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**Michael Sonenscher: Sans-Culottes**

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INTRODUCTION: “ONE OF THE MOST  
INTERESTING PAIRS OF BREECHES RECORDED  
IN MODERN HISTORY”

THIS is a book about the *sans-culottes* and the part that they played in the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup> It is also a book about Rousseau, and, no less centrally, a book about salons. Its aim is to try to show how the three subjects were connected, and by doing so, to begin to piece together the historical and intellectual setting in which the republican politics of the French Revolution first acquired their content and shape. This, in the first instance, entails going back quite a long way into the eighteenth century. It also involves trying to get behind many of the events and images now associated with what the *sans-culottes* became. These centre mainly on the crowds who stormed the Bastille in Paris in July 1789 and, more specifically, on the mixture of direct democracy and physical force that, according to an established range of historical interpretations, either was orchestrated deliberately or erupted spontaneously among the artisans and small shopkeepers of urban France during the violent period of political conflict that occurred after the Parisian insurrection of 10 August 1792, and the trial and execution of Louis XVI in January 1793. By then, France had become a republic and, again according to the same range of established historical interpretations, the *sans-culottes* are usually described either as its social and political vanguard, or as the largely unwitting instruments of its Jacobin-dominated politics.<sup>2</sup> In one guise or another, however, the *sans-culottes*

<sup>1</sup> It is also an attempt to correct some of the gaps or mistakes in Michael Sonenscher, “The *Sans-Culottes* of the Year II: Rethinking the Language of Labour in Revolutionary France,” *Social History* 9 (1984): 301–28; *Work and Wages: Politics, Natural Law and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge, CUP, 1989), ch. 10; and “Artisans, Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution,” in Alan Forrest and Peter Jones, eds., *Reshaping France: Town, Country and Region during the French Revolution* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1991), pp. 105–21.

<sup>2</sup> For these characterisations of the *sans-culottes*, see, for more emphasis on spontaneity, Albert Soboul, *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l’an II* (Paris, Clavreuil, 1958); George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 1959); Richard Cobb, *Les armées révolutionnaires: instrument de la terreur dans les départements*, 2 vols. (The Hague, Mouton, 1961–3); and, for more emphasis on orchestration, François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* [1978] (Cambridge, CUP, 1981); Patrice Gueniffey, *La politique de la terreur. Essai sur la violence révolutionnaire 1789–1794* (Paris, Fayard, 2000); and (with more emphasis on



FIGURE 1. Sans-Culottes, as Remembered by Posterity. (Left) French School, *The Sans-Culotte*, nineteenth century, © Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France / Archives Charmet / The Bridgeman Art Library; (Right) James Gillray, *A Paris Beau*, published by Hannah Humphrey in 1794, © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford / The Bridgeman Art Library.

continue to be remembered (figure 1) as the hardworking, plain-speaking, moustache-wearing members of the popular societies, local militias, and revolutionary committees that proliferated in France between the spring and autumn of 1793, when the republic lurched from war into civil war, and as the institutions responsible for the Terror of 1793–4—from the French Convention’s two great committees of public safety and general security, to the revolutionary tribunal, the maximum on prices, and the law of suspects—were put cumulatively into place. Evaluations may differ, but the *sans-culottes* are still normally identified with the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution.

This book tells a different story, both about the *sans-culottes* and about the French Revolution. It is a story about how to make property generally

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orchestration by local elites), Richard M. Andrews, “Social Structures, Political Elites, and Ideology in Revolutionary Paris, 1792–1794: A Critical Evaluation of Albert Soboul’s *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l’an II*,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (1985): 71–112.

available, and what can happen if things go wrong. It starts with the subject of culture, or what, beyond property, may be required for people to have better lives. It ends with the subject of necessity, or what, also beyond property, may be required politically just for people to survive. By describing the original, eighteenth-century setting to which the phrase *sans culottes* first belonged, and by piecing together the steps involved in giving the phrase its more familiar connotations, the aim of this book is to open up a way towards the real political history of the French Revolution itself. It is still, of course, a history with the same protagonists and the same sequence of events. But, in the one set out here, both the goals and values of the protagonists, and the historical significance of the events themselves will all look rather different. So, too, will the weight given both to economic and social, and to political and ideological explanations of their content and course. Part of the point of this book is, therefore, to start a long overdue process of historiographical realignment by integrating both the politics and the economics of the French Revolution into a single, but still causally differentiated, historical narrative. Its focus is on a mixture of modern debt-based economics and ancient republican politics and, more specifically, on how the first came to be seen in the eighteenth century as the means to revive the second. In this vision of the future, public credit appeared to supply a way to reinstate merit, talent, and individual ability as the only legitimate criteria of social distinction, relegating property, privilege, and inherited advantage to positions commensurate with their status as what, in eighteenth-century language, were usually called goods of fortune. Using the modern funding system in this way appeared to offer the prospect of reviving the ancient virtues, but without the violence of ancient politics, and, at least to some, to hold out the further prospect of a post-Machiavellian world, based firmly on purely natural, pre-Machiavellian, moral and political principles. From this perspective, modern public finance could look like the key to establishing a world made up of nations, not states, where the old phrase “the law of nature and nations” had been stripped, both theoretically and practically, of the state-centred set of connotations and arrangements that it had been given in the modern natural jurisprudence of the Dutch humanist Hugo Grotius and his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century followers (“sorry comforters,” as the German philosopher Immanuel Kant called them in 1795).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For Kant’s phrase, see Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace* [1795], in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, CUP, 1996), p. 326. The phrase, it should be noted, was the original title of the Carlyle Lectures given by Richard Tuck at Oxford University that were published subsequently as *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, OUP, 1999). In this sense, what follows amounts to part of the other side of the relationship between Machiavelli, Machiavellianism, and modern natural jurisprudence described by Tuck both in that book and in

In this sense, the narrative that follows is a story about a number of different eighteenth-century assessments of public debt, and about the way they came to be connected to an older and broader array of eighteenth-century evaluations of human nature, human history, and the part played by human feelings, or the passions, in both. Explaining how and why these connections occurred entails describing a number of subjects that now look quite specialised, but which were, in fact, considerably more central to eighteenth-century thought than they may now seem. Some have to do with early modern assessments of Ciceronian and Cynic moral philosophy, and, more generally, with the part played by ancient thought in eighteenth-century intellectual life. Some deal with what, in the eighteenth century, was usually called enthusiasm, and, more specifically, with the idea that music, dance, and poetry, rather than scarcity, need, and utility, were once the original bonds of human association. Some are concerned with eighteenth-century investigations of the very first forms of government, long before Rome set its seal on Europe's history, and with the possibility that the Scythians, Germans, Celts, or Saxons were once subject to forms of rule unknown in either republican or imperial Rome. Some involve heterodox early eighteenth-century Protestant and Catholic discussions of the origins and nature of property, and their bearing on the subject of love. Some centre on late eighteenth-century scientific speculations about the nature of life, and the part played by the soul in giving the body its complex internal organisation. Some, finally, involve the eighteenth-century afterlife of the ideas of the early eighteenth-century Scots financier John Law. Together, they add up to a story about the origins and nature of late eighteenth-century French republicanism and, more broadly, about how and why eighteenth-century evaluations of the ancient Greek idea of democracy turned from negative to positive, to become part of the political vocabulary and, more elusively, the political practice of modernity.<sup>4</sup> Quite a large number of the features

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his earlier *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, CUP, 1993), as well as by Istvan Hont, in his *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 2005), especially pp. 1–156, 447–528. For a recent examination of eighteenth-century discussions of natural law, see André Charrak, “La question du fondement des lois de la nature au dix-huitième siècle,” *SVEC* 2006: 12, pp. 87–99. For stronger emphasis on the differences between rights-based and virtue-based political theories, see, classically, J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* [1975], 2nd ed. (Princeton, Princeton UP, 2003).

<sup>4</sup>The argument of this book is, therefore, intended to complement that in Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 2007). There, as indicated in the subtitle, the focus fell on the subject of inequality; here, the focus falls on the subject of equality; but both had a bearing on the broader subject of the nature and future of a world made up of states, wars, and public debts. For the most sustained interest in democracy as a historical problem (irrespective of the other types of problem it might present), see John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story*

of this story about democracy's second life have disappeared from modern historiography, perhaps because they do not seem to have had much to do with the Enlightenment, or with the history of political thought, or with the emergence of political economy, or even with the history of the French Revolution itself. Much of the content of this book is designed to show that they did. Rousseau's part in the whole story is, however, quite complicated, because, as will be shown, many of its components came from Rousseau's critics, and not from Rousseau himself. But, without Rousseau, it is not clear that there would have been anything like this story at all.

