitly. He and other members of the police thus referred to another who had committed the same crime to describe Riotte’s offenses, or they spoke of “abominations,” “disorders,” or sometimes “the infamous passion for boys.”

The authorities therefore took a serious interest in the situation of the Riotte family and sympathized with the father’s desire to lock his son away until his death. In the 1720s, the police were very concerned about lax morals and vice in the capital in general, and in particular spent energy and time targeting and uncovering deviant behavior. Deschauffours, the man who had been burnt at the stake, and Riotte, were only two of the many men the police watched and eventually arrested. They might have arrested Riotte even without his father’s request. One example of a man whom the police were observing for this deviant behavior was a lawyer at the Châtelet named Moinet. In a letter from 1725 or 1726, a police commissioner wrote, “We have been receiving for some time now complaints of the abominable life of the S. Moinet... Not only does he host parties of debauchery with other men of rank who have given themselves over to the infamous passion for boys, but he has the indignity of committing the utmost horrors with lackeys. And many [servants] have quitted his service so as to escape from his brutality.”¹⁹ The commissioner recommended that he be sent to the Bastille and his friends kept away from the royal court. Not only did the police find the behavior of these men immoral and dangerous, they were also disgusted that these deviant men did not confine their behavior to those of the same

¹⁸ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

¹⁹ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

rank. Their “debauchery” entailed the danger of confusion of both gender and class. While seducing a chambermaid would not have even raised an eyebrow, engaging in the “utmost horrors” with a valet was a threat to the social order.²⁰

Being a threat both to society and his family in the eyes of those who had power over him, Riotte the son found himself incarcerated for over ten years. His father, in writing to the police, insisted on his “paternal affection” and his terrible “sorrow” in having to ask for his son’s detention, but he always made it clear that he found it a necessity. “He cannot be allowed to do injury to a family that has always lived in honor,” wrote his father. “This is the mercy that a father penetrated with sorrow asks of you, monsieur.”²¹ The father’s attitudes towards his son’s behavior seem to be consistent with the attitudes of the French nobility at the time. Despite the well-known homosexual relationships of prominent figures at the court of Louis XIV, including the king’s brother, noble *débauchés* and their families took pains to keep such behavior secret. When, for example, the police caught the Marquis de Bressey soliciting a young man in the Tuileries gardens in 1725, the marquis threatened to commit suicide rather than face arrest and the dishonor that would come with the widespread knowledge of his “vice.”²² Whenever Riotte the son was released or was about to be released, his father asked for his punishment to be

²⁰ See Jeffrey Merrick, *Order and Disorder under the Ancien Regime* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Jeffrey Merrick and Michael Sibalis, eds., *Homosexuality in French History and Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2012); Robert Oresko, “Homosexuality and the Court Elites of Early Modern France: Some Problems, Some Suggestions, and an Example” *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma, 501-519 (New York: Haworth Press, 1989); Thierry Pastorello, *Sodome à Paris: fin XVIIIème-milieu XIXème siècle: l’homosexualité masculine en construction* (Paris: Creaphis, 2011); Michael Sibalis, “Homosexuality in Early Modern France,” in *Queer Masculinities, 1550-1800: Siting Same-Sex Desire in the Early Modern World*, ed. Katherine O’Donnell and Michael O’Rourke, 211-231 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); *Homosexuality in Early Modern France: A Documentary Collection*, eds. Bryant Ragan, Jeffrey Merrick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²¹ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

²² Sibalis, “Homosexuality in Early Modern France,” 2006, 221.

extended, so much did he fear and/or loathe his son's inclinations, and their consequences for the family's reputation.

Riotte the son was not silent. He was given pen and paper and he wrote to the police and his father, first asking for forgiveness, promising to reform his behavior, and later insisting that he had never harmed anyone or done anything wrong. He wrote an emotional letter to the chief of police asking to be released. "Please have mercy, monseigneur, on an unfortunate," wrote the son, "who has been suffering for four years the most intense sorrow and who has found himself abandoned by his father and all his family, and I lack basic necessities, and I am wallowing in the utmost misery..."²³ Riotte the son wrote similarly plaintive and sorrowful letters to his father but received no reply. In another letter to the chief of police, the son wrote, "Please be so kind, monseigneur, as to order that the letter which I have given myself the honor of writing to my father be delivered to him, as I have not had any reply."²⁴ The police had sent on at least a few of the son's letters to his father, and they also wished to know if his father had decided his son had been punished long enough. But even after reading his son's letters, he remained unmoved. In 1730, after his son had been in the Bastille for four years, his father wrote to the police that his son "had so badly neglected the good counsel which I have always given that is only just that he suffer the consequences."²⁵ Despite his father's stolid refusal, the son tried again. In a letter from 1731, he wrote, "It is now five years and four months that I have been in captivity. I make every effort to once again deserve the tenderness of my father through letters both respectful and

²³ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*, 27 Aug. 1729.

²⁴ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

²⁵ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*, 27 Feb. 1730.

submissive. I have asked his pardon with tears of blood in my eyes for all my past transgressions...”²⁶

Riotte the son knew, whether he believed it was fair or not, that paternal love was to be earned; it was not unconditional. Jonathan Dewald has argued that the idea of a parent’s instantaneous, unconditional love for his or her child was not an aspect of the early modern understanding of the parent-child relationship, especially among the French nobility.²⁷ It was the duty of parents to care for, guide, and discipline their children when they went astray, but they were only expected to love them if they did as they were told, avoided shaming the family, and especially if they brought fame and honor to the family name. Children, for their part, were probably not expected to love their parents with passion and devotion, either, but they were expected to show obedience and respect, and to conform to social norms. Riotte the son had not only failed to marry at the appropriate age, to father an heir, to remain in the elite corps of guards his father had helped him join, and to move up in the ranks, he had also shown himself to be sexually deviant. He was a failure both in the eyes of society and of his family. Dewald argues that French nobles often had two competing imperatives: to sacrifice their own interests for the honor and glory of their families, but also to advance themselves in the world and look after their personal glory, whether at court or in the military. Through his behavior and failure to hide it from others, Riotte showed a blatant rejection or disregard for the quest for rank and honors that was supposed to be every nobleman’s lot. When his father requested that he remain in prison, the police in their notes remarked, “M. Riotte de la Riotterie, governor of Melun, requests that the detention of the S. de la Riotterie his son continue. He has been a prisoner in the Bastille since

²⁶ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*, 28 May 1731.

²⁷ See Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

the month of February, 1726. He had the same tastes as Deschauffours. His imprisonment has not corrected him.”²⁸ The police, it seemed, were beginning to believe that Riotte the son was incorrigible, or at least they were not very willing to thwart his powerful father.

Riotte the son, though, apparently had some friends in high places or still had connections at court because he managed to have one of his letters reach the controller general of finances at the time, a man named Philibert Orry. Riotte told Orry that he had wasted a lot of his father’s money but that he had never harmed anyone. He also believed that his sister was turning his father against him in order to steal his inheritance. He never mentioned explicitly what in his behavior had so horrified his family; instead he confined himself to discussing his (allegedly reformed) vice for gambling. In a letter from Orry to the chief of police, Hérault, Orry wrote, “I have learned, monsieur, that the S. Riotte de la Riotterie the son has been detained at the Bastille for five and a half years. I do not know the reasons for his detention, and if they are of a certain nature I will not ask you to reveal any secrets. But as I believe that his imprisonment is a result of his bad behavior, it seems to me that he has had adequate time to become wise and reform his ways.”²⁹ In referring to “reasons for his detention” being “of a certain nature,” Orry might have been discreetly referring to those imprisoned for political reasons: those out of favor at court, spies who may have double-crossed the Crown or a powerful minister, foreign spies, or simply those who possessed knowledge which made them a threat to the government. Riotte fell under none of these categories, and Orry managed to pull some strings for him, but no sooner was the son released than his father requested to have him put away again. In a letter from 1736, his father once again vaguely referred to his debauchery as well as the debts that he had incurred,

²⁸ Dewald, *Aristocratic Experiences and the Origins of Modern Culture*, 1993.

²⁹ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte* (7 July 1731).

and asked once more that the police “confine my son for the rest of his days, dear though he may be to me, and remove him from being in a position to dishonor a family that holds a certain rank in this town... He somehow seduces all those who hold him in their charge or who approach him, [and as soon as] he is released he throws himself into the same debauchery...”³⁰ Riotte the son may have had a winning personality and good looks as well, which made him even more dangerous in the eyes of his father who saw his talent for seduction as a path to endangering the family’s honor once again. His ability to sway the controller general of finances made that all too apparent.

Riotte the father also gathered testimonies from trusted family friends and people of rank to bolster his case for his son’s life imprisonment. In the same year, a lady who was an acquaintance of his wrote a letter to the police in the father’s defense, acknowledging the son’s seductive qualities and the urgent need to lock him away. She told the police that the son had been able to sway the Capucine monk who had become his confessor in prison. “At St. Lazare (another prison in Paris) and in the Bastille where he was previously, he had similarly fascinated the eyes of his spiritual directors there,” she wrote, perhaps hinting at the possibility of depravity among the clergy. “The debauchery and the crimes of this prisoner can only cover his family with shame and embarrassment. Every time he is liberated, he reverts to his wicked ways. It is thus requested that this prisoner not be released before his family has news of it.”³¹ Because of these letters and his father’s desperate tone, Riotte the son was arrested once more and sent to Bicêtre in Paris, and then transferred to a monastery in the provinces at his father’s request.

³⁰BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte* (3 Feb. 1736).

³¹BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte* (11 May 1736).

His father hoped that the influence of religion would persuade him to mend his ways. In a letter to the police, the father wrote, “I would be much obliged to you if you could obtain from His Majesty the necessary *lettre de cachet* to remove my son from the place where he is now and transfer him for the rest of his days to a religious community where he can seek redemption.”³² The difficulty with a monastery, though, was that it was not a place built to confine people unwillingly like a prison. The police in their notes wrote that “it is important that a man of this character be carefully confined and that he not be allowed to visit anyone.”³³ The police had temporarily placed him in the hospital general where the poor and mentally ill were confined and forced to work, but in the hospital the prisoner could not be perfectly isolated. Sometimes his keepers complained that they did not always have room for him to sleep alone, and instead he slept in a dormitory with several others, leaving “the great number of paupers which augments every day” vulnerable to him.³⁴

Riotte the father and others like him thought of scandal as a contagion that could infect others if not contained. In fact, the original meaning of scandal was that others in a community might adopt the shocking or immoral behavior of one individual. While Riotte’s father wished him to be locked away to preserve the family’s reputation, the monks of the religious community which sheltered the son found their reputation in danger from his very presence. When Riotte was moved from the hospital general to the monastery, very quickly the monks found that their charge was more trouble than he was worth. Brother Dominique Dubois, the superior of the monks in charge of Riotte’s spiritual well-being, only wanted him gone. They could do nothing

³²BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte* (8 May 1737).

³³BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

³⁴BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte* (14 Aug. 1736).

to help Riotte, he believed, and Riotte for his part had done nothing but make their lives difficult, despite the stipend they received from his father. Brother Dubois wrote to the police that the presence of Riotte was “prejudicial to the spiritual and temporal good of our community. His conduct up to present has been far from promising. We have received complaints from individuals both within and without our community. Every time we have spoken with him, it has been useless: he does as he pleases, and his deeds coupled with his speech, both dissolute, have done nothing but scandalize us more and more. It seems that he has divorced himself from our church where he has not made an appearance for a good while.”³⁵ Not attending Mass was unfortunately the least of his offenses in the eyes of the monks. They also complained that he insisted on wearing a sword every day, though he had not had one when he arrived. “He lures to his room,” continued Brother Dubois, “under a thousand different pretenses little boys from the village, and he always takes one away with him when he goes out, especially to the village...saying that the young man who accompanies him is his servant, all of which makes us very suspicious.” Because of his behavior, the monks complained that they were losing money and that their reputation had suffered. Their poverty, asserted Brother Dubois, obliged them to take in pensioners, but Riotte had driven them all away with his scandalous lifestyle. Clearly, the monks were not the only ones in the vicinity who had noticed his behavior, and rather than ignoring him or leaving him to his own devices, it was clear that, to the monks at least, his lifestyle was like a sickness that if unchecked, might spread and infect others in the community.

It is unclear how Riotte’s story ended as the records fell silent after 1741. Perhaps after the death of his father, he was released and returned to the lifestyle of his choosing. From 1726 to 1741, however, Riotte the son was transferred from prisons to hospitals to monasteries,

³⁵BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte* (21 Dec. 1740).

deprived of his freedom with the utmost secrecy all in the hopes that these various institutions would work to “correct” his vice. Keeping his numerous abductions and confinements wrapped in a cloak of secrecy also prevented his supposedly sinful behavior from marring the reputation and honor of his family. As the head of a noble family that occupied a conspicuous position in Melun, a town not far from Paris, Riotte’s father believed that it was vital to protect the family’s honor even if it meant incarcerating his son for life. It is likely that the father valued both the family’s honor and his son’s welfare, but believed that his imprisonment would serve both to protect the family and help his son on his path towards salvation. It was as if the father followed the poetical adage: “I could not love you, loved I not honor more.”

The Widow Nolan

At nearly the same time that the governor of Melun was requesting to have his son sent to the Bastille, a family of much lower social standing begged the police to arrest their scandalous daughter. In a letter to the police from December, 1725, Claude Audot, who worked as the doorman of the Duchesse de Gesvres, requested that the police confine his daughter who had allegedly become pregnant after carrying on an affair with a priest. He described himself and his wife as a father and mother who had always lived with honor, and that he had worked for the duchesse for over twenty-five years to lend respectability or at least credibility to his claim. The police could potentially ask the duchesse to verify his claims, and Audot had no doubt asked her for her support. To Audot, even the suspicion that his daughter had behaved so scandalously was enough for him to fear for the family’s honor. The widow’s parents wrote with dramatic flair to the chief of police that “God and religion” were equally offended by the “criminal” and “abominable” behavior of their daughter, and that since their honor and reputation were at stake,

they turned to the police to put her away at least until she had given birth “in order to punish her for her crime” and at the same time place her in an institution where supposedly she could “avoid the despair to which this unfortunate might abandon herself.”³⁶ “Avoiding despair” might have meant that her family feared that the pregnant widow might fall into a depressed state or even become suicidal after giving birth. Because of the ordeal and loss of face that she would have to suffer as a result of her actions, her family seemed to think that confining her to the hospital where she would be constantly watched and cared for not only protected the family’s honor but also protected the widow from any harm she might inflict on herself, or in her distress, harm she might inadvertently cause the infant.

The police apparently agreed that the case was urgent, and they wrote in their notes that Audot and his wife had requested that “Marguerite Audot, their daughter, thirty-six years of age and widow of two years of François Nolan, be confined at the hospital. The widow Nolan has thrown herself into debauchery and is presently six months pregnant, the handiwork of a priest with whom she is living in sin.”³⁷ Believing the claims and the urgency of the widow’s father, the police immediately began planning the arrest. A police commissioner wrote to one of his colleagues, “I understand, monsieur, that the widow Nolan...is six months pregnant. ...[It] is very important that this widow be confined before she goes into labor... It is essential that the arrest be conducted in such a way that the neighborhood suspects nothing. The person who will bring you this letter, (her father), and who is involved in the matter has assured me that he will assure the means of arresting her... [While the widow] is at liberty, the family is always exposed to scandal... [The widow] should be confined as quietly as possible, you understand. Therefore I

³⁶ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier de prisonniers* Dec. 1725

³⁷ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

ask you to obtain the necessary orders as promptly as possible. Apart from that, I do not see the need to do anything else on the part of the person whose reputation we are safeguarding other than making sure that she admits to her crime...”³⁸ The police sympathized with the woman’s family, appreciating their call for both urgency and secrecy, and they also knew that they could count on her father’s cooperation with the abduction. They noted, though, in their internal correspondence that since the family was poor they would not be receiving any compensation for their efforts.

Nevertheless the police directed their full energy towards arresting the scandalous widow promptly, efficiently, and with the greatest secrecy. The police in their notes wrote that the “officer in charge of executing the king’s order” was to “maintain an inviolable secrecy in this affair, both him and his assistants. To that effect, it is necessary to capture her at night. The means will be provided and he will bring her to a coach in a separate neighborhood.”³⁹ When the deed was done, the police inspector who had been in charge of the abduction wrote a short report to his superior. He wrote in typical formal language, “Today at two o’clock in the morning, I arrested and conducted to the hospital the woman named Marguerite Audot, the widow Nolan, following the king’s order... The task was executed as desired, without anyone, even members of the family, noticing, and they still do not know that she is gone.”⁴⁰ Thus, with the help of the woman’s father and the passive cooperation of her family, the police successfully abducted the widow and confined her at the hospital general without incident. She remained there until after

³⁸ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

³⁹ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

⁴⁰ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte* (8 Dec. 1725).

she had given birth to her child, though the police did not mention what was done with the infant. It was most likely delivered to an orphanage; the mother's family wanted nothing to do with it.

The family feared the shame of scandal so much that they even refrained from prosecuting the priest, though they believed that he was equally if not more guilty in the affair. The widow's brother made sure to tell the police that they did not want to pursue the priest, and even wrote a letter to that effect to the guilty priest as well. To prosecute the priest, wrote the brother, would be to expose his sister to "the height of dishonor," and the family had no intention of sending the priest to a tribunal or "pursuing him legally." The worst case scenario for the family was to see their daughter still going free while the neighbors "murmured against her" or "pointed fingers at her" which the family feared would have happened had she not been confined. The brother wrote that it was difficult enough to have his sister confined, not because of what she might endure in the crowded, unhygienic hospital but because of what the family endured at home. "The supplicant," wrote the brother, referring to himself, "has the misfortune of seeing his father, mother and only sister dishonored and their reputation torn to shreds by people who under the guise of friendship go to try to see his sister where she is confined. They have joined forces with the priest and wish to surprise my father, who knows neither how to read nor write, and make him retract his accusation."⁴¹ In the brother's eyes, it was vital to contain the damage as much as possible because even the family was somewhat guilty. The scandalous widow had been living with her parents at the time, and her parents "found themselves dishonored by her conduct and in some sense responsible before God and man."⁴² For the family, the widow's shame was their shame, and her guilt, like tar, adhered to and stained them as well.

⁴¹ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

⁴² BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

The priest for his part insisted on his innocence, but he also demanded that the widow be confined in order to preserve *his* honor. “It is of the utmost importance,” he wrote to the police, “that she remains, otherwise the accusations will spread again, and the result will only be scandal or even the continuation of vice...”⁴³ The priest could not say whose child the widow Nolan was carrying, but he also agreed that it brought dishonor to the family and too much rumor-mongering to the neighborhood.

After the widow, Marguerite Audot, had given birth, she remained at the hospital general against her will. After a while, though, her family requested that she be released. She no longer had a pregnancy to conceal and some time had passed since she had disappeared from the neighborhood. Her father wrote another request, then, to the chief of police: “Claude Audot, a servant of Madame la Duchesse de Gesvres, humbly requests that the widow Nolan his daughter, detained by the king’s order, recently delivered of the child she was carrying, [be released], that the motive for her detention was the fear [her father] had that the shame of her crime might lead to some extreme measure or her succumbing to despair... As honor compelled the supplicant to punish, perhaps too severely, the first fault of his only daughter, the secret movements of his paternal tenderness now speak in her favor... This unfortunate woman has already been too rigorously chastised by the cruel ordeal of staying in a place whose very name evokes horror and which is enough to expiate her fault.”⁴⁴ Concern for the family’s honor had led her father to request that she be secretly arrested, but now that she was no longer pregnant he wished to have her quietly returned home. The authorities had other ideas, though. Despite their efforts, the police feared that rumors might have spread of the widow’s disgrace, and they perhaps also

⁴³ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*. (7 Dec. 1725).

⁴⁴ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier du fils du Sieur François Riotte*.

feared that she might become a recidivist in her supposed debauchery, and so she was exiled from the neighborhood. In taking measures to save the family's reputation, these parents had also made it nearly impossible for their daughter ever to live at home again.

Mlle. de Nogent

Both Riotte *films* and the Widow Nolan had found their lives destroyed or at least seriously disrupted by families who used secrecy as a weapon to protect their reputations. Sometimes, though, and more and more frequently as the century progressed, the victim of a *lettre de cachet* would try to turn the secrecy of the police against them, expressing distrust of secrecy and trying to use transparency as a weapon on the victim's behalf. A full, open, and public inquiry into an incident, however, was usually what a family that was sensitive to matters of honor wished to avoid. Transparency, in their view, could do irreparable damage to a family or corporation's honor and reputation. One young woman the 1740s nevertheless pushed with all her might for transparency in her case.

A decade and a half after Marguerite Audot had caused her family such consternation, another daughter was arrested for scandalous behavior. In 1740, the Comtesse de Nogent requested a *lettre de cachet* in order to put away her daughter who was allegedly carrying on with the son of a water carrier. What was even more horrifying to the comtesse was that not only the servants in the household knew what was going on, but that others in the neighborhood had begun to gossip when they saw the young man coming and going. The mother and daughter lived together, and the daughter received a pension of six thousand *livres* a year and "the most tender attachment" from her mother provided her conduct was seemly and she consulted her mother before marrying. "But without respect or good morals," the comtesse wrote to the police, her

daughter received her first unsavory suitor, the Comte de Montlery, whom her mother disapproved of and whose conduct was arousing murmurs in “the entire neighborhood.”⁴⁵ According to the comtesse, one of the reasons she disliked this first suitor was that he had failed to pay her the proper respects and had not even once visited her though he came to see her daughter in the same house. What made it even worse was that her daughter, who was by that time twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old, insisted on her autonomy. She told her mother that “she was her own mistress and she would receive whomever she pleased, that she owed an account of her actions to no one and that no one had a right to examine what she did in her own home.” Her mother wrote that she could only feel “mortification...at this reply.”⁴⁶ Then despite her mother’s warnings, Mlle. de Nogent went to dine alone with her suitor and rode in his carriage. When her mother learned that this man had no intention of marrying her daughter she asked her to send the man on his way, but once again the daughter told her mother to mind her own business, using “familiar language” in front of the servants.

When finally the mother managed to chase away this unworthy suitor with a gift of money, she was faced with the even worse prospect of her daughter’s liaison with the son of a water carrier. According to the comtesse, her daughter was “very familiar” with him, and was behaving in a manner that was “attracting the attention of others in the neighborhood and [causing] a great scandal.”⁴⁷ According to her mother, the young man that her daughter had taken a fancy to was named Thomas Dufour and was either nineteen or twenty years old. Mlle. de Nogent had gone so far as to allow Dufour to stay the night in her house. The daughter also

⁴⁵ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁴⁶ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁴⁷ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

“dressed him quite differently than he was accustomed to. He was often seen riding with her in her carriage. Before he had been seen wandering in the most disgraceful state, wearing rags and a wooden shoe on one foot and a slipper on the other, but having acquired the good graces of the demoiselle de Nogent, [Dufour] was transformed, which astonished the neighborhood...”⁴⁸

Much like the Audot family, the comtesse was extremely worried about the attention her daughter was attracting in the neighborhood, and made sure to stress the danger of neighborly gossip in her letters to the police and later the *mémoires* that her lawyer drafted on her behalf.

What was most damning and dangerous, then, in the daughter’s behavior was not only her entertaining an unworthy suitor--a danger to the family fortune--but her mixing socially with Thomas Dufour and his family, people of much lower rank. It was not as if she only saw Dufour once and clandestinely; she frequented him and his family, and had them visit her in her own home, according to her mother’s reports. It was so demeaning and so detrimental to the family’s honor and dignity that even some of the servants refused to cooperate. “The two lackeys who were serving the demoiselle de Nogent at the time were dismissed for having refused to light the way of Thomas Dufour in the evenings, and they preferred to quit her service than serve him at the table of their mistress,” wrote the comtesse, her mother.⁴⁹ What was even worse than having Dufour over for a meal and forcing her servants to wait on him was inviting his father and mother, the water carrier and his wife, for coffee and breakfast. “The demoiselle de Nogent was living with this *canaille* in the greatest familiarity, so much so that she called the water carrier and his wife her dear father and mother. She presented herself in public, visiting the theater with Thomas Dufour without any chaperone save that of her chambermaid. Such behavior on her part

⁴⁸ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁴⁹ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

rendered Thomas Dufour so insolent that he had the temerity to insult the neighborhood.”⁵⁰ It is not clear how exactly Dufour insulted the neighbors, who were no doubt gossiping about him, but one neighbor who was a respectable widow complained about his supposed impertinence. Mlle. de Nogent’s mother, the comtesse, then succeeded in having her daughter arrested by *lettre de cachet* and sent to a convent. She also made sure to have Dufour taken care of, and he was exiled from Paris.

Her mother wished to keep Mlle. de Nogent locked away until she had a change of heart and agreed not to marry Dufour. The comtesse declared herself “justly horrified by the conduct of her daughter and with the baseness of her taste.”⁵¹ Even after the daughter was safely ensconced in a convent in the provinces, her mother still believed she had cause for worry. She told the police that there was evidence that her daughter was corresponding with Dufour and that she had even attempted to find herself a lawyer. Her mother wanted no inquest, though. She believed that that would have only provoked a scandal and harmed the prospects of her daughter. The comtesse “would have had the chagrin to see the entire neighborhood discussing the scandal caused by her daughter,” if the police looked into the matter officially and publicly, and the police were satisfied to keep the matter as quiet as possible. Unfortunately for the comtesse, her daughter had managed to acquire a lawyer, a man named La Charbonnelaye whom both the police and the comtesse viewed as disreputable since he had just had a stay in the Bastille. The comtesse wasted no time maligning her daughter’s new lawyer. “La Charbonnelaye,” she stated, “like his client, knows neither the laws of duty nor the laws of respect... La Charbonnelaye composed a *mémoire* for Mlle. de Nogent which he had printed and which included the most

⁵⁰ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁵¹ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

indecent and satirical language.”⁵² And so, even though her mother had taken every precaution to stifle the scandal, to secretly hide her daughter away and prevent her from communicating with anyone, her daughter had still managed to send letters and most likely promises of financial reward to anyone who would help her. Then she had enlisted the services of a lawyer, perhaps of dubious reputation but not lackluster skill, to plead her case and hopefully win her liberty.

The daughter’s take on the story, not surprisingly, differed from her mother’s. First of all, she usually referred to Thomas Dufour not as the son of a water carrier, but as a musician and organist. Both statements were true. Dufour came from a humble background but had managed to study music and was apparently giving organ lessons. The fact that he was some kind of musician, of course, did not help him in the eyes of the comtesse, but she omitted even that fact in her statements in order to better emphasize his obscure origins. Like many other victims of *lettres de cachet*, especially those from wealthy families, Mlle. de Nogent insisted that she had been unjustly maligned and that someone in her family was only after her fortune. But unlike others’ appeals from previous decades, she accused her mother and the police of acting in secret, which she believed delegitimized or at least rendered their efforts to detain her suspect. In contrast to her mother, Mlle. de Nogent chose to publish her *mémoire*, making it clear that she believed she had nothing to hide and had done nothing wrong. Moreover, she apparently did not fear the harm to her reputation that publicizing a domestic, familial dispute might incur. Since the authorities had failed to protect her liberty and autonomy, which she felt she had a right to, she stated that she would turn to the public for help. In defending her right to privacy and autonomy, she chose to make the events of her life public, which of course mortified her mother even further. It is likely, however, that the daughter did this not only to embarrass and punish her

⁵² BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

mother for her forced confinement, but because Mlle. de Nogent truly believed, unlike some of her predecessors, both that she had a right to frequent whom she pleased, and that an appeal to the public would help her while the authorities, who operated in secret, could not.

Nevertheless, Mlle. de Nogent made it clear that she would not go so far to break with convention as to marry Thomas Dufour. She also insisted on the prestige of her birth and her family's rank to validate her opinions and to underscore the rationality of her decision not to marry Dufour. According to her, he had only been her music teacher. Mlle. de Nogent wrote in her *mémoire* that she had never intended to marry "the organist" and that others in her family were after her fortune. She believed that the chief of police had used his powers "to dishonor a lady of condition who has the honor of belonging to one of the finest families in the kingdom...As long as the enemies of the supplicant (de Nogent) dare not reveal themselves nor support their claims in a court of law, one can only consider them infamous defamers who secretly have nothing but shameful interests in the case."⁵³ She also noted that the police had been lying in wait for her, surrounding her house in Paris like brigands so that they could capture her without telling her who was behind her arrest, though by that point she knew that it was her mother who had requested the *lettre de cachet*.

The police, of course, were very alarmed by Mlle. de Nogent's public attacks, not to mention her mother. They wrote in a report, "Mlle. de Nogent, now detained by the king's order in the convent of the Cordeliers...has printed a *mémoire* which she has made public by which she attacks in a most indecent manner the conduct of the ministry and advances insulting and calumnious claims against the magistrates who have acted in this affair, in accordance with the laws and the orders emanating from the Court. Not content with such libel, she has written

⁵³ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

several letters to people of distinction where she states that she will not remain [in the convent] and that she will publish an additional *mémoire* where she will expose to the public the lives and morals of these same persons and the unjust persecutions that she claims to have endured.”⁵⁴ The police were also certain that her lawyer was a scoundrel and a bad influence.

By 1741 the situation had become even worse for the police. One inspector wrote to his superior, “I have it on good authority that Mme. de Mailly read to the king in the *petits appartements* at Versailles a part of the *mémoire* in question and that the king read the rest.”⁵⁵ In her second *mémoire*, Mlle. de Nogent was even more emphatic. Perhaps influenced by her lawyer, she chose not to emphasize the prestige of her birth this time, but rather underscored her innocence, an innocence which ought to be protected by the authorities. She extended her argument to include her “fellow citizens,” writing that anyone, regardless of rank, had the right to be protected from such incursions if innocent. Mlle. de Nogent, in a tone of outrage, declared that she had been arrested “in broad daylight” like a criminal, and that no one would listen to her pleas and so she had been obliged to turn to the public. “I owe it to myself,” she wrote, “because I am innocent in all respects. I owe it to my fatherland and to all my fellow citizens who, regardless of birth or rank, run the risk of being treated as I am being treated without knowing who accuses them.”⁵⁶ (Those arrested by secret royal order had no right to know their accusers. Often they did not even know the reason for their arrest.) Mlle. de Nogent, of course, knew that her mother was behind her arrest, but she also understood that her mother had used secrecy to contain the danger to the family honor and perhaps more tightly control her daughter as well. The daughter’s spectacular reprisal was so alarming for her mother and for the police because

⁵⁴ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁵⁵ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*, 16 March 1741.

⁵⁶ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

she rejected secrecy and discretion completely, opting for a public and open defense of her actions even if it would draw the attention and scrutiny of many more people towards her private life.

Mlle. de Nogent also made sure to defend the morality and wholesomeness of her upbringing while simultaneously denouncing the secrecy used by her “enemies.” It was also clear that she had long had a difficult relationship with her mother and had been much closer to her father. “My father,” she wrote, “having raised me with much tenderness and with the principles of religion and honor and even educating me beyond my sex...I did not believe that I had to remain in the same residence as my mother who has never shown me the same goodness and with whom my opinions differ in many respects.”⁵⁷ She also alleged that she had been injured because her mother’s parrot bit her arm.⁵⁸ Then her mother attempted to turn the entire household against Thomas Dufour, whom the daughter had hired as a music tutor and whom she asserted had always been a trustworthy servant. Dufour was so talented and versatile, the daughter claimed, that she soon hired him as her secretary as well, which irritated the steward since apparently Dufour was better at managing the household accounts. The steward already discontented, her mother supposedly convinced the other servants to support her claims that the daughter intended to marry Dufour and run away to the Netherlands with him. No one, of course, had confirmed that her mother was behind these accusations since the police had kept everything secret, especially from her. “Such denunciations,” asserted Mlle. de Nogent, “are always suspect when they are clandestine.”⁵⁹ Their use of secrecy, in her view, showed them to be fearful and

⁵⁷ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁵⁸ For more on exotic animals in eighteenth-century Paris as status symbols, see Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁵⁹ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

untrustworthy since she argued that their claims could not be very firm if they could not withstand public scrutiny.

Her mother then marshaled the support of their illustrious relatives including the Marechale de Biron and the Duchesse d'Estrée, who came to visit the daughter in the convent where she was confined to tell her that she had been behaving scandalously. Mlle. de Nogent remained defiant. "I do not know of anything scandalous in my life apart from the voyage I have been forced to make from my place of residence to this convent... I speak with conviction because I fear no reproach upon my morals..."⁶⁰ Mlle. de Nogent had raised such a ruckus in her defense that according to police reports, everyone in Paris and Versailles was discussing her case, and enjoying the titillating nature of the rumors as well. She did not seem to mind, and perhaps even delighted in embarrassing her mother further. She always insisted that she had done nothing and furthermore, that turning to the public and showing that she had nothing to hide bolstered her claims of innocence. Her accusers, on the other hand, who relied on secrecy, made themselves suspect. Her mother and her other relatives, of course, still believed that secrecy and discretion were paramount in containing the scandal that emanated from her daughter.

In turning to the public for vindication and justice, Mlle. de Nogent revealed that her attitudes towards secrecy, honor, and even her worldview represented one very different from her mother's, and by extension, an older generation. Her mother, the comtesse, believed that secrecy was essential to maintaining the family's honor, and moreover, that she ought to have the final say in her daughter's social and marriage choices. Her daughter, on the other hand, insisted on her autonomy in a manner that would have been more unusual had she been younger and never married. Mlle. de Nogent, though, was close to thirty years old and was already a widow

⁶⁰ BA, MS 11504, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

with an allowance, which no doubt led her to persuade herself that she deserved some independence and privacy. Mlle. de Nogent did nevertheless end up marrying within her class and maintaining the family fortune and prestige, thus closing the scandalous period of her life with a sufficiently conventional act.

Growing Resistance and Critiques

After the 1750s, the request for *lettres de cachet* declined while those who found themselves victims of arrests, like Mlle. de Nogent, articulated more and more firmly their individual rights vis-à-vis the supposed rights of the collective. Many of those arrested chose the strategy of acquiring a lawyer and writing a *mémoire*, which seemed to be more common by mid-century. While Riotte the son had appealed to his father and to the police for his release, and had used his connections at court to secure his (temporary) release, Mlle. de Nogent and other victims of *lettres de cachet* who followed her turned more and more to lawyers and formal descriptions of their cases. They almost always made sure to underscore the righteousness of their behavior guaranteed by full transparency before the courts or before the public, and often compared their upright transparency with the secrecy of their adversaries, often their own family. In the arguments of these later generations, secrecy did not preserve honor but rather served as a tool of obscuring a family's grasping designs on one member's fortune.

One example is the case of a German-speaking Alsatian and French subject named Besson who sold provisions to the army was arrested in 1767 on the request of his family. In letters which they had translated into French, they claimed that he was debauched and without honor. They later revealed that he was living in Paris with a mistress. "His confinement is the only means of saving a large family composed of men and women who hold their honor dear and

who occupy a position in society,” they wrote to the police, and they asked that the rest of the family be spared the danger of contact with “this infected member.”⁶¹ The family’s concern for their honor and reputation, and their efforts to quarantine, so to speak, an “infected member,” were typical, of course, of requests for *lettres de cachet*. Besson, however, not only insisted on turning to the public but on going through the ordinary channels of justice, the law courts, where a family’s dirty laundry might be put on display. He even went so far as to argue that all family disputes should be solved in that manner in the future.

The police read Besson’s *mémoire* and found it to be “vehement” and borderline indecent, but Besson insisted on being told what his crime was. “What is his crime?” read the *mémoire*. “Here it is. M. le Marechal de Contades himself has called him dissipated, a man of bad conduct who mistreats his wife. But why use *lettres de cachet* against householders accused of these wrongs? The tribunals are open. Unfortunate wives can bring their complaints to the court, and they will be rendered justice. Such is the law in France. The path of turning to authority must cease when the path of justice is open.”⁶² Thus, the courts were available and perfectly suitable for providing the necessary justice. What was even worse about *lettres de cachet*, though, was that they were quickly executed, but it took a great deal of time to obtain one’s liberty. “Not only should his quality as a citizen guarantee Besson safety from such an order, but he is also innocent of the crimes they impute against him,” continued the *mémoire*. Besson insisted that he had always lived with honor and probity, but even if he had not, he believed that he had a right to be tried in a court, publicly, instead of secretly being put away. When an individual was arrested by *lettre de cachet*, he or she was even referred to as someone

⁶¹ BA, MS 12320, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁶² BA, MS 12320, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

au secret, or “under secrecy,” meaning it would be very difficult to contact him or her and even receive news of the prisoner. Several months after his arrest, Besson wrote to Sartine, the chief of police, asking to be interrogated because he felt that no progress had been made in his case since his arrest. Besson wrote that he had been “under secrecy” without having been interrogated on the subject of the reasons for his arrest, of which he was still ignorant. Besson continued, saying that he beseeched Sartine to lift the order for secrecy and have him interrogated as he requested on the facts of the case. “Please have pity on me,” wrote Besson, “[keeping in mind] the suffering that [I] have endured in secret for five months. And why?”⁶³ Despite his frustration, Besson was not released for at least three more months, and even then the concierge of the prison in Paris where he was confined, Fort l’Evêque, resisted releasing him until his family paid what they owed for his upkeep all that time.

As Besson’s case showed, many who critiqued the use of *lettres de cachet* believed that they slowed the process of justice. Though they were quickly implemented, the aura of secrecy and the practice of keeping the arrestee ignorant made it that much more difficult and time-consuming for him or her to make an appeal. It was not the slow process, however, that constituted the bulk of critiques against the practice. From the 1760s on, as scholars have shown, French subjects requested the orders for arrest less and less often, and part of the reason for that were changing attitudes towards the individual and the collective. People believed more and more that they had a right to privacy in their correspondences and their affairs, as the de Nogen case exemplified.

The case of a servant named Gabriel Godénée who was accused of stealing is another example of this trend. What was interesting about Godénée’s case was that the police found his

⁶³ BA, MS 12320, *Dossier de prisonniers*, 7 January 1768.

insistence on his privacy suspicious, while he believed that no one, including his mistress, should be allowed to look at his letters. His mistress claimed that she had been opening his letters because she suspected him of stealing, and the police became suspicious when they learned that Godénée had told his friends and acquaintances to stop writing to him. When they asked him why, he told the police that he did not want his mistress reading his letters and “knowing his affairs.”⁶⁴ The police could not find evidence that Godénée was guilty of theft, nor could they find the means of forcing him to relinquish his privacy. Fifty or even twenty years prior to his case, it would have probably been unheard of for a servant to defend his privacy so fiercely since servants were under the authority of their masters who were supposed to provide moral supervision. Thus, the notion of personal privacy and increased autonomy definitely contributed to the decline of *lettres de cachet*.

Another contributing factor was the decline of the notion of collective guilt and collective honor. In the Old Regime, servants who committed a crime were generally not considered responsible, and their masters were held accountable instead, unless of course the crime was within the household. In insisting on his privacy, Godénée was also insisting implicitly on his right to be held accountable for his own actions without them implicating anyone else. The Comte de Mirabeau, imprisoned by his father with the use of a *lettre de cachet* for his supposedly debauched lifestyle, based his attack on the practice on the premise of collective guilt. Written as an essay in 1775 and then published as a book in 1782, Mirabeau claimed that he wrote not out of resentment, but towards the goal of social utility. He argued that *lettres de cachet* served no purpose but that of hampering justice and perpetuating injustice and corruption through secrecy. Their “pretended utility” was an illusion, “which can never be weighed against

⁶⁴ BA, MS 12432, *Dossier de prisonniers* 1773.

the inconveniences resulting from so terrible a practice.”⁶⁵ Mirabeau also hoped that he would succeed in swaying the minds of parents—he believed that it was parents more than any other group who were to blame for the practice of *lettres de cachet*—so that “those parents, who in a fit of anger, or under painful circumstances, have delivered up their children to the greedy jailor of those gloomy dungeons, whence their cries can never be heard, will be induced to reflect possibly on the use they are making of their money and their influence.”⁶⁶ Thus, according to Mirabeau, it was parents who were to blame, but they were operating under the faulty premise of collective guilt, thinking that their children’s supposed misdemeanors disgraced the entire family.

In contrast to the general assumption of collective guilt and honor, Mirabeau argued that a crime should and would dishonor no one but the criminal without leaving any mark on those related to him. He offered many examples of how this cultural attitude either robbed the innocent of their freedom, or robbed the justice system of those who were guilty and deserved to be punished. Mirabeau cited one man who was suspected of murder but was imprisoned in Bicêtre by request of his family because they feared his crime would harm their honor and reputation. In Mirabeau’s opinion, that man should stand trial and face the penalty for his misdeeds if he was proven guilty. Instead, a secret order for arrest had sheltered him from justice. Laws were enough to keep the public peace, he argued, and *lettres de cachet* neither maintained a family’s honor nor the tranquility of society.⁶⁷ Though it was traditional for the families of criminals to suffer dishonor and degradation, he believed that *lettres de cachet* did nothing beneficial to these

⁶⁵ Honoré-Gabriel de Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d’état: ouvrage posthume, compose en 1778, Vol. I* (Hamburg: [s.n.], 1782), xii.

⁶⁶ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d’état*, 1782, xiv.

⁶⁷ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d’état*, 1782, 226-231.

families in removing a black sheep from society. Infamy was strictly personal, or at least the sovereign should see to it that it was. Mirabeau did his best to persuade his readers of his argument, asking, “Is it the crime or the punishment that creates disgrace? Crime makes disgrace, not the scaffold. Since when is the mark of infamy no longer personal?”⁶⁸ He then compared France with China and Japan, where he believed a criminal’s disgrace spread to his entire family, which Mirabeau called madness and an atrocity. In contrast, Plato stated that the brother or sister of a criminal should not be punished but rather commended for not being criminals as well. “Why should we make a whole family accomplices in the offense of one of its members?” asked Mirabeau.⁶⁹ His allusion to China and Japan, and his subsequent use of Plato, were deliberate. These references were coded, so to speak, and his use of them in his rhetoric would have had definite meanings for eighteenth-century readers. Referring to the Orient, the region where the despotic state supposedly flourished, would quickly signal to his readers that he was comparing the practice of *lettres de cachet* to Oriental despotism in order to delegitimize them. Plato, of course, recalled Antiquity and the Greco-Roman heritage that educated readers revered and would be familiar with. In speaking of China, Japan and Plato in quick succession, Mirabeau made the dichotomy clear: collective guilt and secret arrests were despotic; punishment by law and individual guilt were rational and sanctioned by the greatest thinkers.

Mirabeau, though, was not against the notion of honor itself. What he wanted was for honor to be attached to the individual alone for individual achievements, and guilt only to the guilty. “Why should infamy, that punishment so terrible in every country where honor is yet known, be allowed to aggravate the misfortune of those who have given life to a criminal?” he

⁶⁸ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d'état*, 1782, 297.

⁶⁹ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d'état*, 1782, 297.

asked.⁷⁰ It was not only for families to rethink their understanding of honor, but for the king to destroy the practice of secret arrests so that “every man will soon learn that all depends on himself.”⁷¹ The king should punish the guilty and reward the virtuous relation. In England, Mirabeau argued, the children of a criminal went on with their lives and even married, carrying the same family name without blushing with shame. By taking the guilty out of the hands of justice, the practice excited “crimes by impunity... Explain to me, I beg of you,” continued Mirabeau, “how a partial favor, which interests only one family, can repair so many breaches of the *res publica*? ... If they are possessed of honor, they should not go to the king who is good and easily prejudiced but should appeal to magistrates—these judges have rules to go by!”⁷² A related problem for Mirabeau was that families believed they could see to their reputations through the use of *lettres de cachet*. A good reputation became an end which justified the means, even the suppression of justice. Instead, Mirabeau believed that only virtuous behavior ensured one’s reputation, and therefore sweeping the misdeeds of a black sheep under the rug only provided the illusion of safeguarding a reputation. Mirabeau was thus advocating a new and individual-based notion of reputation and honor, one that relied on a single person’s actions and personal accountability rather than the community’s perception or knowledge of a group’s, like a family’s, behavior.

Along with attacking the notion of collective honor and guilt, Mirabeau took aim at the supposed benefits of secrecy itself. This was the major trend taking place in the middle decades of the century that led to the decline of the use of *lettres de cachet*; it was not only the rising

⁷⁰ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d’état*, 1782, 297-8.

⁷¹ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d’état*, 1782, 297-8.

