The Dangers Within: Fears of Imprisonment in Enlightenment France[1]

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The historian Jean Delumeau begins his classic study of fear in late-medieval and early-modern Europe by citing Montaigne's description of arriving after nightfall in the town of Augsburg in 1580. To enter the town, Montaigne wrote, the traveler had to pass through a daunting series of protective barriers—hidden doors and iron gates that slammed shut behind him as he advanced; a drawbridge suspended above a moat; and several dark or dimly lit rooms. In the last of those rooms, a bronze vase hung from a chain. Into that vase the traveler deposited his travel money, which the town guard reeled in by pulling on the chain. If the amount was enough to satisfy the required entrance fee, the guard would activate one final door allowing the traveler to pass into the town; if it was not enough, the traveler would be condemned to spend the rest of the night confined in the room. That the citizens of Augsburg would erect so formidable a wall against the threat of external dangers testifies to the general atmosphere of insecurity prevailing at that time. It also provides Delumeau with the framing synecdoche for his study, that of the West as a "besieged fortress" (*cité assiégée*), a fear-ridden civilization struggling to defend itself against the multiple dangers that assailed it during the roughly three hundred years from the advent of the Black Death to the end of the age of religious wars.[2]

But now, by way of comparison, consider the description of another fortress, that of the Château de Vincennes, the donjon on the outskirts of Paris in which the future Revolutionary leader

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[2] Jean Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident(XIVe-XVIIIe siècles). Une cité assiégée* (Paris, 1978), 1-2. Delumeau's reference is to Montaigne, *Journal de voyage*, ed. M. Rat (Paris, 1955), 47-48.

the comte de Mirabeau was confined by *lettres de cachet* from 1777 to 1780. Following his release, Mirabeau published an account of his ordeal at Vincennes, *Des Lettres de cachet et des prisons d'état*, in which he describes in minute detail all the physical barriers separating the prison from the outside world—the deep and wide moat surrounding the donjon, the high towers, thick walls, iron gates, and doors opening onto doors, all loaded with locks and bolts and guarded by vigilant sentries.[3] The description bears a certain resemblance to that which Montaigne had offered two hundred years earlier of the urban fortifications at Augsburg. In this case, however, the barriers do not evoke the promise of protection against external threats so much as the terror of incarceration.[4]

From walls that repel to walls that confine? So stark a contrast would be misleading as an account of historical change if taken literally. Prisons, after all, existed in the late sixteenth century; defensive fortifications in the late eighteenth. By the time of Mirabeau's imprisonment at Vincennes, however, defensive fortifications did not any longer surround towns in the interior of the French kingdom. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the French monarchy had set about building a *cordon sanitaire* of fortresses along its frontiers, while fortifications in the interior of the kingdom, including those of the capital, were either dismantled or allowed to decay.[5] Fragments of the old defensive walls survived here and there, but they did not any longer betoken a sense of imminent danger lurking beyond the gates. That Paris in effect lay open to attack testified to a heightened sense of security within the kingdom.

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[3] [Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau], *Des Lettres de cachet et des prisons d'état* (Hamburg [sic—i.e., Neuchâtel], 1782), 2 : 43-45.

[4] On the contrast between protective barriers and prison walls, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), 116. The prison walls to which Foucault is referring, however, are those of the nineteenth-century penitentiary rather than of an eighteenth-century donjon.

[5] Michael Wolfe, *Walled Towns and the Shaping of France: From the Medieval to the Early Modern Era* (New York, 2009), 123-70.

The establishment of perimeter defenses, the "defortification" of French towns, and the pacification of the kingdom were one side of a process of absolutist state-building; the other side was that the state itself became a new source of fears. In the eighteenth century, political fears proliferated—fears of overzealous police agents, whom Parisians suspected of abducting children from the streets of working-class neighborhoods;[6] of spies (*mouches*), who eavesdropped on conversations in cafés and private social gatherings, creating an atmosphere of distrust in which even friends trembled to speak candidly to one another;[7] and of *lettres de cachet*, the administrative arrest warrants that allowed for the imprisonment or exile of subjects without any formal presentation of charges, judicial proceedings or accompanying publicity.[8] These fears took multiple forms and cut across class boundaries, but they coalesced in the belief, voiced with increasing frequency and increasing stridency during the last decades of the Old Regime, that the monarchy was degenerating into "despotism." And the most potent symbols of despotism were state prisons of the kind that Mirabeau described. Part of a growing body of works dedicated to exposing the frightening reality of life behind prison walls, Mirabeau's description of Vincennes

[6] On the fear of child abductions, which exploded in the Paris riots of spring 1750, see Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).
[7] Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Amsterdam, 1782), 1: 194.
[8] The fear of police surveillance, spies, and imprisonment by *lettres de cachet* shadowed the lives of practically everyone associated with the production and circulation of prohibited books, as Robert Darnton has depicted in his numerous works on Grub Street and the underground book trade, from the essays collected in *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982) to his more recent studies of libels, *The Devil in the Holy Water or the Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia, 2010) and censorship, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature* (New York, 2014), esp. 59-86; and as Gudrun Gersmann shows in her study of the same milieu: *Im Schatten der Bastille. Die Welt der Schriftsteller, Kolporteure und Buchhändler am Vorabend der französischen Revolution* (Stuttgart, 1993), esp. 182-228. It would be a mistake, however, to view the expanding police apparatus as purely repressive, as recent work on the police has emphasized. See, above all, Vincent Milliot, *Un Policier des Lumières, suivi de Mémoires de J. C. P. Lenoir* (Seyssel, 2011); and Vincent Denis, *Une Histoire de l'identité, France 1715-1815* (Seyssel, 2008).

both reflected and shaped the mounting fear of imprisonment during the last phase of the Old Regime.[9] Its significance, when compared to Montaigne's description of the urban fortifications at Augsburg, lay in its shift of perspective: the inward displacement of the object of fear. The traditional extra-mural fears of marauding armies, barbarian invaders, or criminal bands had given way, in Mirabeau's text, to the fear of what would befall the confined self.

The inward displacement of fear went together, moreover, with a growing anxiety about fear itself. In the eighteenth century, fear became a problem, especially in the eyes of the *philosophes*, for whom the conquest of irrational fear was both a condition and a goal of Enlightenment. Analyses of fear, of its sources, its symptoms, and its consequences, multiplied, as did proposals for combating it—notably, in the counter-phobic strategies of Enlightenment pedagogy. In *Emile*, for example, Rousseau devised a program of education with the goal of steeling his imaginary pupil against a long list of age-old fears, including the fears of snakes, masks, the night and ultimately of death itself. While such concerns were not peculiar to the Enlightenment in France, their specifically political dimension was. The two main conditions for the emergence of modern political fears—a powerful centralized state and a vigorous print culture—coalesced in France sooner than they did anywhere else.[10]

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[9] The most-frequently depicted prison in the eighteenth century was not Vincennes but the Bastille. On images of the Bastille, see Monique Cotret, *La Bastille à prendre. Histoire et mythe de la fortresse royale* (Paris, 1986); and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *Die "Bastille." Zur Symbolgeschichte von Herrschaft und Freiheit* (Frankfurt a/M, 1990). John Bender discusses the representations of prisons in eighteenth-century English fiction. Those representations, however, do not correspond to the images of the Bastille current in eighteenth-century France. The main difference was that the famous French prison was usually pictured as a separate, self-enclosed domain surrounded by impregnable walls; the prisons depicted in English fiction allowed for relatively free and easy exchanges with the outside world. Cf. Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1987)

[10] The starting point for the many historical studies of fear remains Delumeau's *Peur en Occident* (see n. 1). Those studies are now too numerous to be listed individually. Andreas Bähr

The transition to a modern regime of fear did not mean that older, extra-mural fears were permanently banished. The traditional fear of "barbarians at the gates," though it may have retreated with the establishment of perimeter defenses and the dismantling of town walls, could—and did—return when those defenses were breached. At such moments of acute national crisis, which occurred, for example, in the late summer of 1792 following the Brunswick Declaration and the fall of Longwy and Verdun to the advancing Prussian armies, or again in 1870-71 at the time of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune, time-honored patterns of behavior reasserted themselves: gates came down and drawbridges went up, albeit metaphorically.[11] Nor did the centuries-old fear of scarcity and hunger or the equally old fear of vagabonds suddenly dissipate.

