

On *Candide*, Catholics, and Freemasonry: How Fiction Disavowed the Loyalty Oaths of 1789–90

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In the history of the French Revolution, the 14 July 1790 Festival of the Federation has the distinction of being the only event upon which everyone seems to agree, when people across the country unanimously supported the new nation. This article analyzes three of the best-known fictional accounts embroidered upon the festivities in order to demonstrate that literary analysis does more than generate what Daniel Gordon calls the “glow” of history. Literature allows us to “get it”: to get the jokes, the innuendoes, and the sarcasm relayed by contemporaries on socio-political issues of their day. Historians have detailed the elaborate physical land works and the propaganda campaign that prepared the site and the spectators of the July 1790 ceremonies; but *Julie philosophe* (1791), *La Boussole nationale* (1790), and *L’Isle des philosophes* (1790) depict the gossip and political jockeying that likely went on behind the scenes, and announce bedfellows that are rarely conjoined today: Voltairean wit, Catholicism, and Freemasonry.

abstract

THE LITERARY historian who ventures into the French Revolution faces mighty challenges: most of the writers who penned the 800-some fictions published 1789–99 are largely unknown, and their works are anchored in a cultural field marked by radical, rapidly changing political alliances, linguistic innovation, and social upheaval. Historians of the political, social, and religious past have long dominated this epoch, and for good reason: their work lends itself to sifting through heterogeneous documentary evidence in service of larger historiographical claims. As Daniel Gordon famously noted: “History is a distinct form of art ... The material that the historian writes about always appears to be a concrete particular—a monument, a document, an action—but that is because the rays of history can be detected only through such specifics. The search is ultimately for something that lends other objects their hue but is itself invisible.”¹ For literary historians, the

¹ Daniel Gordon, “The Glow of History,” *EMF: Studies in Early Modern France* 6 (2000): 61–65. For research support, I would like to thank the John

task is somewhat different: we analyze the cultural significance of sophisticated works of art in, not through, the works themselves. Our focus is acute as we decipher texts written to entertain, instruct, or provoke a public that died years ago, and whose preoccupations were very different from our own. Through historically contextualized close readings, and careful study of the work's reception, we sometimes have the good fortune to stumble upon traces of phenomena that underline the strangeness of revolutionary France. What appears to be an unexpected alignment of *Candide*, Catholics, and Freemasons offers an excellent case in point.

While it cannot be denied that sex and political critique run through almost all works from this period, in three novels published 1790–91—*Julie philosophe* (1791), *La Boussole nationale* (1790), and *L'Isle des philosophes* (1790)—one finds a representative set of themes and aesthetics that transcends the inconsequential coupling of most revolutionary satire and suggests a deliberate critique of oath-taking and national unity. Moreover, based on a study of 60 politically inflected fictions published from 1789–91, I contend that the trio selected here represents a rare combination of relatively elevated literary craftsmanship and in-depth socio-political reflection.² Two of the three had some measurable impact in their day. Unlike much of the ephemera produced in these early years of the Revolution, all three are hefty little tomes (in octodecimo and octavo); the shortest counts 331 pages; the longest weighs in at over 950 pages. Two are illustrated and were reprinted shortly after the original publication; the most famous, *Julie philosophe*, still enjoys a certain renown today thanks to reprints in 1910 and 1968 and links to the libertine genre. Such texts written during the age of federation-building complement the better-known records of newspaper and correspondence with wicked wit, humour, and some poignancy, suggesting the pain felt

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² According to the most reliable bibliography of the period, 210 novels (including translations) were published in French between 1789 and 1791; of that total, only about 80 are new titles by French authors and are explicitly tied to French politics. Research to date can thus be considered relatively exhaustive. See Angus Martin, Vivienne G. Mylne, and Richard Frautschi, *Bibliographie du genre romanesque français, 1751–1800* (London: Mansell, 1977).

by believers during the months that saw the first major attempts on the primacy of the Catholic Church.

In the history of the French Revolution, the 14 July 1790 Festival of the Federation has the distinction of being the only event upon which everyone seems to agree: it is the apex of the patriots, the one moment when people across the country unanimously supported the new French nation. In this article, I analyze three of the most popular fictions of oath-taking written around the festivities, ancestor of modern Bastille Day,³ in order to demonstrate how literary analysis does more than generate a glow for history; it allows us to “get it”—to get the jokes, the innuendoes, and the sarcasm deployed by contemporaries on socio-political issues of their day. Historians have detailed the elaborate physical land works and propaganda campaign that prepared the site and spectators of the July 1790 ceremonies around the country, and have unearthed fascinating traces of the emotional residue left in the thousands of letters, speeches, and diaries of Parisian and provincial deputies.⁴ The novels in question shine an intriguing light on some of the political jockeying that may have unfolded behind the scenes, as refracted through the prism of satire and sentiment. Whether through subversion, co-optation, or resistance, they mark a distance from nationalist rhetoric while ostensibly supporting the revolutionary impulse towards solidarity. Moreover, they announce bedfellows that are rarely conjoined in modern-day accounts of patriotic oath-taking: Voltairean wit, Roman Catholicism, and Freemasonry.

The corpus identified here dialogues with the political history of the first year of the Revolution in three ways: (1) it underlines modern-day historians’ work on the Assembly’s attempt to seek unity in the midst of a contentious political environment; (2) it complements the literature on eighteenth-century sociability by reminding us of the fraught relationship between fraternity and Freemasonry; and (3) it casts a jaded eye on the ability of political innovations to break with deep-anchored networks of kinship and Catholic belief. These fictions focus specifically on oath-taking to reshape and reinterpret the act: by inscribing

³ For more on the history of how this festival became the French national holiday, see Christian Amalvi, “Le 14-juillet, du *Dies irae* à *jour de fête*,” in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 1:421–72.

⁴ See, for example, Timothy Tackett, “Conspiracy Obsession in the Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792,” *American Historical Review* 105 (June 2000): 698–713.

oath-taking into the long duration of the novel, they make what was a theatrical expression of national bonhomie into a seriously vulnerable subject of inquiry and debate.

Politics cannot tell the whole story, however. To fully appreciate *Julie philosophe*, *La Boussole nationale*, and *L'Isle des philosophes*, we must dig deeper into long-term trends in literary history. Like many novels of the years 1789–99, all three recycled and combined existing genres into hybrid forms. Rewriting Voltaire's philosophical tale *Candide* as a female picaresque, *Julie* features an ingénue prostitute who makes a fortune by declaring her patriotism at the most intimate of moments, and in the most didactic of styles. Her clients sign up to serve the nation in a farcical sort of oath-taking that proves as ephemeral as their libidos. *La Boussole* recalls Scarron's *Roman comique* (1651) by relating the burlesque adventures of a peasant in foreign lands, but it combines comic portraits of national types with edifying comments on agriculture, engineering, and industrial practices that reveal a debt to the economically minded Physiocrats. Aligned overtly with the Jacobins, this text displays the most convincing patriotism of the three. But *La Boussole* nevertheless co-opts the constitutional *pacte fédératif* with another pact, sworn by brother Masons to the transnational society of their Lodge. *L'Isle des philosophes* seems at first glance to be an ironic, Swiftian voyage narrative to ideologically charged islands. However, the arrival of enthusiastic dispatches sent by a young patriot from revolutionary Paris ends up discombobulating the chronology and cultural relativism expected of this genre. In the clash between the various worlds encountered here, faith trumps all.

By underlining the impact of recent political developments on otherwise old-fashioned characters and their *péripéties*, these novels bend inherited conventions and exemplars. All three articulate a sceptical attitude towards patriotism and popular enthusiasms that presages the wry attitude of early nineteenth-century writers towards their public, thereby dispelling—if any further dispelling were needed—François Furet and Denis Richet's claims about the "happy year" of 1790.⁵ Upturning

⁵ François Furet and Denis Richet baptized 1790 as the "happy year" in chap. 4, "L'Année heureuse," in *La Révolution française* (Paris: Fayard, 1973), 99–124. Although their account is not devoid of tensions, it evinces an essential optimism, as in its conclusion: "Juillet 1790. Le péril est passé, le ressort se détend. Satisfaction du travail accompli, goût naturel de l'ordre, l'alimentation populaire devenue normale, tout laisse espérer un climat de stabilité et de paix. À elle de bâtir, sur les décombres de l'ancien régime, la belle maison de

national loyalties through recourse to the body, the intellect, and the conscience, they affirm a kind of liberty that transcends efforts at nation-building, and suggest that, despite claims to the contrary, France remained divided indeed during this great year of unity.

Oath-Taking and Its Trace

Nous jurons d'être à jamais fidèles à la Nation, à la Loi et au Roi; de maintenir de tout notre pouvoir la Constitution décrétée par l'Assemblée nationale et acceptée par le Roi; de protéger, conformément aux lois, la sûreté des personnes et des propriétés, la libre circulation des grains et subsistances dans l'intérieur du royaume, la perception des contributions publiques, sous quelque forme qu'elles existent; de demeurer unis à tous les Français par les liens indissolubles de la fraternité.—Oath of the Federation⁶

While organizers were surely dismayed by the terrible weather, that so many thousands of people participated in the Festival of the Federation underscores its particular ethos: a determination to celebrate.⁷ Commemorative prints (see Figure 1) capture the key features: the spectacularly rain-soaked setting in the Champ de Mars outside Paris, where King Louis XVI, Queen Marie-Antoinette, General Lafayette, and Bishop Talleyrand, along with some 50,000 armed national guardsmen and soldiers and a crowd of 300,000 citizens, endured a long and surely tedious parade in the mud. According to the now classic historiography of Mona Ozouf, Samuel F. Scott, and Henri Leclercq, this festival was basically a military gathering with the purpose of reining in the national guards by having them pledge an oath alongside the king's regular line troops.⁸

demain dont rêve le troisième état" (125). Many others have nuanced this claim, however; for example, David Bell points out the country's fractured linguistic identities in *The Cult of the Nation in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 169–71.

⁶ Cited in Dom Henri Leclercq, *La Fédération (janvier–juillet 1790)* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1929), 351–52. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁷ Tackett's account of the months surrounding the Federation nuances this impression of complete unity, noting that "not all of the deputies were equally enthralled by the idea" of mounting this extravaganza. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 296–301, esp. 297.