⁷² de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d’état*, 300, 1782, 304.

notion of individual privacy, autonomy and accountability. Secrecy itself was under attack. Thinkers like Mirabeau, (who, of course, had his personal reasons for hating *lettres de cachet*), saw no reason to defend secrecy on the part of the government. Thus, Mirabeau's argument shifted from one of attacking the practice of *lettres de cachet* to attacking the old ideas which had defended the necessity of governments keeping secrets from their citizens. Mirabeau understood the argument that government secrecy might serve to preserve tranquility and order, but he also believed, along with many of his contemporaries, that that was a form of despotism. "Despotic states are tranquil; I believe it," he countered. "So are dead bodies."⁷³ He believed that the Romans held that preserving state secrets only served to hide a horrible crime. The excuse of "state secret" or "reason of state," in his eyes, threw a veil over so many atrocities. "Reasons of state have always attacked liberties... Every mysterious administration is ignorant and corrupt," he argued, and he added that placing a veil between the sovereign and the people led them to mistrust him.⁷⁴ Even open and publicly acknowledged tyranny was better than "obscure" tyranny for Mirabeau. He quoted Cesare Beccaria, the eighteenth-century Italian jurist who argued against the use of torture, claiming that there were "more victims amongst citizens uncertain of their fate."⁷⁵ Everyone was under the yoke of the law but not everyone was protected by it; meanwhile no one of rank would go through the ordinary channels of justice for reparations—that was the state of things in France as Mirabeau saw it.

In his view, many well-off families' sons—and Mirabeau probably thought of his own experiences—were locked away simply because they had displeased their fathers in some

⁷³ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d'état*, 1782, 91.

⁷⁴ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d'état*, 1782, 109-11.

⁷⁵ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d'état*, 1782, 175.

insignificant way, like disliking their fathers' mistresses. No one was obliged to listen to the imprisoned children of powerful fathers because the entire system of French prisons and *lettres de cachet* seemed to follow the precept of might makes right. Prisoners, being weaker, must be in the wrong. Meanwhile these misused sons were left to go mad in their dungeons. While Mirabeau lamented the fact that so many people were imprisoned unjustly, it was for the secrecy of this practice that he saved the most venom from his pen. He explicitly made a point of proving that there was no such thing as a crime that should not be revealed. Furthermore, it was always tyrannical whenever a king punished in secret; there was no legitimate reason for secret punishments. He asked, was the government afraid of the individual? "Secrecy," he declared, was "the genuine shield of Tyranny," and Tyranny was a goddess who sharpened her sword in the darkness.⁷⁶ In the end, it was not the miscarriage of justice in *lettres de cachet* that Mirabeau abhorred so much as the secrecy surrounding them.

Louis-Sébastien Mercier, in his famous *Tableau de Paris*, echoed the same ideas and similar opinions on *lettres de cachet*. The main issue for Mercier was that he saw a government that was intruding more and more into citizens' private lives yet remained closed off and opaque. Mercier complained of the police having spies everywhere, in taverns, in the staff of families' households, and at social gatherings of any kind. The government's intrusions eroded trust and even the intimacy and qualities of personal relationships according to Mercier. "Spying has destroyed the bonds of trust and friendship; one only speaks of frivolous subjects, and the government dictates, so to speak, to citizens the subjects on which they will speak in cafés," he stated, and he added that it was foolish to still believe that Versailles and Paris should dictate

⁷⁶ de Riqueti, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prison d'état*, 1782, 219.

everything in Europe.⁷⁷ Mercier compared the chief of police to a confessor, a man who knew so many of others' secrets yet revealed nothing. Ministers, for their part, served the state but had their own spies, and they were even more dangerous because they only employed those spies to undo their enemies. Meanwhile, the government left all operations at court in obscurity even though Mercier believed that the public desperately wished to see what was hidden in the state, like a machine whose inner workings one desired to discover. As for *lettres de cachet*, he believed that they were a modern invention, that is, he did not find evidence that they had existed under medieval kings. Louis XIV and Louis XV had used them and "still had a good appetite, that is only too true."⁷⁸ Clearly, Mercier found the practice unsavory, and yet he added that the man who protested the use of *lettres de cachet* one day would request one the next if his nephew did something shameful, so worried would he be about the family's honor. Furthermore, there were some dangers that *lettres de cachet* helped avoid, such as a spy who would sell a state secret if he was not immediately arrested. The tribunals would be too slow in dealing with such a case.⁷⁹ In short, Mercier was ambivalent on the subject. He saw the state's practices of secrecy as hypocritical, and yet he understood why some French subjects might still solicit *lettres de cachet*. Moreover, he believed that the use of *lettres de cachet* was a relatively recent one, and had noticed how the government's emphasis on secrecy coincided with its growing sophistication and interest in measuring, observing and controlling the population.

The turning of public opinion away from the use of the secret orders was, however, the result of many factors. As a long-term cause, the increasing use of surveillance and control by the state helped develop the notion of the private individual, but over the course of the century

⁷⁷ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris, Vol. I* (Amsterdam: s.n., 1783-88), 186-7.

⁷⁸ L. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris, Vol. VII*, 1783-88, 242.

⁷⁹ L. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris, Vol. VII*, 1783-88, 248-50.

the ethos of patriotism, the religious ideas of the Jansenists promoting transparency, Rousseau's fear of artifice, and the proto-nationalism of the 1760s that equated both foreignness and corruption with secrecy all helped turn the tide against the once benign, even merciful image of secrecy and/or discretion in the minds of the French.

In this chapter, we have seen how ordinary French men and women of all walks of life felt positively about the government intervening to preserve family honor through the use of secrecy. Secrecy was thus a vital tool in the task of preserving one's honor and reputation, and keeping misdeeds hidden, whose widespread knowledge would bring shame to a family, was considered a matter of course. This attitude prevailed more or less throughout the first half of the century until a cultural shift began to take place that was the result of many factors. Many scholars have rightly pointed out that in the eighteenth century, people began to think of individual rights more and more, of privacy and autonomy as desirable and valuable, and these ideas helped undermine the notion that a family's honor was of more value than the individual's self-determination. Mirabeau, a victim of a *lettre de cachet*, attacked the ideas of collective guilt and honor, maintaining that the individual's misconduct only dishonored himself and not his family. Though as we will see, the rise of the idea of individual privacy was not the only contributing factor to the shift which led to secrecy being viewed as sinister rather than beneficial. Even Mercier, who disliked the idea of a government that was so secretive while intruding into citizens' private lives, was ambivalent on the subject of *lettres de cachet*, showing that even on the eve of the Revolution, some of the ideas defending secrecy to protect family honor still lingered.

CHAPTER 2: THE FATE OF SECRETS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE COMTE DE BROGLIE AND THE DEMISE OF THE *SECRET DU ROI*

In every century, secrecy has been a part of the diplomatic game and the sine qua non of espionage. But for Louis XV, especially at the end of his reign, secrecy became a volatile weapon that did him more harm than good. It was like fire: sometimes it was mishandled and burned those secretly serving him instead of his enemies, and in the end he himself was burned. In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, Louis XV conducted a secret foreign policy with a network of spies, run for much of its existence until the end by the Comte de Broglie. This network was referred to as the *secret du roi* by its own members and initiates, and sometimes merely as “the secret.” The *secret du roi* often went counter to his official policy and was conducted behind the backs of his ministers. This on the surface is puzzling. Why have two policies that worked at cross purposes and that prompted government officials to be at odds with one another, keeping secrets from one another and certainly not facilitating an efficient flow of information? Traditionally, though, secrets were power. In royal courts, secrets were political currency, and keeping one’s secrets hidden while learning those of potential enemies was essential to survival. Louis XV had taken the advice of his predecessor, Louis XIV, to heart, namely that a king should always have several sources of information, preferably unknown to one another.

By the end of the eighteenth century, though, secrecy was losing its power. It was also losing its legitimacy, much like the French monarchy itself. Much valuable work has been done on the importance of public opinion and the calls for greater transparency in pre-revolutionary

France,¹ but the history of secrecy—the dark underside and counterpart to the well-illuminated and illuminating history of transparency and the public sphere—is an area where scholars have only begun to scratch the surface. The story of the *secret du roi*, particularly its final years and aftermath, is also the story of the fate of secrets as a value and a concept in eighteenth-century France. Secrecy began to lose its mystique and to take on a sinister connotation for many reasons in this period, some of the most important being the rise of public opinion as mentioned above, the growing importance of transparency in the government and in individuals, but also emerging concepts of masculinity that went counter to older, more aristocratic understandings of masculinity. All of these issues we will see in the demise of the *secret du roi*. Far from being an ill-conceived side project of Louis XV's that simply fell apart, I argue that the problems of the *secret* were symptomatic of the changing attitudes towards secrecy and were magnified by the new values of transparency and accountability. When the *secret* became public knowledge at the death of Louis XV, the Comte de Broglie, head of the secret organization, did his best to portray himself as an honest and transparent person to whom secrecy was anathema, even going to so far as to accuse his enemies of secrecy and subterfuge since he believed that the aura of secrecy that surrounded him did harm to his reputation. He knew that there were both advantages and pitfalls in the use of secrecy in diplomacy, but the problems of the *secret du roi* became more acute because of a new culture of transparency, and, once dismantled, the changing attitudes towards secrecy made it impossible for the *secret* to be revived.

¹ See Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: l'opinion publique au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); Lisa Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and of course, Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1990).

The Perils of Secrecy

In the early years of Louis XV's reign, the king clearly believed secrecy to be a useful and powerful tool, and he had inherited this belief from previous generations. Spies and courtiers traded in secrets, and governments had to keep secrets for reasons of security and try to discover those of rivals. The *secret du roi*, however, had been the invention of Louis XV. By all accounts, he was a king who favored secrecy and valued his privacy, but scholars may never know his exact motives for initiating his own network of spies behind the backs of his ministers. Certainly, kings had always had their own spies who answered only to them, just as many courtiers did, but Louis XV began a kind of bureau, perhaps as early as the 1740s when Cardinal Fleury was serving as his prime minister, with the Prince de Conti as the head, and several spies, couriers and secretaries underneath him. The original goal was to strengthen the alliance with Poland and place the Prince de Conti on the Polish throne. Eventually, the *secret du roi* sought to undermine the power of Austria even while a Franco-Austrian alliance was in the making. Through to the end of the reign of Louis XV, the secret network also worked against France's traditional nemesis, Great Britain, especially after the bitter defeat of the Seven Years' War in the 1760s. After the death of the Prince de Conti, the Comte de Broglie came to head the organization. He had already been serving as an ambassador when the Prince de Conti, who knew and trusted him, suggested to the king that he be initiated into the *secret*. After a few years, he gained the king's trust and proved his capacity for keeping secrets.

Despite its lofty goals, the *secret du roi* has often been overlooked by scholars.² A source of titillating memoirs and anecdotes, featuring such figures as the cross-dressing Chevalier d'Eon

² For literature on espionage and politics in Old Regime France, see Lucien Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Fayard, 1990); T.C.W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe, 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Stéphane Genêt, *Les espions des Lumières: actions*

and the playwright Caron de Beaumarchais, the *secret du roi* has been the subject of short articles or footnotes that mention it in passing or focus on one of these figures. Considering the fact that it was mostly a failure and kept secret for most of its existence, it may be understandable that it has not received as much scholarly attention as it might.³ References to the secret network are cryptic in the Bastille archives, though what I found there corroborated the source I used for most of Louis XV's letters, a nineteenth-century collection of them.

The organization had definitely had its crises. The projects that Louis XV and his secret agents undertook from the 1750s to the 1770s were sometimes horrible failures. One spectacular example is the mishap with the Chevalier d'Eon, the king's spy who had been sent to England behind the back of the foreign minister, the Duc de Praslin, and who threatened to defect when he believed he was not being paid enough. Threatened and cornered, the king considered having

secretes et espionage militaire au temps de Louis XV (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2013); Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³ Indeed the scholarship on the *secret du roi* can hardly be called extensive, and the reason for this scarcity is not so much the secrecy surrounding the project (since it came to light at the end of Louis XV's reign) but its unfortunately frequent and embarrassing failures, subsequent demise and fall into obscurity. Much of the material for this paper comes from a nineteenth-century collection of original correspondences between Louis XV and the head of the *secret du roi*, the Comte de Broglie, *Correspondance secrète inédite de Louis XV sur la politique étrangère avec le Comte de Broglie, Tercier, etc.* Ed. M. E. Boutaric (Paris: Henri Plon, 1866). After that publication, there was the Duc de Broglie's 1878 account of the secret network. In the twentieth century, there is the mid-century study by Didier Ozanam and Michel Antoine, *Correspondance secreta du Comte de Broglie avec Louis XV, Vol. II* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1961). Gilles Perrault wrote a sprawling popular history of the *secret du roi* in three volumes, replete with anecdotes and back stories of countless major and minor figures in the courts of Europe in eighteenth century. The books read somewhat like a novel, and the author's main point seems to be that the network is worth studying simply because of how it shows the complex interplay and intrigues among members of the court around Louis XV. See Gilles Perrault, *Le Secret du roi: La Passion Polonaise* (Paris: Fayard, 1992). The most recent scholarly endeavor is that of Gary Savage who argues that the French revolutionaries, rather than discarding all of the diplomatic goals of the ancien regime, took their cues from the *secret du roi* in terms of foreign policy, declining the Austrian alliance in favor other smaller countries, and maintaining the rivalry with Great Britain. This was the policy secretly pursued by members of the spy network even while France's official policy favored the Austrian alliance, sealed, of course, by the marriage of Marie Antoinette to the then Dauphin of France. See Gary Savage, "Foreign Policy and Political Culture in later Eighteenth-century France," *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 304-324. Also Savage, "Favier's Heirs: The French Revolution and the Secret du Roi," *The Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 225-258.

d'Eon kidnapped and brought back to France, but in the end he conceded and paid the spy what he wanted in order to silence and placate him. Furthermore, when it was revealed that the Austrian court had discovered and decoded the correspondences of Louis XV's spies, everyone involved in the *secret du roi* had to scramble to contain the damage. Not long after the Austrian court uncovered the correspondence, however, it became known to the public, and the entire system collapsed just before the king's death, revealing a secret diplomacy that had rarely been effective and that had even been counter-productive to the interests of France.

Louis XV appeared to have been too fond of secrets all his life. The Abbé Georgel, who had once served as an ambassador, wrote in his memoirs at the beginning of the nineteenth century, describing how the king enjoyed keeping secrets and believed in having multiple sources of information. The abbé wrote, "Louis XV's secret correspondence was completely unknown to his council, and especially to his ministers of foreign affairs... This secret network was not even revealed to all of our ambassadors. Sometimes it was the secretary of an ambassador, or another Frenchman traveling privately who acted as the king's spy. The king, who enjoyed this secrecy immensely, wished in this manner to judge the conduct of his ministers in foreign courts and compare those secret reports to the official ones."⁴

Though while Louis XV enjoyed hiding things from others, it made him appear fearful of them. In 1767, the king wrote secretly to the Comte de Broglie, whom he had by then placed in charge of the *secret du roi*, that the Duc de Choiseul, one of his ministers, might have found out about the secret correspondence. He expressed his fears to Broglie, saying that the duc "might know too much... I believe that we must remain as we are and not say anything more to him. Make him believe that these are nothing more than suspicions on his part." A year later, the king

⁴ M.E. Boutaric, ed., *Correspondance secrète inédite de Louis XV sur la politique étrangère avec le Comte de Broglie, Tercier, etc. Vol. I*, (Paris : Henri Plon, 1866), 55, footnote 1.

wrote to Broglie, “M. le Duc de Choiseul might have notions and he seeks certitude, but he has said nothing to me at all about your correspondence with me.”⁵ Clearly, Louis XV worried that his ministers had pried into his secrets, or worse, had discovered them completely but kept their knowledge hidden from the king. Worse still, he worried that his ministers might be conspiring with his mistress to uncover his secrets. The king wrote to Broglie about his mistress, Mme. du Barry, saying, “Mme. du Barry saw your letter. It was not a secret. With regards to the large packet, she found it on the table; she wanted to see what it was. I did not wish to show her. The next day she was at it again. I told her that it regarded affairs in Poland, that as you were ambassador there, you still had reports to send me... That is all I told her. I am sure that she will divulge nothing to M. de Choiseul.”⁶ Whether or not the king’s mistress was sharing his secrets with the Duc de Choiseul, the king was worried that this was a possibility, or had already happened, and shared this fear in many letters with the Comte de Broglie.

There were problems outside of his court as well, and the organization’s plans were sometimes reduced to a frightful mess, even threatening to become a catastrophe for the king at one point like the mishap with the Chevalier d’Eon mentioned above. In 1764, the Chevalier d’Eon who was then the king’s spy in England and official secretary to the ambassador, claimed he had been insulted by the ambassador and later accused the ambassador of trying to poison him. Believing that he had been abandoned by the king, he threatened to reveal all the secrets he knew if the king did not protect him and award him an enormous pension. The king wrote to one of his confidants, saying, “I doubt that we would have war with England if he revealed

⁵ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 1866, 404.

⁶ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 1866, 145.

everything, but we must nip this scandal in the bud.”⁷ He added that the foreign minister wanted d’Eon arrested immediately and that d’Eon deserved it, but that “what is most important is to placate him and have my papers returned. In the future, let us be more prudent in our choices of confidants: he is, however, the only one until now who has threatened treason to such a high degree. Can you imagine what they would do to him in the tribunals?”⁸

The king called d’Eon a “madman capable of anything” but he eventually silenced him with a hefty pension and protection from the foreign minister. Early in the following year, though, when the king was desperately trying to avoid disaster in England, he was struggling to contain the damage on his own shores. The foreign minister at the time, the Duc de Praslin, caught d’Eon’s valet at Calais on his way to England carrying suspicious letters. The king knew that the valet would be sent to the Bastille and that his secret correspondence might be compromised in his own court, but he could do nothing to help the valet without revealing too much to the Duc de Praslin. And so, the king secretly maneuvered to keep the papers found on the valet from the Duc de Praslin even while the valet, a man named Hugonet, underwent interrogations. De Praslin was eager to glean as much information as he could from Hugonet, and he ordered the chief of police, Sartine, to learn the location of d’Eon from the valet, and to send him all of Hugonet’s personal papers (though the king later diverted some of these). Sartine wrote back to the Duc de Praslin, saying of Hugonet, “He said he has absolutely no knowledge of [d’Eon’s] whereabouts, and no matter the questions we asked him, even after threats, we could pry nothing from him...”⁹ But acting under de Praslin’s orders, the police did their best to

⁷ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 1866, 122.

⁸ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 1866, 123.

⁹ BA, MS 12245, *Dossier de prisonniers* 1765

intimidate Hugonet and extract as much information as they could. They had time on their side and several techniques for frightening the valet into talking. The inspector who first interrogated him wrote, “I found him to be an even-tempered man, affecting calm and confidence, but I was not his dupe. Nevertheless, I failed to pry any satisfying information from him. He always persisted in saying that it had been more than two months since he had seen M. d’Eon and that he knew nothing of his whereabouts... I employed all the most efficacious methods I knew to gain his confidence during the journey [from Calais to Paris]... I made little progress during the day, but in the evening at the inn where we had stopped, I saw him deep in reflection and looking far less self-assured than I had seen him the previous day. I took the opportunity to paint a bleak picture of the situation in which he found himself. He heaved a great sigh... He began to cry. I continued to press my argument, and his tears fell in torrents. Finally, he told me, ‘I cannot tell you, monsieur, where M. d’Eon can be found because I do not know.’”¹⁰ Hugonet would remain at the Bastille long after he had been arrested while the king and the Comte de Broglie endeavored to keep as much hidden as they could from the Duc de Praslin.

In January of that year, 1765, the king wrote that the letter found on Hugonet had no signature, but the handwriting was clearly that of the Comte de Broglie’s secretary. “I could not find a copy of this letter nor remember its content,” wrote the king anxiously. And he added, “M. de Praslin is to examine these papers at the Bastille this evening, but I hope that M. de Sartine [the lieutenant general of police] has put aside what I asked him to. I will tell you when I know more... It is not yet possible for you to go to the Bastille and examine these papers with M. le lieutenant de police. That would reveal everything.” The king expressed hope that he could soon send someone he trusted to the Bastille without the foreign minister’s knowledge. He wrote

¹⁰ BA, MS 12245, *Dossier de prisonniers 1765*.

several more frantic letters, trying desperately to learn what the valet had revealed and to outmaneuver his foreign minister, not daring to release those who served him because it might reveal too much to others at court. It was as if the king were maneuvering and struggling to have one of his spies released from a foreign country.

Transparency and a New Masculinity

Dodging mistresses and ministers, placating his own unruly spies, and failing to protect those in his secret network because of the fear of everything coming to light, Louis XV seemed to be a man more burdened with secrets than enriched and empowered by them. In contrast, his mistresses who were often portrayed as usurpers of power at the royal court, were believed to be exercising their unbridled power through backchannels and underhanded means, employing secrecy to their supreme advantage instead of being out in the open and honest in their dealings.

In the same period, the notion of transparency as a desired quality, first in individuals and then in regimes, was beginning to emerge. In the language of the day, one word approaching the idea of transparency was *publicité*, though this word also referred to the related but not identical concept of public opinion and the public's growing power. But *publicité* was not the only word available to those who were trying to articulate their fears and suspicions of secrecy, and the existence of another word no doubt led to the further cementing of the concept. In his novels, Rousseau had used the word *transparence* in descriptions of heroes, heroines and other sympathetic characters. Transparency meant the lack of artifice and hidden motives; a transparent individual was honest, genuine and pure.¹¹ If transparency had such a positive

¹¹ See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, transparency and obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

connotation, its opposite, keeping things hidden—or secrecy—could take on a negative connotation.

The same ideas could easily be applied to politics and government. Even if he did not use the word “transparency,” the Comte de Mirabeau, in a treatise that railed against the use of *lettres de cachet* (secret orders for immediate arrest and indefinite imprisonment), echoed the concerns of many of his contemporaries when he advocated government transparency. For several pages, Mirabeau warned against the dangers of government secrecy, saying that state secrets often covered up atrocities, and that the idea of “reasons of state,” invoked famously by Cardinal Richelieu, had always been an affront to liberties. He believed that every “mysterious” administration was ignorant and corrupt, and that there should be no secrets in cabinets that were kept from the eyes of the people. Furthermore, he made a point of emphasizing the enormity of problems that arose from different branches in government whose limits were not clearly delineated and who did not communicate with one another. To Mirabeau, a “veil between sovereign and people” led to distrust between them, particularly on the side of the people.¹² Mirabeau’s sentiments were certainly symptomatic of the rise of the idea of government accountability, and countless others, from moderate anonymous pamphleteers to vociferous radicals like Marat,¹³ pushed the same message, hoping to press the idea into their readers’ heads like the printing press imprinted the inked blocks onto the waiting paper.

¹² Honoré-Gabriel de Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, *Enquiries Concerning lettres de cachet, the consequences of arbitrary imprisonment, and a history of the inconveniencies, distresses, and sufferings of state prisoners. Written in the dungeon of the castle of Vincennes, by the Count de Mirabeau. Vol. I*, (Dublin: Whitestone, Byrne, Cash, Moore and Jones, 1787), 109-11.

¹³ Marat believed that “plots against the nation [were] always concocted in darkness,” and that “princes [called] no witnesses” to their evil deeds, and so it was up to a sentinel of the people to open “the entrails of deceit.” See Jean-Paul Marat, *Les chaînes de l’Esclavage* Ed. Michel Vovelle (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1988), 144.

The new ideas about transparency were corrosive to elite women's access to power. Women had exercised power at the French court for centuries—and been subjected to suspicion and contempt for it—but a new understanding of masculinity and the public sphere was emerging in the eighteenth century that threatened elite women's hold on power. An older, more traditional concept of masculinity was slowly giving way to something quite different, another kind of masculinity tinged by the new ideas of patriotism, the apotheosis of reason and the suspicion of all things secret and hidden. It was at the same time unsurprising that secrecy came to be cast as a sign of weakness and femininity as well as sinister dealings. Mistresses and other women who had achieved some form of influence in society were seen as conniving and having a negative influence on government, and as figures whose power was ultimately illegitimate.¹⁴ The Comte de Broglie often complained about the king's mistresses interfering in politics, especially the powerful and, to him, meddling Pompadour, “though no one,” he claimed “was brazen to the same degree as Mme. du Barry.”¹⁵ The Chevalier d'Eon also complained to his friend, Broglie, of Pompadour, portraying her as a demanding harpy whose “hysterical vapors” too frequently influenced the king.¹⁶ While they were demanding and emotional, women were also devious; they tried to gain influence through secretive methods while prying into the secrets and affairs that did not concern them.

Pompadour knew how others saw her. She wrote to the Duc de Choiseul in 1756, “They accuse me of being devious, sly, crafty and even false. But I am only a poor woman who has

¹⁴ See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 1866, 413.

¹⁶ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 1866, 435-6.

sought happiness these past ten years and who believes to have finally found it.”¹⁷ It was true that she used her influence over the police to keep an eye on her enemies and slanderers. (The lieutenant general of police, Berryer, had been a friend of hers and owed his position as head of the Paris police from 1747 to 1757 to her.) When she allowed those who slandered her or those she perceived to be a threat to be sent to the Bastille, she believed that it was for the good and stability of the crown, just as the police tracked down underground printing presses and booksellers of forbidden tracts to serve what they believed as the public good and the interests of the monarchy. The famous Chevalier de Latude, a prisoner in the Bastille who became a celebrity during the Revolution for having escaped from the prison multiple times, had originally been sent to the Bastille for devising a false plot to assassinate Pompadour and then pretending to uncover it to gain her favor. When the truth was discovered, he was sent to prison since both the authorities and Pompadour believed him to be dangerous. It is also probable that the police opened and read letters for her, as the revolutionaries later accused her of doing, but it certainly was not a practice that she had invented, and the king (who in fact had the postmaster open letters as well), the police and, of course, the king’s ministers were not exempt from these suspicions. Pompadour saw both surveillance and secrecy as necessities on the part of the government not only because these were traditional tools of those in power, but also because she was keenly aware of the force of public opinion and how it was wise to husband it and control it as best one could.

For Pompadour, the volatility as well as the potential extremes of public opinion was reason enough to be discreet and keep secrets. In a letter to the Maréchal de Richelieu she asked

¹⁷ Cécile Berly ed., *Lettres de Madame de Pompadour: portrait d'une favorite royale* (Paris: Perrin, 2014), 396. See also Thomas E. Kaiser, “Madame de Pompadour and the Theaters of Power,” *French Historical Studies* 10 (1996): 1025-1044.

him to secretly send him a list of officers to receive rewards for meritorious service, adding “the fewer the names you choose, the better it will be for the finances of the king.”¹⁸ It seemed particularly important to her to influence public opinion on the matter of finances. She hoped to show that the court was not as extravagant as the public believed, and understood that regardless of the truth of the situation, the winds that swayed public opinion were what mattered. In 1751 she wrote to her friend, the Comtesse de Lutzelbourg, “The king wishes to diminish his expenses in every respect, and though that in and of itself is not very considerable, the public believing that it is, I hope to influence [*ménager*] opinion and show a good example. I also hope that others are of the same mind.”¹⁹ When her friend asked for a lucrative position for her son, Pompadour refused for reasons of finance and the negative publicity such a favor would garner the royal favorite. She told her friend that if she gave the position to her son it might earn him an extra two thousands *livres*, which would not mean much to the son of the comtesse, but which would mean a great deal to a low-ranking officer.²⁰ She also knew that despite all her efforts, she was seen as a vile temptress who used her feminine wiles to hold sway over the king. She did come to exercise a great deal of influence, and at the height of her power, (incidentally the same period when she had ceased to be the king’s mistress), she was the gateway at Versailles to royal favors, positions and largesse. When she heard of attacks against her, she declared that “the king knows the truth,” and she added that she “had long since decided to console [herself] for these injustices with the certainty of the purity of [her] intentions.”²¹ She believed that she was devoted servant of the crown, and that everything she did was meant to further the king’s interests and strengthen

¹⁸ Berly, *Lettres de Madame de Pompadour*, 326.

¹⁹ Berly, *Lettres de Madame de Pompadour*, 200.

²⁰ Berly, *Lettres de Madame de Pompadour*, 200.

²¹ Berly, *Lettres de Madame de Pompadour*, 256.

his position, though she was continuously portrayed as manipulative, self-serving, secretive and above all, exercising an illegitimate power. The public sphere was becoming the domain of men, and men were expected to be out in the open, not advancing themselves through intrigue and cunning but through strength and honesty. Moreover, this form of masculinity was linked to the rise of public opinion and the idea that a man's reputation and honor depended on public opinion, and not the good opinion of a king or patron.

A few decades later, Jacques Necker, the popular minister of finance, expounded on the apotheosis of public opinion and the need for the public's glare in government affairs. In the 1750s, Pompadour helped run the government while believing in the merits of secrecy though acknowledging the power of public opinion, even if it was volatile and unreliable. By the 1780s, a popular figure like Necker could write dozens of pages on the power of public opinion and how favorably he viewed this development. To Necker, this new power was a godsend, and the goal and desire of every minister and government agents ought to be not the good opinion of the king and court but of the public. According to him, a minister should prefer "that public opinion which is slow in forming itself, but whose decisions must be waited for patiently, to all courtly praise..."²² A good reputation was essential, but it arose from virtue which would win the hearts and minds of the people. Necker called public opinion the "dear object of [his] ambition" and declared that it reigned from a "throne, distributes praises and laurels, and establishes, or ruins reputations."²³ Necker appeared to believe that public opinion belonged on that throne, though he knew that this had not always been the case. He understood that something had changed over the course of the last hundred years, though he could not define exactly how and why public opinion

²² Jacques Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I* Trans. Thomas Mortimer (London: Logographic Press, 1787), xx.

²³ Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I*, 1787, xvii, lv.

had come to assume the role it had by his lifetime in France. He explained that under Louis XIV, public tranquility reigned, but public opinion had very little authority. That king had engrossed everything, making it so that his good opinion was sought above all else.²⁴ By the 1780s when Necker was writing, it was public opinion that held sway over all minds, and “princes themselves [had] it in veneration.”²⁵ Regardless of any notions of the vicissitudes of public opinion and the fickle affections of the masses, Necker believed that it was essential not only to a minister’s success but to maintaining his probity and honesty as well.

Necker also linked the new power of public opinion to the traditional pursuit of honor. Just as earning public esteem helped a minister pursue honor, so, too, was it the minister’s goal to cultivate the love of honor in his subordinates. Necker asserted that a minister should surround himself with skilled and upright people, and “maintain in them the love of honor.”²⁶ He believed that public opinion seemed to “preside in the tribunal of honor” and put up obstacles to the abuse of power since a virtuous minister eventually earned the esteem of the public, which attracted the “honors due to probity.”²⁷ To Necker, honor was impossible without virtue, and only virtue garnered a government agent the cherished and invaluable prize of the good opinion of the public. A minister’s reputation and his honor could only remain unsullied according to Necker if his deeds and his motives were laid bare to the public, which allowed him to gain the respect that was owed to one who did his job well and honestly. This may not have always been the case, avowed Necker, but in the latter half of the eighteenth century when “the progress of knowledge [had] introduced a more intimate connection between those who are governed and those who

²⁴ Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I*, 1787, lv.

²⁵ Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I*, 1787, lvii.

²⁶ Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I*, 1787, xlvii.

²⁷ Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I*, 1787, lxi, xlvi.

govern, ministers are become, on the theater of the world, the actors who attract the greatest notice, and whose conduct is most severely scrutinized. And whilst the former indifference, with which the objects of administration were viewed, left a free scope to errors of all kinds, the interested notice which is taken of them at present, obliges the most sanguine men to a kind of circumspection, which is without doubt salutary...”²⁸ The link between honor and reputation was an old one. One’s honor had always depended upon the regard and esteem of one’s peers and sometimes even superiors. Though some commentators might find some exceptions, personal honor in the old regime could not exist in a vacuum. It was not an internal, private matter between the individual and his conscience, and it was not always synonymous with integrity. Honor required the gaze of and competition with others who were equally determined to defend their own reputations. As Charles Walton has argued, honor was a zero-sum game, a kind of mercantilism where the individual could not increase his own store of honor without taking from or damaging that of a rival.²⁹ Necker, though, saw honor and virtue as going hand in hand, and he clearly believed that a minister’s good conduct would garner him a sterling reputation without the need to damage the reputation of another. Furthermore, it was the public who decided the state of a minister’s honor and bestowed on him his reputation; neither his peers nor the court nor the king had that power. While a good reputation remained essential to any public figure and honor something he or she should always treasure, one’s reputation no longer depended solely on a competition between two rivals in the theater of their own immediate community, in the case of a minister the royal court. Like those involved in litigation who more and more took their

²⁸ Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I*, 1787, viii-ix.

²⁹ See G. Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), passim.

personal affairs to the public to garner sympathy rather than to a powerful patron,³⁰ honor and reputation became more than ever a public affair.

This new power of public opinion had its influence on the conception of masculinity as well. Strength, honesty, selflessness and transparency were becoming the markers of a new masculinity. The more traditional, more aristocratic brand of masculinity—never countenancing any affront physical or otherwise, but also knowing how to be a good courtier: clever and graceful in speech as well as in dissimulation—was giving way to a more modern and more democratizing form. This had very much to do with the increasing importance of patriotism as a cultural value, and the link between patriotism, honor and virtue.³¹ A patriot was someone who put the interests of the nation above his own, who embraced virtue (lack of self-interest), and who gained honor through his pursuit of virtue. Any man, therefore, who was afire with love for his country and who placed the public good before his own could be a patriot. By the 1770s, honor was seen less and less as a mark of the nobility as a class and more a sign of the spiritual nobility of the French nation. Furthermore, many texts dated after the Seven Years' War show how honor came to be more closely associated with the increasingly egalitarian notion of virtue.³² The more an author discussing the subject of nobility associated honor with virtue, the more honor was likely to be seen as within reach of all social classes.³³ Thus, the definition and boundaries of honor like that of nobility were becoming more flexible and more prone to

³⁰ See Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

³¹ See Jay Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: The Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); also, John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

³² Smith, *Nobility Reimagined*, 2005, 166.

³³ Smith, *Nobility Reimagined*, 2005, 2.

commentary and discussion. It now seemed at least possible that more people could have access to the kind of honors that the nobility exclusively enjoyed and that more people could weigh in on the subject. If any man could be a patriot, then any man theoretically could accrue honors and gain a good reputation. Furthermore, if patriotic virtue brought a man honor, serving one's country and exposing one's conduct to public scrutiny seemed more important than settling personal scores. If virtue brought a man honor, then transparency made it possible for the world to know of his virtue.

Certain thinkers and writers even denounced the aristocratic version of honor and looked down on the ritual of the duel, preferring virtue to honor, or putting the honor of the nation above personal honor. According to Louis-Sébastien Mercier, author of the *Tableau de Paris*, duels were no longer common in his day, thanks to philosophy and reason. He considered the practice of dueling "stupid and barbaric."³⁴ If one stepped on someone's foot accidentally, or even had a difference of opinion with someone else, men did not become ferocious beasts any longer.³⁵ Revenge likewise was considered petty and selfish, even immoral.³⁶ Instead, due to new ideas of patriotism and the much vaunted virtue of selflessness, duels were seen more and more as the carrying out of unlawful and irrational vengeance rather than an essential component to preserving one's honor. Mercier wrote that in former days, men could not avoid a futile fight

³⁴ Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. VIII (Amsterdam, 1782-88), 114.

³⁵ L. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. VIII, 1782-88, 114.

³⁶One example of the revolutionary attitude towards vengeance can be found in a letter written in Year IV to legislators of the Convention by Pierre-François Palloy, the architect who oversaw the demolition of the Bastille. Palloy complained that he had suffered insults and that the honor of his family had been attacked in pamphlets when many were suspecting him and his family of counter-revolutionary sentiments, though he always protested his true patriotic fervor. "This is what our patriotism has led us to endure for more than a year... You have listened too infrequently to the complaints of your true friends. I have never carried out any act of personal vengeance because those are the sentiments of a vile soul; I am silent on the subject of individuals, but when it comes to my country, the pain I feel at the prospect of its decadence is cruel." Palloy felt that his honor had been attacked because someone had questioned his loyalty to the nation, and it was the nation, not himself, that had ultimately been abused. Archives de Paris 4 AZ 719 in 4 AZ 15, *Palloy's letter to legislators 5 Brumaire An IV (Convention nationale)*.

because they were afraid that doing so would compromise their honor. He considered the “miserable point of honor” tyrannical since it obliged the most reserved man to “offer his chest to the sword.”³⁷

Honor was more closely linked to virtue, though it was still tied to reputation as it had been before the cultural shifts of the eighteenth century. What was new, though, was the power of public opinion to determine the fate of a person’s reputation in the world and the status of his honor. That was most likely why Mercier believed that the duel had lost some of its potency. Mercier remarked that most men, apart from military men, did not wear swords regularly anymore, and that to him, it was a “useless weapon.”³⁸ He believed that it was horrible that personal honor forced the most gentle and honest of men to fight, and that in the present day, it was public opinion, not the outcome of a violent altercation, that usually decided who should have won.³⁹ Here it is clear that Mercier still valued honor, but he pitted public opinion against outdated practices, where a rational public weighing both sides was the rightful arbiter of a dispute, not violence. Robespierre called aristocratic honor a “gothic prejudice,” and he was once challenged to a duel but refused to fight, claiming that even an insult did not merit the loss of a life.⁴⁰ In his famous Virtue and Terror speech, he declared that “we want in our country to substitute morality for egoism, probity for honor... merit for intrigue, genius for fine wit, truth for brilliance... in short all the virtues and miracles of the Republic for all the vices and

³⁷ Mercier, 215.

³⁸ Mercier, 217.

³⁹ Mercier, 217.

⁴⁰ See A. Jourdan, “Robespierre and Revolutionary Heroism,” *Robespierre*, ed. Colin Haydon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44, 69.

absurdities of monarchy.”⁴¹ Whether virtue was to replace honor, or a new understanding of honor would privilege virtue above all else just as the debates around the definition of nobility continued to rage through the century, the emerging masculinity coupled with the power of public opinion favored a culture of transparency where taking a strong stance meant having nothing to hide and where honor meant achieving the good opinion of the public.

Rejecting Secrecy and the *Secret du roi*

Given his opinions of Pompadour and du Barry, and the growing importance of transparency, the Comte de Broglie distanced himself from the sinister aura of secrecy when everything came to light, though he had been the head of a shadowy network for decades. He had been forced to accept disgrace and exile so that the king could make a show of punishing him rather than admit that Broglie was acting under his orders when another minister, the Duc d’Aiguillon, suspected the existence of the *secret du roi* and targeted de Broglie. After the death of Louis XV, the Comte de Broglie, who was still in exile, wrote to the new king to ask to return to court. He confirmed the secret correspondence to Louis XVI and the public, asking to be vindicated. Having been dishonored, he wished to restore his honor, though in the process, he put that of Louis XV into question. He showed himself to be a secret diplomat whom the king had abandoned because he was too afraid to defy his ministers in order to protect his own. The Comte de Broglie exposed all of these secret dealings, revealing instead of hiding what had taken place to repair the damage to his reputation. What’s more, in his many letters to Louis XVI, he vehemently claimed that he had wished to bring everything to light years ago, that secrecy did more harm than good and that he had advised Louis XV against it from the beginning. Secrecy

⁴¹ Quoted from Slavoj Žižek, *Slavoj Žižek presents Robespierre: Virtue and Terror*, trans. John Howe, (London: Verso, 2007), 110.

had become a sign of weakness while being transparent was a sign of strength and for him, the way to behave honorably.

After the death of Louis XV, these fears and suspicions were all but confirmed by those who survived him. When Louis XVI was newly crowned, Broglie wrote to him, explaining everything about the *secret du roi* as he saw it, since it had already come to the public's attention. He mentioned his predecessor, the king's "desire to hide a secret which his minister, aided by Mme. du Barry...wanted to pry from him..." Broglie saw the king's mistress as meddling in affairs that did not concern her, but he also understood that the king, rather than yielding to her curiosity and being swayed by her, continuously tried to keep his secrets from her, and from his ministers. Those who had secretly served him in these missions like the Comte de Broglie and the Chevalier d'Eon thus perceived Louis XV as a weak monarch who kept things hidden from those in his court because he could not command them. Their sentiments seemed to echo the general opinion. In 1774, after the king's death, d'Eon wrote to Broglie. In their secret correspondence, the king's code name had always been the Lawyer, and d'Eon wrote, mourning the loss of "our lawyer at Versailles" and added that "in the midst of his own court he had less power than a lawyer at the Châtelet, who through an incredible weakness of his, always let his unfaithful servants triumph over his faithful, secret ones, and always did more good to his enemies than to his true friends...It is time that you tell all to the new king who loves the truth and who, I am told, has as much firmness as his illustrious predecessor had little..."⁴² It was no secret that Louis XV's reputation, and that of the Crown, had been tarnished by the end of his reign, and his supposed weakness was to blame in the eyes of many for the setbacks the nation had suffered such as the loss of the Seven Years' War.

⁴² Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 435-6.

Popular, semi-underground newspapers of the time like the *Mémoires secrets* were quick to report the king's conduct once his secret correspondence had been discovered. In 1776, the *Mémoires secrets* reported the former king's hidden attempts to help his spy, d'Eon, in England while his own foreign minister wanted to have him arrested. According to the newspaper, "the king, who could be devious and sly, warned his spy of the minister's actions while pretending to prosecute him. We add that...the king continued a secret correspondence with him, and had him spy not only on the English but also on his own ambassadors and other Frenchmen in London."⁴³ The newspaper found this "incredible" but decidedly true. While this was shocking, it also painted a portrait of a king who was both wily and weak, spying on his own people and secretly defying his ministers since he was afraid to do so overtly.

It was his inability to protect those who were members of the *secret du roi* that angered and embittered many after his death. (Hugonet, for example, ended up spending over two years in the Bastille, and he was finally released in May, 1767. He had been arrested in January, 1765.) That was why the Comte de Broglie wrote to Louis XVI, revealing everything and asking to be exonerated because he had suffered exile and dishonor to protect the king's secrets. Because of the king's unwillingness to reveal his secret network to his own ministers, the Comte de Broglie had suffered damage to his reputation so that the king could blame him and not expose his own secret maneuvers when his foreign minister discovered a spy carrying suspicious papers. In a mémoire from Broglie to Louis XVI, asking to return from exile, Broglie's lawyer wrote, "The Comte de Broglie cannot therefore attribute any other motives to His Majesty when he had him exiled apart from the desire to preserve his secret." Though Broglie emphasized the depth of the

⁴³ *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France, Vol. IX* (London: John Adamson, 1784), 15, 294.

sacrifice he had made to keep the former king's secrets, he considered it vital to reveal everything in order to salvage his reputation.

Broglie also believed that it was important to the future of the nation to bring everything to light, and that such policies of secrecy would no longer serve in the future as well as they had for the previous generation. When Louis XVI first thought it would be wise to burn all the papers related to the *secret du roi*, Broglie demurred. "Far from regarding it as advantageous to burn all the papers of the secret correspondence," he wrote to Louis XVI, it would not do to destroy all the evidence, since Broglie needed "irreproachable proof of [his] past conduct." Because he was at the head of a shadowy and secretive network, Broglie acknowledged that that naturally made him suspect in the eyes of many. That was why it was essential that this correspondence no longer be kept secret. He feared that "in the eyes of all Europe" he would be regarded as a "vile intriguer" when in fact he had only obeyed and participated in the *secret du roi* out of "an excess of love and obedience" for the former king. Broglie maintained that he had only submitted to disgrace and exile to protect the secret, believing it was only momentary. He wrote that this submission on his part would have been "beyond [his] strengths without the certitude that the king [Louis XV] only held [him] higher in his regards."⁴⁴ Broglie wrote to Louis XVI that he hoped the king would deign to remove the "odious patina" with which he might be tarnished through a prolonged exile. He hoped that the king would repair his reputation and honor which he dared to believe would not simply be ignored and destroyed by the new ruler. He repeated in his letters that he was the purest and most zealous of the king's subjects, using florid language and proclamations of loyalty that were common at the time. It seemed nevertheless that Broglie's loyalty was as fervent as he proclaimed, at least until the death of Louis XV. Due to the

⁴⁴ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 410-12.

profusion and length of his letters, he urgently felt that the damage to his reputation needed to be redressed as soon as possible, since he had endured disgrace for so long to preserve a secret that was not his.