The key initial ingredient in the story is, however, the original meaning of the phrase *sans culottes* and, with this in place, its bearing on the sequence of events that led from the fall of the Bastille to the beginning of the Terror. This is because the name *sans-culottes* was actually a neologism with a rather curious history. Although it can be taken initially to refer to someone simply wearing ordinary trousers, rather than the breeches usually worn in eighteenth-century public or professional life (since this, literally, is all that the French words mean), the words themselves also had a more figurative sense. In this latter usage, the condition of not having breeches, or being *sans culottes*, had very little to do with either everyday clothing or ordinary artisans, because it had, instead, much more to do with the arrangements and values of eighteenth-century French salons. In this setting, the condition of not having breeches, or being *sans culottes*, was associated with a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century salon society joke. As with all jokes, the context matters. But, stripped of the details that, for a surprisingly long period of time, made the joke worth repeating, and of the initial story that made it amusing, as well as the now rather inaccessible moral point that both the story and the details were intended to make (these can all come later), the joke relied on the fact that in the eighteenth century a writer who had a patron—in this case a woman who kept a salon—might be given a pair of breeches, while one who did not, would not, and would, therefore, be *sans culottes*.

The word *salon* is also a neologism. Before the nineteenth century, salons were usually called *sociétés*, *sociétés particulières*, *académies bourgeoises*, or *assemblées*, with no metaphorical significance attached to the name of the room in which they often met, as can be seen in the engraving (figure 2) entitled *L'assemblée au salon* published in 1783 by a Parisian engraver named François-Jacques-Barthélemy Dequevauviller, and based on an earlier gouache by a Swedish, but also Parisian, court painter

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*of Democracy* (London, Atlantic Books, 2005). For a recent overview of “social” and “political” interpretations of the French Revolution, see Peter Davies, *The Debate on the French Revolution* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 2006), and, for a further round of the debate, see Henry Heller, *The Bourgeois Revolution in France 1789–1815* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2006).

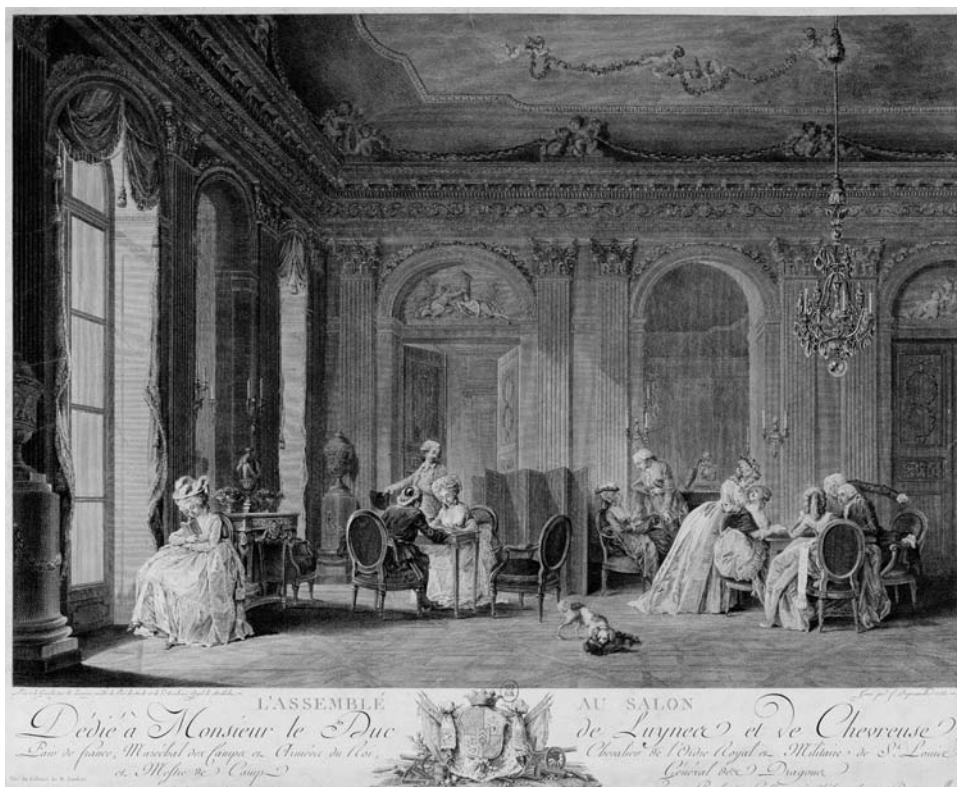


FIGURE 2. François-Jacques-Barthélemy Dequevauviller, *L'assemblée au salon*, 1783. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

named Niclas Lafrensen.<sup>5</sup> But whatever they were called, salons are now mainly remembered as one of the more distinctive informal institutions of eighteenth-century France, and the often rather ornate setting in which women played a major part in establishing and maintaining the mixture of culture, civility, intrigue, and patronage that made up much of the unofficial life of the old French monarchy. It is not usual to think that there was much of a connection between eighteenth-century salons and the *sans-culottes* of the period of the French Revolution (beyond, perhaps, mutual disdain). This is why the first objective of this book is to try to show that

<sup>5</sup> Discussion of the furnishings depicted in the engraving can be found in Mimi Hellman, "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (1999): 415–45. An early nineteenth-century account—Sophie Gay, *Salons célèbres* (Brussels, 1837)—began with a chapter on the salon of Mme de Staël but could still report that in the eighteenth century both Mme du Deffand and Mme Geoffrin had "un salon où l'on faisait des édits et des académiciens" (p. 8). On the large literature on salons, see below, p. 62n12.

there really was, and that it was historically significant, and, in the light of this, that it is worth trying to explain how and why it occurred. The details of how, when, and by whom the connection came to be made are set out, first in chapter 2, and then in chapter 5. A large number of further details are involved both in trying to explain why the connection was made and, more importantly, in trying to describe what the point of making it might have been. These form the subject matter of chapters 3 and 4.

These details are, however, parts of a broader argument, whose first step is partly chronological and partly prosopographical. It is still usual to associate the *sans-culottes* with the year 1793 and the period of the French Revolution that began with the final phase of the conflict between the former lawyer and republican political journalist Jacques-Pierre Brissot, and his political allies on the one side (a loose alliance still sometimes called the Girondins), and the better-known figure of Maximilien Robespierre, and *his* Jacobin political allies on the other (a conflict that Robespierre and his allies won). But it is not difficult to find quite a large amount of historical evidence to show that the term *sans-culottes* was one of a number of now less well-known figures of speech that were used somewhat earlier in the French Revolution, specifically during the autumn and winter of 1791–2, to try to attract the kind of popular support that, by 1793, came to be associated more or less exclusively with the name *sans-culottes* (*hommes à piques*, or pikemen, was one, while *bonnets de laine*, or what, in English, might be called flat-cap wearers, was another). Further historical evidence also indicates that one reason why the words *sans-culottes* caught on, to become the name of a political force, while the other names fell gradually out of use, was because the words themselves had a resonance that was readily available to anyone who knew anything about eighteenth-century French salons (the evidence is set out in chapters 2 and 5). It may not be possible to count up the number of people who actually did know much about eighteenth-century French salons, but it is still possible to show that some of those who did were the political actors who were largely responsible for turning the words *sans culottes* into the name of a political force (with a hyphen to connect the two parts of the name). They were, in fact, Jacques-Pierre Brissot and his political allies, and they did so during the winter of 1791–2. A now forgotten early nineteenth-century tradition once had it that the ministry made up of Brissot's political allies that Louis XVI appointed in March 1792 was known as the *sans-culotte* ministry.<sup>6</sup>

This chronological and prosopographical point has two implications. First, it pushes back the starting point of any historical explanation of

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, François-Auguste-Marie-Alexis Mignet, *History of the French Revolution from 1789 to 1814* [1824] (London, 1846), p. 128; and M. Touchard-Lafosse, *Souvenirs d'un demi-siècle*, 6 vols. (Brussels, 1836), 2:262.

the part played by the *sans-culottes* during the French Revolution to the period that preceded the fall of the French monarchy and the beginning of the Terror. Second, it shifts the initial focus of attention away from Robespierre and his political allies towards Brissot and *his* political allies.<sup>7</sup> Together, they raise an obvious question about the type of connection that could have existed between Brissot, his political allies, and whatever the *sans-culottes* were supposed to be and do. The initial incongruity of the name itself makes the question more intriguing. Before 1789, Phrygian bonnets, pikes, or liberty trees all had a recognisable republican pedigree. They could be associated either with the ancient Roman republic and the liberty cap, or *pileus*, that was used to mark the emancipation of a slave, or with the popular militias, patriotic spirit, and egalitarian political arrangements commemorated in histories of the sixteenth-century Dutch and Swiss republics and the seventeenth-century English commonwealth. In this guise, they could all, for example, be found in the elaborate array of engraved emblems carefully chosen by the “strenuous Whig” Thomas Hollis to decorate the bindings of the many books that he sent all over Britain, Europe, and the United States in the middle of the eighteenth century to promote the republican moral and political values that he himself admired.<sup>8</sup> The phrase *sans culottes*, however, had no such past political resonance. It belonged fully and firmly to the world of the salon, where, well before the French Revolution, it was simply part of a joke.

