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Street Songs and Cheap Print During the French Wars of Religion

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Kate van Orden

*Street Songs and Cheap Print During
the French Wars of Religion*



University of California, Berkeley
1998

Morrison Library Inaugural Address Series

No. 10

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
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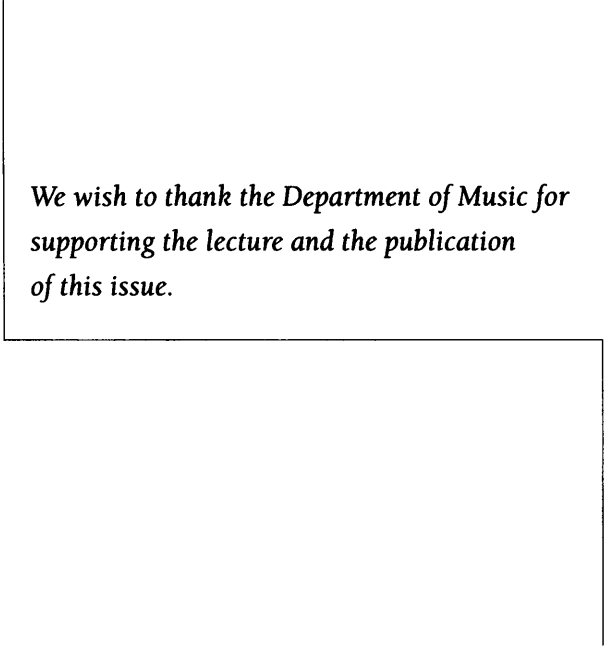
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PREFACE

The goal of this series is to foster scholarship on campus by providing new faculty members with the opportunity to share their research interest with their colleagues and students. We see the role of an academic library not only as a place where bibliographic materials are acquired, stored, and made accessible to the intellectual community, but also as an institution that is an active participant in the generation of knowledge.

New faculty members represent areas of scholarship the University wishes to develop or further strengthen. They are also among the best minds in their respective fields of specialization. The Morrison Library will provide an environment where the latest research trends and research questions in these areas can be presented and discussed.

Editorial Board



STREET SONGS AND CHEAP PRINT
DURING THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION



Songs Punishable by Death

Early in December of 1564, the town crier of Lyon traveled through the city and its surrounding areas to announce a royal ordinance against the singing of “dissolute songs.” It was but one of a number of edicts made by the King’s provincial governor, de Losses, that aimed to squelch the religious violence lingering in the wake of the first civil war. The edict of pacification of 1563 had promised liberty of conscience to Protestants, but had been accepted only unwillingly by the town council of Lyon, and skirmishes between Huguenots and Catholics continued to disrupt the calm of daily life in the city. This ordinance enumerates a number of civil crimes, placing singing amid offenses such as vagrancy, gambling, and blaspheming the Virgin Mary. The printed record is as follows:

Decree of the King and of Monseigneur de Losses...not to blaspheme, gamble, nor sing dissolute songs, all upon pain of death by hanging. Lyon: Benoist Rigaud, 1564.

Very express command is made to all vagrants and people without employment or trade, being in the said city, that, after the publication of the present [commands], they should forthwith vacate and go out of the said city and its faubourgs, upon pain of hanging.

It is charged upon the above pains to all hoteliers, innkeepers, and other persons of whatever quality and condition that they might be, not to seclude, give lodging to, nor administer any board to the said persons beyond one night, without our express leave.

And to remove the means of supporting and secluding the above-said vagrants and idle people, all people living in this city as well as in its faubourgs are forbidden to hold casinos in their homes and gardens, and to permit the playing of

dice, cards, ninepins, and other prohibited and forbidden games there, upon the said pain of hanging, as much against those who operate these said casinos as against those who would be found playing.

Also in following the old Decrees and saintly constitutions of the King our Master, it is very expressly forbidden and prohibited to all persons of whatever estate, quality and condition that they might be to swear, blaspheme, spite, and renounce the name of God, to make other vile and detestable sermons against the honor of God, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints, to sing or say dissolute songs and songs leaning toward sedition, or to agitate by insults or otherwise and under the pretext of Religion, upon the pains contained in these said Decrees.

Copy checked against the original, by myself, Secretary to Monseigneur de Losse, Lieutenant general of the King...


DAVOST

The present decree here above was cried, read, and publicized by loud voice, public declamation, and the sound of the trumpet at each and every one of the crossroads and public squares usual for making announcements, proclamations, and publications in the said city of Lyon by myself, Claude Thevenon, clerk and assistant of Mister Jean Bruyeres, public crier of the said city, today, the fifth day of December, fifteen hundred sixty four.

THE VENON. *

This ordinance prescribes a cleansing of the body politic through the expulsion or execution of vagrants, gamblers, and blasphemers. The critical emphasis placed on songs as a transmitter of social disease and religious unrest must make us wonder, first and foremost, what songs are being censored here, and secondly, how


**translations from the French were done by the author.*




we can account for the severity of the punishment accorded to the “crime” of singing them. Clearly several motives stand behind such a radical attempt to silence those who employed songs in their sectarian goals. The political and social climate that produced this edict was one of popular religious riot, of religious vigilantism, if you will, in which particular songs were hyper-charged with meanings that could rally a crowd to violence. And popular violence always threatened the authority of the state.

