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Roussel/Capet/Walpole

In 1800, in the Passage du Commerce, the heart of the printing district in Paris, a book came out of the workshop of the printer Lerouge. It was sold in the equally fashionable Galérie de Bois, in the Palais Royal. It was a book about an English King, Richard III. A French translation of a better known English text, the writing came from an old notebook found among a pile of scrap papers waiting to be burnt. The language was considered by French readers to be un-idiomatic, and of little stylistic merit.[1] It was advertised reasonably widely, it seems; a publisher as far away as Hamburg decided to include it in a list of recent Parisian publications in the year 1801.[2] The book, entitled *Règne de Richard III, ou Doutes Historiques sur les Crimes qui lui sont Imputés*, did achieve some level of fame- it has certainly made it into the occasional side note in history in the two centuries since- but did not make it any further than that; it appears to have only received a single printing. Despite this, the book presents an intriguing picture of how three different personalities and historical figures came together as writer, translator and editor in an unlikely combination.

The editor of the work was, in fact, anonymous. He wrote an introduction at the beginning of the book, but in it he gave few clues as to his identity. He did not reveal himself until two years later in a writing of his own, *Le Château des Tuileries*, as Jean-Pierre-Alexis

[1] See Roussel's preface to the text, and later francophone scholars' comments on the style; the translation was heavy with anglicisms, from turns of phrase to words which were fully borrowed from English and Francisized. The *in*-prefix words (e.g. *in*certain, *in*compréhensible, *in*connu) come under particular scrutiny for this, as apparently the French language did not officially prefix words in this way until later in the 19th century.

[2] "Le Règne de Richard III". *Journal Littéraire et Bibliographique*. (Hamburg: February 1801) 104-109.

Roussel d'Épinol. Roussel was a man of many names in his own publishing records, often publishing only under his initials, or under a moniker; even within modern scholarship nobody seems to agree on the spelling of his names, or on which of his last two names is his real surname. [3] It is therefore not out of place that he might leave off his name entirely in a book. Of all the three participants in the creation of this book, Roussel remains the most mysterious link in the story. Ironically enough, his inconsistencies in naming himself throughout his published works made him a difficult individual to trace even during his own lifetime- in 1812 he had to publish a letter to the editors in *Le Journal de l'Empire* after his biography, included in the most recent *Dictionnaire historique, critique et bibliographique,* claimed that he had died in 1802.[4] Despite his need to confirm that he was, in fact, not dead, Roussel defended his purposely vague attribution habits with a cryptic quote from Ovid: "Bene qui latuit bene vixit".[5]

The question that emerges is what might have been his interest in a history about a 15th century English king? The fact is that the contents of the text did not particularly matter to Roussel; his interest was in the author, not the subject. According to his own account, Roussel found the original manuscript in a pile of wastepaper from Louis XVI's imprisonment in the Conciergerie, which he was tasked with destroying after the former King's execution in 1793. He writes:

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[3] I will be referring to him as Roussel throughout the text. As a native of Epinol, I find it most likely that his surname was Roussel and, coming to Paris from Epinol, he added this final element to his name then, perhaps to adopt a more high-status sounding name.

[4]Roussel d'Épinal, Pierre-Joseph-Alexis. "Au Redacteur". *Le Journal de l'Empire*, September 28th, 1812. p. 4. The authors of his bibliography had also apparently claimed that his name was L.C. Roussel, although L.C. was actually an abbreviation for "Le Citoyen", which he had added in the title page of one of his books. Nothing is new when it comes to people being confused by Roussel's inconsistencies.

[5] Ibid.

> "On alloit le bruler comme papier inutile, lorsque je reconnus l'écriture de Louis XVI. Sans rien dire, je le pris indifféremment et le mis dans ma poche. Rentré chez moi, je me hâtai de parcourir cet écrit ; j'en confrontai l'écriture avec des lettres de l'infortuné monarque. C'étoit bien la même chose…"[6]

After his more thorough reading at home, which he later described as intensely laborious, given how sloppy and difficult the King's handwriting was to read[7], Roussel found a note that Louis had made in the margin identifying the text as a translation of an English work, which he promptly tracked down: the *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III*, by Horace Walpole, a celebrated British author and antiquarian. It appeared that Louis had worked on the manuscript in two stages over several years: the last would most likely have been after he was deposed, during his time in prison before his execution in 1793. Thus Louis did not write the book. He was simply the translator, just as Roussel was simply the editor.

