# Singing the French Revolution

✦

## Popular Culture and Politics, 1787–1799

LAURA MASON

Cornell University Press

*Ithaca and London*

First published 1996 by Cornell University Press.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Mason, Laura.
Singing the French Revolution : popular culture and politics 1787–1799 / Laura Mason.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.
ISBN 0–8014–3233–2 (cloth : alk. paper)
1. Revolutionary ballads and songs—France—History and criticism. 2. Popular culture—France—History—18th century. 3. France—History—Revolution, 1787–1799. I. Title.
ML3621.R48M37 1996
781.5'99'094409033—dc20 96–17694

Printed in the United States of America

This book is printed on Lyons Falls Turin Book, a paper that is totally chlorine-free and acid-free.

*for Michael*

# Interlude

✦

# From *Chant de Guerre* to *La Marseillaise*

✦ THE YEAR 1792 opened with a declaration of war already under debate in the Legislative Assembly. The preceding August, the emperor of Austria and the king of Prussia had declared that "[they] consider the King of France's current situation as a matter of common concern to all European sovereigns," and the émigré community on France's eastern border grew increasingly threatening. Inside the Assembly, Brissot and the Girondins led the war party, arguing that prompt military action would eliminate foreign threats and force a domestic taking of sides, which would expose counterrevolutionaries. Robespierre and his allies kept up a gradually weakening opposition against these arguments. Matters became more pressing in March, when the young and aggressive Francis II succeeded to the Austrian throne and refused to negotiate with the French. Now the question of war moved beyond Assembly walls to occupy public attention: endlessly debated in the political clubs, the issue appeared under many guises in private conversations and newspapers alike. In early April the Girondist newspapers, the *Chronique de Paris* and the *Courrier*, drafted song culture to the cause by generating enthusiasm for war songs. The *Chronique* raised the issue by printing an article about a battalion in the Dauphiné that had asked for "battle songs." "They express themselves with such enthusiasm, that we cannot doubt the effect that such songs would have on warrior's souls."[1] The *Courrier* immediately announced a competition on behalf of the Dauphiné battalion, offering three hundred livres for the best *chanson de guerre des soldats français*. The contest continued for weeks, as the *Courrier* promised an imminent decision; even the radical *Révolutions de Paris* joined in.[2]

But when France declared war against Austria on 20 April 1792, the nation still had no battle hymn. Clearly, song culture had made significant advances; lyrics intended to stir patriotism and combativeness were penned and published. Since nothing came along to truly replace the cheery *Ça ira*, however, this tune was drafted to the cause. Described as the "song of patriotism" that would animate the French "when it is time to fight the enemies of liberty," *Ça ira*'s title was claimed to be a souvenir from the American Revolutionary War.[3] Eventually a genuine war song would inherit *Ça ira*'s exalted place in revolutionary culture, acquiring its special status not simply because it was good but because of the particular conditions and timing of its appearance in Paris. Brought to the capital by radical revolutionaries from southern France, the song that would come to be known as *La Marseillaise* arrived only a few weeks before the republican revolution of 10 August 1792.

As all French schoolchildren know, *La Marseillaise*—originally the *Chant de guerre pour l'armée du Rhin*—was written by Joseph Rouget de Lisle, an army officer stationed in Strasbourg in 1792.[4] A constitutional monarchist and amateur composer who was exalted by war fever and an evening's champagne, Rouget reputedly produced his hymn in a single night after hearing Strasbourg's Mayor Dietrich and other local elites complain that *Ça ira* and *La carmagnole* were vulgar songs unfit for proper soldiers.[5]

*Chant de guerre pour l'armée du Rhin*[6]

| | |
|---|---|
| Allons enfants de la patrie! | Forward children of the homeland! |
| Le jour de gloire est arrivé; | The day of glory is upon us; |
| Contre nous de la tyrannie | Against us, the bloody standard |
| L'étendard sanglant est levé. | Of tyranny is raised. |
| Entendez-vous dans les campagnes | Do you hear these ferocious soldiers |
| Mugir ces féroces soldats? | Bellowing in the fields? |
| Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras | They come into your very midst |
| Egorger vos fils, vos compagnes! | To slaughter your sons, your wives! |
| Aux armes, citoyens, formez vos bataillons, | To arms, citizens, form your battalions, |
| Marchez, marchez, qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons. | March on, march on, that impure blood will water our furrows. |
| Que veut cet horde d'esclaves, | What do they want, this hord of slaves, |
| De traîtres, de rois conjurés? | Of traitors, of conspiratorial kings? |
| Pour qui ces ignobles entraves, | For whom are these vile fetters, |
| Ces fers dès longtemps préparés? | These irons so long prepared? |



| | |
|---|---|
| Français! Pour nous, ah quel outrage! | French people! For us, ah what outrage! |
| Quels transports il doit exciter! | What transports they should excite! |
| C'est nous qu'on ose méditer | Is it us that they dare to consider |
| De rendre à l'antique esclavage? | Returning to ancient slavery? |
| Aux armes . . . [etc.] | To arms . . . [etc.] |
| Quoi! des cohortes étrangères | What! these foreign troops |
| Feraient la loi dans nos foyers! | Would lay down the law in our homes! |
| Quoi! les phalanges mercénaires | What! these mercenary phalanxes |
| Terrasseraient nos fiers guerriers! | Would bring down our proud warriors! |
| Grand Dieu! par des mains enchaînées | Great God! by means of shackled hands |
| Nos fronts sous le joug se ploîraient! | Our heads would bend beneath the yoke! |
| De vils despotes deviendraient | Vile despots would become |
| Les maîtres de nos destinées! | The masters of our destinies! |
| Aux armes . . . [etc.] | To arms . . . [etc.] |
| Tremblez tyrans! et vous perfides, | Quake tyrants! and you traitors |
| L'opprobre de tous les partis; | The disgrace of all parties; |
| Tremblez! vos projets parricides | Quake! your patricidal projects |
| Vont enfin recevoir leur prix, | Will at last receive their due, |
| Tout est soldat pour vous combattre; | All are soldiers to battle you; |
| S'ils tombent nos jeunes héros, | If they fall, our young heros, |
| La terre en produit de nouveaux | The earth will produce new ones |
| Contre vous tout prêts à se battre. | Ready to fight against you. |
| Aux armes . . . [etc.] | To arms . . . [etc.] |
| Français! en guerriers magnanimes | French people! as magnanimous warriors |
| Portez ou retenez vos coups; | Hold or rein in your blows; |
| Epargnez ces tristes victimes, | Spare these sad victims |
| A regret s'arment contre nous. | Who regretfully arm themselves against us. |
| Mais ces despotes sanguinaires! | But these bloodthirsty despots! |
| Mais les complices de Bouillé, | But the accomplices of Bouillé, |
| Tous ces tigres qui sans pitié | All these pitiless tigers |
| Déchirent le sein de leur mère! | Rending their mother's breast! |
| Aux armes . . . [etc.] | To arms . . . [etc.] |
| Amour sacré de la patrie, | Sacred love of the homeland, |
| Conduis, soutiens nos bras vengeurs | Guide us, sustain our avenging arms |
| Liberté, Liberté chérie! | Liberty, beloved Liberty! |

| | |
|---|---|
| Combats avec tes défenseurs | Fight alongside your defenders |
| Sous nos drapeaux que la Victoire | Beneath our banners to which Victory |
| Accourt à tes mâles accents: | Runs in answer to your manly tone: |
| Que tes ennemis expirants | That your expiring enemies |
| Voient ton triomphe et notre gloire. | Will see your triumph and our glory. |
| Aux armes . . . [etc.] | To arms . . . [etc.] |

If Dietrich was hoping for a song that was dramatically different from *Ça ira*, then Rouget de Lisle answered his wish with the *Chant de guerre*. Lyrically, the two songs describe very different visions of the Revolution and the obstacles that it faced. All versions of *Ça ira*, whether written in 1790 or 1793, reflect the easy hopefulness of the title: things will work out because things are already working out. *Ça ira* places revolutionary actors at center stage and represents obstacles tumbling before them: in 1790 "L'aristocrate dit mea culpa" (The aristocrat says *mea culpa*); in the year II "Le brigand Prussien tombera / L'esclave Autrichien le suivra" (The Prussian brigand will fall / The Austrian slave will follow him).[7] The sense of accomplishment that was so pervasive in the summer of 1790 never ceased to inform the song's lyrics: the Revolution was advancing and singers of *Ça ira* envisaged no great difficulties in accomplishing it. In contrast, the *Chant de guerre*, written within days of the declaration of war, focuses on powerful and threatening enemies. Although the song begins by declaring that "the day of glory is upon us," it immediately continues with a fierce reminder of the real subject: "against us, the bloody standard of tyranny is raised." The lyrics conjure up an invading horde that will not simply overrun the countryside but "come into your very midst," killing sons and wives before enslaving the nation. In the end, the song does promise victory, but a victory that may be achieved only at great cost: "All are soldiers to battle you. If they fall, our young heros, the earth will produce new ones."

The songs are musically distinct as well. Like its lyrics, the bright, jiglike tune of *Ça ira* suggests an easy forward progression. The *Chant de guerre*'s rhythm is slower, closer to the pace of marching. Obviously a more formal composition, the tune is more complicated than the simple, repetitious melody of its predecessor; its steady rhythm and swelling notes ameliorate the fearful images conjured by the lyrics. This music lends greater sensibility to a song whose learned lyrics are difficult and likely to be confusing when heard in performance: the brief pause before the chorus and the swelling of the voice as the singer declaims "To arms, citizens, form your battalions" make absolutely clear the song's central message.