In the first instance, de Losse’s ordinance was directed at Huguenot psalms. Since 1551 or earlier, psalms had been sung during public protests. In 1551, printers’ journeymen in Lyon staged an armed procession in which they led their wives and artisans through the streets singing psalms and shouting insults at Catholic onlookers.¹ Owing to events like this one, Henry II banned the public singing of psalms in 1558, though to little avail. The ban had to be reiterated innumerable times, and it is likely that de Losse’s allusion to “old decrees” refers in part to previous proscriptions against these “battle cries” of the reformed religion. In the summer of 1564—just before the issuance of this ban—the Protestants of Lyon had obstreperously constructed a new temple in a vacant ditch allotted them, and a contemporary describes them “carrying the earth required to fill in the ditches, two by two, singing their songs of Marot and de Bèze.” Huguenots in Lyon were hardly alone in coupling psalm-singing and religious activism: to give but one example, Psalm 144 was the victory cry in Sancerre to mark the Huguenot resistance during the siege there in 1572. Little wonder that the psalms were considered insurrectionary hymns, particularly when texts like that of Psalm 144 condoned militancy and holy war: “Blessed be the Lord my strength which teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight.”²

Despite the well-documented cases of psalm-singing during religious protest, we should not necessarily read de Losse’s 1564 ban as one exclusively targeting Huguenot psalms. Although the


 Chançon nouvelle du Biernois sur le
Chant de Salifson, ortoillon, &c.




 Vi veult ouvrir chascunete,
 Du maudit Biernois,
 Qui pensoit faire amplet
 te
 A veu son harnois
 Pensant par finesse
 A boir la Messe,
 Jean Sendreux malheureux
 Retire toy arriere
 Tu as les pies poudreux,
 Scachant la mort certaine
 De Henry de Vallois,
 Pensoit sans avoir peine
 Nous regir sous tes Loys
 Et de penlee fraische
 Nous bailler la presche,
 Jean sendreux &c.
 Tu as le Catholique,
 Mais c'est pour nous piper,
 Et comme un Hypocrite,
 Tachent à nous attrapper,
 Puis souz bonne mine,
 Nous mettre en ruine
 Jean sendreux, &c.
 Pour couvrir ta malice
 Prend la peau d'un renard,
 Mais de tel sacrifice
 Et de toy Dieu nous gard,
 Et de tes polatiques,
 Plus que Heretiques
 Jean sendreux, &c.
 Ta face Hypocrite,
 Sentant son Hulequin,
 Et son feu Heretique,
 Tendoit à ceste fin,
 Nous faire apparoir,
 Que tu es un chre
 Jean sendreux

Leurs faisant promesse
 D'aller à la Messe,
 Jean sendreux, &c.
 Dreux la gentille ville,
 Pensoit bien attrapper,
 Pour la rendre seruille
 Et ta presche y planter,
 Mais pour fin de conte,
 La quitent a grand honte,
 Jean sendreux, &c.
 Sans ville Catholique,
 Tenent sans obcir,
 Qu'à un Roy Heretique
 Il ne faut obeir
 Ne moins te cognoistre
 Tel que tu veux estre,
 Jean sendreux, &c.
 Viue la sainte Ligue,
 Viue tous les Ligueux,
 Leglise Catholique,
 Et tous les bons seigneurs,
 Qui sans nul enuye
 Amploment leur vie,
 Jean sendreux, &c.
 Nobleste Catholique,
 Mais à quoy penie z vous,
 De future va Heretique,
 Qui se moque de vous
 Il te donne carriere,
 Se morgue en derriere,
 Jean sendreux, &c.
 Dieu permet Heretique,
 Quelque fois dominet,
 Ensemble Hypocrite,
 Pour quelque temps regner,
 Mais la fin suabla
 En est mis en

Figure 1



Catholic liturgy offered up little music with the broad appeal and tuneful style of psalms, both Catholics and Protestants circulated brazenly seditious songs that were printed up as single or “flying” sheets known as “feuilles volantes” or “placards” (see Figure 1).

Little larger than a piece of notebook paper, the first measures approximately eleven inches in height and the second approximately thirteen and a half inches. Certainly the most ephemeral form of printed chansons, they were sung from and sold publicly in city streets and had a very short life-span. These rare examples were conserved by Pierre de l’Estoile, court diarist during the reigns of Henry III and Henry IV, who collected them in a large scrapbook of *placards* and engravings from the period of the radical Catholic faction known as the League (cc. 1576-1594).³ The melodies to which they were sung had achieved some renown and served as timbres or musical templates. New texts were written to the rhyme scheme of the original poem, and the timbre was indicated with the rubric “chanson nouvelle sur le chant de...” Figure 2 depicts a Protestant *placard* in the form of a satirical proclamation by “Pope Pius Antichrist” against members of the reformed religion. Six declarations set off with large letters terminate with a song at the bottom of the page, a “Papal song to the tune of ‘pourquoy font bruit’” that demands the Lutherans pay homage to an idolatrous and satanical Pope. The format of this *placard* mixes song and proclamation, reminding us that the walls lining the streets and squares used for the crying of public news were often plastered with placards both official and inflammatory. In the streets, cry mixed with song, and the traffic in printed news and propaganda was plied with regularity.