⁸ Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan

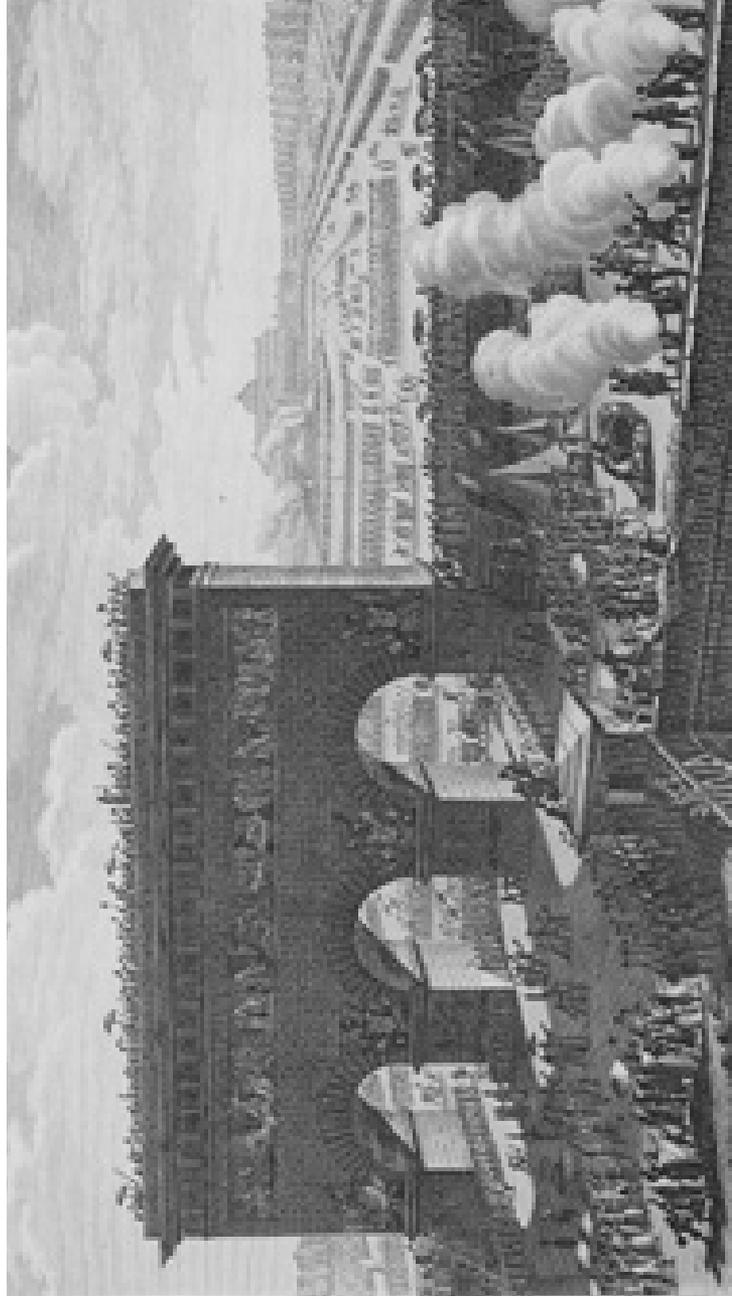


Figure 1. "Fédération générale faites à Paris, le 14 juillet 1790," in *Collection complète des Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française composée de cent treize numéros en trois volumes* (Paris: Chez Auber, An XIII (1804), 1: n.p., Prieur, inv. & del.; Berthault, sculp. Reproduced from the original held by the Department of Special Collections of the Hesburgh Libraries of the University of Notre Dame. Reproduced by permission.

Also significant were the festival's repercussions outside the capital. The Paris festivities mirrored events being held all around the nation, from tiny Provençal villages to major Atlantic seaports, where huge numbers of Frenchmen joined together and, when the clocks hit noon, pledged a solemn oath of mutual support and defence. The proceedings followed a careful script to symbolize union, but left out a significant portion of the population and blurred over the exact meaning of the union in question. After Bishop Talleyrand celebrated high mass, General Lafayette read the oath and the thousands of guardsmen and soldiers raised their right hands and repeated: "je le jure." Next, the king swore his oath to maintain constitutional law as decreed by the Assembly, and the queen showed her young son to the crowd and promised, to much applause, that he would do likewise. Apart from the small contingent accompanying the royal family, the celebrants were primarily middle-class military men and deputies. Most flagrant in their absence were the upper classes. As for the poor (*le menu peuple*), they were neither excluded nor involved, rather they served as witnesses to the national regeneration. Despite this exclusion, Ozouf's history represents the nation as uniting under the oath; as she notes: "It was met nearly everywhere with enthusiasm, even by those not normally enthusiastic about the Revolution."⁹ From an untruth emerged a legend, made truth by the retelling. How did this come about?

The Parisian event did not simply promote patriotism and religion; it announced de facto that both were already reconciled in the new constitution. Historians Leclercq and Suzanne Desan

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Samuel F. Scott, "Problems of Law and Order During 1790, the 'Peaceful' Year of the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (1975): 859–88; and Leclercq, *La Fédération*. The military purpose of the gathering is underlined in Talleyrand's report: "C'est la France armée qui va se réunir, ce n'est pas la France délibérante," cited in Ozouf, *La Fête révolutionnaire, 1789–1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 56. On military anxieties behind the festival, see William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 127–29. See also Bronislaw Baczko, "Serments et perjures," in *Starobinski en mouvement*, ed. Murielle Gagnebin and Christine Savinel (Seyssel: Éditions Champ Vallon, 2001), 331–45.

⁹ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 34. Ozouf underlines this sentiment, noting that "the truth of these untruthful accounts derives, therefore, precisely from this consensus. The harmony between the language used in the festival and that used by the ordinary people in the towns was no doubt temporary, but for the moment complete" (*Festivals*, 60). Furet and Richet echo Ozouf's sentiment: "Fête de l'utopie? Ce fut surtout l'image d'une unité volontaire, confiante et pacifique qui aurait voulu être l'aube d'une époque nouvelle" (114).

claim that for many *fédérés* oath-taking was an explicitly sacred event.¹⁰ Feudal oaths had a long history dating back to *La Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100); more recently, deputies had sworn oaths at the 1614 Estates-General to restore unity following the assassination of Henri iv. Vowing to uphold a constitution, however, was a new idea; and yet the unfinished status of the constitution gave pause. Making a constitution for France was a primary preoccupation for the deputies assembled at Versailles in May 1789; they believed that they had been elected for this purpose, and by 7 July 1789 they adopted the name “National Constituent Assembly.” By August 1789, they approved the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen that laid down the principles—of equality under law, free speech, and national sovereignty—to secure the break with feudalism, and named a committee to begin drafting a constitution. But the first constitution was not officially installed until 14 months after the Federation, and the binding power of the oath remained unclear. Most perplexing was the hazy relation between the constitution, the Gallican Catholic Church, and the French state, the loyalty implied to each, and the question of how oath-taking might impact the delicate balance between the two bastions of French identity.¹¹

Readings based on the iconography of euphoric *pactes fédératifs* spreading across the nation must be tempered by awareness of the social, military, and religious tensions that divided France in fall 1789 through summer 1790. Georges Lefebvre noted in his classic work of rural history that by summer 1789, many long-term antipathies proved impervious to fraternal good will, and

¹⁰ Leclercq highlights the January 1790 ceremony in Pontivy, where some 200 guardsmen, volunteer soldiers, and ecclesiastics from Brittany and Anjou joined to “d’unir l’amour de la patrie à celui de la religion, pour fixer le caractère de la sainte confédération” (*La Fédération*, 251–53). Framed by celebration of two masses, their oath was spoken in the front of the village church and invoked the protection of God. Suzanne Desan comments that “ceremonies throughout France fused patriotic and Christian symbolism as priests baptized babies with the sign of the cross and the cockade and sang the Te Deum to honor the unity of the nation.” Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 7.

¹¹ Accounts of Assembly deliberations from September 1789 to May 1790 show that most deputies assumed devotion to the nation could co-exist with Catholicism, but a vocal minority disagreed. M. Picot, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire ecclésiastique pendant le dix-huitième siècle*, 3rd ed., 7 vols. (Paris: Librairie d’Adrien Le Clere, 1856), 6:2.

old animosities flared anew.¹² As word spread of legislation that restricted feudal rights and formalized tolerance of Protestantism,¹³ towns witnessed latent hostilities turning into skirmishes between the newly formed local militias or National Guards, the king's line troops, and the disgruntled civilians who appealed to both for protection. In a juxtaposition of official harmony and bloody conflict, cities large and small, from Lille to Marseilles, saw violent confrontations and civic oath-taking that spring and summer. The year 1790 not only found French society caught in "the widespread, if not general, breakdown of law and order," writes Scott, but it was also the "year of disintegration" for members of the regular army, whose allegiance to the king and obedience to officialdom were repeatedly tested by the increasing popularity of the National Guards.¹⁴ Faced with an unstable signifier, it is not surprising that the oath would assume radically different meanings when voiced by a Catholic or a Freemason, for example, as opposed to a free-thinking libertine. The meaning of the festival lay less in the performance than in the legitimacy attributed to its performers.

The loyalty oath taken by festival participants in the French capital and countryside on 14 July 1790 was only one in a long sequence of performances that marked that year. Oath-taking

¹² One must also recall the great surge of peasant uprisings continuing sporadically from December 1789, the early appearance of counterrevolutionary sentiments among the nobility, notably with the suppression of noble titles in June 1790, and the violent antirevolutionary rhetoric of conservative newspapers. The scholarship on these symptoms of dissent and unrest is voluminous; classic titles include John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (London: S.P.C.K. for the Church Historical Society, 1969); Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (New York: Schocken Books, 1989); and Jeremy Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789–1799* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹³ For more on the application of the "Edit de Tolérance," see Dom Henri Leclercq, *Vers la Fédération (janvier-juillet 1790)* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1929), 369–89.