Rouget de Lisle, monarchist army officer, wrote his *Chant de guerre* for the king's soldiers. But there was nothing decisively monarchist about the song: performed in a different context, it would acquire republican associations and interpretations. Having been copied and distributed among soldiers in Strasbourg, the *Chant de guerre* was carried south by traveling merchants or perhaps a newspaper, changing context, as Michel Vovelle has pointed out, and taking on a broader meaning as it went.[8] In the East, it had been the war song of a formal army, composed by and for constitutional monarchists who, within months, would refuse to swear allegiance to the new Republic. In the south, the song was adopted as the anthem of the *fédérés* of Montpellier and Marseilles, men who had been radicalized by their confrontations with hostile royalists and who were prepared to extend the Revolution to defend it. These were the singers who would teach the *Chant de guerre* to Parisians, in the process lending it a new name and helping to fix a new set of political associations.

The southern *fédérés* headed toward Paris in midsummer, intending to join other provincials who had gathered there to protect the city and attempt to force the king's hand in a more aggressive prosecution of the war. Although contingents had been arriving from throughout France since early July, the volunteers from the south were awaited with a particularly keen combination of hope and apprehension.

> For the past several days, the arrival of the Marseilleans has been ostentatiously announced. Their numbers are enlarged upon; they are made a bogey for the court; their intentions are spoken of in various ways. On the one hand, they are represented as a bunch of villains. . . . On the other hand, to the contrary, they are proclaimed as devoted patriots . . . who intend to restore the public spirit of tired Parisians, and deliver the final crushing blow against the monarchy.[9]

Arriving in a city in which political tensions were already high, the Marseille volunteers quickly added to the ferment. On their first night in Paris, they insured their reputation as hot-headed Revolutionaries by fighting with a regiment that was singing, "Long live the king, long live the queen, long live Lafayette!" The volunteers then marched along the Champs Elysées singing *Ça ira* and shouting, "Long live the nation!"[10] Ten days later, they joined Parisians and other *fédérés* to take the Tuileries Palace and help overthrow the monarchy.

It was not until the end of August that newspapers began to publish accounts of popular performances of the *fédérés*' hymn. Then the stories came fast and furious, describing a song that had swept the city. On the 29th, the *Chronique de Paris* told its readers: "People in all of the theaters now request the song: *Allons, enfants de la patrie.* The words are by M. Rougez [sic], a captain of genius garrisoned at Huningue. . . . The *fédérés* brought the song from Marseille, where it was very popular."[11] The article closed with the song's six verses. The next day the *Courrier* reported that a patriotic printer in Compiègne had reproduced and distributed the "warlike song" to his brothers at arms; this article, too, closed with the song's lyrics.[12] Even the radical *Révolutions de Paris* joined in: "The people's spirits are still extremely good . . . ; one must see them, one must hear them repeating in chorus the refrain of the war song of the Marseilleans, which the singers in front of the statue of Liberty in the Tuileries gardens are teaching them every day with renewed success."[13]

These reports clustered together in the late summer, but it is unlikely that the southern volunteers had waited that long to sing "their" song publicly. In fact, the *Chant de guerre* had appeared in Paris even before their arrival: the *Courrier* reported its performance at a local civic banquet in late July, printing five verses of the song without mentioning title, tune, or author, and the same lyrics appeared in the *Trompette du Père Duchesne* at about the same time.[14] But the *Chant de guerre* had yet to acquire specific revolutionary associations; like *Ça ira* before it, this song achieved its peculiar emblematic status through a combination of political resonance and advertisement.

The *Chant de guerre*'s rousing tune and fiery lyrics had not been enough to distinguish it; had that been adequate, it might have become popular after its first Parisian performance in July. But the song was also associated with the radical Marseille *fédérés*, and its first flush of popularity followed closely upon the revolution of 10 August. These revolutionary associations helped the career of the song now known by a variety of popular titles: *Allons enfans de la patrie, Aux armes, citoyens*; or simply, the *Hymne des Marseillais* (The *Hymne of the Marseilleans*). The *Hymne*'s circulation by the radical Southerners and its appearance in Paris within weeks of the revolution of 10 August had bestowed upon it particularly republican associations. And once again, newspapers helped to broaden this popularity. Having searched for a successful war song for months, they celebrated performances of the newly popular *Chant de guerre*, thereby advertising and reinforcing the unofficial practice of the streets.

What had been written as a battle cry against Austrian enemies and hostile émigrés became a wholesale republican attack on despotism at



home and abroad. This transformation was facilitated by the song's lyrics, which artfully marry evocative power and vagueness. *La Marseillaise* leaves unnamed France's enemies even as it describes them in terms that are graphic and highly provocative—they are "foreign troops," "mercenaries," "tyrants," "pitiless tigers." By evoking qualities without naming specific enemies, Rouget de Lisle's lyrics heighten general fears but permit individual singers (or auditors) to personalize their enemy, alternately envisioning Francis of Austria or George of England or any nameless foreign soldier. This same vagueness would also favor the song's republican appropriation, because it unwittingly allowed singers to add the faces of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, domestic "aristocrats," and counterrevolutionaries to those of foreign soldiers and despots.

The *Marseillaise* completed the lyrical trajectory initially traced by *Ça ira*. As the Revolution progressed, the flexibility and nuance of *Ça ira* dwindled; as political opinions polarized, the number of song versions declined. Now *Ça ira* was replaced altogether by a song that described a politics of binary opposition, a Manichean struggle to the death. This polarizing vision of the Revolution paralleled the print history of the two songs. *Ça ira* was, above all, a song of oral invention that permitted singers to express their particular opinions about the Revolution; the *Marseillaise* had, from its very outset, a single, definitive version that was fixed in print. Early reports of the song's performances included all, or nearly all, of its verses, and during the next two years it would be reprinted repeatedly in all kinds of formats—with or without printed music, on single songsheets, or in small song books—with essentially the same lyrics.[15] The song's lyrical stability did not prevent other songwriters from using its tune or writing new verses that preserved the original choruses or rhyme scheme; but, after one final verse was added in the autumn of 1792, there were no alternate versions, only imitations and parodies.[16]

After the hymn's appearance in Paris, its popularity grew steadily. For more than two years, it would broaden the role of revolutionary anthem originated by *Ça ira*: performed at local and national festivals and sung in public gardens and fraternal dinners, its tune would be appropriated for the creation of more than two hundred new songs.[17] It was heard in moments of victory and defeat alike: *fédérés* sang it under the windows of the royal family after the August revolution of 1792, just as, in September 1793, "a fairly large number of people . . . sang the marseilloise very heartily, in spite of the bad news that is circulating . . . about the Vendée."[18]

But the *Hymne des Marseillais* was not only a popular civilian song; it had originally been written for the army of the Rhine, and it was already circulating among enlisted military men as the Marseille volunteers carried it to Paris. Copies of the song had been distributed to the Strasbourg regiments in April, and by September the hymn was so popular among soldiers at the front that they were said to have sung it at Valmy, where the revolutionary army won its first battle.[19] The song was adopted in the upper ranks as well. Less than a week after Valmy, the Minister of War wrote to General Kellerman: "The fashion for *Te Deums* has passed, we must substitute something more useful and in greater conformity with the public's mood [*esprit public*], thus, I authorize you general, if you believe you require authorization, to have *The hymn of the Marseillais* sung solemnly and with the same pomp that you would give to the *Te Deum*; I attach a copy of it to that end."[20] The following month, the *Moniteur universel* claimed that the "warlike sounds of the *national hymn*" had been the only song heard in the streets of Chambéry after the "liberation" of Savoy. In Paris, the *Hymne* again replaced the *Te Deum* at a public celebration of the same event.[21]

As the *Hymne des Marseillais* was being sung informally and officially, by civilians and by soldiers, entrepreneurs joined in too. The song was published in several dozen editions, profiting the publishers rather than the author, while Parisian theaters used their own means to celebrate the new tune. In mid-October, the *Chronique de Paris* reported that "the federal and revolutionary tune of *Ça ira* has given way to the warlike chant of the Marseillais, which is so much in harmony with the character of republican valor, and which rings through our theaters every night." The théâtres Italien, Feydeau, du Marais, and du Vaudeville expressed their patriotism and drew a crowd at the same time by performing the song during intermissions, "each with the props appropriate to its genre."[22] The Opera, more ambitious still, staged an entire piece by Gossec, *L'offrande à la liberté*, whose primary object was a grand finale in which men, women, and children crowded onto the stage to sing the *Hymne des Marseillais*.[23]

The formal elements and broad popularity of the *Hymne des Marseillais* combined with the cultural impact of war and republican revolution to galvanize the slow transformation of song culture that had been taking place since the appearance of *Ça ira*. The hymn's poetic and learned lyrics and its almost classical tune lent "higher" cultural associations to the genre of popular song, which had slowly been acquiring revolutionary respectability; its associations with the revolution of 10 August and the Republic's victorious armies solidified a growing faith in the capacity



of songs to rouse and unify enthusiasm. Meanwhile, war and the republican revolution made the manipulation of songs and singing a particularly pressing issue. At the official level, the government was increasingly concerned with propaganda, searching for the means to instill republican values in an unlettered populace and sustain enthusiasm for the war in a popular army. Unofficially, Parisians sang songs to express their commitment to the Republic and to celebrate its victories. As government and populace alike sought to remake the French nation, there was a growing concern that culture should express radically new political and social alignments: language, popular and official iconography, even costume, were all subject to reinterpretation and refashioning.[24] Increasingly deputies, journalists, and publishers would point to singing's revolutionary potential, explore its implications, and suggest means to harness and implement it.