* * *

The Presses of Benoist Rigaud in Lyon

Owing to their fragility and timely nature, only a handful of sixteenth-century *placards* have survived to this day, even fewer with song texts. But whereas *placards* rarely surmounted the trials of time, songs printed in the form of pamphlets fared much better. Dozens of small seidecimo booklets collected song texts under the title of *recueil de chansons*, and among the *recueils*, a unique series published by Benoist Rigaud in Lyon included political songs.⁴

Many of the chansons in Rigaud's *recueils* abandon the usual theme of love, and favor that of war instead. In a world of lyric utterance completely geared toward the expression of love—a world in which ninety-five percent of chansons took love as their subject—these war songs stand out in utter contrast to the rest of the repertory. Their themes range from the hardships of living under siege to stories of battle and prayers for peace. They are often signalled in the titles of prints such as this one: *La fleur des chansons nouvelles, traittans partie de l'amour, partie de la guerre*, the floral imagery somewhat at odds with the gritty contents. Their format is tiny, just three or four inches high and usually with 32 or 64 folios, making them pocket-sized and cheap (see Figure 3).

For over forty years—from 1555 until his death in 1597—Rigaud produced inexpensive vernacular prints with the broadest possible appeal. He printed books of vernacular poetry, French histories, translations of primers on law and arithmetic, descriptions of trade routes, and books of entertainment like the *Amadis de Gaule* cycle and our chanson prints.⁵ In the early part of his career he served as the printer of government documents in Lyon and among that part of his output we find the 1564 ordinance with which we began today.⁶ Alongside this official line of pamphlets, Rigaud dealt in a much more sensationalist genre of news printed in the form of *canards* or chapbooks. They propagated stories of bizarre occurrences and news, including tales of monstrous births, unusual crimes, supernatural prognostications in the

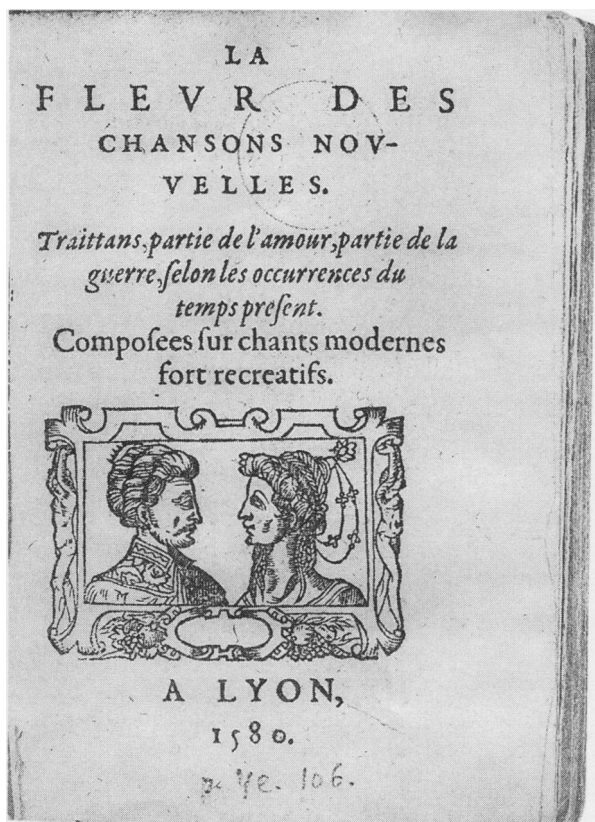


Figure 3

form of comets or other heavenly appearances, the advent of floods or plague, and stories of battles and sieges. The *canards* are of particular interest to us because the stories they tell have sung complements that were produced during the religious wars and printed in Rigaud's *recueils*.

The material aspects of Rigaud's *recueils* and *canards* certainly imply a printing method geared toward the rapid production of cheap print rather than the laborious production of expensive volumes for bibliophiles. Rigaud used an inexpensive grade of paper

which was sometimes of very uneven thickness, and he continually recycled the small and tired woodcuts decorating his title pages. Gatherings of many *recueils* are poorly folded and the type worn.

Rigaud marketed his books in at least four very different ways. His print shop was located in the heart of Lyon's commercial district where one might call in at the store front to buy books "sur place." With the burgeoning industries of silk manufacturing, printing, and the metal trade all concentrated in the streets around his shop, sales must have been fairly brisk right off the street. Lyon bustled with merchants, journeymen, artisans, and bourgeois from near and far. Situated at the junction of trade routes joining Antwerp and London to Venice and Rome, Lyon handled goods from the whole of Europe and the Orient, its commerce fueled by cash from Florentine bankers who had settled in the city. Since 1463, Lyon's four seasonal fairs had made it an unusually privileged site for commerce, and Rigaud regularly sold quantities of books at the fairs to merchants from Le Puy, Montpellier, the Dauphiné, Lorraine, and Navarre.⁷ It is likely that Rigaud sold some material by subscription, particularly prints of royal edicts, ordinances, and letter patents.⁸ Finally, we know that Rigaud sold small books to traveling vendors who in turn resold them in city streets throughout the country.⁹


Song and Colportage

Urban booksellers constantly worked the major streets, squares, and crossroads of cities, singing the songs they sold and crying out the titles of *canards*.¹⁰ Most commonly they were known as "colporteurs" for the tray of goods they carried suspended from a neck strap (see Figure 4).

