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### The Longest-Enduring Pompadour Hoax: Senac de Meilhan and the Journal de Madame du Hausset

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# Art and Culture in the Eighteenth Century

New Dimensions  
and Multiple Perspectives

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Elise Goodman



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# The Longest-Enduring Pompadour Hoax: Sénac de Meilhan and the *Journal de Madame du Hausset*

ALDEN R. GORDON

Much of what has been written about the family and life of Madame de Pompadour is inaccurate. Popular writers and scholars alike have been deceived by the mesh of unreliable sources and, as a result, have contributed to the creation of the myth of Madame de Pompadour. These untrustworthy sources stem initially from oral rumors and songs which became falsehoods recorded by diarists and writers in the scurrilous handwritten news sheets (called *nouvelles à la main*). From the handwritten forms they passed into printed form as faked autobiographies, apocryphal collections of letters, and fabricated journals and memoirs. While a significant number were created between 1745, when Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson d'Étiolles emerged as mistress of Louis XV, and her death in 1764, the volume of Pompadour fakes expanded after her death and continued into the early years of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The motives for the invention of these literary hoaxes varied from personal rancor and political intrigue during her lifetime to include after her death every shade of profiteering, historical reconstruction, and propaganda.

Identifying frauds and debunking them is almost as difficult as understanding the more subtle motives for their invention.<sup>2</sup> In order to detect a fraud, one must think first of the tests to which one would subject any document to verify its authenticity. First and foremost, the physical evidence of an eighteenth-century document is the most important proof of its genuine origin. The paper, watermarks, ink, seals, penmanship, orthography, handwriting, diction, and other physical attributes of an author, nation, or a period can be scrutinized in much the same way that a drawings connoisseur would verify an attribution to an artist and attempt to date a work. A document, again like a work of art, has a provenance or his-

tory of ownership. If the document is in a public archive and its date of entry to the collection and source can be ascertained, this is strong evidence of a *terminus ante quem* for the creation of the manuscript. If the document was part of a private archive, inventories of these private estates may exist. In the eighteenth century, French estate inventories listed the documents in great detail. A document with an inventory number assigned by the notary making the inventory of the estate, which can be cross-checked with the surviving inventory, is nearly proof positive of the authenticity of the document. A continuous history of ownership of a document in private hands might be helpful to ascertain the likelihood of authenticity. Since so many documents of the *ancien régime* were pilfered during the French Revolution, provenance is not so useful as it might otherwise be for other countries or periods.

For this reason, the veracity of French material of the eighteenth century can and should be corroborated by other, proven authentic, contemporary sources. Foremost, the content of the text should be internally consistent with what is known to be factual from other authentic sources. Collaterally, a person with access to specific and consistent factual knowledge would have to be known to and mentioned by contemporaries. The existence of a contemporary letter, diary, or memoir making reference to the document in question or to the same events, facts, and circumstances recounted in the document would argue strongly for the authenticity of the source. By the same token, proven authentic writings by the same author would be a strong proof of the subject's handwriting, style, knowledge, and propensity to write. Other corroborating circumstantial evidence should come from the biographies of the author, the recipients of the

document or its subsequent owners, and from the life histories of those mentioned in the document.

When a text fails to meet most of the criteria sketched above, a scholar should become wary of the source and should challenge it further before presuming to cite it as evidence. In particular, if there is a suspicion that the document could be false, one should ask three questions:

- what might be the motives for creation of the text;
- what is the likelihood that the information in the text could have been assembled at a later date by means other than those professed (as a pastiche from authentic period sources, secondary sources, hearsay, etc.); and
- analyze what were the reasons for finding the text believable in the first place and in what ways might the text be internally inconsistent or contradictory to known fact?

By all of these measures, we can now identify the *Journal de M. H. [Madame du Hausset], femme de chambre de Madame de Pompadour* to be the most enduring of the false sources about Madame de Pompadour and the most difficult to disprove.<sup>3</sup> One of the most successful literary fabrications of all time, enduring for eighteen decades, the *Memoirs of M. H., Chambermaid to Madame de Pompadour*, to give it its English title, is an assemblage of anecdotes which first appeared in 1809 in a light collection of literary and historical pieces whose title in translation means "a mixture of history and literature." It was edited and published by an expatriate Scot who styled himself Quentin Craufurd, about whom there will be much more to add later in this article.<sup>4</sup> The text purports to be dictated to an unnamed third person by Nicolle Collessou du Haussay, a historical figure who was one of three ladies-in-waiting to Madame de Pompadour.