Explaining how and why a joke about breeches could have become a republican emblem calls, initially, for piecing together a number of early eighteenth-century arguments about culture, civility, fashion, and trade, because these were the arguments that first supplied a connection between the various purposes that salons were taken to serve, and someone who was said to be not wearing breeches and was therefore *sans culottes*. The arguments in question (described in detail in chapter 2) amounted to a strong endorsement of the part played by the arts, in the broad eighteenth-century sense of the term, not only in making commerce, not conquest, one of the keys to the difference between the ancients and the moderns, but also in supplying reasons for thinking that the continuous traffic in goods and services that

<sup>7</sup> For a recent study of Brissot, see Leonore Loft, *Passion, Politics, and Philosophie: Rediscovering Jacques-Pierre Brissot* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 2002). On Brissot and his political allies, see Gary Kates, *The Cercle Social, The Girondins, and the French Revolution* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1985); and François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *La Gironde et les Girondins* (Paris, Payot, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> See Caroline Robbins, “The Strenuous Whig, Thomas Hollis of Lincoln’s Inn” [1950], in her *Absolute Liberty*, ed. Barbara Taft (Hamden, Conn., Archon Books, 1982), pp. 168–205 (especially pp. 180–2). According to a notice on Hollis published in the *Chronique de Paris*, no. 21 (13 September 1789), he commissioned the “famous Italian antiquarian” the abbé Venuti to write a dissertation entitled *de Pileo libertatis* (On the Liberty Cap) that was to be dedicated to the English nation.

was one of the more conspicuous features of the modern world could still be compatible with political or even moral virtue. In this context, it was not so much the interests that served to neutralise the passions, as the arts.<sup>9</sup> Here, the analytical focus fell less immediately on property and the productive uses to which it might be put, than on the way that fashion, and the mixture of public display and social conformism that it served to promote, worked to offset many of the more potentially pernicious effects of private property. From this point of view, what, in the early eighteenth century, came to be called “fashion’s empire” could be said to have produced a rather benign form of subjection, where slavery to fashion (or being a fashion slave, as the modern phrase goes) was more metaphorical than real.

Property itself was divisive. “Mankind may live in peace,” wrote Charles-Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint-Pierre, at the beginning of his *Project for Settling an Everlasting Peace in Europe* in 1713, “so long as they have nothing of any sort to be disputed or divided between them.”

They mutually obtain and procure to each other several conveniences, several considerable advantages, by means of the commerce they have with one another, and this unites them. But when they have anything to be disputed or divided between them, each of them, about the possession of the whole, or the greater or lesser share in the division, generally deserts from equity, which alone is able to serve them for a rule in the decision and for a preservative against general disunion.

“Thus mankind,” Saint-Pierre concluded, “who seem to be created only to enjoy the blessings which society procures, are often obliged, for the possession of these same blessings, to re-enter into a state of division.”<sup>10</sup> But, as both he and his friend, a Jesuit named Louis-Bertrand Castel, argued in a public discussion in 1725, the arts and sciences, and the technically innovative, fashion-based system of industry and trade that they had brought in their wake, housed a capacity to neutralise property’s more divisive effects.<sup>11</sup> They did so, as several other early eighteenth-century

<sup>9</sup> On this theme in eighteenth-century thought, see Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Charles-Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint-Pierre, *A Project for Settling an Everlasting Peace in Europe. First Proposed by Henry IV of France, and Approved of by Queen Elizabeth . . . and now Discussed at Large and Made Practical by the Abbot St. Pierre* [sic] [1713] (London, 1714), pp. 2–3. For the original, see Charles-Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint-Pierre, *Projet pour rendre la paix perpetuelle en Europe* [1713], ed. Simone Goyard-Fabre (Paris, Garnier, 1981), pp. 2–5. For a helpful recent examination of theories of property, see Peter Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, CUP, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> See, by way of introduction, the “Lettre sur la politique adressée à Monsieur l’abbé de Saint-Pierre, par le P. Castel Jésuite,” *Journal de Trévoux*, April 1725, pp. 698–729, as well as Saint-Pierre’s various essays on trade, beginning with his “Sur le commerce par rapport à l’état,” reprinted in Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre, *Les rêves d’un homme de bien, qui*

writers also argued, not only because of the price-making power that fashion supplied, or even simply because of the prosperity that fashion could produce (since prosperity could be redescribed less positively as luxury), but because of the way that it tapped those parts of human nature, like the feelings of surprise, wonder, or curiosity, that had little to do with immediate utility or purely physical pleasure. Here, as will be shown in more detail in chapter 2, it was usually the seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes's analysis of the passions of the human soul that supplied a foil to the dark picture of human nature that was so prominent a feature of the strand of seventeenth-century Catholic theology that came to be called Jansenism. Cartesian moral theory helped to make it easier to claim that the arts and sciences, along with fashion, industry, and trade, fell on the right (honourable) side of the long-established distinction, usually associated with Cicero, between the honourable (*honestum*) and the useful (*utile*). Fuller explanations of these technicalities will be supplied in chapter 2. What matters here is simply the positive evaluation of fashion that they entailed. As was registered by another early eighteenth-century writer, Jean-Baptiste Dubos, in an influential book on poetry, painting, and music published in 1719, this type of evaluation cut across the old division between the liberal and mechanical arts (Dubos himself seems to have made a deliberate point of ignoring that older division).<sup>12</sup> Both, in certain respects, could be associated readily with the Ciceronian notion of decorum, just as, in a related gesture towards ancient philosophy's modern relevance, eighteenth-century salons could sometimes be identified with Plato's eponymous *Symposium*. The same conceit could also turn a *salonnière* into a modern version of a Greek courtesan, or *hetaira*. "Even the least celebrated of authors," as one, not entirely sympathetic, eighteenth-century commentator put it, "will still have his Aspasia."<sup>13</sup>

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*peuvent être réalisés* (Paris, 1775), pp. 195–254. On Saint-Pierre's milieu, and its intellectual concerns, see Istvan Hont, "The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce and Luxury," in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, eds., *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, CUP, 2006), pp. 379–418, and, recently, Henry C. Clark, *Compass of Society: Commerce and Absolutism in Old-Regime France* (New York, Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 96–9. On Castel, see Catherine M. Northeast, "The Parisian Jesuits and the Enlightenment 1700–1762," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 288 (1991), and below, chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> On the broad background to this vast subject (including a discussion of Dubos), see the classic article by Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496–527; 13 (1952): 17–46. For its eighteenth-century bearing, see, equally classically, Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of A New Historical Outlook* [1936] (New York, 1972), and, for a discussion, Allan Megill, "Aesthetic Theory and Historical Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century," *History and Theory* 17 (1978): 29–62. For further details, see below, chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Palissot de Montenoy, *Les Courtisanes*, reprinted in his *Oeuvres complètes*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1809), 2:178. For further examples, see chapter 2.

Quite a large number of moves were required to turn evaluations like these into anything to do with republicanism. An initial indication of how they occurred can be found in a pamphlet that was published much later in the eighteenth century, because it touched on both the joke about breeches, and on what the joke became during the period of the French Revolution, in a rather oblique way. Since it supplies a substantial amount of information about some of the real historical figures with whom the joke was initially associated, and about those involved in its subsequent transformation, it is a helpful introduction both to some of the individuals described in this book, and to the mixture of political purpose, moral theory, and cultural criticism that they used to turn the joke about breeches into the now more recognisable figure of a *sans-culotte*. The pamphlet in question was actually a history of the Bastille or, as was indicated by its title (*Mémoires de la Bastille, sous les règnes de Louis XIV, Louis XV et Louis XVI*), a collection of accounts written by a number of individuals during the reigns of Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI describing their periods of incarceration in the famous French fortress.<sup>14</sup> It was published in 1784 and was clearly designed to capitalise on the success of a pamphlet with a very similar title that had been published a year earlier, in 1783. This earlier pamphlet, entitled *Mémoires sur la Bastille* (or *Memoirs of the Bastille*, as the English translation, published in the same year, put it) was also an account of a period of incarceration in the royal prison, this time by a single individual, a lawyer named Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet. The largely satirical use to which the *Mémoires de la Bastille* put Linguet's own *Mémoires sur la Bastille* not only makes it a helpful initial guide to the related subjects of salons, breeches, and *sans-culottes*, but also supplies an introduction to the various types of satire that could be applied to these subjects in eighteenth-century France. Some aimed to emulate the works of the Roman satirist Horace, who wrote at the time when the Roman republic's last stormy years had given way to Augustus Caesar's empire, while others could be modelled in tone and content on the works of the later satirist of imperial Rome Juvenal. Both types of satire, however, took their cue from the ancient Roman conflation of the Greek and Latin pronunciations of the name (the Greek word indicated someone lewd, or a satyr, while the Latin word *satura* indicated a mixture or melange), to

<sup>14</sup>For a recent study of the Bastille, see Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom* [1990], trans. Norbert Schürer (Durham, N.C., Duke UP, 1997). The pamphlet has sometimes been conflated with an earlier, much shorter pamphlet published (with no place of publication) in 1774 under the title of *Remarques historiques et anecdotes sur le château de la Bastille*, and attributed in some library catalogues to an individual named Joseph-Marie Brossais du Perray. It was translated into English in 1780 and 1784 under the auspices of the prison reformer John Howard, and was then reissued in both French and English in 1789.

refer to a collection of miscellaneous, sometimes scatological, subjects that were treated with wit, style, and linguistic dexterity, either to highlight the distinction between rustic vulgarity and urbane decorum or, more fiercely, to underline the real moral difference between virtue and vice. In different ways, both types of satire had a bearing on the subjects of salons and breeches.