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provides a useful survey, as well as a critique of Delumeau's approach, in his study of the descriptions of fear in the seventeenth century: *Furcht und Furchtlosigkeit. Göttliche Gewalt und Selbstkonstruktion im 17. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2013), 21-54. According to Bähr, Delumeau's work reflects a "dialectic of Enlightenment" model of fear: it posits a historical transition from pre-Enlightenment object-related fear (*Furcht*) to post-Enlightenment existential fear (*Angst*). The Furcht-Angst opposition, which Bähr regards as problematic, is crucial to much of the literature on the history of fear, including the two principal studies on eighteenth-century Germany: Christian Begemann, *Furcht und Angst im Prozess der Aufklärung: Zu Literatur- und Bewusstseinsgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a/M, 1987); and Hartmut Böhme und Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft. Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants* (Frankfurt a/M, 1983). In comparison to the German scholarship, the work on fear in eighteenth-century France seems both sparse and under-theorized. While individual episodes of fear have been studied, there is no synthetic account of the subject. Jacques Berchtold and Michel Porret have edited a conference volume: *La Peur au XVIIIe siècle. Discours, représentations, pratiques* (Geneva, 1994). More recently, Ronald Schechter has published an article surveying the shifting meanings, both positive and negative, of the concept of "terror" in the European Enlightenment with a particular emphasis on France: "Conceptions of Terror in the European Enlightenment," in *Facing Fear: The History of an Emotion in Global Perspective*, eds. Michael Laffan and Max Weiss (Princeton, 2012), 31-53.

[11] Timothy Tackett describes the reaction of panic in late August 1792 to the reports of an imminent Prussian invasion: *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015), 207-10. On the siege mentality at the time of the Paris Commune, see John Merriman, *Massacre: The Life and Death of the Paris Commune* (New York, 2014).

Those highly combustible fears came together in the summer of 1789 to produce the explosion of the Grande Peur.[12]

The survival of older fears into the eighteenth century and beyond shows that the history of fear is not a unidirectional process. It embodies what the German philosopher Ernst Bloch described as the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" (*die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*).[13] In order to capture its complexity and its contradictions, one has to be mindful of the coexistence at any given moment of fears originating in different historical epochs.

Yet it is not possible, as a practical matter, simultaneously to study all the fears existing in a given period. In what follows, I concentrate on the new trends in the eighteenth century, beginning with the problematization of fear, and especially political fear, in the discourse of Enlightenment and moving from there to the fear of imprisonment as emblematic of the inward turn in the nature of political fear. I conclude with some general remarks on the afterlife of eighteenth-century fears in the Gothic literature of the nineteenth century.

I. The Analytics of Fear

The oft-repeated association of fear with despotism in the eighteenth century went back to one source in particular: Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des lois*.[14] The famous doctrine of the "separation of powers," the concept of "intermediary bodies," and the celebration of the British constitution—

[12] Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (New York, 1973), esp. 7-23.
[13] Bloch developed the concept of "Ungleichzeitigkeit" in connection with his historical critique of fascism: *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zurich, 1935).
[14] On the idea of fear in Montesquieu's political philosophy, see especially Judith Shklar, *Montesquieu* (Oxford , 1987); and Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford, 2004), 51-72. Melvin Richter provides a general overview of Montesquieu's political thought in his introduction to *The Political Theory of Montesquieu*, ed. and trans. Melvin Richter (Cambridge, 1977), 1-111.

all those highly influential and oft-cited ideas from Montesquieu's magnum opus acquired their full meaning only when set in opposition to the extreme form of political corruption, a type of government that Montesquieu labeled "despotism" and of which the underlying "principle" was "fear" (*crainte*). Under a despotic system of government, neither law nor tradition limited the prince's power, and fear alone deterred subjects from rebelling—the fear of punishment by the state as well as the more diffuse fear inculcated by religion. The combination of those two factors, "fear added to fear" (*une crainte ajoutée à la crainte*), was enough to keep subjects in a state of abject submission, but only so long as the regime of fear was maintained.[15] Because neither virtue (the principle of republics) nor honor (the principle of monarchies) had any influence in a despotic state, the prince could not relax his grip for even a moment. In fact, he was obligated constantly to outdo himself in cruelty and brutality; otherwise, his subjects would soon become inured to terror and the prospect of punishment would no longer deter them from committing crimes or taking up arms against the state.[16]

Where did such despotic regimes exist? For reasons of climate, geography, religion, and national spirit, Montesquieu thought that the natural home of despotism was Asia, a view that reflected an enduring Orientalist prejudice.[17] As many scholars have shown, however, his main concern was not Oriental despotism. It was that Europe—and especially France—might be facing an Asiatic future. Such a future was by no means certain: as a former judge in the Parlement of

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[15] On "fear" (*crainte*) as the principle of despotism and the necessity in such regimes of maintaining fear without any interruption or diminution, as well as the special influence of religion as an additional source of fear in despotisms, Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, vol 1 of *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. André Masson (Paris, 1950), 3.9: 35-36; 5.14: 80-81.
[16] On the logic of escalating brutality in despotic regimes, see Montesquieu's comments on punishments in Japan: *De l'esprit des lois*, 6.13: 115-18.
[17] On Orientalist themes in Montesquieu's work, see Madeleine Dobie, *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism* (Stanford, 2001), 35-82.

Bordeaux, Montesquieu believed that the slide toward despotism could be halted by strengthening such "intermediary bodies" as the *parlements* and by guaranteeing the complete independence of the judiciary. But the historical signs were not encouraging. In France, the reduction of the old feudal nobility to a class of servile courtiers boded ill for the cause of liberty, as did the harassment of the *parlements* by the Crown. Unlike the English, moreover, the French did not enjoy a right of habeas corpus, nor did they have any protection against arbitrary arrest or extrajudicial imprisonment. If current trends continued, they faced a bleak future indeed—a world such as Montesquieu had evoked in miniature in the harem of *Les Lettres persanes*, a world so filled with fear as to make death seem preferable to life. The mere possibility of such a future supplied the ultimate ground for Montesquieu's defense of liberal institutions, a philosophy that the political theorist Judith Shklar described as the "liberalism of fear."[18]

Of course, not all the *philosophes* embraced Montesquieu's brand of "liberalism" (to use Shklar's admittedly anachronistic term). Voltaire, who took a much more favorable view of the Crown's historical role than did Montesquieu, derided his defense of the *parlements*. But all the *philosophes*, whatever they may have thought of the relative merits of the *thèse royale* and the *thèse nobiliaire*, would have endorsed Montesquieu's ultimate goal of reducing the burden of fear. That goal united them at the same time that it set them apart from a long tradition of Christian teaching on the subject of the passions. Thinkers in that tradition viewed fear as a useful counterweight to strong and ungovernable passions. Such a view commended itself in particular to theologians who emphasized the doctrine of Original Sin and who interpreted ungovernable passions as signs of man's fallen nature. For those theologians, it was pious to fear the wrath of

[18] Shklar, *Montesquieu*, 89. On the "liberalism of fear" more generally, see Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann (Chicago, 1998), 3-20.