Broglié went so far as to label his detractors as secretive and manipulative while he portrayed himself as ever transparent and loathe to use secrets. He laid most of the blame of his disgrace and exile at the feet of the foreign minister at the time, the Duc d'Aiguillon. Broglié and his lawyer spared no effort to paint a picture of d'Aiguillon as an intriguer and often referred to his "shadowy" plots and machinations. According to Broglié, d'Aiguillon pulled the strings in the shadows with the help of the then royal mistress, Mme. du Barry, to discredit Broglié and destroy his influence and position at court. In a memoir written to Louis XVI in May, 1774 Broglié claimed that Mme. du Barry and d'Aiguillon had been in league against him because they were jealous of the royal favor he enjoyed. Broglié added that he even proposed introducing d'Aiguillon into the secret network but that Louis XV had refused. Despite this affirmation of openness, Broglié's attitude towards d'Aiguillon had been far from conciliatory before his exile. There had been an incident where Broglié had written a rather insulting note to the foreign minister because the minister had refused to let him pay visits to his extended family in the Piedmont while on a diplomatic voyage. Broglié believed that the king had used this disrespectful letter as a pretext for his exile. He asserted that the king was "not desirous of admitting to the existence of the network that he wished to keep secret" and that he looked upon Broglié's insulting letter as a suitable pretext to protect his secret.⁴⁵ Clearly, in Broglié's eyes, his offer to include others in the secret network had pushed the king to momentarily move him out of the way and perhaps punish him for trying to put an end to the project, since letting the

⁴⁵ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 390-2.

foreign minister in on the secret would in a sense defeat the purpose of the *secret du roi*, which was to have a channel of information separate from the office of foreign affairs. Thus, having done nothing wrong, Broglie believed he had been forced to endure disgrace, and what was worse, the appearance of having lost to one of his enemies at court, d'Aiguillon. All of this had occurred to preserve a secret that he did not believe was worth keeping.

The Duc d'Aiguillon did most likely try to set a trap for Broglie, and though he did not succeed at having him arrested, many of those under Broglie like his personal secretary and others in his service were sent to the Bastille, which led many to cast a suspicious eye on Broglie, and there were even rumors of treason which enraged Broglie and alarmed those under him who had so far escaped imprisonment. Interrogations of those imprisoned, most of whom were connected to the *secret du roi*, soon took place at the Bastille which Broglie called “a shadowy procedure” designed by d'Aiguillon to implicate Broglie and to make it look as if he maintained on his own “a criminal correspondence with secret emissaries in all the foreign courts to discredit the efforts of the king’s ministers and to ignite everywhere the torch of war.” Broglie added that “His Majesty knew the falsehood of all these imputations.”⁴⁶ Rather than Broglie being the secretive intriguer who hid terrible things from others and plotted in the shadows, it was his curious enemy, jealous of being kept out of the king’s pet projects, who used intrigue and worked in the shadows to achieve his nefarious ends, regardless of whose lives he destroyed in the process.

On the surface, the battle between the Duc d'Aiguillon and the Comte de Broglie was the typical head butting between two powerful rivals at court. The Duc d'Aiguillon was the foreign minister at the time and officially wielded power as such, but the Comte de Broglie, as head of

⁴⁶ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 392.

the *secret du roi*, exercised power in areas that overlapped with the foreign minister's purview and enjoyed the king's confidence as well. It was inevitable that they would begin to step on each other's toes and eventually wish to be rid of the other. One of the most effective ways to be rid of a rival at court or practically in any community in the old regime was to attack a rival's reputation, one of his most precious assets. Thomas Brennan, in his work on social drinking and taverns in eighteenth-century Paris, argued that tavern brawls were not usually a result of a desultory working class driven to fight by alcohol consumption, but that most altercations were the result of issues of honor.⁴⁷ Accusations of immoral behavior and dishonesty, especially in a social space like a tavern, had to be addressed at once since a man's reputation and honor were at stake. What's more, an artisan or a laborer seeking to destroy a rival made sure to insult him in the tavern where everyone would hear so that he could turn his rivals "into members who were not irreproachable."⁴⁸ In that sense, d'Aiguillon and de Broglie were no different from those artisans in a tavern brawl, seeking to destroy the other's reputation in the community where they were both known and seen, in their case the royal court. What was new about de Broglie's defense of his reputation, however, and a mark of the developments in the second half of the eighteenth century, was his appeal not only to the king and the court but to the public at large. He did not content himself with a duel of words and insults with his adversary. He ultimately believed it was the public that should decide the outcome along with the king, though the king ought to defer to public opinion in making his decision in order to show that there was nothing to hide. Like Necker, de Broglie believed that public opinion, and not simply doing battle with

⁴⁷ Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 28.

⁴⁸ Brennan, 28.

d'Aguillon, would be the arbiter of his honor. Furthermore, he believed that showing himself to be transparent and distancing himself from secrecy would help restore his honor as well.

The other guilty party, though Broglie never dared to mention it explicitly, was the king. Broglie claimed again and again that the king knew of everything, knew of his innocence and of the foreign minister's machinations, but still did nothing, nothing apart from sending Broglie into exile and letting his subordinates cool their heels at the Bastille. If Louis XVI was reluctant to bring everything to light, even if it meant exonerating Broglie, it was most likely because Broglie's revelations cast Louis XV in such a negative light, and consequently, the monarchy's reputation would suffer as well. Louis XV had already closed his reign as a monarch of dubious repute after the scandals of his mistresses and the humiliating defeat of the Seven Years' War. If it was revealed that Louis XV had failed to protect those in his service in order to maintain a secret project that had done little to further the interests of the nation, that would only be another puncture wound in the already sinking and deflating balloon of the monarchy. Like the families that requested *lettres de cachet* to hide away a black sheep to preserve their honor, Louis XVI clearly preferred to hide everything, whether good or ill, in order to protect his family's, that is, the monarchy's reputation. If everyone kept silent, and the scandal was swept under the rug, a few might languish in prison, even the innocent might suffer, but the former king's honor would be intact, or at least, would suffer no further damage.

Broglie, of course, saw things differently. He wished to salvage his own reputation, but for him the best means to do so was to expose everything, the details of his life even, to the glare of the public gaze. He wanted Louis XVI to dig deep into the documents and letters himself and expose everything that had happened in order to prove that the Duc d'Aiguillon, and possibly Mme. du Barry as well, had conspired to slander and discredit Broglie. Broglie also feared that

d'Aiguillon had already prejudiced the king against him, even though the new foreign minister that Louis XVI appointed, the Comte de Vergennes, had been a member of the *secret du roi*. But attempting to discredit d'Aiguillon in order to redeem himself once again placed Louis XV in a bad light. Broglie told Louis XVI that he hoped that the king “would deign to delve into sources separate from those of this minister [d'Aiguillon]... in order to determine the true reasons for my exile. If I am not mistaken, bringing together several letters of the former king will prove that there was no other reason [for my exile] apart from His Majesty's desire to hide a secret...”⁴⁹ To Broglie, the sole motivation of his slanderers and enemies was malice brought on by envy since he protested that he had done nothing wrong. “They suspected me, all of them, of having been honored with the secret confidence of the master [i.e. the king]...” he told Louis XVI in another of his letters.⁵⁰ But if envy and malice motivated Broglie's enemies, what motivated his patron, the king, to act as he did apart from weakness—weakness vis-a-vis the members of his court, and moral weakness—and fear? In contrast, Broglie portrayed himself as intrepid and steadfast, willing to make sacrifices out of service and loyalty (though he would not accept his victimization for long), and as a man of honor because he was afraid of nothing that might surface in an investigation. He had done nothing shameful, and so he had nothing to hide. Behind all of his rhetoric and his arguments for his innocence was the assumption that those who kept things hidden did so out of shame, just as those who maneuvered in the shadows were conspirators with nefarious ends. He proudly declared, “I fear no one in the examination of my life in its entirety.” Again and again, he asserted his innocence and his honorable conduct, though he did not seem to realize how his deluge of letters and memoires would affect the king's

⁴⁹ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 399.

⁵⁰ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 399.

image, or how they might irritate Louis XVI. Broglie was relentless in his assertions and his requests for a return from exile, becoming passionate, even forceful in his letters, clearly hoping that his zeal would persuade the king of his loyalty and innocence. He told the king that “if the proof that I have the honor of sending Your Majesty of my fidelity, of my innocence...does not appear sufficient, I will dare to propose that Your Majesty send me from [my estate] to the Bastille where I will remain until you have found the most extensive evidence of my conduct.”⁵¹

In his memoir, Broglie’s lawyer made sure to underscore the point that Broglie had never sought the post of secret head of the correspondence. He discussed his reluctance to participate and the fact that Broglie had to be ordered twice to take charge, saying that “[Broglie] even tried to quit the political arena for that of the military.” He wanted to join the 1747 campaign, but the king refused to grant his permission and Broglie was ordered to return to Poland as ambassador. Broglie knew only a “blind obedience to the will of the king,” and his loyalty was only further bolstered by his gratitude in receiving the “cordon bleu which [the king] had just given him despite the desires of Mme. de Pompadour.”⁵² Receiving the cordon bleu meant being inducted into the knightly Order of the Holy Spirit, the most prestigious and highest honor in the land, granted only to royalty, princes of the blood and the highest nobility whom the king chose to grace with the honor of membership. The cross that all members wore around their necks always hung from a light blue, silk ribbon, hence “cordon bleu.” Broglie had not been a protégé of Mme. de Pompadour, and he claimed that it was because she was jealous and suspected (rightly) that Broglie was involved in some sort of secret mission that the king kept from her. Despite his “blind obedience” in the past, Broglie seemed to have his eyes wide open

⁵¹ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 399.

⁵² Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 413.

when he requested again and again a return from exile and a lifting of the stain of disgrace and dishonor from his name. He made it clear that he had been innocent, but that meant that the previous king had forced him to suffer personal anguish in the degradation of his honor by forcing him to keep a secret. Only revealing everything would save him from disgrace.

Broglié “felt that his attachment for the king would render him sooner or later the victim of his constant fidelity, a fear that was to be confirmed only too well...” At the same time that the secret correspondence damaged Broglié’s honor and reputation, he believed that it also did harm to that of the state, certainly more harm than good. He told Louis XVI that years ago when the mantle of the *secret du roi* was passed from the Prince de Conti to himself he wanted to put a stop to it then and there and end the “useless internal difficulties” that the correspondence occasioned, but that the king was so attached to it that it continued. He made sure to show that the *secret du roi* had not been a correspondence of intrigue, though secret, and that he had always argued that it would have been more useful to include the ministers of foreign affairs from the beginning, though Louis XV had refused. And now, Broglié advised, it was important “that all person who were under his orders learn in the future that they should only correspond with the minister of foreign affairs,” instead of in secret.⁵³ If Broglié remained exiled and dishonored, it would do harm not only to his reputation but to that of the former king and of the monarchy. If he was not exonerated, “the public might be led to suspect that there were actual abuses” going on as a result of the secret correspondence since failure to reveal everything would make the public wonder what the government had to hide. But even if that were true, it did not bolster the previous king’s already tarnished reputation by revealing that the king had been too weak to protect those who served him loyalty, preferring to protect a secret (that in the end

⁵³ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 413.

seemed to do little in advancing the nation's interests since it was unsuccessful and had been discovered by the Austrian court) rather than share his plans with his ministers and end their persecutions of Broglie and others.

Interestingly, while Broglie advocated doing away with secrecy within the court, he also voiced his suspicions about what was known as the *cabinet noir*, a secret branch of the post office that opened private letters if they were considered suspicious or dangerous to the government. Broglie believed that the government's violation of individual privacy might be justified for reasons of security. He wrote that "this institution's goal was to keep the king and the government informed of any issues which might affect the State in order to be able to prevent occurrences that might be harmful to the prince and to the public."⁵⁴ But he disapproved of the postmaster, d'Ogny, since he believed that d'Ogny had long since been in the pay of one of the king's ministers, or even Mme. de Pompadour, serving his or her personal ends rather than the good of the state and the people. Broglie explained, "There has been for a long while at the headquarters of the post a secret bureau. M. d'Ogny is its head today, and he has a dozen or so of workers under him who open all the letters or at least those they find suspicious, and then they promptly write copies or excerpts." Though Broglie was revealing the existence of the cabinet noir to the king and not to the public, he clearly had his doubts about its validity and effectiveness. Out of this "good principle" of serving the good of the state, there resulted nevertheless "as often happens, disquietude and great inconvenience for private individuals and consequently for the [king]. His ministers had decided it was essential to place someone in this office who were loyal to them alone in order to take advantage of the access to these letters and present selected excerpts to the king in order to advance their own passions, vendettas or

⁵⁴ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 395-99.

friendships. There are even cases, it is rumored, where ministers have fabricated excerpts to implicate those who were innocent.” In a position where one “can dispose of the secrets of all citizens,” Broglie believed it was vital to place someone that the king could trust, who would not be swayed or bribed into the service of this or that minister or royal mistress. For the man in the position of postmaster was “to render no accounts of letters to anyone, even to ministers except by the [king’s] orders. Moreover, he should apply himself to his task with delicacy and the most impeccable scruples.”⁵⁵

The *secret du roi* was often counter-productive and sometimes teetered on the brink of disaster in its various projects. When the entire project was revealed, the Comte de Broglie, who himself had been at the head of the *secret*, called for it to be dismantled and for a new era of transparency and communication to begin. This was because for Broglie revealing everything would save his reputation since it would show that he only acted under the orders of the king. For the state, it would safeguard the monarchy’s reputation since keeping secrets had come to mean a mark of inefficiency and distrust. Over the course of the eighteenth century, secrecy had come to be seen as something suspect while transparency was emerging as a positive trait not only in the individual but also in a government. While secrecy may have been a traditional and unquestioned aspect of the monarchical regime in the past, its value and even its capacity for efficiency was being questioned. To add to that, a new kind of masculinity had emerged where revealing oneself and being honest and open had become the new mark of an honorable man. Secrecy had become a source of dishonor and a sign of weakness in an era when more and more, transparency meant strength and legitimacy. The Comte de Broglie, by emphasizing the problems of the *secret du roi* as he did, looking at them at a particular angle and exposing it to

⁵⁵ Boutaric, *Correspondance*, 395-99.

the glare of public opinion, held a magnifying glass under the sun. Focused with the right intensity, it could start a blaze.

CHAPTER 3: THOSE WHO KNOW YOUR SECRETS: JESUITS SECRECY AND THE PROTO-NATIONALISM OF THE JANSENISTS

While changing notions of masculinity helped shift cultural attitudes in favor of transparency, religious conflicts in eighteenth-century France played a major role in this shift as well, in particular the activity of the group known as the Jansenists in their long-standing rivalry with the Jesuits. The Jansenist attacks on the Jesuits culminated in that religious order's expulsion from France in the 1760s. From the beginning, though, as d'Alembert noted in his 1765 book on the fall of the Jesuits in France, attacks against the Jesuits had been full of inconsistencies and contradictions. Since their arrival in France in the sixteenth century, the Jesuits were accused of regicide and fomenting rebellion against legitimate rulers during the days of the Catholic League. They were, often simultaneously, accused of despotism and of an obsessive and blind obedience to authority, usually within their own order and to the pope. In the eighteenth century, the Jansenists accused the Jesuits of influencing the Crown and the bishops in order to persecute Jansenists and further the reaches of despotism at the expense of the *parlements* who represented the "nation." This did not stop the Jansenists from claiming that the Jesuits had been regicides from their inception. But what mattered, according to d'Alembert, was "not to tell the exact truth, but to say as much ill of the Jesuits as possible."¹

One of the most revealing aspects of the campaign against the Jesuits at mid-century was the repeated emphasis on the secretive nature of their organization. Those inclined to speak "as much ill as possible" of the Jesuits came back time and again to their penchant for secrecy. Since

¹ Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Sur la Destruction des Jésuites en France, par un auteur désintéressé* (s.n. 1765), 78.

the Jesuits were known for their ultramontaniam, or intense loyalty to the pope, the idea of the secrets they learned in the confessional, especially secrets they possessed as royal confessors, led the Jansenists and others to fear the Jesuits' divided loyalty when they knew so many secrets. The Jesuits' relation to secrecy, at least as it was framed by the Jansenists, turned into one of the most powerful tools the Jansenists used against them. By mid-century, the Jesuits found themselves disbanded, expelled and labeled as foreigners for their alleged devotion to the pope above the nation.

First, however, it will be useful to know who exactly the Jansenists were, how their rivalry with the Jesuits in France began, and finally where it led. There is a long trail of scholarship connecting Jansenist thought to the ideology of the Revolution.² Despite the skepticism of the *philosophes* and the anticlericalism of the revolutionaries, few now deny the influence religion had on the political culture of the eighteenth century. It was in the early seventeenth century, though, that the Jansenists first appeared in France. In comparison to the Society of Jesus, the devotees of Cornelius Jansens had a somewhat more egalitarian approach to the church hierarchy and a more austere interpretation of Augustinian grace, closer to that of Calvinism but remaining within the confines of Catholicism in regard to dogma. They favored a biblical language of light versus darkness and the merits of "divulging" hidden truths. This pious and meditative group first appeared in France during the height of the Catholic Reformation, and came to be called Jansenists after the writings of Cornelius Jansens, a Dutch writer whose ideas

² See Monique Cottret, *Jansénismes et Lumières: pour un autre XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998); William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); B. Robert Kreiser, *Miracles, Convulsions, and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Eighteenth-century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Brian Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640-1799* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Dale Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Idem., *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

on grace were condemned by the pope. At the beginning, they were the least political and politically savvy people in the kingdom, preferring solitary confinement and prayer to worldly pursuits. Jansenists found adherents among many elite families including the high nobility and powerful bourgeois clans in the magistracy, both in the capital and in the provinces. They first provoked the ire of the Bourbon monarchy when they took issue with the kingdom siding with Protestant countries during the Thirty Years' War in order to challenge Habsburg hegemony.

As for the Jesuits, the Jansenist quarrel with that religious order began with theological disputes. One of the most famous Jansenist critiques of the Jesuit theological stance is Pascal's *Lettres provinciales*. Unlike d'Alembert who wrote with a High Enlightenment plague-on-both-your-houses attitude towards the Jansenists and the Jesuits, Pascal, a Jansenist writing in the 1650s, harnessed all of his wit and fame to attack the Jesuits' allegedly lax moral and theological stances. In Pascal's *Lettres*, a fictional gentleman seeks advice from his Jesuit confessor on various day-to-day issues. Predictably, and in ways that were very amusing to an educated reader in the mid-seventeenth century, the Jesuit uses all of his faculties and casuistry to justify his penitent living in the manner he pleases with as little religious rigor as possible so that the Jesuit will not lose him to a confessor of another order. To the Jansenists, the Jesuits were too indulgent in order to find favor with the powerful, and they were far too optimistic when it came to human nature. The Jansenists despised Jesuit molinism. Molinism, a concept first articulated by a sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit named Luis de Molina and then adopted by the order, was, put simply, the idea that despite the fall of Adam and Eve human beings could use their free will as an instrument towards redemption. While never fully able to achieve the perfection and innocence of humanity before the Fall, men and women could still approach that perfection through piety and good works. Molinism tended towards optimism because the underlying idea

was that most human beings could participate in their own salvation if they simply chose to do good.

The Jansenists had a very different opinion of post-lapsarian humanity, and therein lies an essential point in understanding the Jansenist worldview. Unlike the Jesuits, the Jansenists believed that human nature was nearly irrevocably corrupt.³ After the Fall, men and women were prone to evil and selfish impulses with the exception of a select few who, because of God's grace rather than their own choices, were destined for salvation. In this sense, Jansenism was close theologically to the Protestant idea of predestination. Unlike Protestants, however, Jansenists insisted on remaining within the Church, and they had an affinity for mysticism and devotion of the saints. If ignored and left to their own devices, Jansenists tended to prefer lives of prayer and meditation, and avoided worldly affairs, like Pascal who withdrew from the outside world to live a life of contemplation even though he had written the *Lettres provinciales*. They were not, at least at the beginning, even very interested in Gallicanism, the tradition of the church in France tolerating little influence and oversight from Rome though remaining Catholic. The Jansenists would soon become strong proponents of Gallicanism, however, due to disapproval and perceived persecution from Rome.

As for the government, Louis XIV was convinced that the kingdom had to be united under one king, one faith and one law. Henri IV's Edict of Nantes granting toleration to the Protestants had never sat well with him, and the Jansenists, whom he considered vaguely "republican" because they seemed to eschew hierarchy in their loose confederations, were perceived as a threat. Louis XIV was probably encouraged by the Jesuits who had positions at

³ Mita Choudhury elucidates this point well in her book on a Jesuit confessor's alleged seduction of his penitent. See Choudhury, *The Wanton Jesuit and the Wayward Saint: A Tale of Sex, Religion and Politics in Eighteenth-century France* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 146-7.

court to mistrust the Jansenists, but it was ultimately the king's decision, and his wariness of anything slightly heterodox, that led to the razing of the Jansenist convent Port-Royal towards the end of his reign. In the same period, the king requested a papal bull called *Unigenitus* that declared many of the beliefs of the Jansenists heretical. The Jansenists protested that there was nothing heretical to their beliefs and blamed the Jesuits for the bull, claiming that they had given the king the idea. The *parlements*, or law courts, meanwhile, refused to register the bull in France because their Gallicanism led them to perceive the bull as papal encroachment on French affairs even though it was the French government that had solicited the bull. Those who wished to see the bull appealed came to be called *appelants*.

From then on, the Jansenists began to take a keen interest in politics and forged an alliance with the *parlements*, especially the one in Paris where several lawyers had Jansenist leanings. The eighteenth century, then, became the period of politicization for the Jansenists, and it was also the time when Jansenists were sent in high numbers to the Bastille. The reality of persecution coupled with the Jansenist Manichaean worldview, which was reinforced by a biblical imagery of light and darkness, led them to believe that they were cherished by God, that their struggles were a sign of their righteousness, and that God would vindicate them in the end. Then, as if the Jansenists were not already afire with excitement and certitude that they had God on their side, the refusal of sacraments controversy galvanized them even further to enter the political arena. In the 1750s, the zealous archbishop of Paris, Christophe de Beaumont, began to refuse last rites to those suspected of being *appelants* unless they could find a non-Jansenist priest to certify that they were not Jansenists. The archbishop was not a Jesuit but he was sympathetic to them, and the Jansenists believed that the Jesuits were behind the refusal of sacraments to Jansenists and had secretly given de Beaumont the idea. And so, the refusal of

sacraments controversy only intensified the Jansenists' feelings of persecution, and they produced volumes of pamphlets denouncing the practice. The Paris *parlement* sided with the Jansenists and eventually succeeded in having the archbishop exiled to his country estate, but there he continued to issue orders to refuse last rites to Jansenists.

Because the Jansenists had found an ally in the *parlements* and had taken up the banner of Gallicanism, they began to argue that they were upholding not only the interests of French Jansenists, but also the French nation over foreign interests or selfish impulses. Just as the *parlements*, along with other groups, were articulating the idea of the “nation,” the Jansenists were increasingly joining their cause with the *parlements* on the basis that France had to be protected from foreign meddling. It was also in the 1750s that the Seven Years' War began. Countries on both sides of the conflict began to develop their national rhetoric, extolling their own particular national characteristics and condemning those of their rivals.⁴ More and more, writers and thinkers began to speak of patriotism, emphasizing the idea that true virtue lay in being a patriot, that is, selflessly devoting oneself to the nation and privileging national interests over personal ones. Since the Jansenists defended Gallicanism, it made sense for them to use the idea of Jesuit ultramontanism to argue that the Jesuits were foreigners in their own country, that they were not part of the “nation” since their loyalty lay elsewhere. They were incapable of truly belonging because they placed loyalty and obedience to their order and the pope above all else, and furthermore, it was a blind obedience, loyalty without question, which rendered the Jesuits

⁴ See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Frans de Bruyn and Shaun Regan, eds., *The Culture of the Seven Years' War: Empire, Identity and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Mark H. Danley and Patrick J. Speelman, eds., *The Seven Years' War: Global Views*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Jay Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: the Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

inclined towards despotism. (Jansenist claims of Jesuits' penchant for despotism never seemed to conflict in their eyes with the idea that the Jesuits had regicidal and insurrectional tendencies.)

From the 1750s on, patriotism and what it meant--and the first seedlings of what would become nationalism--became popular and often urgent topics of discussion and pamphleteering. The Jansenists and the *parlements* contributed to this growing discussion, connecting their Gallicanism to the idea that there was an ancient contract between the king and the nation which the *parlements* were meant to uphold and protect. Therefore they had to articulate what the "nation" was, and began to speak of a primordial French people and French character. The Jansenists supported and fed this trend since a developing nationalism would help them attack the Jesuits. Spurred on by their feelings of persecution and by the political atmosphere in a time of war, labeling the Jesuits as foreign became an effective tool in attacking them. Because of the Jansenist tendency to view their world in terms of light and darkness, good and evil, locked in a struggle prefigured by Scripture, they were also convinced that God would vindicate them and bring all evil deeds to light. And no one was more secretive, conniving and wicked in their eyes than the Jesuits. To the Jansenists, the Jesuits had influence because they glided into confessionals and courts and whispered in the ears of the powerful, learning everyone's secrets while keeping their own counsel. They gained power unofficially and illegitimately, and this was even more dangerous to the French nation because their loyalties were not to France.

Before they knew what had happened, the Jesuits found their days numbered. The Jansenists had developed a logic of attacking the Jesuits in which their foreignness could be linked to their secrecy, and secrecy to illegitimacy. Furthermore, this form of attack had an added sting: the Jesuits became the foreign "other," the foil to the French patriot-citizen. Countless scholars have pointed out the importance of dichotomies, even if they were false or imagined, in

the development of nationalism. The Jansenist proto-nationalist discourse was not the full-fledged nationalism of the nineteenth century, but it had much in common with more developed nationalisms in that they knew that it was important to pinpoint an “other” against which to define themselves and the nation. Dale Van Kley has rightly argued that it was not the *philosophes* and growing dechristianization that led to the fall of the Jesuits, rather, the Jansenists and their proto-nationalism brought about the expulsion of the Jesuits. In studies of other regions from which the Jesuits were expelled during the same period, scholars have looked at how the Jesuits had gotten in the way of “modernization” in Portugal, for example, that is, other groups in the Portuguese government, wary of the Jesuits’ close alliance with the monarchy and their power in provincial centers, maneuvered to have them removed in order to strengthen centralization.⁵ Similarly, French Jesuits represented a more traditional value system that saw merit in secrecy but was losing ground in the political climate of the eighteenth century. I argue that the Jansenists successfully labeled Jesuits as the “other” in contrast to the French citizen, the shadowy evildoers in contrast to the Gallican Jansenists who were Catholic but loyal to the nation. The Jansenists also portrayed themselves as transparent because they eschewed the covert ways of the Jesuits and advocated bringing everything to light. Moreover, Jesuit secrecy reinforced their status as illegitimate foreigners, and helped the Jansenists make the connection between their proto-nationalism and transparency. It also helped the Jansenists launch the idea

⁵ For more on the argument of Jesuits and modernization, see Sabine Pavone, “The History of Anti-Jesuitism: National and Global Dimensions,” in *The Jesuits and Globalization: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Thomas Banchoff and José Casanova, (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2016). See also Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright, eds., *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context: Causes, Events and Consequences*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Catherine M. Northeast, *The Parisian Jesuits and the Enlightenment, 1700-1762* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991); John W. O’Malley, S.J., ed., *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540-1773*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); John W. O’Malley, S.J., *Saints or Devils Incarnate: Studies in Jesuit History* (Brill, 2013).

that for a nation's own good and survival, a villainous "other"--the negative of the transparent patriot--had to be expelled.

The Jansenist Worldview and the *Monita Secreta*

Because of their particular take on divine grace and humanity after the Fall, the corrupt nature of human beings was a central component in the Jansenist worldview. Human beings were naturally prone to evil, could do almost nothing towards their own salvation, and only a small minority would gain heaven due to God's grace, not their own actions on earth. One well-known seventeenth-century Jansenist, Antoine Arnauld, wrote that "the Free Will suffices for evil; and it is sufficient for doing good only if it is aided by the sovereign and almighty good..."⁶ The world was thus a corrupt place full of wickedness and vice, and human beings, prone to evil, could only do good if aided by divine grace. Another Jansenist of the same period, Pasquier Quesnel, believed that in contrast, the theology of the Jesuits was "soft" and "human," a "theology that is gentle,...insinuating, accommodated to the reason and ordinary ideas of men; that sheds grace abroad in all directions, from an abundant supply; that renders the free will master of its own operation and of the very operation of grace itself; that places the salvation of people in their own hands; that widens the road to heaven... and since they always have a good opinion of the dispositions of all Christians, they will send [these folk] ...to the Holy Table."⁷ If most human beings were corrupt and could not be relied upon to act according to Christian principles, then it made sense for upstanding and Christian citizens (which is how the Jansenists saw themselves)

⁶ Antoine Arnauld, *Seconde Apologie*, quoted in Ephraim Radner, *Spirit and Nature: The Saint-Médard Miracles in Eighteenth-century Jansenism* (New York: Crossroad Publications, 2002), 33.

⁷ Pasquier Quesnel, *Abregé de l'Histoire de la Congregation de Auxiliis, C'est-à-dire, Des secours de la Grace de Dieu*, quoted in Radner, *Spirit and Nature*, 2002, 39, footnote 26.

to keep an eye on others who tried to hide what they were doing, even the powerful or those in government, and to be suspicious of goings-on behind closed doors. It is true that Jansenist pamphleteers in the early eighteenth century became masters of subterfuge in publishing their forbidden tracts and underground newspapers, but their secrecy was a necessary evil, an expedient in a time when the state was persecuting them and they felt they had no other choice. Despite their skill at publishing and distributing on the black market, Jansenist works are full of suspicion towards secrecy, and Jansenist writers were nearly obsessed with Jesuit secrecy. They were convinced that the Jesuits hid much from outsiders. Jansenists also believed that one kept secrets mainly because they hid something shameful or nefarious. At the same time, they believed that the Jesuits secretly exercised their influence from the confessional and elsewhere, subtly manipulating the powerful when they had no right to do so. If proceedings and decision-making were more transparent, then those trying to influence government illegitimately would lose their power.

Jansenists believed in a struggle of light versus darkness, good versus evil, and they had little interest in nuance or ambiguity. There were those on the side of Truth in a religious sense, and those who were trying to obstruct or obscure it.⁸ One of the Jansenists' favorite themes in pamphlets against the Jesuits was the Society's skill at penetrating others' secrets while simultaneously keeping their own. In one Jansenist pamphlet of the 1730s, the author explained what he believed to be the Jesuit strategy in accumulating as much influence as possible through secretive means. According to him, the skill with which the Jesuits arrived at their goals was "surprising and almost impenetrable."⁹ Furthermore, the Jesuits had a recognizable and well-

⁸ See Choudhury, *Wanton Jesuit*, 2015, 146-7.

⁹ "Instructions aux Princes sur la manière qui se gouvernent les Jésuites, traduite du Latin pour l'utilité du Public par un religieux désintéressé" (s.n., 1734), 50. Archives des Jésuites, C-Pa 23.

established pattern for gathering others secrets and thus increasing their power. “First of all,” explained the pamphlet’s author, “Jesuits are the confessors of a large number of the nobility in Catholic countries; they do not even admit to their confessionals anyone who is poor or lowly of either sex. Moreover, they strive to be the confessors of rulers, and by this design they are able to penetrate a prince’s plans, resolutions and inclinations. They then inform the General or his immediate subordinates in Rome... Is it not plain to see what harm they can do to princes when their own goals conflict with theirs?”¹⁰ According to the author, the Jesuits could render their General more informed of princes and their states than the princes themselves. “By means of confessions and simple questioning, [the Jesuits] know the most intimate secrets of many subjects, and know who is attached to a prince and who is not...”¹¹ Apparently, Jesuit confessors had no qualms about breaking the vow of secrecy of the confessional, according to the author, and used it simply as an information gathering tool to quietly increase their power and influence across Europe, usually at the expense of the kingdoms they had infiltrated.

In his massive, multi-volume anti-Jesuit diatribe, the Jansenist lawyer, Louis-Adrien Le Paige, visited the same themes. Like the anonymous author of the pamphlet mentioned above, Le Paige explained to his readers the strategy of the Jesuits. Le Paige wrote that the Jesuits never ceased promoting the “errors of Molina” and trying to eliminate anyone who stood in their way. They had used all sorts of “secret resources and strategies” in order to “succeed in their pernicious designs.”¹² Le Paige added that “in attracting to the Society both sovereigns and the people, it is above all essential not to let anyone penetrate into the goals or character of the

¹⁰ “Instructions aux Princes,” 50.

¹¹ “Instructions aux Princes,” 50.

¹² Louis-Adrien Le Paige, *Histoire generale de la naissance et des progrès de la Compagnie de Jesus, et analyse de ses constitutions et privileges, Vol. I* (Paris: 1761), 97-8. Georgetown Woodstock Library LAU Woodstock SpColl 271.91 C83

Institute [or constitution of the Jesuits]. Thus, [their constitution, or set of rules and guidelines] is a mystery that the Jesuits hide with the greatest care, and their rules even require that they hide them, which proves that this constitution contains things which they would not like to be known.”¹³ Here, Le Paige insinuated that if anyone hid something so carefully and completely, it was only because it would cause them shame if revealed. “Thus,” continued Le Paige, “though the constitution of the Jesuits, the addendums they’ve made, and the larger part of the bulls on which they base their privileges are printed, we cannot flatter ourselves in thinking we can know the constitution to its very heart. It is a general rule among the Jesuits to make of their constitution an inaccessible mystery to outsiders, and not even all Jesuits are privy to those secrets.”¹⁴ In making this claim, Le Paige and others like him, created a failsafe attack on the Jesuits: they did not even let junior members of the order have full knowledge of their secrets and so naturally lesser members of the order would deny that secret rules existed, having no knowledge of them. Their denials thus only reinforced suspicions of their secrets.

According to Le Paige, one could only assume that the Jesuits had a secret set of rules since they supposedly had strict rules regarding secrecy. Le Paige wrote that one of their rules was “not to communicate to outsiders about either the Constitution or the other books and writings that contain the rules and privileges of the Society. It would be difficult to conceive, then,” reasoned Le Paige, “that these strict guidelines only concern the printed Constitution and the other Jesuit books that have been published... These strict rules thus principally concern the secret Constitution and those other mysterious writings called *Scripta* which the Jesuits reserve

¹³ Le Paige, *Histoire generale, Vol. III*, 1761, 311-13.

¹⁴ Le Paige, *Histoire générale*, 1761, 311-13.

for their eyes only.”¹⁵ Again, Le Paige applied a logic similar to that used by conspiracy theorists, and many Jansenists did wholeheartedly believe in a Jesuit conspiracy for world domination.¹⁶ The only reason that the Jesuits would be so secretive was that they had something terrible or at least unsavory to hide. Since they had published their Constitution and nothing very incriminating could be found in it, there must be a secret one that contained their true motives and their nefarious strategies. To further bolster this idea, Le Paige insisted that not even all Jesuits knew of these secret rules, and so when some Jesuits sincerely denied their existence, it was because they had not become privy to the secret.

Many Jansenists believed that the Jesuits’ secret set of rules, often called the *Monita secreta*, (Latin for secret instructions), contained their most guarded and valued, tried-and-true guidelines for accumulating power and influence and furthering their goals. These secret rules appeared several times in print in the eighteenth century in France and abroad, often with introductions asserting the veracity of the *Monita secreta*, including the supposed prophecies of medieval saints who had foretold the coming of the Jesuits and their destruction. The *Monita secreta* read like a traditional set of guidelines for a religious order on the surface, but a closer look reveals a clever satire and critique of what was seen as Jesuit secrecy and hypocrisy. The guidelines are shameless in their privileging of power and self-promotion over probity all while maintaining the dry tone of an innocent set of religious rules. Jansenists insisted that the *Monita secreta* was authentic and that the more Jesuits denied its authenticity, the more it confirmed that the rulebook was genuine.

¹⁵ Le Paige, *Histoire générale*, 1761, 313-14.

¹⁶ For more on conspiracy theories in the eighteenth century, see Barry Coward and Julian Swann, eds., *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories in Early Modern Europe: from the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), and Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton, eds., *Conspiracy and the French Revolution*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

The *Monita secreta* was actually the work of a Polish ex-Jesuit who wrote it in 1612 in order to attack the order after having become disillusioned or discontented with it. The bishop of Krakow had the book condemned in 1616 and then the Church placed it on the Index in 1621. The *Monita secreta* nevertheless surfaced from time to time in French translation, usually during times of Jansenist frenzy, when they marshaled the full force of their underground press during crises such as the controversy over Unigenitus or the refusal of sacraments. One French copy from 1718 was entitled, “Translation of the Monita Secreta, or the Secret Intrigues of the Jesuits.” Most French copies of the secret rules tended to resemble each other closely with only a little variation in the introductions. In the introduction to the 1718 version, the anonymous author wrote that the Jesuits will always “try to abolish truth, and they might almost be able to achieve it since these sorts of people can easily transform themselves: with pagans they are pagans, with atheists they are atheists, and with Jews they are Jews... They will be admitted into the councils of princes... They will enchant them to the point of convincing them to reveal their most hidden secrets...”¹⁷ According to the author, the Jesuits had no shame in hobnobbing and even blending in with the worst sort of people in order to further their goals. One particular incident, for example, the Chinese rites controversy, put the Jesuits in hot water in the late seventeenth century. Jesuit missionaries in China were accused of blending too much of the Catholic Mass with Confucian rites in order to attract the Chinese. This was often cited as a negative example of Jesuit flexibility and lax judgment. It did not help their reputation, in Europe at least, that Jesuit missionaries adopted Chinese dress in China in order to better mix with elites and intelligentsia in that country and attract new Christians.

¹⁷ “Traduction des Monita secreta, autrement les intrigues secrètes des Jésuites,” (Turin: Chez Jacques Daniel, 1718). AJ, C-Pa 23.

Along with being able to “transform themselves” at will, Jesuits were accused of a myriad of underhanded and surreptitious methods in achieving their goal of greater power and influence. “The following text,” read one introduction to a 1765 copy of the *Monita secreta*, “... has been stifled since birth by these Fathers [the Jesuits]: share this pamphlet with others, and it will serve to make known their politics and strategies.”¹⁸ From the first pages, the author made sure to underscore Jesuit duplicity and hypocrisy. In the first chapter, Jesuits are instructed to always maintain “an exterior modesty, in order to edify and impress outsiders...”¹⁹ According to the pamphlet, the Jesuits never said anything with candor or performed any action with sincerity. If they wanted something done, they made sure to use subterfuge, especially making use of someone else as a pawn so that the deed could not be traced to their own order. If they wanted to expel someone from their order, they found ways to make it unpleasant for that member to remain rather than simply asking him to go.

Many of the chapters in the alleged secret rulebook focused on Jesuits earning the trust of the rulers and elites. “Experience teaches,” read the instructions on influencing rulers, “that princes are fond of those ecclesiastics who, far from reprimanding them severely for their odious actions, excuse their misdeeds or even interpret them in the best light.”²⁰ When it came to royal marriages between close relations, the *Monita secreta* instructed its readers to sanction them even if God might disapprove in order to remain in the king’s good graces and to please foreign princesses who might be sympathetic, thus helping Jesuits in foreign courts. Jesuits at court were even instructed to give gifts to ladies-in-waiting and win their confidence in order to better know

¹⁸ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*

¹⁹ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*

²⁰ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*

a princess's secrets, according to the rulebook. "Be sure," continued the rules in the chapter on influence at court, "to adopt the most conciliatory and easy sentiments with regards to the spiritual direction of the Great [i.e. the king and elites], which will leave the most liberty to their consciences... In this manner, princes and lords will leave their old confessors to place themselves under our direction..."²¹ The guidelines on confession continued, saying that the Jesuit confessor must guide princes "in such a manner that their direction seems only to have the prince's good conscience as a goal... but little by little, through their adroit spiritual instruction, [the Jesuits] will enter into political and exterior government... They will say, however, that they do not at all want to meddle in government apart from making a remonstrance here and there to the prince on matters of justice because it would be their duty... Above all, it is essential to have the prince choose the principal members of government who will be friends to the Society [of Jesus]." ²² Here the author of the false rulebook underscored the most pressing fears of the enemies of the Jesuits, that they insinuated themselves into royal courts and the houses of the powerful in order to influence politics at large, not confining themselves to spiritual matters. In the same chapter, Jesuits were also instructed to find favor with bishops and powerful clergy, especially those sent to Rome as ambassadors so that the ambassador will take a French Jesuit along instead of the member of another religious order.

The *Monita secreta* also explained the underhanded and indirect methods Jesuits used to achieve their ends. They wanted to have members of the court under their sway who were in powerful positions, but they would not suggest a promotion themselves. "We will not name them ourselves to the prince," read the rules, "but rather, we will have someone friendly to the Society

²¹ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*, 9.

²² BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*, 17.

who has the confidence of the prince make the suggestion... We will charge others to take action for us and act under their names.”²³ According to the *Monita secreta*, the Jesuits’ indirect and clandestine methods helped them to be particularly cruel and vindictive as well. If a person of high rank had taken in someone who had been expelled from the order, the rules instructed the Jesuits to reveal to that high-ranking individual all the worst things they knew of the person taking refuge. In attacking the character of someone who had left their order, they could easily refer to incriminating things that individual had said about himself in his examination of conscience, which he would have had to perform and write down when he first entered the order. If the person of rank was still not amenable, the Jesuits were to try to pull some strings with other “people of distinction.” The rules told them, “If we cannot entirely succeed, at least we will be able to do as much damage as possible, ...and we will expose the reasons for his dismissal with a great deal of exaggeration.”²⁴ This supposed strategy was another means of attacking the Jesuits in their use and abuse of others’ secrets. Like confession, the examination of conscience was not something to be shared, but the Jesuits as portrayed in the *Monita secreta* had no such scruples when it came to using information that ought to be secret. Furthermore, in revealing others’ secrets the Jesuits were not advocating any form of transparency since they did so only selectively. They kept the secrets of others amongst themselves and those to whom they chose to reveal them. Secrets were instruments to be used against one’s enemies, and keeping one’s own secrets was still paramount.

The afterword of the *Monita secreta* set a common trap for the Jesuits, asserting that they would always deny its existence. Thus, the more the Jesuits denied it, the more readers could be

²³ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*, 19.

²⁴ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*, 41.

sure that it existed since the *Monita secreta* instructed them to deny it. The *Monita secreta* decreed, “Let all superiors scrupulously guard these secret guidelines and only communicate them to other fathers who can be trusted... Do not have them be established as rules and writings of the Society but only as advice that a few of our wisest and most accomplished have bequeathed to us. If it so happens that outsiders learn of these guidelines, they must be vehemently denied, even to the point of having those among us who are not aware of the secret rules swear an oath to that effect.”²⁵ According to the afterward, not even all Jesuits were aware of the existence of the *Monita secreta*, and so their fervent denials coupled with the alleged existence of the secret rules made sense to those who were suspicious or hostile to the Jesuits. The afterward also reaffirmed Jesuit secrecy and spite. It instructed Jesuits to always “oppose these particular guidelines to the general rules and regulations which are printed and which go contrary to these secret rules. Finally, we must be sure to know if one of our own will not accept them or has lost a copy, and no superior will be negligent in guarding secrets of such grave consequence. If the slightest suspicion falls over someone, we must have him expelled from the Society without mercy.”²⁶ The *Monita secreta* was therefore asserting that it was more important to the Jesuits to keep their secrets and their power than to protect their own.

The Jesuits knew, of course, that Jansenists were circulating copies of the *Monita secreta*, but often their denials did them little good. Jesuits could legitimately indicate their (authentic) constitution as a sign of their true intentions, and showcase many examples of their actions that could fall under the umbrella of public utility, a concept so favored by the *philosophes*, but they were nevertheless up against a die-hard opposition. Furthermore, their strategies of defense

²⁵ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*, 59.

²⁶ BA, MS 12264, *Instructions secrètes de la Compagnie de Jesus, tirées de ses constitutions, 1765.*

hampered them in a world where public opinion was now heralded as the new great power and force for good. While the Jansenists had learned to excel in influencing public opinion, the Jesuits still employed more traditional tactics like appealing to powerful patrons, and defended, to their detriment, the merits of secrecy.

The Problematic Jesuit Counter-attack

The Jesuits and their supporters did not remain idle in the face of these attacks, but the form that their counter-attacks took sometimes did them more harm than good. Many of the problems with the Jesuit counter-offensive were the very things of which they were accused or suspected: secrecy, but also a smattering of elitism. At a time when new ideas about patriotism began to propound a more egalitarian idea of citizenship and virtue, and when Jansenists were fighting “despotism” along with the *parlements*, Jesuits clearly looked down on Jansenist supporters whom they viewed as riffraff while they enjoyed the support of the king and powerful bishops, the same elite that had often antagonized lower Jansenist clergy. Jesuits also appealed to these powerful patrons for protection while Jansenists used their energetic pamphleteers and underground presses to marshal public opinion in their favor. As Sarah Maza has shown, by the mid-eighteenth century the idea of appealing to public opinion in court cases was slowly replacing the more traditional strategy of asking a powerful patron for help.²⁷ More and more, people in eighteenth-century France believed that public opinion, rather than those in high positions, ought to decide such issues, even in matters of grave importance.