¹⁴ Within a month of the May 1790 ceremonies in Lyon, for example, peasants and guardsmen engaged in battles against the upper-class municipal officers and regular army units stationed in town. A similarly dramatic crisis followed the April 1790 pact between the soldiers of Languedoc and the National Guard of Montauban and Toulouse. The August mutiny of the Swiss troops and National Guards in Nancy and Châteauevieux ended with 300 dead: although restitution was attempted through a symbolic ceremony on the Champ de Mars, memories of this bloody feud remained bitter. For more on these conflicts, see Scott; on the mutinies and insurrections of 1790, see Leclercq, *La Fédération*, 460–534.

had already swept through the nation beginning in summer 1789, first at the Tennis Court Oath of June 20, then following the news of the Night of August 4 and Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. The vogue became especially pronounced after Louis XVI's dramatic appearance in the Constituent Assembly on 4 February 1790; during spring and summer 1790, *pactes fédératifs* spread across the provinces. The gesture brought to mind virtuous Spartans and other heroes of Antiquity such as the Horatii of Jacques-Louis David's tableau, but it also infringed on individual honour.¹⁵ Some claimed that oath-taking itself was an affront, since any worthy citizen would not need a public audience to confirm his virtue.¹⁶ Partisan politics were not uninvolved: the now-famous Tennis Court Oath was itself a result of partisan positioning. As Claude Langlois points out, the deputies' euphoric gesture was considered just one event among others until the fateful day when the king swore his allegiance at the Assembly. From that moment on, the oath "to the nation, the law, and the king" was on everyone's lips, and this first oath acquired its status in the patriot press. Reacting to the upsurge in popularity of Louis, journalists suddenly inscribed the June event as a founding moment of the Revolution, an interpretation that would be consecrated by David's drawing presented to the Salon in 1791.¹⁷ The delay between signifier and signified here reveals the artist's debt to left-wing activism, and testifies to the potent symbolism of oath-taking in the public eye.

The year 1790 saw the large-scale promotion of a performative sort of public political culture as had never before been experienced in France. Marie-Hélène Huët and Susan Maslan

¹⁵ Tackett, *Religion, Revolutions and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Harold T. Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries: A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 24.

¹⁶ This reaction was elicited by Jacques-Louis David's painting *Le Serment des Horace* (1787); as a review in *Le Journal de Paris* exclaimed: "je vous avoue que l'action de prêter serment, pour faire son devoir, a selon moi, quelque chose d'avilissant et de bas, et fort au-dessous du caractère Romain." Review of *Le Serment des Horace* by Jacques-Louis David, in *Journal de Paris* (12 May 1787), cited in Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 310n47.

¹⁷ Claude Langlois, "Counter-Revolutionary Iconography," in *French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799* (Los Angeles: Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, UCLA, 1988), 42. See also Jean Starobinski, "Le Serment: David," in *1789: Les Emblèmes de la raison* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), 81-93.

have focused on the distinction between the performed and the performative enacted in these rituals, and have shown how contemporaries demanded a classically inspired “virtuous spectacle” that would eschew the theatricality and artifice of the *ancien régime* court.¹⁸ Focusing on the words spoken and the actors speaking in fictionalized rituals of oath-taking can reveal much about the oath’s shaky content and the weakening prestige of the monarchy in the months surrounding the writing of the constitution. No matter how earnest its performers, ritual could not amount to much as long as its key player—the constitution—remained off-stage. When performance is seen to be enacted by illegitimate actors, the results elicit even greater scepticism. The three works studied here tackle the issue of legitimacy: the first undermines oath-taking with sly innuendo, the second co-opts it to extra-national purposes, and the third refuses it outright, but in moral not political terms. Literary performances thus parallel the paradoxes of real-life drama, and through their strategies of indirection and allusion, they illuminate the political repressed.

“Julie philosophe,” or Candide Turns a Trick

A Voltairean irony imparts much of the humour to the anonymous *Julie philosophe, ou le bon patriote* (1791), a fictional autobiography that enjoyed some contemporary success, judging from its second edition in 1792, and which continues to intrigue readers today. Its eroticism may account for its popularity; that *Julie* was considered pornography comes out clearly in a police

¹⁸ The focus on the “virtuous spectacle” is in Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy, and the French Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). See also Marie-Hélène Huet who, in a pioneering study of the conjunction between revolutionary justice and drama, reveals not only the political relevance of discursive content but also its transmissibility to audiences in *Rehearsing the Revolution: The Staging of Marat’s Death, 1793–1797*, trans. Robert Hurley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 27–45. On performative speech acts as a site of individual theatrical performance, see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); on the performative as a cultural iteration of individual identity, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997). Cecilia Feilla presented an interesting take on this question in “The Oath in Revolutionary Literature and Culture: A Performative Paradigm of Action” (lecture, New Paradigms for Revolutionary Studies: French-American Colloquium, South Bend, IN, 6 October 2008).

report of An IX (1801) that includes the novel alongside *Thérèse philosophe* and *Le portefeuille du fouteur* in a list of books seized for immoral content.¹⁹ The 1910 edition by Guillaume Apollinaire and more recent scholarship emphasize the salacious nature of Julie's *périples*.²⁰ Courtesan, spy, and adventuress, Julie is regarded by critics as one in a series of independent whores celebrated in libertine fictions of the Enlightenment, such as *Fanny Hill* (1748–49), *Moll Flanders* (1722), or *Margot la ravaudeuse* (1750), who masterfully practice their trade in order to gain wealth and prestige. But when one looks behind the plot line to the logic underpinning *Julie*, one spies a politicized satire of Voltaire's best-known tale, *Candide, ou l'optimisme* (1759).

Although Julie's early education conforms to conventions of period erotica, the narrative also explicitly refers to a penchant for explanatory life-writing that recalls the ridiculously doctrinaire stances embraced by Voltaire's optimist *Candide* and Diderot's fatalist Jacques. "J'ai toujours aimé à raisonner mes actions," Julie notes on one occasion; and "j'ai déjà dit que toutes mes actions étaient raisonnées, et j'étais ingénieuse à les justifier vis-à-vis de moi-même après coup, quand la faiblesse, la passion, ou les circonstances m'avaient entraînée" (1:30; 1:67). Like *Candide*, her desire for "learning" gets her expelled from home and sets off the journey plot. The philosophical tic takes on a more topical air when Julie wanders into war-torn regions of the Brabant

¹⁹ Archives de la Préfecture de la Police, Paris. AA/132, no. 178 (Vendémiaire, An IX).

²⁰ Guillaume Apollinaire attributed *Julie* to the well-known author of libertine fiction, Chevalier Andrea de Nerciat. Malcolm Cook has noted, however, that textual clues are unreliable and that no biographical evidence supports this attribution. Cook, *Politics in the Fiction of the French Revolution, 1789–1794*, in *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 201 (1982): 270–72. On *Julie*'s place in the libertine tradition of Margot and Moll, see Kathryn Norberg, "The Libertine Whore: Prostitution in French Pornography from Margot to Juliette," in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 225–52; Pamela Cheek, "Prostitutes of 'Political Institution,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28, no. 2 (1995): 193–219; and Stéphanie Genand, *Le Libertinage et l'histoire: politique de la séduction à la fin de l'ancien régime*, SVEC 2005:11 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005). *Julie philosophe* was originally published as 2 vols. in octodecimo, with no place or publisher. *Julie philosophe ou le bon patriote: Histoire à peu près véritable d'une CITOYENNE ACTIVE qui a été tour à tour agent et victime des dernières révolutions de la Hollande, du Brabant et de la France*, ed. Guillaume Apollinaire, 2 vols. (1910; Paris: Tchou, Briffaut, 1968). References are to this edition.

and émigré circles in London, before returning to revolutionary France at the end of the novel.

Just as the Legislative Assembly would do in 1791 and the Convention government in 1792, Julie undertakes her own liberating mission to neighbours abroad, and with such success!²¹ Thanks to one of her first lovers, a rebellious Amsterdammer whose grandiose ambition compensates for his tiny penis, the heroine claims to become a “proselyte of the cause” and her ardour—metaphorical and literal—never flags (1:91).²² The diverse origins of her clients drive home the essentially transnational libertinism of their practices: the Dutch ship captain who initiates her into the useful practice of prostitution deploys an appealingly “republican” energy in their tryst; and an English lover is praised for pumping her with “spirits of liberty” (1:71; 1:204). As Harvey Chisick has noted, this notion of “patriotism” was intended to connote a value that was not exclusive but universalist; its opposite was not cosmopolitanism but selfishness.²³ So thoroughly enthused do these experiences make her, that one suspects a certain tongue-in-cheek intent. Although Julie’s mercantile affirmation of individual freedom turns Candide’s deterministic casuistry upside down, the function of patriotism in *Julie philosophe* feels strangely familiar. Perhaps patriotism is to this heroine what optimism was to Candide.

In episode after episode, Julie’s principles are tested, and always she reiterates the same blind devotion to the cause. Her most harrowing adventure occurs back in France, where she narrowly escapes a hanging by a mob of irate citizens. Here too the heroine proves surprisingly tolerant of violence against her person, and comments: “Quoique victime innocente ... la cruelle épreuve par laquelle j’ai passé n’a point changé mes sentiments; je suis toujours patriote” (2:62). In ironic understatement, she admits that “il est toujours fort désagréable d’avoir été pendu, fut-ce pour la bonne cause”; nevertheless her support for the people remains steadfast

²¹ Alan Forrest, “La Révolution et l’Europe,” in *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 146–55.

²² The prostitute’s ridicule of her clients for their “flabby” organs and impotence corresponds to the conventions of libertine literature outlined in Norberg, 237–38.

²³ Harvey Chisick, *The Limits of Reform: Attitudes Towards the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 215–25.

(2:66). This absurd metaphor of reduction—calling a hanging a “disagreeable” experience—casts a broad wink at another Voltairean hero, Babouc who, after enjoying weeks of high living in the operas, theatres, and homes of elegant Persepolisans, realizes that his “trials” are minor compared to Jonah’s imprisonment three days in a whale’s belly.²⁴ Babouc’s reliability is debunked by his exaggerated self-importance and the ease with which he changes his mind; Julie’s reliability proves just as dicey but for the opposite reason. Like Candide, she never allows events to impact her beliefs. Her simple-minded patriotism robs the narrator of the credibility she might otherwise have claimed with the tell-all strategy of the autobiography. How can one be so blind to the dangers of ideology?