God, the torments of hellfire, or the temptations of the devil. Such fears humbled overweening pride and fostered Christian humility.[19] Christian thinkers, however, were not the only ones to embrace the idea of using fear to counteract other, more destructive passions. One can find that idea at work in the thought of neo-pagan thinkers of the Renaissance such as Machiavelli, who counseled the prince on the importance of inspiring fear in his subjects, and above all Hobbes, whose whole political philosophy rested on fear—specifically, the fear of death. In Hobbes's account of the origins of political society, the fear of death supplies the motive for human beings to quit the unruly, passion-tossed state of nature—the *bellum omnium contra omnes*—and to enter into the covenant establishing the commonwealth. It appears therefore as a form of political intelligence: better to submit to the absolute power of the sovereign than to endure the constant fear of living in a state of nature.[20]

To the French *philosophes*, the premises as well as the conclusions of such reasoning were repugnant.[21] Thinkers as diverse as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Hélvetius, and Rousseau all rejected the idea that the passions were inherently evil, let alone sinful. As part of their larger

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[19] The valorization of fear—or what Jean Delumeau called the "evangelism of fear" (*pastorale de la peur*)—was particularly characteristic of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The distinctive feature of that tradition was to lay greater stress on the Passion than the Resurrection, sin than pardon, hell than heaven. On the "pastorale de la peur," see Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture*, trans. Erich Nicholson (New York, 1990), 327-557. On fear of God as a religious virtue in the early-modern period, see in particular Bähr, *Furcht und Furchtlosigkeit*, esp. 55-184.

[20] On the role of fear in Hobbes's political philosophy, see Robin, *Fear*, 31-50.

[21] While the *philosophes* rejected Hobbes's political philosophy, they nonetheless took it very seriously. Diderot was the author of the long entry in the *Encyclopédie* on Hobbes, whom he called "the apologist of tyranny" ("Hobbisme," in *Encyclopédie* [ARTFL], 8:232-41); and Rousseau's political philosophy can be read as a sustained response to and refutation of Hobbes. How the *philosophes* responded to the challenge of Hobbes is a recurrent theme in the recently published survey of the Enlightenment by Anthony Pagden: *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (New York, 2013), esp. 56-64.

commitment to promote human happiness in this world, they sought to rehabilitate the (moderate) passions; and along with that rehabilitation went a corresponding devaluation of fear. Seen from their perspective, fear did not supply an antidote to man's tempestuous nature so much as it poisoned his existence. The less of it, therefore, the better.[22]

The list of fears whose baneful influence the *philosophes* decried was a long one. It included not only the political fears discussed by Montesquieu but also a wide range of religious fears, from the belief in purgatory and hell to the existence of the devil. Not all forms of fear, however, were subject to the same degree of suspicion and critique. To help separate the really pernicious from the relatively benign forms, the *Encyclopédie* developed what could be described as an analytics of fear, a set of categories and definitions that anticipated, in some respects, psychoanalytic distinctions such as the one between "realistic" and "neurotic" fear.[23]
At the bottom of the scale was what the *Encyclopédie* called simply "*peur*." Such an emotion resulted from "the vivid apprehension of some danger" or "the idea of imminent peril." The person who experienced fear of that kind was expressing a healthy survival impulse, "a love of self-preservation" (*amour de notre conservation*) similar to the passion of "self-love" (*amour de soi*) that Rousseau imputed to man in a state of nature. Somewhat less benign because more paralyzing

[22] For a recent discussion of the idea of happiness in the Enlightenment, see Darrin McMahon, *Happiness. A History* (New York, 2006), 197-252. Ronald Schechter observes that the *philosophes* accepted the utility of fear, or more specifically "terror," in certain specific domains—notably, warfare and the punishment of crime. They recognized, in other words, that it was useful to strike fear in the hearts of enemy soldiers and would-be criminals. But recognition of that fact did not negate their overall commitment to reducing the burden of fear in human existence. See Schechter, "Conceptions of Terror in the European Enlightenment."

[23] The distinction between "realistic" and "neurotic" fear (*Angst*) was developed by Freud in the "Twenty-Fifth Introductory Lecture on Psycho-Analysis" (1916-17), then refined and substantially modified in "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety" (1926) and the "Thirty-Second New Introductory Lecture on Psycho-Analysis" (1933). See *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London, 1956-74), 15: 392-411; 20: 77-175; 22: 81-111.

were the extreme forms of fear that the *Encyclopédie* listed in ascending order—first "*frayeur*" (fright), then "*terreur*" (terror). Even those, however, were described in fairly neutral language. The really poisonous form of fear was what the *Encyclopédie*, following Montesquieu in *L'Esprit des lois*, called "*crainte*" (dread). [24] In the article on "crainte," an entry three times as long as the one dealing with "peur, frayeur, and terreur," the Chevalier de Jaucourt, a disciple of Montesquieu and close collaborator of Diderot, laid stress on the utter "uselessness" of such a passion. Far from signaling the approach of danger, "crainte" detached itself from its ostensible object and floated free of temporal coordinates. It did not therefore produce an experience with a sharply drawn beginning and end, so much as a condition, a permanent state of mind, the very horror of which moved Jaucourt to lyrical heights:

> How many people have become miserable from their fear of becoming miserable, how many ill from their fear of falling ill? … Other evils make themselves felt while they exist, and the pain lasts only as long as the cause. But *la crainte* extends into the past, into the present, and into a future that is not and perhaps will never be. The enemy of our repose, she knows only evil—often mistakenly—and, in addition, removes—annihilates, so to speak—the real goods that we enjoy and takes delight in corrupting all the pleasures of life. She is therefore an ingeniously tyrannical passion, one that, far from drawing honey from flowers, sucks out only the bitterness and dashes merrily toward the sad visions that consume her.[25]

Though the feminine pronouns may sound strange in English, they are necessary in order to capture Jaucourt's personification of *la crainte*. Endowed by him with all the attributes of subjecthood—willing, desiring, and knowing—*la crainte* resembled a jealous goddess, avenging fury, or even,

[24] Louis de Jaucourt, "Crainte"; "Peur, Frayeur, Terreur," in *Encyclopédie* (ARTFL), 4 : 428-29; 12: 480. The life-affirming aspect of "peur" comes through even more clearly in the article on "Crainte" than in the article on "Peur, Frayeur, Terreur." In the former, Jaucourt seeks to identify the debilitating effects of "crainte," which he does by contrasting them to the healthy effects of "peur." The claim that "peur" springs from a "love of self-preservation" (*amour de notre conservation*) is contained in the article on "Crainte."

[25] Jaucourt, "Crainte." It must be admitted, however, that the *Encyclopédie* as a whole was not perfectly consistent in its definitions. Diderot contributed an entry on "allarme, terreur, effroi, frayeur, épouvante, crainte, peur, appréhension" (1: 277-78), the definitions of which did not correspond to those given by Jaucourt.

considering its pleasure in doing evil for the sake of evil, the devil. One might say that Jaucourt demonized *la crainte*, though not literally: none of the *encyclopédistes* really believed in the existence of the devil. It was as if *la crainte* had lodged itself in the conceptual space left empty by the withdrawal of the devil from the scene of human suffering.

How to exorcise so devilishly perverse a passion? The simplest solution was, in fact, not to exorcise it at all, but rather to prevent it from developing in the first place. That was why in *Emile*, Rousseau was so insistent on keeping his fictional pupil away from doctors: "I do not know of what illnesses the doctors cure us," he wrote, "but I do know that they give us quite fatal ones: cowardice, pusillanimity, credulousness, and terror of death [*terreur de la mort*]… The lying art of medicine… does less to cure illnesses than to inspire a fear [*effroi*] of them, less to postpone death than to make it felt ahead of time."[26] Rousseau's view of medicine could hardly have been more damning. And yet, ironically, he also borrowed a page from the textbook of eighteenth-century medical wisdom in designing Emile's education. To cure Emile of his fear of the night, Rousseau proposed a remedy modeled on the logic of smallpox inoculation. That remedy was to fight fear with fear, to expose Emile to the night until he ceased to be afraid of it.[27]

Ultimately, the goal of Rousseau's pedagogy was to endow his pupil with strength of character and immunize him against such irrational terrors as would prevent him from becoming a good man and a good citizen. The main culprit, therefore, was not this or that particular fear so

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[26] Rousseau, *Emile ou De l'éducation,* vol. 4 of *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris, 1969), 1: 269-70. The English translation cited in the text comes from: *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York, 1979), 54.