To add to that, the Jesuits continued to defend their use of secrecy even though they published their constitution and always denied the existence of any secret rulebook. They also

²⁷ See Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Cause Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

intelligently defended their efforts as educators on the grounds of social utility. Nevertheless, their old-fashioned tactics, their reputation for secrecy and refusal to condemn it outright, and their somewhat aristocratic veneer all condemned them in the eyes of both the Jansenists and those who were siding more and more with the *parlements*. The *parlements* were not exactly anti-elitist, but the Jansenists nevertheless persisted in portraying the negative aspects of the Jesuits' supposed elitism.

One example of the accusation that Jesuits favored and condoned aristocratic extravagances—especially sensitivity to matters of honor—is a short poem from the 1730s mocking the Jesuits. Addressing the Jesuits, the speaker declared, “You would challenge a man/Simply for a piece of fruit/When you can only save your honor/ By killing in the most cruel manner/Even for kings you will defend/Without impunity this doctrine.”²⁸ The anonymous author added in a footnote, “If one can save his honor only by killing, it is permitted... Such is the doctrine of all the Jesuits.”²⁹ Jesuits denied that they would ever condone duels or killing for revenge which was condemned by the Catholic Church, but their reputation for lax attitudes towards the nobility and their culture of honor remained.

Furthermore, Jansenists often portrayed Jesuits as having a kind of elitist disdain towards anyone but their high-ranking penitents and patrons, and sometimes Jesuits inadvertently corroborated these claims. In 1732, the Jansenists circulated the news that a Jesuit named Father Chamillart had died just after rejecting his own order and declaring himself an *appellant*, that is, someone who wished to see Unigenitus appealed. The Jesuit priest in question had in fact not died and had certainly never become an *appellant*, and he published an angry letter denying these

²⁸ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

²⁹ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

claims. “The Jansenists,” he wrote, “have dared to spread throughout the kingdom and even beyond that I had died an *appelant*, that in deciding the place of my burial there had been a great dispute between Jesuits in favor of appealing and those against... Those against, supported by the lieutenant general of police supposedly, had me deprived of the ecclesiastical sepulcher and buried in the garden... I am, by the grace of God, alive. I was not even ill.”³⁰ Exasperated and irritated, Father Chamillart related that according to these reports, his body once buried began to emit a “sweet and blessed odor which had the power to cure maladies of both body and soul.”³¹ He knew that they had begun to compare his tomb to that of the Jansenist deacon François de Pâris in the cemetery of St. Médard where recently Jansenists of all walks of life had famously gathered, many of them convulsing in religious ecstasy and reporting miraculous cures. Father Chamillart referred to them with sarcasm and disdain, adding that it was too bad that his alleged burial place was not open to the “canaille” as the cemetery of St. Médard had been.

“There would have been a crowd of pilgrims,” at his tomb, continued Father Chamillart, “and the *convulsionnaires* would have been galvanized anew to better jump and leap upon my tomb,” and one convent had even offered a novena in his honor, according to the report. “It is only in our century that such extravagant notions can take hold,” he added, “...[and] one can thus judge the veracity of the miracles attributed to so-called saints of [the Jansenists] by observing those which were attributed to me.”³² Full of contempt and frustration, the Jesuit priest, Chamillart, dismissed as spurious all claims of Jansenist miracles and sanctity. “A Jesuit who had died an *appelant* would be a great triumph for them, and despairing of finding one in reality,

³⁰ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

³¹ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

³² Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

the choice fell onto me though I have no idea why. Accustomed as they are to churning out the most absurd stories... the paradox of a Jesuit *appelant* would serve to divert a public that was becoming bored with the scandalous and insipid stories of the St. Médard cemetery.”³³ The Jansenists knew, and perhaps Father Chamillart had an inkling as well, that maintaining public interest was essential to the survival of the Jansenist cause. Moreover, the Jansenists were both relentless and skilled in attracting attention with their endless publications. Father Chamillart only expressed contempt for their publications without perhaps realizing that publicity also gave Jansenists power.

The Jansenists were guilty in his eyes not only because they did not respect the truth but also because they did not appear to respect the distinctions of birth and rank. The “Jansenist gazettes,” he wrote in the same long-winded letter, were full of baseless accusations against the Jesuits, and their pamphlets and printed stories were brimming with calumnies that respected “neither rank nor authority” and were full of “insolence beyond belief...”³⁴ One of the Jansenists’ worst offenses, then, was not their misleading the public with falsehoods but the lack of observance of rank or privilege in their attacks, a free-for-all that left anyone who might be against them an open target, which was both astonishing and frightening to someone like Father Chamillart who found much to be lauded in the status quo. Father Chamillart then went on to complain of the Jansenist treatment of Jesuits in general, passionately defending Jesuit service both in education and charity and decrying the accusations they had been forced to endure. He wrote,

“The [Jansenists] make every effort with a myriad of strategies to render us odious in the eyes of a certain public; they impute wickedness which we have not

³³ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

³⁴ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

committed, they stifle word of the good that we have done... Several of the men who criticize us forget that they owe their education to us. They hold no worth to the time and labor of our professors in the dust of the classrooms, nor to the zeal of our preachers in delivering sermons, nor to the sweat and suffering of our missionaries in barbarous lands, nor even to the blood of so many of our martyrs shed for the faith nor for the courage of more than forty Jesuits who died recently, victims of their own charity, while tending to plague victims in Marseilles, Aix and Toulon, where it is clear that they have only too quickly forgotten their service...”³⁵

Instead, the Jansenists eviscerated the Jesuits “cruelly in their discourses and in their pamphlets.”³⁶ In the course of his long letter, Father Chamillart transitioned from sarcasm and contempt to passionate, self-righteous anger, accusing the public of ingratitude and a short memory.

Father Chamillart was writing in the 1730s, but in the 1760s everything truly began to unravel for the Jesuits. In 1761, the Jesuits had lost a shipment of goods coming back from the West Indies which nearly bankrupted a firm in Lyon who sued them for their losses. Despite the Paris *parlement*'s Jansenist leanings, the Jesuits brought the case to this court in Paris believing that the evidence was in their favor and that they would receive a favorable ruling. They did not expect, though, that the indefatigable Jansenist lawyer, Le Paige, and others of his party would use this case as an opportunity to examine the legality of the Jesuits' presence in France, arguing that they had never formally been accepted in the kingdom and using this inquiry to cloak the order in a mist of foreignness and suspicion. Louis XV wished to protect them, but he was already contending with his *parlement* over financing the Seven Years' War. One by one, provincial courts began to follow the one in Paris in mandating restrictions on the Jesuits such as trying to expel them from their schools and hand them over to the local universities who were

³⁵ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

³⁶ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

often the local rivals of the Jesuits in a given town. Quickly, the Jesuits faced other restrictions as well. Soon they were not allowed to take on any new novices, cutting off the future of the Society in France. Then they were required to take an oath disavowing their obedience to their general in Rome and even agreeing that their own interpretations of theology were in error, or else they were to leave France. Many Jesuits chose to leave and face hardship and poverty rather than take such an oath. By 1764, all Jesuits who had not sworn the oath, renounced their order and become secular clergy, or given up the cloth entirely, were forcibly expelled from France. The expulsion particularly caused hardships since French Jesuits were not allowed to live communally and pool their resources, or to communicate with their superiors.³⁷ Louis XV's attempts to salvage the order with only a few amendments to their constitution failed as he had, unfortunately for the Jesuits, harder fights ahead of him with the *parlement*. The Jesuits were a sacrifice he reluctantly made in hopes of gaining further support for financing the war, though the war was over in 1763. The force of public opinion had played its role as well since the Jansenists had successfully worked to turn it in their favor.

To many observing these events, though, the expulsion of the Jesuits seemed astounding. By the eighteenth century, the Jesuits were interwoven in the fabric of French society. They had schools, seminaries and churches throughout France and these were often the center and economic mainstay of a community. While the Jesuits were attacked for their ambitions in the capital and the royal court, the vast majority of their members were to be found in the provinces.

Given that the bulk of French Jesuit labor took place in small towns as educators, Jesuits were frustrated and flabbergasted by the obsession with their secrecy and their supposed inclination for both despotism and regicide. In their supplicatory letter to Louis XV, the Jesuits

³⁷ See D. Gillian Thomas, "French Jesuits, 1756-1814" *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context*, ed. Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 187.

lamented the actions the Paris and provincial *parlements* were taking against them, and once again reaffirmed their statement that they had never preached regicide, though it was clear that they did not fully understand why they even had to address the issue. “We are less concerned with the ignominies that your *Parlement* of Paris heaps on our name and the suspicions that they spread over our doctrine than the safety of the sacred person of Kings, and so we humbly beg Your Majesty to receive the declaration of our sentiments on such an important point,” they wrote.³⁸ The Jesuits already enjoyed the king’s protection and support, but they felt that it was necessary to cement their loyalty to the king to ensure continued protection. They told Louis XV, “We hold, believe and teach that it is never permitted under any circumstances to concoct any plot and commit any attempt whether direct or indirect against the authority of the sovereign. We detest as execrable any doctrine opposed to that.”³⁹ They were emphatic in their repudiation of any form of regicide and rebellion, though the king was already convinced that they were not dangerous. Those who believed in the Jesuit doctrine of regicide: the *parlements*, the Jansenists, and the public they were rousing with their pamphlets, found themselves united by religious fervor, Gallicanism, or a simple dislike for the Jesuits.

The Jesuits knew that attacks against them usually focused on the Jesuit support for regicide, and the unconditional obedience owed to their General. If the General of the order decreed that a ruler had to be killed, the Jansenists believed that Jesuit loyalty would lead them to carry out such an order. On the contrary, declared the Jesuits, “for us, obedience has just limits. According to our constitution, we must obey only when there is no sin in the commandments given us. All those who have been educated at our schools, whose consciences we have directed

³⁸ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

³⁹ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

and those who have attended our public or private lectures can stand witness... We will console ourselves, Sire, for our present misfortunes if Your Majesty will deign to accept the protestation that we lay at your feet.”⁴⁰ The Jesuits had certainly published similar statements and hoped to circulate them throughout the kingdom, but they still relied on and trusted the king who they believed would remain a shelter for any storm.

While the Jesuits appealed to the king, others who defended them knew of the power of public opinion and feared for what that meant for the future. In 1762, seeing the Jesuits even more curtailed by the *parlements*, some of the “faithful” magistrates from the court in Provence wrote a *mémoire* in their defense. While the *parlements* of Brittany and Normandy were the most vociferous and aggressive towards the Jesuits, in the south the feelings were more mixed. The magistrates feared that everything the Jesuits had suffered up to that point made everyone “feel that the hatred of *parlements* was more to be feared than the protection of kings was to be sought.”⁴¹ The fact that the Jesuits had received little protection and refuge from the onslaught was disturbing since it pointed to a weakness on Louis XV’s part and a troubling power on the part of a Jansenist-inspired public. The Jansenists and their allies, according to the Provençal magistrates, were attempting to destroy the Society “without humanity and without any regard for decency.” Then the magistrates drew from history to illustrate their point. Though the Jesuits were often accused of regicide and of allying with the ultra-Catholic and extremist League during the Wars of Religion, the magistrates pointed out that most of France’s *parlements* had been *ligueurs* following the lead of the Parisian law court. Even the *parlement* of Provence had been *ligueur* with the exception of seven magistrates who could not be convinced to follow the

⁴⁰ Catholic University Mullen Library, Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

⁴¹ Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v. 26 *Mémoire de M. le Président d’Eguilles*, (22 Oct. 1762)

others. They withdrew to the tiny village of Digne and declared themselves “against the *parlement* without any resource or support other than the admiration of the people for their courageous fidelity.”⁴² The magistrates considered themselves the heirs and imitators of those seven magistrates from the sixteenth century. It was those “faithful” magistrates, like the Jesuits, who were truly loyal to the Crown and the least likely to advocate regicide. Like Father Chamillart, they accused the Jansenists and their allies in the *parlements* of having a short memory. The *parlements* wished to be the representatives of the nation, but it was not too long ago, the magistrates pointed out, that they had represented the groups in France that had been the most amenable to regicide.

An anonymous defender of the Jesuits, perhaps a Jesuit himself, addressed the historical issue of the League as well. “The adversaries of the Jesuits love to remind us of these times of trouble and confusion,” the author wrote.⁴³ According to the author, it did no good to talk of the time of the League since many foreigners had come to France, then, and become involved in the League, not to mention other religious orders. Some might believe, wrote the author, that the Jesuits still had “designs and goals resembling that of the League. We know that there does not remain the least vestige of the League in the century in which we are living, and that if there is to be found in our time any spark of fanaticism, it would certainly not be among the Jesuits that we would find it,” added the author, clearly referring to the Jansenists.⁴⁴

The author then went on to defend the internal Jesuit culture, as it were, in terms of both its secrecy and flexibility, which also served to protect the Jesuits from accusations of despotism.

⁴² Rare Books Clementine 273.7 M678 v. 26 *Mémoire de M. le Président d’Eguilles*, (22 Oct. 1762)

⁴³ Archives des Jésuites, C-Pa-61 *Mémoire sur l’établissement et l’état des Jésuites en France*.

⁴⁴ AJ, C-Pa-61 *Mémoire sur l’établissement et l’état des Jésuites en France*.

If there was any disagreement or small problem of discipline within the order, the author wrote, “it would be better to hide it or to tolerate it than to foment discord under the pretext of trying to achieve a greater good.”⁴⁵ Here the author defended tolerance and even dissimulation when it came to minor problems, at least, since the Jesuits privileged smooth relations and continuity over the disruption that might come from digging into a problem, exactly the contrary of a Jansenist’s approach. The author also assured his readers that the Jesuit regime was “full of regard and kind attentions... If the general of the Jesuits is a monarch as many falsely assert since he is below the pope and the general congregation, this monarchical power is tempered by the long exercise of obedience that he would have had to perform before he achieved this rank...”⁴⁶ The author’s defense of the Jesuits revealed a cultural difference: Jesuits favored flexibility and even dissimulation insofar as it could help avoid discord, while Jansenists were certainly more rigid but advocated bringing problems to light instead of suppressing and tolerating them.

Those who defended the Jesuits defended secrecy as well. The General Assembly of the Clergy had written a formal letter to Louis XV in 1762 arguing that it was folly to restrict and expel the Jesuits because of their services in education and because they were useful as a depository of secrets, that is, as trusted confessors. First, they emphasized the essential good that education did for a state, and the chaos and detriment to the youth of the country that would result if the Jesuits were forced to close their schools. “Education is the lifeforce of a state; it is education that helps prepare the next generation for the future, and it is in schools where we find

⁴⁵ AJ, C-Pa-61 *Mémoire sur l’établissement et l’état des Jésuites en France*.

⁴⁶ AJ, C-Pa-61 *Mémoire sur l’établissement et l’état des Jésuites en France*

the formation of superior men who may one day enlighten or lead their nation.”⁴⁷ Here the bishops promoted an Enlightenment-era progressive take on education: the future leaders and great achievers of the nation would emerge from its schools which were certainly not the exclusive domain of the nobility. For the bishops, the Jesuits were the guides and conduits of this education and the future progress of the nation. They referred to the Jesuits as “these ministers of the Gospel who are charged to guide the people in the way of salvation, these faithful and virtuous citizens... the ornament of the Patrie,” and they insisted that the education Jesuits offered “must not suffer any variation other than that which can add to its perfection, and any interruption would lead to the misfortunes that always come from ignorance and corruption.”⁴⁸ According to the bishops, it would take too much time and effort to find replacements as skilled as the Jesuits if they were expelled from France. It only made sense to allow them to remain in the kingdom. “Thus everything speaks, Sire, in favor of the Jesuits,” they told the king. “Religion recommends to you its defenders, the Church its ministers, and Christian souls the depositaries of the secrets of their consciences...” To the bishops, Jesuit secrecy was an advantage. They certainly did not put much stock in the accusation that the Jesuits broke their vows and shared the secrets of the confessional with each other, or the belief in the dangers of Jesuit secrecy. On the contrary, they believed that keeping secrets was a skill and a necessity, and that the Jesuits’ ability to maintain secrecy represented their most positive traits. Jansenists did not dispute the secrecy of the confessional, though they did not prioritize such secrecy. Instead, Jansenists feared the Jesuit use of the secrets which they attained in the confessional for their own advancement.

⁴⁷ George Washington University Burns Library BX3731.C38, “Lettre et romonstrances de l’Assemblée du Clergé de France au Roi au sujet des Jésuites” (1762, reprinted 1765).

⁴⁸ George Washington University Burns Library BX3731.C38, “Lettre et romonstrances de l’Assemblée du Clergé de France au Roi au sujet des Jésuites” (1762, reprinted 1765).

The bishop of St. Pons, writing a year later in 1763 to the *parlement* of Toulouse, took up the same themes, defending the Jesuits and the merits of secrecy. He attacked the *parlements* of the kingdom for going after the Jesuits with such ferocity, and perceived how the Jansenists and the *parlements* had already linked the ideas of fighting despotism, of representing the nation and decrying secrecy with expelling the Jesuits for the good of the nation. For the bishop of St. Pons, the remonstrances of “our *parlements* are full of vile and indecent declamations” and stated that they did not seem to realize that for the ruler of a great empire,

there “are cases that require celerity and secrecy, [and to use secrecy] is wise and prudent. The English, who are assuredly very jealous of the authority of their king, and who limit him as tightly as they can, have understood themselves what I am arguing. Everyone knows the famous Act that they call Habeas corpus, which does not permit the king to hold one of his subjects prisoner without giving him a trial... Well! Though this privilege is very dear to their hearts...they know the inconveniences, and the Parliament was obliged to authorize the king to lock away certain persons who were dangerous to the government. At the same time, we hear our *parlementaires* whose authority does not yet resemble that of the parliament in London... emit piercing cries, and seditious ones at that, with regards to the least *lettres de cachet* [secret orders for arrest] if they are not expedited in their favor...”⁴⁹

The bishop saw more danger in limiting the powers of the king in times of crisis than in implementing a law resembling the English Habeas corpus. He knew that by this time many had formed a connection in their minds between secrecy and despotism, and he wished to defend a government’s use of secrecy.

He defended it, however, rashly and imprudently by attempting to justify *lettres de cachet* and attacking the *parlement’s* darling idea of protecting a contract between the king and the nation. “They never talk more of anything than a primordial contract between the prince and the nation, and they never cease placing it under the eyes of the monarch in order to remind him

⁴⁹ George Washington University Burns Library BX3731.C38 “Lettre de Monseigneur l’Eveque de St. Pons, à Monsieur le Procureur general du parlement de Toulouse (Basle: Chez Jacques Bosquet, 1763), 95-6.

of his obligations... They discuss, so they say, with him in the presence of his people, the clauses of the contract and the conditions under which his subjects have promised him service and fidelity, and this to the best of kings, to Louis the Bien-Aimé, that they dare make this insult! ...What temerity!”⁵⁰ Like Father Chamillart, the bishop expressed both contempt and fear of the direction of the *parlements* and the Jansenists, in which respect for rank and authority seemed to be diminishing. The bishop also believed that the arguments against government secrecy were based on exaggerated concerns over *lettres de cachet* while in his eyes the damage they did was minimal.

After defending *lettres de cachet* and accusing the *parlements* of lacking respect for the Crown, the bishop of St. Pons then directly spoke in favor of the Jesuits. The bishop pointed out that the *procureur général* of the *parlement* of Toulouse had even admitted that the Jesuits had talent, morals and piety, but had then asserted that the Jesuits might still have “a hidden seed within them that might germinate when interest demanded it.”⁵¹ This idea only enraged the bishop. “What, monsieur!” he continued angrily. “Nothing reassures you, not even the experiences of a century? And it is even the present innocence of the Jesuits which you use as a motive for not wasting a moment in exterminating them with ignominy? Our French Jesuits, as you say, might still be infected with some trace of venom! Monsieur, all of us carry in our hearts the seed of all crimes: you should then exterminate without delay the human race...”⁵² The

⁵⁰ George Washington University Burns Library BX3731.C38 “Lettre de Monseigneur l’Eveque de St. Pons, à Monsieur le Procureur general du parlement de Toulouse (Basle: Chez Jacques Bosquet, 1763), 98.

⁵¹ George Washington University Burns Library BX3731.C38 “Lettre de Monseigneur l’Eveque de St. Pons, à Monsieur le Procureur general du parlement de Toulouse (Basle: Chez Jacques Bosquet, 1763), 108.

⁵² George Washington University Burns Library BX3731.C38 “Lettre de Monseigneur l’Eveque de St. Pons, à Monsieur le Procureur general du parlement de Toulouse (Basle: Chez Jacques Bosquet, 1763), 108.

bishop's fury and concerns over the lack of the respect for authority, however, failed to move the *parlement* of Toulouse, and they continued to take action against the Jesuits.

To those defending the Jesuits, hidden plans and goals were not problematic as long as the ultimate goal was doing God's work. To the Jesuits' detractors, however, none of those arguments mattered, even those defending Jesuit efforts in education, since they had already decided the Jesuits were too secretive, too foreign, and used their secrecy to further the goals of foreign powers.

Secrecy and the Foreign Other, Transparency and the Patriot-Citizen

Calls for the expulsion of the Jesuits were therefore full of references to their secrecy and penchant for despotism, but the suspicion in those writings could often rise to a level of visceral hatred filled with accusations of conspiracy and frequent comparisons to the Jews, (a marginalized group in France with few rights until the Revolution), to underscore the notion that the Jesuits were both irreconcilably foreign and unwelcome. This picture that the Jansenists and their allies painted of the Jesuits could then serve as an adequate foil to the patriot-citizen who fought despotism, favored Gallicanism and advocated transparency. Furthermore, this citizen was first and foremost French, and always placed the interests of the nation above his own. In the unfriendly portrayals of the Jesuits, they could never possibly adhere to the same principles since their loyalties supposedly lay in Rome.

Only the king, the bishops, and those who defended the Jesuits tried to argue for compromises such as changes to the Jesuit constitutions as public opinion began to turn against the Jesuits. No one attacking the order ever advocated anything other than total expulsion. The Jesuits were simply considered too loyal to the pope, and their general as having an "absolute

power” over the order. Those attacking the Jesuits often used the terms “absolute power” and “absolute authority” to describe the Jesuit general, and always in a negative context. A necessary expedient for the “maintenance of our liberties,” asserted one Jansenist pamphlet, was “the humiliation of the Jesuits.”⁵³ The Jesuits, the author insisted, were like the Pharisees in Scripture, and it was essential to “be vigilant and keep an eye on their intrigues in order to discover the strategies of their cabal... I leave it to those who know them the best to decide if we could possibly conserve the kingdom without expelling them permanently...”⁵⁴ The Jesuits preferred, according to these pamphlets and the statements published by the *parlements*, to have “neither family nor fatherland,” and had to be expelled since they were a “hydra always ready to reproduce itself” which “could exist anywhere if it is not everywhere annihilated.”⁵⁵ Another pamphleteer believed that the level of submission and obedience required within the order aroused the same “surprise and horror in every Christian that St. Paul created with his energetic portrayal of the antichrist...”⁵⁶ Despite the Jesuits’ ostensible zeal for religion, this was only a veil behind which they used “secret means” to spread the “contagious venom of calumny” against their enemies. The Jesuits even had a sort of “secret inquisition” and made sure that all members of their order enjoyed the “astonishing and revolting privileges of the secret inquisition.”⁵⁷ The author maintained that these claims were true since they could be found in a book in the royal library called “The Directory of the Secret Inquisition.” Because of their

⁵³ Catholic University Mullen Library 273.7 M678 v.27 item 5.

⁵⁴ Catholic University Mullen Library 273.7 M678 v.27 item 5.

⁵⁵ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Arrest et arrêté du Parlement, séant à Rouen, au sujet d’un libelle intitulé Mémoire au roi par deux magistrats” (Rouen: l’Imprimerie de Richard Lallemand, 1764).

⁵⁶ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Arrest et arrêté du Parlement, séant à Rouen, au sujet d’un libelle intitulé Mémoire au roi par deux magistrats” (Rouen: l’Imprimerie de Richard Lallemand, 1764).

⁵⁷ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Arrest et arrêté du Parlement, séant à Rouen, au sujet d’un libelle intitulé Mémoire au roi par deux magistrats” (Rouen: l’Imprimerie de Richard Lallemand, 1764).

privileges and power, the Jesuits had become so arrogant that they were “the most extraordinary phenomenon that has ever appeared in the universe.”⁵⁸ Insisting that the evidence of Jesuit hypocrisy and power could be found in the royal library was also a not-so-subtle insinuation that the despotism of the Jesuits was supported by and linked to the despotism of the Crown.

Other attacks against the Jesuits had more bizarre claims about their relation to the Crown, insisting that Jesuits manipulated the king, rendering the powerful more the victims rather than the accomplices of the Jesuits, though even then they were not free of suspicion. Those who attacked the Jesuits considered them especially dangerous since they had “certain secret rules with which they authorize themselves to include secular Jesuits, who without changing their rank or their clothes are truly subjects of the Society...”⁵⁹ Even Louis XV had long ago taken the “first vows” of the order, according to some, and this rendered kings “subjects and sovereigns at the same time.”⁶⁰ The Jesuits had supposedly attached the king to their order “in the most intimate fashion.” Would this not lead them to “reign over the people and person of kings?” the author asked. Suspicion of the Jesuits’ secret power and privilege, along with their close ties to the monarchy, was the reigning theme in these pamphlets, so much so that even the king of France could be accused of secretly being a Jesuit.

The Jesuits, according to their detractors, might have even been tolerable in the beginning if they had maintained a “patriotic spirit.” But the spirit of patriotism, they asserted, had unfortunately always run contrary to the spirit of the Society since its early days in France. When they had first established themselves in France during the reign of Henri IV, they had already

⁵⁸ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Arrest et arrêté du Parlement, séant à Rouen, au sujet d’un libelle intitulé *Mémoire au roi par deux magistrats*” (Rouen: l’Imprimerie de Richard Lallemand, 1764).

⁵⁹ Mullen Library 273.7 M678 v.28 item 8.

⁶⁰ Mullen Library 273.7 M678 v.28 item 8.

been known for their ultramontanism and for hiding their constitution “with impenetrable secrecy.” Nevertheless, Henri IV “overwhelmed them with favors,” hoping to inspire in them “gratitude towards the state and a patriotic spirit. But nothing could be done with an order that is vicious on principle. Faithful to their vows and not to their patrie, they continued to preach the seditious maxims of their foreign doctrine all while pretending to teach good morals... Finally, they have perpetuated in France a secret chain, a tradition of this ultramontane doctrine, terrible in its murderous consequences and dangerous in that it is contrary to that of this kingdom.”⁶¹ The author then went on to explain the dangers of such secrecy, emphasizing the Jansenist idea that transparency and dealings out in the open helped prevent wickedness from spreading since it could not benefit from the cover of darkness. “It is not in an open and public manner that error spreads,” stated the author. “It is more often through clever insinuations, proposals which on the surface have no design, which are persuasive since they do not seem contrived, by a thousand off-the-cuff remarks which leave durable impressions in the minds of children...”⁶² Everything the Jesuits hoped to accomplish, every action they took, had a two-fold nature: displaying modesty and probity on the surface and in reality pursuing their nefarious ends in the shadows, usually control of royal courts and elites and eventually world domination. Particularly insidious were the dangers posed to children in education. Not only were the Jesuits trying to control the minds of kings, in the eyes of these authors, they also set down roots early on in the minds of children.

Even d’Alembert, who referred to himself as a disinterested and impartial author, adopted the language of patriotism which was very much in vogue in the 1760s, and used this idea to

⁶¹ Mullen Library 273.7 M678 v.28 item 8. “Observations des Commissaires de l’Université de Caen”

⁶² Mullen Library 273.7 M678 v.28 item 8. “Observations des Commissaires de l’Université de Caen”

explain why the Jesuits could not remain in France. D’Alembert saw himself as a “zealous citizen” who wished to “render public homage to the truly philosophical patriotism” of those who had attacked the Jesuits while avoiding being fanatical.⁶³ He even referred to the Jesuits as “this ultramontane Society” which recognized even in the heart of France “another patrie and another sovereign.”⁶⁴ In adopting this language that had become so widespread by mid-century, d’Alembert was perpetuating ideas already developed by the Jansenists to link the expulsion of the Jesuits with the dictates of patriotism and serving the nation.

Several universities wrote to the *parlement* asking to have the Jesuit schools closed and the order expelled. According to these universities, the Jesuits had a “spirit of servitude” and a “dependence without limits and unparalleled on a foreign monarch.” Though the Jesuits did not always charge tuition, the universities insisted that the Jesuits were not acting for the public good but to attract distinguished families and ruin the universities.⁶⁵ Those writing against the Jesuits at the University of Caen insisted that the Jesuits from the beginning rooted into the minds of their students “a spirit of slavery without limits, which constitutes the spirit of a Jesuit, this blind obedience to the will of an unknown general, this total submission to rules which they do not even completely know.”⁶⁶ Instead of this spirit of total servitude or slavery that the Jesuits possessed (to a foreign entity), the men at the university emphasized that “any man who instructs the youth must have the views, principles and interests essentially the same as that of the State... [The Jesuits] in contrast are accustomed to regard their own order as another patrie which is their

⁶³ d’Alembert, *Sur la Destruction des Jésuites en France*, 1765, 5-6.

⁶⁴ d’Alembert, *Sur la Destruction des Jésuites en France*, 1765, 5-6.

⁶⁵ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Observations des Commissaires de l’Université de Caen.”

⁶⁶ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Observations des Commissaires de l’Université de Caen.”

first priority... all things which are opposed to the uniformity that is the source of public tranquility.”⁶⁷ Not only were the Jesuits both too despotic and too servile, their foreign nature rendered them inadequate and even dangerous instructors of the nation’s youth. According to these authors, universities needed to be composed of “secular teachers without any foreign engagement,” and the College du Mont, the Jesuit college, needed to be reclaimed by the university instead of being occupied by “foreigners.”⁶⁸ Adopting the rhetoric and the arguments of the Jansenists, the university followed them to their logical conclusion. If a group with supposedly foreign allegiances could not be trusted to serve the nation, then they certainly could not be trusted to instruct in the nation’s schools. Rather, the professors who belonged were patriots and citizens whose views should align with the state, not foreigners who could not be trusted.

Labeling the Jesuits as foreign and secretive emboldened their detractors to take the logic even further, comparing them to another group that had long been considered foreign and secretive, the Jews. Since the Middle Ages, Jews in Europe had been associated with secrecy and secret knowledge, sometimes in a positive sense, often in a negative one. The word cabal originated from the Hebrew *caballah*.⁶⁹ One Jansenist pamphlet declared that “God will in the end destroy this Society... to the extent that they will become odious to all the nations. They will be of worse condition than the Jews, they will have no fixed place upon the earth, and then even a Jew will have more favor than a Jesuit.”⁷⁰ Sometimes the level of hatred towards the Jesuits

⁶⁷ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Observations des Commissaires de l’Université de Caen.”

⁶⁸ Burns Library BX3731.R53 1764 “Observations des Commissaires de l’Université de Caen.”

⁶⁹ See Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800* Trans. Jeremiah Riemer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ “Traduction des Monita secreta, autrement les intrigues secrètes des Jésuites” (Turin: chez Jacques Daniel, 1718) AJ, C-Pa 23.

reached its greatest extremes in the texts that compared them to the Jews. On satirical poem, mimicking Jesuit instructions to their novices, read, “To love your God in a Christian manner/Is a heavy yoke you can shake off/ And you, my son, can then/Have leave then only the Jews/To love as true children...”⁷¹ Having then asserted that the Jesuits were false Christians and had more in common with the Jews with anyone else, the speaker could then go on to imagine the violent ends they would meet. “One to be hanged, one to be burned/One among you to be hacked and mangled/Without lacking the respect that we owe to the Church/It should be at the Place de Grève that they canonize you/They should elevate your virtues/By tying you up in a forest and hanging you from the trees.”⁷² The Place de Grève was the square in the front of the Hotel de ville in Paris where criminals were traditionally punished and executed. This particularly violent and malevolent imagery became more and more permissible the more the Jesuits could be characterized as foreign and harmful to the nation. A Jansenist review of a book of theology published by the Jesuits asserted that the Jesuits took great precautions “to hide any censures or critiques” of their newest book, but in it “one searched in vain for the true spirit of the New Testament, which is a spirit of grace and charity, a far cry from that mercenary and servile spirit which is the spirit of Jews, purely of Jews.”⁷³ It was not only that the Jews were a convenient scapegoat in these Jansenist writings. Drawing parallels between the Jesuits and the Jews made sense because of the way in which they could turn the use of secrecy into something sinister, a rejection of transparency and the moral good that could result from it.

⁷¹ Catholic University, Mullen Library, Rare books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

⁷² Catholic University, Mullen Library, Rare books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26.

⁷³ Catholic University, Mullen Library, Rare books Clementine 273.7 M678 v.26. “Règles de l’Equité naturelle et du bons sens pour l’examen de Constitution” (1714)

Comparing the Jesuits to the Jews was simply following the arguments about their foreignness and secrecy to the most extreme conclusions. If the Jesuits could not be counted on to be out in the open in their dealings, then there must be something unsavory going on under cover of darkness. In an era of heightened talk of the power of public opinion and the merits of patriotism, the Jansenist weapons of choice in attacking the Jesuits were also handy in developing the proto-nationalist discourse of the *parlements*. In their early days, the Jansenists had not the slightest interest in politics or even Gallicanism, but finding an ally in the Paris *parlement* after Unigenitus, the papal bull solicited by Louis XIV, coaxed the Jansenists into the political arena. Their Manichaean worldview and their suspicion of the Jesuits who were often confessors at court, led them to view the Jesuits as an archenemy that had to be destroyed utterly-- and with God's blessing--and also to advocate transparency as a necessary condition for good morals and governance. If the Jesuits could secretly manipulate the sinews of power, then the government ought to be more transparent to prevent such sly maneuvers. The Jansenists were also relentless in attacking the Jesuits on the grounds of their supposed foreign nature and loyalties, and so they could link secrecy with foreign loyalties, and transparency with patriotism. Finally, in turning the Jesuits into a dangerous, foreign "other" that was to its very core incapable of being truly of the nation and truly patriotic, they could then argue that for the survival of the nation, the Jesuits had to be expelled.

In their campaign against the Jesuits, the Jansenists thus played an important role in the rise of secrecy as a central part of the political and moral lexicon in eighteenth-century France. The Jansenists succeeded in translating their religious aversion to secrecy to a wider political meaning in the cultural climate of mid-century: their Christian ideas of light and truth, and their attacks against the Jesuits for allegedly meddling clandestinely in government led them to

advocate government transparency. Jansenists also succeeded in linking their embryonic form of nationalism to their ideas about transparency. Meanwhile, those who defended the Jesuits also defended the practices and merits of secrecy. From mid-century on, one's attitudes towards secrecy coded one's political stance. In the next chapter, I will look at the Paris police and how they, like the Jansenists, though for different reasons, played their part in the changing cultural attitudes towards secrecy.

CHAPTER 4: “I PROMISE NEVER TO SPEAK TO ANYONE”: THE BASTILLE AND POLICE SECRECY

Without intending to, the police, as the most visible and ubiquitous manifestation of state power and control, played an important role in making secrets and secrecy suspect. Through their practices and in their use of the Bastille, the police laid the groundwork for the culture of transparency that flourished during the Revolution. By then, the Bastille’s reputation as a place of horrors and terrible secrets had long since been well established. In 1790, celebrating the demolition of the Bastille and delivering a speech on the meaning of its scattered stones, Pierre-François Palloy, the architect in charge of the demolition, declared, “These stones will no longer hear the cries of our oppressed brothers; they will no longer form the lugubrious vaults of dungeons, truly tombs for the living...”¹ Models of the Bastille were then carved out of its stones and sent to several deputies, people of note in the capital and throughout the provinces, symbols of the nation’s freedom from tyranny.² Palloy called the Bastille the “arrogant citadel” and in his many speeches on the prison which he helped deconstruct he often tied its destruction to the overall task of the revolution in unmasking “hypocritical patriots” and “spreading light, keeping an eye on public administrations and pursuing abuses.”³

¹ Bibliothèque historique de Paris, Pierre-François Palloy, *Discours à Messieurs les membres du Directoire des Districts, Cantons et des Municipalités du Département* (1790) CP 5252.

² See Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille: l’édification d’un lieu de mémoire* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012).

³ BP, Pierre-François Palloy, *Discours prononcé à la société de Sceaux l’unité, 10 Frimaire, Fête de la raison* (Year II) CP 5252.

The Bastille had not always been synonymous with government abuses and secrets. Its reputation as a frightening state prison more or less began under Richelieu, but it was in the eighteenth century when the prison was fully within the purview of the police that it truly gained the reputation it had by the Revolution. It was the police who made the Bastille the Bastille of legend. In reality, the Bastille may not have been the terrifying place that it was in the minds of the revolutionaries, but reality itself became a matter of the mind where the Bastille was concerned. To quote the poet John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, “the mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.” The factual circumstances of the prison were less important than its imagined horrors because of the public’s fervent belief in them. This made them real in the sense that prisoners feared what might happen to them because of these rumors, and that deep anxiety colored their perception and the public’s perception of reality, and as a result altered it. Furthermore, the secrecy surrounding the prison fostered these rumors and helped fuel the culture of transparency that emerged in the Revolution. While the police believed that secrecy could help keep public imagination in check, secrecy instead gave the rumors new life and gave the public free rein in its speculations.⁴ With little verifiable information, writers’ and the public’s imagination could run wild.

Along with the broader powers of the police in the eighteenth century, the emergence of public opinion was a major force, of course, in the culture of transparency. The police realized the power of public opinion and made every effort to rein it in, spying on and arresting hundreds of illicit booksellers and authors while the police unwittingly tilted public opinion out of their favor. When the Bastille became used as a state prison in the early seventeenth century and Paris’s first modern police force came into being in the 1660s under one lieutenant general, the

⁴ For more on the imagination and rumors in pre-revolutionary France, see Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

use of secrecy in prisons and during interrogations and arrests never aroused concern. In the eighteenth century, as countless scholars have noted, the public became a more fully-formed concept and public opinion was seen as a force for good.⁵ The idea of secrecy as a problem or hindrance to justice emerged, along with new ideas about privacy. A finer appreciation for personal privacy and private domestic space characterized the second half of the eighteenth century, and this informed complaints about police abuses in the decades before the Revolution.

No one could deny the power of public opinion and the emerging public sphere, though scholars continue to debate ways of understanding it. Scholars often divide the debate on how to understand the public sphere between public realm theory or a normative understanding of the public sphere represented by Jürgen Habermas and to some extent, Hannah Arendt, and the postmodern critique of that conception, especially that of Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. For Habermas, public opinion and the public sphere are sociological phenomena; following Weber, Habermas conceives of modernity as a period of rationalization. It developed through the use of reason; the rational way to deal with social and political issues was through publicity, and debates took place in a space of plurality and equality, a place, also for Arendt, of “uncoerced deliberation” and the reaching of consensus. These rational debates took place in print media and in places like squares and cafés.⁶

⁵ See Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); David A. Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of a Political Elite in Old Regime France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: l'opinion publique au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); Lisa Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1990); Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: the Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶ See Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1990.

For Foucault and Lyotard, the rise of public opinion resulted from epistemological shifts and changing power relations. A thing cannot exist until it is discursively construed, and public opinion first emerged in the eighteenth century because it was the first time that it was spoken of. Foucault questioned the idea of a space free of coercion for deliberation, and retheorized the nature of power in the modern age. Modern power was insidious and everywhere; it was also invisible as long as one only considered the state and sovereignty as sources of power.⁷ While Habermas favors the idea of the formation of autonomous selves and non-hierarchical power (as opposed to negative, repressive power), Foucault believed that discipline and domination could exist even without hierarchy; there was no clean-cut difference between the “positive” power of the public sphere and the negative one of hierarchy. For example, along with power as understood in the state, the self-policing of individuals who internalized a hegemonic idea of public good was a form of power. For Lyotard, the idea of the public sphere as a space where individuals would agree through consensus on the most rational decision was tied to the emancipation metanarrative of the Enlightenment.⁸ Lyotard doubted the idea of context-free validity derived from science or reason. All of these thinkers, though, understood the development of the public sphere as a story of modernity: at one point in the eighteenth century public opinion went from being the fickle moods of the multitude to something that had to be taken seriously by the powers that be. The government began to pay attention to songs, poems

⁷ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Michel Foucault, “Politics and Ethics,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Dana R. Villa, “Postmodernism and the Public Sphere,” *The American Political Science Review* 86, No. 3 (1992): 712-721; Ashley Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition: Reflections on Nihilism, Information, and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018);.

⁸ Lyotard famously defined postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives.” See Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

and pamphlets, and enforced silence or respectful language through the police.⁹ They were also eager to police themselves, and codified the duties and powers of the police, most famously in Nicolas de la Mare's *Traité de la Police* (1719), and later Duchesne's *Code de la Police* (1758), and this self-policing aligns with Foucault's understanding of power as broad and pervasive, rendering subjects the subjugated simultaneously.

Historians of the Paris police tend to agree that they were instrumental in French state formation, though few dwell at length on the police's masterful and sometimes excessive use of secrecy. For Steven Kaplan, the work of the police could and did benefit the populace, though they certainly were resented from time to time as well.¹⁰ According to Alan Williams, the police of Paris reached beyond the traditional functions of defense and justice and took on new responsibilities for public order. One can track the progression of the French state by observing how the police began to control dimensions of life that it had formerly neglected. The Paris police, because of its size and structure, was the first modern police force.¹¹ Williams believes that the police "marked out a sphere of ambition and activity that enhanced its resemblance to a modern state; but in so doing it generated and exacerbated hostilities that would haunt it until the Revolution..."¹²

In Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*, the three most frequent critiques leveled against the police in the eighteenth century were common themes: that they violated citizens'

⁹ Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-century Paris* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010), 131.

¹⁰ Steven L. Kaplan, "Note sur les commissaires de police de Paris au XVIIIème siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 28, no. 4 (October 1981): 669-686. See also Catherine Denys, "The Development of Police Forces in Urban Europe in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Urban History* 36, no. 3 (May 2010): 332-344.

¹¹ Alan Williams, *The Police of Paris, 1718-1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), xvi-xvii.

¹² Williams, *The Police of Paris*, 1979, xvi-xvii.

privacy, that they were secretive and used secrecy to hide abuses, and most of all, that the prisons where the police threw their victims were places of pain and horror. According to Mercier, the police had so many spies in so many places that as soon as two people were seen speaking together, a spy came near and tried to eavesdrop. They were also guilty of arresting the innocent as often as the guilty, whom they threw into dark, disease-ridden prisons guarded by dogs. The dungeons of the police were the “receptacle of all horrors and human miseries,” and vices were learned there, not corrected.¹³ Mercier went on to say that it was impossible to write a history of the past three kings without discussing the Bastille, though the most interesting things would always be hidden because nothing came out of the abyss that was the Bastille.¹⁴ The Bastille had heard the moans of so many victims, and though his contemporaries had a history of the prison, there was still an “impenetrable veil” over state secrets. In that place, prisoners were treated with “tyrannical violence” during the reign of the chief of police, the Marquis d’Argenson (1697-1718), even though those unfortunate victims were already deprived of their liberty.¹⁵ Mercier also believed that the most common way a prisoner left the Bastille was through death.¹⁶ For Mercier as for many others, there was a connection between the intense secrecy the police maintained at the Bastille and violence. When both the Paris police and the notion of public opinion had grown in power and sophistication, writers began to make this connection. More broadly speaking, as the state in the form of the police began to venture into areas it had not touched in previous centuries, notions of public versus private began to crystallize, and secrecy came to be a concept worth debating.

¹³ Louis- Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. I, (Amsterdam: [s.n.], 1783-88), 184; Vol. III, 264-6.

¹⁴ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. III, 1783-88, 287.

¹⁵ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. III, 1783-88, 288-9.

¹⁶ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. III, , 1783-88, 289.

