Grub Street Revisited

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ABSTRACT

This essay traces the origin and polemics connected with Robert Darnton's thesis about the importance of Grub Street and hack writers under the Ancien Régime and during the French Revolution. As an exercise in self-criticism, Darnton modifies his original version of the thesis and relates it to the understanding of Jacobinism.

Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank the Institut d'études avancées for inviting me to spend a month at the hôtel de Lauzun on an intriguing assignment: to look back over my early work and to reconsider some arguments that have become absorbed in the current understanding of eighteenth-century French history.

I chose an article published in 1971, "The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France" (Darnton, 1971). It provoked considerable debate when it first appeared. Since then it has been accepted, even by its critics, as a work that occupies a central place in debates about the origins of the French Revolution (Chartier, 1991; Maza, 1992; Mason, 1998; McMahon, 2002; Turnovsky, 2010). Now, more than fifty years later, it needs to be revised.

In the article, I argued that historians and literary scholars had failed to take account of an important sector of the literary world, which I called "Grub Street", drawing on a parallel with London, where hack writers lived down and out in a street of that name

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during the seventeenth century. They scattered to garrets in other locations throughout the city in the eighteenth century. But a periodical, The Grub Street Journal (1730-1738), made the name stick as a pejorative for hacks, and Alexander Pope, who contributed to the journal, pilloried them in The Dunciad (three versions, 1728 to 1743). No such street existed in Paris, but scribblers proliferated there, too, churning out hack work and living miserably in garrets.

Having studied the career of one of them, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, a future leader of the Girondists during the French Revolution, and run across many others in the archives of the police, I became convinced that they constituted a distinct milieu with a sub-culture of its own. As many identified with Rousseau, they eventually came to be known as "les Rousseau du ruisseau" (Rousseaus of the gutter). Yet, they admired Voltaire, and aspired to win fame as philosophes by following his example. When they knocked on the door of his "church," however, it remained closed. Paris was flooded with aspiring writers in the 1770s and 1780s, and there was no room for them in the system of patronage and clientelism, which formed the basis of most literary careers.

To be sure, a few made it to the top, but they belonged to the second generation of philosophes, men like Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard and Jean-François Marmontel, who, unlike their predecessors, did not face serious persecution and settled comfortably into the salons and academies, where the plumbs were passed around. By the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI in 1774, the state permitted most philosophical works to circulate freely, unlike the 1750s, when the Encyclopédie was banned and most Encyclopedists---with the exception of a few stalwarts led by Diderot, who was secretly protected by Lamoignon de Malesherbes, the head administrator of the book trade---ran for cover and did not emerge until the danger had passed. I described the 1770s and 1780s as the period of the "High Enlightenment" in contrast to the "heroic" Enlightenment of the mid-century years. The writers who made it to the top during the last decades of the Ancien Régime advocated moderate change in the manner of Voltaire while they dominated the Académie française and monopolized pensions and sinecures.

Those at the bottom wallowed in misery. They vented their frustrated ambitions in much of their writing -illegal works, which constituted the most dangerous branch of the book trade, known among booksellers as "livres philosophiques". This literature included some serious philosophy, atheistic works like Système de la nature, but it consisted mainly of libels, pornography and seditious political tracts, which sold in the sector where the risks and profits were greatest. Driven by poverty, the Grub Steet writers attempted to

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cash in on the demand for scandalous accounts of the private lives of public figures. Such genres did not lend themselves to the exposition of philosophy, but they abounded in anecdotes that conveyed the themes of decadence and despotism. They were seditious in tone rather than logic. Instead of scoring hits with Voltairean wit, Grub Street writers blasted at their targets ---the grandees of the court, government, and high society (le monde) ---with a rhetoric of denunciation and moralizing (Darnton, 1982; Darnton, 1987).

Insofar as they evoked philosophers, the hacks favored Rousseau rather than Voltaire, because Rousseau had turned against the established elite of le monde, whereas Voltaire had appealed to it. Yet, the hack writers did not renounce the values and ideas championed by the philosophes, nor did they develop ideas of their own. The ideological divide ran along a fault line that was social rather than philosophical. It expressed a contradiction within the Republic of Letters, a realm that supposedly was open to everyone but excluded an increasingly large number of aspirants. The favored few in the second generation of philosophes were integrated in the power structure of the Ancien Régime and did not challenge its fundamental principles, while the hacks of Grub Street made the entire system look bad. Writers who had suffered from exclusion under the Old Regime of letters ---men like Brissot, Marat, and Hébert--- expressed a spirit of sedition in language that would resonate among the Jacobins and sans-culottes.