This sixteenth-century engraving of a colporteur shows him displaying his wares and speaking or singing as he walks along. His cry of "beaux abc, belles heures" serves as a title and gives us



Figure 4



some idea of the sorts of print hawked through colportage, which included books for the marginally literate like abc's and books of hours. Written accounts of colporteurs describe them with baskets full of almanacs, romances, indexed literature, *canards*, and *recueils de chansons* containing drinking songs, airs, and often "dirty and nasty secular songs" as well.¹¹ Alongside print, mirrors, gloves, tape, ribbons, and other odds and ends crowded their trays.¹² Colporteurs were often little better off than beggars—L'Estoile describes them as "poor" and "dejected"—and they trod city streets selling whatever cheap print and trinkets came to hand. When it came to news, they traded in the stories of the wonderful and newsworthy, calling out the titles in a strange counterpoint to the official public announcements of town criers.¹³

Colporteurs often sang the songs they sold as a form of advertisement that drew attention to their stock in trade. Indeed, singing and the peddling of cheap print went hand in hand, where the song pitched the sale of the print at whoever paused to listen. This accounts in some measure for the bounty of rhetorical hooks used in the songs, opening formulae such as "Who would like to hear a little song..." or "Listen, ladies, listen to the story..." One of the problems for colporteurs, however, was that little separated them from beggars who used song and minstrelsy to glean handouts from passersby. Vagrants haunted cemeteries offering to sing "bizarre little hymns for the dead" for a few coins;¹⁴ instrumentalists regularly faked blindness and perched themselves on chairs before the church to play the lute for alms;¹⁵ and errant minstrels who might dance, do acrobatics, play on the flute, and sing for money had a bad reputation as "loathsome and vile" sorts.¹⁶ Looking back to the Lyonnaise ordinance of 1564 in this light, it is perhaps not so surprising that the expulsion of vagabonds from the city and the interdiction against singing dissolute songs should come in the same breath. Furthermore, because colporteurs so often sold libelous and indexed literature, they naturally came un-

der surveillance from the authorities. They disguised seditious material by crying other titles; they sometimes claimed illiteracy and thus ignorance of what they sold; they worked at night; and some books were “colportés” by confectioners beneath their cakes and rolls.¹⁷ Most of what we know about colportage is recorded in rulings attempting to curtail its practice.

The Politique of Rigaud's Songs

Rigaud had a particularly difficult time negotiating the shifting sands of religious politics in Lyon. Not that it was easy, for the political situation was decidedly unstable.

He began his career in 1555 in partnership with a zealous Protestant, Jean Saugrin, and although their business alliance broke up in 1558 owing to religious differences, the Protestant connection that it established would haunt Rigaud for some time.¹⁸ Saugrin went off to print Protestant material on his own and Rigaud, from all appearances, remained a Catholic. But appearances change. The spring of 1562 brought a revolution to Lyon resulting in Huguenot rule of the city council for over a year. Although the Catholics regained control of the city in 1563, the next four years saw a period of relative tolerance in the city. And so, Rigaud printed works sympathetic to the Protestant cause during this time. In the fall of 1567, however, the tide shifted once again: the second religious war got underway, and Protestants in Lyon suffered a sudden onslaught of persecution. The Protestant temple was destroyed; the government ordered Protestants out of the city or imprisoned them, seized their property, confiscated the stocks of Protestant booksellers, and drove a number of Rigaud's fellow printers from the city.¹⁹ Rigaud got off lightly, for he was only fined 100 *livres* for his empathy with those of the reformed faith. He quickly abjured Calvinism and after his abjuration he never again published a heretical work.²⁰ His religious temperament, inasmuch as it can be

discerned from the prints that came off his presses, was moderate. This moderation is most evident in Rigaud's prints following the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. Rigaud was rightly horrified by the *vêpres lyonnaises*, during which even people like himself, who had abjured Protestantism, were killed. And the carnage took an appalling 600 men, women, and children. Their bodies were dumped in the river, creating a terrifying spectacle all the way down the Rhône to Avignon. Rigaud printed five Catholic pieces on the Saint-Bartholomew massacre in 1572 and 1573 and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is at this time that his *recueils de chansons*—which previously had been devoted to love songs—begin to include songs of peace and grievance as well. A song from 1572 will serve as one example.

Chanson nouvelle de la complainte des pauvres Laboureurs & gens de village sur le chant "Dames d'honneur, je vous prie à mains jointes"
(Lyon: [Rigaud], 1572)

Dieu tout puissant, que nul ne peut desdire,	All powerful God, who nothing can
Voy le tourment, & le cruel martyre,	make retract a promise, See the torment &
Que tous les jours j'endure sans cesser,	cruel martyrdom That I incessantly endure
Entens ma voix, vueilles moy exaucer.	Hear my voice, please grant my prayer.
Guerre civile m'a mis nud en chemise,	Civil war left me naked in a shirt,
Helas, helas c'est bien pauvre devise	Alas, Alas, it is surely a poor device.
Rien que le corps il ne m'est demeuré,	Nothing but my body remains to me,
J'ay tout perdu ce qu'avois labouré.	I lost everything for which I labored.