No single source has been so frequently used as the basis for anecdotal insight into the intimate life of Madame de Pompadour and Louis XV. From its appearance in 1809 until today, it has been paraphrased and recast in book-length form in dozens of guises. In addition to being reedited many times, the journal of *Madame du Hausset* was the principal source for most early nineteenth-century accounts of Pompadour—notably Scipio Marin's 1830 two-

volume *Mémoires de Madame la marquise de Pompadour* and C. A. de Sainte-Beuve's articles on Pompadour in his *Causeries de Lundi*.<sup>5</sup> Most biographies of Pompadour in the twentieth century have depended, more or less, on the tone and incidents of the journal of *Madame du Hausset*. Some, such as Marcel Tinayre's *Madame de Pompadour, d'après le journal de sa femme de chambre*, are novelistic first-person accounts. Most recently the popular French novelist and raconteuse Ménie Grégoire published her own celebratory story, entitled *Le Bien-Aimé*, based on *Madame du Hausset* and clearly subtitled as the "apocryphal memoirs of Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour."<sup>6</sup>

The anecdotes in *Madame du Hausset* are delightful and have seemed so necessary to the biographer because they are the only sustained intimate descriptions of the private life shared by Louis XV with Madame de Pompadour. And therein lies the gnawing sensation that the journal of *Madame du Hausset* is too good to be true. The anecdotes supply precisely the kind of voyeuristic intimacy about incidents, emotions, and personal quirks that people desperately want to know about any famous person. Having not existed in actuality they had to be invented to supply the lack. Subsequent writers have wanted to believe in the text despite evidence that it might not be authentic. Furthermore, it can be construed to be a positive depiction of Madame de Pompadour, or at least a very human depiction of her. Biographers of Pompadour have tended to find an ally in the author of the memoirs of *Madame du Hausset* and have not been as skeptical, perhaps, as they should have been. After all, what harm did it do?

There are solid bases beyond instinct for recognizing the journal of *Madame du Hausset* as a literary confection. Doubt was first shed on the journal by Pierre Gaxotte in 1956 in an address to the Institut de France in which he, I believe correctly, attributed the forgery to Sénac de Meilhan.<sup>7</sup> Gaxotte elaborated his case in 1986<sup>8</sup> just as a new edition of the text under the title *Mémoires de Madame du Hausset sur Louis XV et Madame de Pompadour* was beginning distribution by its publishers, Mercure de France.<sup>9</sup> Pierre Gaxotte deserves credit for being the most vocal to denounce it as a fake. Adrien Thierry acknowledged the questionable status of the *Mémoires de Mme du Hausset* in his very

solid biography of Mme de Pompadour.<sup>10</sup> Even its most recent editor accepts that a later author added parts of it.<sup>11</sup> Pierre Escoube flatly denounced the book as a pseudo-memoir;<sup>12</sup> yet the word has failed to reach many academics and art historical writers who continued to cite the book as factual.

It is worth admiring the genius of the deception and why people wanted to believe in the *Memoirs of Madame du Hausset*. There are two strong elements that fuel the desire to believe. There had been a real Madame du Hausset who, had she been the actual author of memoirs, would have been in a position to tell these kinds of things about Madame de Pompadour and Louis XV. The story about how Craufurd came to possess the manuscript and how the manuscript itself had survived was impossible to verify since all of those associated with the tale were dead by 1809. In any event, the story of the manuscript's provenance was itself entertaining and romantic.

What, then, are the flaws that prevent us from believing in the two justifications that are put forward as guarantors of the memoirs? Why should we not believe that the historic personage wrote such a memoir about her employer and what error is there in the alleged provenance of the manuscript?