Having accepted the invitation to attempt some self-criticism, I should explain the context in which I wrote the "The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature". In 1968, I belonged to the radical Left that opposed the American intervention in Vietnam, took to the streets after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and supported student protests from Berkeley to Paris. As a graduate student in Oxford from 1960-1964, I fell under the spell of historians like E. P. Thompson and my supervisor, Richard Cobb, who advocated studying history "from below." After completing my doctorate, I had a brief career as a reporter on The New York Times, mainly covering crime. I had been broken in as a reporter from police headquarters in Newark, New Jersey, for the Newark Star Ledger; and coming from a family of newspaper people, I felt sympathy for the "shoe leather" men who saw the world from street level and conveyed their view in clear, clipped prose. For me, the ideal type was Meyer ("Mike") Berger, a veteran crime reporter and friend of my parents, who captured the lives of ordinary people in "About New York", a column for The Times.

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My critics have taken this sympathy for newspaper work as a symptom of a populist or even an anti-intellectual outlook. I failed to discuss the ideas of the French philosophes in depth, they objected, and I did not provide an adequate interpretation of the Enlightenment. In my view, that indictment, a central theme in a volume about my work entitled The Darnton Debate, was unfair, because I never pretended to write a history of the Enlightenment (Popkin, 1998; Gordon, 1998; Eisenstein, 1998; Kaiser, 1998). I had studied the works of the philosophes intensely with one of my tutors at Oxford, Robert Shackleton, an expert on Montesquieu, and before that I spent most of my last semester as an undergraduate dissecting Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. Later, in doing research on books as items in commercial exchanges, I did not think I was denying their power as vehicles of ideas. I thought I was contributing to something distinct from standard Enlightenment studies: the history of books as a new discipline.

In retrospect, however, I believe my critics scored some valid points. There is an aggressive, anti-elitist tone to my early writing, as if at times I were a sixty-eighter, protesting in the streets. I seemed to sympathize with the hacks of Grub Street and to share their hostility to the literary elite. In my original article about Brissot, published in 1968, I drew on the manuscript papers of Jean-Charles-Pierre Lenoir, the lieutenant general of police in Paris in 1774-1775 and in 1776-1785, which revealed that Brissot had been a paid spy for the police after being released from the Bastille, where he was imprisoned in 1784 under suspicion of collaborating with libellers. I found Lenoir's statement convincing, despite his evident bias (he wrote it after fleeing from the Revolution, when he had no love for revolutionaries). Others have contested my interpretation, although they have provided no evidence to disprove Lenoir's remark (Popkin, 1991). I don't believe they have demonstrated their case, but I cringe when I read parts of my own argument, such as the following on Brissot as a police spy:

"The story of his spying deserves emphasis, not in order to pass judgment on Brissot, but in order to understand him. His embastillement did not prove the purity of his patriotism, as he argued later. It corrupted him, and in the corrupting it confirmed his hatred of the Old Regime. How he must have hated it! How he must have raged inwardly against the system of arbitrary power that first struck him down and then enlisted him in its service. How he must have reviled the men in control of the system, who first blocked his attempts to win honor for himself and then dishonored him by making him their agent" (Darnton, 1982).

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If I could expunge anything from my early publications, I would delete those "must haves". How can I know what Brissot must have thought and felt? In speculating about Brissot's inner life, I went beyond the bounds of the evidence and indulged in gratuitous psychologizing. Perhaps for reasons buried in my own biography I identified with Brissot. I have written a 500-page draft of a biography of him and left it in a filing cabinet as if it were a part of my early life that I would prefer to forget.

The subjective element in writing history shows through other passages in my descriptions of Grub Street in the 1971 article. For example:

"Is it surprising that the writers whom Voltaire scorned as la canaille de la littérature should have moralized in the manner of Russeau in their politico-pornography? To them the Old Regime was obscene. In making them its spies and smut-peddlers, it had violated their moral core and desecrated their youthful visions of serving humanity honorably in Voltaire's church. So they became rank atheists and poured out their souls in blasphemies about the society that had driven them down into an underworld of criminals and deviants" (Darnton, 1971, p. 36).

In rereading that today, it seems overblown and underdocumented. I also find the conclusion of the article too strong, both in its language and in its claim to identify "authentic" radicalism on the eve of the Revolution:

"The crude pamphleteering of Grub Street was revolutionary in feeling as well as in message. It expressed the passion of men who hated the Old Regime in their guts, who ached with the hatred of it. It was from such visceral hatred, not from the refined abstractions of the contented cultural elite, that the extreme Jacobin revolution found its authentic voice" (Darnton, 1971, p. 40).

Aside from the subjective and time-bound character of the argument, the energy behind it came from a more decisive factor: the excitement of coming up with a new idea and the temptation to push it as far as it would go. In 1971, historians generally assumed that a causal link connected the Enlightenment with the Revolution, although they never managed to show how it operated. For my part, I did not deny the influence of the philosophes after 1789, because the revolutionaries often quoted them [Montesquieu as frequently as Rousseau (Butler, 1983)] along with other sources, particularly authors from antiquity. But I believed that enlightened ideas and values had been absorbed in the upper ranks of French society and even in the governing elite before 1789. Despite their differences, Turgot, Necker, Calonne, Brienne, and other ministers of Louis XVI

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held enlightened views. Some of them intervened to support Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, the publisher who produced many works of the High Enlightenment, including the Encyclopédie and the Encyclopédie méthodique. The diffusion of those works did not threaten to topple the power structure. Had there been no crippling royal debt, no disastrous increases in the price of bread, no intransigent opposition by the parlements, no incompetent management by the Crown, France might have ridden out the crises that brought down the Ancien Régime.