After the storming of the Bastille in 1789, the fortress was plundered for ammunition and many of its documents were stolen or lost. Learning of how much of the Bastille's documents had been taken during the confusion and excitement of the 14th of July, authorities publicized requests to those who had documents in their possession to return them to a depot where they could be preserved for posterity. Some private citizens also published what they found, or claimed to have found, in the bowels of the Bastille. *Révolutions de Paris*, a popular newspaper begun in 1789, published descriptions of mysterious ledgers and lists of prisoners that were found in the fortress, containing all sorts of information that would hopefully “shed light on the dark details of history.”¹⁷ Another edition of the newspaper published the names, inscriptions, expressions of horror and lengths of time of imprisonment that supposedly had been carved into the walls of the Bastille's dungeons.¹⁸

Already in mid-century, Bastille had acquired such a sinister reputation that it was said that no one could pass it without a shudder of terror, especially at night. Though rumors of nocturnal horrors continued to proliferate, the police did nothing to counter these rumors, and their silence only served to augment the imagination of those who believed the Bastille was a place of horrors. Arlette Farge has argued that as the police began to modernize in the eighteenth century and develop the first incarnations of a security administration, the Bastille was an effective means of social control. Secrecy, even terror, could be a useful tool in keeping a tumultuous population in check. If a prisoner, and the families of prisoners, knew nothing of his circumstances or possible release, their ignorance would only serve to augment their anxiety and render them more pliant and cooperative during police investigations. Secrecy was also useful in

¹⁷ *Révolutions de Paris* (18-25 July 1789), 11.

¹⁸ *Révolutions de Paris* (2-8 August 1789), 31.

keeping public opinion from running wild, or so the police believed. Sometimes the secrecy surrounding the Bastille, arrests and police investigations was so elaborate and institutionalized that it came to be both a means and an end.

Inviolable Secrecy

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Bastille was a dilapidated eyesore that stood in hideous contrast to the elegant plazas and other architectural achievements of the city. It sat, squat and unprepossessing, like a massive, black toad beside the St. Antoine gate, one of the entrances to Paris, and was a poor welcome to tourists and outsiders who had come to see the beauty and marvels of the capital. It was staffed by three officers called the governor, the major, and the king's lieutenant; a handful of turnkeys; a small corps of guards; and after the 1760s, retired soldiers called *bas officiers* (also a term for low-ranking, non-commissioned officers) who received a small stipend to guard the Bastille but mostly spent their time drinking and smoking in the courtyards. The fortress was surrounded by a moat that was no doubt foul-smelling from centuries of garbage. It was also falling apart. In 1774, when the drawbridge was being lowered to admit a carriage, one of the ropes supporting it snapped and the drawbridge fell into the moat, though luckily, as the major reported to the chief of police that morning, no one was hurt.¹⁹ Louis XVI had made plans for its demolition and would have carried it out if the revolutionaries had not done so first.

Yet a prisoner, having been snatched from his or her home and brought to the fortress in the dead of night, confronted with the stern silence of the officers, the empty courtyards lit by flickering torchlight, the mysterious tolling of a single bell, the dark twisting stair of the tower to

¹⁹ BA, MS 12435.

which he or she was led, and the heavy iron bracing on the door of the cell that was shut behind the prisoner with a dreadful thud, that prisoner might still feel terror upon finding herself or himself in such a place. That vague terror coupled with the secrecy that everyone knew surrounded the Bastille, served to enhance its frightening reputation even while the actual structure was falling to pieces.

The rules and regulations of the Bastille concerning secrecy could fill volumes. The officers and policemen who wrote them spared no detail and made every effort to create guidelines for every conceivable breach of security. They wanted to be sure that prisoners could not communicate with each other, with the outside world or even with their jailors. Vague and ominous punishments were promised to turnkeys who disobeyed these strict rules or who were simply indiscreet. The secrecy seemed reasonable or logical when a prisoner was a suspected spy or a member of a family who had had him or her put away to preserve the family honor, but prisoners who were held for criminal offenses like sexual perversions or practicing magic were subjected to the same rigorous restrictions, though, of course, those under the strictest security had further restrictions. Some prisoners were never even visited by the turnkeys and only the officers saw them.

When a prisoner arrived at the Bastille, it was usually at night. Likewise, prisoners were usually transferred or released at night, often very late. Burials of prisoners who died in the Bastille took place under cover of darkness as well. This practice of prisoners coming and going at night served to minimize the possibility of these activities being observed and of interference from those who were sympathetic to a prisoner or seeking to communicate with him or her. Interrogations took place during the day within the prison, but transfers and arrests seemed to be the business of the night. Clearly, the police believed that nighttime work facilitated the moving

of prisoners who had fewer options if they absconded into the city in the middle of the night, the advantage of darkness notwithstanding. Darkness was to the police's advantage, not to the prisoners, apparently, and perhaps a nighttime arrest also served to intimidate a prisoner more than being taken during the day. Inhabitants were also more likely to be at home in the evening hours or early in the morning.

A prisoner was usually brought by a police inspector, though sometimes another individual like a military or provincial officer who had arrested the prisoner far from Paris brought him to the gates of the fortress. Occasionally, a prisoner presented himself with an order for his own arrest, often a nobleman who had found disfavor at court and who was ordered to turn himself in at the Bastille. For example, in 1727 the governor of the Bastille received a letter from a minister of the government about an army officer from Metz who was to turn himself in when he arrived in Paris. The governor was to hold him for a month without informing the prisoner, however, how long he was to be incarcerated. Ignorance of his fate was part of his punishment. The minister writing to the governor added, "Send word to me the day that he arrives so that I can inform His Majesty."²⁰ A *lettre de cachet* followed the minister's letter, providing the official order for imprisonment for the term of a month. The officer from Metz must have angered someone very powerful, or misbehaved in such a manner as to attract the attention of those at court or of his own family who might have requested to have him punished in a way that taught him a lesson.

Then, after a prisoner had come through the gates, a bell was rung and the courtyards were cleared of all personnel who might set eyes on the prisoner. This precaution seemed to be observed for every prisoner that arrived. Once the prisoner was brought inside, officers wrote down in a ledger his or her name, condition, and the date and time of the prisoner's arrival,

²⁰ BA, MS 12602.

unless orders had been given that a prisoner remain unnamed. Then the prisoner was conducted to a cell, the size and comfort of which depended on his or her rank and whether or not the police wanted to punish a prisoner with poor accommodations and little food for a few days.

Turnkeys were instructed to answer no questions related to an individual's imprisonment. Families and friends of prisoners, and sometimes the prisoners themselves, found it extremely difficult to glean any information from the authorities about the terms of imprisonment, whether or not a prisoner might be transferred, or even the reason for the arrest. Many prisoners did not know why they had been taken until interrogations began. Often the police would not even confirm that an arrest had taken place, and would answer no questions about an individual's disappearance. It was as if the prisoner simply ceased to exist, and the outside world was told to forget him or her. For example, when in October of 1773 the friend of a high-ranking prisoner asked after his welfare on behalf of the prisoner's sister, communications between the major at the Bastille and the chief of police, Sartine, make it clear that they simply decided not to reply. The major forwarded the letter of request to Sartine, adding "I will not write a response."²¹ The prisoner's sister, the abbess of the Abbaye de Ferraques in St. Quentin, was a woman of rank herself, but at the top of her letter someone high in the police hierarchy, probably Sartine's secretary, had written: "recommended to M. le Major not to reply."²² Similarly, the relatives of Quantelle du Duranville, a butcher sent to the Bastille in 1773, wrote to the authorities to learn the reasons for his imprisonment and the length of his confinement after they found out that he had been arrested by the police. The police did not reply. Then the butcher wrote to the chief of police, asking permission to write to his parents to let them know that he was in good health. He

²¹ BA, MS 12435, *Dossiers des prisonniers* 1773.

²² BA, MS 12435, *Dossiers des prisonniers* 1773.

assured Sartine that he had been warned to remain silent on the subject of his captivity, the reasons for his arrest, and even where he was being held, telling the chief of police that it would relieve his parents' sorrow only to receive some news from his own pen and to know that he was still alive.²³ The police dossier did not indicate whether or not the butcher received permission to write to his parents.

Sometimes prisoners' letters did reach their families, but their letters were always carefully read and often redacted by the police. If the chief of police was so inclined, he had the prisoner re-write the letter. In 1767, Sartine sent a redacted letter back to a prisoner with a note that he should "only speak of what he needs without adding any commentaries or reflections."²⁴ As for another prisoner's letter, Sartine sent it back after reading it and told the major of the Bastille, "You will ask M. Le Clerc [the prisoner who authored the censored letter] to explain the underlined sentences in the letter I am sending back to you."²⁵ On other occasions, he simply refused to pass on the message, perhaps because a prisoner could not limit himself to only the most innocuous comments, or because the police believed it was too risky to an investigation for a prisoner to communicate at all. Sometimes the chief of police found certain statements to be so reprehensible, imprudent or offensive that he threatened a prisoner with punishment if he ever found them again in a letter. In May of 1767, Sartine wrote to the major, "I am very displeased with the conduct of Demai, who calls himself Picard. Please inform him that if anything like this occurs again I will have him put in one of the dungeons."²⁶ It is unclear whether the prisoner named Demai wrote an imprudent letter, was simply behaving badly in prison, or both, but he

²³ BA, MS 12435, *Dossiers des prisonniers 1773*.

²⁴ BA, MS 12509.

²⁵ BA, MS 12509.

²⁶ BA, MS 12509.

had angered the chief of police, and Sartine did not hesitate to threaten and punish prisoners, usually with “bad lodgings” or being given only bread and water to eat for several days.

Often prisoners had no way of knowing if their letters had been delivered or not. They could only wait and hope that their friends and relatives would be allowed to respond. The turnkeys and guards were instructed never to inform prisoners on this subject when asked. Turnkeys being the go-betweens for the prisoners and the officers of the Bastille, their cooperation in the maintenance of secrecy was essential, especially since they did not all reside in the fortress. The rules for turnkeys began, “M. the governor requires of the turnkeys an inviolable secrecy in all duties they perform with regards to prisoners.”²⁷ Keeping secrets was their first and most important duty. They were expected to be able to read and write, to be polite, to be obedient to the officers, but above all else, to be discreet. They delivered the letters that the prisoners were meant to receive, prevented the ones that were illicit, and were the first line of defense when a prisoner attempted to smuggle a missive out of the prison. One set of rules for turnkeys from 1784 gave them guidelines that sometimes seem obvious and others that seem excessive. For example, turnkeys were instructed never to leave keys in the towers, (all the prisoners were kept in the towers of the Bastille), and not to speak too loudly, especially near the cells where they might be overheard by prisoners, or near the gate where they possibly could be heard and observed by outsiders and passersby. They were also told to keep prisoners from slipping from their cells when they entered them to see to prisoners’ needs, an injunction which seems to go without saying. As if that rule were not obvious enough, turnkeys were told not to take prisoners *out of the Bastille*, another guideline that was perfectly self-explanatory and again, most likely unnecessary.

²⁷ BA, MS 12509, *Service des porteclefs*.

The authors of these guidelines emphasized that the turnkeys should always be polite to prisoners, and this seemed to apply to prisoners of all ranks, though those of high rank always enjoyed more privileges. The jailors were to listen to prisoners' questions and concerns, but only to speak to them of their immediate needs, not of the reasons for their imprisonment or of the outside world. They were to follow prisoners when they had to leave their cells and move up and down the towers to make sure that prisoners did not drop any notes or letters for someone to find later. After serving meals, they were to pay attention to every dish in order to check if any marks or messages were made upon them, and if so to show them immediately to the officers. They had to regularly check the doors, windows and chimneys, and to try out the grills with an iron hammer once a week, doing this activity preferably when a prisoner was out, usually at chapel. The turnkeys had to search the chapel and other places to see if prisoners hid any letters there, and watch workers if they had to come in for repairs in order to keep them from speaking or passing letters to the prisoners. Furthermore, the turnkeys were told to only speak about prisoners to the officers and no one else, and to refer to prisoners only by their cell number. "[Turnkeys] will never speak of what goes on inside the Bastille when they are out in the city, and will always be very careful as to the questions that are addressed to them," read one set of rules from the mid-eighteenth century.²⁸ They were also the ones who were in charge of searching prisoners when they first arrived, and usually they were the ones who had most contact with a prisoner while in custody. If turnkeys were allowed to speak at all to a prisoner, they were not to converse with them on any subject apart from "the rain and the fine weather" and "their small, particular needs."²⁹ Some prisoners, though, were considered dangerous in terms of the secrets they might

²⁸ BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs*.

²⁹ BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs*.

possess that only the officers could see and speak to them, and it was the officers who saw to their needs alone. A prisoner might be considered so dangerous that only the governor saw him, though why so much secrecy was considered necessary was never recorded. Most of the time the officers and even the governor had no idea why a prisoner was being held. They received orders from the police, or received a *lettre de cachet* from a minister in the government, and held a prisoner who was sometimes registered under a pseudonym, knowing nothing about him or her. It was the police commissioners, after all, who conducted interrogations at the Bastille. It was the role of the staff to enforce the secrecy that the police found necessary to their operations.

As for the officers, they had strict guidelines to follow as well, and there were pages and pages of rules that officers could refer to if they were in doubt. Article 7 in one set of rules from 1764 instructed the officer in charge “not to let any person from outside speak to a prisoner without the express order of His Majesty or one of his secretaries of state” when the governor was not present.³⁰ This, however, seemed to be the rule even when the governor was present, though in theory the governor might have had the prerogative to allow certain individuals access to a prisoner. Nevertheless, the governor remained under the authority of the lieutenant general of police. Article 8 instructed all of the officers to go “several times a week to see prisoners in their cells and deliver a report every day to the governor, excepting those prisoners who are not allowed to be seen, and these rules will be observed both when the governor is present and absent in the fortress.”³¹ These detailed rules and regulations, designed to provide for every contingency and danger, were no doubt set by the police to enhance their use of the Bastille as a handy tool for control and enforcement of public order. Though at the same time that the police were tightening the reins over the staff of the fortress in order to stamp out disorder in the city,

³⁰ BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs*.

³¹ BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs*.

they gradually loosened the rules concerning their own access to the fortress and the checks on their liberties and privileges in dealing with prisoners. Late in the seventeenth century, the chief of police had already gained permanent access to the Bastille, and never again had to ask permission of the king or the governor to come and go as he pleased. Louis XIV clearly believed it expedient to give the police greater leeway in the efforts to weed out unruliness and dangerous sentiments in a populace that elites had always considered violent and barely controllable. It was a populace that the police considered always on the verge of a riot if not carefully monitored.

By mid-century, the police had made it even easier for them to make arrests without going through the usual bureaucratic formalities. In theory, every order for arrest that sent a prisoner to the Bastille was an order that came directly from the king. All *lettres de cachet*, after all, which usually sent the unfortunate individual named on the order to the Bastille, were signed by the king. By the eighteenth century, though, it was clear that ministers and the chief of police made arrests under their own aegis. Often the king's secretary signed for him, and ministers could decide on their own to send someone to the Bastille, sometimes without the king even knowing. Once or twice scandals had broken out when rumors circulated that *lettres de cachet* were being mass produced by ministers at Versailles and sold to intendants in the provinces with blank spaces in which they could fill in the names of their victims, but these were largely unfounded. Nevertheless, the police had succeeded in streamlining the process of arrest and imprisonment in the Bastille. For example, in 1764 the governor of the Bastille received an order telling him that "when M. le lieutenant general de police sends prisoners your way, you will accept them if you receive a letter from him even if it is not the formal order, and hold the prisoner until the formal order arrives. The same rule stands for when M. le lieutenant general de police permits prisoners to receive visitors which now only requires a simple letter from him and

not the formal order.”³² As time progressed, the police made it easier and easier for themselves to carry out their work and use the prison without formal orders and bureaucratic procedures emanating from Versailles. At the same time, the officers of the Bastille, usually the major, were expected to report to the chief of police when a prisoner arrived to confirm an arrest and that the prisoner was in safe custody. The major of the Bastille was also required to help with police work; he was the one who held onto evidence that the police collected from a suspect’s home or workplace, and he also forwarded prisoners’ letters to the lieutenant general of police. The reports from the major, however, reveal a certain frustration with the secrecy they were supposed to maintain, and sometimes an almost apathetic attitude since they were forced to let the police have free rein while they themselves could do nothing but watch and cooperate.

One casually written report from the major to the chief of police, probably from the 1760s, read as follows: “I have the honor to inform you that I received at four o’clock in the morning at the Bastille an individual named such and such [following the prescribed format though no name was given], who was brought here by Monsieur such and such, inspector of the police, who was bearing your letter, and I am awaiting the formal order.”³³ It was clear that the major, who had probably been woken in the middle of the night, had no idea whom he had imprisoned and who had brought him, only that the one conducting the prisoner was probably a police inspector since he had a simple order from the police for the man’s arrest. It might have been possible that no one would even read his report, though he still had to follow the rules and send it. The officers of the Bastille were always supposed to note the time of arrivals as well as

³² BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs*.

³³ BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs*.

their names, to keep good records and report to the police, but the police had no such restrictions and were content to keep their motives and operations as secret as possible.

The staff, of course, knew if and when a prisoner left the Bastille, or died there, but the police wished that kept as secret as possible, too. A set of rules from the 1730s instructed officers to inform a government minister as well as the chief of police if a prisoner died. “With regards to the burial,” read the rules regarding the death of a prisoner, “it will always take place at night in the parish of St. Paul... [The] turnkeys will attend, serve as witnesses, and will sign the register.”³⁴ A deceased prisoner was to be buried under his family name unless otherwise specified. There were also guidelines for when prisoners died “by accident,” though that leaves the reader wondering what other kinds of deaths they might have meant. Death by torture was a possibility, though torture was quite rare as an interrogation technique by 1650, and according to Lisa Silverman, had only been recorded being exercised a handful of occasions in the latter half of the seventeenth century.³⁵ The rate of torture continued to decline in the eighteenth century, though it was still used throughout France. Those records, on the other hand, only concern the interrogations that took place at the Châtelet, where criminals were processed through the ordinary channels of justice and suspects were brought before magistrates and investigated by the court. What took place at the Bastille was the sole purview of the police, and they were the only ones with access to their files. No one but the king and his ministers had any right to knowledge of what went on in the Bastille, apart from the police. What files have survived and can be found in the archives, however, suggest that death by torture, while it could and did occur, was very rare. Furthermore, death from torture would be considered “accidental” as well since

³⁴ BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et consignes: Consigne du service pour les porteclefs*.

³⁵ See Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth and the Body in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), *passim*.

the purpose of torture was to elicit confessions and acquire names of accomplices, not to execute criminals.

Suicide might be a more likely possibility. There were often suicides at the Bastille, certainly more often than accidental deaths from torture, though those dead by suicide were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground and so were not taken to the parish of St. Paul. Whatever the cause of death, the rules were very strict regarding the handling of a deceased prisoner. In the same section that dealt with burials, the rules specifically addressed the governor and the officers, stating that they were to avoid the “slightest deviation from the rules and discipline of the house, [i.e. the Bastille],” and that they ought to always be sure to “punish very severely those who contravene them.”³⁶ What they feared the public might see during a burial remains unclear, but the rules clearly specified that burial only and always took place at night. Perhaps marks on the body might be misconstrued as evidence of torture, or the authorities had some reason to keep the identity of a prisoner a secret, and so the same rule of burial at night was applied to all prisoners in order to simplify procedures, though simplification hardly seemed a priority. It is also unclear how turnkeys who violated the rules were punished, but they were most likely dismissed from their positions or denied wages.

The police made it a priority, then, that prisoners not be seen, or be seen as little as possible. A set of rules from 1761 instructed the guards and turnkeys to keep passersby from looking into the windows or making signals to the prisoners. The guards were furthermore supposed to keep outsiders even from coming near the drawbridge, and of course, from letting others into the fortress when a new prisoner was admitted.³⁷ As mentioned above, the guards

³⁶ BA, MS 12602, *Reglements et Consignes*.

³⁷ BA, MS 12602, *Consigne devant les cazernes*.

were expected to see the prisoners as little as possible, and were not allowed to set eyes on a new arrival. Regarding a prisoner's arrival, the rules read, "Upon the arrival of a prisoner, whether it be night or day, the officer in charge will collect all his troop and have them withdraw to the guardroom, and he will make sure that the prisoner is not seen by anyone nor speaks to any living soul."³⁸ If a prisoner arrived during the daytime, the sentinel on duty was to drive away any of the "curious" who might gather to watch, which might also explain why they buried deceased prisoners at night since apparently curious citizens might gather to watch these comings and goings. This also shows how much the secrecy of the Bastille's administration attracted curiosity. While the secrecy and generally forbidding atmosphere of the centuries-old fortress were designed to frighten the unruly and the general public into obedience, they inspired great curiosity as well as fear, enough for it to be mentioned several times in the regulations that the curiosity of the public might hinder the secret workings of the prison.

The sentinels, while instructed to keep the prying eyes of the public at a safe distance, were also expected to be as discreet as the turnkeys. They were not to speak of anything they saw in the Bastille—even of the most mundane activities and certainly the activities of the prisoners-- amongst themselves and with the outside world. When a prisoner arrived at the Bastille, they were instructed to have their muskets at the ready with the ends of the barrels showing over the tops of the walls by the gate until the prisoner had gone into the interior of the one of the towers. Though they stood at the tops of the walls with their muskets, they were to make sure that the incoming prisoner or prisoners "saw and spoke to no one."³⁹

³⁸ BA, MS 12602, *Consigne devant les cazernes*.

³⁹ BA, MS 12602, *Consigne devant les cazernes* .

Furthermore, the sentinels were expressly forbidden to speak to prisoners or to answer prisoners if they addressed any questions to the sentinels, “no matter the situation or pretext of the prisoner for speaking to the sentinels.”⁴⁰ They were also to watch the tradesmen who came and went such as the butcher or the repairman, make sure that it was always the same tradesman who came to deliver his particular goods, and that he left with the same amount of tools or whatever items he might need for his work such as repair as when he arrived. All the comings and goings of workers from the outside were carefully observed, and workers were warned that lack of discretion would be severely punished. The sentinels were to make sure that the conversations of those who worked in the kitchen were always “very moderate and careful” and that they only spoke of their work.⁴¹ It was the duty of the sentinels to make sure that no strangers entered the kitchen as well. The surgeon of the prison, for his part, was never to find out the names of his patients and was instructed only to speak to them of their ailments, and generally to speak to them as briefly as possible. The surgeon was furthermore not permitted to find out why the prisoners were detained, and was not to speak of the prisoners to anyone, not even his “intimate friends,” outside the Bastille.⁴² How the police enforced the secrecy of all these different workers and professionals who were required for the smooth running of the prison was unclear since the rules and regulations usually proposed only vague threats. If one fell out of favor with the chief of police, though, who was arguably the most powerful man in Paris, one could easily find oneself in the Bastille.⁴³

⁴⁰ BA, MS 12602, *Consigne du chateau*.

⁴¹ BA, MS 12602, *Consigne du chateau*.

⁴² BA, MS 12602, *Mémoire pour le chirurgeon major de la Bastille*, 1750.

⁴³ Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel explore the growing suspicion and antipathy towards the police after 1750 in their study on missing children in eighteenth-century Paris. See Farge and Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris*:

Even at the end of a prisoner's stay, the authorities did their best to enforce silence and to make sure that the rule of secrecy extended as far out from the prison as possible like an invisible web. Every prisoner who left the Bastille alive, whether to be set at liberty or to be transferred, was expected to sign a declaration promising never to reveal what he or she saw or heard in the prison. If a prisoner could not write, the declaration was read to him and he was required to make an x or a cross in place of his name. The format of the declaration changed a little over the years, but mostly read as follows: "Being at liberty, I promise, in conformity with the King's orders, never to speak to anyone in any way, shape or form of the prisoners or of anyone or anything else concerning the chateau of the Bastille that may have come to my knowledge. I acknowledge moreover that any money, papers, personal effects or jewels on my person or that I had delivered to the said chateau [i.e. the Bastille] during my detention have been returned to me... Written at the royal chateau of the Bastille this..." and a date and signature would follow. Declarations from earlier in the century were even more stern and forbidding. One declaration signed by a prisoner in 1707 read, "Following the order of the King, I will submit myself to any kind of punishment if I speak or write on the subject of the prisoners with whom I was incarcerated and who were in the same tower."⁴⁴ Another declaration from the same year read, "I promise according to the King's orders not to speak to anyone including relatives and friends of the prisoners with whom I was incarcerated and with whom I might have had communication on pain of chastisement ordered by His Majesty."⁴⁵ By the 1720s, the format of the declaration

Rumor and Politics Before the French Revolution Trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁴⁴ BA, MS 12581, *Sortie des Prisonniers*.

⁴⁵ BA, MS 12581, *Sortie des Prisonniers*.

became more standardized and less ominous, though prisoners were always expected to obey and fear the king's reprisals if they broke their vow of silence.

Simon-Nicolas Henri Linguet, a lawyer in the *parlement* of Paris, publicly violated this vow after he left the Bastille, albeit from the safety of foreign shores. A writer and provocateur who was as famous as Voltaire in his day, Linguet also wrote on the evils of the Bastille and believed that all its secrets should be divulged to the public. According to Mercier, everyone knew of the “famous Linguet” though no one knew his crime.⁴⁶ Writing in 1783, Linguet argued for the destruction of the Bastille, claiming that it contributed nothing to the pursuit of justice and that it only facilitated the arbitrary power and oppression of ministers who manipulated the king. Like Voltaire, he also had a turn at the Bastille for allegedly slandering someone prominent at court, and Linguet responded by writing a four-volume exposé of the Bastille's horrors. He told his readers that all prisoners were required to swear an oath of silence before they were released from the prison, but in his introduction, he justified his violation of that oath. He wrote: “But is there no interdict to prohibit the disclosure I am about to make? Can I without scruple treat the several subjects which I have engaged to discuss? Can I in conscience let the public into the secret of the terrible mysteries into which the 27th of September 1780 [the date of his imprisonment] has initiated me? ... Oh ye well-informed of every nation, rigid casuists who know what honor and delicacy prescribe, pronounce: Because my hands have been unjustly bound, must my pen be restrained, too?”⁴⁷ Linguet had been sworn to secrecy, and he knew that while this work might garner him fame and fortune, it was by its very existence a violation of

⁴⁶ L. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Vol. III, 290.

⁴⁷ Simon Nicolas Henri Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille. Containing a full exposition of the mysterious policy and despotic oppression of the French Government, In the Interior Administration of that State-Prison. Interspersed with a Variety of Curious Anecdotes. Translated from the French of the celebrated Mr. Linguet, Who was Imprisoned there From September 1780, to May 1782* (London: G. Kearsly, 1783), 8-9.

that oath. According to Linguet, while it was dishonorable to fail to keep one's word, it was far worse to keep the secrets of a despotic regime.

Writing from England where he had exiled himself in order to avoid another arrest, Linguet professed untiring, fanatical patriotism for his own country again and again. As a mark of that patriotism, he had taken it upon himself to unveil the governments' foul secrets. To him, it was a duty that he owed the people and the king who had too long been manipulated by greedy ministers. What seemed even more despicable in Linguet's eyes was that this same regime that so carefully concealed its own inner workings, had eyes and ears to penetrate into the private lives of its citizens. After his first exile in England and his subsequent return to France, believing himself to be safe, Linguet recounted the various "snares" set for him by the police of Paris. He wrote that "a spy, under the mask of a friend...had been pensioned by the police...to penetrate into my secrets..."⁴⁸ While Linguet constantly maintained that he had done nothing wrong and that he had nothing to hide, he nevertheless counted the unmerited probing of his secrets as a terrible abuse of justice and as one of the many affronts he had suffered. He portrayed the police as having no scruples, including the respect for privacy, in their attempt to malign and incriminate an innocent man. In another passage, describing the conditions a prisoner of the Bastille endured, Linguet wrote, "[The prisoner's] letters, when he is allowed the means of writing, pass open to the police, or are there broke open. The doleful lamentations of the captives afford no small amusement to the persons appointed to inspect them: they divert themselves for a short time with the various notes of the different birds they have in their cage, and then tie up carefully in a bundle together the several epistolary productions of the day; not to be applied to any use, but either to deposit them in some hidden magazine, or to burn them; and neither the

⁴⁸ Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille*, 1783, 64.

persons who wrote them, nor those to whom they are addressed, ever see them or hear of them afterwards.”⁴⁹

In theory, no prisoner could leave without having signed the declaration. It was difficult to enforce, however, and while the police threatened exile or another incarceration, they certainly could not make sure that every prisoner kept his or her word. Furthermore, many prisoners of rank brought their own servants who stayed with them for long periods of time in the Bastille. Servants had to remain in the fortress as long as their employers were incarcerated, but their names and ages were only sometimes noted in the prison’s register, and they were not all required to sign the declaration when they left the prison.

All in all, the secrecy of the Bastille’s administration was designed to help the police maintain control over the populace of the city. The police hoped to keep curiosity in check and provoke fear. They also wished to have control over the inmates whose knowledge or actions might be dangerous to the Crown, and over the staff who had contact with prisoners. Over time, though, the extreme secrecy of the Bastille’s everyday operations turned into an end in and of itself as the rules became more elaborate, detailed and recondite, sometimes with no obvious purpose. These practices of secrecy and keeping even the most mundane activities hidden from the public continued up until the Revolution even though they had outlived their usefulness and only a handful of prisoners remained.

Secrecy and Rumor

As the institutional secrecy continued to hold sway over the day-to-day operations of the Bastille, that secrecy also provoked the wave of rumors, legends and anecdotes of hidden abuses

⁴⁹ Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille*, 1783, 23-4.

going on in state prisons. The police's regime of secrecy over the prison did serve to inspire fear in the inhabitants of the city as well as throughout the kingdom and even abroad, but fear—contrary to the hopes and designs of the police—did not always entail silence. Fear and a lack of access to information could lead to the proliferation of all sorts of unfounded rumors and stories. For example, when a prisoner died in the Bastille, the authorities wanted it kept as quiet as possible even if a prisoner's death probably resulted from natural causes, the knowledge of which would not create an uproar or scandal of any kind. Prisoners were buried in the nearby churchyard, unless they were not Catholic. In that case, prisoners were sometimes buried in the governor's garden.⁵⁰ These might account for some of the corpses that were found in 1789-90 in the dungeons of the Bastille and that so excited the revolutionaries during the demolition of the fortress. The revolutionaries could find no record of burials that took place at the Bastille, and so the discovery of human remains led to wild speculations of secret executions that took place at the orders of the king or more often a wicked minister or royal mistress. (There were, though, a few executions that had taken place at the Bastille under Louis XIV.) When in 1704, a prisoner at the Bastille committed suicide, the lieutenant general of police wanted the affair hushed up. He wrote, "I believe it is best to say as little as possible on the subject of his death and its circumstances. And the same should be done when any such misfortunes occur at the Bastille. I have proposed that we keep knowledge of this from the public which is always prompt to exaggerate accidents of this kind and attribute them to abuses of government which they suppose but of course cannot be certain of."⁵¹ The people of Paris had known for a long time, however,

⁵⁰ A register of deaths from 1720 in the Bastille, reads "le nommé de Lian(?) est décédé le 3 décembre 1720: il a été enterré au jardin le lendemain n'ayant donné aucune marque de la religion catholique." BA, MS 12581, *Sortie des Prisonniers*.

⁵¹ Elise Dutray-Lecoin and Danielle Muzerelle, eds., *La Bastille, ou, L'enfer des vivants: à travers les archives de la Bastille* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), 165.

that they buried Bastille prisoners always at night, and the fact that the police tried to cover up or at least say as little as possible about the death of a prisoner could and probably did lead to all sorts of dark rumors. Also, if the actual facts of the situation had been publicly known, it would have led to far less speculation and curiosity.

Similarly, the letters written from the major at the Bastille, Chevalier, to the lieutenant general of police, Sartine, in 1765 about a certain prisoner reveal the same problem. In November, 1765, the major wrote to Sartine of a distraught prisoner who only went by the name of Adam. The major told his superior, “The prisoner named Adam does nothing but weep day and night and is inconsolable. As this prisoner is a German, he believes that he will be imprisoned to the end of his days being at the Bastille.”⁵² Adam’s fear of the Bastille shows that by this period the prison’s sinister reputation had already spilled over France’s borders. In fact, many of the spine-chilling memoirs decrying the Bastille’s horrors were published abroad, read abroad and then smuggled into France.

The major’s letters to the chief of police (who had ordered the prisoner’s arrest) are full of both pity for the prisoner and frustration with his superior. The major seems more and more at his wit’s end as to what to do with a prisoner who was on the verge of an emotional breakdown and perhaps suicidal, and at the same he received little help or guidance from Sartine. Like the rest of the staff at the prison, he had no idea why the prisoner was there. In December of the same year, replying to orders he had received from the chief of police, the major wrote that “it is first necessary that we know the reason for his detention, of which I am completely ignorant.”⁵³ Six months later, the major was still writing to the chief of police about this prisoner who had

⁵² BA, MS 12507, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁵³ BA, MS 12507, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

gone from bad to worse, he said, and who did nothing but shout and weep in his room and tell his jailors that he needed to return home to his father who was very ill. The major often told the chief of police, “I fear for the future” and “I do not know what will come of this.” He wrote in September of 1766, “This prisoner is in the most wretched state. If you saw him you would feel pity for him. He does not cease weeping day and night, and does not want to eat.”⁵⁴ Then in October, when Adam had been in the prison almost a year, the major wrote that he was no longer recognizable. Writing at night, the major told his superior that “at this very moment he is shouting and screaming so loudly in his cell that we can hear him throughout in the fortress and even outside in the square.”⁵⁵ When he was finally released from the Bastille only to be transferred to another prison, the major wrote that the prisoner began to sob uncontrollably despite his attempts to console him. The treatment Adam received in the Bastille, at least by the major’s account, was not harsh or cruel by any measure. Rather, the staff did their best to make sure he ate and to console him, though without any knowledge of the reasons for his arrest or when he might be released, they could do little to alleviate his aggrieved mental state. While he suffered no physical deprivation, the prison’s fearsome reputation and his lack of knowledge of his own future served to exacerbate his anguish. Furthermore, the major wrote of one terrible night where the prisoner was screaming so loudly he could be heard outside in the street. Even if there was no torture, starvation, or cruel and terrible punishments of any kind taking place in the prison, what were the citizens of Paris to think when they could hear screams, wailing and lamentations coming from the Bastille in the darkest hours of the night?

⁵⁴ BA, MS 12507, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

⁵⁵ BA, MS 12507, *Dossier de prisonniers*.

The emotional outbursts of this prisoner seemed to be unusual judging from the major's letters, but tears and other signs of distress were still common in the prison. In the same year, 1765, the major wrote to the chief of police explaining that he forgot to return a prisoner's personal effects to him when he was leaving the Bastille because the man, who was not being released but transferred, "was sobbing and groaning, which made me forget myself for a moment seeing him in that state."⁵⁶ The major seemed to be someone who was moved to pity by the emotional state of the prisoners around him, and he certainly did his best to console them though that did little to stem the tide of anguish, fear and growing despair. The police methodically reported weeping during interrogations, which they always interpreted as a sign of imminent success in culling the information they were seeking. For the police, threats and intimidation were useful tools, but the fear and hatred they inspired lived well beyond a given day of interrogations and even beyond the existence of the prison itself. The police wanted to be feared since they believed that that fear inspired respect and facilitated order. The emotions of the prisoners that come out in interrogations and the letters of the Bastille's officers reveal how deeply that fear had become instilled in ordinary citizens who found themselves on the wrong side of the prison's walls.

By then, when more than half of the century had passed, the Bastille had become entrenched in the political imagination as a symbol of despotism, abuse of power and cruelty, and the intense secrecy surrounding its operations played no small part in the creation of these rumors. The prison was hardly the place of horrors, especially by the eighteenth century, that everyone imagined it was, but what was important and lasting was the image of the Bastille, not the reality. The public saw it as a terrifying place of death and suffering, and that belief made it

⁵⁶ BA MS 12507 *Dossier des prisonniers*.

in a sense real as in the case of the prisoner Adam who was filled with so much anguish because of what he *believed* might happen to him.

Suicides were common at the Bastille for the same reason. For example, a painter named Nattier (probably of no relation to the famous painter Jean-Marc Nattier), was imprisoned over the winter of 1725 and 1726 for suspected sodomy, a crime punishable by death. He had no doubt heard of the fate of a man named Duchauffour who had been given the death penalty a few years earlier in a spectacular and by that time rare form of execution--burning at the stake--for the same crime. Fearing that he faced the same end (though no one else connected to Duchauffour was executed in such a terrifying manner), Nattier suffered from anxiety and suicidal thoughts which he voiced to anyone who would listen. The staff grew worried and assigned a guard to keep an eye on him. According to his guard, Nattier told him that “the affair for which he was arrested was not going well, and he saw that he was in dire straits,” though his guard always did his best “to lift his spirits and console him.”⁵⁷ Despite being watched, Nattier still managed to slit his throat early in 1726, clearly preferring to end his life there than to face whatever the authorities had in store for him.

When an unexpected death occurred at the Bastille, despite the prison’s secrecy, it was stipulated that it had to be investigated and an official report sent to the police signed by the surgeon of the Bastille. In 1774, after having been imprisoned for half a year for stealing a large sum of money from the *Compagnie des Indes* before it had been dissolved in 1769, a soldier named Joseph Grimelin hanged himself with a bed sheet attached to his window after undergoing an interrogation. The next morning, the surgeon and other officials came to examine the body in order to “determine the cause of death of a prisoner who was deceased the previous night in the

⁵⁷ BA, MS 10895, *Dossier de Prisonniers*.

said chateau of the Bastille.”⁵⁸ The officials made sure to provide as detail and thorough a report as they could. While the cause of death was evident, they followed the rules to the letter examining everything on the body and in the room and describing them in their report. They stated that they arrived around one o’clock in the afternoon, went to the fourth room in the Bertaudière Tower where, they wrote, “We found a male cadaver hanging by a piece of twisted cloth which was attached to the second iron bar crossing the five vertical bars, also of iron, in the window of the said chamber. We observed that the back of the said cadaver was turned towards the window...”⁵⁹ This description of the deceased which noted every minute detail was like the written equivalent of a photograph at a crime scene, intended to document everything even if suicide was the probable cause. There are countless similar reports in the Bastille’s archives of suicides by hanging with twisted bed sheets, or slit throats and wrists and jailors discovering cell floors covered in blood in the morning. The prisoners who were not allowed sharp objects were perceived to be dangerous not because they might attack others but because they might harm themselves. The prison was simultaneously a myth and a reality of terror.

Knowledge of deaths at the Bastille, despite the police’s secrecy, eventually spread to the public and only worsened the police’s reputation. Jean-Charles Le Prévôt, a lawyer who was arrested in 1768 for denouncing high-ranking members of the government as part of a large-scale conspiracy that he believed was taking place to create a grain monopoly, was in prison for over twenty years and wrote copious letters, tracts and even a book manuscript because his jailors believed pen and ink would appease him and keep him from making trouble in prison. From prison, he wrote lengthy, vituperative letters denouncing members of the governments and especially the police, which only the police and his jailors read. None of his hundreds of letters

⁵⁸ BA, MS 12432, *Dossier de Prisonniers*.

⁵⁹ BA, MS 12432, *Dossier de Prisonniers*.

and essays were ever delivered; they remained in police files until the Revolution and then were moved to the Bastille archives where they reside to this day. In one of his many disorganized essays or rants against the government which he saw as debilitated by corruption, Prévôt claimed that the police did nothing to help the citizens of Paris or the nation at large. In fact, they were a hindrance to justice, public tranquility and the smooth running of the kingdom. He was imprisoned in the Bastille and then the Chateau de Vincennes, but his denunciations of the police stemmed both from his own experiences and the reputation the police had acquired, particularly from their use of the Bastille. Prévôt wrote that the police “conspire against the liberty of citizens, arrest them both day and night...At a simple denunciation from one of their spies, they abduct citizens and bring them to the Bastille...where they undergo the preparatory question...”⁶⁰ The preparatory question or putting to the question was the use of torture to elicit a confession from the suspect of a crime. There is no evidence that Prévôt had undergone the question as the police make no mention of it in their notes on his interrogation, and as mentioned above, torture was quite rare by the eighteenth century. The fear of torture, however, remained in the collective imagination, and the police were perhaps not averse to the public believing in the possibility of torture at the Bastille. At any rate, they did nothing to counter rumors of torture or even secret executions.

Prévôt continued vilifying the police in his letter to the chief of police, relying once again on both rumors of the police and his own experiences to fill his pages of invective, saying, “If it’s true that...Sartine tyrannized more than forty thousand good subjects without Louis XV even being troubled by the fact, do not the souls of these innocent victims cry out to God for vengeance? ...You are surely not so ignorant as to believe that ministers or lieutenant generals of police can legitimately have the power of life or death over citizens who were secretly abducted

⁶⁰ BA, MS 12351, *Dossier de Prisonniers*.

with the power of *lettres de cachet* or even without them...?”⁶¹ By his own account, Prévôt had been deprived of his freedom, “without just cause, without having committed a crime, and without any semblance of a trial,” and when he misbehaved he wrote that he was punished by being thrown into a dungeon and given only the “bread of sorrow and the water of anguish” with which to nourish himself. In another insulting note to the chief of police he wrote, “You have no idea what the police is or is supposed to do. It would take me too long to explain it to you... As things stand, you destroy as much as humanly possible the natural liberty of Frenchmen who are your brothers and fellow citizens... You secretly take them from their homes with the help of your thugs and spies... You treat them like animals that belong to you. You are dissipated; you extort and take from the royal treasury the finances that come from the people, you enrich yourself without shame and sell men and women to jailors to hold them in captivity, tyrannize them, devour them, some for several years and others for life if you suspect them of trying to unveil your injustices and your crimes... You not only torment bodies but souls in installing chaplains who are nothing but your spies.”⁶² For Prévôt and for many others, secrecy facilitated abuses in the Bastille, and the police took conscious advantage of their cover.

Then during the Revolution, the Old Regime, in the form of the Bastille’s records, was forced to open its entrails to the public, as Marat once put it, revealing evidence like human remains that were so frightening because they were mysterious. The police had used secrecy as an instrument of terror and also to rein in public opinion, but it backfired and fueled the rumors of government abuses that took place behind closed doors, away from the eyes of the public. The Bastille had become a sort of forbidding island in the capital, a place where time and reality were

⁶¹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossier de Prisonniers*.

⁶² BA, MS 12351, *Dossier de Prisonniers*.

warped, where mysteries seemed to conceal deeper enigmas, and disappearances abounded. Believing that the Bastille had devoured living men, French citizens devoured with their eyes the sight of cadavers that had been found in the prison's ruins, believing that secrecy was synonymous with despotism and that a transparent regime could never repeat these abuses.

Along with the changing attitudes that came with the Enlightenment, the entrenched customs of secrecy and the former regime's reluctance to officially deny any of the horrifying rumors helped lay the groundwork for the mania for transparency of the revolutionary period. This traditional secrecy helped create a culture ripe and receptive to exaggerations of the Bastille legends as well as to the dangers of secrecy as a tool and as an attitude. It was also in this period that the need for transparency in the state became a favored theme for journalists and other authors. The state no longer had any right to keep secrets in their points of view since it only used secrecy to carry out its despotic aims. To them, governments used surveillance to control citizens, and while this could not be avoided, citizens could return the gaze and shine a light on the state in order to curb abuses. As Jacques Pierre Brissot wrote in the prospectus for the *Patriote français*, "A free press is an outpost that watches out unceasingly on behalf of the people."⁶³ Similarly, Jean-Paul Marat believed that "in a well-ordered state, freedom of the press must be unlimited for writers who keep an eye on public officials. And since plots against the nation are always concocted in darkness, since princes call no witnesses... and since they rarely sign their [written instructions], it should be permitted [for writers] to denounce them on the slightest evidence."⁶⁴ The press was the sentinel of the people, "[watching out] for their interests,

⁶³ BA, MS 12351, *Dossier de Prisonniers*.

⁶⁴ Jean-Paul Marat, *Les chaînes de l'Esclavage* Ed. Michel Vovelle (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1988), 144.

opening the entrails of deceit and revealing them...”⁶⁵ As journalists, these authors had an essential role to play in a new regime of liberty and democracy. It was their role to shine light on everything, to show that transparency in the government, and a press without censorship, was possible, and necessary.

Marat certainly decried the secrecy and opacity of what he saw as a despotic regime; he even had the habit of not only denouncing particular individuals in print, but also of publishing their names and addresses.⁶⁶ (His work against monarchy and other forms of government that he found unjust and illegitimate, *The Chains of Slavery*, was first published in English in 1774, and published again in French in 1792).⁶⁷ Marat believed that “in a small state, the magistrates always have their eyes on the people, and the people have their eyes on the magistrates,” which seemed to be an unavoidable and tolerable state of affairs. But governments, whether or not the gaze was returned, always had their eyes on the people, and if governments themselves were not kept under surveillance, they would easily realize their despotic designs.⁶⁸

The author of the widely-read pamphlet, *The Paris Police Unveiled*, which denounced the Old Regime police during the Revolution, Pierre Manuel, echoed the sentiments of Marat, Mercier and others, in believing that the police could do no right, and that transparency would protect the people from abuses. On the title page of the pamphlet was the motto: “Publicity is the safeguard of laws and morality.”⁶⁹ Publicity or transparency protected the people, since

⁶⁵ Marat, *Les chaînes de l'Esclavage*, 1988, xlvi.