As narrated by this diarist, patriotism justifies any number of moral transgressions, and the loyalty oath absolves all kinds of sins. Prostitution comes across as a not only lucrative but also virtuous enterprise: even the most formidable noblemen become *sans-culottes* under the influence of Julie’s persuasive harangues. A sort of revolutionary casuistry runs through these sordid details, as when the heroine explains her decision to accept the lewd advances of Louis XVI’s former finance minister Calonne as a gesture comparable to the sacrifices committed by the heroes of Antiquity, such as the Horatii celebrated in David’s painting: “Je parviendrai peut-être à le changer, me dis-je, à en faire un honnête homme, un bon citoyen’ ... je me comparais à ces anciens Romains qui se dévouaient généreusement pour leur Patrie” (2:34). After bedding several times with this ugly yet energetic client, Julie’s plot succeeds: he realizes the errors of aristocratic prejudice and he writes to the Assembly asking for permission to return to France from exile in England and to take a civic oath (2:43–44).

²⁴ Babouc is the hero of *Le Monde comme il va, ou Vision de Babouc* (1748). The comparison between the voyage of Babouc (luxurious foods and pleasures in a wealthy foreign city) and the trial of Jonah (imprisonment in a whale’s belly with nothing but fish to eat) emerges at the end of the tale. As the narrator notes: “Babouc fut bien loin de se plaindre, comme Jonas qui se fâcha de ce qu’on ne détruisait pas Ninive. Mais quand on a été trois jours dans le corps d’une baleine, on n’est pas de si bonne humeur que quand on a été à l’opéra, à la comédie, et qu’on a soupé en bonne compagnie.” Voltaire, *Le Monde comme il va, ou Vision de Babouc*, in *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 65 vols. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2004), 30B:63. On the unreliability of language in *Babouc*, see Roy Wolper, “The Final Foolishness of Babouc: The Dark Center of ‘Le Monde comme il va,’” *Modern Language Review* 75, no. 4 (1980): 766–73, esp. 772–73.

Before accepting a liaison with an aristocratic émigré in Austria, Julie demands a conversion as well: “Je suis d’un parti opposé au vôtre; la cause de la liberté n’a pas un plus zélé partisan que moi. Ah! s’il en est ainsi, dès ce moment, je déteste, j’abjure une cause qui n’est point la vôtre, et je suis prêt à vous immoler mes intérêts les plus chers pour vous prouver mon amour ... il n’est rien que je ne fasse pour vous plaire, et je suis prêt à m’engager par serment à tout ce que vous voudrez m’ordonner” (2:201–2). Days later, after embracing new principles—but nothing else—from the coy taskmistress, he seals the deal with a “most sacred oath,” and finally receives his reward (2:205). When an accident leaves him on his deathbed shortly thereafter, the one-time conspirator regrets only that he did not have time to “expiate his errors” and prove that he had become “as uncompromising a patriot as he had once been a flagrant aristocrat” (2:217).

Based on this recurrent plot device, I disagree with Margaret Jacob’s dismissal of the novel as a “preachy” kind of failed pornography, and propose rather that *Julie* be read for the Voltairean spirit it incarnates.²⁵ Along with its rocambollesque erotica, *Julie philosophe* presents a sustained, ironic conversion tale that satirizes the mania for oath-taking which swept the French nation in 1789–90. Even modestly knowledgeable readers of 1791 would remember Calonne’s despicable role in the Diamond Necklace Affair.²⁶ With rumours running thick of his activism among the émigrés in London in 1789, the notion that this roué might swear a loyalty oath to the nascent French nation was surely a burlesque gesture. The oaths in *Julie philosophe*, like the patriotism they profess to symbolize, function in the same way that the tenets of Leibnizian optimism functioned in *Candide*. They are vain gestures involving a vacant signifier: they cannot explain the world or even predict a character’s intent.

²⁵ Interpreting *Julie philosophe* as a poor remake of *Thérèse philosophe* (1748[?]), Margaret Jacob argues that Julie is “hardly as naughty or philosophically astute as her mid-century predecessor,” and judged the novel unfavorably because of its disconnect from the “complexities of the materialist world that pornography sought to narrate and describe.” Jacob, “The Materialist World of Pornography,” in *The Invention of Pornography*, 200.

²⁶ For more on Calonne’s involvement in this scandal, see Robert Lacour-Gayet, *Calonne: financier, réformateur, contre-révolutionnaire 1734–1802* (Paris: Hachette, 1963); and Sarah Maza, “The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited: The Case of the Missing Queen,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 63–89. Calonne would move to Turin and then to Koblenz in 1790, where he became “prime minister” of the Count d’Artois.

Julie philosophe ends as did *Candide* by exposing her principles as a sham. Thanks to the lucrative traffic in sex, Julie becomes a wealthy landowner. Despite her oft-cited love of equality, she admits no desire to share the fortune except with a strapping peasant husband. In an explicit wink to *Candide* that ends with the famous adage “Il faut cultiver notre jardin,” *Julie philosophe* concludes: “Adieu mon cher lecteur; il m’en coûte de ne plus pouvoir bavarder avec toi, mais je te quitte pour aller trouver mon cher Jérôme, qui laboure une pièce de terre derrière notre maison, car, quoique nous soyons riches, nous n’en travaillons pas moins ... et je finirai en disant comme Candide: “Tout cela est bien, mais il faut labourer notre jardin” (2:229).²⁷ Note the titillating slip of vocabulary; from the elegant verb of agricultural and intellectual work *cultiver* to the double-entendre implicit in *labourer* (to work and to dig or plow, as in the poetic expression *labourer les sillons de Vénus*, to plow the furrows of love). Just as Voltaire’s naive hero ultimately found himself slaving as a subsistence farmer, this fiery patriot concludes her life as the kind of genteel aristocrat that she all along professed to despise, though she too dabbles in gardening.

Julie was not the only text to satirize the vogue for civic oath-taking. Consider the caricature *Ma Constitution* (ca. 1791; see Figure 2) that depicts General Lafayette placing his right hand in a gesture of oath-taking onto the genitals—*res publica*—of a scandalously exposed lady. This insulting caricature marks an affront to all three subjects of the real oath—*La Nation, la loi et le Roi*—by showing a *putto*, symbol of love and lust, knocking the royal crown off the globe on the right, while a penis ejaculates below. It implies that the world is now governed neither by the Assembly nor by the monarchy, but by the leader of the nation’s military who is himself led by his prick.²⁸ Also relevant are the

²⁷ On the ambivalence implicit in the dénouement of *Candide* and its philosophy of optimism, see Lionel Gossman, “Voltaire’s Heavenly City,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 3, no. 1 (1969): 67–82; and David Langdon, “On the Meanings of the Conclusion of *Candide*,” *SVEC* 238 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1985), 397–432. A similar Candidean plot, where a cynical narrator travels the world, sees much injustice, and finally gets a nice job as a librarian and gardener, marks Abbé Jean-Jacques Gaudier, *Jean le noir, ou le misanthrope* (Paris: Hôtel de Bouthillier, 1789).

²⁸ There is debate about the identity of the woman in this image. Vivian Cameron and Michel Vovelle claim it depicts Queen Marie-Antoinette, whereas Langlois, citing an advertisement in *Le Journal de la Cour et de la ville* (1792), argues it is Sophie de Condorcet. See Vivian Cameron, “Political Exposures: Sexuality and Caricature in the French Revolution,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, 97; Michel Vovelle, *La Révolution française: Images et récit*,



Figure 2. *Ma Constitution* (ca. 1791). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Reproduced by permission.

bawdy jokes that appeared in newspapers, such as the September 1791 *Journal des sans-culottes*, which depicts a patriot swearing fidelity to the constitution as if she were a slutty girlfriend: “Madame, si j’avais l’honneur d’être votre mari, je ne vous caresserais jamais le cul que la main droite posée sur la Déclaration des droits de l’homme.”²⁹ In *Julie philosophe*, as in period caricature and journalism, the ritual of oath-taking is transformed from a solemn event into a trivial or burlesque gesture heralding sexual favours to come.³⁰ Oath-taking becomes a sly joke to share among friends, a cynical reminder that patriotism—or indeed any ideology—can hardly rival the libido.

5 vols. (Paris: Editions Messidor, 1986), 2:66; and Langlois, *La Caricature contre-révolutionnaire* (Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1988), 242. Whether or not this particular caricature meant to insult the queen is irrelevant, since it resembles many other texts and images targeting Lafayette and Marie-Antoinette. See, for example, *Soirées amoureuses du Général Mottier et de la belle Antoinette* (Persepolis, 1790) and the image reproduced in Langlois, *La Caricature*, 151.

²⁹ Cited in Antoine de Baecque, *Le Corps de l’histoire: métaphores et politique (1770–1800)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993), 75.

³⁰ That the oath would re-emerge as an important plot device in the Gothic and royalist fiction of the late 1790s is evident in the analysis below. Vow-taking plays an equally dramatic function in the dénouement of Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le noir* (Paris: Levasseur, 1830), although the gesture is veiled in irony for its overly melodramatic sentimentality.

“La Boussole nationale,” or the Federation of Masons

Where these last examples explicitly skewer revolutionary idioms with irreverent humour, the irony that seems to cloak oath-taking in Pochet’s *Boussole nationale* (1790) derives from a political innuendo of an entirely different nature.³¹ This novel, whose beautifully illustrated title page (see Figure 3) announces its attribution to a “true Patriot,” includes a dedication to a most distinguished ally: Jean-Sylvain Bailly, academician, astronomer, and Mayor of Paris from 1789, who presided over the Assembly during the famous Tennis Court Oath. Although largely unknown today, *La Boussole* was well received by the press and went into a second edition in 1791 with the title *Voyages et aventures d’un laboureur descendant du frère de lait d’Henri IV* (Travels and Adventures of a Labourer, Descendant of the Foster-Brother of Henri IV). The editors’ instructions for its dissemination are tantalizing yet enigmatic. The preface describes Bailly’s support for the novel—deemed “l’ouvrage d’un bon Citoyen”—and exhorts compatriots to stage public readings or *veillées* as soon as possible. Moreover, it offers grandiose instructions aiming for wide distribution: “Nous bornons nos vœux pour qu’à l’imitation de nos Concitoyens qui forment des Sociétés des Amis de la Constitution, établies dans les villes municipales de Besançon et Strasbourg, MM. les chefs de districts villageois, les curés de campagne, les chefs de régiment et de manufactures, établissent des Sociétés de lecture, qu’on y lise les aventures survenues aux inconséquens parens du descendant du frère de lait de notre bon roi Henri, [et] que cette histoire soit pour eux l’œil du maître, avec lequel ils acquerront les lumières nécessaires à tout bon citoyen.”³²

³¹ Little biographical information on Pochet is extant. Apart from his literary work, he was once director of l’Ecole Gymnastique of the Military School in St Petersburg and author of *L’Héroïsme uni à l’espérance par la félicité publique à l’autel de la liberté. Fête Gymnastique et Athénienne, Allégorique, composée pour être exécutée par des jeunes Patriotes, dédiée à Louis XVI, Roi des Français, inventée par le Sieur Pochet, pensionnaire du Duc des Deux-Ponts, à l’occasion de la nouvelle Constitution, acceptée par le Roi, le 4 septembre, l’an troisième de la Liberté* (n.p.: De l’Imprimerie de Pain, c. 1792). Alexandre Cioranescu, *Bibliographie de la littérature française du dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1962), 2:1407.