To be sure, this string of "might haves" looks as tenuous as the "must haves" that I just disavowed. Yet, the more I study the course of events between 1750 and 1800, the more importance I attribute to contingency, unforeseen consequences, miscalculation, and sheer accident, such as the hailstorm in the Paris region of July 13, 1788. I am not persuaded by historians who argue that some form of Enlightenment discourse brought down the Ancien Régime and determined the course of the Revolution (Furet, 1979; Baker, 1990). Insofar as the regime was vulnerable to ideological disruption, I still believe that my argument from 1971 is valid. The political system could assimilate Enlightenment principles and even profit from applying them---that is, by promoting greater equality in the collection of taxes and the administration of justice, as well as specific measures such as the abolition of the corvée (forced labor in road building), the withdrawal of internal custom duties, and toleration of Protestants.

The government enacted some of these reforms and attempted to do more in 1787-1788, when it was blocked by the parlements and surges of hostile public opinion. The parlements were aristocratic bodies, whose members usually sided with the enemies of the Revolution after 1788. But they commanded widespread support during the pre-revolutionary crisis, when large crowds took to the streets and rioted in order to block what they perceived as ministerial despotism. That perception did not derive directly from the Enlightenment, although it was compatible with some works of the philosophes, especially "De l'Esprit des lois". It developed over decades of protests and pamphleteering about abuses of power and decadence among the governing elite (Doe, 2023).

Those themes went back to the Mazarinades of the Fronde and the Phillipiques of the Regency. As the names suggest, they were personal attacks on men in power (Cardinal Jules Mazarin and the Regent, Phillipe, duc d'Orléans), and they were followed by powerful barrages at the end of the regime: the Maupeouana of 1771-1775 directed against chancellor René Nicolas de Maupeou and the Calonniana of 1787, which helped

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bring down controller general Charles Alexandre de Calonne. Libelling was a major industry in Grub Street. Far from expounding ideas, it stirred passions, operating at street level among ordinary Frenchmen. In retrospect, I concede that I overstated my Grub Street argument, but I believe it uncovered an unknown aspect of the Revolution's ideological origins.

In order to trace ideological currents, I spent most of the years after 1971 studying the diffusion of books. The archives of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel supplemented by French sources, especially the papers of the Bastille, made it possible to identify the "livres philosophiques" and to show how they penetrated into the social order of the Ancien Régime. I concentrated so heavily on this theme that I became identified with it---at least to one French historian who located me in the eighteenth century: "L'un des principaux propagateurs des écrits séditieux était un certain Robert Darnton, éditeur à Thionville. Il travaillait avec la Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, qui imprimait les gazettes et les brochures à scandale. Pour couvrir cette activité délicteuse Darnton publiait aussi en toute légalité des almanachs, des livres pieux et des ouvrages scolaires" (Besson, 1989).

In fact, I found the history of books so intriguing as a new discipline that I suspended my research on authors and worked on subjects such as printing, pirating, censorship, bookselling, and the politics of publishing, which concerned books in general, including legal works and the Encyclopédie. Yet, I continued to think of prerevolutionary France as vulnerable to two tendencies that had escaped previous research: the expansion of a particular sector of the book trade, "livres philosophiques", and the growth of a particular social milieu, Grub Street. They did not always converge (some illegal books were written by respectable authors, and some hack writers produced inoffensive works), but they coincided often enough to undermine the political system's legitimacy.

In my current research, I have returned to the theme of authorship, and by doing so intend to close a cycle that opened up more than fifty years ago. I also hope to correct my original argument by confronting two main objections.

First, taken as a social reality rather than a metonym, Grub Street may have been relatively unimportant. How many writers actually occupied the bottom ranks of the literary world? Did their number increase during the eighteenth century? And if the population grew, did it create the kind of pressure that can be associated with an alienated intelligentsia? Although those questions involve sociological theory---from

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Pareto to Bourdieu---they are empirical in nature and can be answered, at least approximately.

Second, hack writing did not necessarily lead to Jacobinism. Hacks produced propaganda for anyone who would pay them, including government ministers before 1789 and, at least in a few cases, counter-revolutionary interests afterward (McMahon, 2001). Moreover, Jacobinism derived from many sources, some of them unrelated to the conditions of life at the bottom of the literary world, and what I have characterized as Grub Street literature did not always come from Grub Street. Libels sometimes were produced by writers located further up in the social order, and the notion of Grub Street itself ("basse littérature" or "littérature des bas-fonds" in French) could have been primarily a fiction, used polemically by some writers to vilify their enemies.