Linguet is quite well known to specialists of eighteenth-century French history, and of the history of eighteenth-century political thought.<sup>15</sup> He made his name as a lawyer by using the techniques of the theatre to turn legal proceedings into the dramatic rhetorical and emotional public spectacles that, in many parts of the world, they still are. He also made his name as a political writer by turning Jean-Jacques Rousseau's attack on the poisonous effects of private property into a justification of a centrally managed system of common ownership that, he argued provocatively, would be controlled by an absolute royal government similar in structure to the actually existing system of government of the Ottoman Empire. Both types of notoriety played a part in his imprisonment in the Bastille on 27 September 1780. Linguet's courtroom theatrics led him to be struck off the register of the Parisian order of advocates, while the literary and political journal, the *Annales politiques, civiles et littéraires*, that he had begun to publish in 1777 rapidly brought him to the attention of the French police authorities. The journal attained notoriety both for its violent attacks on certain named royal ministers and for its ferocious denunciations of the highest appeal courts in the kingdom, the thirteen royal parlements, as corrupt bastions of the financial and personal privilege that, he argued, ruled out justice from almost all legislative and political decisions made in the king's name. Linguet made great play of the sinister activities of his ministerial and his magisterial enemies in the account of his twenty-month incarceration in the Bastille that he published in 1783. In doing so, however, he rather overplayed his hand. On his account, not only had he been imprisoned in "a lion's den," where many of his earlier counterparts had been tortured or poisoned, but he had also suffered the indignity of being confined for two whole months without breeches (*sans culottes*).

Here, as Linguet emphasised, the date of his incarceration was what mattered. He had been arrested in late September, when it was still warm,

<sup>15</sup> For recent studies, see Darlene Gay Levy, *The Ideas and Careers of Simon-Nicolas Henri Linguet: A Study in Eighteenth-Century French Politics* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1980); Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993), pp. 23–4, 45–50, 57, 279–80; David A. Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of a Political Elite in Old Regime France* (Oxford, OUP, 1994), pp. 134–6, 146–7, 151–5, 159–62; and Miriam Yardeni, "Linguet contre Montesquieu," in Louis Desgraves, ed., *La fortune de Montesquieu* (Bordeaux, Bibliothèque municipale, 1995), pp. 93–105.

and, since he was about to go to the country to dine, all that he had at his disposal was his summer wardrobe. By November, however, it was getting much colder. “During that month, which in 1780 was extremely rigorous,” as the English translator of his pamphlet put it, “I was reduced to the necessity of either condemning myself to close confinement in my cell, or of going naked, literally naked, to brave in my walk the violence of the cold.” Although he offered “to *buy* the breeches which, I was informed, they *gave* to others,” nothing happened until the end of November, when a Parisian silk merchant named Lequesne (a further object of Linguet’s ire, but also, as will be shown, a name of some significance) sent over a winter collection (or *convoi d’hiver*) consisting of stockings “which a child of six years could scarcely have got on, with the rest of the habiliments in the same proportion.” “Doubtless,” Linguet commented, “they concluded I must have fallen away prodigiously,” meaning, in more modern language, that he must have become exceedingly small and thin. The arrival of this unwelcome attire led Linguet to complain bitterly to the governor of the Bastille about “being derided in this manner.” The result, he reported, was an explosion. The governor said “sharply” that “*je pouvais m’aller faire f\*\*\*, qu’il se f\*\* bien de mes culottes*” (or, as Linguet’s translator put it more decorously, “that I might go to the \*\*\* and that he did not care a \*\*\* about my breeches”), adding as an afterthought that Linguet either ought to have taken more care to avoid being thrown into the Bastille or, once there, should have known how to put up with it.<sup>16</sup>

The story resurfaced in several satirical or more serious publications produced in response to Linguet’s description of his ordeal at the hands of what he was only too willing to call ministerial despotism. The content of the more serious reaction can be left to chapter 6, because it has a bearing on understanding the political thought of the abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably. The satirical reaction, however, supplies an initial clue as to what a Parisian silk merchant might have been doing by sending Linguet a set of tiny stockings and breeches. It appeared in the *Mémoires de la Bastille*, the pamphlet published in 1784 to capitalise on Linguet’s best-selling account of his victimisation. Its anonymous author made a point of highlighting the story about Linguet’s run-in with the governor of the Bastille by setting it alongside a number of other famous stories about breeches. The first could be found in an episode in Voltaire’s mock-heroic poem about Gothic barbarism and religious superstition, *La pucelle d’Orléans* (The Maid of Orléans) of 1756. In this episode, Joan of Arc had crept into the tent in which John Chandos was lying asleep in a drunken stupor and had

<sup>16</sup> Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, *Mémoires sur la Bastille, et sur la détention de M. Linguet, écrits par lui-même* (London, 1783), pp. 155–6, and, in English translation, *Memoirs of the Bastille* (London, 1783), p. 156.

stolen his breeches, adding insult to injury as she left by drawing a *fleur de lys* on the English knight's equally somnolent servant's naked bottom. The breeches were then stolen again, this time by the volatile Agnès Sorel so that she could disguise herself as a man and, in this guise, resume her tryst with her heart's desire, Charles VII, king of France, by gaining entry to his armed camp. Before she could do so, however, she was captured by the English and brought face-to-face with the owner of the breeches, John Chandos, just as he was waking from his drunken stupor. How, Voltaire wrote, would you feel if you were to awake to see "so beautiful a nymph" at your side, wearing your *grègues*, just as sleep gives way to wakefulness, and as the senses begin to stir desire into voluptuousness? Before answering this entirely self-evident question, Voltaire inserted a pseudoerudite note to explain that the word *grègues* was an old Celt word for breeches. These, he wrote, were quite unlike modern breeches in appearance, since they were, in fact, long. The word itself, Voltaire explained, was a corruption of the old Celt word *brag*, and had then become the Latin word *bracca*, as in *Gallia braccata*, or *Gaule enculotté* (Gaul in breeches), the term once used to refer to the part of Gaul that was not ruled directly by the Romans, in contradistinction to *Gallia togata*, or the part of Roman Gaul that was subject to the authority associated with the togas worn by Gaul's imperial rulers. The word *brag*, Voltaire noted, actually referred to the upper part of the breeches, or to what was once called the codpiece, and is now usually associated with the fly-buttons (or *braguettes* in French). This part of the breeches, he explained, was usually of immense size, possibly out of necessity, but equally possibly because of vanity. Our ancestors, he continued, "kept oranges, sugared almonds and sweetmeats in them to give the ladies pleasure" (the author of *Memoirs on the Bastille* here, helpfully, referred readers to a picture published in the January 1783 entry of the *Almanac de Gotha*). This line of thought clearly fitted John Chandos's behaviour. The result, as Voltaire put it, was that Agnès Sorel's "modesty suffered greatly," and a good deal more happened too.<sup>17</sup>

John Chandos's breeches, the satirist noted, were "undoubtedly one of the most interesting pairs recorded in modern history."<sup>18</sup> There were,

<sup>17</sup> [Anon.], *Mémoires de la Bastille, sous les règnes de Louis XIV, Louis XV et Louis XVI* (London, 1784), pp. 68–71. See also François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *La pucelle d'Orléans* [1756] (Paris, 1766), cantos 2 and 3, pp. 40–2, 60–72. On the distinction between *Gallia braccata* and *Gallia togata*, see, for example, Thomas Carte, *A General History of England*, 4 vols. (London, 1747–55), 1:19–20: "The name of *Gallia Braccata*, by which the Narbonensis was called, being given to distinguish it from other parts of Gaul, was taken from the peculiar dress of the inhabitants of those provinces, who wore Braccae, trousers striped, and of various colours, serving for both hose and breeches, as the ancient Britons did of old, and the Irish, as well as the highlanders of Scotland continued to do till within living memory."