³² [A. Pochet], *La Boussole nationale ou Aventures historico-rustiques de Jacob surnommé Henri quatrième laboureur, descendant du frère de lait de notre bon roi Henri IV. Recueillies par un vrai patriote*, 3 vols. (Paris: De l’imprimerie de la liberté sur la Place de la Bastille, 1790), 1:n.p. References are to this edition.

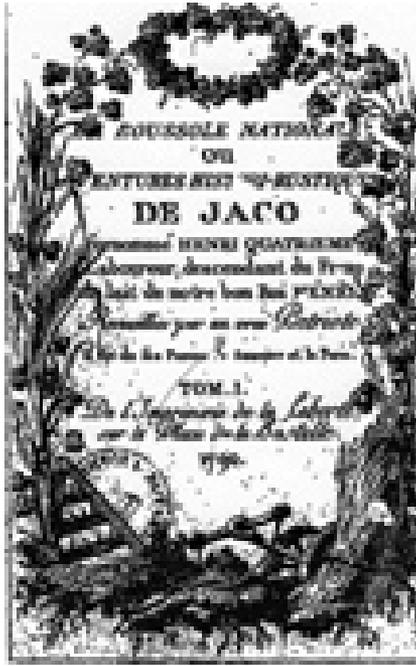


Figure 3. Title page from [A. Pochet], *La Boussole nationale, ou Aventures historico-rustiques de Jaco surnommé Henri quatrième laboureur, descendant du frère de lait de notre bon roi Henri iv. Recueillies par un vrai patriote* (Paris: De l'imprimerie de la liberté sur la Place de la Bastille, 1790), vol. 1. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Reproduced by permission.

Even if this lengthy little book (more than 950 pages in three volumes in octavo) was not read aloud as the editors requested, it was apparently promoted among the Jacobins.³³ Four book reviews appeared in June–October 1791 in the leading newspapers, *Le Journal de Paris*, *Le Moniteur Universel*, *La Chronique de Paris*, and the more specialized *Feuille de correspondance du libraire*, and *La Boussole* is praised as a “very useful” book, which offers not only a “faithful and lively tableau of the happy life in France,” but also warns of the “evils found in foreign lands by those unwise enough

³³ On the network of Jacobin clubs and their role in educating rural populations, see Michael Kennedy, “Les Clubs des Jacobins et la presse sous l’Assemblée nationale, 1789–1791,” *Revue historique* 264, no. 1 (1980): 49–63; Ozouf, *Varennes: La mort de la royauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 354; and Françoise Parent, “De nouvelles pratiques de lecture,” in *Histoire de l’édition française: Vol. 2, Le Livre triomphant*, eds. Henri-Jean Martin et Roger Chartier, 4 vols. (Paris: Promodis, 1984), 2:606–21.

to betray their country in guilty emigrations.”³⁴ The agricultural lessons of *La Boussole* may be banal borrowings from didactic publications such as the *Feuille villageoise*; more intriguing are the *lumières* that every good citizen needs.³⁵

Most of the novel relates the travails of the peasant-hero Jaco as he travels through Holland, Russia, Poland, Germany, and England; wherever he goes, he is duped by unscrupulous swindlers, is welcomed by fellow Masons, learns about new agricultural technologies and tips on topics such as sheep breeding and crop rotation, and seeks to locate his lost relatives who had fallen prey to “guilty emigrations” in search of work—and religious freedom—abroad.³⁶ His main goal throughout is to convince his cousins to return home and join the family farm in rural France, where they are now welcome thanks to the king’s lifting of restraints against non-Catholics.³⁷ At the end, all the relatives and many more peasants, who have followed their lead, settle on the farm and adopt a lifestyle that is as heavily legislated as the other schemes for social engineering found in period fiction.³⁸ Despite

³⁴ “Les lecteurs trouveront dans ces anecdotes le tableau fidèle et animé du bonheur que l’on goûte en France, et des maux que rencontrent dans les pays étrangers les imprudents qui trahissent leur pays par de coupables émigrations,” Review of *Voyages et aventures d’un laboureur descendant du frère de lait d’Henri IV*, *Le Moniteur universel* 283 (10 octobre 1791), in *Réimpression de l’Ancien Moniteur*, 32 vols. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1862), 10:74. See also the reviews in *Le Journal de Paris* (June 1791) and *Chronique de Paris* (September 1791) reprinted in *Feuille de correspondance du libraire* (3:61; 10:237–38). Unlike the emigrations of nobles which would shortly rob the nation of its financial and military might, when news of the royal family’s failed escape attempt launched a massive exodus of the wealthy, the characters in *La Boussole* emigrated for religious reasons. As members of a Huguenot clan, they fled the French hostility against Protestants by taking their trades abroad. But the author’s warning against emigration may well have explained its appeal to readers in the post-Varennes days of Fall 1791. Massimo Boffa, “Emigrés,” in *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française*, 348.

³⁵ For more on the kinds of teachings included in the popular *Feuille villageoise*, see Michel Vernus, “Lectures et pratiques de lecture en Franche-Comté (1780–1800),” in *Livre et révolution*, ed. Frédéric Barbier, Claude Jolly, and Sabine Juratic (Paris: Aux Amateurs des Livres, 1988), 172; and James Livesey, *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 96–99.

³⁶ On the links between the character of Jaco and the ideal of the reforming farmer, a republican prototype that was embraced and promoted with particular fervour during the Directory period, see Livesey, 88–166.

³⁷ On the “Edit de Tolérance,” see Leclercq, *Vers la Fédération*, 369–89.

³⁸ The detailed recommendations on space usage, work timetables, and gender-specific leisure pursuits recall the elaborate scheme of Gaspard Guillard de

its strenuous support for the constitutional monarchy, King Louis xvi and the legislative reforms afoot in France in 1789–90 are not mentioned as much as the localized reforms being enacted on Jaco's territory. When Louis xvi is held up for praise, his name is invariably coupled with the hero's great-great-grandfather's foster-brother Henri iv, and Louis' policies are compared favourably with the religious tolerance and agrarian reforms of that illustrious forebear, or it is suggested that he look to his ancestor or to his loyal labourers for advice.³⁹ This genre of kingly dialogue reveals the connection between *La Boussole nationale* and the dozen or so brochures known as the *Entretiens des Bourbons* that were published the same year.⁴⁰ However what is relevant here is not the king's presence but rather his relative absence from the tale.

Especially significant is the blurred constitutionalism behind the ritualized oath-taking that marks the grandiose finale of *La Boussole nationale*: a spectacular 30-page tableau of rustic festivals on Jaco's farm, where he convokes a meeting of what he calls his "petite monarchie." Counting more than 1,200 inhabitants, this compound includes 32 farms, workshops housing weavers, tanners, and a stocking factory, all set up according to the most modern criteria. But the final oath taken by the men in Pochet's version of the Federation is not a constitutional oath at all, rather it is a pledge to Freemasonry.

Beaurieu, *L'Élève de la nature* (Lille: Lehoucq, 1762; reprint 1778). For more on these topoi, see Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man, and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 124–25.

³⁹ The voyage narrative relays a number of comments on fiscal and commercial policies, as when the narrator offers advice on the import-export business: "Si le gouvernement n'est pas plus attentif, désormais à retenir par de bonnes primes, récompenses, privilèges, les bons ouvriers manufacturiers, fabricants, et ceux des bons ouvriers, qui nous donnent encore l'avantage sur nos concurrents, d'ici à la fin du siècle, les fabriques des autres nations auront plus de bras que nous, et par conséquent feront baisser leur prix" (*La Boussole*, 2:316). For more on the history of Freemasons in France, see Margaret C. Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts and Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and Pierre Chevalier, *Histoire de la francmaçonnerie française*, 3 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 1984).

⁴⁰ As Annie Duprat has noted, these hostile pamphlets exemplify a hard-line monarchism that violently condemns Louis xvi. Duprat, "Louis xvi morigéné par ses ancêtres en 1790: *Les Entretiens des Bourbons*," *Dix-huitième siècle* 26 (1994): 317–32; and Duprat, *Les Rois de papier: La caricature de Henri III à Louis XVI* (Paris: Belin, 2002).

Although the novel's last page is illustrated with emblems indicating support for the constitutional king (see Figure 4; note the lilies winding around a sword and a bugle, while a banner-bedecked beehive sits atop a book of laws), and it bears the familiar slogan of *Le Roi, La Nation, réunis et soumis à la loi*, the text conflates constitutionalism with an initiation into the Freemasons. The villagers do join together at one moment to read the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, and take an oath to the National Assembly and the king (3:313–18). But the emotional high point of the event emerges at the end. After three days of Rousseauian open-air merrymaking in which Jaco, the village nobleman, and the parish priest choreograph the distribution of prizes to the best citizens and celebrate marriages between young couples, they bring together the hundreds of men who head the community households and offer them three objects. Each man receives a symbolic instrument that corresponds to his Masonic rank, a copy of the “Duties and rights of men and citizens,” and a copy of *La Boussole nationale* itself, which they are incited to learn by heart so they can repeat it to their families, each one incarnating the virtuous transparency of life under the “eye of the master.”⁴¹ Before closing, the men also learn the secret rites and password of the Freemasons, they raise a glass of wine in a toast, and they make a pledge. This pledge invokes unity and brotherhood, which resembles the rhetoric of the Federation, except that the pledge exactly reproduces the language of the well-known Masonic *Apprentices’ Song* (*La Chanson des apprentis*). The *Boussole* pledge goes: “Joignons-nous de mains en mains / Tenon-nous fermes ensemble / Rendons grâce aux destins / Du nœud qui nous rassemble”; the *Chanson des apprentis* reads: “Joignons-nous, mains en mains / Tenons-nous fermes ensemble, / Rendons grâce au destin / Du nœud qui nous assemble.”⁴² There are only a few letters, and a very slight emphasis, differentiating the first from the second: *le destin* becomes *les destins*, and *assemble* becomes *rassemble*. This striking

⁴¹ “L’œil du maître peut tout, c’est lui qui rend la vie / Au mérite expirant sous la dent de l’envie, / C’est lui dont les rayons ont cent fois éclairé / Le modeste talent dans la foule ignoré / Un roi qui sait régner nous fait ce que nous sommes, / Les regards d’un héros produit de grands hommes” (*La Boussole*, 3:325).