In a forthcoming book, The Writer's Lot in Eighteenth-Century France, I provide well-documented estimates of the literary population during the second half of the eighteenth century. Although they demonstrate that the number of writers had at least doubled between 1750 and 1789, they do not show what proportion of the total was made up by scribblers who had no fixed income or employment. Le Petit Almanach de nos grands hommes lists 672 obscure poets in 1788, and I have checked enough of its references to verify their accuracy. But it says nothing about their financial situation. A survey of writers living in Paris between 1748 and 1752 by Joseph d'Hémery, the police inspector for the book trade, mentions many impoverished hacks among the 500 he identified. For example:

"AUBLET de Maubuy: C'est un jeune homme qui a perdu ses père et mère et qui a d'abord été abbé, ensuite clerc de procureur et enfin sans état. Il était en pension en attendant un emploi, paraissant en avoir un grand besoin. Il a de l'esprit, fait des vers et beaucoup de satires, tant contre le clergé que contre le Parlement, qu'il faisait imprimer par Beauvais, où il allait souvent souper" (Aublet de Maubuy, 1766 ; Aublet de Maubuy, 1779).

Yet, d'Hémery left many blank spaces in his reports, and one cannot assume that the authors whose occupations were not identified, even those "sans état", were starving scribblers. True, the number of cases like Aublet probably increased along with the total number of writers from 1750 to 1789. Indeed, the proportion of their size within the literary population probably got larger, because the prestige of writers, especially celebrities like Voltaire and Rousseau, attracted an increasingly large number of aspirants

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to literary glory during the last three decades of the Ancien Régime. But no hard data support these "probablies". They derive from literary sources like Le Petit Almanach, Mercier's Tableau de Paris, and more obscure works such as Linguet's "L'Aveu sincère, ou lettre à une mère sur les dangers que court la jeunesse en se livrant à un goût trop vif pour la littérature".

The literary character of the sources does not mean, however, that they were sheer fiction, divorced from social reality. Le Neveu de Rameau, for example, contains a vivid portrait of a hack, who lives on the fringes of the established world of musicians and artists:

"Son premier soin, le matin quand il est levé, c'est de savoir où il dînera; après dîner, il pense où il ira souper. La nuit amène aussi son inqiétude. Ou il regagne à pied un petit grenier qu'il habite, à moins que l'hôtesse ennuyée d'attendre son loyer, ne lui en ait redemandé la clef; ou il se rabat dans une taverne du faubourg où il attend le jour, entre un morceau de pain et un pot de bière" (Diderot, 1951).

Far from being a figment of Diderot's imagination, the nephew actually existed, living in Grub Street. He published his own description of his lot in a long poem, La Rameïde:

> "Quoique j'aie tenu la route peu commune,
>
> Ce ne fut point pour moi, celle de la fortune"
>
> (Magnan, 1766, p. 25; Magnan, 2023).

Diderot worked the description of the nephew's miserable, marginal existence into philosophical reflections on the nature of morality and the self---including Diderot's own self (the "MOI" of the dialogue), for he, too, had lived in Grub Street. So had his friend from the 1740s, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a vagabond and an impoverished musician who may have served as a model for the nephew, at least in part---that is, the part that characterized deviant genius.

Voltaire frequently derided his enemies as literary hacks, desperate to scratch up a few sous. His satire, Le Pauvre Diable, corresponded closely to the experience of actual writers. In reconstructing the biography of one of them, the abbé Le Senne, a scribbler

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so obscure that his first name remains unknown, I tried to show how the downward trajectory of a career fit the pattern sketched by Voltaire (Darnton, 1982). My purpose was not to treat literature as a source for social history but rather to draw on fiction as a way to understand the inner lives of the writers I studied.

In reassessing my earlier views, I am still convinced that frustrated ambition existed everywhere in the lower ranks of the literary world, although I consider it as only one of many elements in the collective consciousness of authors. It certainly fueled several revolutionary careers, particularly among marginal writers, because they confronted a contradiction that ran through every sector of literary life under the Ancien Régime: in principle the Republic of Letters was open equally to everyone and success was earned by talent; in practice, it was a closed world dominated by patronage and privilege. A brief look at some careers shows how this contradiction was experienced and expressed (or elided) among writers who became radical Jacobins.

Les Gens de lettres (1787) by Fabre d'Eglantine builds its plot around the theme of the barriers to the recognition of genius. Yet, this indictment of the world of letters is an exception in Fabre's early writing. His previous plays read like those of other minor authors, and his career conformed to a pattern set by playwrights in the seventeenth century (Viala, 1985). Like Molière, he bounced around the provinces with itinerant troupes for many years before attempting to conquer Paris. His published work, from Laure et Pétrarque (1780), a comic opera, to Augusta (1787), a five-act tragedy, dealt with standard themes, without a hint of seditious sentiment. None succeeded on the stage, and all were soon forgotten, although Fabre managed to get them published--without running into difficulties with the censors and police. After finally scoring a hit with Le Philinte de Molière (1790), he wrote a few more plays but ceased to depend on the theater as a source of income. The Revolution offered him the opportunity of a new career as a political activist, and he seized it.