<sup>18</sup> [Anon.], *Mémoires de la Bastille*, p. 72.

however, several others. At the battle of Parma in 1734, the satirist observed, French forces had been surprised by those of the Holy Roman Empire, but their commander, Marshal Broglie, had earned himself lasting fame by appearing in the field without his breeches (*sans culottes*) to issue the orders that won the day. Nor was this the last story to be listed, because, the satirist continued, “Mme de Tencin’s breeches are no less famous.” These had nothing to do with the celebrated early eighteenth-century salonnière’s own attire but consisted, instead, “of a pair of velvet breeches that the lady gave as a New Year’s Day present to each of the wits (*beaux esprits*) who frequented her house, beginning with M. de Fontenelle. She was the most amiable woman of her age, and the breeches that she distributed have become proverbial.” Alongside this “illustrious frippery,” there were also “the old, henceforth famous, breeches” that had once been consigned to the *Annals* of the eighteenth century but were now destined “not to occupy the lowest of ranks among memorable breeches” (this, too, as will be shown shortly, was an allusion to Linguet). Finally, and “if the subject were not so serious (*grave*),” room on the list might also be found for the once-celebrated pair of breeches described in the old comic opera *Arlequin, roi de Sérendib* (Harlequin, King of Serendipity), where Harlequin’s identity was revealed not only by his tears but, even more obviously, by the cut of his breeches.<sup>19</sup>

Not all these stories about breeches have a bearing on the connection between Simon Linguet’s encounter with the governor of the Bastille in 1780 and whatever the *sans-culottes* were supposed to be or do during the period of the French Revolution. Marshal Broglie’s breeches did have a short afterlife in Franco-British war propaganda at the time of the War of the Austrian Succession (from one point of view, they served to symbolise the French flair for nonchalant courage, while, from another, they helped to highlight French proneness to abject cowardice, since, in this version of the story, Marshal Broglie had simply deserted the battlefield, *sans culottes*).<sup>20</sup> The breeches’ association with the family name may also have had some bearing on the younger Marshal Broglie’s aversion to Prussian-style

<sup>19</sup> [Anon.], *Mémoires de la Bastille*, pp. 72–4. On Marshal Broglie’s breeches, see also Barthélémy-François-Joseph Mouffle d’Angerville, *Vie privée de Louis XV*, 4 vols. (London, 1781), 2:13–4.

<sup>20</sup> Modern technology allows Broglie’s breeches to be found in a widely reprinted poem entitled “Marshal Broglie’s Breeches,” in, for example, *The Englishman’s Miscellany* (London, 1742), pp. 29–30; *The New Ministry* (London, 1742), p. 30; *The Summer Miscellany* (London, 1742); and Samuel Silence, *The Foundling Hospital for Wit* (London, 1743), pp. 46–7. The story was also rehearsed in John Winstanley, *Poems* (Dublin, 1742), p. 259; [Anon.], *An account of the birth, life and negotiations of the Marechal Bellisle* (London, 1745), p. 13; [Anon.], *Flanders Delineated* (London, 1745), p. 266; [Anon.], *Beauty’s Triumph, or The Authority of the Fair Sex Invincibly Proved* (London, 1751), p. 247. It could still be found in Frederick II, King of Prussia, *Letters between Frederick II and M. de Voltaire*, 3 vols. (London, 1789), 2:322.

military discipline, as against French-style military flair, during the long argument over French army reform that punctuated much of the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI, as well as on the same younger Broglie's doubts about the merits of turning the guns of the French army on the population of Paris, just before the Bastille fell.<sup>21</sup> But, as will be shown in chapter 5, other reasons mattered more. A more recognisable set of evaluations occurred in the autumn of 1793, when the etymological distinctions involved in Voltaire's pseudoerudite footnote on *bracca* and *Gallia braccata* resurfaced as an entirely unsatirical evocation of the moral principles of the indigenous Gallic society that had once existed beyond the confines of *Gallia togata*. In this guise, the ordinary attire once worn by the Gauls (without any reference to the size of their *braguettes*) came to stand for the difference between an old, but now new, republican morality and its corrupt modern counterpart, as symbolised by Versailles. It also meant, in the light of a related, more or less scholarly tradition, that Hercules had originally been a Gaul. These, accordingly, became the reasons why the last five days of the new era's calendar came to be named *sans-culottides*, with each day celebrating a special feature of the French republic's moral qualities, beginning (on Robespierre's insistence) with virtue, followed by intelligence, work, repute, and memorable actions.<sup>22</sup> But, by the autumn of 1793, it was already quite clear what a *sans-culotte* was.

<sup>21</sup> On the younger Broglie's views on the French army, see his "Mémoire sur l'état de l'armée" of 1769, printed in Albert Latreille, *L'armée et la nation à la fin de l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1914), pp. 343–93, and, on his views in 1789, see L. Hartmann, *Les officiers de l'armée royale et la révolution* (Paris, 1910), pp. 37, 46, 53; and, in more detail, Munro Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy* (London, Macmillan, 2002). On the subject of army reform, see below, chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup> The initial proposal had "genius" as the first subject to be celebrated in the five holidays, but Robespierre insisted on "virtue" (perhaps because Fabre d'Eglantine's first suggestion was too redolent of the thought of Helvétius). On the discussion, see Jacques Guillaume, ed., *Procès-verbaux du comité d'instruction publique de la Convention Nationale*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1891–1907), 2:704–5. On the idea of a Gallic Hercules, see, for example, Pierre de Longchamps, *Tableau historique des gens de lettres*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1767–70), and the review of it in the *Journal des beaux arts et des sciences* 1 (1768): 126–42, as well as Louis Poinset de Sivry, *Origine des premières sociétés, des peuples, des sciences, des arts et des idiomes anciens et modernes* (Amsterdam and Paris, 1769). Two further associations are worth noting. According to a satirical pamphlet entitled *Le parchemin en culotte* (Amsterdam, 1789), "forty years ago, workers in towns and villages wore sheepskin breeches." These then cost three livres but now cost three times as much, because of the large amounts of sheepskin required to make the parchment used in legal and fiscal documents. Less litigation, and fewer fiscal disputes, the pamphlet suggested, would make sheepskin less dear, "et les ouvriers auront des gants, des tabliers et des culottes" (p. 61). According to another pamphlet, also published in 1789, generals who were soldiers of fortune were called "leather breeches" (*culottes de peau*) by courtiers who relied on intrigue and patronage for promotion to high military office, which was why Chevert, "une culotte de peau," never became a marshal of France: see *Le premier aux grands, ou suite du Fanal* (n.p., 1789), 14, note.

Although, with hindsight, John Chandos might seem to have been the very first *sans-culotte*, the story that actually had the most considerable initial bearing on what the *sans-culottes* became was the one about Mme de Tencin and her “proverbial” practice of giving “the wits who frequented her house” a pair of velvet breeches on New Year’s Day. To see why it did, two further pieces of information are required. Both concern the *sans-culottes* in their more familiar guise and can be found in two accounts of the origin of the name that were published in 1799 by a playwright, essayist, novelist, and moralist named Louis-Sébastien Mercier in a collection of short essays to which, echoing the earlier success of his *Tableau de Paris* (a multivolume description of Paris and its assorted inhabitants that began to appear in 1781), he gave the name *Le Nouveau Paris*, or a *New Picture of Paris*, as the English translation of 1800 was entitled. The first account of the term’s source is quite well known and appeared in a chapter headed *Sans Culottes*.<sup>23</sup> “We are in general ignorant of the origin of this name,” Mercier wrote.

It is this. The poet Gilbert, perhaps the most excellent versifier after Boileau, was very poor. He had trimmed [mocked] some philosophers in one of his satires. An author who was desirous of paying his court in order to be of the Academy wrote a little satirical piece, which he called the *Sans Culotte*. Gilbert was rallied [ridiculed] on it, and the rich readily adopted this denomination against all authors who were not elegantly dressed.

At the time of the Revolution, they remembered the term, adopted it, and employed it as an invincible spear against all those whose writings or discourses tended to a great or speedy reform.

They thought it an excellent joke, and that they might laugh at it as they did twenty years ago. But politicians are more invulnerable than poets, and they took with a good grace the title which was given them. I was inscribed on the first list of *sans-culottes*, at which I only laughed.<sup>24</sup>

A great deal more can be said about the satirical poet Nicolas-Joseph-Laurent Gilbert and the bearing that his life and unhappy career may have

<sup>23</sup> The passage is reproduced in Annie Geffroy, “Sans-culotte(s),” in Annie Geffroy, Jacques Guilhaumou, and Sylvia Moreno, eds., *Dictionnaire des usages socio-politiques* (Paris, Klincksieck, 1985), pp. 159–86.