Historically, the *Marseillaise* galvanized the development of revolutionary song culture; figuratively, the song's career may be taken as a vantage point from which to consider the broader milieu of which it was a part. This song would become a critically important emblem between 1792 and 1796, setting a standard for popular song culture and yet remaining unique. Its career highlights some of the dominant characteristics of the larger culture that it helped to create, and of which it was an integral part.

The advertised search that preceded the *Hymne*'s appearance and the specific circumstances surrounding its emerging popularity suggest both a growing self-consciousness about song culture and, paradoxically, the difficulty of creating popular songs by fiat. As singing came to be more widely recognized as a revolutionary activity, those journalists who regarded songs most favorably attempted to draft them to particular political purposes; above all, they hoped to use the search for a battle song to generate popular enthusiasm for war. But these men quickly found that it was impossible to simply summon an anthem into existence. They might publish new songs, but they could not single-handedly make them truly popular. As the case of *Ça ira* suggested, and as the emergence of the *Marseillaise* underscored, broad and meaningful popularity emerged out of a lively and complex interaction between lyrics, singing practices, and particular revolutionary events. This is one of the reasons that, in the years to come, however much legislative deputies would try to direct and even dictate popular song culture, they would repeatedly find themselves dependent upon and finally foiled by outside initiative and independent song production.

The *Hymne* was also significant in that it almost immediately came to play a double role as a patriotic instrument and a source of profits. Its

marketability reflected, in part, the traditional marketability of *nouveautés*—here was the song that everyone was talking about, and so it sold well—but it also represented a first step toward the increasingly close relationship that would develop between songs as political emblems and songs as commodities. This relationship would prove equally beneficial to republican politics and republican commerce: political criteria would be used to judge the market value of republican songs, while entrepreneurs broadened republican culture by celebrating it in order to sell songsheets, songbooks, and theatrical tunes.

Above all, the *Hymne des Marseillais* represented the consensus that revolutionaries had temporarily achieved around song culture. For this song temporarily resolved persisting tensions between widespread practices and cultivated representations of them. In the *Marseillaise*, journalists, politicians, musicians, and composers found a song that was both wildly popular and respectable. With its complex tune and learned lyrics, this was a song that cultivated men and women could praise as a national and revolutionary anthem without embarrassment or hesitation.

The sudden and remarkable success of the *Marseillaise* was laden with irony, however. The *Hymne*'s adoption by the army and the Convention, as well as in the streets of Paris and throughout the countryside, pointed to new possibilities for the movement of songs between official and unofficial arenas. Belief in such a movement would encourage members of the National Convention to fund the National Institute of Music and, in company with other government officials, to patronize independent song production, thereby contributing to the extraordinary flourishing of song culture that France would witness in 1793 and 1794. But however much the ideal of a uniform, national song culture was celebrated in succeeding years, the *Hymne des Marseillais* would prove to be unique. Moreover, the multiple associations that favored the song's popularity in 1792 and 1793 would have opposing effects when consensus broke down, quite dramatically, in 1795. The song's affiliation with radical republicanism would almost prove to be its undoing during the Thermidorian reaction, as revolutionaries learned the difficulty of breaking down the univocality that they had so painstakingly created. Ultimately, however, the *Hymne*'s militarism would save it, pointing the way toward a new set of priorities during the final years of the Revolution.

For the moment, however, this song drew revolutionaries together, simultaneously revealing the coherence—both achieved and imposed—and the heterogeneity of republican song culture. Like the fixed lyrics of the *Hymne*, the multitude of songs produced during the next two years would reflect the rigid and radical nature of political life. Song production was about to reach its revolutionary zenith as songwriters celebrated republican principles, military victories, and revolutionary martyrs. But the immutability of the *Hymne*'s lyrics and the apparent homogeneity of republican song culture are equally misleading. The *Hymne* had already been shaped to a variety of ends in the first six months of its existence, when it was sung in informal celebrations by private citizens, incorporated into public festivals by government officials, and capitalized upon by entrepreneurs. So, too, would hundreds of seemingly similar republican songs be shaped to vastly different needs during the next two and one-half years, serving the distinct and sometimes opposed objectives of sans-culottes and Jacobins, amateurs and entrepreneurs alike.

# Chapter Four

✦

# The Revolutionary Song (April 1792–Pluviose Year III)

✦ THE APPEARANCE of the *Marseillaise* coincided with the opening of a period of crisis that would persist until the election of the Directory in late 1795. The effort to wage foreign and civil wars while provisioning cities and seeking equilibrium between the competing constituents of the new Republic would create considerable material and psychological insecurity, which the National Convention and the Parisian populace sought to conquer with draconian legal measures backed by violence. Censorship was practiced with increasing rigor after the August revolution of 1792, and the Terror was formalized in the fall of 1793 with the wide-ranging "Law on Suspects." Henceforth, Paris prisons filled steadily as citizens became subject to arrest for a broad range of vaguely defined activities.

But republicans were not simply meeting crises, they were simultaneously trying to fashion a new political culture. So these were also years of feverish creativity. In the National Convention, deputies initiated and examined projects for public instruction, for the creation of a new calendar and the unification of the language, and for the establishment of republican cultural institutions. From beyond legislative walls, citizens from Paris and the provinces volunteered proposals that touched on almost every aspect of public instruction, suggesting projects for the regeneration of education, public monuments, and civic rituals. Meanwhile, the streets and sectional assemblies of the city were alive with discussion and debate: What is the proper means to express love of Liberty? In what terms should one celebrate the Republic? How should despotism be represented?



This complex combination of repression and creativity did not affect all forms of cultural production equally. Some kinds of media suffered badly: newspapers and pamphlets were hard hit by crowd action and judicial restraints, and their numbers declined precipitously in 1793 and 1794. In the theatrical world, Opéra and Comédie-Française saw their actors and directors imprisoned, as did the théâtre du Vaudeville.[1] Song culture was a much different case, however. For, even as particular kinds of songs were silenced, revolutionary song production soared well beyond anything yet seen. Twice as many songs were written in 1792 as in 1791, and the number of new compositions doubled again in 1793; almost a thousand revolutionary songs are known to have been composed in the year II of the Revolution.[2] Meanwhile, song culture took on a variety of seemingly contradictory faces. For even as the members of an apparently homogeneous revolutionary society came to share common singing practices and lyrical tropes, they simultaneously explored the broad range of possibilities offered by performance, publication, and interpretation.

Song production and singing practices had been slowly expanding and gaining respectability since 1789, and they were galvanized by the combined impact of war, republican revolution, and the brilliant career of the *Marseillaise.* The war effort encouraged singing and song writing by fanning the flames of a patriotism that amateurs and professionals alike were eager to express and reinforce musically. Republicanism encouraged widespread cultural experimentation at the same time that it explicitly raised the status of working people's culture, thus ameliorating some of the traditionally negative associations of singing. Meanwhile, radicals—above all, Jacobins—who continued to express doubts about singing were mollified by the popularity of the *Marseillaise.* Here they found an anthem that evoked the seriousness and respectability they sought.

But song culture was not simply growing; it was taking off at the very moment that print media was shrinking in the face of republican repression.[3] This singular trajectory was, in part, the product of the revolutionary development of the genre. After 1789, changing practices and vigorous, sometimes violent debate gradually stripped songs and singing of their ambiguity and associated them ever more closely with revolutionary enthusiasm. Then, what began as a gradual transformation was catalyzed by events between 1792 and 1795 to produce a singularly rich and prolific republican song culture.

Three factors were particularly important in these years.[4] Above all, singing became an integral element of sans-culottes' political culture. In the years to come, song culture would benefit from the republican cele-

bration of common people's culture and from singing's unique capacity to express the enthusiasm and fraternity that were essential to a vigorous, radical politics. No longer cheap entertainment nor an ephemeral expression of political passion, unofficial singing would become inextricably linked with sans-culottes' activism. Simultaneously, the market would come to play an increasingly important role during these years. Entrepreneurs would not only help to expand song production; they would broaden the revolutionary credibility of singing by celebrating and elaborating its political pedigrees as part of their marketing strategies. Finally, administrators and legislators would come to recognize the revolutionary potential of song. They would praise and periodically subsidize certain kinds of song writing with genuine if haphazard enthusiasm.

But as song culture reached its revolutionary zenith, a new critique would emerge. In the winter of 1793–94 official uneasiness about the scope and force of the popular movement would find expression in a new wariness of singing. Equally concerned by the relationship between popular activism and singing, Robespierrists and Dantonists would disagree about how to respond to it. In the short term, the Robespierrist policy of channeling popular singing practices for official celebration would triumph over the Dantonist desire simply to impose silence. In the long term, however, post-Thermidorian governments would find compatibility between the two policies as they successfully married official appropriation with outright repression.