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The story of the book really began in the city of London, England, thirty-two years earlier. In 1768, Horace Walpole caused a stir in the community of British historians when he published a new book, the *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III*. His aim was to question the common assumptions that Richard III, King of England from 1483 to 1485, was a tyrant, a murderer and a usurper, objecting in particularly to charges that Richard murdered members of his own family and that of the Lancastrian family who had ruled

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[6] Anon. [J.P.A. Roussel d'Épinal], "Avis de l'éditeur" in Horace Waplole, *Le Règne de Richard III, ou Doutes historiques sur les crimes qui lui sont imputés*. trans. Louis XVI (Paris: Lerouge, 1800) A foliation (non-paginated)

[7] His lengthy complaint detailing every possible handwriting fault and confusion he has encountered in deciphering Louis' manuscript is probably the most entertaining footnote I have ever read.

beforehand. Whether or not Richard was notorious, Walpole argued, "the crimes were contrary to Richard's interest, and almost all inconsistent with the probability [sic] or with dates..."[8] He further argued that the King who had slain and succeeded Richard, Henry VII, had every reason to slander his predecessor, and Walpole posited that the public's knowledge of King Richard III was more likely the result of a successful political misinformation campaign than an indictment of actual events.

Complaints, doubts and attacks immediately followed the publication of Walpole's work. Although he was not the first to defend King Richard's historical reputation, Walpole already had a reputation of his own. He was an influential member of English Whig circles and son of a British Prime Minister. He also had already established a literary reputation for himself, having published the popular Gothic classic *The Castle of Otranto* only a few years earlier. It was likely Walpole's own literary fame which made his book more popular than earlier revisionist histories; the first 1200-book print run of the *Historic Doubts* sold out just over a day after it was released.[9] With such a wide readership, however, the work was also far more open to criticism than earlier authors who had made similar arguments. Richard III's evil deeds were commonly accepted knowledge, not only to scholars but in the minds of the general public as well, as popularized by Shakespeare's tragedy *Richard III*, among other works. Walpole's scholarship was reasonably strong, but that did not prevent controversy from erupting, in particular surrounding his choice of a particularly unusual source. He referenced Richard III's Coronation Roll in an effort to disprove the story that Richard had

[8] Horace Walpole, *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III*. (London: Dodsley, 1768) 3
[9] Lewis S. Wilmarth, "Walpole's Portfolio for His *Historic Doubts of the Life and Reign of Richard III*" in *Rescuing Horace Walpole*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) 194

murdered his nephews, but many detractors argued that his interpretation of the ordering of accounts in the Roll was purely based on conjecture.[10] Many, including the celebrated English historian David Hume, also argued against his dismissal of the accounts of Thomas More and Francis Bacon, who were traditionally considered to be the main sources on the period.[11] The controversy was such that two years after the book's publication Walpole resigned his Fellowship in the exclusive and prestigious Society of Antiquarians in frustration after a colleague there criticized his work particularly severely.

Across the Channel in Versailles in that same year, 1768, the fourteen-year-old Louis, then Dauphin of France was already an avid reader of British history, and was pursuing studies in the English language. His father, who was normally quite uninspiring, had inspired him in this vein as a child, introducing him to David Hume's multivolume series on British History. The boy had enjoyed that work so much that he insisted on meeting Hume during his travels in France.[12] Louis XVI's fascination with the English language, as well as British history, politics and culture in general is a significant, albeit lesser-known element of his life. According to the inventory of his library taken after his death, books in English accounted for over 7% (586) of the 7853 books in his collection; the majority of the books in English were, furthermore, produced during his reign, meaning that he must have personally

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[10] Horace Walpole, "A Reply to the Observations of the Rev. Dr. Milles, Dean of Exeter, and President of the Society of Antiquaries, on the Wardrobe Account of 1483, &c." in *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford in five volumes, vol. 2*. (London: G and J Robinson, J. Edwards. 1797). 232-235
The fabrics set out for Edward V, Richard's nephew were interspersed with those of other attendees of Richard's coronation, and he was described as "Lord Edward". Walpole suggested that these details indicated that Edward attended Richard's coronation and that his uncle was on friendly terms with him.

[11] Horace Walpole, "Supplement to the Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of Richard III" in *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford in five volumes, vol. 2*. (London: G and J Robinson, J. Edwards. 1797) 195-198

[12] Ironic, given that Hume was Walpole's sworn enemy in the Richard III debates.

acquired them rather than inheriting them from older royal collections.[13] He also followed English politics regularly, as it appears, not only out of necessity, but from a genuine interest. This did not stop him from doing his best to oppose Britain's burgeoning power through projects like his revitalization of the French navy and his support for the American Revolution; if anything, his knowledge of Britain from afar may have further encouraged him in France's rivalry with the UK.