⁶⁶ See Harvey Chisick, Ilana Zinguer, and Ouzi Elyada, eds., *The Press in the French Revolution*, (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991), 17.

⁶⁷ Chisick, Zinguer, and Elyada, *The Press in the French Revolution*, 1991, 9.

⁶⁸ Marat, *Les chaînes de l'Esclavage*, 1988, 23, 236.

⁶⁹ Pierre Manuel, *La Police de Paris dévoilée* (Paris: Chez J. B. Garnery, 1793), frontispiece.

according to the author, the police did anything but that. Before the Revolution, he wrote, there was nothing too unjust or dishonorable to the police. It was true that the Paris police was seen as one of the marvels of the world, but Manuel insisted that the machine of the police was over-complicated, expensive and despotic.⁷⁰ What's more, the police penetrated unlawfully into family secrets, their only talent was spying, they privileged the rich, and ignored the real problems of the city.⁷¹ Allowing the police their secrecy and all their broad powers had done nothing to benefit the people whereas government transparency would ensure that these abuses could not prevail. By the radical phases of the Revolution, though, those journalists whose newspapers were still in print called for total transparency even of the citizen since traitors and false patriots appeared to be lurking around every corner. In Year II, the same year as Manuel's pamphlet, a journalist of *Révolutions de Paris* suggested that the *sans-culottes* form committees of surveillance to keep an eye on their own sections, leaving the "guilty with no hope of escaping punishment," and defended a proposal to search the homes of private citizens in order to be sure that no one was hiding anything counter-revolutionary in nature. He wrote, "The gazes of a people that are fixed upon the Republic must only fall upon objects that elevate the soul... This precaution of purging the interiors of houses of all the foolish emblems of the credulity and servitude of our fathers will only seem petty to those who have not studied the human heart to its depths."⁷² By this period, those who kept secrets, or wanted to safeguard their privacy, now appeared sinister to the revolutionaries. It would be best to sacrifice one's privacy than to leave oneself vulnerable to suspicion, and it would be better for the entire populace, so these authors

⁷⁰ Manuel, *La Police de Paris dévoilée*, 1793, v, 1.

⁷¹ Manuel, *La Police de Paris dévoilée*, 1793, 2, 10, 13.

⁷² *Révolutions de Paris* (3 August to 28 October 1793), 89.

argued, to accept surveillance and even participate in it in order to expose traitors and criminals. By the time of the Terror, transparency had come to rule the day and anyone who claimed that it was being taken too far was liable to be suspected of counter-revolutionary sentiments.

The Obstacles to Reform

The government during the Old Regime was not unaware of all the complaints and criticisms leveled at the police and state prison. The police and the prisons they used underwent so much criticism after the 1760s that the government began in earnest to think of projects of reform. Prison reform was also a popular topic in pamphlets and in the salons. A central figure in the efforts for reform was Guillaume-Christien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, the son of an elite legal family and later minister of the king's household under Louis XVI. Malesherbes was a lawyer for most of his life but entered politics in 1771 when he protested the Maupeou coup, the dissolution of the *parlements* and their replacement with more streamlined and compliant courts. Malesherbes was banished to his country estate but was recalled when Louis XVI came to power, and he became a powerful, reform-minded minister in 1775. His tenure only lasted nine months, however, and afterwards he retired to his country estate and traveled around Europe.

When Malesherbes became a minister, he was riding on a wave of popularity. He was backed by the hopes of many that he would reform an overly elaborate system that left much leeway for abuse. At the beginning, he was determined to enact reforms and interviewed many prisoners himself, trying to find out the reasons for their imprisonment, if it was possible that they be released, and what their greatest grievances were. The lawyer, Prévôt, who had by then been imprisoned for seven years for denouncing what he believed was a conspiracy, recalled being visited by Malesherbes in July of 1775. Malesherbes gave him paper with which he could

write out his grievances if he wished, and Prévôt did not fail to take him up on this offer. He described in detail the abuses that he was sure were taking place, some that he had witnessed and endured himself, others that he had heard of. Prévôt wrote that he had been thrown in a dungeon many times for allegedly misbehaving at the Chateau de Vincennes, but the dungeon where he had been was not the worst one for there was another deep in the foundations of the tower where “one cannot fail to perish in little time due to the lack of air and the infected and stagnant water that drips constantly down the walls from the vaulted ceiling to the floor. It is in these sorts of dungeons that unfortunates sent there by the police die in secret without any trial or formal accusation...”⁷³ Malesherbes eventually decided against releasing Prévôt, probably upon hearing from his jailors and the police that he was madman, which they all took him to be. Prévôt blamed his continued imprisonment on the chief of police who had visited him along with Malesherbes in order to “intimidate” him and turn the minister against him. Even if Malesherbes did not push to have the prisoner released, he clearly believed some of the critiques of the treatment of prisoners and released many after having spoken to them.

One of the most difficult obstacles to his reform project, however, was the institutional secrecy of the police and their prisons. The overwhelmed minister found not only several cases of mismanagement but also terrible ignorance or deliberate obfuscation in his research into reasons for arrest. Secrecy in prison had always been a matter of course, but when Malesherbes began to investigate he realized he lacked the basic information that would make reform feasible. Lack of communication between government branches had created a tangled paper trail as well as a dearth of valuable information.

⁷³ BA, MS 12351.

In September of 1775, Malesherbes wrote to the governor of the Bastille asking about the prisoners whose names were written on an attached list. He requested that the governor send him “a copy of the order from the king in which the prisoners on the attached list were ordered to be arrested and detained at the chateau of the Bastille. This document will greatly facilitate the investigation into the reasons for which they were deprived of their liberty.”⁷⁴ No one could tell the minister to his satisfaction why those on the list had been imprisoned. The staff of the Bastille certainly had no idea. They were never told the reasons for arrests.

In the years that followed, Malesherbes’ successors could make little headway. In 1776, a minister and secretary of state wrote to the governor of the Bastille for the same kind of order of arrest in order to ascertain if the orders “emanated from my department which is unlikely considering there is no trace of these orders in my office.”⁷⁵ According to what little records they could find, the orders for arrest had most likely come from that minister’s office though he could find no record of them nor remember the reason for the arrests. The government did not give up, though, trying to look into prisoners conditions and the reasons for their arrests. In 1778, a minister sent a letter to the governor of the Bastille saying, “Monsieur, the king wishes to be informed of the number of prisoners who are currently detained in the chateau of the Bastille, which you command, by virtue of the orders expedited by the secretaries of state in the War Department. Upon receiving this letter, please send me a list with their names and the date of the orders.”⁷⁶ The minister believed the orders for arrest had emanated from the War Department, but when the governor of the Bastille wrote to that department to receive a confirmation of those

⁷⁴ BA, MS 12852.

⁷⁵ BA, MS 12852.

⁷⁶ BA, MS 12852.

orders, a secretary wrote back that “there was no prisoner sent to the Bastille with an order from the king countersigned by the secretary of state of the War Department.”⁷⁷ The minister in charge of reform, the governor of the Bastille, the king, and the entire War Department with all the powers at their disposal could not uncover the reasons for the arrest of the prisoners who were being investigated. The police might have known, and these ministers no doubt asked the police for information, but the police apparently kept their own counsel.

Carrying out reforms and investigating prisoners’ stories became nearly impossible when the necessary records were simply unavailable and departments did not communicate with each other, or at least communicated badly. Secrecy had become such an entrenched tradition that the staff of the Bastille maintained it even when there were few prisoners and little to hide in an age where the public pushed for reform. A century earlier, when the officers of the Bastille began to keep records of prisoners, demanding that the government lay its workings bare to the people or even to an educated elite was unthinkable. In the eighteenth century, when well-intentioned ministers and officials attempted reform, motivated by the values fostered by the Enlightenment, they discovered an opaque and overly complicated system whose barriers to the flow of information hampered reform and even efforts to retrieve records. Secrecy had gone from a useful tool to an inconvenience and even a hindrance, though in the process the system and culture of secrecy at the Bastille made possible the very stories that galvanized revolutionaries to tear it down.

⁷⁷ BA, MS 12852.

CHAPTER 5: THE FAMINE PLOT: THE CASE OF A JANSENIST CONSPIRACY THEORIST

The Jansenist obsession with transparency and their campaign against the allegedly secretive Jesuits helped forge the connection in the minds of the public between being secretive and being the foreign “other,” and between transparency and citizenship. The Jansenists, who espoused an incipient form of nationalism in invoking a national character and constitution lost in the mists of time, also succeeded in tying their favoring of transparency, their Manichaeian worldview and their fear of secrecy to the growing trends of nationalism. Fear of secrecy could also lead to a fixation on conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories were not new to Europe in the eighteenth century, but the Jansenist strain of fear and suspicion of all things secret was not unlike the conspiracy-related paranoia of the revolutionaries a few decades later. One example of a Jansenist who lived and breathed conspiracy theories was Jean-Charles Le Prévôt.

Le Prévôt was a lawyer from Normandy and a devout Catholic with Jansenist leanings. He was born in the 1720s and eventually came to make a modest but comfortable living as the secretary to the intendant of Alençon in the 1750s. Then in the next decade he moved to Paris and entered the service of the Abbé de Broglie, who incidentally was the brother of the Comte de Broglie who headed the *Secret du roi*. Le Prévôt had a keen interest in fencing, thought of himself as an expert in the art, and published a book on the subject. He also traded and sold paintings on the side, especially to his employer, the Abbé de Broglie, though he decried excess nudity in art. Sometime late in the 1760s he returned to Normandy and, convinced that powerful members of the government were hoarding grain in order to drive up prices and profit from

widespread hunger, he denounced this conspiracy publicly to the *parlement* of Normandy in 1768.

Rumors of so-called “famine plots” were not uncommon. The government began to experiment with liberalization to see if it could improve the fluctuations in the price of grain and the hunger and frustration price changes created. In 1775, for example, when the minister of finance, Turgot, wanted to lift the price ceiling to see if a laissez-faire economy would improve the situation, prices soared. At this time, ordinary people barely understood the effects of economic forces, and when prices rose, rumors of a famine plot surfaced again. To add to that, lack of transparency, as James Van Horn Melton has argued, contributed to rumors and notions of conspiracy because, until Jacques Necker published his *compte rendu* detailing the kingdom’s finances in the 1780s, ordinary men and women could only speculate about the kingdom’s financial situation. Subjects of the Crown in fact paid more taxes to the government in England than in France, but revolts over taxation were more frequent in France since they perceived that the burden of taxation was greater than it was.¹ Like many others of the reading public, Le Prévôt was optimistic about the new ideas of the free market, but when prices rose and hunger became widespread, he blamed the problem on a government conspiracy. To him, these were not merely rumors but evidence of a clandestine plot. As a fervent Jansenist, he also believed that God wished him to make public what he thought he knew of a conspiracy so that those plotting against the common people could not find shelter in the shadows.

¹ See James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Cynthia Bouton, *The Flour War: Gender, Class and Community in late Ancien Regime French Society* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Steven A. Kaplan, *The Famine Plot Persuasion in Eighteenth-century France* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1982); Idem., *Le Pain, le peuple et le roi: la bataille du libéralisme sous Louis XV* (Paris: Perrin, 1986); E.P. Thompson, Florence Gauthier and Guy-Robert Ikni, eds., *La Guerre du blé au XVIIIème siècle: la critique populaire contre le libéralisme économique au XVIIIème siècle* (Montreuil: Editions de la Passion, 1988);. For works on rumor, see Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution* Trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Lisa Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

Among those he denounced was the lieutenant general of police at the time, Sartine. Le Prévôt was immediately arrested, taken to the Bastille and interrogated. He was not arrested because the authorities put much stock in his accusations and they feared he had uncovered the truth, but because he had insulted many high-ranking men in the government, and the police found his accusations dangerous. Most of those who were interrogated by the police commissioners at the Bastille were soon cowed and adopted attitudes of contrition. After a period of incarceration, and promises that they would reform their behavior, they were usually released unless they were perceived to be too dangerous. The police often determined length of incarceration by a prisoner's behavior and demeanor. Unlike most prisoners, however, Le Prévôt was zealous, unapologetic and indefatigable in his accusations and his certainty that he was speaking the truth, a truth which ought to be heard by all. Soon, the police decided that he was simply mad and he was kept in prison, first the Bastille and then the Chateau de Vincennes, for decades. It was not until the Revolution that he was released, and it was only because the Revolution had taken place. The police during the Old Regime had never had any intention of releasing him.

Considered mad and unfit for society, (his fierce, uncompromising and feisty personality did not help him in that regard), Le Prévôt was given paper and ink most of the time because writing calmed him and kept him quiet. For one thing, writing kept him from trying to start a prison riot, which he almost did on more than one occasion. He wrote copious notes and manuscripts for himself on religious and political topics, and countless letters to men in positions of authority announcing the famine conspiracy, all of which the police kept in their files. When the Revolution took place and he was released, he was poised to become one of the prisoner-celebrities like the Chevalier de Latude (famous for his multiple escapes from the Bastille),

imprisoned during the Old Regime and hailed as a victim of despotism and a martyr to freedom. Le Prévôt had even written memoirs like Latude, but he was far less skilled at attracting the attention of the public, appealing to sensationalism and performing the identity of a celebrity than Latude, and Le Prévôt was soon outshone by him. He thus attracted very little fame though he did succeed in receiving a lifelong pension from the government in 1792. Despite the hardships of his decades-long imprisonment, some certainly real and some exaggerated, Le Prévôt lived to the incredible age of 97, surviving Napoleon and several different regimes. Those who knew him in his old age in the town of Bernay where he lived said that he was quiet and subdued, and did not speak often of “the old days.”² The long years of imprisonment and disappointment may have taken their toll on him. He died in 1823 and fell into relative obscurity though he was remembered by some in the subsequent generations. In 1839, he featured as the hero in a play called “Le Pacte du Famine,” and during the Third Republic he was occasionally referenced as an example of the Old Regime’s tyranny. Since then, though, he has been mostly forgotten.

Treated for a large portion of his lifetime as a madman and fanatic, and then more or less ignored, Le Prévôt nevertheless left a massive paper trail revealing an extraordinary, ardent and indomitable spirit. He stubbornly asserted his right to form his own opinions, even against the actions of the state. A close look at his supposed rants shows that, first of all, that his language of secrets echoed the language discussed in earlier chapters, especially Jansenist anti-Jesuit rhetoric. Le Prévôt’s religious sensibilities informed his understanding of his treatment by the state, and the Jansenists, using a biblical language of light and darkness, more and more frequently advocated freedom of thought and government transparency. We can also see from Le Prévôt’s

² E. Le Mercier, *Le Prévôt dit de Beaumont, prisonnier d’état, détenu pendant vingt-deux ans et deux mois à la Bastille et dans différentes prisons pour avoir dénoncé le pacte du famine* (Bernay: Miaulle-Duval, 1883), 12-13.

prodigious output over the decades the transition from quasi-political, religious values to a firm political critique of monarchy, though he vacillated between blaming the king's ministers for the ills of society and excoriating the king in the most emphatic terms. Lastly, his writings reveal a strand of thinking not far from that of the revolutionaries. His concerns about secrecy and his efforts to link transparency to patriotic zeal anticipated that of the Jacobins who were at the height of their influence decades later. The story of this prisoner of relatively humble background is thus a case study of how his Jansenist beliefs led to an obsession with transparency and how religion played a key role in his politicization, but it is also evidence of the widening cultural attitude towards secrecy after the midpoint of the century, certainly influenced by but no longer limited to the Jansenists.

The Penitent

Alluding to the Prophet Malachi in the Old Testament and perhaps meditating on the darkness of his prison, Le Prévôt turned to one of his favorite topics, the salvific qualities of light. He explained, “We were in deepest night because of our ignorance and the blindness of our hearts, and God by His Word shed light into the heart of darkness... Jesus Christ is the true sun of justice who has risen to illuminate those who were in darkness and in the shadow of death...”³ Like many of his fellow Jansenists, the battle of light and darkness was one of his favorite themes. The idea of this sacred battle, and his faith itself, most likely brought enormous comfort in times of perceived or real persecution and hardship. Le Prévôt spent countless hours copying out prayers and sermons from the religious texts he was allowed to read, handwritten pages that numbered in the hundreds. Though he had a deep-seated conviction of his knowledge of

³ Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

dastardly conspiracy and his own righteousness, this lawyer from Normandy also spoke endlessly of confession. It was one of his favorite activities, and though confessions were meant to remain secret, he was in the habit of writing his down and showing them to whomever came his way or expressed interest. He often liked to write addendums or afterthoughts of sins that he only remembered after his confessor had gone. When he wrote out his confessions, he usually began with the same prayer: “Come, O God, to dispel the darkness...teach me to humbly confess to you my wretchedness and to deplore before you all my crimes.”⁴ Despite the long lists of sins, they were barely worth mentioning. In one of these lists he wrote, “I have lied several times, not in matters of consequence, but it is always a great sin to disguise, to dissimulate, and to contradict the truth in any way, shape or form...”⁵ Le Prévôt was fond of lists in general, and when he wrote his many lists of complaints to his jailor and to the police, he usually numbered them, beginning each complaint with “fifth persecution” and “sixth persecution” and so on.

Though confession was considered a private affair and its secrecy sacrosanct, much of Le Prévôt’s notes, essays and lists of confessions included various statements on the dangers of secrecy and keeping things hidden. He liked to quote one of his favorite Jansenists, Pierre Nicole, a well-known theologian of the seventeenth century. He often quoted Nicole, saying, “The evil that one conceals by remaining silent is worse than that which comes about through speaking.”⁶ Le Prévôt, of course, added his own reflections to that of Nicole, writing underneath that the practice of concealment generally did damage to one’s honor as well. He believed that “in the most respectable conditions there are so many practices...so many artifices and

⁴ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁵ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁶ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

stratagems...that the true character of honor is almost everywhere erased... [But] God wills that all secrets should be revealed and everything hidden be made public.”⁷ His aversion to secrecy was therefore not a personal one, but an aversion that he believed he shared with others of his religious and political inclinations, and one, moreover, that was willed by God.

Le Prévôt wrote countless letters to high-ranking members of the government and the clergy (which the police always kept), and in one letter to a bishop he both explained the plot he believed to have discovered and the issues prisoners were confronted with in making confessions. He set a series of terrible revelations before the bishop, first beginning with the famine plot, then going on to abuses in prison, and finally writing pages on the subject of confession. He told the bishop that the famine plot served as a thread to help him “descend in silence all the way to the heart of the labyrinth. There I discovered horrors that would make the most ruthless of men shudder... I discovered the depository of the greatest number of plots inside the Bastille itself.”⁸ It is unlikely that he found any kind of depository since he was only taken out of his cell for interrogations and finally when he was transferred to the Chateau de Vincennes. He was, however, like much of the reading public, aware of the Bastille’s reputation by that point and was well-versed in the rumors surrounding the royal prison. In the same letter, he told the bishop that the Bastille’s chaplain aided its staff and officers “in burying secretly and always at night the prisoners who have died without last rites and without aid,” and that the chaplain wrote out the official death certificate, declaring that the deceased prisoner had received all the succor and spiritual guidance he had requested, “which is a bald-faced lie,” added Le Prévôt. “Thus, with this infernal rubric of the police these unfortunate prisoners are persecuted

⁷ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁸ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Jean-Charles Le Prévôt 30 November 1782.

even after their deaths.”⁹ Officers at the Bastille buried deceased prisoners at night in order to avoid curious onlookers and because secrecy in general was the rule at the prison. This secrecy made Le Prévôt and many others suspicious of the practices in the prison and led him to believe that they could only be hiding something sinister.

As if burying prisoners at night and supposedly without last rites were not already terrible, Le Prévôt told the bishop, prisoners were also very restricted in their ability to give their confessions. The prison’s confessor, Le Prévôt asserted, was a spy for the police and not a true chaplain at all. In order to confess in the Bastille, one first had to obtain permission from the police, a condition he found egregious. Even when this permission was given, the chaplain had to take his orders from the jailor who decided “to absolve or refuse absolution to the prisoner who will have had the courage to confess...to this chaplain having no other (since at the Bastille as at Vincennes the choice of confessor is not free though the Gospel tells us a penitent should have full freedom of choice...).”¹⁰ Le Prévôt certainly numbered himself among the oppressed, and even reveled in a way in his martyrdom. Confession for him was a means of further purification and bringing him closer to God. Confessing to a spy of the police, then, was a kind of defilement of a sacred mission, and while he had no qualms about revealing everything about himself, he certainly had no intention of letting the police supposedly fool him into thinking they could give him absolution. Absolution could only come from one of God’s ministers. He wanted no forgiveness from the temporal authorities who had thrown him in prison.

Le Prévôt also believed that the police and their spies prevented him from reading the Jansenist books that he requested and from allowing him a suitable confessor, which was designed simply to prolong his suffering and to advance the interests of the devil. He even

⁹ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Jean-Charles Le Prévôt 30 November 1782.

¹⁰ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Jean-Charles Le Prévôt 30 November 1782.

believed that they had dangled a temptation before him, that of renouncing his notion of a plot and admitting he was wrong in order to be released, but he considered it his sacred duty to resist this temptation and persist in his claims. In the same letters where he insulted his jailors, however, and the police and accused them of wishing him to suffer, he often wrote down his requests, usually for religious texts, for paper, sometimes that his jailor take his book manuscript to a printer, or to go to confession. He asked for Jansenist texts such as when he requested a book by a M. Treuvé, “one of the ecclesiastical saints of Port Royal,” the Jansenist convent that was razed by Louis XIV in the beginning of the eighteenth century. This author, according to Le Prévôt, was “the spiritual director for those who have none,” and he added peevishly that he would have already had everything he requested if his jailor had sought them from the bookstore himself instead of going through the police (though this was standard procedure).¹¹

Le Prévôt was at his most furious when he was punished with a ban from attending Mass or giving confession, or when he believed that his confessor was a spy of the police. In another letter to a bishop, he complained of a confessor who had supposedly admitted to Le Prévôt that he was under the direction of the police.irate, the prisoner then told his confessor, “If I had known earlier of this I would not have given my confession. Does not the Gospel say that one’s choice of confessor should be free? ...Judge then yourself if you, rather than being a man of God, are a man of the police, or rather, without wishing to offend you, a man in service of the devil.”¹² When Jean-Charles-Pierre Lenoir succeeded Sartine as chief of police in 1775, Le Prévôt sent his complaints about a confessor to him from then on. Addressing the new chief of police as, “Demon Le Noir,” he denounced the new confessor he had met as a spy of police and

¹¹ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

¹² BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 25 Feb. 1784.

asked to have his previous confessor again. “Is it to a demon now that I have to give a confession?” he asked angrily.¹³ “The new confessor,” he told Lenoir, “profanes all that is sacred and fulfills none of his functions according to the rules set down by the Church... [He] is more Jesuit than the cursed Jesuits themselves.”¹⁴ Being a Jansenist, he had cultivated a hatred for the Jesuits, and if he was not calling one of his alleged enemies a demon or a devil, Jesuit was his favorite epithet.

Le Prévôt also believed that Lenoir had sent the new confessor to oversee his death and bury him secretly since he still believed that the police wanted him dead and had only kept him alive so as to torment him. He defiantly told the chief of police that the new confessor would not bury him under cover of night “as he believes he will do, nor will he do so to any of my fellow prisoners.”¹⁵ He then called Lenoir a demon once more, demanded his liberty and accused the chief of police of “crimes, plots, conspiracies, assassination attempts, murders both spiritual and corporal, theft, rape, cruelties, execrable tyrannies, treason against the King and the State, abduction of free men and women against the will of the King, machinations, prostitutions, seductions, corruptions... I will accuse you and convince you of it all in spite of your efforts... I am the prisoner of no one, and no one has a right to my liberty.”¹⁶

While his religious beliefs no doubt brought him comfort in prison, they also served to intensify his frustration, his conviction that he was in the right, and his anger and resentment towards those in power. He expected to be heard and vindicated one day by the king, and instead he was met with disappointment year after year. His furious statements also seemed to alarm the

¹³ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 1781 (?).

¹⁴ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 1781 (?).

¹⁵ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 1781 (?).

¹⁶ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 1781 (?).

police who read his letters, and underscored their belief that he was a dangerous lunatic who ought not to be released. More and more, he grounded his fear of government secrecy in his religious sensibilities; his cultural attitudes and suspicions informed his political stance. In the same letter, written in the 1780s, Le Prévôt then went from discussing vindication for the righteous in religious terms to simply discussing the dangers of secrecy in the government. He declared himself a “vigilant citizen” who “has the right to reveal the conduct of the one who governs the state. He can attack him out in the open as long as he wishes to combat him with the arms of truth.”¹⁷ Le Prévôt believed he was fully justified in attacking the reputations of those in power since he believed in the famine conspiracy and the power of transparency to prevent officials from corrupt and wicked dealings. He also asserted that the citizen making the accusations be transparent and hide nothing about himself. Those who profited from anonymity to render the sovereign odious to his subjects, Le Prévôt declared, were guilty of “an abuse that is pernicious in all sorts of governments.” Maligning ministers, he added, using one’s “finesse” or devious skill for selfish or political reasons was “a work of darkness” and “premeditated lies.”¹⁸ Accusing those in power or running the government—both of these activities required transparency in his view. Neither citizen nor ruler were to hide from each other what they were up to, especially if the government made decisions that directly affected the livelihood and liberty of citizens and if citizens sought to complain or change something in government. “In a free country like England,” Le Prévôt wrote, “one does not have the right to impede a public examination of all the measures of government and the character of ministers...” Here Le Prévôt, like many other French authors and *philosophes*, alluded to the popular idea at the time that the

¹⁷ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 1781 (?).

¹⁸ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 1781 (?).

French could learn from the English parliamentary system and should adopt more liberal laws like England's habeas corpus. While some wrote favorably on constitutional monarchy and the idea of separation of powers, Le Prévôt's anglophilia tended towards the ideas of the power of the public in government decisions and the importance of making and enacting important decisions out in the open. One did not rule a government or seek to change it behind closed doors.

The Political Theorist

In his many letters to the king, to ministers and to the chief of police, Le Prévôt thus constantly tied his religious convictions to his political stance, denouncing the alleged famine plot and government secrecy in general. Eventually, growing bolder and more frustrated with his long imprisonment, or perhaps following his arguments to their logical conclusions, Le Prévôt began to critique the monarchy overtly. At first, though, he blamed the king's ministers for the corruption he saw in the government and for keeping his letters from the king. In one 1769 letter to a minister, Le Prévôt accused him of betraying the *patrie* and "damning" his own soul "to perdition." He added a rhetorical question, saying, "When God punishes his subjects, does he, like tyrants, have reasons of state that one may not penetrate? And when he lets them suffer does he forbid them complaint?"¹⁹ He accused the minister of not letting him spread the truth about the plot: he denied his guilt, and demanded an audience with the king. "I must declare the atrocious injustice and the violations of all sorts that I have been forced to endure... [But] I am resigned even unto death, which I expect every day," he told the minister, willing to endure his suffering if it meant the news of the famine plot would one day reach the public.

¹⁹ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, 1781 (?).

In a letter to the king, Le Prévôt was even more dramatic. He told Louis XV that he had discovered by chance “the greatest conspiracy that has ever been hatched against France since the beginning of the world. It is currently being executed in a clandestine manner under the name and authority of Your Majesty at the expense of your honor, interest and glory.”²⁰ He then explained the timeline of events as he wanted the king to understand them, saying that he had first denounced the plot to the *parlement* of Normandy a year earlier, but that his packet of incriminating information had been intercepted and he had been arrested. Then he had unfortunately been placed “under the power” of the “one of the leaders of conspiracy. It is none other than your lieutenant general of police.”²¹

Thus Le Prévôt truly believed that knowledge of these conspiracies had been revealed to him by God and that it was his duty to make them public. Locked up and often isolated from his fellow prisoners, though, his frustration manifested itself in multiple ways, and his behavior, rather than his writings, led his jailors to believe that he had lost his mind. He quickly earned himself a reputation as a troublemaker, and this was at the same time that the Marquis de Sade was imprisoned at Vincennes. His jailor wrote to the chief of police, his superior, complaining of his troublemaker prisoners, the Marquis de Sade, but more often, Le Prévôt. According to the jailor, the Marquis de Sade continued to attempt to communicate with other prisoners, but Le Prévôt interrupted Mass, shouting about a conspiracy at the top of his lungs, and on another occasion attempted to pass a letter to the priest. The jailor asked how he should proceed with his prisoners because he was at his wit’s end with Le Prévôt especially.

²⁰ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 24 December 1769.

²¹ BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 24 December 1769.

Along with interrupting Mass, Le Prévôt tried to throw letters over the walls of the prison as often as he could. At one point, he claimed he had made his way to the roof and thrown letters from the tower. Sometimes his jailor would write to the chief of police complaining of ill health. He apparently had been suffering from tuberculosis, and the prisoners were aware that he was ill. Le Prévôt wrote to the chief of police about the jailor's health as well, though he believed his jailor was sick because he ate too much.²²

Le Prévôt knew that the staff considered him insane. He wrote that he was treated like a fool and a madman, "though if anyone is mad," he wrote, "it is certainly monsieur my neighbor who has definitely lost his mind but is not treated as badly as I am."²³ Then, although he was requesting more books and had already received paper, he complained that he was deprived of everything and that the chief of police and his jailor were possessed by demons, or were demons themselves. He was fond of calling his jailor a demon when he was denied confession since "demons hate nothing more than confession."²⁴ Or he would write to both the police and his jailor, saying "Ah, messieurs demons, enjoy yourselves then, torment yourselves as the devils of Milton tormented others..."²⁵ Le Prévôt was comparing them to the demons in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, suggesting that their efforts to make him suffer and deprive him of what he requested (though he was given much of what he asked for) were all in vain and that he would remain steadfast in his beliefs.

The police commissioners had written in their notes that he was well-educated and well-read; his letters were full of references to literature and to the Classics. To them, it was

²² BA, MS 12352, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 24 Nov. 1782.

²³ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

²⁴ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

²⁵ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

unfortunate, then, that he was of unsound mind, though his letters and his thoughts only became more radical, not more incoherent, as his imprisonment progressed. Le Prévôt could change his mind mid-letter, though, and what he demanded at the beginning he would retract at its close. At the end of his long letter in which he called his jailor a demon, Le Prévôt wrote a postscript saying, “On second thought, no, I won’t send you any of my manuscripts because you would only steal them.”²⁶ He knew that he depended on his keepers for everything—especially his supply of paper and ink—but he refused to change his tone or his attitude towards them in any way.

Because he was often so unruly and defiant, the police and his jailors hoped paper and ink would mollify him, though they were not always successful. Le Prévôt was probably most quiet and calm when he was writing; he could pour all of his emotions, resentment and the endless flow of ideas onto the page. He had even written the larger part of a manuscript on the art of ruling by the time he was released. The longer he was in prison, the more critical he became of the government, its ministers and even the king. By the time Louis XVI ascended to the throne, there were even more publications and more talk of the need for prison reform. Louis XVI’s new popular minister, Guillaume-Chrétien Lamoignon de Malesherbes, made a point of visiting prisons and prisoners himself to hear their stories and look into means of reforming the prison system. Le Prévôt eventually learned of Louis XVI coming to the throne and of the attempts for reform. Malesherbes even paid him a visit and asked for a *mémoire*, a written description of his complaints, his story and his request to be set free. (Malesherbes visited Vincennes among many other prisons, and probably spoke to every prisoner since there were not

²⁶ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

very many there at the time.) Le Prévôt soon saw, however, that nothing came of it, at least for him, and it only redoubled his frustration.

When in 1777 Le Prévôt found himself still in prison, he wrote another one of his vitriolic letters to the minister who had visited him. “You have taken so much pleasure in toying with an unfortunate,” he angrily wrote, “[and] you allowed me to address a *mémoire* to you concerning my detention and its causes in order to, as you said, deliver a report to the king, while in secret you give *carte blanche* to my jailor and to your underling in the police who are your accomplices and trusted executors.”²⁷ Le Prévôt went on to say that the minister was guilty of high treason and of abusing the confidence of a young king because he was, no doubt, a party to the conspiracy since he had chosen not to help Le Prévôt or bring his story and accusations to the king. Le Prévôt continued, saying, “...a minister does not take in hand the administration of justice and state prisons only to render innocent citizens miserable and persecute them, then abandon them to the arrogance of a jailor, to neither see them nor render them justice...”²⁸ Le Prévôt also believed incorrectly that Louis XVI had abolished the use of *lettres de cachet*, rendering him full of promise and far superior to his corrupt and decadent predecessor in the prisoner’s eyes. His fury not yet spent, he wrote further to the minister, “[As] I am not your prisoner, you have neither right nor cause nor pretext to keep me incarcerated... Even the king, having forbidden *lettres de cachet*, [does] not wish to abandon his poor subjects as Louis XV did to the injustice of his ministers... Therefore in refusing me a liberty that in good conscience you owe me, you are guilty of a grievous miscarriage of justice and fault against me which cries continually to heaven for vengeance ...” Le Prévôt thus blamed ministers more than the king for

²⁷ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*. Letter 24 June 1777.

²⁸ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*. Letter 24 June 1777.

his misfortunes, though he was becoming more and more critical of Louis XV and kings in general as time progressed.

Though he had just maligned Louis XV, Le Prévôt asked in the same letter to be released and to be given a position in the government. If released, he told the minister, they would find him faithful to the state that he would serve “with the affection and disinterest of a generous patriot and a true citizen... Instead of acting against me as a hidden enemy...let me know your intentions. Why, when I am not your enemy and you have no reason to treat me as yours, would you wish to prolong my captivity until my death, or even provoke my death with the duration that I have endured? It is already nine years that I have been detained for the crime of another. Is that only a trifle in your eyes?”²⁹ The imprisoned lawyer did his best to underscore his unjust suffering while simultaneously highlighting his talents and knowledge of government.

For example, Le Prévôt sent an insulting missive to Sartine explaining why he thought he was supremely unqualified for his new post as minister of the navy, and how he, the long-suffering prisoner, had better ideas for what would help the nation out of its financial and military woes. Sartine was lamentably ignorant of anything but that which would further his own ambitions in Le Prévôt’s view. “They have apparently decided that being a brazen Corsair on land who robs good French citizens of their liberty, you would make an even better pirate at sea to repel the Algerians and other enemies of the nation...” he told Sartine, whom he addressed as “sea phantom.”³⁰ Le Prévôt declared the French navy to be “almost defunct, humiliated and dishonored for so long” and expressed his doubts that Sartine could do anything to ameliorate the situation. He wondered if Sartine would institute a naval academy as Mirabeau had proposed.

²⁹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*. Letter 24 June 1777.

³⁰ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*. Letter 24 June 1777.

“Will you render France a naval force to be reckoned with, commensurate to the rank and position she holds in Europe? Will you restore her credit, her reputation, her commerce, her glory...? ...No, you will do nothing of the sort, [and] since you can provide no service to our navy due to lack of knowledge, zeal, and fidelity, you will inevitably do it much harm like all the other ignoramuses who are more fit to row in our galleys than govern the navy. What will you do, then, in a position that is far above your talents and faculties?”³¹ After insulting Sartine, he reaffirmed his conviction that the new minister of the navy was still plotting against the state and the people of France, and using his power to “perpetuate the persecution of an innocent, an orphan, a citizen, a pauper, a Christian and a captive abandoned and helpless.” Then he demanded, “How can you not blush with shame at your cruelty?” Le Prévôt seemed to favor Mirabeau’s idea of a naval school, but he doubted that Sartine would implement any measure that would improve the navy or France’s standing on the world stage. While the frustrated lawyer was filled with ideas that would benefit the state, a man he despised had become minister of the navy and was currently “touring our coasts in order to learn what ports, vessels, frigates and sailors are.”³²

Though he became more and more critical of Louis XV--Le Prévôt once quoted the Gospel of St. Luke, saying, “Verily I tell you, He will promptly carry out justice on their behalf. Promptly will come the day of these oppressors’ deaths. How could it be that with such words from God there are still tyrants who do not tremble?”³³--he clearly wished to believe that Louis XVI was surrounded by wicked ministers (like Sartine) and could never be wicked himself, at

³¹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*. Letter 24 June 1777.

³² BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*. Letter 24 June 1777.

³³ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*. Letter 24 June 1777.

least in the beginning. In a letter of the same year, Le Prévôt wrote to one of his friends, a fellow lawyer named Voilquin, telling him that he was certain that the new king was surrounded by traitors, and of the abuses he had witnessed and endured in prison, which he was sure Louis XVI was ignorant of. He told his friend that it was the “secret design” of Sartine to have him perish in a dungeon, but he had survived only to suffer and to have the death of Louis XV “carefully hidden” from him for a long while.³⁴ Le Prévôt believed that the king’s death had been kept from him so that he would not expect any relief or change in his circumstances under a new king. According to Le Prévôt, the abuses had only become worse since they were better concealed under the new, more compassionate monarch. “In the eight dungeons of the towers [of the Bastille],” he told his friend, “eight unfortunates died in secret, robbed of their freedom by the police without any formal judgment or accusation...”³⁵

Le Prévôt went on to accuse the police of making the jailors and governors of state prisons their accomplices and rewarding them for criminal behavior. He accused the police of “giving carte blanche to jailors to tyrannize their prisoners... They abandon them completely for the rest of their days, especially those who have no one to speak for them in the outside world. [They are left] in despair of ever being heard or obtaining any kind of protection from their sovereign...”³⁶ The anger and despair that Le Prévôt felt sometimes pushed him to make even more radical pronouncements, especially towards the later years of his imprisonment. This “perpetual abandon” to which prisoners were subjected, Le Prévôt asserted, forced them to revolt against the king, but it was clear from the Gospels that God would “avenge them and punish kings severely for their indifference... If it is true that...Sartine tyrannized more than forty

³⁴ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 17 Dec. 1777.

³⁵ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 17 Dec. 1777.

³⁶ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 17 Dec. 1777.

thousand good subjects without Louis XV ever becoming worried or concerned over the fate of so many oppressed innocents, do not their souls cry out to God for vengeance?" he asked with indignation and fury.³⁷

The imprisoned lawyer believed that Louis XVI did not desire his subjects to be oppressed as they were under his predecessor, but the "infernal" police expressed only contempt for the orders of the king. "They arrest citizens even without orders, confine them in the Bastille or Vincennes without making an official report and in secret," he informed his friend. The king was still surrounded by traitors, Le Prévôt believed. "Certainly the king," he told his friend, "will never reign gloriously [surrounded by] scoundrels wearing masks."³⁸ Not only were Louis XVI's ministers corrupt, they were false and secretive in their corruption which made it all the more repugnant. In a letter written in 1781 to someone high-ranking in the government, Le Prévôt demanded to know if everyone in the state was working only for himself and not for the king. "I know full well that the abuse of the venality of offices began under the Valois princes and that the Bourbon princes did not follow their consciences and continued to sell justice: but ignorance at this point will not excuse them, though [this practice] is upheld by their impious ministers... The king is a good and virtuous prince, but he lacks discernment, [and] he only has demons incarnate as guides in his counsels and in the government..."³⁹ By 1781, Le Prévôt was in his fifties and had already been in prison for over twelve years. He had grown even more confident in his critiques of both the king and the government, and angrier towards them as well. Because of those "demons" that the king permitted to remain at his side, the nation suffered from the "sale

³⁷ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 17 Dec. 1777.

³⁸ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 17 Dec. 1777.

³⁹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 15 Oct. 1781.

of authority in the King's name, the sale of royal prisons to unscrupulous jailors, the sale of offices and government posts that plague the state with tyrannical practices, depredations, self-serving pillaging and waste of the finances of the Royal Treasury.”⁴⁰

The more Le Prévôt considered his treatment at the hands of the state, the more he was willing to blame the king. Kings were both to blame and not to blame: they had surrounded themselves with wicked ministers who were far crueler and more corrupt than they were, and yet they had allowed themselves to be duped and to let their subjects suffer. Worse still, these kings were to blame for being inaccessible. “A king who does nothing but make his people tremble under the force of his power is only half a king. He lacks the essential quality of being accessible to his subjects, of being disposed to hear their requests and complaints and to relieve their misery, [of being] always attentive to aiding them in time of need,” wrote Le Prévôt. Neither of the kings he had known in his lifetime or whom he had studied in history apparently met these criteria. Kings, now more than ever, were proving their uselessness. “As soon as the people shake off the yoke of obedience...their power becomes almost indomitable,” declared Le Prévôt. “[T]he name of King is nothing but a vain title; the prince is only a man like any other, weakened by pleasures which hide great weaknesses and faults under the brilliance of the finery which covers him. If you take away the forces of those who surround and serve him, you can see his weakness, further worsened by a life of pleasure and leisure. All that he is good for is giving out commands since he is accustomed neither to action nor to work.”⁴¹ After decades of imprisonment for accusing those in power, after railing against the police and the ministers and the judges who had placed him in prison and ignored his pleas, Le Prévôt finally reached the

⁴⁰ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 15 Oct. 1781.

⁴¹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 15 Oct. 1781.

conclusion that not only was the government corrupt and impenetrable, the monarchy itself was guilty and obsolete.

The Patriot

Le Prévôt believed that his revealing of the famine plot was not only a religious duty because of the divine power of light and transparency to ensure justice, but also a patriotic duty. His zeal, obsession with transparency, and fear of conspiracies anticipated that of the Jacobins during the Terror. He often stated that he was compelled--that it was his duty in fact—to reveal the plot as he had because of his “fidelity and attachment to the king, love for the patrie, the duty of a citizen, personal honor, and divine laws” which enjoin “to the subjects of a monarchy, an empire, or a republic, whoever they may be, to denounce and reveal any conspiracy or plot that they know to be taking place or being hatched, either against the state, against the person, or against the honor [of the king]...One can never impede the truth nor keep it from being what it is,” he added.⁴² The level of intensity in his letters could go even higher whenever he connected the “tyranny” of his jailors to the rapacity of the alleged conspirators. In a letter to the chief of police in 1769, Le Prévôt declared that it was his greatest wish to “destroy the empire of tyranny and despotism of jailors..., to prevent the liberty of the nation from being violated with impunity, to keep the truth from being hidden or despised...so that crimes of the state that are always hidden away will not triumph in favor of the powers of darkness, so that the inhumanity and oppression on the part of ministers cannot find shelter in position and power, so that the honor, life, liberty, faith, fidelity and probity of good citizens and patriots is not continually deformed by artifice, lies, calumny, perfidy, false politics, nor abandoned to the cruelty of the

⁴² BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 15 Oct. 1781.

police...” Le Prévôt occasionally quoted Rousseau without naming him, and he compared himself to Voltaire during his first year of imprisonment in the Bastille where he spent “eleven months of the most unjust detention in a dungeon surrounded by chains.”⁴³ In one of his letters, he wrote that he was imprisoned in the same place as the author of the “Henriade verses,” and seemed proud that he could make this claim.

He even went so far as to suggest that someone high-ranking ought to pay with his life for the great injustice that was this famine plot. He added, though, that one execution, even of someone very influential in the government, could hardly make amends for all the cruelty and oppression caused by the supposed conspirators. “How could one death,” asked Le Prévôt, “remedy all of this evil...and dissipate this colossus of iniquity?” Seeing a prisoner making such claims emphatically and repeatedly, the police believed they had no choice but to continue to keep this vociferous lawyer locked away. He had not done physical harm to anyone, nor even threatened physical harm, but his accusations and insults certainly did harm to reputations, and in eighteenth-century France, defamation and calumny, especially of some of high rank, was considered criminal since it did damage to a person’s credit and honor.