## Sans-Culottes' Singing

With the republican revolution of August 1792, sans-culottes moved to the center-stage of French song culture. Songwriters composed *nouveautés* that celebrated their initiative in the creation, constitution, and future of the Republic. Describing the August insurrection as the work of sans-culottes and *fédérés* alone, they went further still and dismissed legislators altogether, to assert that *le peuple* were the principal movers of the new Republic.

| | |
|---|---|
| Si l'on ne voit plus à Paris | If you no longer see in Paris |
| Des insolents petits marquis, | Those insolent little marquis, |
| Ni tyrans à calottes: | Nor tyrants in skullcaps: |
| En brisant ce joug infernal, | If by smashing this infernal yoke, |
| Si le pauvre au riche est égal, | The rich and poor are equal, |
| C'est grâce aux sans-culottes.[5] | It's thanks to the sans-culottes. |



When legislators do appear in song, they are peripheral or subservient figures. Relegated to a final verse or a single line, they are sketched as servants of the people without independent initiative. While this subordinate relationship is implicit in the structure and claims of particular songs, it is explicated in lyrics themselves, like the song title that describes Louis XVI as "brought to the bar of the National Convention and already judged by public opinion while awaiting the law to pronounce on his fate."[6]

The lyrical centrality of the sans-culottes is hardly surprising, given the importance of singing to sans-culottes' political culture. Near the end of the Revolution and later, in the nineteenth century, chroniclers and historians would look back at the Terror and marvel at the efflorescence of singing during years remembered for the revolutionary tribunal and the guillotine.[7] And it was remarkable: all varieties of unofficial political activity were interspersed with singing. Members of sectional assemblies heard songs about revolutionary martyrs and the Supreme Being, they sang together to celebrate the décade, and they closed General Assembly meetings with a chorus of the *Marseillaise*.[8] Deputations to the Paris Commune, and even the National Convention, performed songs there.[9] And such performances were recorded as rousing and wildly successful.[10]

More striking still was the popular singing that flourished in Parisian parks, theaters, and cafés, ordinary spaces that these collective expressions of republicanism transformed wholly.

> Five thirty in the evening at the café de Lattre . . . a group of good citizens gathered together and began to sing patriotic hymns. This seemed to bring enormous pleasure to all the spectators who, with a unanimous voice, began to shout Long live the Republic! Long live liberty! Down with the monarchy![11]

Citizens sang together in spite of bad news from the Vendée and because of the good news of the recapture of Toulon.[12] There were macabre performances of songs: "The conspirators were guillotined to shouts of Long live the Republic! . . . During this ceremony, the people sang, danced, and were very much satisfied." There were disruptive performances as well: "People have found a means to prolong theatrical performances. The last piece has scarcely been played before couplets rain down on the stage from all sides, which the actors are obliged to sing. If this mania of a few rhymesters is tolerated, the theaters will not close until midnight."[13] What is perhaps most surpris-

ing is that, given this propensity for singing, there were not more of both.

Why this particular means of celebration? It would be absurd to deny the most obvious explanations: singing was enjoyable, inspiring, and an easy means of instruction. Readily available in bars and cafés, it was cheap and patriotic entertainment. During moments of crisis, it relieved tension and drew singers together against threatening enemies. In neighborhood assemblies and at popular gatherings, it helped to disseminate the new principles among children and the illiterate. But songs had always served such functions; these reasons fail to explain why popular choruses multiplied to become almost omnipresent after 1792. The cause of this explosion lay in the development of republicanism and in the political culture of the sans-culottes.

Republicans did not simply extend the vote to all male citizens, regardless of income. Many of them actively celebrated the status, language, and culture of working people. This celebration of working people was most marked within sans-culotism, the extralegislative variety of radical republicanism that began to emerge in Paris and throughout France in 1791. Although historians once narrowly defined sans-culotism as a movement of artisans and shopkeepers who briefly exercised political power through Parisian sectional assemblies, it was in fact more broadly based.[14] Sans-culotism extended beyond militantly activist artisans and shopkeepers to include wealthier and better-educated radicals. At the same time, it appealed to working people who gave no evidence of political participation.[15] After the August revolution, sans-culotism designated a political ideology that advocated universal male suffrage and direct democracy, price controls, and a vigorous defense of the Revolution against foreign and domestic enemies. Even as a political ideology, however, it is significant that sans-culotism labeled itself a social movement and that it vociferously claimed to represent the interests and celebrate the condition of the working people. Regardless of the true social composition of the movement, the ideal sans-culotte would continue to be the working man who "lives quite simply with his wife and children, if he has any, on the fourth or fifth floor."[16]

As the early years of the Republic witnessed the formal recognition of working people as political actors and the valorization of their culture and means of expression, singing acquired an unheard-of respectability. The very quality that had once been its greatest liability, commonness, now became a source of strength. While popular songs gained respectability because of their commonness, they also won acclaim because they helped to celebrate and reinforce the essential values of



radical republicanism. Above all, singing was uniquely suited to the republican effort to create a new politics that would draw the national community together, destroying barriers between citizens and encouraging all in a sustained revolutionary effort.

The republican ideal of transparency—the absence of artifice or barriers between citizens—was wholly congruent with contemporary singing practices. Radical republicans aspired to an energetic transparency rooted in an enthusiasm that proclaimed, advertised, and enacted revolutionary sentiments. In theory, this enthusiasm reinforced transparent politics by eliminating distance between citizens; in very practical terms, it served radical politics by countering the "moderationism" that threatened to cool the energy necessary to accomplish the Revolution and prosecute the war.[17] Through their enthusiasm, revolutionaries expressed their commitment to the Revolution and encouraged others to make sacrifices; it militated against delinquent citizens, not because they attacked liberty but simply because they failed to act on its behalf.[18] Thus, to proclaim attachment to the Revolution was both the expression of a patriotic desire and obedience to a political imperative.

Singing was consistent with these ideals because songs have a singular capacity to arouse and reinforce enthusiasm. Lyrics aside, the act of singing itself serves as a rallying cry that invigorates political ardor. A good orator was acknowledged to be one who spoke "energetically and as a true republican," and the enthusiastic singer was more republican still: songs produced "a saintly enthusiasm" and "electrified" auditors.[19] A song in the first person further underscored the singer's proclamation of his or her republicanism and call to action:

| | |
|---|---|
| Partons, mes amis, pour la gloire | Let's go my friends, in search of glory |
| Accourons tous au champ d'honneur, | Let's all rush to the field of honor, |
| Nous sommes sûrs de la victoire, | We are certain of victory, |
| Et de la mort n'ayons pas peur.[20] | And of death let us have no fear. |

While republican populism and enthusiasm nourished singing of all sorts, the cult of fraternity encouraged the increasingly widespread practice of singing in groups. Among intellectuals and politicians, fraternity had very specific meanings that could be traced to the Enlightenment, but in the streets and popular societies of Paris it had more quotidian resonance as it encouraged unity in a fragile polity.[21] Fraternity served as a necessary counterweight to republican equality by en-

couraging the development of new social bonds to replace the social hierarchies which the Revolution was sweeping away.[22] But even as fraternity offered a means to exert pressure on one's fellow citizens, it was celebrated as a positive force that drew the political community together and reinforced solidarity in the face of the Revolution's enemies.

Singing reinforced fraternity as perhaps no other means of expression could because of its ability to excite emotion and draw singers together in common chorus. A fraternal dinner was not complete without singing. In the section des Piques, for example, the "patriotic songs" "sung by a few young citizennesses and echoed by the citizens enhanced still further the love of liberty and equality," while toasts drunk to the Mountain and the sans-culottes "gave proof of friendship and fraternity."[23] Thus the sans-culotte Chaumette could choose singing as the principal representation of fraternity when he accepted the new Constitution on behalf of the Paris Commune: "Frenchmen, let us gather together in fraternal groups around these saintly laws that we have given ourselves. Let us preserve them from the unhealthy breath of fierce ambition, from partisan anger . . . ; let us join together in striking up a hymn to saintly fraternity; let shouts of elation, songs of liberty and friendship replace the bitter sound of the trumpets of discord."[24]

The cult of fraternity also encouraged singing in sectional societies, where meetings were often reported to have closed with collective performances of "the hymn of the marseillais." In particular, energetic choruses punctuated the episodes of fraternization between sections that guaranteed the dominance of radicals in the spring of 1793.

> The president of the section of Cité . . . explains that they belong to the same city and are neighbors of the Pont Neuf section, and that they will always be ready to aid their oppressed brothers, and they march through the hall singing the hymn to liberty.[25]

And even after that movement had ended, sections continued to send deputations to the Paris Commune and even to the National Convention, to offer songs as a sign of patriotism and fraternity with their representatives.[26]

From well beyond Paris, private citizens and members of provincial popular societies sent songs to the Convention for the same reasons.[27] Their songs, often with accompanying notes, suggest half of a dialogue between the populace and the government, a testimony of private citizens' patriotism, fraternity, and faith in the Convention. Each victory and every decree that reshaped civic life elicited a flurry of songs in which men and women attested to the power exerted over them by the creation of the republican calendar, the reconquest of Toulon, or the Convention's recognition of a Supreme Being. Sometimes poorly rhymed or badly misspelled, these compositions were moving expressions of faith in, and commitment to the Revolution.



> Always passionate to contribute, as a member of the republic, all that might be of use to it, I believe it my duty to share a patriotic song about the victorious reconquest of Toulon. . . . I want very much . . . to prove [to the Convention] the sincere and inviolable emotions by which I will live and die a true French republican.[28]

These were the most positive and creative dimensions of popular singing. But transparency, enthusiasm, and fraternity did not draw the community together in a wholly benign way; they drew it together against a crowd of hostile adversaries and, in the process, enforced conformity on its own members. Song lyrics forcefully expressed republican fear and exclusiveness. By 1792, simple disdain of defeated "aristocrats" and "oppositional parties" was giving way to increasingly detailed, fearful, and angry descriptions of enemies.[29] As we have already seen, the *Marseillaise* was one of the earliest and most important songs to elaborate this vision, and by 1793 many Parisian songwriters had appropriated Rouget de Lisle's lyrical conceits, and often his melody, to produce songs that balanced precariously between exploiting popular fears through vivid and violent imagery and reinforcing confidence by celebrating recent or impending victory.