Other prominent Jacobins also struggled in vain to make a name for themselves as authors before the Revolution. Like Fabre d'Eglantine, Jean-Marie Collot d'Herbois spent his youth as an itinerant actor and playwright, and the plays he wrote conformed to the standard formulas of light comedy and the "drame bourgeois". In "Lucie, ou, Les parents imprudents" (1781), young lovers overcome the opposition of narrow-minded parents in a plot that could have come from Molière, although it has none of his wit. Le Paysan magistrat (1780) contains a few passages that challenge aristocratic privilege, but

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it is set safely in Spain, and love triumphs in the end, leaving the social order undisturbed (Collot d'Herbois, 1780).

Jacques-Nicolas Billaud-Varenne, Collot's closest ally in the Committee of Public Safety during the Terror, joined his father's law practice in La Rochelle in 1778, but he attempted to break into the ranks of writers with a play, La Femme comme il n'y en a plus. It flopped so badly that Billaud earned a reputation as an all-around failure:

> "Désertant le barreau qui n'y perd pas grand'chose,
>
> Billaud crut chez Thalie avoir plus de succès;
>
> Mais, auteur sans talents, avocat sans procès,
>
> Quel fruit a-t-il tiré de sa métamorphose?" (Begis, 1893).

He then took up a garret existence in Paris, supported by odd jobs for lawyers and occasional sums sent by his father. When money ran out, he fell back on teaching in an Oratorian collège, while continuing to write plays. He failed to get them accepted by any Parisian troupe and finally, with a pension from his father, got inscribed as a lawyer in the Parisian bar. By 1789, he was married, making a modest living, and had turned to political polemics. Two ambitious tracts, published in 1789 but written earlier, showed him to be an enemy of monasticism and a supporter of the Parisian Parlement as a bulwark against ministerial despotism (Billaud-Varenne, 1789; Billaud-Varenne, 1789). They contained standard arguments advanced by "patriots" but none of the vitriol that later appeared in the rhetoric of the extreme Left.

The most vitriolic of the leftists, Jacques-René Hébert, had the most miserable existence as a failed playwright before the Revolution. None of his plays have survived, and little is known about how he supported himself after being condemned for writing a libel while a law clerk in Boissy, Normandy. He fled to Paris and churned out poems and plays, sinking deeper and deeper into poverty. Instead of getting works performed, he managed only to earn a pittance as a ticket collector. During the Terror Camille Desmoulins tried to undercut Hébert's influence by deriding him as a "receveur des

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contremarques" and a sycophant who "ouvrait les loges aux ci-devant avec des salutations jusques à terre" (Desmoulins, 1834, p. 104, 110, 122).

Desmoulins himself suffered from poverty as a pamphleteer before the Revolution. Although he joined the Paris bar in 1785, his stutter prevented him from succeeding as a lawyer. He survived by doing clerical work for attorneys and extracting a few louis from his father when he could no longer keep the wolf from the door. He did not qualify to join the National Guard in 1789, because he had no fixed residence. He had been living in one furnished room after another for the last six years, he wrote to his father in October 1789; and despite the success of his recent pamphlets he was desperate for help. "Auriez vous la cruauté de me refuser un lit, une paire de draps ?" (Desmoulins, 1836), he begged his father. Desmoulin's journal, Révolutions de France et de Brabant, founded in November, 1789, finally produced enough income to rescue him from indigence and to launch his career as a politician.

Another friend of Desmoulins, Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just, serves as a final example of the most radical Jacobins, although he did not have much of a prerevolutionary career, because he was only 22 years old when the Bastille was stormed. Still, he wrote a one-act play, Arlequin-Diogène, in 1789. It features Harlequin, the favorite character of boulevard farces, who tries and fails to dupe a suggestible lass into falling in love with him. It was neither published nor produced. In 1789 Saint-Just did manage to publish an ambitious, mock epic, Organt, in two volumes of rhyming verse. He wrote most of it in prison. After completing his studies at the Collège Louis-le-Grand in Paris, he returned to his home in Blérancourt near Laon, then stole the jewelry of his widowed mother and, back in Paris, sold it to support some riotous living. His mother obtained a "lettre de cachet" to get him interned in Picpus, a correction house, from September 1786 to March 1787. Apparently chastised, he threw himself into the Revolution at the local level and gained such a reputation that he was elected to the Convention in September 1792, becoming its youngest and most extreme member. An attempt to comb through Organt for previews of Saint-Just's revolutionary radicalism yields little---some mockery of religion, chivalry, the French court, and the Académie française, but no sustained political or social criticism. Its salient passages are pornographic. It reads as an attempt at a "succès de scandale" in the manner of Voltaire's Pucelle, but it has none of his wit, and the public paid no attention to it. As Saint-Just confessed in his preface, "J'ai vingt ans; j'ai mal fait; je pourrai faire mieux" (Saint- Just, 1789 ; Saint-Just, 1946).