The kingdom’s finances were one area where Le Prévôt never ceased providing suggestions for improvement. He also had endless examples of the corruption that he believed infected every sector of the government. His ideas were not remarkable for their originality but rather for their breadth. He did not differ from many of the other writers pushing for reforms and for more transparency, though his religious background made him even more vociferous in his emphasis on transparency and his suspicion of secrecy. In tackling issues like the venality of offices or the farmers general who collected taxes and who were believed to be corrupt, Le Prévôt always approached the topic within the framework of patriotic zeal, transparency and lack

⁴³ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 15 Oct. 1781.

of self-interest. These same tyrannical jailors had supposedly robbed him of the works he had written, long manuscripts full of advice for the king, but he could still console himself that the king had instituted some reforms such as reducing the power of the farmers general “and all tax collectors who rob the king of two hundred million every year...”⁴⁴ He again stated that all of these reforms had been his ideas, adding that at least the evil ministers close to the king had decided to carry them out. He also suggested that the king reestablish the Estates General. If only he could speak to the king in person, he wrote, he would take it upon himself to not only to remedy “the two billion in debts contracted by the self-serving and fraudulent practices of the previous reign, but also to force open all the false pathways through which the revenues of the king and the state are lost, and to render my sovereign more powerful than any of his ancestors without asking anything of him, for I have need of nothing to die poor which is just what I desire.”⁴⁵

Though Le Prévôt claimed, with a seemly and patriotic lack of self-interest, to want nothing but a life of poverty, his writings show that his desire for fame and recognition was only second to his need for liberty and exoneration. Long years of imprisonment and the mockery and contempt of his jailors had not managed to plant any seeds of doubt in his mind. It was most likely his faith and his hope for recognition from the highest circles that kept his resolve intact. In psychological terms, he had such fervent and unshakable convictions (or delusions) that years of being isolated, ignored and even mocked--potentially crippling blows to one’s self-esteem--had not had the ego-depleting effect on him that it would have had on others. In his mind, the widespread secrecy and corruption of the state not only went hand in hand, but had led to the

⁴⁴ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 15 Oct. 1781.

⁴⁵ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 15 Oct. 1781.

suffering of innocent citizens such as himself. Wiping out the corruption of the state and rendering it transparent would not only solve his problems, he believed, but those of the entire nation, and so his story, his life, was one of the utmost importance. His story intersected with the story he and others told themselves of how the nation had taken a turn for the worst, and how it might be revived. He repeated again and again that if patriots like himself were in command, the problems of France, including its immense deficit, would quickly disappear.

It was therefore vital that he be released not only because his arrest had been a miscarriage of justice but because men like him were meant to lead the country. Le Prévôt saw himself as the perfect candidate for a position where he might serve as a minister, official or advisor to the king. He had suffered at the hands of corrupt ministers and he had had years to read, reflect and even to write a massive tome filled with advice for rulers. In 1782, he asked his jailor for several books on the subjects of “royalty, population, economy, the Gallican Church, politics, royal works, state prisons, liberty, the state, ministers of state, legislation, justice, conspiracies, morality, the police, religion, privileges, finance....” These topics also corresponded to the titles of chapters in his book, though he added another chapter entitled, “Secrets against the State Revealed.” He called his book “a kind of encyclopedia,” and in a 1783 letter to the printer of the Louvre, who he imagined would publish his work, Le Prévôt told him that printing his book was a matter of “burning with patriotic zeal in order to save the state which is on the verge of inescapable decadence.”⁴⁶ He even wanted his jailor to read his book. Then he changed his mind. “I will not send you the table of contents of my book...” he wrote to the governor of Vincennes, “because one, I know you too wicked to make use of it as you should;

⁴⁶ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter to printer of the Louvre 1 January 1783.

two, because you would keep it or give it to the demon [the chief of police, Le Noir]...”⁴⁷ Le Prévôt knew that the police read everything that he wrote, and he probably had not made copies of work that he clearly valued, and so he was afraid that if he passed his manuscript over to his jailor, he might never see it again. Certainly his letters were never returned to him though they were never delivered.

On the whole, Le Prévôt wished for everything he wrote to be read by all and sundry. He not only made broad, sweeping statements about secrecy and corruption, or insulting accusations towards the police and his jailors, he also wrote out in detail the problems of the state as he saw them with concrete examples of the solutions he wanted. For instance, he wanted the Sorbonne to cease to exist entirely because, in his opinion, it was useless. Its theologians did nothing for the public, and almost never published. “They have a famous library which Cardinal Richelieu gave to them and which Michel le Masle, his secretary, further embellished, but they do not allow the public access to it. They make a profession of being useless to God and the King and the State and to themselves...”⁴⁸ Le Prévôt had only contempt for the Sorbonne’s doctors of theology, almost as much as he had for the Jesuits, and saw them only as a drain on the state. While the Sorbonne had always seen the Jesuits as a threat, it was hardly Jansenist, and Le Prévôt saw the institution as doing little to further the goal of eradicating corruption in the state or solving its financial woes. He had also suggested, in order to restore the “glory” of France, getting rid of the King’s Musketeers, one of the many corps of guards in the royal household, whom he hated for some reason and whom to his delight had been dissolved in 1776. Le Prévôt wrote that it was good that Louis XVI had decided to get rid of the useless corps who were only

⁴⁷ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter to Rougemont, 24 November 1782.

⁴⁸ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*, Letter 30 November 1782.

a waste of the state's money, and he added that many of his good ideas had come to fruition because the police and ministers had been reading his letters and stealing his ideas without giving him credit.

Along with doing away with supposedly useless institutions, Le Prévôt suggested that the king purge all of his councils and replace them with new men, and re-instate the Estates General. The king should also abolish indefinitely “the two controllers general and the seven intendants of finance...and give the department of war to the virtuous Maréchal de Broglie, and that of the navy to an experience seaman, abolish the positions of all the receivers general of finance ...and provide a safe and simple way of receiving revenue without the state losing a *sou* of the four hundred million in taxes raised on the people...”⁴⁹ By getting rid of all of the corrupt officials who skimmed off the top as often as they could and robbed the state of what it was owed, Le Prévôt believed that France could be free of “two billion in debts contracted by the wickedness of the ministers of Louis XV” in four or five years.

It was not only a matter of replacing corrupt ministers with well-meaning zealots but also of immediately changing laws that were harmful to the most vulnerable members of society. He even wrote in defense of prostitutes. The “infamous” lieutenant general of police, kept issuing “unjust and ridiculous” judgments from the Grand Châtelet, the police headquarters in Paris, against prostitutes who were forced to appear at the Châtelet, accused by spies of the police, “against whom they have no other advocate but themselves.” Too many laws, in Le Prévôt's opinion, were being executed badly, and there was much abuse of the poor “under the pretext of helping them and establishing order for the veil of charity covers almost all crimes under the name of police and public good. The poor who are obliged to beg to survive in Paris are arrested

⁴⁹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

during the night in the places where they sleep and consequently lose their liberty forever. Those in the provinces who stray so much as one league from their parish to look for bread are declared vagabonds, arrested, dragged to houses of correction and treated like scoundrels or enemies of the state. Because their only means of subsistence is invoking charity, the state makes a wretched situation into a crime. If richness and abundance never even think of them, is it right to deprive them of permission to ask the public to see to their needs, especially when the price of bread is so high because of infamous conspiracies? ...Is it not shameful that these timid friends of God, live only in the most wretched misery?"⁵⁰ Le Prévôt was thus extremely critical of what Foucault called the "great confinement" where from the mid-seventeenth century on the poor in France, especially the urban poor, were often rounded up and put into hospitals or workhouses and forced to perform tasks such as making rope or carding wool so that they would supposedly no longer be a burden to society.⁵¹ The problem of poverty in his country was not a matter of laziness on the part of the poor, as he saw it, but a problem rooted in the inherent injustices of society where the rich continued to profit off of the poor.

Le Prévôt also tied the "famine plots" secretly carried out by elites to the woes of the poor. He described in colorful detail the imagery of a spider, which symbolized monopolies and price fixing of grain, that sucked the blood of innocent flies, representing the people. "Imagine," he wrote in his figurative story of the blood-sucking spider, "that the thick web with which it covers itself is a fog, an impenetrable mystery... Imagine still other spiders more or less great in size and all occupied with sucking the blood of the most succulent flies that it can find in the

⁵⁰ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁵¹ See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); Robert M. Schwartz, *Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Alan Williams, *The Police of Paris, 1718-1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

space of fifteen thousand leagues... You might only see the small ones. The big ones are always hidden by their webs...⁵² The rich who preyed on the poor were therefore not only foul creatures but masters of subterfuge and secrecy. Their webs of influence were vast but difficult to perceive. The image of the devious and clandestine predator that lurked in dark places only to strike at the innocent encapsulated Le Prévôt's attitude towards elites. Ordinary Frenchmen like himself had suffered at the hands of conspirators who, like spiders, wove their webs in darkness to capture the unwary. "Frenchmen, my dear compatriots," continued Le Prévôt, "you should blush to learn it; you should blush! This enemy so brazen and yet so timid, so weak and yet so strong, often wears a human mask to walk among us. This enemy lives in the hearts of the most corrupt... I see France as a helpless fly in the clutches of a spider..." The poor suffered terribly from these spider-like conspirators who enjoyed high positions, but Le Prévôt, of course, also saw himself as victimized, martyred even, and tangled up in a mysterious, nefarious web.⁵³

He never once doubted, however, that he was someone who ought to be heard. He was neither a well-known writer nor a member of a prominent family, but he believed nevertheless that his words were important because revealing what was hidden was important, as was pointing out injustices, and he was qualified to do both. As if someone had posed the question of why his opinion mattered—and the police might have said something along those lines when they had first interrogated him—Le Prévôt wrote that no one should conceal a conspiracy when he discovered one, and added that the common people were entitled to pointing out faults in laws. Like many educated men of his time, he cited examples from Antiquity to bolster his argument.

⁵² BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁵³ For more on conspiracy theories in this period, see Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaise,r and Marisa Linton, eds., *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), and Barry Coward and Julian Swann, eds., *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

“Similarly,” wrote Le Prévôt, “Cicero...blemished the memory of Marc Antony for all time by means of his thundering invective because it was a matter of saving Rome. If nothing can be illuminated or perfected except through contradiction and debate, how can it not be free to a rational and generous citizen not only to censure with a holy courage and strength whatever brings about the ruin of the State, but even to venture his opinion as to what reforms might be suitable...?” Simply because he was a citizen and because he had ideas for reform, Le Prévôt believed he had a right to speak, and that as a patriot, he should. He admitted that no one had asked for his opinion, “but is there a need to be Counselor to the King to be able to have an opinion? ...Must we...believe that everything is well-planned, well-thought-out and well-established as it is? ...Good sense tells us no. Let us give our opinion then.”⁵⁴

Le Prévôt proceeded to give his opinion for the next decade, writing (and sometimes shouting) to whomever would hear him. The world was far from well-thought-out in his view. Its problems were boundless, and the authorities not lending him their ears was yet another issue he took with the world. “Morals, religion, zeal, the sentiments,” Le Prévôt lamented, “no longer remind citizens of their duties as citizens, of generosity, patriotism, of the humanity that invites all subjects to come to one another’s aid... Each man only thinks of his personal interest and only works towards his own ambitions, towards avarice and rapacity: all the workings of government tend towards this baseness and it is the infamous ministry of our century which has brought about the corruption which reigns in the body of the nation... The candor, simplicity, personal disinterest, frugality, uprightness, natural probity of our fathers are no longer virtues among us... The philosophy of our day consists of not having religion, of being a bad citizen, of

⁵⁴ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

loving neither God nor the Prince nor the Patrie...”⁵⁵ Lack of patriotism and selflessness were, of course, central to the problems France faced in his view, but the crisis was especially acute because public figures, including the *philosophes*, and those in government lacked zeal. France fed “monsters at its very heart” which were multiplying in the royal court. Ministers and royal favorites were to blame for nothing less than treason, plots, “secret homicides and confinement in prisons.” The crimes of *lèse-majesté* and what Le Prévôt called “*lèse-Humanité*” were of far greater consequence when committed by a minister than by a private citizen--“whether a nobleman or a commoner who has no hand in public affairs”--showing that the divide between the public and private spheres was more important to him than that of class in judging a person’s actions.⁵⁶

He even went so far as to assert that those who conspired against the people and the nation were thus enemies of the patrie and should not be considered “as if they belonged the patrie even if they live in our midst; all commerce with them ought to be avoided except in cases of absolute necessity... One should no longer look upon them as his neighbors: to denounce them, that is to serve God.”⁵⁷ Like the Jansenists in the *parlements* who were at the forefront of the effort to oust the Jesuits, Le Prévôt saw his religiously motivated belief in transparency as intimately linked with his ideas of patriotism and who belonged to the nation and who did not. Those who conspired against the nation, always in the shadows, were by definition false patriots and deserved to no longer belong to the nation. There were to be treated as outsiders; they were no longer even qualified to be considered one’s neighbor in the Christian sense. To Le Prévôt,

⁵⁵ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁵⁶ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁵⁷ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

the moral thing to do was not to reconcile them with the community but to denounce them. . His thinking was not far from that of Jean-Paul Marat, who believed that it was essential to open “the entrails of deceit” and that “plots against the nation are always concocted in darkness, since princes call no witnesses... and since they rarely sign their [written instructions], it should be permitted [for writers] to denounce them on the slightest evidence.”⁵⁸

If confession was one of Le Prévôt’s favorite pastimes, denunciation was certainly another. The Paris police was the “academy of iniquity,” the ministers corrupt, the royal court a nest of vipers, royal favorites and the Jesuits usurpers of power, the elites perpetrators of famine plots, and the jailors that he had come to know over the years their willing accomplices. Lack of both religious and patriotic zeal were to blame. What was worse, the government sought to know everything about private citizens and even violated their rights while remaining opaque and resistant to investigation. “The police,” he declared, “take it upon themselves to do everything, invade everything, possess everything, but they do not let anyone perceive anything praiseworthy in their actions apart from their ability to both impose and conceal their incompetence and crimes because they have never been accused nor investigated nor reformed...”⁵⁹ That was the crux of Le Prévôt’s frustration and resentment towards the powers that be: the police, like the others running the government, were both irreproachable and impenetrable. There were no mechanisms in place through which a police force, reprehensible or corrupt as it might be, had to answer to the people, while he, who felt that he had always been in the right, was defenseless when accused and incarcerated.

⁵⁸ Jean-Paul Marat, *Les chaînes de l’Esclavage* Ed. Michel Vovelle (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1988), 144.

⁵⁹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

Also like Marat, Le Prévôt believed that kings who hid themselves from their subjects were by definition tyrants. “It is still a common practice among oriental rulers,” wrote Le Prévôt, “to allow themselves to be seen only rarely, the idea being that such reserve will inspire a more profound respect in subjects for their sovereigns. In rendering themselves so inaccessible and almost invisible to their subjects, they claim to make them tremble with the force of their power.”⁶⁰ Concealing themselves from time to time from the public was also the practice of some early modern Spanish monarchs, but Le Prévôt preferred to make an unfavorable comparison to “oriental despotism” in order to argue that being “inaccessible” and “invisible” did anything but inspire respect. In the same passage on kings, Le Prévôt paraphrased the Bible, mentioning passages that bolstered his ideas of the benefits of transparency. He wrote, “[God] uncovers what was hidden in the deepest darkness... The mysteries of the eternal election will then be revealed... What God has hidden for centuries past and what men would not have even thought of or desired will become public... Those who were living in darkness and in the shadow of death will see a great light... The savior...will dissipate the night...”⁶¹ As with other topics, Le Prévôt interspersed his discussion of kings with religious language that always reflected the idea of darkness being dispelled and of things concealed being uncovered. To him, even the idea of a king hiding himself from his people, and being impenetrable, was very close to rendering him illegitimate. “But is this the sole way to bring about respect for sovereign authority?” he asked. “Is it even the most sure way to attach peoples to their kings and assure their obedience? Is it not rather a moderate, wise, just and reasonable government which holds subjects to their duty? A king who remains enveloped in his grandeur without allowing his subjects to approach

⁶⁰ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

⁶¹ BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

him will never make himself loved, and he who is not loved cannot count on their fidelity. It is for this reason that despotic states like Persia or the Ottoman Empire where there is no law but the will of the sovereign are subject to frequent revolutions.”⁶² By revolution, Le Prévôt was not referring to the new definition of the word that came about after 1789, but rather the prevalent definition that simply meant a change in government or ruler. Still, by this point in his captivity, the imprisoned lawyer seemed ready for revolution in the modern sense, at least judging by his condemnation of kings and his own government, his Jansenist interpretation of Scripture, his obsession with transparency, and even his occasional sprinkling of Rousseau into his letters and essays. “Men who are born free,” wrote Le Prévôt in the same passage on kings, “and who see themselves treated like slaves will cherish nothing. They are always ready to change masters, persuaded that their condition cannot be any worse...”

Considering the toll long imprisonment and isolation can have on the mind, it would not be surprising if Le Prévôt’s experiences had weakened or damaged his mental state. It is not clear how much psychological damage he endured, but even a cursory look at his works shows a man whose intelligence and religious fervor remained intact, and who only became further radicalized as the years went on. He echoed the ideas of Rousseau, whom he had obviously read, in many of his writings, and even prefigured Marat and other revolutionaries in his discussion of kings and government corruption, but it was his Jansenist background and faith that informed his particular interpretation of Scripture and his use of Scripture to expound on his ideas of government transparency. Though only one individual, Le Prévôt served as an example of a wider phenomenon: how religious convictions and even zealotry could translate into a political ideology. Believing that God willed him to share his ideas about conspiracies with the rest of the

⁶² BA, MS 12351, *Dossiers de prisonniers*.

world, Le Prévôt took that idea and built his political views around it, bolstered, of course, by the Jansenist tradition of decrying secrecy and eventually claiming to represent the nation. He believed that both the government and the citizen ought to be transparent in order to avoid corruption, waste and the suffering it brought about. He also believed that those who betrayed the nation, who acted selfishly because of lack of patriotism and hid their misdeeds, deserved to be cast out from the community, just as the Jansenists in the Paris *parlement* portrayed the Jesuits as both secretive and foreign, and ultimately as outsiders who could never belong.

Throughout his long imprisonment, Le Prévôt never wavered in his belief in the need for transparency on all levels, and in his right to criticize the government even if he was only an ordinary citizen. He may have gone into prison as an unhinged individual and emerged a total lunatic, but he also certainly came in as an agitator, and released by the Revolution, came out a revolutionary.

CHAPTER 6: DESIRE, DREAD, AND THE GRATEFUL DEAD: THE BASTILLE, ITS CADAVERS, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY GOTHIC IMAGINARY

In the summer of 1790, a year after the storming of the Bastille, the French press reported that so many cadavers were being found in the ruins of the fortress that the accumulation of remains was beginning to get in the way of demolition work. Workers were being bribed by curious onlookers, eager for a glimpse of the long-hidden victims of the despotism of the royal regime. It became such a problem that officials intervened and forbade the practice of paying workers to see skeletons. Eventually, the workers pooled their profits, donated them to a charity organization, and the corpses were collected and given a funeral.

The event turned into a grand and solemn ceremony, including a formal march comprised of officials of the committee in charge of the demolition, several clergymen, over eight hundred demolition workers, and a detachment of the National Guard. Speeches were given to commemorate the dead--victims of tyranny--who had been killed in secret but were now finally honored in public. For centuries, rulers in France had used spectacles as a valuable tool to impress the people, elites, and foreign dignitaries; to establish or re-establish law and order; and in general to make displays of power and legitimacy in which royal subjects were expected to play the role of passive observers. Here, what took place was a funeral not of a person of rank but of anonymous victims who represented the people, and who had apparently died what would have been ignominious though secret deaths in the bowels of a state prison. Those who had lived and died in chains, literally or figuratively, in the ancien régime were not wont to receive

magnificent state funerals with a parade and an honor guard. But this was a new era, and along with the unidentified corpses who were being laid to rest, French citizens were burying a decaying and now defunct regime and way of life.

The horror and fascination that produced this strange and macabre ceremony had deep roots. By the time of the French Revolution, the Bastille had become a hated symbol. By eighteenth-century standards, though, it was a relatively comfortable prison where inmates were not badly treated, though few of the prisons in Paris had anything but the most deplorable hygiene, hence the calls for prison reform in the 1780s. And yet literature on the prison flourished in the decades leading up to the Revolution. What placed the Bastille in a class apart from the other prisons of the city was the secrecy that surrounded it. Prisoners who were arrested for crimes such as theft and even murder, and processed through the ordinary channels of justice were sent to the Chatêlet, or sometimes Bicêtre if they were considered mad, but prisoners arrested because of *lettres de cachet*, secret orders for imprisonment that the king could use at any time, were often the black sheep in a family looking to safeguard its honor, or those under suspicion whom the police wanted to interrogate at length, and they were sent to the Bastille. Towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV, the lieutenant general of police gained permission to have permanent access to the Bastille and to place a commissioner there for interrogations; it soon became the location of the closely guarded police archives. The Bastille was independent of the *cours de justice* where magistrates handed down public sentences, and with *lettres de cachet* imprisonment was indefinite, and arrests kept quiet.¹ The fortress was therefore a place deliberately shrouded in mystery. Both inmates and turnkeys were sworn to secrecy since the

¹ Vincent Denis, "La Police de Paris et la Bastille au XVIIIème siècle" *La Bastille, ou L'enfer des vivants: à travers les archives de la Bastille* Ed. Elise Dutray-Lecoin and Danielle Muzerelle (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), 37.

police believed that secrecy helped them keep control over an investigation, helped preserve the honor of families who hoped to suppress the merest breath of scandal, and served as an instrument of intimidation.

Because of this secrecy and because of the Bastille's use as a deterrent for vociferous dissidents like Protestants and especially Jansenists at the end of Louis XIV's reign and during the Regency, many of those who had been imprisoned there and many others who claimed to be, published memoirs (usually abroad) of the Bastille's abuses. These memoirs usually exaggerated the horrors of the Bastille to conform to their target audience's negative views of the French regime, as in the case of French Jansenists who published such memoirs in the German lands or the Low Countries. One example are the famous memoirs of Constantin de Renneville, written early in the eighteenth century, that more or less established the so-called Black Legend of the Bastille with graphic descriptions of torture.² By century's end, the trickle of Bastille literature had become a flood, and famous figures like the Comte de Mirabeau, Voltaire, the lawyer Simon Linguet, and the fraudster and escape artist, the Chevalier de Latude, had all written poems, manifestos or memoirs decrying government abuses in prisons, especially the Bastille, not because they were oppressed Jansenists, but because, inspired by Enlightenment principles, they believed that the government's institutionalized secrecy left it prone to corruption and to committing abuses.

But there was such an outpouring of tracts, pamphlets and stories on the Bastille (the legend of the man in the iron mask was a particular favorite) that their popularity cannot be explained merely as a patriotic, enlightened revulsion to government abuses committed in secret. Stories of abuse and injustice certainly help foster revolutions, but these Bastille stories also had

² See Constantin de Renneville, *Souvenirs d'un prisonnier de la Bastille*, ed. Albert Savine (Paris: R. Castells Éditions, 1998).

a remarkable similarity to Gothic literature, a genre that was thriving at the same time. Though transparency had come to be heralded as a safeguard against future abuses and even as a mark of honesty and probity, and secrecy demonized more and more, the Gothic elements of literature on the Bastille reveal an attraction to something that came to be repressed and rejected in the new culture of transparency: secrets, things veiled or hidden, mysteries and the unknown.

The sinister aura of both mystery and dread continued to surround the Bastille even after its demolition and into the nineteenth century, or so Frantz Funck-Brentano, archivist of the Bastille's documents under the Third Republic, believed. Funck-Brentano made it his life's work to debunk what he called the Black Legend of the Bastille.³ When he was not performing invaluable work sorting the documents that remained of the Bastille's archives, he was publishing studies in the Rankean vein of historical research, trying to prove with empirical evidence that the Bastille was not the horrible place that revolutionaries and Romantic authors would have everyone believe. Funck-Brentano argued that in the Bastille, as in the *ancien régime* generally, decisions were always made according to established custom, which served to curb abuses of power.⁴ He described the sorts of meals served at the Bastille, and provided anecdotes and memoirs of prisoners who came and found favorable treatment despite their fears, though he had to admit that the best treatment and the best food were reserved for prisoners of rank. He was determined to replace the black legend with the *légende rose*, suggesting with very little subtlety that the *ancien régime* was a more elegant, more romantic and gentler time as compared with the stark, industrial and more egalitarian nineteenth century. In that sense, he might have succumbed

³ See Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Légendes et archives de la Bastille* (Paris: Hachette, 1898).

⁴ Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1892), xxiv.

to some of the romanticism he derided all while promoting a scientific, empirical approach to history.

Third Republic historians more or less followed this new turn in the historiography into the twentieth century. More recent historians, too, have taken up a similar theme like Brian Strayer who wrote on the *lettres de cachet*, which were perceived like the Bastille as both a symbol and an instrument of despotism. Strayer's goal, like Funck-Brentano's, was to rehabilitate the *lettres de cachet* and show through careful research that the orders for arrest were often of a form of mercy and a means of escaping the ordinary and harsh channels of justice.⁵ Families often solicited them to put away a black sheep like an abusive husband or dissolute son to safeguard the family honor but also to spare the family member in question a possibly brutal and public punishment. Both Funck-Brentano's and Strayer's works have merit, though, as mentioned above, a prisoner's experience at the Bastille could vary considerably depending on his or her social rank and connections, and the *lettres de cachet* could and did rob individuals unjustly of their liberty and sometimes even damaged their lives and careers irreparably.

Other historians of the Bastille have focused on the legends surrounding it in its political context, how it became a part of the iconography of revolutions and class struggles. German scholars such as Hans Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, looking at how student protests at the time of the Cold War adopted the Bastille as a symbol of the struggle against despotism and

⁵ Brian Strayer, *Lettres de cachet and Social Control in the Ancien Regime: 1659-1789* (The University of Iowa: Proquest Dissertation Publishing, 1987). For more on the *lettres de cachet*, see Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le désordre des familles: lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982). This work is mainly a reproduction of original requests for a family member to be put away in the eighteenth century with commentary at the beginning and end emphasizing the dysfunctional and violent nature of familial relations at this time, and the fact that most *lettres de cachet* were requested by French subjects, not arbitrarily handed down by the king and his ministers. For a popular history of the Bastille and the *lettres de cachet*, see Claude Quétel, *Une légende noire: les lettres de cachet* (Paris: Perrin, 2011), and idem., *La Bastille: histoire vraie d'une prison légendaire* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1989).

oppression, explored the history of the Bastille's reputation.⁶ Lüsebrink especially believes that the Bastille became a political prison in the eighteenth century because prisoners' stories of horror (which were never publicly refuted) were used to legitimize the new regime.⁷ These and other scholars like Héloïse Bocher and Monique Cottret focused less on discovering the reality of circumstances for prisoners and the validity of revolutionaries' claims about its horrors, and more on its lasting legacy and how it came to be appropriated and shaped as the symbol par excellence of tyranny to be overrun and overthrown.⁸ Others like Vincent Denis took interest in the psychological effects of imprisonment as well as the changing relationship between the state, its apparatuses and the individual, particularly how the state's increasing use of control and surveillance helped shape modern identity.⁹ Thus, after its demise, the dreaded fortress took on new life, since scholars played tug-o-war between the two versions of its legends, delved into its political potential as a justificatory symbol of revolution, and then picked it apart as a tool of social control and state bureaucratization.

But few historians have explored the idea of the Bastille as a place of Gothic imagination except to decry a Romantic misrepresentation of it, particularly its popular portrayals in nineteenth-century literature.¹⁰ Fewer still have sought to understand how the legends

⁶ Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *The Bastille: a history of a symbol of despotism and freedom*, trans. Norbert Schürer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997)

⁷ Lüsebrink, "Les grandes affaires politiques," in *La Bastille, ou L'enfer des vivants*, ed. Élise Dutray-Lecoin and Danielle Muzzerelle, (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), 56.

⁸ See Monique Cottret, *La Bastille à prendre: histoire et mythe de la forteresse royale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986); and Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille: l'édification d'un lieu de mémoire* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012).

⁹ Vincent Denis, *Une histoire de l'identité: France, 1715-1815* (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 2008).

¹⁰ The Bastille and other French prison are key figures and backdrops in the novels of Hugo, Dumas, and many others. See Michèle Sacquin, "La Bastille Romanesque: entre idéologie et pittoresque" In *La Bastille, ou L'enfer des vivants*, eds. Élise Dutray-Lecoin and Danielle Muzzerelle, (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), 181.

surrounding the Bastille, though excellent tools for a revolutionary regime trying to discredit the former and establish its own legitimacy, provoked such intense curiosity and fascination, not only in the nineteenth century during Romanticism's heyday, but as early as the first years of the revolution. In those years, the prison served as a symbol of despotism to reinforce the revolution's political goals, of course, but in the collective imagination it was also a site of forbidden secrets, mysteries and even wonder like the fictional castles and ruins of Gothic literature. The reason it lived on in literature and memory well after the turbulent years at the end of the eighteenth century was not only its importance as an icon of revolution, but also its ability, like the Gothic, to feed a hunger for mysteries, secrets and the desire that had come to be repressed. A world without secrets, a world where everything and everyone was transparent, though it might be more just, was, after all, a world deprived of the pleasure and mystique of the unknown.

Desire and Repression

It might be argued that shocking and eerie stories, like scandals, have always attracted readers, but the fascination with the Bastille's dark secrets, and the massive number of works relating the supposed horrors of the Bastille, coincided with, influenced and was influenced by the Gothic, a literary style that developed in the latter half of the eighteenth century and reached the height of its popularity in France in the 1790s. The story of the Gothic genre in France—and the story of its relationship to the French Revolution—is a complicated one, but by exploring this history, we will see evidence of the organic connection between an allegedly English genre and the genre of Bastille literature, so to speak. The roots of the Gothic can be found in all sorts of

strange places, and Bastille literature was one of many thorny tendrils in a germinating Gothic imaginary.

Not surprisingly, literary scholars do not all agree on the origins of the Gothic, its interpretations and its relation to history. Most, however, tend to emphasize terror as a central component of Gothic literature, and they also assert that novels and tales of this sort often contain the theme of uncertainty and ambiguity. Certainly, ambiguity and contradictions lie at the origin of the Gothic. The first recognizable and well-known Gothic work is, of course, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, written in 1764. It contains many of the now characteristic elements of the Gothic: the supernatural or implied supernatural, family secrets, things veiled or hidden, a gloomy castle or dungeon, uncertainty, terror, violence, and so forth. Throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Gothic was considered an English genre, especially with the popularity of Ann Radcliffe's novels in the 1790s. Scholars have shown, though, that English authors were very much influenced by and indebted to the French travel genre as well as the immensely popular sentimental novel. Markman Ellis argues that the Gothic is invested in exploiting a character's thoughts, emotions and feelings, and making the reader identify with the protagonist. The Gothic used the same strategies as the late eighteenth-century "culture of sentimentalism."¹¹ To add to that, many French and German authors were Gothic storytellers in their own right, developed the genre, and were read and translated by English

¹¹ Markman Ellis, *The History of the Gothic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 8-9. See also Clive Bloom, *Gothic Histories: The Taste for Terror, 1764 to the Present* (London: Continuum, 2010); Valdine Clemens, *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from the Castle of Otranto to Alien* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Carol Margaret Davison, *Gothic Literature 1764-1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009); Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Le Gothic: Influences and Appropriations in Europe and America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Ellen Malenas Ledoux, *Social Reform in Gothic Writing: fantastic forms of change 1764-1834* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, *The Routledge Companion to the Gothic* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Dale Townsend, *The Orders of Gothic: Foucault, Lacan and the subject of Gothic writing, 1764-1820* (New York: AMS Press, 2007) Angela Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

authors. To further the confusion, English and French authors, (as well as German), frequently plagiarized, translated or *pretended* to translate each other to the effect that French authors often passed off their own work as the translation of an English author such as Radcliffe in order to profit from the popularity of the *genre anglais*. This, of course, reinforced the idea of the Gothic as an English invention and as a product of a certain English character and literary culture, though the authors were frequently French and pandering to a French audience. (The term “Gothic” has both a medieval and English or German connotation. In the seventeenth century, it was usually a derogatory term referring to supposedly uncouth periods in history before what became known as the Renaissance, and it also referred to the Goths, one of the Germanic tribes that sacked Rome. By the eighteenth century, though, it took on a more positive, sometimes nationalist hue as many in England, especially during the Seven Years’ War, began to associate the “Gothic” with sacred and ancient English liberties. The term’s eventual connection to the genre of literature that Walpole inaugurated had to do with the idea of Gothic tales being romances in the medieval sense since they embraced the marvelous or the supernatural.) To complicate matters even further, French authors who did translate English Gothic works sometimes took liberties with the translation, and altered the text or omitted certain sections to suit their needs and preferences. French authors were also fond of adapting Gothic works for the theater, which became very popular as with other forms in the 1790s, such as the many theater adaptation of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.¹²

Thus, despite the Gothic’s assumed English character, the genre in fact has no one discernible national origin, nor were its contributors and developers exclusively English or slavishly imitating a real or fictive English style. That said, there was no conception at the time

¹² Chantal Tatu, “Les Mystères d’Udolpho: Melodrame avant la lettre?” *Mélodrames et romans noirs: 1750-1890*, ed. Simone Bernard-Griffiths and Jean Sgard (Toulouse: Presses universitaires de Mirail, 2000), 83.

of a recognizable French Gothic, or any surge in French Gothic writing until after the Revolution.¹³ Interpretations of the Gothic are similarly multivalent and complex. What did it mean that writers and readers of eighteenth-century France gobbled up stories of haunted castles, enchanted portraits, mysteries, unexplained phenomena, gore, and dark family secrets? Why did it become so popular? There are three explanations for the mania for this genre that are pertinent to the discussion of literature on the Bastille.

One interpretation is that Gothic literature anticipated revolution or reflected the cultural shifts of a pre-revolutionary and /or revolutionary society. *The Castle of Otranto* was translated into French in the 1760s, but it was during the 1790s that readers in France became more enthusiastic about the story. In Walpole's story, the aristocratic villain who rules his domain with an iron fist attempts to maintain his hold on power first by forcing his son into a marriage, and then, after his son's death, trying to force a virtuous maiden to marry him to produce an heir. There are several strange and unexplained occurrences such as a giant helmet that falls from the sky and crushes his son as if a sign from Providence, and a portrait in the castle that comes to life and walks out of its frame. At the end of the story, the villain-tyrant is overthrown by Theodore, the peasant-hero (though secretly of noble birth), and peace and tranquility return to the domain. Many have interpreted *Otranto* as an allegory for revolution with its tyrant struggling to maintain his hold on a crumbling empire from his decaying castle, and whose basis of power is revealed to be illegitimate and unjust.¹⁴ The story could be seen, however, as a celebration of order and tranquility (as opposed to revolutionary chaos), and of leaders who legitimately inherit their power.

¹³ Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic*, 2013, 11.

¹⁴ Ellis, *The History of the Gothic*, 2000, 33.

French Gothic works could also be interpreted in the vein of the pre-revolutionary. Michel Foucault believed that the Gothic world of gloomy chateaux and dungeons with its aristocratic and clerical villains represented the negative of the revolutionaries' Rousseauist dream of transparency and light. The revolutionaries had a "fear of darkened places," and those imagined Gothic interiors represented the threat to the desire for "power through transparency," since the "new political and moral order could not be established until these places were eradicated."¹⁵ Certainly in some of these French Gothic tales, (male) aristocrats dove to new depths in immorality and depravity. (Women in Gothic literature were often the victims, and this has been interpreted by some as a reinforcement of patriarchy, and by others as a subversion of it.) Many scholars have pointed out how attitudes in France had changed dramatically towards the nobility in the second half of the eighteenth century, and that the nobility experienced a sort of identity crisis and loss of purpose in this period.¹⁶ While the highest virtues of honor and courage had traditionally been associated with the nobility, Gothic stories in the eighteenth century portrayed a nobility (and a clergy) that had not only become the moral equals of the third estate, but also and more often morally degraded and inferior to them. For example, one Gothic author, Loaisel de Tréogate, penned a tale called *La Comtesse d'Alibre* in 1779, in which the eponymous comtesse has an affair and becomes pregnant with an illegitimate child. When her husband learns of her infidelity and of her pregnancy, he imprisons her in a cave under his chateau without food or water, forcing her to choose between starving to death or consuming her own child. The comte's opulent chateau shelters a cruel and despotic power, and conceals a

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* Ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 153-4.

¹⁶ See Jay Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: The Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), passim.

horrifying dungeon and place of torture beneath it.¹⁷ The chateau, an emblem of aristocratic power and privilege, also became a symbol of decadence, cruelty and concealed horrors. Countless Gothic tales are centered around a chateau, and bear titles like *Le Chateau mystérieux*, *Le Chateau noir*, or *Le Chateau d'Alvarino*.

In his melancholy tale, Loaisel de Tréogate described the comtesse's prison as a "dark vault, excavated out of the foundations of [the] chateau" whose ceiling was "dotted and spiked with stones where one could perceive the slimy traces of reptiles." In the vault, there was a "terrifying silence" and a single torch "whose pale light illuminated the sepulcher, and the torments of the innocent victim..."¹⁸ Loaisel's description of the comtesse's prison and eventual tomb was not unlike the writer, Brossays du Perray's, anecdotes relating to the Bastille, published in 1774, where prisoners of the Bastille's dungeons were incarcerated in cells dripping with "foul-smelling slime" and populated by "toads, lizards, rats and spiders."¹⁹ He eagerly provided a number of horror stories which he assured his readers were absolutely true, citing his sources as often as he could. According to Brossays, the "tyrant Louis XI" kept the prisoners whom he wished to die a slow and miserable death in these dungeons, some of whom went mad as a result of their incarceration. Sometimes they were pulled from their cells to endure various torturous ordeals like the pulling of teeth.²⁰ Prisoners who did not die a slow and painful death in these living tombs experienced a sudden though no less horrifying demise in this account, making it difficult for the reader to decide which was worse. Sometimes the prisoners were killed

¹⁷ Daniel Hall, *French and German Gothic Fiction in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: P. Lang, 2005), 98.

¹⁸ Loaisel de Tréogate, *La Comtesse d'Alibre*, quoted from Daniel Hall, *French and German Gothic Fiction in the Late Eighteenth Century*, 2005, 98.

¹⁹ Joseph Marie Brossays du Perray, *Remarques historiques et anecdotes sur le château de la Bastille, et l'Inquisition de France* (Paris: N.P., 1774), 8.

²⁰ du Perray, *Remarques historiques et anecdotes sur le château de la Bastille*, 1774, 9.

as soon as they entered the Bastille “under the guise of justice or by the ordeal of the oubliettes”: rooms in which the floor gave way like a seesaw “where [victims] fell onto wheels armed with spikes or blades; others were drowned with a stone tied to their necks, or were strangled in the dungeons.”²¹ Tyrannical kings and diabolical aristocrats who tortured their innocent victims in the most cruel and imaginative ways—these became the common tropes not only of the eighteenth-century Gothic, but also of the Bastille literature that flourished in the same period.

Given the evidence that the Gothic was most prominent in the 1790s, however, scholars—and many critics of the time including the Marquis de Sade (whose work some have considered an extreme form of the Gothic)—attributed the popularity of the genre to the fear and horror of the chaos that revolution engendered, and to a sense of uncertainty and instability of a post-revolutionary world.²² For them, the Gothic was neither pro- or anti-revolutionary, but rather a reflection of the insecurity and ambiguity of a world where those who traditionally had held power no longer stood on solid ground, or where everyone stood on ground that kept shifting. But considering the fact that the countless pamphlets and anecdotes relating to the Bastille were published in the years leading up to and during the Revolution, a second explanation for the appeal of the Gothic seems appropriate, and that is the idea of the Gothic’s unusual quality of inspiring both desire and dread, which is also intimately connected to Edmund Burke’s idea of the sublime.

Many scholars have remarked that the thrill of terror and the frisson felt at the eerily unknown that the Gothic provided is what brought so much pleasure to readers and had them eagerly looking for more of the same. This odd pleasure prompted by the Gothic did not go

²¹ du Perray, *Remarques historiques et anecdotes sur le château de la Bastille*, 1774, 11.

²² Hall, *French and German Gothic Fiction in the Late Eighteenth Century*, 2005, 127.

unnoticed at the time, either. One reader and critic named Anna Aiken, writing in 1773, tried to answer the question of why the experience of terror and mystery through literature brought so much pleasure. She believed that what was so enticing in Gothic literature was that the reader could feel “passion and fancy co-operating to elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.”²³ Her contemporary, Edmund Burke, perhaps most famous for his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, expressed similar views on the subject of the sublime. The sublime was a concept that had been discussed in literature since Antiquity, but what was new about Burke’s understanding of it was his discussion of terror. For Burke, terror and the pleasure and beauty of the sublime were one and the same. There was a dynamic between the pain of terror, and pleasure. As Burke understood it, danger or pain could simply be unpleasant, but in experiences such as the view of a storm at sea from a safe haven—or the descriptions of frightening and unexplained phenomena in literature—that pain was mitigated by the distance, and the resulting terror and awe rendered pleasurable. Thus, as many scholars have noted, the Gothic is indebted to Burke’s idea of the sublime.²⁴ This interplay between desire and dread, pleasure and terror, made Gothic literature so novel and so alluring to readers who were already steeped in the genre’s predecessors and forebears like the sentimental novel. That powerful emotional combination could be found, too, in the endless stories and anecdotes of the Bastille, whose popularity cannot be explained solely through an eighteenth-century reader’s healthy distaste for despotism.

For an excellent example of the comingling of desire and dread in the Gothic, consider one of the genre’s most famous works, Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The meat of the

²³ Quoted in Ellis, *The History of the Gothic*, 2000, 8-9.

²⁴ Ellis, *The History of the Gothic*, 2000, 10-11.

novel is its vaguely terrifying descriptions of the castle where the heroine, Emily, is forced to live after she becomes the ward of her aunt who has married the villainous Montoni, master of the eponymous castle. The castle is full of the typically Gothic dark staircases, empty, echoing halls, and long dimly-lit corridors filled with mysteriously veiled portraits, hidden niches, enclaves, and many, many closed doors behind which wait horrors that the heroine (though prone to fainting) is too curious to ignore. The curtains must be lifted and the doors opened, although those curtains and closed doors provoke anxiety, even terror. One of the hallmarks of the Gothic is that the story presents one mystery or several, and often dark secrets as well, that the reader has to patiently work to unfold throughout the course of the narrative.²⁵ In *Udolpho*, when Emily wanders about the castle, it is almost always at night. Radcliffe masterfully sets the mood for Emily's nocturnal meanderings, as when she heads out of her room one night accompanied by her maid to find out if her aunt had truly been confined by her husband:

The castle was perfectly still, and the great hall...now returned only the whispering footsteps of the two solitary figures gliding fearfully between the pillars, and gleamed only to the feeble lamp they carried. Emily, deceived by the long shadows of the pillars and by the catching lights between, often stopped, imagining she saw some person, moving in the distant obscurity of the perspective; and, as she passed these pillars, she feared to turn her eyes toward them, almost expecting to see a figure start out from behind their broad shaft. She reached, however, the vaulted gallery, without interruption, but unclosed its outer door with a trembling hand...²⁶

²⁵ Ellis, *The History of the Gothic*, 2000, 50.

²⁶ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho Vol. III* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999), 7.

Having effectively created an atmosphere of terror, mystery and looming danger, Radcliffe sends her heroine through all the gloomy interiors of the castle, the foreboding geography of its woods and the outer courtyards with the turrets and crenellated walls of the castle overhead. Then she brings her protagonist back into those mysterious rooms and hallways where Emily finds what appears to be an instrument of torture, though it is never fully explained in this chapter. Emily comes into a dim room where she finds:

no furniture, except, indeed, an iron chair, fastened in the center of the chamber, immediately over which, depending on a chain from the ceiling, hung an iron ring. Having gazed upon these, for some time, with wonder and horror, she next observed iron bars below, made for the purpose of confining the feet, and on the arms of the chair were rings of the same metal. As she continued to survey them, she concluded, that they were instruments of torture... An acute pain seized her head, she was scarcely able to hold the lamp, and, looking round for support, was seating herself, unconsciously, in the iron chair itself; but suddenly perceiving where she was, she started from it in horror... Here again she looked round for a seat to sustain her, and perceived only a dark curtain... [T]he appearance of this curtain struck her, and she paused to gaze upon it, in wonder and apprehension. It seemed to conceal a recess of the chamber; she wished, yet dreaded, to lift it, and to discover what it veiled... [S]he seized it, in a fit of desperation, and drew it aside. Beyond, appeared a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath. The features, deformed by

death, were ghastly and horrible, and more than one livid wound appeared in the face.²⁷

In this passage, the heroine's curiosity compels her to lift curtains and open doors almost despite herself. But it is more than curiosity. Though it is almost certain that something horrible is lurking behind those doors and veils, there is always a wonder and fascination that accompanies that horror. The horror or terror is never too much that the protagonist shrinks from uncovering what lies hidden, or from solving the mysteries of a given castle or family. Dread is always accompanied by desire, and horror with wonder, in Emily's searches throughout the castle. What is most thrilling about the iron chair that she discovers is that, though it is most likely an instrument of torture, nothing is ever explained, and the fascination of the mute object is that much is left to the reader's imagination. Then Emily seats herself in that chair, supposedly from weakness and shock, a scene that only serves to enhance the thrill and terror experienced yet not experienced, at least not directly, by the reader. She wants desperately to look; the mystery is irresistible, even if—or perhaps *because*—what is to be unveiled is terrifying.