⁴² *La Boussole*, 3:326. The *Chanson des apprentis* is reproduced in *Le Parfait maçon: Les débuts de la maçonnerie française (1736–1748)*, ed. Johel Coutura (St Étienne: Publications de l’Université de St Étienne, 1994), 284.



Figure 4. End page from [A. Pochet], *La Boussole nationale ou Aventures historico-rustiques de Jaco surnommé Henri quatrième laboureur, descendant du frère de lait de notre bon roi Henri IV. Recueillies par un vrai patriote* (Paris: De l'imprimerie de la liberté sur la Place de la Bastille, 1790), vol. 3. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Reproduced by permission.

similarity between the novel's language and imagery of the all-seeing eye and the discourse of Freemasonry may be chalked up in part to the borrowings that were known to operate between revolutionary and Masonic symbolism.⁴³ One thing is sure, however: this vow does not conform to the *pacte fédératif* seen

⁴³ The combination of a Mason with a representative of the First and Second Estates would not have been as shocking to period readers as it may seem to us. As Roger Chartier has noted, the rituals and principles of Freemasonry were not democratic; rather they replicated many features of old regime sociability, including honorary distinctions and an exclusivism based on social standing. Chartier, *Les Origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (1990; Paris: Seuil, 2000), 290–91. Richard Cobb and Colin Jones have usefully pointed out the prevalence of Masons in the Estates General (at least 200 were elected) and the borrowing of symbols (the eye representing vigilance, the level symbolizing equality) and mottoes (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*) from Freemasonry into patriotic rhetoric of the early Revolution, and they too stress that Masonic political views were seldom radical. Cobb and Jones, *The French Revolution: Voices from a Momentous Epoch, 1789–1795* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 109. On the links between Bailly, the Physiocrats and Freemasonry, see Edwin Burrows Smith, “Jean-Sylvain Bailly: Astronomer, Mystic, Revolutionary, 1736–1793,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 44 (1954): 427–538.

above. By introducing the transnational dimension of Masonic brotherhood, this vow departs radically from the original national pledge—"demeurer unis à tous les Français par les liens indissolubles de la fraternité"—which bolstered support for the French in and only among the French.

It is also significant that the constitution, the National Guard, and the Assembly, which was entrusted with drafting the document, are all missing from this climax. Those agents who are present—the Masonic leader, the village nobleman, and the local curate—represent an amalgam of old-fashioned and new-fangled authority figures. All three orders being equal, it is nevertheless Jaco the peasant who heads the "little monarchy." This juxtaposition of old regime sociability, egalitarianism, and fraternity seems to be a deliberate move on the part of author Pochet that reveals much about the unsettled state of constitutional politics in 1790. It also brings an important nuance to our idea of the French *mentalité*.

The positive image of helpful, intelligent, and organized Freemasons in this book and in Robert Lesuire's novel *Charmansage* (1792; reprint 1795) should ring a bell of caution to those modern critics who may hastily conflate Freemasonry with conspiracy theory, or misunderstand its resonance in 1790–91. Although the work by Roger Chartier, among others, has seen Masonic sociability as an early model for revolutionary ideals of regeneration and equality, opinion also ran strong against it, and on all sides of the political spectrum. The masterful Ronald Paulson and Margaret Jacob both cite 1793 as the turning point—Jacob notes that "by 1793 freemasonry was suspect to both the French left and the French right"—but neither explains how this shift occurred.⁴⁴ Evidence of confusion and ambivalence over the secretive group

⁴⁴ Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 203; Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789–1820)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 223. In *Charmansage*, the Masons are more cautiously referred to as a *société mystérieuse* or *le sabbat des philosophes*, but the gestures of solidarity and promotion of intelligence sound Masonic, as does the Fête de la Rosière that the hero hosts to celebrate the villagers' virtue. See Robert Martin Lesuire, *Charmansage, ou mémoires d'un jeune citoyen faisant l'éducation d'un ci-devant noble*, 3 vols. (Paris: Defer de Maisonneuve, 1792), 2:118–36. Another Masonic link lies in the work of François-Félix Nogaret, who published prolifically throughout the revolutionary decade. See Janet Burke, "Leaving the Enlightenment: Women Freemasons After the Revolution," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 255–65, esp. 259.

emerges strikingly in François Doppet's novel, *Zélamire, ou les liaisons bizarres* (1788, reprint 1791), where the narrator describes his father as a goodly Freemason who was nevertheless seduced by an unscrupulous *illuminé* with dastardly powers of mind control over his initiates.⁴⁵ That rumours conflated Freemasonry with other shady sects is attested by the distinction in *Zélamire* between the Freemasons and the *illuminés*, but their shared predilection for magic ends up costing his father his life. Moreover, this learned author—a medical doctor who during the Revolution would serve as general in the republican army—inserts a note that declares: “Quoi! Les illuminés vont aussi en Savoie? Il faut avouer que cette secte ridicule se multiplie singulièrement. Ce qu’il y a de plus étonnant, c’est la protection dont jouissent ces imposteurs [par].. des gens en place.”⁴⁶ The political power of the Freemasons was part of their allure, and explains some of the alarm.

Regardless of the doubtful innuendoes that cloaked the Freemasons among some camps, the fact remains that the positive representation of the group in *La Boussole* was a significant support. That the novel was well-received in the press, and that both the author and the purported ally of the book in the revolutionary government supported them, lend credence to our appeal for caution. Moreover, the instructions included in the preface suggest a fascinating reciprocity between literature and the civic activism of the Freemasons. The cities where *La Boussole* is to be sent—in imitation of the good work being done in Besançon and Strasbourg—will by association join with what Daniel Ligou labels the “rationalist” Lodges of the Freemasons, where members were attempting to distinguish themselves from their more mystical confederates by setting

⁴⁵ Describing his father, the narrator writes: “Mon père étoit d’une secte connue sous le nom de *Franche-Maçonnerie*; j’ignore ce qui se pratique dans ces assemblées, mais j’ose assurer que, puisque mon père étoit un Franc-maçon, la plupart sont certainement des honnêtes gens.” François Amédée Doppet, *Zélamire, ou les liaisons bizarres, Histoire récente, mise au jour d’après les Mémoires de l’Héroïne, & publiée par l’Éditeur de ‘Célestina’* (1788; Paris: Marchands de Nouveautés, 1791), 17–18.

⁴⁶ Doppet, *Zélamire*, 18. François-Amédée Doppet (Chambéry, 1753–1800) was also author of several works of medicine, poetry, history, most notably *Mémoires politiques et militaires du général Doppet* (1797). An ardent Jacobin, he founded a newspaper after the coup d’état of 18 Fructidor An v (4 September 1797), entitled *L’Écho des Alpes, journal démocratique*, but it only lasted a few months. *Index biographique français*, 3rd ed., ed. Tommaso Napo (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2004), fiche 1, 325, 20–40.

up literary and scientific academies to respond to local needs.⁴⁷ Clearly, the Freemasons in 1790–91 appeared to some, if not all Frenchmen, as wielding the potential to provide important assistance and structure (“the eye of the master”) to the rural citizenry—and perhaps more effectively than the nation could do for itself.

“L’Isle des philosophes”: An Object Lesson on Silencing the Oath

Refusing outright to take the constitutional oath presents an even more provocative challenge to revolutionary reform, and yet it appears the most sensible choice in Abbé Balthazard’s epistolary novel, *L’Isle des philosophes* (1790). Through dialogues between an enthusiastic patriot and his long-suffering yet loyal friend, Abbé Balthazard portrays the ambiance of uncertainty affecting a broad cross-section of French society in the months leading up to the festival. Sympathy for the Church is unsurprising given that Balthazard’s only other publication is *L’Année chrétienne* (1789), a book of Christian exercises.⁴⁸ Both books project an image of the author as citizen-priest: less a sacred intercessor or miracle worker than a spiritual educator and willing servant of society.⁴⁹ Immediately upon opening this tome, however, the reader encounters the dilemma confronting the would-be patriot; as the “Preliminary reflections” declare: “Et moi aussi, je crie vive la Nation! Je désire son bonheur, & je crains sa ruine plus que personne au monde. Qu’elle vive donc, la Nation françoise, qu’elle prospère à jamais, & qu’elle ne perde rien de son antique splendeur! Tel est mon vœu, tel est le vœu de tous les bons patriotes.”⁵⁰ From these prophetic words, the campaign of resistance begins, as the partisans of “good patriotism” and “ancient splendour” defend tradition against the innovators.

⁴⁷ Daniel Ligou, “Franc-maçonnerie,” in *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française*, ed. Albert Soboul (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 475–81.

⁴⁸ Little is known of Abbé Balthazard (or Baltazard), save his ecclesiastical functions as priest in the diocese of Metz and his death in Chartres in 1801.

⁴⁹ The concept of “citizen priest” is drawn from Desan, 77.

⁵⁰ [Abbé Balthazard], *L’Isle des philosophes et plusieurs autres, Nouvellement découvertes, & remarquables par leurs rapports avec la France actuelle* (n.p., 1790), iv. According to Barbier, *L’Isle* was published in Chartres by Deshayes. Antoine-Alexandre Barbier, Gustave Brunet, and J.M. Quérard, *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes*, 2 vols. (Paris: F.-J. Féchoz, 1889), 2:888.