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This quick tour of prerevolutionary careers among some of the most radical Jacobins indicates that they had literary ambitions and moved in and out of Grub Street, but, with the exception of Fabre, their writings did not express the hostility to the established order that I posited in 1971. To be sure, other writers who became Jacobins did indeed produce libels and seditious tracts before the Revolution. Pierre Manuel is a typical example of the hacks in the literary underground who published and peddled works outside the law. Yet, their careers reveal only the vertical dimension of the Republic of Letters. I think we should also consider horizontal relations---that is, the tension between the center and the margins.

The writer who best illustrates marginality is Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, the most notorious journalist of the 1770s and 1780s (Crupii, 1895; Levy, 1980). After demonstrating precocious talent as a student and gaining experience abroad in various posts, Linguet tried to make his name as an author. He considered his Histoire du siècle d'Alexandre (1762) and Théâtre espagnol (1768) worthy of winning him election to the Académie française. But the Academy rejected him; he quarreled with its secretary, d'Alembert; and he threw his lot in with the enemies of the Enlightenment by accusing the philosophes of monopolizing positions of power and prestige (Linguet, 1764). At the same time, he took up the law. In a serious of spectacular cases, beginning with his defense of the chevalier de la Barre in 1766 (Linguet won the admiration of the public, although he failed to save "la Barre" from being executed for sacrilege), he demonstrated a formidable talent as an orator ---and outspoken scorn for his colleagues. A particularly sharp attack on Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Gerbier, France's most prominent lawyer, led to his expulsion from the Paris bar in 1775 (Linguet, 1779). Linguet then took up journalism, pouring scorn on his many enemies in the Journal de Politique et de Littérature. He was forced to resign from the Journal after again sniping at the Academy, and emigrated to London and then Brussels, where he published a journal of his own, Annales Politiques, Civiles, et Littéraires, in 1777. Its verve and iconoclasm made it an enormous success. Linguet kept it going until 1792, despite endless difficulties, including two years of imprisonment in the Bastille after he ventured into Paris in 1780. His Mémoires sur la Bastille (1782), a powerful best-seller published from exile, where he resumed the Annales, reinforced his appeal as a defiant critic of the established order. He never sank into Grub Street. Far from it, he gained wealth and fame; but he failed to win a place at the center of power and prestige. He remained the ultimate outsider.

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Linguet's swashbuckling career made him the most famous French writer, Beaumarchais and Mirabeau included, during the last two decades of the Ancien Régime. His Annales, reprinted and pirated from many locations, won him an enormous readership and earned him a fortune. He did not attack the Crown (Marie-Antoinette was rumored to enjoy his articles) or the ministers (he had defended the much-hated Chancellor Maupeou in 1774). Instead, he argued in favor of increasing the government's power and reducing aristocratic privileges in order to relieve the suffering of the peasant masses (Linguet, 1767; Linguet, 1780). He concentrated his fire on corporate bodies ---the parlements, the order of Parisian lawyers, and any institution that bore "le fatal nom d'Académie," in the sciences and fine arts as well as literature (Linguet, 1777). The academies incensed him most, because they had been taken over by the philosophes, whose power extended everywhere: "En France, il n'y avait rien qui ne lui [the faction of the philosophes] fût subordonné. Ministère, magistrature, science, compagnies littéraires, elle avait tout envahi: elle disposait de tout, et des réputations même: elle seule ouvrait l'entrée de la gloire et de la fortune" (Linguet, 1779, p. 386).

This message had enormous appeal for other marginal writers. While struggling to get ahead in the world of letters, Jacques-Pierre Brissot fell under Linguet's spell and defended him in an anonymous pamphlet, "Un Indépendant à l'ordre des avocats", which opened with a defiant attack on privileged bodies in general: "Je ne suis rien, je ne tiens à rien, je ne demande rien; je dirai donc la vérité. L'homme isolé, indépendant, a seul la force de le dire et le droit d'être cru" (Brissot, 1781). Brissot sought out Linguet and attempted to collaborate with him (he got as far as writing an index to a volume of the Annales), but their paths diverged in the colony of French expatriates in London, where Brissot fell in with some buccaneering pamphleteers. Still, Brissot always admired Linguet's independent spirit. During the Revolution when he wrote his memoirs, he reminisced, "Ah! Linguet! Linguet!...J'aimais à te voir terrasser le despotisme orgueilleux des corps" (Brissot de Warville, 1912).