[27] Emile, in *Œuvres complètes*, 2: 381-385. Rousseau did not, however, propose that children should be exposed to the night individually. The technique he advocated was to organize some kind of night game in which children would participate as a group. On the counter-phobic strategies in Rousseau's pedagogy, see Jean Starobinski, "Surmonter la peur," in *La Peur au XVIIIe siècle*, 87-95 (esp. 92-95).

much as fearfulness, a disposition or inclination to be afraid. The *philosophes*, however, could hardly hope to achieve through their publications the task of character formation that Rousseau assigned to the tutor. Authors did not have that kind of power over their readers, nor, of course, could they determine who their readers would be. And no doubt many of those whose superstitious and irrational fears the *philosophes* sought to dispel were the ones least likely to read their works, either because they would never, on principle, open such blasphemous and sacrilegious works, or because they lacked the means to acquire them, or because they did not have the literacy skills to read them. To some extent, the Enlightenment campaign against fear was therefore a matter of preaching to the converted. And yet, even among the converted, victory was by no means assured. The *salonnière* Mme. du Deffand, when asked whether she believed in ghosts, said that she did not but that she feared them nonetheless.[28] Rational conviction alone was not enough to direct the will.

Nor was it enough, in combating political fears, merely to alter the mental outlook of French subjects. Unlike hell, purgatory, demons, witches, ghosts and all the other imaginary fears inspired by religion, police inspectors, police spies, and prisons really existed. At a bare minimum, the remedy for political fears, such as the fear of imprisonment at the hands of the state, required concrete measures to reduce if not eliminate the use of *lettres de cachet*. But how could anyone outside the councils of state hope to bring about such a change in the policies of an absolutist monarchy? The answer was by appealing to "public opinion." Though a relatively new concept, "public opinion" emerged during the final decades of the Old Regime as an important force in

[28] Cited in Richard Alewyn, "Die Lust an der Angst," in *Probleme und Gestalten. Essays* (Frankfurt a/M, 1974), 316. Unfortunately, Alewyn does not supply a reference for Mme du Deffand's *boutade*.

French political life—shadowy, imprecise, and hard to gauge but a force nonetheless.[29] The irony, as we shall see shortly, is that the effort to mobilize public opinion against *lettres de cachet* relied in no small measure on scare tactics, or what I will call the "public use of fear."

II. The Public Use of Fear

Though the origins of *lettres de cachet* went back to the sixteenth century, their use expanded enormously beginning in the reign of Louis XIV. In the eighteenth century, the victims included Jansenist dissidents, magistrates in the parlements, insubordinate workers, undisciplined soldiers, renegade clergymen, and a wide range of authors, from such famous *philosophes* as Voltaire and Diderot to obscure Grub Street hacks who turned out libels for a living. The largest category of victims, however, consisted of individuals imprisoned at the request of their families. Families could address such requests either to the minister in charge of the King's Household, or to the Lieutenant General of Police in Paris, or to the *intendant* in the provinces; and they could make them on the grounds of libertinism, profligacy, or madness—indeed practically any type of behavior that threatened to produce a scandal and that the families wished to see ended as discreetly as possible. In such cases, the costs of maintaining the prisoners fell on the families that had sought the *lettres de cachet*, not on the state; but many of those arrested at the demand of their families found themselves thrown together in the same state prisons as those arrested by direct order of the government. And a few even ended up in the Bastille, a fortress surrounded by such thick walls of

[29] Keith Baker, "Public Opinion as Political Invention," in *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), 167-99; and Mona Ozouf, "L'Opinion publique," in Keith Baker, ed., *The Political Culture of the Old Regime* (Oxford, 1987), 419-434. For a somewhat different approach, which criticizes Baker and Ozouf for treating "public opinion" as merely a discursive construct, see Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York, 1995), esp. 232-46.

mystery and dark legend that it grew into a symbol of Bourbon despotism. Closely associated in the popular imagination with the Bastille, *lettres de cachet* cast a long shadow of fear.[30]

Not so long a shadow, however, as to darken the lives of most French subjects. Estimates place the number of prisoners confined by *lettres de cachet* in 1789 at between 7,000 and 8,000, a large number when one considers that none of those prisoners had been formally accused of any crime, but small when set against the total population of the French kingdom, which was more than 25 million.[31] In addition, it should not be forgotten that for every errant youth or drunken, abusive husband confined against his will, there was a family grateful for the opportunity to have that individual shut away. However it may appear to us today, the use of *lettres de cachet* was not self-evidently an evil in the eighteenth century.[32] Those who believed that it was an evil had to make the case for it. How did they go about doing so?

Perhaps the most powerfully argued case against *lettres de cachet* came from the pen of Lamoignon de Malesherbes, the friend and protector of the *philosophes* who served at various times during his long career as Director of the Book Trade, magistrate in the Cour des Aides, minister of the King's Household, and ultimately defender of Louis XVI during his trial, before he

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[30] On the multiplication of *lettres de cachet* beginning in the reign of Louis XIV, see Claude Quétel, *Les Lettres de Cachet. Une légende noire* (Paris, 2011). According to Quétel's estimates (*Les Lettres de Cachet*, 318), anywhere between one and two hundred thousand French subjects were imprisoned for an average duration of two to three years in the period stretching from the reign of Louis XIV to the outbreak of the Revolution. The vast majority of them would have been held in a religious community, house of confinement (*hôpital général*), or beggars' hospice (*dépôt de mendicité*) rather than in a famous state prison like the Bastille. There is no doubt, however, that *lettres de cachet* were closely associated, in the popular imagination, with the Bastille, the dark reputation of which is described by Cotret (*La Bastille à prendre*) and by Lüsebrink and Reichardt (*Die "Bastille"*). On the requests for *lettres de cachet* by families in Paris during the eighteenth century, see in particular Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le Desordre des familles. Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille* (Paris, 1982).

[31] Quétel, *Les Lettres de cachet*, 318.

[32] Vincent Milliot (*Un Policier des Lumières*, 294-97) discusses the defense of *lettres de cachet* offered by J. C. P. Lenoir, Lieutenant General of Police under Louis XVI.

himself fell victim to the Terror in 1794. In several remonstrances that he wrote on behalf of the Cour des Aides, first to Louis XV in 1767, then to Louis XVI in 1775, Malesherbes offered a scathing indictment of the use of *lettres de cachet*—or rather of their *misuse*, for he did not contest the principle that the king might have to circumvent the normal course of justice in exceptional circumstances.[33] With the multiplication of *lettres de cachet*, however, the king had no knowledge at all of most of the extrajudicial arrest orders that went out under his name. Ministers and their numerous underlings diverted the *lettres de cachet* from their intended function and used them instead to pursue their own personal interests and private acts of vengeance. Even worse, they did so in secret, with hardly any possibility of being called to account. For Malesherbes, secrecy was the enemy of justice, publicity its chief support. And he was convinced that in "the age of printing," the normal system of justice in France had in fact become more open, transparent and public than ever before. Not only the texts of laws but also trial briefs—the lawyers' *mémoires judiciaires*—were now printed, he observed: "Judges themselves may be judged by an informed public, and this judgment is much more severe and just when it is exercised through calm and reflective reading than when opinions are carried away in a tumultuous assembly."[34] Immune to such public scrutiny, *lettres de cachet* were the very negation of justice.