<sup>24</sup> Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris* [2 vols., 1799] (reprinted, Paris, 1862), 1:425–9, and, in the contemporary English translation, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *New Picture of Paris*, 2 vols. (London, 1800), 1:420. Mercier’s statement that his name appeared on a “list of *sans-culottes*” can be corroborated from the anonymously published *Liste des Sans-Culotte* [sic] (Paris, 1791), where it appears on p. 4 (along with eighty others, including Georges Danton, Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, Jean-Jacques Rutledge, Camille Desmoulins, François-Xavier Lanthénas, Fréron, Tallien, Jean-Paul Marat, Louis Carra, Joseph-Marie Prudhomme, Fabre d’Eglantine, Nicolas Bonneville, Anacharsis Cloots, François Robert, and François Momoro, to list those names that will be familiar to specialists of the French Revolution).

had on what the *sans-culottes* became (some is available in chapter 2). So far, however, no trace has been found of “the little satirical piece” called the *Sans Culotte* to which Mercier referred.

One possible reason may be that the piece in question was never actually published because it did not refer to Gilbert at all, but to Simon Linguet, and may, in fact, have been the cause of the episode that took place in the Bastille in 1780. Somewhat earlier in his *New Picture of Paris*, Mercier presented a rather different account of the origin of the name. This one appeared in a description of the background to or, as Mercier put it, the “first symptoms” of the Parisian insurrection of 10 August 1792, the day that marked the overthrow of the French monarchy and the beginning of the first French republic. To describe them, he gave them a specific geographical, and social, location. “The tempest rolled at a distance in hollow murmurs,” Mercier wrote. “The inhabitants of the faubourgs [the suburbs mainly on the eastern side of Paris] made up a formidable corporation under the name of *sans-culottes*, which had been given them as a mark of derision by Laceyuil, and which they afterwards preserved as a title of glory.”<sup>25</sup> Again, no trace of any Laceyuil has ever been found, although there was a marquis de Laqueuille, whose name is similar enough to the name Lequesne—the silk merchant responsible for sending Simon Linguet the set of tiny stockings and breeches during his incarceration in the Bastille—to suggest a possible confusion.<sup>26</sup> Linguet’s outburst about “being derided in this manner” is also similar enough to Mercier’s description of the name’s being used as “a mark of derision” to suggest, too, that Linguet’s story about his breeches may have been the source of this version of the origin of the term.

Whether or not, and also with hindsight, Gilbert or Linguet could lay claim to the title of being the first *sans-culotte*, both stories indicate that someone without breeches, or *sans culottes*, could become an object of derision. As will be shown in more detail in chapter 2, the derision applied particularly to a certain type of man of letters. It was an outcome of Mme de Tencin’s widely publicised practice of giving a pair of velvet breeches on New Year’s Day to the men of letters who frequented her salon. Linguet himself certainly knew of the custom, since he published an article in the December 1777 issue of his *Annales politiques* to correct a mock obituary notice that had appeared in the London *Morning Post*. According to that notice, the recent death of another *salonnière*, Mme Geoffrin, meant, as the English newspaper put it, that “about two hundred poetasters” would, “in all probability, never wear velvet again” (“no less than four thousand

<sup>25</sup> Mercier, *New Picture of Paris*, 1:126.

<sup>26</sup> On the marquis de Laqueuille, see Edna Hindie Lemay, *Dictionnaire des constituants*, 2 vols. (Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1991), 2:525–6.

pair of velvet breeches,” it explained, “have been worn out in the poetical service of that lady”). As Linguet pointed out in reply, “the glory of the academic breeches” belonged first to Mme de Tencin, not Mme Geoffrin, even though, he wrote, the latter might have continued “so wise an institution.” Perhaps, he continued, the name of the *order of the breeches* (*ordre de la culotte*), emblematised by a miniature pair of breeches garlanded with pink or puce ribbons suspended from the buttonhole, might one day replace the name of the French Academy, which was already looking rather worn out and had lost much of its lustre.<sup>27</sup> But whomever they were associated with (and they were, in fact, associated with both), the gift meant that someone who enjoyed either Mme de Tencin’s or Mme Geoffrin’s friendship and patronage had a pair of breeches, while those who did not were *sans culottes*.

Both Gilbert and Linguet could be associated with this latter category, which, as will also be shown in chapter 2, had come to have a broadly generic sense in the second half of the eighteenth century (although Mme de Tencin died in 1749, Linguet was not the only individual to indicate that the memory of her breeches lived on). Sending a set of miniature breeches and stockings to Linguet was, from this point of view, rather similar to writing “a little satirical piece called *The Sans Culotte*” about Gilbert, or even, perhaps, a satirical gesture towards Linguet’s own joke about establishing an order of the breeches to replace the Académie française (this, presumably, was the point of the allusion to the “annals of the eighteenth century” made by the author of the *Mémoires de la Bastille*). In this sense, both of Mercier’s two accounts of the origin of the name *sans-culotte* can be connected to this now largely forgotten story, and, since both referred to events that had occurred well before the French Revolution, it is entirely possible that, by 1799, Mercier’s memory was no longer very accurate. He might, quite simply, have conflated the stories about Gilbert and Linguet by turning the name of the silk merchant Lequesne into Laceuil as a misremembered version of the name Laqueuille, a real individual whose hostility to the events of the revolution was of more recent memory. He might, equally plausibly, have conflated the name of the fortress in which Linguet had been imprisoned with the mysterious Laceuil’s putative remark about the inhabitants of the suburb known as the *faubourg* Saint-Antoine, because the *faubourg* Saint-Antoine adjoined Linguet’s prison in the Bastille.<sup>28</sup> It also happened to be the case that Gilbert, too, had been

<sup>27</sup> Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, *Annales politiques, civiles et littéraires du dix-huitième siècle* (London, 1783), December 1777, pp. 405–8, commenting on the notice published in the *Morning Post* of 3 November 1777, from which the statement about “two hundred poetasters” and “four thousand pair of velvet breeches” is cited.

<sup>28</sup> On the silk merchant Pierre Lequesne (or Le Quesne, as the name was spelt in contemporary publications), who was the French distributor of Linguet’s *Annales Politiques* at the time of Linguet’s arrest in 1780, but then, like many others, became embroiled in a lawsuit

incarcerated in 1780, but in the Parisian Hôtel-Dieu, not the Bastille, and for his own protection rather than as punishment, because while Linguet was imprisoned for libel, Gilbert had gone mad.

There may, however, have been other reasons for the two versions of the origin of the term. Connecting the origin of the name to Gilbert, rather than Linguet, may have had the merit of eliminating any allusion to Linguet's despotic political propensities (highlighted, so his opponents claimed, by his call for a royal debt default in the August 1788 issue of his *Annales politiques* as a first step towards putting private property under state control).<sup>29</sup> But the possibility that Mercier's memory was more than simply garbled is still not the whole story. A little later in the chapter on *sans-culottes* in his *New Picture of Paris*, he went on to offer an explanation of why the term had become part of the political currency of the French Revolution. "All this," he began, referring to the story about the poet Gilbert, "took place before the Revolution. Who would have thought that republicans would have adopted this term, and made it a point of rallying?"

It was certainly in order to annex contempt, hatred, and execration to the word, to the idea of republic, to the quality of republican, to the only government which can be avowed by reason, justice, and social reason. It was to render the natural rights of liberty and equality detestable that the Jacobins imagined and put in vogue the ignoble *sans-culottisme* and the *sans-culottide fêtes*.<sup>30</sup>

Here, what was at issue was certainly more than memory loss because it was, in fact, Mercier himself who had played a prominent part in encouraging "republicans" to adopt the term and "made it a point of rallying." The details of how he went about achieving this goal are set out in chapter 2. As Mercier also did not say, even though this memory was of equally recent vintage, his own efforts to identify the word *sans-culotte* with "the quality of republican" had been matched by an equally vigorous campaign (described in chapter 5) by another man of letters, an art critic and political journalist named Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, to do the same thing. These

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with him, see Levy, *Linguet*, pp. 1, 190–206, 236. On the marquis de Laqueuille's hostility to the new regime, see B. L. F33 (13), a satirical pamphlet entitled *Décret important de l'assemblée nationale* (n.p., n.d. but 1790 from the contents), p. 13. It may also be worth noting that the story about Linguet and his breeches was repeated in the *Journal des Révolutions de l'Europe en 1789 et 1790*, 14 vols. (Strasbourg, 1789), 2:32–34. "A la vérité," the journal noted (p. 32), "les culottes de M. Linguet vont devenir fameuses, et ce ne sera pas un petit aliment pour ceux qui lui reprochent avec fondement un égoïsme dont le fiel orgueilleux perce à travers toutes les beautés dont fourmillent ses ouvrages."