Like the *Marseillaise,* the republican songs of 1793 and 1794 described the—typically male—republican's enemies on all sides, even at home.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ma femme souvent me désole, j'm'en f—— | My wife often pesters me, I don't give a shit |
| En fréquentant mauvaise école, j'm'en f—— | By frequenting bad company, I don't give a shit |
| Elle me prône la charité | To me she extols charity |
| Moi je prêche la liberté; j'm'en f——.[30] | Me, I preach liberty; I don't give a shit. |

As descriptions of the nation's foes grew lengthier, they were rendered in an increasingly violent language; enemies became "wolves," "vile hell-

hounds" (vils suppôts de l'enfer), "monsters vomited from hell" (monstres vomis de l'enfer), and "cannibals," who, in their rage, would strike out and spill blood until the cries of mothers, sisters, brothers filled the air.[31] As detail became more vivid, songwriters began to identify these hostile figures. By 1793, Rouget de Lisle's generic "tyrants" and "traitors" had been given specific names, faces, and actions. Foreign enemies were listed systematically—Frédéric, Pitt, Cobourg, the duke of Brunswick, and King George of England—and domestic foes received more attention still, as lyrical confessions were placed in their mouths.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ne sachant que répondre, | Not knowing how to respond, |
| Brissot, d'un air troublé, | Brissot, with a troubled air, |
| Dit "Mon hôtel à Londres | Says, "My villa in London |
| N'est pas encore meublé. | Is not yet furnished. |
| Quoi, du fédéralisme on chasse ici l'apôtre? | What, you banish the apostle of federalism? |
| Si j'ai mis un Roi de côté, | If I brought down one king, |
| Cela n'était, en vérité, | It was only, to tell the truth, |
| Que pour en faire un autre."[32] | To raise up another." |

Like vivid detail, naming made adversaries recognizable, transforming them from shadowy figures to specific individuals who carried out precise actions. But even as it heightened the sense of an enemy's presence, such naming also mollified fears by identifying the counterrevolutionaries and assuring that their plotting had been uncovered.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ciel, que d'espèces d'intrigants, | Great God, what a bunch of schemers, |
| Roturiers, Nobles, et Calottes, | Commoners, nobles, and clergymen, |
| Pour dire mieux, que de brigands, | Or better yet, what highwaymen, |
| Vrais fléaux des vrais sans-culottes, | True scourges of true sans-culottes, |
| Mais, leur règne enfin est passé, | But their reign is finally done, |
| Leur fier orgueil est terrassé, | Their haughty arrogance is brought down, |
| Pour jamais tout est éclipsé, | All is vanished forever, |
| Grâce à la Montagne.[33] | Thanks to the Mountain. |

Song lyrics like these, all printed on the cheap octavo sheets that were the medium of truly common songs, rendered the political world in stark black and white, naming friends and foes. This vision was characteristic of sans-culottes' ideology, and these lyrics favored rousing performances of republican enthusiasm.[34] But in spite of undeniably radical



lyrics and rousing performances, songs continued to excite questions and occasional discomfort among some revolutionaries. Certainly, French men and women had to confront questions of signification and interpretation throughout the 1790s, but these matters became particularly acute in the years immediately following the August revolution, as republicans set out to redefine objects and gestures at the same time that they attempted to found a radically new, but absolutely stable system of signification. Songs, whose lyrics or performative impact could be changed in a single moment, continued to be subject to scrutiny. Who would be permitted to sing? What matters were appropriate to musical treatment?

Some people complained about obscene songs, and others expressed reservations similar to those that Jacobins had voiced. A man in a café feared that a versified Rights of Man was insulting rather than instructive; readers of the *Observateur sans-culotte* along with the newspaper's editor questioned whether street performers should sing as lightly of executions as they did of victories.[35] Although revolutionaries were unable to control all performances or song variations, many found that group singing permitted songs to be discussed, their performance or message corrected if necessary, and ambiguities conjured away.

> At the former church of St. Laurent . . . a young man of 10 years old sang a song about the conquest of Toulon; a verse of the song praised Robespierre. A member named Thibaut . . . said: citizens, I love and esteem Robespierre; but the living must never be flattered. They must not be raised onto altars until after they are dead; . . . otherwise liberty and equality will always be in danger. . . . The verse of which I spoke was stricken.[36]

Sans-culottes dealt with their lingering doubts about the malleability of songs by singing in groups, thereby policing lyrics and singing practices at the same time. This seemed a natural way to confront the problem, for singing was already intimately associated with a broad range of sans-culottes' activities, including fraternal dinners, sectional meetings, and appearances before the council of the Commune. But even as government administrators and legislators sought to co-opt and direct this energetic song culture, it remained a source of some discomfort for many of them. In particular, the Dantonists became increasingly uneasy about the close association between singing and sans-culottes' activism. This issue would not, however, emerge until the winter of 1793–94. But before considering it, we must consider the other force that most actively exploited and expanded republican song culture: the market.

## Selling Republicanism

As singing became a more esteemed means of republican entertainment and expression, songs acquired new status as commodities, and the market for songs that had begun to take root early in 1792 grew stronger. Entrepreneurs both exploited that reputation and helped to rewrite the history of popular songs by ascribing sound political purposes and pedigrees that they hoped would attract customers.

The song market that flourished in 1793 and 1794 emerged gradually during the early years of the Revolution, the product of shifting consumer habits and the deregulation of the publishing world. During the Old Regime and throughout the early Revolution, much of the market had been driven by the desire for *nouveautés*. This predilection for novel and sensationalist songs would persist into the nineteenth century. The long careers of *Ça ira* and the *Marseillaise* underscore the brief popularity—hence brief marketability—of most popular songs. While the desire for *nouveautés* remained constant, the song market witnessed other developments as well. As the newly found respectability of revolutionary songs attracted new customers, the growing popularity of singing played to the desire to purchase what was *à la mode*. The end result was a market that was both lively and politically sound.

As the desire for *nouveautés* and the growing fashionability of singing broadened the market for songs, the dramatic reshaping of the publishing world by revolutionary governments encouraged printers and publishers to fully exploit it. The calling of the Assembly of Notables in 1787 had begun the flood of ephemeral literature that would inundate France in the next decade, serving readers who were eager for news and opinions of current political events. After 1789, the steady dismantling of censorship and privilege forced printers and publishers to abandon the increasingly uncertain business of book publication for the more competitive world of ephemera: newspapers, pamphlets, sheet music, plays, and eventually, songs.[37]

And yet, politics also brought about the decline of certain kinds of publications. Royalists who managed to continue publishing until the summer of 1792 were driven from the scene by the August revolution; Girondins were the next to go, after their expulsion from the Convention in June 1793. Other writers and publishers were silenced by the strict press laws of 1792–93, and by the disturbingly broad Law on Suspects of September 1793. As a consequence, newspaper and pamphlet publication declined, and counterrevolutionary songs gradually disappeared from print.



Revolutionary songs, however, remained lucrative ephemera. Easy to produce and increasingly easy to sell, songs possessed sound republican resonances that publishers found elsewhere only with difficulty. Unlike newspapers and pamphlets, which critiqued, debated, and polemicized, revolutionary song lyrics rarely expressed contrary or even nuanced visions of the Revolution. Simple and enthusiastic proclamations, they were ideal commodities for publishers who were seeking to make their livelihoods under the strictures of the Terror. As publishers produced a growing number of songsheets and songbooks, editors included a growing number of songs in the pages of their newspapers, replacing editorials with the only items that were as politically secure as the *procès-verbaux* of the National Convention.

The period from 1792 through 1794 witnessed the diversification and the expansion of the market. At the beginning of the decade, revolutionary songbooks continued to appear in the cheapest of Old Regime formats. Tiny twelve- to fifteen-page pamphlets that contained a few topical songs and a romance or two, they were hawked in the streets by streetsingers or colporteurs.[38] Early in 1792, however, the Jacobin Thomas Rousseau introduced a new method of formating and marketing popular songs. Although his project would fail within a month of the August revolution, his example would provoke successful emulation.

Rousseau began to publish the periodical *Les chants du patriotisme* in the winter of 1792, announcing in the first issue that his central purpose was to "celebrate the most interesting periods of the Revolution, and engrave the memory of them in the hearts of our youth." Furthermore, "to add a new dimension of interest to words and tunes, I have enhanced the text with instructive or interesting notes." In an effort to outwit counterfeiters, he offered his songs in the form of a twice-weekly periodical; to insure that the songs reached as wide an audience as possible, he set the subscription rate at the "meager price" of 10 sous per month.[39] *Les chants du patriotisme* was a model of revolutionary pedagogy. Each issue contained a single song that celebrated what Rousseau believed were the most important events of the Revolution—the taking of the Bastille, the abolition of privilege on August 4, the creation of a *caisse patriotique*—and included lengthy footnotes that explained particular lyrics and allusions to classical figures or which developed the author's reflections on different aspects of the Revolution. When, at the end of his twenty-fourth number, Rousseau paused to remind subscribers to renew for the second trimester, he urged them on not by praising the quality of his compositions but by stressing the patriotism of the project.