.....

Femmes et enfants sans cesse apres moy crie,	Women and children cry after me
Du pain, du pain, pour soustenir leur vie,	incessantly, Bread, bread, to sustain their
Morceau n'en ay, gensdarmes ont tout mangé,	life, I do not have a crumb, soldiers ate all
Mon bien batu, nauré & outragé.	my food, Beat, harassed, and insulted me.


.....

Helas bon Roy faites une ordonnance	Alas, good King, make a ruling
Que vos soldats n'usent pas de violence	That your soldiers not use violence
Au laboureur, quoy qu'ils mangent son bien	Upon the worker, though they eat his food
S'ils continuent ils ne trouveront rien.	If they continue, they will find nothing.

.....

Gentils soldats qui marchez en campagne,	Kind soldiers who march in the country
Qui que sayez de France, ou d'Alemagne,	Whether from France or Germany
Changez voz moeurs & vos complexions	Change your morals and your dispositions
Ottant de vous ces imperfections:	Get rid of these imperfections:
Ayez pitié de nous pauvres Rustiques	Have pity on us poor Rustics
Vivez en paix sans faire de repliques	Live in peace without making retaliations
Considerant que nous sommes Chrestiens	Considering that we are Christians
Comme vous autres & non pas des Payens.	Like you others & not heathens.
Ne nous traiste ainsi que bestes brutes	Do not treat us like brute beasts
Et ne nous faites coucher emmy les rues,	And do not make us sleep in the streets,
Ce que trouvez, mangez paisiblement	That which you find, eat peaceably
Vous contentant tousjours honnestement.	Always satisfy yourselves honestly
Dieu tout puissant qui tiens tout sous ta dexte	All powerful God who holds all under
Aye pitie de ton peuple champestre	your right hand, Have pity on your rural
Qui crie à toy, se voyant affligé	people Who cry to you, seeing themselves
Par les gensdarmes & tous les jours pillé.	afflicted By soldiers and pillaged each day.

The first person voice of the song complicates our interpretation of it, claiming to be a rustic whereas the song was more likely written by a literate urbanite instead. And the political supplications to a “good king” and all powerful god are difficult to weigh for veracity. Many of these songs contain what might be considered “signatures” in which the author identifies himself as a soldier reporting from the field of battle or some bourgeois or petit



noble. While the authorship of songs like “Dieu tout puissant” must remain in question, the song does address a very real problem, which was the billeting of troops in people’s homes. Catholics and Protestants alike suffered at the hands of soldiers who often behaved like marauders. In this way, and through the taxes levied by the monarchy to pursue the wars at home and in Flanders, everyone suffered during these years. Furthermore, inhabitants of the open countryside—real rustics—were unprotected and perpetually victimized by troops seeking food and shelter.

A word about the melody. You will have heard that it is repetitive and has a small range. These are characteristics of timbres, which were part of an oral repertory. The timbre, “Dames d’honneur” is not just a blank slate that might be used for any text, however. It was always associated with lament and so used for songs of mourning. Just the titles of other texts written to be sung to its melody will give you an idea of the pathos it seems to have evoked: (in translation) “Deploration of the Ladies of La Fere, forcibly held by enemies of the Catholic religion,” “new song of the regrets of a Lady from Rouen who, having been sentenced to death, said that she had been poorly watched over during her youth,” “new song of the sad regrets and lamenting tears of Elizabeth of Austria, Queen of France, on the death of king Charles IX, her husband,” “new song on the sad complaint of the Ladies of La Rochelle to the ruffians of the King’s camp,” and “Lamentation of the king to all his people of France.” The complex of songs on this timbre point up the regular linking of the tune to lamentation in the female voice, and it also affords us a concise example of how diverse Rigaud’s occasional songs were, for they encompass songs about besieged Protestant strongholds (La Rochelle and La Fere), songs on royal deaths, general lamentation at the war, and a song about unusual crime.

The next song has a very different melody, a tune taken from a courtly song that originally set the verse of France’s most renowned

poet of the age, Pierre de Ronsard (the text of “Quand j’estoy libre” is by Ronsard). The melody has a larger range and a more complicated rhythm than the first. The source of this timbre is a good reminder that urban minstrelsy and courtly music-making often shared musical material. And as we wonder about the connections between courtly lyric production and what sorts of newsy songs might have been heard in the street, this song cautions us not to assume a blunt correlation between cheap print and lower class consumption. For all of the songs printed by Rigaud that seem to resound with the “voice of the people,” there is no doubt that these printed collections were purchased by nobles and courtiers.

This is a song that describes the taking of La Charité. The usual strategy of war at the time was for opposing forces to engage in siege and battle over the control of walled cities. La Charité was one of the fortified towns on the Loire river that had been ceded to the Protestants in the treaty of May, 1576 and one of the first to be besieged when the wars against the Protestants were renewed in 1577. It fell on May 2, 1577 to royal forces headed—according to the song—by François, the Duke of Anjou and Henry, duke of Guise and leader of the extremist Catholic league. Notice the actuality and the timeliness of the poetry, which is written from the vantage of someone inside the city.