<sup>29</sup> On this aspect of Linguet's career, see Michael Sonenscher, "The Nation's Debt and the Birth of the Modern Republic: The French Fiscal Deficit and the Politics of the Revolution of 1789," *History of Political Thought* 18 (1997): 64–103, 267–325.

<sup>30</sup> Mercier, *New Picture of Paris*, 1:421.

further details suggest that Mercier's story about Gilbert was rather more than the outcome of a hazy recollection of distant events, but was instead an effect of a more deliberate interest in highlighting one aspect of a more complicated set of memories. Gorsas's campaign, which took place during the winter of 1791–2, also had its starting point in the story about Mme de Tencin, her salon, and her breeches (although one of Gorsas's political opponents pushed the story back even earlier, to the seventeenth-century fable writer Jean de Lafontaine and his patron, Mme de la Sablière).<sup>31</sup> For both Gorsas and Mercier, far from its being the case that their aim in recycling the story had been “to annex contempt, hatred, and execration to the word, to the idea of republic,” their initial purpose had been the exact opposite. Mercier himself made this particularly clear in the context of a full-blown endorsement of civil war that he published in July 1792, but which he had, in fact, first made public many years before the French Revolution in a satirical novel entitled *L'an 2440, rêve s'il en fut jamais* (The Year 2440, a Dream If Ever There Was One), published during the last, decaying, years of the reign of Louis XV (who died in 1774). If, as Mercier claimed in 1799, the word *sans-culotte* had nothing to do with “the quality of republican,” this had certainly not been the case in 1792.

Although he did not quite put it like this, the most charitable interpretation of Mercier's various memory lapses is that republicanism in its Jacobin guise, or the republicanism of Robespierre, Saint-Just, and the revolutionary government of 1793–4, had entirely discredited whatever the term *sans culottes* once stood for. The substantive aim of this book is, accordingly, to describe what the term really did once stand for, before the image of the *sans-culottes* came to be set in its more familiar historical guise. In this sense, finding out about someone who was *sans culottes* before the *sans-culottes* became a political force (here, the hyphen is important) may help to open up a way to find out more about what republicanism in late eighteenth-century France once looked like, before it was given a real existence by the first French republic itself.<sup>32</sup> Doing so, however, first requires a further story. This one is about Plato and the ancient Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Synope. By the eighteenth century, however, it had also become a story about salons and men of letters, since, as the

<sup>31</sup> See below, p. 358.

<sup>32</sup> For two recent ways in to the large subject of republicanism, and a helpful reminder of the subject's historicity, see David Wootton, “The True Origins of Republicanism, or *de vera respublica*,” in Manuela Albertone, ed., *Il repubblicanismo moderno. L'idea di repubblica nella riflessione storica di Franco Venturi* (Naples, Bibliopolis, 2007), and his earlier review of Quentin Skinner and Martin Van Gelderen, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, CUP, 2002), in *English Historical Review* 120 (2005): 135–9. See, too, Paschalis M. Kitromilides, ed., *From Republican Polity to National Community: Reconsiderations of Enlightenment Political Thought*, *SVEC* 2003: 09.

early eighteenth-century French philosopher André-François Boureau Deslandes observed, the latter could be associated quite readily with both the poverty and satire of the Cynic way of life. “As for men of letters,” Deslandes wrote, “it is well known that it is generally their lot to be at odds with fortune. Diogenes is of all ages, and his empty tub is but too often the patrimony of wit, which is, however, a kind of fatality hardly to be lamented, since penury and distress give one an air of vivacity which is wanting in a flowing felicity.” The wit sometimes went along with moral criticism. “Every age, and especially our own,” wrote the better-known philosopher Jean Le Rond d’Alembert in the context of a discussion of the relationship between men of letters and the great, “stands in need of a Diogenes, but the difficulty is in finding men who have the courage to be one, and men who have the patience to endure one.”<sup>33</sup> In this particular story about Diogenes, Cynic wit was applied to Plato’s taste for high living and his willingness to consort with unjust rulers, notoriously with the ruler of Sicily, Dionysius the Tyrant. Diogenes, whose own views on tyrants are best known from his curt request to Alexander the Great to get out of his sunlight, was said to have made a point of showing his disdain for Plato by trampling on his purple carpets, or, in other versions, his purple cloak, with his bare, filthy, feet. The choice of object could be taken to indicate either that Diogenes was rejecting the power associated with the imperial office, or that he was spurning the luxury associated with the imperial court. Both, more unequivocally, meant that he took Plato to be up to no good. By the eighteenth century, however, the story had acquired a more metaphorical significance. Just as a salon could be described as a reincarnation of an ancient Greek symposium, so a moral critic of salon society could be described as a reincarnation of a Cynic. If, according to the story about Mme de Tencin and her breeches, salon society supplied men of letters with a pair of *culottes*, then someone who made it a point of honour to avoid this type of patronage not only had no breeches in a literal sense but also was *sans culottes* in a Cynic sense.

From one point of view, not having breeches in this latter sense could amount to an ostentatious display of Cynic pride. But from another, it could also imply a strong endorsement of Cynic moral and political independence. It is not difficult to see how either characterisation could have been applied to the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as well as to Rousseau’s

<sup>33</sup> [André-François Boureau Deslandes], *Réflexions sur les grands hommes qui sont morts en plaisantant* [1714] (Rochefort, 1755), p. 12. I have used what seems to be an original English version, published as *A Philological Essay, or Reflections on the Death of Free-Thinkers, with the Characters of the Most Eminent Persons of Both Sexes, Ancient and Modern, that Died Pleasantly and Unconcern’d* (London, 1713), p. 8. D’Alembert’s statement can be found in his *Essai sur la société des gens de lettres et des grands* [1754], translated in Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Literature, History and Philosophy* (London, 1764), pp. 153–4.

own descriptions of himself (many of his critics did exactly that).<sup>34</sup> The remorseless eloquence of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* can make it easy to forget the ferocity of his wit (the most famous story of all about the French Revolution actually began as an episode in his *Confessions*, where, long before the remark came to be associated with Marie Antoinette, Rousseau described "a great princess" reacting to the news that "the peasants had no bread" by saying "let them eat cake," or, in the original, *qu'ils mangent de la brioche*).<sup>35</sup> But, as will be shown in chapter 3, the Cynic label that was often applied to Rousseau was also applied to a number of other, now much less well-known, writers, including Louis-Sébastien Mercier himself. One of them was one of Rousseau's earliest and most savage critics, the Jesuit Louis-Bertrand Castel, now perhaps known less for his friendship with the abbé de Saint-Pierre than for his lifelong efforts to find a way to invent a clavichord, or piano, that would play colours, not sounds. Another was also one of Rousseau's critics, this time a high Anglican English political moralist named John Brown, whose *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, first published in 1757, was translated into almost every major European language during the following decade. A third, the abbé Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, was also one of Rousseau's critics, and a strong admirer of Brown. The title of his best-known work, *Phocion's Conversations*, was also a gesture towards Cynic philosophy, since Phocion, according to the *Encyclopédie* entry on the sect, was one of the later Cynics. They were, the entry concluded, "enthusiasts of virtue."<sup>36</sup> So, too, according to Robespierre a generation or so later, was Rousseau. But the generic term "virtue" could encompass a wide variety of different evaluations of human behaviour, and an equally wide range of assessments of their causes and effects. As will be shown from chapter 3 onwards, quite a large number of historically contingent moves were required to bring them into moral and political alignment.

From a distance Rousseau, Mably, and Brown may all have looked quite similar. All three subscribed to a three-stage model of the development of human association, even if their respective descriptions of the social arrangements corresponding to each stage were still significantly different. All three were invited in 1762 by the Swiss Patriotic Society to contribute entries to one of its prize competitions on the subject of moral and political reform, while the argument of Brown's *Thoughts on Civil Liberty, on Licence*

<sup>34</sup> "By a morality, apparently of a severe kind, by leading the life of a cynic, and by writings replete with fire, eloquence, and genius, he has influenced some minds of more sensibility than strength": Louis Dutens, *The Tocsin, or an appeal to good sense* [1769] (London, 1800), p. 19. For other examples, see below, chapter 3.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions* [1783], 3 vols. (London, 1786), vol. 2, bk. 6, p. 296.

<sup>36</sup> Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1755), pp. 598–9.