A darker and more tragically ironic element to his interest in British history was his marked fascination with Charles I in particular, but also with Richard II and Richard III, all kings who had been dethroned and met violent deaths.[14] Lambin, an English language studies scholar who has studied Louis' book collection in great detail has suggested that this may have been a reflection on Louis' own situation: there was increasing unrest in France as his reign wore on; two more specific parallels are the conflict between royal power and the Parlements in the period, and Louis' own fears of betrayal by his power-hungry cousin, the Duc d'Orléans.[15] Although it is impossible to say for certain what Louis was thinking when he approached these stories, the narrative of intrigue and politically motivated *damnatio memoriae* evoked in Walpole's narrative of Richard III could well have reflected similar preoccupations in Louis' present, especially in his later years revising the text in prison. However, this is not to discount the possibility that his work on the text was for purely escapist purposes during that period instead.

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[13] Georges Lambin, "Louis XVI Angliciste", *Études Anglaises*, 22 no.2 (1969): 119
[14] The parallel with Charles I, who fascinated him the most, is particularly ironic given that Charles was the only British King to ever be executed by public beheading, after *extensive conflict with his parliament*, no less.
[15] Lambin, 123

Roussel's publication of Louis XVI's translation was in fact one of many Ancien Régime documents he published between 1800 and his death in 1815. Having worked as a lawyer in his native town of Epinol, in Lorraine, he moved to Paris during the early 1790's, after which he became Secretary to the Commission of the Convention government. While working as Secretary he naturally came into contact with a large quantity of state documents from the Revolutionary governments and the preceding Ancien Régime.[16] These would prove a valuable element to his side-hustle, publishing, and it was during this period in his career that he came into contact with Louis' writing. Practically as soon as the monarchy ended and the Revolution happened, a market sprang up for books on the recent past, and Roussel was one of many who supplied it. Much of it is in the form of "mémoires", both in the sense of individual reminiscences and compilations of primary source works surrounding an individual or historical event. This popularity may have been out of an effort by people to understand the massive changes that their society had undergone, and the unrest that had occurred and was still in progress along with those changes. Whatever the reasons behind the genre's success, Roussel was one among many authors who was determined to profit from it.

In his publishing career, Roussel sold his writings by making them sound exciting and occasionally salacious. Julia Douthwaite, in her book on French Revolutionary authors, appropriately describes him as a "Pseudohistorian" for his tendency to seamlessly combine

[16] Julia Douthwaite. "The Satire of a Pseudohistorian: Roussel's "Le Chateau des Tuileries" (1802)". *The Frankenstein of 1790 and other lost chapters from revolutionary France*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2012) 35

"fiction, rumour and archival content".[17] This tendency was evident even in the titles of his books: his *Histoire Secrète du Tribunal Révolutionnaire* was "Avec des Anecdotes piquantes sur les Orgies que faisaient les Juges et les Jurés", and featured an engraving of Robespierre squeezing blood from a human heart into a goblet in the front matter[18]. He also offered several volumes of "secret correspondence", including titles such as *La Politique de tous les Cabinets d'Europe*. His most famous book was an original work of his own, *Le Château des Tuileries*, in which he claimed to recount all that had happened in and around the castle during its existence. In fact, it was a combination of fiction, personal reminiscence and satire; in his most famous episode he attends a meeting of a club of female revolutionaries including the famous Olympe de Gouges, who makes a complete fool of herself and is mocked mercilessly by Roussel and his friend.[19]

Of course, Roussel's interest in publishing secret and possibly salacious documents brought him a significant risk at times- it is likely for this reason that he was intentionally inconsistent at naming himself in his books. Some of the government officials involved in the more recent correspondence he included in his books were still alive; the publication of secret diplomatic correspondence in particular was a concern, to the extent that he was imprisoned in 1802, and the documents to be published in his upcoming *Mémoires sur la Vie*

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[17] Douthwaite, 35 Roussel was not particularly original in this regard- "secret history" and saucy history were already well-established genres. However, Roussel's commercialisation of his works plays a role in the specific history of this text, and I will leave it to other authors to discuss this tendency as a whole in greater detail.
[18] de Proussinalle [J.P.A.Roussel], *Histoire Secrète du Tribunal Révolutionnaire, tome premier.* (Paris: Lerouge, 1815) title page and frontispiece
[19] Unfortunately, for many years this passage was read at face value and considered to be one of the most important sources on the proceedings of women's revolutionary societies during the French Revolution. However, today scholars generally acknowledge that the work is satirical and not reliable as a source on the women's actual politics; as it stands though, Roussel has definitely contributed to plenty of sexist rhetoric in the scholarly interpretation of politically active women during the Revolution.