The remonstrances in which Malesherbes condemned the misuse of *lettres de cachet* can be tied to a particular view of print culture, one that contrasted the sound judgments reached "through calm and reflective reading" with the volatile opinions of a "tumultuous assembly." Such

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[33] On Malesherbes's criticisms of *lettres de cachet*, see Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham, 1991), 34-36; and Quétel, *Les Lettres de cachet*, 323-25.
[34] The English translation of the 1775 remonstrance by the Cour des Aides is drawn from: Keith Michael Baker, ed., *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, vol. 7 of *University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization*, ed. John W. Boyer and Julius Kirscher (Chicago, 1987), 69-70.

a view had broad appeal in the late eighteenth century—from Kant's famous essay, "What Is Enlightenment?" which connected the domain of print with "the public use of reason," to Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau du progrès de l'esprit humain*, which associated the invention of the printing press with the development of science and the spread of Enlightenment. In all those accounts, the slow, reasoned reflection encouraged by print stood in sharp opposition to the culture of the spoken word, a domain in which rumors ran rampant and emotions reigned supreme.[35]

So sharp an opposition, however, hardly did justice to the diversity of rhetorical styles that coexisted within Enlightenment print culture. Even the published lawyers' briefs—the *mémoires judiciaires* that Malesherbes associated with "calm and reflective reading"—were very far from eschewing emotional appeals. As Sara Maza has shown, the authors of those briefs sought to gain sympathy for their clients by manipulating the narrative techniques of melodrama. They cast their clients as the protagonists of moralistic, sentimental tales—as Virtue undone, or Innocence betrayed—less to provoke "calm and reflective reading" than to elicit tearful compassion.[36] Of course the victims of *lettres de cachet* did not have the benefit of lawyers writing briefs on their behalf while they were in prison. And neither were they allowed to speak of their arrest and detention after their release. Prisoners who had been detained in such state prisons as the Bastille or the Château de Vincennes were made to swear an oath of silence as a condition of their liberation. Not all of them, however, honored their oath. In the early 1780s, two recently freed victims of *lettres de cachet*—the comte de Mirabeau and Simon-Nicholas-Henri Linguet—

[35] Roger Chartier, "Les Représentations de l'écrit," in *Culture écrite et société. L'Ordre des livres (XIVe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris, 1996), 20-26; Elizabeth Eisenstein, *Divine Art, Infernal Machine: The Reception of Printing in the West from First Impression to the Sense of an Ending* (Philadelphia, 2011), 149-51.
[36] Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The causes célèbres of Pre-Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993).

published blockbuster bestsellers in which they described the torments of their imprisonment. In these exposés of life in jail, Mirabeau and Linguet sought to dramatize the iniquity of *lettres de cachet* for a broad public of readers, the vast majority of whom would have had no direct experience of extrajudicial imprisonment. Their depictions of prison life gave concrete shape to the vision of *crainte* evoked by Jaucourt: the image of fear as a relentless and implacable torturer.

III. The Carceral Imaginary

Mirabeau and Linguet took very different paths to prison. The former was an aristocratic libertine, arrested in 1777 and confined for forty-two months in the Château de Vincennes at the request of his father for a variety of scandals, including the abduction of a married woman, with whom he had run off to Holland. The latter was a disbarred lawyer and muck-raking journalist, imprisoned in the Bastille from September 1780 to May 1782 for having antagonized the maréchal de Duras, a powerful and influential *académicien* whom he had managed to offend both publicly in his journal and in a personal letter. In addition, Mirabeau and Linguet differed quite significantly in their political views. The future defender of an English-style constitution in the National Assembly, Mirabeau followed Montesquieu in regarding "despotism" as the supreme evil.[37] Linguet, on the other hand, saw the Crown as a potential ally in the fight against privilege, a form of injustice that he denounced in its many institutional incarnations, from the Order of Barristers, to the Booksellers' Guild, to the Académie française.[38] So great were the differences between them

[37] There is a large body of literature on Mirabeau, the hero of the Tennis Court Oath and leader of the Constituent Assembly during the early phase of the Revolution. For a brief sketch covering both "halves" of his life, before the Revolution and after, see the article by François Furet in Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds., *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 265-71.
[38] Linguet was an enemy of most of the *philosophes*. A self-styled man of the people, he attacked (some would say "libeled") the established *philosophes* in the manner of Rousseau for their

that they would have been very unlikely to see one another as partners in a common struggle. And yet the works they published on the basis of their experiences in prison—Mirabeau's *Des Lettres de cachet et des prisons d'état*, which was published in two volumes in 1782, and Linguet's *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, published in one slender volume the following year—reveal a number of important similarities.

To begin with, both publications emerged from major centers of clandestine French publishing—Mirabeau's from Neuchâtel in western Switzerland, Linguet's from London. Printed at exceptionally high pressruns and in multiple editions, they were prohibited in France, but smuggled into the kingdom and circulated widely through the networks of the underground book trade.[39] Secondly, both authors used their personal experiences of imprisonment to mount general

complicity with privileged institutions. David Bell has described him as the embodiment of a new type of barrister who emerged during and after the Maupeou reforms at the end of the reign of Louis XV, the lawyer who aspired to a highly visible public role. See Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of a Political Elite in Old Regime France* (Oxford, 1994), 134-63. What Linguet was *not*, despite his sometimes slanderous comments on the subject of the *philosophes*, was a counter-Enlightenment author of the kind described by Darrin McMahon in his *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford, 2001). For a general overview of Linguet's career, see Darline Levy, *The Ideas and Careers of Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet: A Study in Eighteenth-Century French Politics* (Urbana, 1980). Discussions of *Mémoires sur la Bastille* are contained in: Cotret, *La Bastille à prendre*, 119-26; and Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *Die "Bastille,"* 29-33.

[39] According to Lüsebrink and Reichardt (*Die "Bastille,"* 28-29), the original edition of *Lettres de cachet*, published by Jonas Fauche in Neuchâtel, was printed at the staggeringly high pressrun of 15,000 copies; *Mémoires sur la Bastille* appeared in six different French-language editions as well as in Linguet's political journal, *Annales politiques, civiles et littéraires du dix-huitième siècle*. On the circulation of those works through the underground book trade in France, see Darnton, "A Clandestine Bookseller in the Provinces," in *The Literary Underground*, 139. Darnton's study analyzes the orders of a bookseller in Troyes, a clandestine dealer named Mauvelain who received books from the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN). The recently published on-line database devoted to the STN (Simon Burrows, Mark Curran, Vincent Hiribarren, Sarah Kattau and Henry Merivale, *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe Project, 1769-1794* [http://fbtee.uws.edu.au/stn/, 6 May 2014] ["**FBTEE Project**"]) reveals that the STN did not always fill Mauvelain's orders exactly: Mauvelain ordered 30 copies of the work by Linguet but received only 10; he ordered 21 of the work by Mirabeau but received only 6. The STN did not fill the orders for the simple reason that it did not have enough copies of the

attacks on *lettres de cachet*. Linguet concluded his work by appealing to Louis XVI to destroy the Bastille—an appeal echoed in the frontispiece to the London edition of his work, which depicted a statue of Louis XVI on the site of the Bastille with the ruined, crumbling walls of the fortress in the background and grateful subjects gazing worshipfully at the statue in the foreground. It seems doubtful, however, whether Linguet really believed that Louis XVI would heed such a call. In effect, the target of his work was the same as Mirabeau's: not to reach the king directly but rather, as Mirabeau put it, "to sway [public opinion]," which "sooner or later exerts a great influence." And to achieve that goal, both of them pursued the same rhetorical strategy: they sought to make readers participate imaginatively in the horrors of their imprisonment.[40]

What made the imprisonment so horrible? Conditions in the Bastille and the Château de Vincennes were not nearly so harsh as they were in such squalid, overcrowded *hôpitaux* as Bicêtre or La Salpêtrière, the all-purpose institutions of confinement into which were dumped a hybrid population of beggars, vagabonds, petty criminals, the aged, infirm, and insane. Those institutions, discussed by Michel Foucault in his famous account of the Great Confinement (*Grand Renfermenent*), housed the poor, the abandoned, and the downtrodden, whereas the Bastille and the Château de Vincennes were generally reserved for prisoners of elevated social rank and some financial means.[41] Mirabeau, a nobleman supported by a pension from his father, was not exposed

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books in stock. Neither of those books were its own editions. But that does not alter the fact that Mauvelain registered a strong demand for the works. Finally, it is worth noting that the works of Linguet and Mirabeau also circulated widely outside of France. On their diffusion in Germany, see Jeffrey Freedman, *Books Without Borders in Enlightenment Europe: French Cosmopolitanism and German Literary Markets* (Philadelphia, 2012), 227-30.