> Under the easy guise of the song, I offer instruction to all classes of citizens; instruction which is all the more precious because, far from distracting citizens from their respective tasks, it animates them all the more with songs that are pure, easy and everywhere repeated with civic-mindedness [civisme] and patriotism. . . . I hope that all good citizens . . . will make it . . . a duty to contribute, through their meager subscription, to the success of an enterprise that should produce such great advantages for all classes of people in general.[40]

Apparently, not enough citizens acknowledged this duty because, two months later, Rousseau was berating the public for its apathetic response to his work. Unless he tripled subscription rates beyond the current 150, he threatened "I break my lyre and silence myself."[41] But the crowds of new subscribers were not forthcoming and so, the next month, Rousseau announced that he was suspending publication.

Rousseau published only original compositions and the most properly revolutionary of songs. And yet his project failed. Perhaps it was because, in his eagerness to educate, he too often neglected to entertain. In celebrating the Revolution's history, he included a great many songs that must have been of dubious popular resonance in 1792: singers might be eager to recall the taking of the Bastille, but could they find equally moving the "Decree concerning a new edition of Voltaire's works"? Or the song celebrating the "Establishment of a *patriotic treasury* on 12 September 1789, to receive all the gifts and free tributes of the people"? Finally, there was the difficult matter of footnotes: taking up at least as many pages as the songs themselves, the notes, no matter how informative (or pedantic), undermined all pretense that this publication was a good buy. Better to learn the entertaining compositions from a friend and save one's sous for a booklet that devoted every page to songs.

Rousseau's case, however personally frustrating, set an important example. In promoting a lengthier format for popular songs, this committed Jacobin justified his novel marketing strategy by calling upon revolutionary principles. Rather than presenting himself as an entertaining composer or enterprising publisher, he sought to capitalize on his status as a good republican.[42] But his failure served as a potent reminder that no matter how revolutionary the product, it had to obey certain commercial principles. *Les chants du patriotisme* suggested lucrative publishing possibilities that other composers and publishers would improve on. Wedding the commercial and the patriotic more successfully, Rousseau's successors produced a wealth of revolutionary songbooks over the next three years. Aiming for the broadest possible audience, publishers would unite professionally trained composers with amateurs, actors, and authors of vaudevilles, to produce a new kind of publication that combined sober and learned hymns with lively but patriotic couplets. Unlike Rousseau, these publishers printed only songs that were devoted to the most illustrious and popular of past events, and they kept them free of lengthy footnotes.[43] On the other hand, while their prefaces and forewords praised the songs' traditional qualities of gaiety and entertainment, they imitated Rousseau by emphasizing the republican dimension of singing, thereby rendering even gaiety and entertainment into republican virtues.



> The vaudeville is to the French what moral lessons are to other peoples: there are neither events nor remarkable actions that have not been set in verse. . . . Most astonishingly, we will carry the precepts of the healthiest reason among our neighbors with the baubles of Momus. The silent Englishmen, the grave Spaniard, the speculating Dutchman, the thick German, will one day smile at the witticisms of our songs, and soon Truth, accompanied by the charms of lovable Folly, will introduce itself among these peoples by the means of pleasure.[44]

Compelled to disseminate revolutionary principles, editors and publishers wielded "patriotism" and "republicanism" as marketing slogans at the same time that they set out to redefine the traditional appeal to *nouveautés*.[45] Songsheets—cheap and ephemeral—provided songs for immediate celebration or commentary; songbooks were founded on commemoration. Admittedly, by the year II, publishers only celebrated events that had taken place since the August revolution, but even their celebrations of the most recent events had a commemorative dimension. If one sang about the taking of Toulon or the assassination of Marat, this was not because these events were current and newsworthy but because they represented decisive stages in the progress and development of the Republic. Publishers promised that such songs would not go out of vogue. And editors quite plausibly argued that commemorating the Revolution, tracing its history and celebrating its imagery, was a patriotic act: "There is no collection that brings together the best patriotic songs that have appeared since the Revolution; we believed that we would render a service to liberty and her friends in launching one."[46] Buying and selling revolutionary songbooks had become patriotic.

Theatrical entrepreneurs also brought politics to the service of their enterprises. As we have already seen, some theaters exploited the popu-

larity of the *Marseillaise* by performing it during intermissions. Others produced patriotic plays and vaudevilles that described the war effort or treated republican themes, marrying the politically sound with the desire for *nouveautés*. Journalists who praised such productions and printed the best revolutionary couplets provided theaters with free advertising.[47] The most striking alliance between commercial theater and revolutionary politics was visible in the association of the general assembly of the Tuileries section with those masters of profitable politics, the owners and authors of the théâtre du Vaudeville. Here politics and commercial production became so intermingled as to be virtually indistinguishable.

As noted earlier, members of the Tuileries section were instrumental in winning the vaudevillists' freedom from prison early in the fall of 1793, and a working relationship developed between the two organizations over subsequent months. Piis and several actors from the Vaudeville began to write songs for celebrations of the *décade* in the Tuileries section, perhaps to ensure that they would have no more trouble with the authorities. Performances of the songs in sectional assemblies received newspaper coverage almost as regularly as did the theater. and the original lyrics appeared in songbooks published by the section's presses and by the Imprimerie Nationale.[48] Newspaper accounts reminded readers that the couplets they printed had been "sung at the Tuileries section and at the théâtre du Vaudeville"; songbooks repeated this claim or recalled the association between the section and the theater by identifying one of its principal songwriters as an "actor at the théâtre du Vaudeville."[49] These associations provided political and commercial benefits to both arenas. Those who could not afford a theater ticket could come to the Tuileries section to hear the latest compositions of one of the city's most popular theaters, perhaps receiving some republican instruction in the process. Meanwhile, the Vaudeville received incomparable advertising, which kept the theater's name perpetually in the public eye and suggested that patronizing it was truly a patriotic act.

But publishers and theater owners went further still. Not content to capitalize on the current status of revolutionary songs, they rewrote the history of singing.

> All ancient peoples had poets in the fore who fired their courage and urged them into combat with war songs. More than once, the fierce Spartans owed the defeat of their enemies to the male accents of Tyrtée. The Gaulois had their bards [too.][50]



While the editor of the *Chansonnier de la Montagne* harked back to Old Regime memorialists with this reference to the ancients, publicists for the théâtre du Vaudeville were even more inventive, imagining a new history of prerevolutionary singing.

> Everything ended with songs because everything could not yet be finished off by a spirited resistance to oppression; men were not yet mature enough to land powerful blows; but these songs more than once proved to the monsters who devoured the people's marrow, that the people recognized their infamy.[51]

This emphasis on patriotism made its way into critiques of published and theatrical songs as well. Beyond asking whether a song was simply pretty or clever, critics now analyzed its patriotic flair. Thus the songs in the *Chansonnier patriote* were "in good taste, of the right pitch, and suitable for fortifying patriotism," while a rather flat song at the Vaudeville was criticized with the assertion that "such nonchalance would seem less reprehensible if it were applied only to subjects of no import. . . . But that which represents liberty ought, even when singing, to respect its work."[52] Critical judgments had certainly become infused with politics, but this is hardly surprising in light of the active exchange that had developed between politics and commerce.

Traditionally, historians of the arts have complained that the Revolution disfigured cultural production by imposing political criteria upon it.[53] Although this complaint has died away in the past decade, some contemporary historians continue to regard the politicization of certain cultural forms as the product of restraints imposed externally by the National Convention or zealous sans-culottes.[54] And yet, while the songwriters and theatrical entrepreneurs we have considered here were subject to the same political constraints that weighed upon all Parisians during the Terror, they were also intent on turning a profit. They were therefore eager to capitalize and expand on current fashions. Such men and women did not simply bow their heads before political constraints; they actively exploited them.

In the face of such entrepreneurial exploitation, we must also revise traditional notions about the song culture of the early Republic. Historians have, accurately, represented early republican song culture as healthy and flourishing. In so doing, however, they have implied that all revolutionaries celebrated songs with equal enthusiasm.[55] In particular, Thomas Rousseau's sloganeering might be taken as significant evidence for the universal popularity of singing. But that sloganeering was not a

simple political pronouncement; it was also a means of commercial advertisement. Entrepreneurs developed an image of an unquestionably revolutionary song culture because it was in their interests to do so. But other members of republican society were less sure. In the National Convention, in government bureaus, and among the police of Paris, administrators and legislators considered songs more cautiously, weighing their extraordinary pedagogic potential against their association with sans-culottes' activism.

## Republican Authorities Consider Song Culture

As unofficial and commercial song cultures flourished, journalists, professional musicians, administrators, and legislators assessed singing practices and proposed specific policies for shaping them. These men did not always agree on policy, nor did they share the same attitudes toward songs, but they all defined themselves as members of a political and cultural elite with a responsibility not only to fight counterrevolution but to educate and contain their popular allies, whom they regarded with a mixture of paternalist concern and apprehension.