The historic Nicolle Colleson du Haussay, as it was spelled in legal documents,<sup>13</sup> was a companion to Madame de Pompadour and was present in her apartments at all hours of the day and night. Her status as lady-in-waiting and her personal insignificance in the court hierarchy would have made it readily possible for her to have been present to hear intimate conversation. Had she kept a diary it might have escaped the notice of people in the literary world. Her biography was written in 1937.<sup>14</sup> Born into a family of merchant weavers in Champagne, her father died when she was five. Her mother remarried a man who treated his stepchildren ungenerously, as a result of which she had almost no education. The only surviving examples of her handwriting are very brief letters, receipts, and signatures on legal documents. On these grounds alone it is impossible to either confirm or deny Nicolle du Haussay as capable of authoring her memoirs, but clearly there is no evidence of any sustained literary activity even of modest scale. Being generous, she might have narrated incidents

orally to another person who gave them literary shape.

Madame de Pompadour also made a fetish of secrecy about herself and her intimate circle. She placed great emphasis in the selection of her intimates and servants upon their loyalty to her. There is clear evidence of Nicolle du Haussay's family ties to Madame de Pompadour. She, and the other two personal attendants upon Madame de Pompadour, were all chosen for their family bonds and debts of loyalty. The very act of recording for the delectation and entertainment of outsiders the intimate details of her health, daily life, and conversations with the King would be precisely the activity that Madame de Pompadour sought to preclude. That this should be done as a kind of pastime by a trusted friend whom she had lifted from the poverty of widowhood of a rural nobleman would have been an act of treachery. Even assuming that Nicolle du Haussay did keep such a notebook, the world in which Madame de Pompadour moved was so restricted that it is highly unlikely that any person close enough to her to have firsthand knowledge and to have written it down would not also be known to have shared such knowledge with contemporaries, even after Madame de Pompadour's death. Such an inside source would have been mentioned in other people's journals or correspondence and some references made to this person and to their writings or conversation. But nowhere in any letter or other contemporary document does anyone mention Nicolle du Haussay, characterize her intellect, and certainly no one makes any reference to her writing.

In fact, Nicolle Colleson owed a great deal of loyalty to the Poisson family, both the sister, Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, and the brother, Abel-François Poisson, Marquis de Marigny. Dame Nicolle Colleson was born a commoner on 14 July 1713 in Vitry-le-François. There is a high likelihood that she was acquainted with the family of the Poissons' mother, Madeleine La Motte. Both Nicolle's uncle and Madeleine La Motte's father were food contractors to the Royal Military Hospital at the Invalides and were housed on its grounds. Nicolle lived with her uncle before her marriage in 1734 and could well have known Madeleine La Motte and her daughter, the future marquise de Pompadour, at what was a very dif-

ficult time in their lives, during the exile of Madeleine's husband, François Poisson. Nicolle married at twenty-one in 1734 into the minor nobility to Jacques René de Haussay, seigneur de Desmaines. She was eight years older than her future mistress. She had three children, two of whom survived to adulthood. Her husband, thirteen years her senior, died in 1743 at age forty-three leaving Nicolle a widow at thirty-one. Nicolle Colleson was a cousin to the Jacquier family of Vitry. The well-known Jesuit mathematician, Père François Jacquier, was a teacher to the Marquis de Marigny at the Collège Louis le Grand and a correspondent with the Poissons. He also wrote a letter of recommendation to Madame du Châtelet on behalf of Nicolle after she was widowed.<sup>15</sup> By 1747 and perhaps in 1746, Nicolle Colleson entered the service of Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson as one of three lady's maids who served her in rotation. Nicolle was with Madame de Pompadour to her death in 1764 and received a pension by her will. This pension was honored during the lifetime of the Marquis de Marigny to his death in 1781 and then was passed on by the terms of his will as an obligation of his estate upon his heirs, the Poisson de Malvoisin. Only the Revolution and the loss by the Poisson de Malvoisin of their property interrupted the pension. Never in want and attended by her children, Nicolle lived until just short of her eighty-eighth birthday, dying in Paris on 5 Thermidor of the Year IX (24 July 1801).<sup>16</sup>