[40] The reference to the influence of "public opinion" is in *Des Lettres de cachet et des prisons d'état*, 2: 95. Note that the first volume of Mirabeau's work is devoted primarily to attacking *lettres de cachet* on historical and philosophic grounds. It is in the second volume that Mirabeau draws on his personal experiences of imprisonment in order to depict the horrors of prison life.

[41] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1965), 38-64. Foucault's *Grand-Renfermement* thesis has inspired

to any great material privations. Though he alluded once to a "hunger dungeon," a cell in which prisoners had to survive for a certain period of time on a diet of bread and water as punishment for some infraction, he did not describe the punishment in any detail, nor did he claim to have endured it himself. In fact, his own diet seems to have been quite plentiful, to judge from his complaints on the subject of food, which focused on the dryness of the meats and the lack of seasoning in the sauces.[42] By comparison, the material hardships of Linguet's imprisonment seemed severe. He complained bitterly of the cold in the winter, the heat in the summer, a moth infestation in the autumn, and the pestilential odor rising up from the sewers of the rue St. Antoine. But even he did not claim that he had ever been at risk of starving. Both Mirabeau and Linguet described the conditions of their imprisonment in such a way as to suggest that the principal object of their punishment had been to torture the 'soul' rather than the body.[43]

The punishment began with the experience of entering the prison. To penetrate into the interior of Vincennes or the Bastille was to pass over into another world, one completely cut off from the world outside. Mirabeau went to great lengths, as we saw earlier, to describe the many physical barriers the prisoner would traverse on the way to his cell—the moat, towers, walls, gates, and the multitude of doors.[44] Those barriers symbolized the autarchic nature of prison life. Isolated

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a good deal of critical commentary. That debate, however, is not directly relevant to the subject of this article precisely because conditions in the hôpitaux were so profoundly different from those described by Mirabeau and Linguet. I am currently at work on a more general study of fear in Enlightenment France, one chapter of which will be devoted to the fear of incarceration in the hôpitaux among poor and working-class Parisians.

[42] On the "hunger dungeon" (*cachot de la faim*), see *Des Lettres de cachet*, 2: 25. Mirabeau complains repeatedly about the poor quality of the food, which he attributes to the financial peculations of the prison commander Rougemont.

[43] Linguet speaks of "tortures of the soul" (*ces tortures de l'âme*) and says that the goal of imprisonment in the Bastille is "to tear apart souls" (*déchirer les âmes*): *Mémoires sur la Bastille, et la détention de l'auteur dans ce château royal depuis le 27 septembre 1780 jusqu'au 19 mai 1782* (London, 1783), 55, 57.

[44] *Des Lettres de cachet*, 2: 43-45.

and turned in on itself, the prison was a self-contained regime in which the prison commander, his guards, and the ubiquitous turnkeys ruled over the prisoners like so many sultans, satraps, and vizirs. Unfettered by laws or ethical restraints, they did to the prisoners whatever they pleased—or rather whatever pleased them. And what pleased them above all was tormenting the prisoners, as both Linguet and Mirabeau discovered when they were searched on their arrival. The search—*la fouille*—functioned like some grim rite of passage, an initiation into the malign and sordid universe of prison life: "He [i.e., the prisoner] is as surprised as he is terrified [*effrayé*] to find himself delivered over to the searches and to the groping [*tâtonnements*] of four men whose appearance belies their official duties and makes their actions all the more shameful," Linguet wrote—"four men who wear uniforms such as would lead one to expect some show of consideration and who are decorated with marks of distinction that presuppose… unblemished service."[45] The sexual nature of the "shameful" actions—*tâtonnements*—to which Linguet alluded was hard to miss. Indeed, the whole atmosphere of the prison seemed to be suffused with a kind of predatory sexuality, a point that both Linguet and Mirabeau conveyed by playing on the sexual connotations of the verb "*jouir*" (to enjoy): "The prison commander," Mirabeau wrote, "is an absolute tyrant who takes pleasure [*jouit*] when he is able to put prisoners in cells, load them with chains, and make them feel the heavy weight of his iron scepter… To inflict suffering is his sweetest pleasure [*faire du mal est sa plus douce jouissance*]." The prison guards, Linguet observed, know quite well that the treatment they inflict is bound to produce despair: "That is one of their most cherished pleasures [*c'est une de leurs plus précieuses jouissances*]."[46]

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[45] *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, 64. Mirabeau also describes the shame and humiliation of the "search" (*la fouille*), an experience that he recalls with "indignation and pain." See *Des Lettres de cachet*, 2: 47.
[46] *Des Lettres de cachet*, 2: 42, 60; *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, 76.

Separated by impenetrable barriers from the outside world and subjected to the omnipotent will of their jailers, the prisoners were also isolated from one another—in fact, their exposure to anyone other than their turnkeys was kept to a bare minimum. If one of them had to leave his cell for an interrogation or medical treatment in the "main building" (*corps de logis*), Linguet explained, his turnkey would make a noise to alert others of the prisoner's passage, and all the curtains, shudders, or blinds of any windows in his path would close before him. In that way, the jailers conveyed to the prisoner the sentiment that "he no longer exists in the world for anyone other than them."[47] It was a sentiment inextricably bound up with feelings of utter helplessness and imminent doom: "Every time the door of his cell is opened, the lugubrious jangling of the locks… can sound to the prisoner like the precursor of a death sentence, a signal for the arrival of silent executioners summoned to kill him."[48] Of course Linguet was not in fact murdered in his cell, as readers of his work would inevitably realize. To live in constant anticipation of being murdered, however, was a torture in itself. Isolated and powerless, the prisoner could never know from one moment to the next what would happen to him. He existed in a state of permanent anxiety.

In such a state, the prisoner's mind would float free of its moorings in external reality. A stray sound or smell was enough to turn it loose. Then the mind would supply images corresponding to the sounds and smells; those images would call up other associations, and so on without any possibility of confirmation or refutation. Linguet recalled, for example, how on one occasion he had been awakened at 2 o'clock in the morning by a great commotion in the staircase. People stopped at the cell beneath him. Words were exchanged, groaning could be heard, and there was much coming and going. It was possible, he thought to himself, that a prisoner had been taken

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[47] *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, 71-73.
[48] *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, 54.

ill and a doctor called to treat him, but equally possible that an executioner had come to kill him—there was no way to know. Then, three days later at the same hour, he heard another noise in front of the same door. This time he detected the sound of what he took to be a coffin being carried into the cell and a body placed inside, followed soon after by the smell of juniper. He did not explain how he identified the sound as that of a coffin, nor did he describe his reaction to the smell of juniper (a plant used widely in early-modern Europe to fumigate rooms infected with Plague). He left it to the reader to imagine how terrifying that odor would have been to a prisoner lying alone in the dark at 2 o'clock in the morning.[49]

Similarly, Linguet described how he had come to believe that his food was being poisoned, and how such a belief had caused him to experience the symptoms of poisoning. Afterward, he realized that his fear may have been unfounded, yet he blamed the Bastille for having created the conditions in which such suspicions could take root and flourish: "even if those apprehensions and those symptoms had been merely the fruit of an overwrought imagination, is it not already a veritable crime that the Bastille occasions such fears [*craintes*] and places the prisoner in a position of absolute powerlessness to defend against the secret machinations that could justify them?"[50] Even worse than the physical hardships of life in the Bastille were the phantoms of the imagination that such a life awakened.