Inside the National Convention, deputies demonstrated an abiding concern with public instruction in many forms. But despite an active interest that was made manifest in speeches and decrees alike, the Convention was haphazard in its encouragement of the arts and cultural institutions, since it had to juggle political and economic crises with its desire to reshape French culture.[56] Singing fell prey to this haphazardness as much as did other means of expression. In January 1793, the deputy J. B. Leclerc was the first member of the Convention to explicitly raise the issue of using songs as a revolutionary instrument. He did so in the course of a speech on the importance of *poésie*—a category that he took to include hymns as well as lyric poems.[57] Leclerc began with the standard prejudice, acknowledging that *poésie* had been corrupted under the Old Regime because it was used to flatter the powerful and circulate the lies of religion. Such corruption was not, he argued, inherent in the genre itself; *poésie* was a sublime form, which had been turned to bad ends by dishonest men. "Once it has been regenerated, it can restore the courage of citizens, sustain in them the love of virtue, and serve the Fatherland, as much by its regular influence as by the authority that it exerts upon souls in moments of difficulty." Not surprisingly, to prove this point, "I call upon the example of the immortal hymn of the Marseillais."



Leclerc's voice was at first alone, however. Other deputies rarely addressed the pedagogic benefits of songs, and although music was central to the conduct and success of all festivals, ceremonial hymns continued to be solicited on a case by case basis as they had been since the opening of the Revolution.[58] Increasingly sympathetic to the revolutionary benefits of music and singing, the Convention nonetheless remained almost wholly dependent on outside initiative for song production until the year II. As the printing presses of the Paris Commune, local popular societies, and sectional assemblies churned out songs by members and admirers, the Convention mimicked the practices of the Assemblies that preceded it by contracting festival hymns from individual composers and occasionally printing a song that had been performed at its bar.[59]

Official song production began to grow more regular in the fall of 1793. Thomas Rousseau, who abandoned the commercial public to try his hand at winning government subsidies, secured an order from the minister of war for 100,000 copies of his *L'âme du peuple et du soldat*, to be distributed in the army.[60] More important still was the proposal that Bernard Sarette and the musicians of the Paris National Guard made to the Convention, requesting that they be subsidized and authorized to form a music institute.[61] The Convention decreed the establishment of the National Institute of Music in Brumaire year II (November 1793).[62] The Committees of Public Instruction and Public Safety were slow in supervising formal organization, but the men of the Institute acted quickly: they requested and received a depot for musical instruments and a printing press to publish festival music, and they began to compile songbooks for the provinces and the military.[63] In the end, the Institute would be given complete responsibility for the composition and performance of festival music.[64]

The cases of Thomas Rousseau and the National Institute of Music are instructive and exemplary: the Convention's nascent efforts to encourage pedagogic singing emphasized the composition of festival hymns and military songs. Festival songs and hymns served several purposes. Technically, they amplified rhetoric that might instruct and explain.[65] Unable to magnify a single voice throughout the enormous crowds that Parisian festivals assembled, directors could at least embed lessons in songs that could then be performed by a choir or, as in the case of the festival of the Supreme Being, sung by all participants. More generally, singing played the same unifying role here that it played in cafés and sectional assemblies, bringing together participants and spectators and underscoring the sense of national community that festivals were designed to impart and reinforce. Finally, it was hoped that songs

would serve as a vehicle to carry the festival's lessons beyond their spatial and temporal boundaries.[66] In the military, songs were expected to educate the quickly expanding armed forces. Concerned about the loyalty and discipline of its soldiers, particularly after the treason and desertion of Generals Lafayette and Dumouriez, the Convention undertook to inform those at the front of the Revolution's progress and, above all, to remind them that their first loyalty was to the nation rather than to specific commanding officers.

The printed songs that the Convention sent to soldiers and sailors promoted republican principles. Unlike their ephemeral Parisian counterparts, however, the lyrics bore few traces of the independence, undisciplined anger, or vulgarity of the sans-culottes. Here one found no "je m'en foutre" (I don't give a shit) or gleeful celebrations of the guillotine. Unlike the Parisian songs that occasionally threatened—"Je suis un des vrais sans-culottes . . . je fais caca sur les despotes" (I am one of the true sans-culottes . . . I shit on despots)—official military songs favored classical imagery and formal language.[67] They characterized sans-culottes as "dignes émules d'Achille" (worthy equals of Achilles), and warned enemies in exalted terms:

| | |
|---|---|
| Tremblez, ennemis de la France, | Quake, enemies of France, |
| Rois ivres de sang et d'orgueil; | Kings drunken with blood and arrogance; |
| Le peuple souverain s'avance; | The sovereign people advance; |
| Tyrans descendez au cercueil.[68] | Tryants descend to the tomb. |

The most striking difference between military songs and many of those hawked in Paris was the proximity or distance of the Revolution that they conveyed. Parisian songs painted a vivid picture of events and personalities: they attacked Louis XVI, then Brissot, and finally Marie-Antoinette, "the Austrian tigress," with endless detail. French soldiers were far from all this, and the songs that the government distributed brought them no closer: official lyrics fixed their eyes on war and Austrian enemies, or praised the abstract principles of the Revolution: liberty, dignity, human rights. If the government hoped to use songs to educate and contain, their best hope lay with their captive audience of soldiers and sailors at the front.

Technically, songs were well suited to the government's objectives. Cheap to produce, they circulated still more cheaply once they left the printed page. Thomas Rousseau complained bitterly of lost profits—"[my songs] have flown, each day they continue to fly from mouth to



mouth"—but ease of transmission was undoubtedly one of the benefits that the government sought.[69] Songs played the same unifying role amongst soldiers that they played in festivals and then went further still, easing the weariness of marching, encouraging soldiers when they attacked, and providing signals of advance or retreat.[70]

Songs were useful to festivals and the army for other reasons. The men of the newly founded National Institute of Music concurred with others who reflected on the pedagogic capacity of songs, arguing that music was singularly appropriate to bringing order to a society and "instilling in hearts the fires of patriotism and the enthusiasm of liberty."[71] Songs did not simply instruct and inspire; they organized.

> The marvels that [music] accomplished among the free peoples of antiquity are well known. . . . [The ancients] made it one of the bases of their social institutions. . . . Between the hands of the wisest legislators, music served as a powerful means to enlighten men, . . . fortify public spirit [esprit public], inspire love of the Fatherland and respect for laws, sustain patience, rouse the courage of their warriors, and nourish the seeds of useful and generous actions in all hearts.[72]

Like the commercial publishers and amateur songwriters who offered proposals to the Convention, deputies and professional musicians shared a common enthusiasm for revolutionary songs, which they justified by looking to the ancients. But these men found a different moral among the ancients. Rather than defining songs as an instrument equally available to all, they considered them to be a tool with which the few might gently guide the many: "in every period, there has been no more seductive means to encourage, seduce and lead a people than with music."[73]

And yet, even as powerful instruments for "encouraging," "seducing," and "leading" the people, songs were most often celebrated within the specific and controlled contexts of festivals and the military. Singing, like other forms of public instruction and celebration, was promoted as a community activity. Certainly, group singing promoted feelings of unity that strengthened the Republic, but we know as well that the group provided a potent means of controlling what images circulated and how those images would be represented and interpreted.

Beyond the confines of festivals and military life, songs made a somewhat more ambiguous contribution to the Revolution, and Jacobins continued to be those most likely to voice concerns about their potentially disruptive effects. Uncertain of their popular allies, many Jacobins

feared that the mass of the citizenry was so unenlightened and buried in daily affairs that they had little time to develop rational political ideas. In their eyes, the polity's best hope lay with a small, educated elite endowed with the capacity to think and argue. Such an elite might win and keep the allegiance of the ignorant and undifferentiated mass.[74]

Jacobin editorials accused the Nation's enemies of using every means at their disposal to agitate the spirits of the people: "exaggerating terrible news; enfeebling all that is appropriate to raising national hopes; entering into the people's suffering."[75] Journalists reminded revolutionaries that "evil words incite evil actions; their presence must not be tolerated at the cradle of the Republic," at the same time that the revolutionary tribunal acted on the belief that songs were capable of exciting monarchism or dissuading youth from joining the army.[76] Like good oratory, singing might be turned against the Revolution for exactly the same reasons that it could be used so effectively on its behalf: songs stirred the emotions and shaped public opinion.[77]

Certainly, some of these fears were overblown. As a direct and noisy means to proclaim political sentiment, songs were a grossly inappropriate means to express counterrevolutionary opinion given the close scrutiny characteristic of the Terror. Few dared to sing such songs or even keep copies of them. The occasional man or woman arrested for counterrevolutionary singing usually claimed drunkenness; the more common attitude was quite likely that of the citizeness Rudeuil who, having heard that her tenant had found and kept a counterrevolutionary song, "scarcely slept the whole night. . . ."[78] But many radical republicans were concerned with more than counterrevolutionary singing. Some attacked songs that seemed to make light of revolutionary hardship or, worse still, obscene songs that they feared would threaten the very foundations of the Republic.[79] For if one believed, like Robespierre, that "immorality is the foundation of despotism, just as virtue is the essence of the Republic," then obscene songs did not simply overheat the imaginations of republican maidens (no one worried about the overheated imaginations of young men); they endangered the sound morals upon which the Republic must be founded, and so threatened to bring the whole political order crashing down.

In truth, such fears seemed old-fashioned and merely habitual by this point—of course, popular songs might be obscene or frivolous—and they were more than counterbalanced by the praise raised by these same men. The *Feuille de la République* ran bucolic accounts of spontaneous song performances, and police spies repeatedly measured the patriotic fervor of private assemblies by the singing done there: "The cafés on the boulevards . . . were full of people, but they sang only patriotic tunes . . ."[80] Within the National Convention, however, a new critique of popular singing emerged in the winter of 1793–94, which very explicitly responded to the singing practices that had developed since the August revolution. Although this critique would briefly die with its exponents, the Dantonists, it would return to shape government policy in later years.