This long digression on the biography of Nicolle du Haussay is relevant both as regards the unlikelihood that a diary of this kind would have been created as a benign pastime and as it touches the story propounded by Craufurd for the discovery of the alleged journal. Craufurd, as editor and publisher of the *Mélanges d'histoire et de littérature* in 1809, claimed that:

An (anonymous) friend of Monsieur de Marigny [presumed to be Sénac de Meilhan, as we shall discuss below] entering one day into Marigny's abode found him burning papers. Taking a fat packet that he was also about to throw on the fire, he said, "This is a journal of my sister's maid, who was an estimable woman. But all of that is 'rabâchage'; into the fire!" And then he stopped himself saying: "Don't you find that I am standing here like the curate and the

barber of Don Quixote, who burned the works of chivalry?" "I ask for a pardon for that one," said the other. "I love anecdotes and I shall find without doubt something that will interest me in that manuscript." "I should like that very much," Marigny said and gave it to him.

Craufurd goes on to explain, without any details or dates, that the person in the story was Sénac de Meilhan and that he sold the manuscript to Craufurd.

Before dealing with the characters of Sénac and Craufurd, there are three glaring falsehoods in Craufurd's story that demonstrate that it is pure invention. The first is that Marigny was not a friend of Sénac de Meilhan and Sénac would not have been welcome to stroll into Marigny's library while he was destroying papers from his sister's estate. Second, if, as the story suggests, the journal ended up being taken with all of the papers in his sister's apartments and, thus, came into his possession, then the journal would, as with virtually every other scrap of paper in the estate, have been listed in her inventory. There was, of course, no way for Craufurd or Sénac in the first decade of the nineteenth century to know that such an inventory had been made or that it survived as it was not identified or published until much later.<sup>17</sup> As you might anticipate, there is no citation of a diary or journal that in any way could match the document in question. If, however, one presumes that Nicolle du Haussay herself gave the journal to Marigny and that it was not in the papers of Madame de Pompadour, this raises other questions. First, why should Nicolle du Haussay, who as we know was very much alive and well and was to outlive Marigny, give her memoir to Marigny, especially considering the intimate things, not all flattering, which it says about Marigny himself. Still further, no one could have known at the time that Marigny was himself a manic record keeper. There survives in the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris Marigny's own index to his files.<sup>18</sup> In this index, Marigny listed in detail the categories of records—and in many cases the precise material—contained in his file boxes. One large category included personal letters and slanderous pamphlets and memoirs directed against his sister or himself. Marigny spent large sums of money to prevent gossip, hearsay,

and slander about his sister from circulating, even years after her death. And yet he assiduously kept copies of every such item. While Marigny certainly did destroy sensitive personal papers, he would never give such an item away, and certainly not to a mere acquaintance. If such a journal did exist, he would have guarded it carefully. No journal of Madame du Haussay appears in Marigny's index. All of the papers which do appear in Marigny's index later appear in the inventory of his estate, a clear and absolute proof of the reliability of the mutually corroborating sources and of Marigny's habit of careful preservation of his personal archive.

From the point of view of physical evidence, there is no case in favor of Craufurd's story of how he came into possession of the text. The 1809 published text is the entire basis and source of the account. There is no document and thus no physical evidence that it ever did exist. No one, except the original perpetrator Craufurd, claims ever to have seen the manuscript, which all of its subsequent editors admit does not exist.

Since there is no external evidence that the journal of *Madame du Hausset* is authentic, we must fall back on the last issues—internal evidence and motive. Should the internal evidence of the document itself vis-à-vis other contemporary documents not prove its authenticity, then we must proceed to the final tests of forgery. These are to challenge the believability of Craufurd, the likely motives for creation of a fraud, the likelihood that the contents could have been assembled independently, and ultimately, the reasons the text has been found believable.

As has been mentioned, the journal of *Madame du Hausset* cannot be corroborated as an original manuscript from the lifetime of Nicole Collessou du Haussay by any external means. Is there, then, internal evidence that the document contains information of a precision and irrefutable nature that could only have been known at the time of authorship? Even a cursory reading reveals that the narrative is not a journal at all. It is characterized by a total absence of dates and jumbled "recollections" together out of chronological order, as has been acknowledged by all of its editors.