By candidly describing the phantoms that had tormented him during his imprisonment, Linguet invited readers to consider just how tenuous was the mind's hold on external reality, and how thin the frontier separating reason from madness. Whether deliberately or not, he tapped a deep well of epistemological anxiety among philosophers of the Enlightenment. No less a figure

[49] *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, 75.
[50] *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, 86.

than Immanuel Kant worried repeatedly about how to distinguish objective experience from the visions of religious fanatics and the delusions of madmen.[51] Although Linguet did not address that issue in the language of philosophy, he dramatized it vividly in his narrative. Through his astute psychological self-reporting, he showed that an individual cut off from exchanges with other human beings had no reliable way to tell whether he was sane or insane. The experience of isolation opened onto the abyss of solipsism.

Mirabeau did not plunge his readers into quite such terrifying depths. In fact, his work even offered a few moments of comic relief: darkly humorous, bitingly sarcastic passages in which the cupidity, vanity, and overblown pretensions of the prison commander Rougemont, Mirabeau's nemesis, were held up to ridicule. But Mirabeau too insisted on the connection between imprisonment and madness, claiming that prisoners could easily lose their minds from "the horror of a solitude in which they encounter at every instant the figments of an imagination sharpened by pain." And like Linguet, he laid particular stress on the psychological torments of confinement—"the tedium of being alone," "all the horrors of uncertainty," and the lack of "correspondence," "distractions," and "exercise."[52] For all their differences, Mirabeau and Linguet came to remarkably similar conclusions about what made the experience of imprisonment such a torture. The question was how readers would react emotionally to their descriptions of that suffering.

One possible reaction was pity, an emotion of the kind that Rousseau considered to be a natural response to the sight of someone else's pain. The rhetoric of both Linguet and Mirabeau, however, aimed to produce something more like sympathy in the literal sense of "suffering with."

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[51] Kant's preoccupation with the question of how to distinguish objective experience from mere fantasy went back to his pre-critical writings—above all, *Träume eines Geistersehers* [Dreams of a Spirit Seer] (1766), his response to the mystic Swedenborg. See Hartmut Böhme und Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft*, 233-74; and Begemann, *Furcht und Angst*, 261-73.
[52] *Des Lettres de cachet*, 1: 267, 262.

Its goal was to inspire in readers the same terrors as were evoked on the page, a duplication of emotional states similar to that which Diderot's *drame bourgeois* strove to accomplish in the theater. Just as the *drame bourgeois* invited the theater audience to feel the pain and sorrow of the tragic hero or heroine represented on the stage, so Linguet and Mirabeau encouraged their readers to identify with the victims of *lettres de cachet*. That many of those readers did not consider themselves to be at any risk of arrest should not matter, Mirabeau wrote: "What man of feeling will need to think of his own situation in order to be frozen with fear at the thought of arbitrary arrest warrants?" (… *quel homme sensible aura besoin de faire ce retour sur lui-même pour être glacé d'effroi en pensant aux ordres arbitraires*?)[53]

The two former prisoners used various rhetorical techniques to achieve their goal of reproducing in readers the emotional states they depicted on the page. To begin with, both of them narrated their experiences of imprisonment primarily in the third person. Thus the victim of *lettres de cachet* was not the authorial "I," a singular individual, but rather an impersonal "he"—"the prisoner," a role that readers could step into and inhabit imaginatively. Although Linguet used the first-person to recount such intensely personal and unique experiences as the terrifying episode of being awakened at two in the morning, he reverted to the third-person just as soon as he was describing an experience common to all prisoners such as the dreaded *fouille*.

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[53] *Des Lettres de cachet*, 1: 96. Mirabeau's appeal to "l'homme sensible" echoed the rhetoric of sentimentalism, an emotional style that set a high value on compassion. There is a vast and growing body of research devoted to sentimentalism. See, among others, William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), 141-210; Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 2014); Anne Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears: Sensibility and Sentimentality in France* (London, 1991); and David Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, 1994).

Secondly, both Linguet and Mirabeau went to great lengths to emphasize that the same fate to which they had fallen victim could strike anyone. "Which is the inhabitant of countries in which *lettres de cachet* exist who does not have a sharp sword suspended above his head?" Mirabeau asked. All that was required to become the victim of *lettres de cachet* was a bit of bad luck. It was enough to catch the eye of a pretty woman who happened to be the mistress of a powerful and jealous minister, or to be in the way of a courtier whose intrigues required your removal. The next thing you knew you were being spirited off to prison. And once you were locked away, immured in total secrecy and dead to the outside world, there was nothing further you could do about it. "Abandon all hope, you who enter here" (*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi che' ntrate*), the same words Dante found written on the gates of hell would, Mirabeau thought, make a fitting epigraph to be displayed above the entrances of state prisons.[54]

Finally, and most dramatically, both Linguet and Mirabeau sought to evoke fear in the minds of readers by comparing imprisonment to the most terrifying form of confinement imaginable: that of being buried alive. Burial metaphors abounded in both of their works. Mirabeau compared the chateau de Vincennes to a vast "sepulcher" and said of himself that he had been "buried for fifteen months in the most austere solitude"; Linguet spoke of the Bastille as a "grave in which the prisoner was buried alive," of the isolation in which he had been held as a "funerary shroud," and of himself after his liberation as a "new Lazarus."[55]

While readers today might be inclined to dismiss such metaphors as little more than a literary conceit, those images would have resonated with great force in the second half of the eighteenth century. At mid-century, doctors had suddenly begun to issue dire warnings about the

[54] *Des Lettres de cachet*, 1: 94.
[55] *Des Lettres de cachet*, 2: 55, 95; *Mémoires sur la Bastille*, 48, 54.

difficulty of distinguishing between "seeming death" and real death and the consequent danger of premature burial. In dozens of treatises, pamphlets, and journal articles, they argued that the only infallible sign of death was the putrefaction of the corpse, and that unless burial were delayed until the onset of putrefaction, mistakes were inevitable and many unsuspecting victims would awaken to find themselves entombed beneath the earth—indeed, those works suggested that a great many people *were* enduring that horrific fate. The medical arguments were carefully reasoned, and yet the doctors did not rely on reasoning alone to make their point, any more than did Linguet and Mirabeau. They also told stories, hundreds of lurid, blood-curdling tales of people who had been buried alive or who had narrowly escaped such a fate. Those tales appear to have had a profound impact on some readers. The salon hostess and wife of the French finance minister Suzanne Necker, for example, was so terrified of being buried alive that she made her husband promise not to bury her until he had attempted a multitude of reanimation techniques, including cutting and burning her seemingly lifeless body.[56] By piggybacking, so to speak, on the horror-mongering of the doctors, Linguet and Mirabeau used one fear to support another.

Did such scare tactics actually succeed? Of course, one can never say precisely how great was the impact on public opinion of any particular work, even such spectacular bestsellers as *Mémoires sur la Bastille* and *Lettres de cachet*.[57] There can be little doubt, however, that

[56] On the fear of premature burial in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Jeffrey Freedman, "The Limits of Tolerance: Jews, the Enlightenment, and the Fear of Premature Burial," in *Into Print: Limits and Legacies of the Enlightenment. Essays in Honor of Robert Darnton*, ed. Charles Walton (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2011), 177-97. On Mme. Necker, see Antoine de Baecque, *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths under the French Revolution*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York, 2001), 184-203. On the fear of premature burial across the ages, see Jan Bondeson, *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (New York, 2001).