de Louis XVI were seized.[20] Some scholars have cited professional jealousy from other officials in the same publishing side job as the reason for his dismissal, but it was equally true that Roussel's access to still-sensitive papers from the recent past made him problematic, even to the Napoleonic government.[21]

As part of Roussel's larger publishing focus, it is evident that the contents of *Le Règne de Richard III* held little interest for him in themselves. The significance of the book- and the selling point for his edition- lay almost entirely in its connection to Louis XVI. If it were not evident enough from Roussel's dramatic story of rescue from the flames, it was made all the more clear by the title page of his book. While Walpole is credited before Louis on the front page, Louis' name is presented in a much larger, more comfortably-spaced font, and occupies the very centre of the page; the sentence describing him as translator of the work is quite small by comparison, so that from a cursory glance at the title page it would appear that Louis was in fact the author. Roussel hoped to capitalise off of the sentimental pathos surrounding Louis XVI in the years following his execution- particularly after the Thermidorian reaction, when Royalist sentiment was once more in vogue. A line on the title page announced Roussel's commercial strategy clearly from the beginning: "Du premier des Français, voilà ce qui nous reste". The text in this sense was almost intended to act as a literary reliquary to its audience- a figurative piece of the dead King's mind for those who read it.

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[20] In a letter by Roussel dated to 7 Messidor, an IX, cited in Léonce Grassilier and A. Mathez "Inventaire des Papiers de Rouselle d'Épinal" *Annales Révolutionnaires*, vol. 8 no. 4 (1916) 545-546

[21] Grasilier and Mathez cite politics, but emphasise the role of professional jealousy on the part of the Abbé de Soulavie (another government-figure-turned-memoirist) in bringing the charges against Roussel. (Grasilier, Mathez 542-545) Douthwaite gives politics as the primary reason. (Douthwaite 35)

Roussel was not the only person to promote a reading of the text primarily in the context of Louis XVI, as the translator. Louis was notoriously uncommunicative when it came to personal matters[22]. The *Règne de Richard III* (and Louis' corresponding manuscript text) have thus provided an interesting perspective on the king's intellectual pursuits in his spare time- modern historians too tend to find the work more interesting for its reflection on Louis than for the subject matter itself. There are two common themes which appear on critical writings involving the *Règne de Richard III* and the associated manuscript since it was first published.[23] The first involves guesses as to Louis' motivation behind the translation. The explanations range from the mundane- Louis began work on it after seeing a very bad play about Richard III[24]- to the downright Freudian- Louis was interested in Walpole's book because he hated but also loved his own father and wanted to justify his feelings via a historical figure.[25] The second theme in scholarship on the work has been to use the translation as a way of assessing Louis' linguistic capabilities, and, more generally, his education level and intellectual capacity. The ironic fact is that, like Richard, Louis XVI's reputation in the eyes of posterity appears to be largely influenced by defamatory rumours

[22] One source which has annoyed scholars in particular is the journal which he fastidiously kept over the course of three decades… in which he put only the most basic facts about special events, mass, and hunting trips.

[23] Interestingly enough, the manuscript bears the different, more faithfully translated title of Doutes Historiques sur le Règne de Richard III. Roussel took many liberties with his edition, as we shall see, and it is likely that he changed the title too to make it sound snappier.

[24] Roussel "Avis au lecteur"

[25] Charles Duckworth, "Louis XVI and English History: A French reaction to Walpole, Hume and Gibbon on Richard III" *Studies on Voltaire* 176 (1979) 391-392 I could write an entire essay on how Freudian theories have resulted in so many strange distortions and exaggerations in popular biography on Louis XVI, but I will save that for another time (Thanks, Stefan Zweig). Suffice it to say two things: Louis was not a very good locksmith- if he had been competent at a forge he might have survived a little longer than he did, as the National Assembly discovered his damning letters after he had to call his former metallurgy teacher to help him make a strongbox to hide them and the teacher ratted on him; as to why he took so long to consummate his marriage, being a painfully awkward young person who is nervous about sex is a far more likely theory than phimosis, especially with the evidence we have on his personality and his other physical activities during that period of his life.

spread about him during his life, which portrayed him as lazy and stupid. These stories had come from all sides- it was a portrayal which was popularised by the revolutionary caricaturists, but, more surprisingly, it began even earlier on with his father, the previous Dauphin, who constantly sought to undermine his second son. As we shall see, the *Règne de Richard III* has been used both to support this narrative and its rehabilitative counter-narrative.