Chanson nouvelle de la prise de la Charité, rendue en l’obeissance du Roy nostre Sire, Et se chante sur le chant, Quand j’estoy libre, &c. (in *La fleur des chansons*, Rigaud, 1580)

O terre ô ciel, voyez la grand detresse	Oh earth oh heaven, see the great distress
Voyant l’aussaut la grand fleur de noblesse,	Seeing the assault of the great flower of
Tant de Soldats François,	nobility, So many French soldiers
Doubles Canons de furieuse audace	Double canons of furious boldness
Sa grand furie des rempars nous dechasse	Its great fury chases us from the ramparts
Tremblant d’un grand effroy.	Trembling with a great terror.



Ja la bresche aussi le bastillon
Tout renversé de grands coups de canons
Les soldats preparez
A nous monstretre nostre dol & fallace
Je les vois tous de furieuse audace
S'emparer des fossez.

Yes the breach also the stronghold
All destroyed by great canon shots
The soldiers prepare
To show us grief and our fallacies
I see them all with furious boldness
Sieze the ditches.

Et nous voyans les canons de furie
Brisant, tuant, nous ravissant la vie,
Avons parlementé:
Priens le Roy d'appaser la furie
Voyans les murs brisez d'artillerie
Nous ont espouventez.

And we, seeing the canons of fury
Breaking, killing, carrying off our life,
Negotiated:
Begging the king to abate the fury
Seeing the walls broken from artillery
We were terrified.

.....

Monsieur d'Anjou Prince tresdebonnaire,
Nous a servy de tresfidelle pere
Nous prenant à mercy,
En sauveté sous sa protection
Faisant cesser la furie du canon
Qui nous eust tous occis.

Very debonnaire Prince d'Anjou
Served us for his faithful father (Henry III)
Taking mercy on us,
And rescuing us under his protection
Making the fury of the canon stop
Which slayed all of us.

.....

Monsieur de Guise s'exposa au hazard
Et à toute heure approchoit du rampart
N'avoir peur de la mort,
Dans les trenchees il estoit en personne
Ne craignant point l'artillerie qui donne
Ruynant tout nostre effort.

Monsieur de Guise exposed himself to
Hazards And each hour went to the rampart
Having no fear of death.
In the trenches he came in person
Not fearing at all the artillery shots
Ruining all our effort.

.....

Car le haut Dieu qui tient tous sous dextre,	For the high God who holds all in his right
En un moment fera par l'univers	hand, In a moment he will make the
Vivre dessouz sa loy,	universe Live under his law,
Tranquilité, une paix & concorde,	Tranquility, one peace and concord,
Fera cesser les querelles & divorce,	Will make the quarrels and divorce end,
Recognoissant son Roy.	Recognizing his King.
Prions le Roy Henry de grand valeur,	We pray to King Henry of great merit,
Puis que sur nous a monstré sa faveur	Since he has shown us his favor
En toute loyauté:	In all loyalty:
Prions sans fin ce grand Dieu souverain:	We pray without end to this great sovereign
Nous prosternant priant à jointes mains	God: We prostrate ourselves praying with
Nous tenir effacé.	clasped hands, forgive us.

My argument about this song is that it takes up a newsy and immediate tone that finds its analogue in the literature of *canards* that were cried on the streets. In fact, Rigaud produced innumerable prints describing the principal sieges of the time. In 1577 he printed an eight-folio pamphlet about La Charité entitled, *Le discours du siege tenu devant la Charité, ensemble de la prise par Monsieur frere du Roy avec le nombre des morts, tant d'une part que d'autre*. Then in 1580 this song surfaces in a *recueil de chansons*. It is, I would suggest, just another form of the same news.

The three-year time lag between the event and the printing of this song—presuming that this was its first appearance in print—naturally causes us to wonder about when it was first written, when it was first sung, and the relationship between the performance and the print.

Publishing and the Public Sphere

Sixteenth-century technologies of information were vastly different from our own. First of all, the exchange of news and information most often took place in public. It was in public locales that urban folk beheld spectacles such as royal entries, heard official edicts proclaimed in a loud voice, read placards pasted to the doors of the church, and received news by rumor, town crier, street song, or tocsin. A corollary observation is the reliance of these technologies on the oral. So fundamental is this connection between publicity and the spoken word that to publish was, by definition, an oral act.


In sixteenth-century France, the term public—or *public*—bore two separable categories of meaning. The first arose from the understanding of the King as the head of state. Heritor and guardian, first owner of all things public, the king was, in effect, France. His participation in processions and entrées represented his embodiment of divine authority and likewise, his lieutenant governors to the provinces served the public by representing the king. It is in this royal sense, then, that we may also understand the work of town criers when they declaimed edicts and decrees. Royal proclamations were “read, cried & published by trumpet and public cry,” and those who performed this service were “public” representatives of the king before the people in the royal sense of the word.