The notion of the "Indépendant," the writer who defied established bodies and proclaimed unorthodox truths, fit the situation of many marginal writers, some trapped in poverty, others well off. Antoine-Joseph Gorsas typified the former. He scraped together a living as a schoolmaster in Versailles while turning out poems and pamphlets (Sgard, 1999). In burlesque tracts about the exhibitions of paintings in the biennial salon sponsored by the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, he adopted the personage of Chrysostôme Critès, a cobbler-poet and "pauvre diable" from the ranks of the "écrivassiers rimailleurs". Sometimes accompanied by an ass, Critès marched through the

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salons, holding forth about art with a provocative bravado that made the Academy and its domination of the art world look ridiculous (Gorsas, 1785; Gorsas, 1786; Crow, 1985; Baecque, 2000). In 1788 Gorsas joined the stable of hack writers who produced radical pamphlets under the name of Mirabeau, and he published La Cour plénière, a powerful attack on the ministry of Étienne- Charles de Loménie de Brienne. His seditious activities (and possibly some kind of scandal in the Versailles school) led to Gorsas's confinement in Bicêtre, a notoriously nasty prison. Soon after his release in 1789, he withdrew into a garret and, according to the former lieutenant general of police, Jean Charles Pierre Lenoir, lived by writing libels and peddling forbidden books (Lenoir, 1982). In July of 1789 he launched one of the Revolution's most popular journals, Le Courrier de Versailles à Paris et de Paris à Versailles (later Le Courrier de Paris dans les provinces et des provinces à Paris). An early Jacobin, he eventually supported the Girondists and after their overthrow was guillotined on October 7, 1793.

Jean-Louis Carra, a friend of Gorsas and Brissot, was cut from the same cloth and followed a similar route into revolutionary journalism and Jacobinism (Lemny, 2000). Difficulties in his early life (imprisonment under an accusation, later dismissed, for a theft) led to a precarious existence as a proofreader and occasional writer in printing shops outside France and then as an adventurer in eastern Europe. But by 1789 he had put Grub Street behind him, having gained a steady income and a respectable position in the Bibliothèque du Roi. He published serious, ambitious works, notably Le Système de la raison, ou le prophète philosophe (1782), laying claim to be a philosophic luminary, although he never gained acceptance in the ranks of the philosophes. In Nouveaux principes de physique (1781-1783), he pretended to have outdone Newton as a physicist. But the Académie des sciences refused to recognize his cosmological speculations, and his anger as an outsider shows through in the libels he published on the eve of the Revolution: L'An 1787, ou précis de l'administration de la Bibliothèque du roi sous M. Lenoir (1787) and M. de Calonne tout entier (1788). His Annales patriotiques et littéraires de la France made him one of the most influential revolutionary journalists. Like Gorsas, he threw his lot in with the Girondists, and after their downfall, he was guillotined.

Jean-Paul Marat was a more extreme Jacobin and a more serious scientist than Carra. Far from sinking into indigence, he pursued a successful career as a doctor, first in England, then in France, where in 1777 he was named "Médecin des gardes du corps du comte d'Artois" (Walter, 1933). After years of experimentation, he sought recognition by the Académie des sciences for discoveries about the nature of light, fire, and electricity.

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From 1778 to 1780, committees of the Academy investigated his work. In the end, it pronounced that it could not verify all his experiments and would not sanction his theories. He had expounded them in a handsome and legally published volume: "Découvertes de M. Marat... sur le feu, l'électricité et la lumière" in 1779. In it, he, too, claimed to have superseded Newton, but he spoke respectfully of "ce grand homme" and deferentially about the Academy. Having invented a new science, "la péroptrique" (with subdivisions such as "la catoptrique," "la dioptrique" and "l'opisoptrique"), he knew that his discoveries would upset those who held orthodox views, but he expected to prevail, thanks to the soundness of his experiments. In a second edition published after his failure to win the Academy's backing, Marat appealed to the "tribunal suprême" of public opinion (Marat, 1779; Marat, 1784). He maintained a moderate tone in his subsequent scientific works, such as "Notions élémentaires d'optique" (1784) and even a political tract, Eloge de Montesquieu, which he submitted, unsuccessfully, to a prize essay contest sponsored by the Academy of Bordeaux in 1785. But he expressed his bitterness at academicians, especially the philosophes who dominated the academies, in his private correspondence: "Comme ils ne négligent rien pour étendre leur malheureux empire, ils se multiplient sous toutes les formes. Nos facultés, nos académies en sont peuplées, et sans pouvoir les éviter j'ai eu affaire à eux dans toutes mes entreprises" (Vellay, 1908, p. 28). His anger finally boiled over in "Les Charlatans modernes, ou lettres sur le charlatanisme académique", published in 1791 but written before the Revolution. In it he vilified the leading members of the Académie des Sciences and also of the Académie française, because they, too, were frauds: they monopolized pensions and honors, while persecuting isolated geniuses, like Rousseau, who produced the only true advances in knowledge. All academicians were parasites, "courant les cercles, encensés par les trompettes de la renommée, engraissés par le gouvernement, et dévorant...la substance du malheureux artisan, du pauvre laboureur" (Marat, 1791, p. 7).