Reworking a satirical leitmotif inherited from what is now commonly known as the counter-Enlightenment, *L'Isle des philosophes* proves deeply enmeshed in the anti-philosophical debates of the early Revolution.⁵¹ Composed of eight long letters and commentaries dated from May 1789 to March 1790 and sent by a nobleman (*le chevalier*) to his nephew in Paris, the fiction relates a voyage among strange and quixotic peoples residing on a number of islands off the coast of America. In a genre made popular by early modern novelists such as Gabriel de Foigny, Jonathan Swift, and Restif de la Bretonne, and reworked in numerous revolutionary allegories, the voyage format allows the author to comment upon different social systems and expound upon the philosophies that they represent.⁵² Each landfall encountered in *L'Isle des philosophes* prompts the two Frenchmen to engage in a heated exchange on issues regarding the origins of man and the Earth, the moral superiority of man over beast, and other debates inherited from the 1750s to the 1770s. Critics have proven Balthazard's debt to the reactionary polemics spawned by Abbé Barruel, whose best-selling *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme* would deliver a major jolt to left-wing literati in 1797.⁵³ But its dialogue with the vogue for oath-taking and the spirit of Federation remains unexplored.

⁵¹ My research and the data in the Martin, Mylne, and Frautschi *Bibliographie* indicate that *L'Isle des philosophes* may have gone into two editions in 1790, but it was not reviewed in the contemporary press. For more on Balthazard's debt to the counter-Enlightenment, see Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 2.

⁵² For more on these traditions as reworked in the 1790s, see Anne-Rozenn Morel, "Modes d'engagement de l'utopie: Le ludique et le juridique," in *Littérature et engagement pendant la Révolution française*, ed. Isabelle Brouard-Arends and Laurent Loty (Rennes: Presses de l'Université de Rennes 2, 2007), 79–89; Gillian Beer, "Discourses of the Island," in *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression*, ed. Frederick Amrine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 1–27; Philip Babcock Gove, *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction* (London: Holland, 1941).

⁵³ See Darrin M. McMahon, "Narratives of Dystopia in the French Revolution: Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and the *Isle des philosophes* of the Abbé Balthazard," *Yale French Studies* 101 (2002): 103–18; Joël Castonguay-Bélanger, *Les Écarts de l'imagination: pratiques et représentations de la science dans le roman au tournant des Lumières* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2008); Anne-Rozenn Morel-Daryani, "Lettre et utopie dans l'œuvre contre-révolutionnaire de l'Abbé Balthazard," *Revue de l'Aire* 30 (2004): 40–47; and Cook, 253–55.

The temporal disjunction running through *L'Isle des philosophes* may be one of its most valuable legacies to modern readers. Thanks to the multivocal epistolary genre, the numerous inset tales, and the paratextual materials appended to the voyage story, Balthazard's novel allows its readers to experience vividly the anxiety felt by his contemporaries in the summer of 1790. That is when it appears to have been written, judging from the author's criticism of the press for condemning people who "still think the way they did 15 months ago": presumably a reference to the pre-Bastille days of spring 1789 (*L'Isle*, vii). Reading this book is befuddling, because each letter relating the voyagers' adventures includes a P.S. where the hero comments on the news from Paris as relayed by his nephew and relates the often heated conversations they elicit with his friend (*le vicomte*), but these appendices frequently focus on events that happened months after the dates of the letters. Such chronological incongruities point to a crisis of temporality that doubtless mirrored the lived experiences of many French in this turbulent moment.

After a shipwreck strands them in the midst of the ocean, the travellers discover a number of islands inhabited by deformed humans and gifted animals. Most disconcerting are the Swiftian Island of the Bears (where intelligent bears dominate dull-witted human beasts of burden) and the Island of Chance (where humanoid horses rule over hooved homo sapiens).⁵⁴ Here they witness the surprising results of chance, as when a cup holding the letters of a word game is accidentally knocked over during an earthquake and spells out the king's speech to the National Assembly on 4 February 1790. Insisting on the veracity of this anecdote, the narrator claims that he would never have imagined the king of France bowing before the people, and a footnote echoes the irony by exclaiming: "En effet, qui auroit prévu que Louis XVI seroit dans le cas de parler de la sorte en 1790?" (*L'Isle*, 88).

The metaphorical distance between new worlds and the old gradually shrinks until the travellers disembark on the Island of Philosophers. There they meet a "learned man" who expounds on principles that clearly parallel legislative battles in France, as when he describes the methods that he and his faction employed to annihilate religious feeling among the populace. Initially, they made religion the butt of ridicule, clever sarcasm, and jokes, he

⁵⁴ Both these islands are clearly indebted to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and especially part 4, "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms."

explains, before adopting print media, distributing and reading anticlerical brochures in the streets, and finally insinuating their views into philosophical writings, catechisms, and academic tirades. The result is splendid, as he announces with satisfaction: “Ainsi grâce à nos efforts, la religion est aujourd’hui reléguée parmi le petit peuple, & ne sert plus d’aliment qu’aux esprits faibles” (*L’Isle*, 120–22).

Although set in a faraway land, this campaign would ring familiar to many Frenchmen who feared that the Assembly, under the cloak of budgetary reform, was launching a veritable campaign of de-Christianization. The future of the Catholic Church in France had inspired much anxious debate since the fateful night when feudal privileges were abolished (4 August 1789), and it suffered its first major setback with the 2 November 1789 law that placed church property at the disposal of the nation for possible future sale. In the next six months, the National Assembly adopted ever more aggressive measures against the Church, going beyond fiscal appropriation of property to launch a frontal attack on the status of the Catholic organization in France. This trend culminated in the 13 April 1790 Assembly rejection of Catholicism as the state religion, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy on July 12, and the more punitive measures against non-juror priests that followed in 1791.⁵⁵

The postscript following this visit makes the connection between *philosophie* and de-Christianization explicit, and furthermore anchors such sacrilege in French history. The chevalier naively enthuses: “Quand j’entendais le recteur nous conter la manière dont les philosophes de l’isle ... avaient dépouillé le clergé, je ne m’imaginai pas que les philosophes français imitèrent sitôt un si bel exemple” (*L’Isle*, 200–1, 209). But his friend retorts morosely that the deputies would never live down this infamous act, and compares them to heretics who had tried to sully the Church in earlier times. In its contrast between present enthusiasm and anxiety for the future, this exchange reveals the different use of time in revolutionary and monarchist discourse. Where the former celebrates the nation’s break with the past, the latter emphasizes continuity and perceives the disconnection from repeatable

⁵⁵ For more on this complex history, see Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*; and Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

exempla as a kind of cultural melancholy.⁵⁶ This tendency also runs through royalist caricature, which insisted that the Revolution was not a rupture and was not irreversible or instantaneous; instead, it was a specific time, a present stretched out beyond measure and not easily understandable, which constantly required the evocation of the immediate past and the anticipation of the near future.⁵⁷ In this invocation of historical sweep lay the counter-revolutionaries' greatest arm, for it replaced the patriots' reassuring fictions of newness with reminders of their shameful hubris and spectres of a guilty future looming ahead.

Most relevant for my purposes is the seventh letter dated 25 February 1790, where the chevalier describes hearing from his nephew about the patriotic oaths being celebrated in France: "Cette lecture m'a comme électrisé, j'ai partagé l'enthousiasme de l'assemblée nationale, & j'ai prononcé sur le champ à la compagnie, presque toute composée de Français, de faire le serment civique et de jurer de *maintenir de tout notre pouvoir la nouvelle constitution de la France*" (*L'Isle*, 252). Much to his surprise, he finds that the others disagree. Here Balthazard offers his most precious insights into the conflicted feelings of Frenchmen in early 1790, as he represents a number of different social types explaining why they all refuse to swear. A nobleman refutes the oath on legal grounds, arguing that it enacts a kind of emotional and political violence against individual free will: "vous tyrannisez ma conscience, vous forcez mon opinion, & vous violez l'article XVIII de cette même constitution qui laisse à l'homme la liberté de penser sur-tout, même en matière de religion" (*L'Isle*, 253). A Quaker refuses on doctrinal grounds, arguing that his religion forbids oath-taking and moreover, the declaration of rights protects religious freedoms. A Catholic refuses because of his great respect for such a "religious act," deferring judgment until the constitution is finished (*L'Isle*, 254). A writer refuses because he feels the oath binds his critical judgment ("je ne veux pas enchaîner mon opinion," *L'Isle*, 254). A parish priest refuses because he would have to convince his parishioners that the constitution is fair, even if he does not believe so. Finally, and most compelling, an ordinary man (*un bonhomme*) takes the floor and explains:

⁵⁶ Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 74.

⁵⁷ Langlois, "Counter-Revolutionary Iconography," 50.

Je suis comme des millions de Français, un être nul, par rapport au gouvernement & aux affaires de l'Etat. Si vous exigez seulement de moi de me soumettre au nouvel ordre de chose, qui sera adopté par toute la nation, & en attendant de ne point fomenter de trouble, de ne point soulever les peuples contre la constitution, à la bonne heure; ma religion elle-même me défend d'exciter des révoltes. Cette religion qui m'inspire des sentiments pacifiques, est plus utile qu'on ne pense à la tranquillité publique, & on a grand tort de ne pas la déclarer la religion de l'Etat. (*L'Isle*, 256)

With this, the episode abruptly ends. Unlike other scenes, it is followed by no dialogue with the vicomte, no spirited repartee, no attempt to defend the Revolution. Conscience and faith trump partisan politics.

Whereas historical accounts of early 1790 polarize between the images of spontaneous intra-village goodwill that dominate Ozouf's account, on the one hand, and the visions of religious persecution and infighting penned by Catholic historians and historians of rural France,⁵⁸ on the other hand, here is a portrait of ordinary Frenchmen as conscientious citizens who support Catholicism, remain wary of change, and justify their views with intelligent reasons. The novel concludes with a scene where the *vicomte* relates the despair of a monk forced to leave his monastery, lists all the reasons why Catholicism should be the state religion, and then challenges his interlocutor to practice the virtue of tolerance. In a deft move, the author turns the doctrine of free speech against the enemies of the Church, and demonstrates that refusing to take an oath makes more sense than swearing to obey. As in *Julie philosophe* (but what a difference of tone, style, and humour!), the meaning of oath-taking lies less in the performative aspect of the act than in the legitimacy attributed to the words and the performers. Where the 1791 novel showed a promiscuous seductress using patriotic rhetoric to make an ironic statement on political expediency, Balthazard's work provides a roll call of upstanding individuals whose close scrutiny of the oath, in word and in deed, rejects the integrity of a supposedly democratic ritual. By the end of *L'Isle*, the legitimacy of the revolutionary state lies in tatters. Unlike Swift's example, it is not the interlocutors encountered on the fantastic voyage who bring about this sea

⁵⁸ For a Catholic interpretation of the 4 February 1790 oath of loyalty, see Picot, 5:403–21; and on the July 1790 Civil Constitution of the clergy, see Picot, 6:1–54. For more on disturbances in rural France, see Lefebvre.

change, but rather the French themselves who are faithful to a higher power.