The second meaning of “public” in the late sixteenth century presages our modern usage, a sense increasingly distanced from the essentially feudal connotations just posed. *Publier* and *publicquer* both meant to confiscate and sell by auction, to put private goods up for sale by force. Even more proximate to our modern definitions of public are currency of *publicateur* and *publieur*: one who spreads or makes something known. Sixteenth-century mechanisms of publication differed most significantly from subsequent ones in that they were based on oral means of communication. We

will search in vain for the signal use of *publiés* in reference to printing. Books were not yet to be *publier* (published), but only literally *imprimée* (printed), and there existed only the most fragile semblance of a press to disseminate information on paper. Rather, publication was an oral practice, one exemplified by the system of town criers and, I would argue, our newsy songs.

Like the ordinance of 1564 against seditious songs, decrees conclude with the formula: “the present decree here above was cried, read, and publicized by loud voice, public declamation, and the sound of the trumpet at each and every one of the crossroads and public squares usual for making announcements, proclamations, and publications in the said city of...” (see p. 8). In every instance, the authorization of official pamphlets by civic criers signals that the paper pamphlet only registered the actual publication preceding it, which was made in a loud voice in the city’s public spaces. Print thus often entered into urban life in conjunction with the spoken word, as a shadow of oral publications with far less certain trajectories than the institutionalized work of town criers.

About street songs we know far less, for they were everything but institutionalized. Certainly songs sold inexpensively and through colportage can be located in public places. Furthermore, characteristic features of the *recueils* help explain their appeal to a broad public. Works printed for a broad public counted on their readers’ previous knowledge, depending on the recurrence of extremely coded forms, the repetition of motifs that return from one work to another, and by reuse of the same illustrations. Since the realization of the song texts rested on a stock of common musical material held in the memories of the readers, the texts always activated a background store of knowledge, rendering them more readable. The interlocking relationships between text, memorized timbres and contrafacta texts shaped a matrix of familiar idioms and forms that reveal what is “popular” about these songs.²¹



Many of you will recognize that the foregoing discussion of publicness and publicity relies to a large extent on the theories of Jürgen Habermas expounded in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. The bourgeois public sphere as he defines it was created by coalitions of private people—that is, those who did not participate in the rule of the state—who eventually asserted themselves in the public sphere initially created by princely authority.²² It was the system of publicity originally established for ceremonies of monarchic representation that were eventually turned by merchants to their own uses. The ultimate hallmark of the fully developed bourgeois public sphere was the moment when public authorities—representatives of the King—were engaged by the people in open debate over political issues.

Of course, the power claims of merchants and bourgeois against public authority in late sixteenth-century Lyons were too weak to control the public sphere in significant ways. In addition, the primary instrument of publicity as we understand it today—the press—did not yet exist. Still, Habermas identified the sixteenth-century oral mechanisms of publicity as important precursors to the seventeenth-century press. Just as the press would eventually serve both the state and the bourgeoisie, so the trafficking of news in the sixteenth century can be understood as controlled partly by the monarchy and partly by the interests of merchants. As entrepreneurs engaged in long-distance trade, they relied on news of distant events in order to calculate the fluctuations of their markets, and they shortly began to traffic news along with other commodities. It was merchants who organized the first mail routes between major trade cities. Indeed, almost simultaneously with the origin of stock markets, postal services and the press institutionalized regular contacts and regular communication.²³

Habermas was well aware that cheap print and street songs could be considered early analogues to the bourgeois newspapers

of the seventeenth century. But he questioned their ability to create a bourgeois public sphere in the face of the traditional public sphere reserved for rituals of the monarch:

Sixteenth-century single-sheet prints still bore witness to the strength with which an unbroken traditional knowledge was able to assimilate communications whose rising stream, to be sure, already pointed to a new form of public sphere.... Often ...[they] were written in the form of songs or dialogues, i.e. were meant to be declaimed or sung, alone or with others....In this process, the novelty moved out of the historical sphere of “news” and, as sign and miracle, was reintegrated into that sphere of representation in which a ritualized and ceremonialized participation of the people in the public sphere permitted a merely passive acceptance incapable of independent interpretation...²⁴

Habermas maintains that the singing of news fundamentally changed its nature, transforming it from news into another ritualized performance of monarchic public authority. If I read him correctly, it is the public singing of the song that strips it of its bourgeois newsmanship and casts it back into the old public sphere created by the second estate. Habermas rightly observes that many of the historical songs serve the state in the same way as other monarchic publication. For example, “O terre, o ciel,” which celebrates the victories of the Duke of Guise and the king’s brother, the Duc d’Anjou, certainly reads as a heroic epic that glorifies the Valois and equates Henry’s princeliness with the godliness of his sovereignty.

I must argue, however, that not all songs permitted those who heard them—to use Habermas’s words—“merely passive acceptance incapable of independent interpretation.” The French civil wars initiated the period in which the absolute authority of the Valois dynasty was most severely threatened. Some of these songs, for all the mediation of unknown authors and editors, seem genu-

inely to bubble up from the passions of merchants, artisans, and bourgeois comprising the third estate. As a case in point let us consider two songs rejoicing over the victory at Chateau-Double in the Dauphiné. Here follows an excerpt from one of them:

Chanson de la prise de chateaudouble en Dauphiné au mois de Mars 1579. Sur le chant de Petit Rossignolet sauvage (in La fleur des chansons nouvelles, Rigaud, 1580)

Je leur demande en conscience,	I ask them in good conscience
D'où est sorty si grand tresor	From whence these great treasures
Et s'ils n'ont du peuple de France	And if they do not have for the French
Dedans leurs coeur quelque remord	people Some remorse in their hearts
D'avoir mis bas & tout à plat,	For having put down and laid out flat
Tous ceux qui sont du tiers estat.	All those who are of the third estate.