[57] That Linguet's work created quite a stir is clear from the pamphlet war it provoked—a reaction documented in the underground journal *Correspondance secrete, politique et littéraire* published by Louis-François Mettra in Cologne: Lüsebrink und Reichhardt, *Die "Bastille,"* 32. According

Mirabeau's stated goal of turning public opinion against *lettres de cachet* was in fact achieved by the eve of the Revolution. Nearly all the *cahiers de doléances* drafted by the bailiwick assemblies of the Third Estate, as well as many from the First and Second Estates, called for their abolition.[58] In November 1789, the National Assembly created a special committee on *lettres de cachet* under the direction of none other than Mirabeau. And, in March 1790, the Assembly decreed their formal abolition. Even before that, however, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, adopted in August 1789, had, in effect, outlawed the practice of extrajudicial imprisonment: "No man may be accused, arrested, or detained except in cases determined by the law and according to the forms it has prescribed," the Assembly famously proclaimed in Article 7. The principle of legal due process defended by the *philosophes* and supported through the public use of fear seemed finally to have prevailed. [59]

IV. From the Old Regime Prison to the *cité sadienne*

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to Sara Maza, Linguet and Mirabeau supplied many of the themes for the widely disseminated judicial *mémoire* published in 1786 by the lawyer Lacretelle on behalf of his client the comte de Sanois, a victim of *lettre de cachet*. To win sympathy for Sanois, Lacretelle described the sadistic jailers and the mental torments to which his client had been subject during his imprisonment. See Maza, *Private Lives*, 280. On the Sanois case, see also Lüsebrink, *Kriminalität und Literatur im Frankreich des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1983), 227-28.

[58] Quétel, *Les Lettres de cachet*, 342. The "public" whose opinion the *cahiers* expressed should not be conflated with the entirety of the French population. According to Sarah Maza (*Private Lives*, 87), lawyers often made up between 70 and 90 percent of the members of the local committees that drafted the *cahiers* in the provinces. In such cases, one would expect the concerns of lawyers to have predominated.

[59] For a similar argument as applied to the doctrine of natural rights more generally, see Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights. A History* (New York, 2007). According to Hunt, the emotional identification of readers with the characters in sentimental novels contributed to developing their sense of a common humanity, a feeling of kinship with unknown others that was a necessary condition for the emergent ideology of universal rights.

It would be nice to conclude on so triumphant a note, with danger eliminated and fear laid to rest. Unfortunately, the triumph was short-lived. The fear of arbitrary arrest came back with a vengeance in September 1793 when the Convention adopted the Law of Suspects. That law, one of the most important establishing the government of the Terror, defined the category of "suspect" so broadly that hardly anyone could feel safe. Of course those arrested as suspects during the Terror were not, strictly speaking, victims of extrajudicial imprisonment. They were brought before revolutionary tribunals and, if found guilty, executed in public. But such a distinction would have seemed like legal sophistry to the hundreds of thousands of French citizens who had ran afoul of their neighborhood Watch Committees. Those citizens lived in dread anticipation of a late-night knock on the door.[60]

With the dismantling of the Terror came a flood of publications depicting the torments visited on its victims. Such works as *Almanach des prisons* by Philippe-Edme Coittant, published in 1794, and *Histoire des prisons de Paris* by Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, a four-volume collection published three years later, invited readers to enter imaginatively into the dark, squalid confines of the Conciergerie and other Revolutionary prisons.[61] While perpetuating the memory of the Terror, those works echoed the prison literature of the Old Regime, as did the increasingly popular genre of Gothic novels, which made extensive use of the fears evoked by Linguet and

[60] Studies of the Terror are too numerous to be listed. The recently published study of Timothy Tackett evokes the atmosphere of fear prevailing in the capital at the height of the so-called Great Terror during the late spring and early summer of the Year II. By then, according to Tackett, 300,000 "suspects" were either awaiting trial in prison or guarded in their homes: *The Coming of the Terror*, 330, 334. Of course, the fear of arrest during the Terror was a fear not just of imprisonment but also of the guillotine.

[61] Philippe-Edme Coittant, *Almanach des prisons* (Paris, 1794); and Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, *Histoire des prisons de Paris*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1797). The references to Coittant and Nougaret I owe to Howard Brown of Binghamton University, who is working on the memory of the Terror during Thermidor and the Directory. My thanks to Prof. Brown for providing me with those references.

Mirabeau—notably, the fears of isolation, madness, sexual violence, and premature burial.[62] Through the medium of the Gothic, carceral images originating in the polemical literature of the Enlightenment were transmitted to the nineteenth century, an age in which "disciplinary power," to use the concept of Michel Foucault, extended the regime of confinement to a wide range of social institutions, from military barracks and boarding schools to work houses, factories, orphanages, reformatories, insane asylums, and penitentiaries.[63]

Plus ça change… ? Before leaping to that conclusion, we should take note of the fact that the authors of Gothic novels used the fear of imprisonment for their own distinctive purposes—not to sway public opinion, as Linguet and Mirabeau had done, but to elicit a frisson of aesthetic pleasure. Such a hybrid emotion, which the German literary critic Richard Alewyn described as "pleasure in fear" (*Die Lust an der Angst*), poses difficult problems of interpretation.[64] It may be, as Kant argued in his analysis of the sublime, that the aesthetic enjoyment of fear is only possible from a position of relative safety: that fear is cultivated in fiction when it has diminished in everyday life. It may equally be that the pleasure of reading Gothic novels is a defensive reaction

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[62] The most famous Gothic novels were of course English—notably, Mathew Lewis's *The Monk*, published in 1796. But Lewis visited Paris in 1791, and his novel came out in a French translation just one year after its original publication in English. In the first half of the nineteenth century, French authors made some noteworthy contributions to the Gothic genre, from Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) to Pétrus Borel's *Madame Putiphar* (1838), a work inspired by the prison memoirs of the renowned escape artist Jean-Henri Latude. On Borel and the links connecting Old Regime prison literature to the Gothic imaginary, as well as the place of carceral images in French Romanticism more generally, see Victor Brombert, "Pétrus Borel, Prison Horrors, and the Gothic Tradition," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 2, no. 2 (1969): 143-152; and *La Prison romantique. Essai sur l'imaginaire* (Paris, 1975).
[63] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135-308. According to Foucault's analysis, "disciplinary institutions" are designed to facilitate surveillance, and thereby instill in their inhabitants the feeling of being perpetually watched. From that standpoint, neither the Bastille nor the Château de Vincennes as described by Linguet and Mirabeau would have qualified as "disciplinary institutions": the two former prisoners evoked feelings of solitude but not of being subject to surveillance.
[64] Alewyn, "Die Lust an der Angst," 307-30.

to ward off feelings of fear. In any case, the aesthetic use of fear in Gothic fiction should be distinguished from the public use of fear in the Enlightenment.

And yet the distinction between those two uses should not be drawn so sharply as to obscure the similarities. The works of Linguet and Mirabeau were, as already noted, bestsellers. In light of their success in the literary market, it seems likely that at least some readers found their representations of prison life darkly fascinating as well as terrifying, or perhaps fascinating *because* terrifying. The revelation of secret worlds hidden within enclosed, walled-in spaces—what Peter Brooks has described as the "claustral" theme of eighteenth-century literature—held a strong fascination throughout the period, from the harem of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* to the convent of Diderot's *La Religieuse*.[65] Those spaces evoked fear and desire in equal measure, and so also, in its own way, did the more sinister fictional universe of the Marquis de Sade, an author who was imprisoned at both Vincennes and the Bastille and whose life and work exemplified the connection between the prisons of the Old Regime and the genre of Gothic fiction. The imaginary space Roland Barthes called the "*cité sadienne*"—a fully self-sufficient and hermetically sealed world with its own time, morals, population and practices—was prefigured in the autarchic image of prison life offered by Linguet and Mirabeau.[66] Behind the thick walls of the *cité sadienne* lurked both the terror of annihilation and the thrill of transgression.

[65] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, 1995), 19, 209n26. See also, on representations of cloisters, Robert Shackleton, "The Cloister Theme in French Preromanticism," in *The French Mind. Studies in Honour of Gustave Rudler*, ed. Will Moore, Rhoda Sutherland, and Enid Starkie (Oxford, 1952), 170-86.
[66] Roland Barthes, "Sade I," in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris, 1971), 23. The connection between Linguet and Sade is also noted by Cotret: *Bastille à prendre*, 121.

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