A legislative movement to silence some kinds of revolutionary singing emerged as Danton and his political allies began to agitate for a demobilization of the Terror. Persuaded that the Revolution's crisis was past, the Dantonists urged the Convention to dismantle the extraordinary measures of the Terror and loosen its ties of alliance with radical sans-culottes. Initially favored by Robespierre, the Dantonists seized all opportunities to promote their position: Camille Desmoulins published increasingly explicit polemics against radical and popular government, while Danton and even Robespierre made careful speeches at the Jacobin Club and traded barbs with the sans-culottes' spokesman, Hébert, when he called for intensification of the Terror. Inside the Convention, Danton made few overtly moderate speeches, but he promoted the restoration of a more businesslike politics by repeatedly urging that decrees be sent to committee rather than debated on the floor of the Convention.[81] And, at the end of January, as the moderate campaign reached its first climax, he insisted that the Convention take a more critical view of singing.

A deputation from the Piques section arrived to ask the deputies to attend their celebration of the "martyrs of liberty" several days hence. One of their members sang a "patriotic song of his composition," and the deputy Laloi moved that the deputation's speech and song be included in the Convention's bulletin. Danton objected, "The Bulletin of the Convention is in no way meant to carry verse throughout the Republic, but rather good laws written in good prose. Moreover, a decree requires the Committee of Public Instruction to give preliminary consideration to all that concerns the arts and education." Laloi responded with common republican praise of song, but Danton was not to be dissuaded. "One must not invoke principles we all recognize in order to reach false conclusions. Certainly, patriotic hymns are useful . . . for electrifying republican energy; but who among you is in any condition to pass judgment on the song performed at the bar? Did you truly hear its words and its meaning? Because I myself cannot judge them."[82] The song was sent to the Committee without further debate.

It may quite plausibly be argued that at this point Danton was simply urging that songs be treated with the same circumspection he promoted for legislative decrees. But having regularized the Convention's proce-

dures for publishing songs, Danton went still further and attacked popular singing itself. Shortly after the arrest of the Hébertistes, which was quite clearly an overt attack on the extralegislative activism of the sans-culottes, a deputation from the Mont-Blanc section appeared at the bar to congratulate the legislature on its victory. Danton interrupted their singer in midverse.

> The halls and the bar of the Convention are meant to hear the solemn and serious expression of the citizens' wishes; none may allow himself to express these wishes with sideshow singing. . . . Here we must coolly, calmly, and with dignity sustain the great interests of the Fatherland, discuss them, sound the charge against tyrants, point out and strike down traitors, and raise the alarm against impostors. I acknowledge the civic-mindedness of the petitioners; but I request that henceforth we hear nothing at the bar but reason in prose.[83]

The proposal was adopted without discussion and popular singing was banished from the legislative halls.

Coming as they did at the height of the struggle for moderation and against popular radicalism, these brief speeches spoke volumes about the Dantonists' view of sans-culottes' singing. Danton himself recognized that the sans-culottes meant to express their fraternity and alliance with the Convention by means of their performances, and there could be no more evocative way of repudiating that alliance than by silencing popular singing. But this was more than an isolated critique developed within the context of a specific political battle. One of the distinctive features of early republican political culture had been its celebration of the laboring poor and its valorization of common people's means of expression, including singing. Now, one of the principal spokesman of the Convention had begun to criticize singing and drive it from the Convention, which amounted to arguing that sans-culottes had no legitimate place there. But by the time he made his second speech against singing, Danton was losing his political battle. Within three weeks, he and Camille Desmoulins would be arrested, tried, and executed. Yet Danton's critique of singing was only temporarily silenced; it would lie dormant for almost a year, only to return victorious.

Having eliminated their political opponents on the Left and the Right, the members of the Committee of Public Safety embarked on a frenzy of activity to regenerate and renew France. As the number of accused and executed rose dramatically, the National Convention passed decrees intended to set the foundations of a truly republican culture by



creating monuments, reforming the language, and organizing education.[84] Now Montagnards turned their attention to actively shaping song culture, attempting to assimilate the popular to the official.

The Convention and the Committee of Public Safety issued decrees which requested the submission of hymns and songs that treated specific themes. On 18 Floréal (7 May 1794), for example, the Convention's decree recognizing a Supreme Being and organizing a national calendar of festivals included an article which "calls all talents worthy of serving the cause of humanity to the honor of contributing to its establishment with hymns and civic songs."[85] Two months later the Committee of Public Instruction issued an invitation that called upon republican poets to contribute to the celebration of the memory of Barra and Viala, youthful "martyrs" who reputedly chose death rather than renounce their republican principles.[86] True to the Convention's goals, these requests solicited songs that might be used within the controlled context of the Festival.[87] And, not content with simply harnessing popular initiative, legislators sought to broaden and reinforce festival singing. Thus, when plans were laid for the great festival of the Supreme Being, the Institute of Music sent its members to each Paris section, to teach locals the words and tune of the hymn that had been officially adopted.[88]

While they actively set about shaping popular song production and singing practices, the Jacobins also shaped publishing practices. For, at the same time that they complained about obscene or irreverent songs and promoted more elevated compositions for festivals and the army, a number of such songs and hymns were making their way into revolutionary songbooks. By the year III (1794–95), the informal and entertaining songs that had dotted and even filled songbooks had given way almost entirely to more formal republican hymns composed by learned poets or musicians, thus insuring that festival songs would stand a better chance of making their way to the streets. Ironically, even as reactionary newspapers began to blossom in Paris, booksellers were advertising their most republican publications yet:

> The citizen Chemin . . . has put a collection of almanacs on sale. The choice of songs and other pieces of which they are composed, do honor to his taste and prove his patriotism.
>
> 1. Poor Richard's almanac
> 2. New Republican songbook, with calendar of the decade
> 3. Almanac of the national festivals
> 4. Almanac of the sans-culottes[89]

The early years of the Republic witnessed the flourishing of the song culture that we most commonly associate with the French Revolution, one in which abundant compositions and performances received praise from all sides for their revolutionary and pedagogic power. During these years revolutionary song culture reached its zenith. Not only did production and performance flourish, compositional and singing practices unified a number of seemingly disparate arenas—commercial and amateur, legislative and popular, high-brow and common. For once, cultivated representations of singing accorded with practice, if only briefly. It is no coincidence, of course, that song culture came to flourish at the very moment that the Revolution claimed most forcefully to represent the interests of working people. Songs flourished now, as other cultural forms began to decline, partly because they were the poor person's means of expression *par excellence.*

But, as this chapter has meant to suggest, we would be missing a great deal if we contented ourselves with a simple picture of republican enthusiasm and homogeneity. For, in the first place, the homogeneity that was to be found among compositions and singing practices was enforced as much as it was achieved: Parisians sang soundly republican songs because, after the fall of 1793, no one dared to sing anything else. Secondly, and perhaps most significantly, much of this homogeneity was only apparent: different fractions of the population drew upon a common culture to achieve very different ends. The most ironic example of this was, of course, that sans-culottes used singing to encourage and celebrate the very qualities that enabled them to compete and negotiate with the Convention, even as deputies and bureaucrats hoped to draft songs to the task of disciplining and indoctrinating the populace.

Given these diverse motives, it is not surprising that tensions persisted concerning the significance of singing. Even in the streets, some were concerned by the unpredictability of this very fluid form of expression. While deputies and bureaucrats actively drew upon songs to encourage republican commitment, others were disturbed by the occasionally rough language of songs or, like Danton and his allies, by the alarmingly close association between singing and extralegislative activism. Many undoubtedly would have preferred that singing take place under controlled circumstances—at festivals, in local gatherings, in the army—and most hoped to create a song culture dominated by songs which, like the *Marseillaise,* brought together exalted language, formal composition, and wild popularity. While such tensions and diversity underscore the complexity of song culture even at the moment of its greatest uniformity, they also suggest quite pointedly the difficulties inherent in making assertions about republican culture that are based on the activities or statements of a single party. Even at its most homogeneous, republican culture remained an uncertain compromise between a diversity of practices, aspirations, and ideologies. However much they tried, neither the government nor any part of the populace could achieve uniformity without—as the final months of the Terror remind us—a staggering level of coercion.



Finally, 9 Thermidor was not the signal for a sudden, seismic change in this culture. Rather, Robespierre's fall initiated a slow and steady mutation which gradually solidified into a self-conscious culture of Reaction. Contemporaries at first believed that they had simply witnessed another republican victory over tyranny: "the day of 10 Thermidor enhances the glory of 10 August, of which it serves as a kind of anniversary."[90] The slow change that followed was as much the product of political considerations as it was of the peculiarities of cultural innovation: Thermidor swept away only the most powerful and vocal clique of the Convention, leaving behind a great many deputies who were themselves implicated in the Terror and none too eager for a sudden rush to vengeance and the settling of accounts.

The Convention acted slowly and hesitantly in dismantling the Terror, and the transformation of early republican culture was gradual, progressing slowly from Republican denials of Robespierre to debate to reaction. And as the reaction gained momentum and adherents inside of the Convention and out, its voice acquired an impressive volume and—need we be surprised?—became associated with a song. On 30 Nivôse, year III, in the Guillaume Tell section, the actor Pierre Gaveaux performed a song whose lyrics he had written. The *Réveil du peuple* would quickly become the anthem of reaction as well as the source of an ongoing cultural struggle within the populace, and between populace and government, for the next two years. This song, and not 9 Thermidor, marked another crucial shift in Republican song culture.