By 1579, peasants and urban artisans just south of Lyons had suffered such atrocities at the hands of soldiers and nobles that they revolted. Indeed, the list of outrages drawn up by one small-town lawyer in a petition to the king included rape, kidnappings, ransoms, sackings, and exorbitant levies and taxes. The most visible success of this insurrection was the sacking and burning of a noble brigand's castle at Chateaudouble. Rigaud wasted no time in printing two songs on the peasant's revenge, which came out in 1580.

Peasant revolts were few during the wars of religion, as are these songs so clearly marking the concerns of the third estate, or those who labored. But they exemplify an argument being made more and more forcefully by recent historians of the wars of religion: the wars were not just a power struggle between a factional nobility. They were wars waged with the equal participation of the laboring classes. Let me in turn close with the suggestion that many of the songs printed by Rigaud ring with the voices of France's third estate. The rising tide of religious and political tensions both

within the third estate, and between it and French rulers, erupted as religious riot and popular revolt. Song informed, preached, converted, and incited its considerable publics to violence in an oral economy of publicity that effectively employed official channels to subversive ends. If the songs that surface in pamphlets and canards are an early form of urban news, I think it fair to read them for what they can tell us about the coalescence of the bourgeois public sphere that would come to challenge the authority of the king. Merchants like Rigaud, who were behind the production of such songs, maneuvered in a narrow space of discourse that was just shifting from speech to print and which would explode into the press of the seventeenth century. The street songs and cheap print we have been studying witness the early trajectory of that shift.

Footnotes

1. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 4-5 or Jean Guéraud, *La chronique lyonnaise de Jean Guéraud, 1536-1562*, ed. Jean Tricou (Lyon, 1929), 54-55.
2. Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 139.
3. Pierre de l'Estoile, *Les belles figures et drolleries de la Ligue, avec les peintures, placards et affiches injurieuses et diffamatoires contre la mémoire et honneur du feu roy, que les Oisons de la Ligue apeloient Henri de Valois, imprimées, criées, preschées et vendues publiquement à Paris par tous les endroits et quarrefours de la ville, l'an 1586*. Facsimile reprint. *Mémoires-journaux de Pierre de l'Estoile*, ed. Brunet and Tricotel, vol. 4 (Paris: Tricotel, 1875-96). L'Estoile dates his collection 1586, but clearly many items were included later, such as the song on the death of Henry III, who was murdered in August of 1589.
4. For a general account of contemporary *recueils de chansons*, see this author, "Vernacular Culture and the Chanson in Paris, 1570-1580," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1996, chap. 4.
5. H. and J. Baudrier, *Bibliographie lyonnaise: Recherches sur les imprimeurs, libraires, relieurs et fondeurs de lettres de Lyon au XVIe siècle* (Lyon: Louis Brun and Paris: A. Picard et Fils, 1897), 3: 175 ff.
6. See Baudrier, *Bibliographie lyonnaise*, 3:177-78, for the renewal of his privilege to print royal ordinances and edicts dated 1566. He printed less and less official material in the course of the 1570s, and by 1587 we find him being petitioned by Jean Pillehotte, the new holder of the royal privilege, to stop infringing on his rights (Baudrier, 3: 182-3).
7. *Ibid.*, 3: 176-83.
8. L'Abbé Reure, *La presse politique à Lyon pendant la Ligue (24 février, 1589-7 février, 1594)* (Paris: Alphonse Picard & Fils, 1898), 28.
9. Baudrier reprints notarial records relating to a contract between Rigaud and "Jehan Guynot, marchand contreporteur" who owed him 611 livres tournois on a purchase. Baudrier, *Bibliographie lyonnaise*, 3: 479, 481.

10. Cited in Seguin, *L'information en France avant le périodique: 517 canards imprimés entre 1529 et 1631* (Paris: Éditions G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1964), 15.
11. Cited by Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire aux 17e et 18e siècles* (Paris: Éditions Imago, 1985), 23.
12. See Shakespeare's ballad-seller Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, especially IV, 590-93.
13. On colportage see Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. by Lydia Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 168, 175-8.
14. Thomas Platter, cited in Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 13.
15. Luc Charles-Dominique, *Les ménétriers français sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 220-21.
16. François de Thierriat, *Trois traictes sçavoir 1. De la noblesse de race, 2. De la noblesse civile, 3. Des immunités des ignobles* (Paris: Lucas Bruneau, 1606), 122.
17. Reure, *La presse politique*, 20, 28-9.
18. Baudrier, *Bibliographie lyonnaise*, 3: 479-81; Natalie Zemon Davis, "On the Protestantism of Benoît Rigaud." *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 17 (1955): 246-51.
19. A. Kleinclausz, *Histoire de Lyon* (Lyon: Librairie Pierre Masson, 1939), 1: 424-5.
20. Davis, "On the Protestantism of Benoît Rigaud," 251.
21. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 13.
22. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 27-31.
23. *Ibid.*, 16.
24. *Ibid.*, 254.

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