It would be possible to cite many other writers who lived on the margins of the world of letters yet did not inhabit Grub Street. Mathieu Pidansat de Mairobert serves as a last example, because he wrote and collaborated on several best sellers in the underground book trade of the 1770s and 1780s: Anecdotes sur Mme la comtesse du Barry (1775), Journal historique de la révolution opérée dans la constitution de la monarchie française par M. de Maupeou, chancelier de France (1774-1776), L'Observateur anglais, ou correspondance secrète entre Milord All'Eye et Milord All'Ear (1777-1778), Correspondance secrète et familière de M. de Maupeou avec M. de Sor*** (1771-1771), Mémoires de M. l'abbé Terrai (1777), and the 36-volume journal of gossip and public

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affairs, Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la République des lettres en France (1777-1789) (Tate, 1968; Popkin, 1998; Sgard, 1999).

Despite their scurrilous and gossipy character---or because of it---these libels spread a hostile view of the reign of Louis XV, particularly during the "revolution" of the judicial system by Chancellor René Nicolas Charles Augustin de Maupeou in 1771-1774. Although qualified to practice law, Mairobert supported himself from administrative positions (commissaire de la marine and later secrétaire des commandements de M. le duc de Chartres). He also served as a censor, although he was removed from his post for misconduct in 1761. According to a notice about his death by his successor as editor of the Mémoires secrets, he was protected by Malesherbes, the head of the book trade administration, and by several lieutenant generals of police (Bachaumont & Mairobert, 1784). As a favorite in the worldly salon of Madame Doublet, where the Mémoires secrets originated, he cut something of a figure among the café regulars who tended to favor the Parlement of Paris in its quarrels with the government.

Despite these connections with a worldly and wealthy milieu, Mairobert was a "frondeur" (agitator) who lived on the edge of disaster. On July 2, 1749, he was arrested for distributing seditious verse about Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV, and the government. He spent nearly a year in the Bastille. His brother, who provided information to the police, said Mairobert refused to have any contact with his family or to follow a conventional career in the law. Before his arrest, Joseph d'Hémery, the police inspector in charge of the book trade, put Mairobert down as a suspicious character: "Il a dit au café Procope en parlant de la réforme qui a été faite [the recent reorganization of the officer corps in the army], que le militaire qui se trouvait dans le cas devait envoyer faire f... pour jamais la cour, qui n'a d'autre plaisir qu'à dévorer les peuples et de commettre des injustices... Ce Mairobert est un des garçons qui aient la plus mauvaise langue de Paris". Other reports indicated that Mairobert made a habit of collecting and distributing seditious verse. A police spy who had engaged him in conversation reported: "En raisonnant avec lui sur le risque que court l'auteur de pareils écrits, il répondit qu'il n'en courait aucun, qu'il ne s'agissait que d'en glisser dans la poche de quelqu'un dans un café ou au spectacle pour les répandre sans risque ou d'en laisser tomber des copies aux promenades". Mairobert also took risks in financial speculations. On March 27, 1779, after being compromised in a settlement after the notorious bankruptcy of the marquis de Brunoy, he went to a bathhouse, shut himself in a tub, sliced open a vein, and ended his life with a pistol shot (Bachaumont & Mairobert, 1784).

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Although Mairobert disappeared before 1789, he contributed to the cacophony of messages that fed into the Revolution from the margins as well as the bottom of the literary world. Their common element was hostility to the cultural barriers that had kept outsiders outside. This passion provided much of the energy behind the revolutionary campaign against privilege, particularly in the realm of culture ---privileges for books, journals, theaters, and academies.

The National Convention abolished the academies on August 8, 1793. In arguing for their suppression, Jacques-Louis David attacked the Académie de peinture et de sculpture and academies in general as the "dernier réfuge de toutes les aristocraties" (David, 1793). Abbé Grégoire, who drafted the report adopted by the Convention, condemned the Académie française for "la prétention d'accaparer la gloire, de s'arroger le privilège exclusif des talents". He argued that it violated the basic principle of the Republic of Letters: openness and equality. Moreover, it victimized the writers who deserved most from the French republic: "Vos coeurs seront sans doute émus" he said to the deputies in the Convention, "en apprenant que plusieurs hommes de lettres, usés par leurs veilles, et brûlant de patriotisme, sont aux prises avec la misère. Les récompenses nationales doivent couler dans le sein de ceux qui en sont dignes; et après avoir repoussé les vils courtisans du despotisme, il faut que nous allions trouver le mérite indigent dans son souterrein ou à son sixième étage" (Chamfort, 1791; Grégoire, 1793, p. 4, 8-10).

Grégoire himself had not suffered in a garret, nor had other leading Jacobins, including Robespierre. Many different paths led to Jacobinism. But the route through Grub Street appeared particularly important to the radicals of 1793, as Grégoire emphasized in his conclusion: "Presque toujours le véritable génie est sans-culotte" (Chamfort, 1791; Grégoire, 1793, p. 10).

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