Like Radcliffe's Emily who was unable to resist coming closer to scrutinize that chair and the mysterious iron ring above it, even going so far as to sit in it herself, those who had most likely read of the Bastille's terrors came in droves during its demolition to have a closer look. Although it was forbidden for ordinary citizens to enter the work site, people often bribed workers for artifacts they had supposedly found, for pieces of the fortress and for tours of the ruins. It was equally forbidden to enter the site at night, mostly for safety reasons, but workers were also bribed to take these Bastille tourists, as it were, into what remained of the dungeons. The workers would hide at the end of the day with the necessary tools such as lanterns, and then

²⁷ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho Vol. III*, 1999, 20-2.

surreptitiously lead those who had bribed them into the now accessible dungeons. Many tried and in fact did spend the night there in order to experience the terror, so they hoped, felt by prisoners of bygone days. In her book on the demolition of the Bastille, Héloïse Bocher described this practice as a kind of “emotional tourism” where those who had crept into the Bastille demolition site at night were lured there by the terror and fascination that always surrounded ruins in the eighteenth century. For Bocher, there was a “poetics of ruins” at this time, and much was written on ruins in the eighteenth century, this literature serving as a precursor to the romantics of the nineteenth century who often waxed lyrical on the power of ruins to evoke reverie and a taste for the wondrous.²⁸ Ruins may have evoked adventure and the distant past, but in this particular instance of “emotional tourism,” the appeal lay in the Bastille’s aura of mystery and terror.

Furthermore, authors of pamphlets and books on the Bastille seemed to delight in mentioning what they referred to as death- or torture-machines. In an introduction to one such pamphlet, the author mentioned the unlawful deaths of prisoners who were victims of the “infernal machines forged in the boutique of Satan which were used to promptly and secretly do away with the unfortunate citizen who dared to hinder the pleasures of a libertine minister or a dissipated *grand*.”²⁹ He, like many other journalists, did not offer any description of the machines, but seemed to assume that his readers were as convinced as him of their existence. Just as the love of liberty could never exhaust itself, neither could, so it seemed, the need for stories of cadavers, oubliettes and secret passageways. The fascination with the mysterious and the macabre could not be denied, even if writers and readers claimed to approach such stories

²⁸ Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille*, 2012, 121.

²⁹ *Recueil fidèle de plusieurs manuscrits trouvés à la Bastille* (Paris: Girardon, 1789), 10.

only with horror and disgust. As the idea of anything secret or hidden was ostensibly demonized more and more, the eagerness to uncover and read of secrets and mysteries only grew. One poem by an anonymous but patriotic author entitled “The Dawn of Liberty, or Despotism Expiring” described in florid language these same sentiments. He wrote in an apostrophe to prisoners of the Bastille whose fates the poet lamented: “Cruel Despotism! What! For having not pleased/ Those great in name but otherwise abject and base/ Secretly in this place they stole your life away/ They confined you. Strange barbarity!/ These appalling dungeons where you lived in horror/ Where the deep silence only inspired terror/ Where the sun began and ended its course/ Without the daylight ever reaching you!”³⁰ Secret deaths, hidden horrors, dungeons of impenetrable darkness—they may have inspired terror, but they also inspired a great deal of poetry and other literature. Everything could now be rectified, the horrors of the past could remain in the past, but that did not mean that they would simply be erased. For these journalists and writers, such stories should be revived and retold again and again, like ghost stories told by the fire, to make readers not only shudder with fright but quiver with patriotic fervor.

As mentioned above, the height of the craze for the Gothic in France, especially Radcliffe’s novels, was in the 1790s, and her works were mostly translated into French in the latter half of that decade. The Bastille literature discussed here, though, dates mainly from the period between 1789 and 1791, and given its close similarities to the Gothic, owes much to the ideas and stories written in the years leading up to the Revolution. One could even go so far as to say that this profusion of anecdotes and pamphlets represented yet another form or expression of the Gothic. In its fashion, it was Gothic literature. Thus, something had been building in the culture at large to account for this literature at this time, and the cultural explanations for the

³⁰ *Recueil de pièces intéressantes sur la Bastille* (Paris: J.B. Hérault, 1790), 12.

popularity of Bastille literature overlap with those for the attraction to the themes of Gothic literature. The third explanation for the Gothic's appeal is very much connected to the ideas of desire/dread and the sublime since it has to do with the lure of secrecy and mysteries, and the psychoanalytical idea of repression. Though secrecy had become sinister in the political culture by the end of the eighteenth century, secrecy was a common theme in Gothic stories, and for literary scholars, the appeal was not merely that they concealed something dreadful. For some scholars, all the secrecy and uncertainty of these stories with its frightening veils, closed doors, long corridors and nocturnal wanderings represented the symbolic invisibility and secrecy of the unconscious, as well as a negation of any distinction between public and private, collective and individual.³¹ If the Gothic interiors and style of narrative were to be seen as a symbol for the mind, then not all secrets and not all parts of the memory could be accessed immediately, nor should they be. They were to be discovered and revealed over time, just as a character in a novel might have emotional complexity that slowly came to the surface as the reader progressed through the narrative. To add to that, while the public and private spheres were taking on new shape and meaning in the political culture, the characteristic ambiguity in the Gothic represented, for some literary scholars, a blurring of boundaries that challenged the newly dominant delineations of the political world.

What is even more germane, though, in the scholarship on the Gothic to Bastille literature is the interpretation of the Gothic as a manifestation of what a culture has repressed. Like Romanticism, the Gothic has been interpreted as a reaction to and a critique of the Enlightenment since "dark irrationality and pleasurable terror" are central to this form of literature.³² But it was

³¹ Tatu, "Les Mystères d'Udolpho: Melodrame avant la lettre?" 2000, 91.

³² Ellis, *The History of the Gothic*, 2000, 13-14.

more than a simple reaction to Enlightenment principles of reason and progress; the genre revealed the anxieties and the unspoken, almost forbidden attraction to what was secret, mysterious and concealed even while the political culture of the time trumpeted the importance of transparency and shining light into all the dark places. In a society where more and more the norm for the individual, the state and the culture was to be transparent, secrecy took on a new allure now that it had been deemed sinister and an aid to those seeking power illegitimately or away from the eyes of the public and the press. The journalists and authors of the Bastille literature, though, always announced to their readers that these anecdotes served to prove the abuses that an opaque and corrupt regime could be capable of if allowed to exercise power behind closed doors, but the hunger for these stories, and the detailed and almost voyeuristic descriptions of torture chambers and cadavers, told a different story.

The Bastille and its Buried Secrets

The Gothic, therefore, certainly anticipated and reflected the cultural shifts of a society moving towards revolution. Like its offshoot, the literature on the Bastille, however, the Gothic also revealed a culturally repressed desire and pleasure in what was secret or concealed since secrecy was no longer acceptable on the surface or in the mainstream. Many of the newspapers that covered the storming of the Bastille and its subsequent demolition provided their voracious readers with reports of cadavers, various human remains, and the damp dungeons in which they had been found, often in several installments. One popular newspaper, *Le Juif Errant*, described the Bastille as “a tableau of clandestine cruelties” and reported to the public, “They have found in the demolition of the Bastille the skeletons of two of its victims, destined for sorrow and death because of the hatred of ministers... Upon seeing them, M. de Mirabeau the Elder, after a few

instances of horrified silence, exclaimed with indignant fervor, ‘Why did those wretched ministers not eat the bones?’”³³ The author then went on to suggest that these “precious skeletons” be placed in the *Cabinet d’Histoire Naturelle* where fathers could show them to their children, inculcating the love of liberty and the Constitution.³⁴ *Révolutions de Paris* reported that the architects and engineers had spoken to the turnkeys of the prison “whose name one only uttered with horror” and had found “no prisoners, only a few cadavers, doubtless innocent victims of the most perfidious betrayal.”³⁵ Several months later, in early 1790, the journal entitled *Versailles et Paris* related the ongoing demolition of the Bastille, writing that “it does not cease to attract the curious.” The journalist continued, saying, “...while it was always dangerous and often criminal in the eyes of despotism to speak of this terrible chateau, it was whispered that the victims of ministerial furies sometimes received the death penalty in secret with no formality other than a more or less ambiguous order to the jailor... The workers have been charged to keep an eye out for any vestiges of such a barbarity.”³⁶

This journalist seemed to be right, both about the curiosity of the public and the possibility of finding cadavers. Judging from the number and frequency of these reports, the newspapers’ readers were eager for more, and a few lines later, the journalist was able to report that workers had found two skeletons in the subterranean dungeons of the Bastille’s towers. They had also discovered that the governor’s garden was connected to two subterranean galleries and a

³³ *Le Juif Errant* (1789), 5.

³⁴ *Le Juif Errant* (1789), 5

³⁵ *Révolutions de Paris* (18-25 July 1789), 10.

³⁶ *Assemblée Nationale, Commune de Paris et Corps Administratifs du Royaume, par continuation du journal intitulé: Versailles et Paris* (23 April 1790), 7.

secret door.³⁷ The author wrote, “[In] these galleries several small, dark and dank dungeon-like cells were found, and prisoners destined for the horror of a ghastly death were forced to pass through these, either from the tower or from the governor’s quarters.”³⁸ During the demolition of these small cells, workers had reportedly found a human femur in the wall as well as an entire skeleton.³⁹ This proved, according to the journalist, that the Bastille had oubliettes, and he believed that they would find more examples buried underground of the horrors that despotism had enacted.⁴⁰

Pierre-François Palloy, the architect and builder who was in charge of the demolition of the Bastille, attested to the fact that human bones were found in the ruins.⁴¹ He wrote that there was found “the 4th, 8th, 12th of May and the 8th of June 1790 four individuals, the remains of unfortunate victims [of the prison]. Soon these unveiled atrocities captured the attention of the public papers. A crowd of citizens of all conditions came to see them. The enthusiasm and the patriotism [of the Bastille demolition workers] who were the eyewitnesses of the barbaric atrocities led them to want to celebrate the funeral ceremonies of these ministerial victims... The authorities attended. The registers at St. Paul will prove it.”⁴² Palloy seemed determined to prove the veracity of his claims, mentioning several times that there were many other witnesses to the

³⁷ *Assemblée Nationale, Commune de Paris et Corps Administratifs du Royaume, par continuation du journal intitulé*, (23 April 1790), 7.

³⁸ *Assemblée Nationale, Commune de Paris et Corps Administratifs du Royaume, par continuation du journal intitulé*, (23 April 1790), 7.

³⁹ *Assemblée Nationale, Commune de Paris et Corps Administratifs du Royaume, par continuation du journal intitulé*, (23 April 1790), 7.

⁴⁰ *Assemblée Nationale, Commune de Paris et Corps Administratifs du Royaume, par continuation du journal intitulé*, (23 April 1790), 8.

⁴¹ For a recent, well-written work on the demolition of the Bastille and Palloy’s life and career, see Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille: l’édification d’un lieu de mémoire*, 2012.

⁴² AP, 4 AZ 719 in 4 AZ 15.

cadavers that had been found, and that many had signed to verify their testimony. In the registers of the Committee of St. Louis de la Culture, the church where the Bastille documents were temporarily housed, members of the committee came to investigate the news of “ the several cadavers that workers found in the rubble; they believed that it would be useful to verify this fact and to make an official report....”⁴³ They headed to the Bastille, and led by Palloy and the workers who had made the dreadful discovery, they made their way through the ruins where they found stone staircases still partially intact and descended into what had once been the prison’s dungeons. In the report, they wrote that one corpse “was at a distance of about a foot and a half from the first, and a little bit more elevated. It was not surrounded by stones in the form of a coffin like the first but was propped up against the wall on the right side.”⁴⁴ The official report was made in the presence of the aide-de-camp of the Marquis de Lafayette, Palloy, and several of the workers who had participated in the extraction of the cadavers and who signed the report if they could write. Then, on the 8th of May, the committee, “believing that it would be advantageous to inform the public of the cruel tyranny that had too often reigned in this abominable prison,” sent a copy of the report on the cadavers to the president of the National Assembly, another copy the mayor, and printed several others to send to the fifty-nine other districts in the city.

In his own letters, Palloy went on to describe discoveries in painstaking detail that were, however, more difficult to believe. If he did in fact discover everything that he reported, what he uncovered only deepened the mystery and baited the morbid curiosity of those in the public who read reports of these findings. Palloy described what he found during his demolition work in

⁴³ BNF, Richelieu NAF 2681 *Extrait de Registres du Comité de Saint Louis de la Culture* (8 May 1790).

⁴⁴ BNF, Richelieu NAF 2681 *Extrait de Registres du Comité de Saint Louis de la Culture* (8 May 1790).

strange and disturbing detail. At one point, he reported finding lodged in the wall of one of the Bastille's towers a child's skeleton, hidden behind a rectangular block of stone.⁴⁵ He added no commentary or speculation, however, as to why it might have been there, or how long. He also reported finding instruments of torture, "parts of Gothic statues, all sorts of inscriptions in the interior of dungeons, pleas and prayers in different languages, papers hidden between stones, which proves that it was necessary to destroy this infernal prison."⁴⁶ While the discovery of cadavers seems more verifiable due to the number of official reports, this last claim of Palloy's is more difficult to believe since the turnkeys and officers of the Bastille were always instructed to scrupulously clean and check for any inscriptions or scraps of paper both at regular intervals during a prisoner's incarceration and after his release or transfer. Sometimes the entire walls or floors were painted over and ground down in order to erase the merest trace of writing or images. In a list of rules and regulations for turnkeys of the Bastille written in 1784, which was similar to several others that predated it, turnkeys were instructed to follow prisoners when they moved up and down towers in case they furtively dropped any letters, to pay attention to dishes to see if any marks were made after they served meals, and if so to show the officers, to inspect the doors, windows and chimneys often, to test the grills with an iron hammer once a week (and to do it preferably when prisoners were out of their cells, if possible), to look in the chapel and other places to see if prisoners had hidden a letter, and to watch workers when they came and went to make sure that they did not speak to or receive letters from the prisoners.⁴⁷ Unless the staff of the

⁴⁵ AP, 4 AZ 719 in 4 AZ 15 *Palloy's letter to the Commissaire du Directoire, Département de Seine, Year VI*.

⁴⁶ BNF, Richelieu NAF 2811 *Discours préliminaire* (1790).

⁴⁷ BA, MS 12602 *Consignes et Reglements* (1784).

Bastille had been extremely lax in their duties throughout the ancien régime, it appears unlikely that so many letters and carvings could have been found at the time of demolition.

Even if some of the reported findings were fabricated, the public rushed to the ruins of the fortress to scavenge for what souvenirs they could make off with. Palloy wrote that many foreigners came out of curiosity and stole pieces of stone and other objects. “In order to prevent accidents from falling stones,” he wrote, “we were obliged to reinforce the guards,” and one woman was even crushed to death, the “victim of her own imprudence.”⁴⁸ He complained to the authorities at the Hotel de Ville that even those who were supposed to be in charge of guarding the Bastille from thieving tourists were carrying off their own souvenirs. He claimed that one man stuffed his carriage with “effects” from the Bastille *on their orders*. “I am at my wit’s end,” he declared in frustration.⁴⁹

Palloy, however, was also caught up in the craze for horrifying and melancholy anecdotes of the Bastille, and he reported that among those cadavers that were discovered, “two were found still enchained...which proves that they were placed in irons while still alive and died thus...In order to make these crimes known, I have sworn to be the maker of monuments to the events of the Revolution.”⁵⁰ During the time of the funeral that was arranged for the discovered cadavers, Palloy erected a monument and headstone to commemorate and memorialize the death and discovery of these unknowns. The monument was placed in the cemetery of St. Paul where prisoners who died in the Bastille were traditionally buried, being close to the Rue St. Antoine that had led to the fortress and one of the portals out of the city. Palloy constructed the

⁴⁸ BNF, Richelieu NAF 2811 Discours préliminaire (1790).

⁴⁹ BNF, Richelieu NAF 2811 Discours préliminaire (1790).

⁵⁰ BNF, Richelieu NAF 2811 Discours préliminaire (1790).

monument out of stones of the Bastille just as he had had models of the fortress carved out of the same stones. Palloy believed it would be a monument that would “perpetuate the love of humanity and hatred for tyrants;” it was his goal, he declared, to eternalize the glory of the nation and also to provide “protections against slavery with the image of this tomb” which would “remind free men that these stones once served to bury alive their fellow men simply because of the commands of kings.”⁵¹

Palloy wrote petitions to the government first to have his monument erected. Later, when it was vandalized and then destroyed during the Directory, he wrote asking to have it replaced, and in all of his requests he made sure to emphasize the veracity of his claims, attaching official records signed by witnesses attesting to the fact that cadavers had been found. He may have wished for the recognition and glory that came with doing his patriotic duty in reporting and publicizing these discoveries, but Palloy also appeared to truly believe in the necessity of staging a funeral and later erecting a monument to remind everyone of the horrors of despotism and keep the flame of liberty burning. The press eagerly recounted the funeral to the readers of their newspapers, and according to their reports, the streets were packed with onlookers.

During the ceremony, a speech was given in honor of these victims of “ministerial barbarity.”⁵² The official addressed the workers in particular, saying, “And you, citizens,...whose arms in demolishing that infernal lair have found in those awful dungeons these precious remains, are you convinced now of how far those ferocious souls, those inhuman tyrants would carry their atrocities against a people born to be free and whom they held for so long

⁵¹ BNF, Richelieu NAF 2811 Discours préliminaire (1790).

⁵² *Recueil de pièces intéressantes sur la Bastille* (Paris: J.B. Héroult, 1790), 24.

bowed under the enormous weight of their chains?”⁵³ The curé presiding added that the present public glory of the funeral rites would hopefully console the victims for the secret infamy of their deaths.⁵⁴

Soon, the Bastille was completely demolished, and many kept its stones as souvenirs. Palloy sent a Bastille stone carved in the shape of the fortress to every one of the newly formed departments in France.⁵⁵ Though it was gone, it lived on in the political imagination as a symbol of despotism, abuse of power and cruelty. According to the evidence, those in charge of the demolition of the Bastille found a few cadavers and other human remains in the rubble and debris of the old fortress (though they could not determine their cause of death). Furthermore, real oubliettes did exist and could be found in medieval chateaux, not to mention a wide variety of torture devices which had been in use for centuries. But the fascination and hunger for stories relating to these grim subjects, especially those whose supposed origin was the Bastille, and the genre of literature, the Gothic, exploded in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was also in this period that the need for transparency in the state became a favored theme for journalists and other authors. The state no longer had any right to keep secrets in their points of view since it only used secrecy to carry out its despotic aims. To them, governments used surveillance to control citizens, and while this could not be avoided, citizens could return the gaze and shine a light on the state in order to curb abuses.

The Man in the Iron Mask

⁵³ *Recueil de pièces intéressantes sur la Bastille* (Paris: J.B. Hérault, 1790), 24.

⁵⁴ *Recueil de pièces intéressantes sur la Bastille* (Paris: J.B. Hérault, 1790), 25.

⁵⁵ See Héloïse Bocher, *Démolir la Bastille*, 2012.

One example of the hunger for these sorts of stories was the high number of published works on the mystery of the man in the iron mask, either focusing on it exclusively or mentioning it among a host of other horror stories and mysteries of the Bastille. While it was a fascinating mystery that did not fail to attract the fanciful pens of historians and novelists alike long after the Revolution, the obsession with the masked prisoner in the eighteenth century was more than curiosity. It was a symptom of the association between secrecy and government abuses, and the new emphasis on transparency in the regime and in society. Brossays did not fail to mention the story himself. He told his readers that “the famous prisoner of the Bastille known by the name of the man in the iron mask” was “obliged to always wear a mask of iron and was forbidden to remove it or to make himself known on pain of death. These circumstances have given birth to many conjectures.”⁵⁶ Several pages followed, describing the many different authors and their theories as to the prisoner’s identity, including stories of the secrecy of his arrest and the mysterious deaths of those who supposedly had discovered the secret.

Most of the books and pamphlets published on the mysterious prisoner did not fail to mention the high interest and curiosity of the public. One pamphlet published in 1789 whose author claimed to have found a manuscript in the Bastille unveiling the prisoner’s identity began, “Nothing less than the taking of this fortress was needed to finally uncover the identity of this famous personage whose detention has so intrigued all of Europe and on whom even Voltaire could only give uncertain conjectures.”⁵⁷ Even if the prisoner had not intrigued all of Europe, he certainly had caught the imagination of countless authors in the second half of the eighteenth century, and, one can assume, the imagination of their readers as well.

⁵⁶ *Recueil de pièces intéressantes sur la Bastille* (Paris: J.B. Hérault, 1790), 39-40.

⁵⁷ *L’Homme au masque de fer dévoilé d’après une note trouvée dans les papiers de la Bastille* (Paris: chez Maradan, libraire, rue Saint-André-des-Arts, 1789), 1.

While authors of such pamphlets might have disagreed or found fault with Voltaire's theory on the prisoner, they often mentioned him, and could not deny that his curiosity matched their own or surpassed it. These authors were referring to Voltaire's famous *Siècle de Louis XIV*, first published in 1752, in which Voltaire first put forward information that he claimed to be accurate relating to the mysterious prisoner. Voltaire spent years researching for this magnum opus, and for the enlarged 1767 edition, he wrote to contacts and acquaintances all over France in order to verify or glean more information or documents. Voltaire wanted to do the work of a serious historian, and insisted again and again on the accuracy of his claims. In a letter to a friend, he wrote that his account of the masked prisoner was "indeed true," adding, "when I set out to write seriously, I leave behind poetic fictions."⁵⁸

Voltaire believed that great historians of Antiquity who, though they might have done admirable work, had failed to be accurate and impartial. He wrote that the works of Plutarch were more agreeable than truthful, and asserted that "it is not permitted today to imitate Plutarch... We only accept for historical truths those that have been guaranteed."⁵⁹ Voltaire believed that the very obstacle to the truth was also what guaranteed it: secrecy. As he said, "The most useful and precious anecdotes are secret writings..."⁶⁰ The fact that something was so carefully hidden, and that he, the historian, had to go to such great lengths to unearth what he found, proved in his eyes that what he reported to his readers was true. According to this logic, if something was not true, why would it be hidden? Voltaire related everything he knew on this prisoner who was arrested "in the greatest secrecy" and who was "always masked," taking care

⁵⁸ Voltaire, "Lettre de M. de Voltaire à M. de Palissot de Montenois, 4 juin 1760," In *Correspondance littéraire, philosophiques, et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, etc.*, Vol. 4, ed. Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Garnier frères, 1878), 255.

⁵⁹ Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Vol. I, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), 307.

⁶⁰ Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Vol. I, 1966, 307.

to add footnotes to verify his sources and the fact that he corresponded with them himself. “M. de Chamillart,” wrote Voltaire, “was the last minister who knew this strange secret. The second Maréchal de la Feuillade, his son-in-law, told me that just before the death of his father-in-law he begged him on his knees to tell him the identity of the man that was only known under the name of the man in the iron mask; Chamillart told him that it was a state secret, and that he had sworn never to reveal it.”⁶¹ The Maréchal de la Feuillade had told Voltaire all that he did know about the prisoner, even if he could never pry the truth of his identity from his father-in-law. Voltaire added, “There are many others of my contemporaries who will verify the truth of what I assert” and that “M. de Bernaville, successor of Saint-Mars [the governor of the Bastille at the time of the iron mask], has often confirmed it to me.”⁶²

It might seem strange at first that Voltaire insisted so vehemently on the truth of his claims with regards to a minor anecdote that only occupied a few pages in a massive historical work. He was not the only one, however, who made assertions on this mystery, and he sometimes feuded with others who disputed his claims, even going so far as to suggest that he would engage them in fisticuffs if he were younger.⁶³ Authors were vying with one another not only for the prestige of finding the truth but also for the authority to make such claims and be believed. Voltaire, who was a fervent admirer of Louis XIV and nostalgic for his reign, nevertheless felt that it was his duty to uncover a state secret and bring to light as much of the mystery as he could. Behind the attempt to unmask this unknown and insignificant prisoner was the desire to unveil all that the government had kept hidden. While ministers may have been

⁶¹ Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Vol. I, 1966, 314.

⁶² Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Vol. I, 1966, 314.

⁶³ Voltaire, “Lettre de M. de Voltaire à M. de Palissot de Montenoy,” 1878, 255.

sworn to secrecy, historians and journalists were not, and they saw it as their moral duty to uncover rather than to keep the state's secrets.

Authors had speculated on the identity of the prisoner since his putative arrest, but it was Voltaire who truly started off the craze mid-century for uncovering the identity of the iron mask. Many of those that followed him in speculating on the mysterious prisoner did not fail to reference him, either in agreement or in dispute. One example was Frederick Melchior Grimm, the well-known literary and dramatic critic, who put forward his own theory on the mysterious prisoner as well as reviews of those published by others. Grimm admired Voltaire, and also entered the fray, insulting those whom he believed had insulted or contradicted Voltaire. One author's theory added little to Voltaire's, another's was an "absurdity" and its author "an Arlequin pretending to be a savant."⁶⁴ Grimm's theory, however, did not seem any more far-fetched than the others since he claimed that two shepherds had come to the palace to demand an audience with the king on the eve of the birth of Louis XIV, foretelling the birth of identical twins. Once the king told Richelieu of this alarming prophecy, Richelieu immediately had the two shepherds confined in a madhouse, and upon the birth of the twins, one of them was safely spirited away to a house in the provinces.⁶⁵ Grimm assured his readers that his account was true since he had heard it from a former valet of Louis XV named La Borde who had found the story in the papers of the late Maréchal de Richelieu.⁶⁶ Since Grimm read and reviewed so many of the theories on the man in the iron mask, he apparently could not resist the temptation to publish his

⁶⁴ Frederick Melchior Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophiques, et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, etc.*, Vol. 8, ed. Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Garnier frères, 1878), 122-3.

⁶⁵ Grimm, *Correspondance*, Vol. 15, 1878, 498.

⁶⁶ Grimm, *Correspondance*, Vol. 15, 1878, 498.

own. Whether or not he had convinced himself that his story was accurate, he seemed convinced that his readers would be interested in his take on the story.

He was quick to praise the accounts of others who claimed to be able to support their theories with documents that they had found. In his review of one such pamphlet published in 1789, Grimm wrote, “This collection is remarkable because it is composed only of original documents that have been found in the Bastille and that have been deposited at the Lycée where anyone can go to see them.”⁶⁷ Grimm included the collection’s Latin epigraph, which was an excerpt from the eighth book of the Aeneid, describing the mythical cave where the fire-breathing monster, Cacus, dwelt: it was now “bared of covering” and its “gloomy caverns in inmost recesses revealed.”⁶⁸ In this myth as told by Virgil, Hercules had been forced to shove aside the stone blocking the entrance to the cave and venture into its depths in order to vanquish the monster. Grimm made sure to include this epigraph because it represented what all of them, be they hacks, journalists, poets or serious historians, were attempting to do: shine light into the gloomy cavern of history, enter it and fight the monster of hidden horrors by uncovering what a despotic regime had hidden for so long.

Grimm also seemed to have mostly favorable things to say about the newspaper, *Révolutions de Paris*, even if the newspaper suggested a theory on the iron mask that differed from his own. He wrote that of all the journals with which Paris was currently “inundated,” it was not “the best written, but it [was] the one that ha[d] collected the most facts” and had “in general a good amount of exactitude...”⁶⁹ Soon after the fall of the Bastille, *Révolutions* had

⁶⁷ Grimm, *Correspondance*, Vol. 15, 1878, 495.

⁶⁸ Grimm, *Correspondance*, Vol. 15, 1878, 495.

⁶⁹ Grimm, *Correspondance*, Vol. 15, 1878, 495.

published a theory that the man in the iron mask had been the disgraced minister of finance under Louis XIV, Nicolas Fouquet, but a few months later, the newspaper published a letter to the editor in which one reader refuted that claim. This reader, who identified himself as an *ingénieur-geographe du roi* named Moithey, wrote “In regard to what you announced in No. VII of the *Révolutions de Paris* that the iron mask who was imprisoned in the Bastille was Nicolas Fouquet...I would like to enlighten you on this subject...”⁷⁰ Moithey believed that he had documents proving that it could not have been Fouquet, though he could not say who indeed the prisoner was if not him. Nevertheless, it was clearly important to him to clear up this point with the newspaper, and its editor felt that his letter was worth publishing. *Révolutions* had, after all, published its own suggestions on the subject of the mysterious prisoner because readers were eager for the latest mysteries and secrets coming to light after the storming of the Bastille. One reader, at least, had been interested enough in the mystery to add his own contribution to those of the slew of journalists and other writers who had already made conjectures. Moithey received no reward for his pains other than the pleasure of seeing his name in print and aiding in the search for truth in uncovering the mysteries of the past.

As another author had written, he wanted to invite the search for the truth behind “one of the mysteries of our modern history which has occupied and tormented the curiosity of such a great number of historians.”⁷¹ This was Jean-Louis Soulavie, a defrocked priest and author of the apocryphal memoirs of the Maréchal de Richelieu, to whose papers Soulavie claimed to have exclusive access. According to Soulavie, the identity of the man in the iron mask was a secret

⁷⁰ *Révolutions de Paris* (3-10 October 1789), 36.

⁷¹ Jean-Louis Soulavie, *Mémoires du Maréchal de Richelieu, Pair de France, Premier Gentilhomme de la chambre du roi, etc. pour servir à l'Histoire des Cours de Louis XIV, de la Régence du Duc d'Orléans, de Louis XV, et à celle des quatorze premières années du Règne de Louis XVI, Roi des Français et Restaurateur de la Liberté, Vol. VI* (London: Joseph de Boffe, 1790), 5.

that the government of the old regime had actively kept hidden. Soulavie wrote, “The French government, which has not been as ignorant about this secret as Voltaire suggested, has always feared and contradicted the various efforts at research on this subject; and the former keeper of the seals, Hue de Miromesnil, like his predecessors, had never allowed anyone to discuss anecdotes relating to this mysterious personage whenever they indicated a member of the royal family... Voltaire related a few facts in his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, first published abroad; never was he willing to reveal the secret entirely, even when in exile where he sent out pamphlets that overturned our altars...for he had promised silence.”⁷² Soulavie thus believed that Voltaire, despite his undeniable curiosity, had restrained himself out of respect or fear from revealing all that he knew. Voltaire, who was writing from abroad and who had dared to publish so many incendiary works, according to Soulavie, still felt enough pressure to refrain from disclosing everything he knew on a subject that would dishonor the Crown. For Soulavie, this showed how far the government was willing to go to silence those who might reveal its secrets, and how long its hidden tendrils truly were.

Soulavie believed that the government had done its utmost to keep the scandalous secret hidden for so long because if revealed, it would persuade an angry people to take up arms against the ruling branch of the royal family and a “prostituted and degraded court” that had “prepared without knowing it the disaster that happened to it in 1789.”⁷³ Soulavie’s take on the mysterious prisoner’s identity did not differ very much from Grimm’s, namely that Louis XIV had imprisoned his identical twin brother. As Soulavie explained to his readers, “By liberating his twin, but not recognizing him as a prince of the blood, the king would have excited public

⁷² Soulavie, *Mémoires du Maréchal de Richelieu*, 1790, 6.

⁷³ Soulavie, *Mémoires du Maréchal de Richelieu*, 1790, 7, 10.

curiosity, and by recognizing his brother, he would have found himself with a potential rival at court who could bring others to detest a ministry, a tyranny that the king had resolved to reaffirm rather than sacrifice his power... [To the king], this prince had to be kept in prison if the king wanted to enjoy the peace and tranquility that despots love so much."⁷⁴ For Soulavie it was clear: the mystery of the man in the iron mask had been solved, but more importantly, it was a secret that the government had solicitously kept for over a century, not to protect the people but to protect itself and its own despotic designs. The man in the iron mask was emblematic of the abuses of an arbitrary and secretive regime, and a prime example of what could go wrong. Secrecy did not protect the people, it only furthered tyranny in the minds of Soulavie and authors like him. But uncovering the state's secrets also served another purpose. Not only were these authors engaging in the moral and disinterested search for truth, they were also catering to a by then well-established market for gruesome stories and mysterious legends. Few of them failed to remark on the curiosity of the public when it came these sorts of legends, and the desire to sell copies as well as achieve prestige for having turned their penetrating gaze towards the shadowy state kept them vying with one another for the gaze of the public.

Secrecy came to be demonized, but it also brought on a new and vigorous fascination. If secrets were not allowed, if nothing should be hidden, then how could one protect oneself if the state slid into despotism and unbridled surveillance once more? And was that, after all, desirable? Beneath the putative horror of grisly tales and long-hidden secrets lay the hunger for them; this was evident in the large number of pamphlets and newspapers relating such stories. The public snapped up tales of the man in the iron mask, subterranean passageways and

⁷⁴ Soulavie, *Mémoires du Maréchal de Richelieu*, 1790, 16, 19.

oubliettes because, as much as these were supposed to represent the abuses of the former regime, they were also irresistible.

CONCLUSION

Writing in the 1720s, the Abbé Theru, who voluntarily spied for the Paris police in his neighborhood, believed that secrecy was a boon in immoral times. “Great disorders” would result, he wrote, if one revealed everything about “corruptors,” because then “all kinds of people will take off their masks, believing that everything is permitted...”¹ In the 1790s, the revolutionary, Louis Pierre Manuel, who played a role in the insurrectionary Paris Commune, wrote that the documents of the conquered Bastille must be made public in order to “let all Frenchmen into the confidence of the secrets of Despotism. The time to unveil all turpitudes and tear off all masks has come.”²

The writings of the revolutionaries are filled with calls to unmask false patriots secretly plotting against the nation, and to unveil the mysterious inner workings of despotic regimes and their agents, such as the Paris police. Their parents’ generation, however, and certainly their grandparents’, had not necessarily shared their suspicion towards secrecy and affinity for transparency. Many of them saw merits in secrecy both in small communities and in the state. In this dissertation, I have attempted to trace the arc of the dramatic shift in cultural attitudes towards secrecy in eighteenth-century France, and also to explain how and why this shift took place. Historians have long understood the centrality of transparency in the ideology of the

¹ Michel Rey, “Police and Sodomy in Eighteenth-Century Paris: From Sin to Disorder” in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, eds. Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma (New York: Haworth Press, 1989), 134.

² Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1892), lxiii.

revolutionaries, and how revolutionaries took their ideas to the extreme in the days of the Terror. Given the level of intensity and obsession with transparency in this period, I would like to emphasize that this story of changing attitudes towards secrecy is not a story of “modernization” or simply becoming “modern,” or even an inevitable and unquestioned component of the emerging public sphere and the power of public opinion. Instead, I argue that the French went from having a positive or neutral attitude towards secrecy in the beginning of the eighteenth century, to viewing secrecy as sinister and advocating transparency, and finally to approaching the idea of total transparency with ambivalence. Particular forces and trends that converged in France in the middle of the century led to the drive for transparency in the political culture of the Revolution.

Firstly, the changing understanding of the relation between honor and secrecy led to this cultural shift. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, heads of family from all levels of society solicited *lettres de cachet*, or secret orders for arrest, requesting the government to secretly arrest and imprison a shameful member of the family such as an unruly son or an adulterous wife. Those who requested these arrests viewed secrecy as a very handy tool in the maintenance of family honor and reputation. They believed that, rather than seeing justice done, it was more important to hide the wicked behavior of a black sheep in order to avoid gossip, speculation, and the shame that came with it. *Lettres de cachet* denied the justice system the punishment of criminals, but the police encouraged and carried out these arrests since they spared families the shame of a public trial or the public punishment of one of their members. These secret arrests also served to reinforce an ideology of preserving order: in the eighteenth century, the police and families who requested their aid began to look upon transgressions less as

sins and more as disorders that had to be corrected and contained.³ Those whose behavior did not conform to social norms also found themselves locked away at their request of their families, sometimes for several years. Maintaining the reputation of a family, and the control of the head of family over its members, justified the secret arrests which hid supposed malefactors from the law courts.

Honor, credit, and reputation—these concepts which were so important to individuals and corporations in old regime France remained paramount through to the Revolution and beyond, but critiques of the practice of *lettres de cachet* focused on severing the connection between secrecy and honor. Families who requested the orders for arrest relied on the shared understandings of secrecy and the discretion of the police to quietly arrest a troublesome family member and thus preserve the family's honor. The practice of preserving family honor through secrecy was predicated on the notion that the wicked or disgraceful behavior of one member of a group shamed them all, and so one should keep such behavior hidden. Wicked behavior might also spread like a contagion and infect others, according to this logic, and so it was best to keep it hidden from those who might be unduly influenced. Conversely, the accolades or honors that one member accrued enhanced the standing of the group. Towards the middle of the century, though, attitudes began to change when those who attacked the practice did so by attacking the notion of collective guilt; they pushed for more individual autonomy and asserted the idea that the shame of wrongdoing only stained the honor of the individual who committed a crime, and not that of his or her family.

When those who attacked the notions of collective guilt and honor also asserted the idea of individual freedom and responsibility, they also attacked the need for and the valuing of secrecy in preserving honor. Secrecy was only useful, according to the new arguments, to those

³ See Rey, "Police and Sodomy in Eighteenth-Century Paris: From Sin to Disorder," 1989.

who wished to exercise control over others and take away their autonomy unjustly. Furthermore, there was no need for secrecy when there was no need to protect the collective from the misdeeds of an individual. One no longer needed to conceal an individual's bad behavior and even help him or her avoid punishment in order to spare the collective.

These new ideas about individual responsibility and honor also influenced the ways that writers, politicians, and others understood masculinity. By examining the demise of Louis XV's *secret du roi* and the Comte de Broglie's defense of his actions as the head of the organization, I showed that de Broglie's attitudes towards secrecy reflected a new understanding of masculinity that linked it to transparency. De Broglie admitted his role in the *secret du roi* while simultaneously distancing himself from it and by extension, Louis XV. He advocated a kind of masculinity that was direct and transparent as opposed to an older, aristocratic or courtly form of masculinity that privileged secrecy, cunning, and urbanity. When the public learned that Louis XV had maintained a secret organization with spies and missions unknown to his ministers, the king came across as weak and devious rather than clever because he had hidden his goals from powerful ministers.

De Broglie insisted that he had only played along because of the king's orders all the while decrying the secrecy of the organization, implying weakness on the part of the king, and defending his honor and reputation by inviting public scrutiny and stating that he had nothing to hide. De Broglie thus insisted on defending his honor by being utterly transparent, and he associated such transparency with strength and masculinity. As a new, less aristocratic form of masculinity became dominant, so, too, did an evolving understanding of honor: those like de Broglie and the later revolutionary generation believed that virtue determined honor rather than

noble birth.⁴ They also believed that transparency rather than secrecy could showcase one's virtue to the world and boost one's reputation. The revolutionary generation still viewed honor as a matter of reputation and how the community viewed the individual, but they emphasized the importance of virtue and saw transparency both as the goal and instrument in the pursuit of virtue and honor. For example, Rousseau used the word *transparence* in descriptions of heroes, heroines, and other sympathetic characters in his novels. Transparency meant the lack of artifice and hidden motives; a transparent individual was honest, genuine, and pure.⁵ This trend continued through the rest of the century, so much so that Jacques Necker could write on the eve of the Revolution that public opinion seemed to "preside in the tribunal of honor" and that the esteem of the public attracted the "honors due to probity."⁶

Over the course of the century, the link between secrecy and honor in the minds of ordinary French men and women eroded, and a new kind of masculinity championed transparency. Religion in French culture at mid-century also played a vital role in changing attitudes towards secrecy. The Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, had a reputation for secrecy and wielding power behind the scenes. The Jansenists, long-time rivals of the Jesuits, helped promote the values of transparency and accountability because of their interpretations of Scripture and theological stances, which ultimately led to their politicization. Because of their attraction to the biblical idea of shining light into darkness, and because of their belief that the Jesuits persecuted them, the Jansenists attacked the Jesuits' supposed predilection for secrecy

⁴ See Jay Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: The Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 166.

⁵ See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, transparency and obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 189.

⁶ Jacques Necker, *A Treatise on the Administration of the Finances of France Vol. I*, trans. Thomas Mortimer (London: Logographic Press, 1787), lxi, xlvi.

and used it to discredit them. Because their suspicion of the Jesuits also came from the idea of Jesuit loyalty to Rome which allegedly surpassed any national ties, Jansenists made a connection between Jesuit secrecy and foreignness, and in an era of growing nationalism, built off of their Gallicanism to link transparency with nationalism. With these arguments and a successful network of pamphleteers and underground newspapers, the Jansenists launched a campaign against the Jesuits, effectively turning public opinion against the Jesuits, which eventually led to that religious order's expulsion from France in 1764.

The Paris police, who were no friends of the Jansenists at least in the first half of the century, also played an important role in the shift towards transparency, albeit unwittingly. The Paris police force, inaugurated in 1667, began to draw the ire of those who found themselves under their surveillance in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Many of these people included Jansenists who found themselves carefully watched and often arrested by the police for their borderline heretical pamphlets. The police became the most visible organ of a state that increasingly observed, documented, and intervened in the lives of individuals at all levels of society in order to maintain order. They became notorious both for their use of spies and for their secrecy, especially in their use of state prisons like the Bastille. From the beginning of the eighteenth century until the Revolution, the police controlled the prisons and actively used prisons (and secrecy) to maintain social control and inspire fear. The state's further encroachment into everyday lives both provoked the defense of privacy (a concept not fully articulated before the eighteenth century) and the reaction against secrecy, particularly state secrecy. Though French men and women eagerly asked for the help of the police when they requested *lettres de cachet* in the first half of the century, by the middle decades they claimed that the police intruded into private lives and spied on everyone all while maintaining the utmost

secrecy in their operations. In attacks against the police, prisons, especially the Bastille, became the focal point because of the Bastille's symbolic status as representing royal power and authority, and because the police deliberately shrouded prisons in secrecy.

The lack of transparency on the part of the state also created fertile ground for conspiracy theories, and certainly by the time of the Revolution paranoia about conspiracies had run rampant. The Jansenist lawyer, Jean-Charles Le Prévôt, whom the police arrested in 1768 insisted that several members of the government, including the chief of police, were involved in a "famine plot." As a devout Catholic and a Jansenist, Le Prévôt believed that the world was locked in a struggle of good versus evil where one day all wicked deeds would come to light and God would vindicate the innocent. With this worldview, Le Prévôt interpreted the price fluctuations of grain as the result of a secret cabal of powerful men who controlled the market for their own profit, and kept the poor famished and helpless. His religious obsession with transparency quickly became a political one as, ignored and imprisoned for years, his beliefs led him to critique royal ministers and their running of the government, and eventually to critique the king and the institution of monarchy itself. Le Prévôt's jailors labeled him a madman, but his belief in transparency as a cure-all for social ills and his fixation on conspiracies did not place him far from the thinking of the revolutionaries a generation later. This similarity was not a coincidence since Jansenist thought had influenced the political culture by the time of the expulsion of the Jesuits to the point that secrecy and transparency had become a part of the political language, and one's attitudes towards secrecy pointed toward one's political dispositions.

By the time of the Revolution, then, belief in government transparency and the freedom of the press became part of the dominant political ideology. When demolition workers found

several skeletons in the ruins of the Bastille in 1790, the press immediately interpreted the discoveries as evidence of a despotic regime's abuses committed in secret. But though journalists declared their horror at such discoveries, their reporting of these skeletons and the putative horrors of the Bastille's dungeons bore remarkable similarity to Gothic literature, a popular genre at the time. Many of the stories circulating about the Bastille at this time resembled Gothic stories of the same period with their forbidding dungeons, decaying chateaux, and rotting corpses. I believe that there is a connection between the appeal of Bastille literature, so to speak, and the Gothic. The Gothic owes its allure to its ability to both frighten and give pleasure. During the Revolution, the attraction to dark legends of the Bastille both revealed the dominant push for transparency and the ambivalence towards it, along with the fascination with all things secret and hidden. While the revolutionaries opened a new world where transparency of the state and of the citizen would hopefully ensure that false patriots or counter-revolutionaries could not remain hidden, their fervor for transparency also triggered a desire for the mysterious and the unknown that Gothic tales both fed and reflected. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the French went from an excessive (at least to modern sensibilities) tolerance for secrecy to an extreme aversion to it and an intense drive for transparency by century's end. The ambivalence and attraction to secrets reflected in the popular Gothic stories of the 1780s and 90s suggests that readers and writers of such literature longed, perhaps only subconsciously, for a happy medium, a space where secrecy would not mask any wrongdoing but where there was still room for the mysterious and the unknown.

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