*and Faction* of 1765 was used, when it was published in French translation in 1789, to endorse what its translator emphasised was the idea of moral improvement supplied by Rousseau's more slippery concept of *perfectibilité*.<sup>37</sup> But on closer inspection, their moral and political theories were actually very different. For Mably, Rousseau's imaginative reach far exceeded his analytical grasp, resulting too often in "shocking disparities" and "those paradoxes that are so displeasing to sound minds." "We are born," he wrote, "for honest sufficiency (*médiocrité*). A virtue carried too far becomes a vice, just as all the qualities that form genius degrade it, if, through an unbalanced mixture, one of them has too much of an empire over the others."<sup>38</sup> This was Rousseau's failing, and, as will be shown in chapter 6, the basis of Mably's sustained criticism of his moral and political thought. Reconstructing both the similarities and the differences between Rousseau and his critics is a way not only to identify what Cynic moral philosophy may have stood for in the eighteenth century, but also, and in contradistinction to Rousseau, to begin to describe what, in the eighteenth century, a noncontractual theory of a republican polity might once have looked like.

Here, too, the various types of moral evaluation involved in having or not having breeches form a helpful starting point, because they make it easier to highlight two contrasting conceptions of human decency. Just as, from a Ciceronian point of view, the first condition could be associated with the cultivation of the arts and sciences, and the civility and decorum that they brought in their wake, so, from a Cynic point of view, could the second condition be associated with a more natural set of human qualities and, more particularly, with the idea that the peculiarly human capacity for music, dance, and poetry was once the primary bond of society. To its critics, as will also be shown in chapter 3, this way of thinking about the very first forms of human association fully deserved the Cynic label. But

<sup>37</sup> [John Brown], *De la liberté civile et des factions* (n.p., 1789), p. 11. The content of Brown's 1765 pamphlet was made available earlier in a translation of the attack on it by Joseph Priestley in his *Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (London, 1765) that was published by the former Jesuit Jean-Baptiste-René Robinet in his *Dictionnaire universel des sciences morale, économique, politique et diplomatique, ou Bibliothèque de l'homme d'état et du citoyen*, 30 vols. (London, 1772–83) under the rubric "éducation libérale." On Brown, Rousseau, Mably, and the Swiss patriotic society, see below, chapter 4.

<sup>38</sup> Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, "Des talents," in Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, *Collection complète des oeuvres*, 15 vols. [1794–5], ed. Peter Friedemann (Aalen, Scientia Verlag, 1977), 14:178–81. For an overview of the relationship, see Giuseppe A. Roggerone, "Rousseau-Mably: Un rapporto umano e culturale difficile," *Il Pensiero Politico* 23 (1990): 219–39. According to one (eccentric) defender of absolute government, Mably was the source of "l'économie des systèmes de vos nouveaux disciples, car vous êtes leur oracle et le créateur de la jurisprudence politique que nos auteurs nouveaux ont embrassé et voudraient nous faire adopter": [Augustin-Jean-François Chaillon de Jonville], *Apologie de la constitution française, ou états républicains et monarchies comparés dans les histoires de Rome et de France*, 2 vols. (n.p., 1789), 2:29.

Rousseau's Jesuit opponent Louis-Bertrand Castel called it "naturalism" (he also blamed Montesquieu for having led Rousseau astray), while John Brown wrote two versions of the same book (soon translated into French) to show that the original union between music, dance, and poetry that, he argued, was still visible in French Jesuit missionaries' descriptions of the North American Hurons, as well as in the recently discovered poems of the Celtic bard "Ossian," indicated that the very first manifestation of human culture had to be the hymn.<sup>39</sup> One of Voltaire's admirers wrote a large satirical novel, entitled *Le Diogène moderne* (The Modern Diogenes), to suggest that Rousseau's thought was simply Brown, minus Brown's religious dogma. Brown's own suicide, the novel suggested, merely underlined the untenable quality of both types of moral philosophy.

But whether Cynic moral theory was taken to be sceptical, as with Rousseau, or dogmatic, as with Brown, it still relied heavily, at least according to this characterisation, on the claim that the arts in their original form had nothing at all to do with fashion and display, but derived instead from the various types of intense emotion involved in "enthusiasm," as, for example, these were described by another widely read English (and also Anglican) moralist, Edward Young, in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* of 1759.<sup>40</sup> In this context, the arts were not the offspring of necessity, but the outcome of the feelings of wonder, awe, or reverence produced by the human capacity to respond emotionally to what was sacred or sublime. From this more spiritually charged point of view, as Young wrote in 1742 in his equally celebrated *Night Thoughts*, "passion is reason; transport temper *here*."<sup>41</sup> Seen like this, the arts, and the emotions from which they

<sup>39</sup> On Brown, and the broader subject of Ossian, see below, chapter 3, and Paul Van Tieghem, *Ossian en France*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1917), 1:241–2. For a recent overview, but with more emphasis on the origins of later musical categories, see Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge, CUP, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> On Young, see the best edition of his *Night Thoughts* [1742], ed. Stephen Cornford (Cambridge, CUP, 1989), and, on Young's French reception, see, for the best study, Fernand Baldensperger, "Young et ses *Nuits* en France," in his *Etudes d'histoire littéraire*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1907–39), 1:55–109. See, too, Walter Thomas, *Le poète Edward Young 1683–1765. Etude sur sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris, 1901); Paul Van Tieghem, *Le Prérromantisme*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1948), 2:3–203; John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment* (Oxford, OUP, 1981), pp. 335–8. For a starting point on Young's ideas and readership, see H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, eds., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge, CUP, 1997), pp. 141–9, 165–6, 629–32.

<sup>41</sup> Young, *Night Thoughts*, ed. Cornford, p. 107, night 4, line 640 (the italics are in the original). On this aspect of Young's thought, see Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, Stanford UP, 1999), and, for its reverberations in German Pietist circles, including Young's friend, the poet Friedrich Klopstock, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 2005), pp. 152–81 (especially pp. 156–8). "Je veux du mal au sublime Young d'avoir infecté le monde du poison de son imagination transcendante et noire," wrote the Swiss political essayist Georg Ludwig Schmid d'Auenstein to his friend Johann Georg Zimmermann in

derived, could be associated with an entirely different moral universe from the one described, for example, in Voltaire's poem *Le Mondain* (The Man of the World), or even, as Young noted in his early (1728) *Vindication of Providence*, from "the wrong bias" given to the treatment of the emotions by Descartes in his study of the passions of the human soul.<sup>42</sup> Here, culture was less a matter of acquired civility than the authentic voice of human dignity. Brown was the first writer in the English-speaking world to pick up the recently coined French word *civilisation* to describe this type of moral universe, and when, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the painter Jacques Réattu began the painting that he was to call *The Triumph of Civilisation* (see figure 3), the moral values that it was intended to endorse were substantially nearer to Brown than they were to Voltaire.<sup>43</sup> The two points of view did share a measure of common ground, since both dealt with the related subjects of human association and morality, or what in the eighteenth century was usually called sociability, in terms of something other than indigence, need, and utility. But, despite this initial similarity, the differences were more pronounced. For the first, the arts polished and embellished primitive human nature, while for the second, they were real evidence of humanity's original natural dignity. One, put very crudely, pointed to the value of culture. The other, put equally crudely, pointed to the value of nature. Both terms require much fuller explication (also supplied in chapter 3). But in a remote yet still real sense, the *sans-culottes* could be described as the product of Cynic criticism of Ciceronian moral philosophy, as both were construed in the eighteenth century.

Setting Rousseau's moral and political thought against this large and now rather neglected strand of eighteenth-century thought (which Castel, in the eighteenth century, called "naturalism," but which, in the first half of the twentieth century, came to be called "primitivism") helps to highlight Rousseau's subtleties and ambiguities. Both were captured memorably by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his description of Rousseau as

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1756 (Nieder-Sächsische Staastarchiv, Zimmermann papers, MS XLII, 1933, AII, 83, fol. 115, Schmid to Zimmermann, 1 December 1756). Young's "genius," wrote Anna Laetitia Barbauld in 1794, "was clouded over with the deepest glooms of Calvinism, to which system however he owed some of his most striking beauties." See her "Essay on Akenside's Poem," in Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (London, 1796), p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Young, *A Vindication of Providence, or a True Estimate of Human Life. In Which the Passions are Considered in a New Light* [1728], in Young, *Works*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1774), 6:preface (unnumbered pages). For an interesting suggestion that this type of "enthusiasm" had a bearing on Tom Paine's thought, see Joe Lee Davis, "Mystical versus Enthusiastic Sensibility," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943): 301–19 (318).

<sup>43</sup> On the eighteenth-century concept of "civilisation," see, most recently, Bertrand Binoche, ed., *Les équivoques de la civilisation* (Seysse, Champ Vallon, 2005). On Brown's use of the term, see below, pp. 180, 191. On Jacques Réattu, see Katrin Simons, *Jacques Réattu (1760–1833), peintre de la révolution française* (Paris, Arthéna, 1985).