Making Sense of History with Fiction

If we fast-forward to later years of the Revolution, the issues of constitution-drafting and oath-taking continue to concern French writers, yet the stakes have changed considerably since the Federation. Fervour for oath-taking spread around the country in the days following the king's attempted escape in June 1791, and a vow to "live free or die" helped instil a common purpose among a worried populace.⁵⁹ In pledging to defend a National Assembly that was now perceived as the sole site of governmental power, people shifted allegiance from the monarch to the state: some claim this was a signal moment in the emergence of French nationalism. But counter-revolutionary caricature tackled the uncertainty with oaths of its own. Consider the 1792 image entitled *Le Serment de la noblesse françaises [sic]* (*Oath of the French Nobility*) which shows Louis XVI and Henri IV as two heads sitting on a pedestal and watching a procession of woeful aristocrats and clergymen pay their respects and take a vow of loyalty to the monarchical cause (see Figure 5). Although buttressed by the beloved Henri IV on his right, it is the king's brothers on his left—the émigré princes—who emerge as the true heroes of the day, as they rally the group to pledge a counter-offensive against the republic.⁶⁰

The line between burlesque and grotesque, comedy and horror, depends on the observer: while the caricature above may strike some as a playful yet acerbic satire of the battle between monarchical and constitutional politics, a number of contemporaries took the imagery as a real warning of imminent attack. Caricatures insulting the monarchy and threatening vengeance against the nobility who remained in France were routinely produced in the press during 1790–92, and were apparently sent to members of court and rural noblemen to urge them to join émigré forces abroad. According to

⁵⁹ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 158.

⁶⁰ Langlois, *La Caricature contre-révolutionnaire*, 123. For an alternative interpretation of this caricature that situates it within the tradition of the "talking heads" automaton evoked by the two kingly busts, see Julia V. Douthwaite and Daniel Richter, "The Frankenstein of the French Revolution: Nogaret's Automaton Tale of 1790," *European Romantic Review* 20, no. 3 (2009): 381–411, esp. 390–92.



Figure 5. *Serment de la noblesse françoises* (1792). “Nous suivrons Sire, vos Augustes frères. Ils viennent de l'école de l'adversité. Sans elle HENRY IV n'eût pas été si grand. Comme lui, ils veulent reconquérir le Royaume en vainqueurs & en père, pour le remettre entre vos mains.” Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Reproduced by permission.

influential witnesses, cartoons actually did succeed in this attempt. In their frontal attacks on the monarch and constitutional state, political imagery contributed to the rising fears of reprisal among one-time partisans, and thus hastened the increase of emigration from the French countryside in 1790–91.⁶¹

Such guerrilla tactics were operational at other moments in revolutionary history as well, according to the literary record, and they served various political purposes. Oath-taking runs through many of the Thermidorian fictions that emerged after the fall of Robespierre (July 1794): in prison tales and other accounts of suffering under the Montagnards, victims whisper oaths to each other in order to nourish the flame of freedom while

⁶¹ On persecution through caricature, see Mme de la Tour du Pin, *Mémoires de la marquise de la Tour du Pin; Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans (1778–1815)*, ed. Christian de Liedekerke Beaufort (1979; reprint, Paris: Mercure de France, 1989), 161.

awaiting better days to come.⁶² The subject of their oath is no longer the king or the constitution, but rather the basic ideals of '89—*liberté, égalité, fraternité*—that were obfuscated by the Terrorist state and its judiciary during the terrible years 1793–94. An oppositional kind of oath-taking punctuates dramatic moments in royalist fiction as well, where family ties re-emerge with special poignancy. In novels such as *Adolphe ou la famille malheureuse* (1797) or Elisabeth Guénard's best-selling *Irma, ou les malheurs d'une jeune orpheline* (An VII [1799]), oath-taking abounds: a kindly stranger vows to adopt a lonely orphan in the first, and a sorrowful daughter (Irma being a partial anagram for Marie, sole survivor of the Bourbons) takes a vow over her father's grave in the second.⁶³ That these gestures were of key significance can be verified by the concrete evidence of the books' production: frontispieces to both celebrate the vow-taking scene, and the political stance of *Irma* is further underlined by the hidden profile of a furious-looking Robespierre jutting out of the folds of her gown (see Figure 6). Emulating the vogue for hidden profiles of the royal family found on porcelain and medallions of weeping willows and "mysterious urns,"⁶⁴ these images are clearly not ordinary families but stand-ins for the Bourbon monarchy, and their vows of filial sentiment form a resistance

⁶² This scenario is replayed several times in Joseph de Rosny, *Les Infortunes de La Galetierre pendant le régime décennal* (1797, 1st ed.; Paris: Leprieur, An VII [1799]), vi; 60; 70–71.

⁶³ "Je te jure d'être bon père," declares the kindly father-figure in *Adolphe*; standing in front of Louis XVI's tomb in *Irma*, the hero (Duke d'Angoulême) vows: "Je te jure par l'ombre sacrée de ton père, que je n'existerai jamais que pour toi," and his intended (Marie-Thérèse) repeats the same vow. In the second, however, a horrific spectre of Robespierre appears shortly after these solemn oaths, and threatens to devour all the cadavers buried in royal tombs (2:203–4). Mme Grandmaison Van Esbecq, *Adolphe, ou la famille malheureuse*, 2 vols. (Paris: Lepetit, An V), 1:26; Elisabeth Guénard [Mme Brossin de Méré], *Irma ou les malheurs d'une jeune orpheline; histoire indienne*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez l'auteur, An VIII), 2:202. There are many other examples of oath-taking in revolutionary literature; see Olympe de Gouges, *Les Vœux forcés* (1790), and Stéphanie Félicité Genlis, *Les Vœux téméraires ou l'enthousiasme* (1798).

⁶⁴ A German medallion bearing the image of a girl vowing filial loyalty to the tomb of Louis XVI, with the slogan "Seule consolation d'Irma" is found in Vovelle, *La Révolution française: Images et récit*, 2:351. For more on the fad for hidden profile imagery in this epoch, see Langlois, *Les Sept morts du roi* (Paris: Anthropos, 1993), 13–15; and Richard Taws, "Trompe l'Œil and Trauma: Money and Memory after the Terror," *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 3 (2007): 355–76.



Figure 6. “Je te jure par l’ombre sacrée de ton Père. Que je n’existerai jamais que pour toi. Elle répète le même serment.” Elisabeth Guénard, *Irma, ou les malheurs d’une jeune orpheline; Histoire indienne* (Delhy and Paris: Chez l’auteur, An VIII), vol. 1, frontispiece. Reproduced from the original held by the Department of Special Collections of the Hesburgh Libraries of the University of Notre Dame. Reproduced by permission.

to republican nationalism. Ceremonies of allegiance to Masonic and other secret societies pepper many fictions of the late 1790s as well, where secrecy and religious liberalism, often interpreted as libertine sexuality, made Freemasonry a magnet for counter-revolutionary myth-making.⁶⁵ Oath-taking thus transfers from a public and patriotic spectacle of civic unity into a private issue of individual honour and duty, or a clandestine gesture of allegiance to an oppressed or illicit minority.

The mixed messages and paradoxes that underlie the historiography of the year of the Federation now make more sense. As this brief incursion into literary history has shown, the period from August 1789 to July 1790 saw a major conflict between patriots and monarchists over the meaning of democratic political processes and the allegiance required of citizens in a constitutional state. Although the language of *L'Isle des philosophes* may seem tame in comparison to the harsh invective of journalism, the ordinary Frenchmen depicted by Abbé Balthazard do important cultural work.⁶⁶ By voicing opinions freely exchanged between believers and non-believers, revolutionaries and royalists, Balthazard proffered what might be the most significant service to the nation: he inscribed into the long duration of a novel the most important achievement of his day—freedom of conscience and thought—and depicted ordinary Frenchmen as politically informed, active citizens of the *patrie*. Their refusal of the oath highlights a genuine dilemma experienced by many in 1789–90, and to a greater extent in 1791–94: how to understand the role of religion separate from politics. Although David Bell celebrates the advent of state *laïcité* and nationalism as breakthroughs realized by the Revolution, this novel casts a tragic aura around the people's sense of being forced to abandon their belief in an apostolic church and a divinely ordained

⁶⁵ Abbé Barruel was the principal theoretician of this movement in the religious-political realm, but the revelation of Masonic secrets forms a veritable subgenre in literature of 1797–1820 as well. For one of the most lurid descriptions of Masonic initiation rituals and mysterious beliefs, see J.-J. Regnault-Warin, *Spinalba, ou les révélations de la Rose-Croix*, 4 vols. (André: An Onze, 1803).

⁶⁶ For more on revolutionary newspapers, see Popkin; Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche, eds., *Revolution in Print: The Press in France, 1775–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Béatrice Didier, *Écrire la Révolution, 1789–1799* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 89–120; Jean Sgard, ed., *L'Écrivain devant la Révolution, 1780–1800* (Grenoble: Université Stendhal de Grenoble & Société Française d'Etude du XVIII^e siècle, 1987).

king for a new deity of uncertain origin and future.⁶⁷ The moral ambivalence depicted in literature such as *L'Isle des philosophes*, like the heart-breaking dilemma in Victor Hugo's *Quatre-vingt-treize* (1874) where the characters must choose between kinship, love, or honour, injects a much-needed human dimension into the discourse of nationalism.

The ceremonies of oath-taking that marked 1789–90 were based on a myth: that words might conquer an invisible enemy. But the organizers of the many festivals in Paris and the provinces did not reckon with the vulnerabilities of the rite, including its essential illegitimacy. By interpreting the fictions of oath-taking on their own historically specific terms, we are able to “get it”: we get the anxieties felt by ordinary parishioners faced by the attacks on their clergymen, their lack of confidence in the unknown constitution, and their curiosity about the shadowy, powerful Freemasons. Moreover, we share in some of the humour, the gossip, and political jockeying that apparently surrounded the famous ceremony. Using strategies still operative among political satirists today—undermining through ridicule, co-optation, and resistance—the literature of the early Revolution presented a parallel competing field of performance where the politically repressed found full expression.



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⁶⁷ Bell, 7–8.