The actual style of the Louis translation has been troubling to many French readers, especially in the published version. Some of these quirks are a product of the original text: Louis' writing is full of anglicisms, the most notable examples of which are his invention of terms such as "inexistant", "incompetent".[26] In addition, several of his renderings of Shakespearean passages are simply strange.[27] Other faults in addition to these which appeared in the published book were a product of Roussel's editorship; as we have already seen, Roussel had a notoriously difficult time reading the King's handwriting, and, not understanding English, could not easily cross-check his readings with the original text. Through the editorial process words were mixed up and the meanings of entire sentences changed, degrading the quality of the translation significantly further. The corrupted text that resulted was often used during the 19th century by scholars such as Henri Druon, who quoted the text several times as proof of Louis' illiteracy and incompetence when it came to

[26] The in-prefix structure of negation was already common in English, and is amply employed by Walpole in his writing. However, it would not officially be introduced to French until the 1830's, and thus the words Louis used would have appeared completely made-up to most early 19th century French readers.
[27] While at the same time English scholars fault Louis for his mis-rendering of the archaic word "manquel" into "mutiler", when in fact it is a synonym for "murder". However, given that the mediaeval prince in question in the passage was being "piteously murthered and manquelled" I personally think the translation actually improved on an extremely redundant original passage; I would totally have guessed the same reading the English text at a glance. Who murders and then murders someone again!?

writing.[28] Since the 1960's, historians such as Lambin and Duckworth, who both did comparative studies of the MS and print editions, have concluded that Louis' style is indeed heavily English-influenced, but that a majority of the faults are a result of Roussel's confusion with Louis' script. In a complete reversal of Druon's use of the text, Lambin and Duckworth both interpret the text as evidence for the reasonably high level of English literacy that Louis achieved.[29]

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"It is afflictive to have lived in an age called not only civilized, but enlightened, in this eighteenth century, that such horrors, such unparalleled crimes have been displayed on the most conspicuous theatre in Europe, in Paris." Horace Walpole wrote in 1797, in a new preface to his *Historic Doubts*.

> "Yes, I must *now* believe that any atrocity may have been attempted or practiced by an ambitious prince of the blood aiming at the crown in the fifteenth century… After long plotting the death of his sovereign [Louis XVI], a victim as holy as, and infinitely superior in sense and many virtues to, Henry VI. [sic] Orleans has dragged that sovereign to the block, and purchased his execution in public, as in public he voted for it."[30]

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[28] Illiteracy in his own native French, to be specific- Druon did not actually mention the fact that he was quoting a translation.

[29] Duckworth 396 and Lambin, 130-132

[30] Horace Walpole, "Postscript to my Historic Doubts" in *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford in five volumes, vol. 2*. (London: G and J Robinson, J. Edwards. 1797). 251-252

The Duc d'Orléans was Louis XVI's cousin. The two were lifelong enemies- they both hated each other, and to make things worse, Orléans had designs on the throne. Orléans was in favour of constitutional monarchy and ended up siding with the National Convention during the Revolution, where he voted in favour of Louis' death during the King's trial. He was also quite a celebrity in England, as he travelled there during the various times he was banished from France.

The news Walpole had heard of the French Revolution had deeply shaken him. Louis' execution and his betrayal at the hands of his own cousin threw Walpole into doubt over his previous belief that Richard's crimes were improbable, and caused him to write an entire new preface in which he renounced the position he had so vehemently argued in his *Historic Doubts* of thirty years earlier. In a final twist of irony, Walpole never knew that the King had passed his final year in prison labouring over a translation of his very book, and he was dead by the time that Roussel published the French edition.

The story of the Règne de Richard III is really the story of a book which encompasses three individuals who never met, and three books which ended up completely different- the literary English nobleman and his contentious bestseller, the French King and his private linguistic exercises and the Napoleonic era bureaucrat and his publishing side-job, over the course of more than three decades. The final book in the chronology, the published *Règne de Richard III*, is in many ways an accumulation of all their layers of history. Through their transmission of the text through different formats and for differing purposes, they each transformed the original text by altering it, adding layers of meaning to the text itself and to its historical significance. In this way, the final *Règne de Richard III* which went to press in 1800 was not the product of Roussel, Louis XVI or even Horace Walpole- it was created by all three, despite the fact that they never met or even communicated, and that they contributed to the final text for completely different reasons. Although it did not achieve much recognition during its time, the story of the *Règne de Richard III* is a prime example of the power of textual transmission to link people across time and space.

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