All events in which there is a physical description of the setting take place at Versailles, suggest-

ing that the author had some familiarity with the rooms occupied or formerly occupied by Madame de Pompadour. This strongly suggests that the author did not have a physical knowledge of any of her houses or other apartments, all of which Nicolle du Haussay would have known just as well as she knew the Versailles apartments. Most striking of all, the author seems not to have been aware that Nicolle du Haussay served as but one of three ladies-in-waiting to Madame de Pompadour. Thus the description of routine events in the establishment lack verisimilitude. The anecdotes that are recounted are of such a nature that they cannot be refuted or checked. They are good stories but they cannot be corroborated in other diaries and none appear elsewhere. On the other hand, the author reveals a political awareness that makes it hard to imagine the descriptions of subtle political intrigues and opinions issuing from the mouth of a simple lady's maid who is purported to be their inventor.

There is also, in the text, a quality of hindsight in political knowledge that should have been a glaring signal of the period and the intent of the invention of the journal of *Madame du Hausset* and that marks them unmistakably as the product of the post-Revolutionary period. This, then, is the direction that one must pursue to move from the debunking of the hoax toward the attribution of the fabrication.

The probable author of the journal of *Madame du Hausset* is Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan, born in 1736 and died in exile in Vienna in 1803. He was a bona fide survivor of the royal court of the *ancien régime* who had all of the personal experience and contacts to be able to conjure up the physical places, the manners, the people, and the animosities that make the memoirs feel right. He was the son of the leading doctor to Louis XV, Jean-Baptiste Sénac, a brilliant student of the human circulatory system, for which his family was ennobled. Thus young Sénac grew up in a family whose conversation at home would have included his father's accounts of his attendance on the king. The father also gained a reputation for cupidity and exploitation of his authority, in particular to extort hefty payments from aspirants for teaching posts in the medical school at Montpellier.<sup>19</sup> Young Sénac was nine when Madame de Pompadour arrived at court.

During Sénac's adolescence, the talk of the court was of the new mistress, her bourgeois family background, and her effect on the king. Sénac would also have heard his father speak about her medical condition as he attended her along with her own doctor, François Quesnay. In 1749 and 1750, when young Sénac was in puberty, he almost certainly would have heard and likely taken a special fascination in his father's discussions with his colleagues or his wife of the medical crisis which caused Madame de Pompadour to suspend or curtail her sexual relations with Louis XV. Accompanying his father to the château, young Sénac would have received impressions of the physical arrangements of private life by the courtiers, though certainly not a precise knowledge of Madame de Pompadour's suite or the routine of her household. Sénac had the background to write a description that would have sounded convincing to readers ignorant of the actual layout of Madame de Pompadour's apartments and makeup of her staff. This is consistent with the conspicuous vagueness in the *Memoirs of Madame du Haussay* about the physical setting, the dates and sequence of events. It also explains the failure to mention Nicolle du Haussay's fellow ladies-in-waiting.

Sénac studied law, began government service as a *maître des requêtes* to the *Conseil d'État* before having three successive posts as an intendant in the provinces and colonies. Believing himself to be a great administrator, he had hoped for a leap to high office under Louis XVI. This never materialized. Witty, a fascinating conversationalist and hungry for praise and recognition, he found himself opposed to the policies of Necker and relegated to lesser posts. In the 1780s, he wrote pornographic poetry and tried his hand at the fashionable literary adventure of composing hoaxes, publishing his *superchérie* *Les Mémoires d'Anne de Gonzague, princesse palatine* in a pastiche of seventeenth-century style.<sup>20</sup> He also is assumed to have written two philosophical books of hedonistic bent, *Considerations on Mind and Manners* and *Considerations on Riches and Luxury*, and a novel called *The Two Cousins, A True Story*.<sup>21</sup> In 1790 he had intended to join in the free-for-all which followed the ending of royal censorship with a contribution to the wave of faked memoirs with his proposed *Memoir on the Life of Fieldmarshal, the Duc de Richelieu*.<sup>22</sup> However,

the Revolution put an end to Sénac's clandestine writings for a time.

Forced to emigrate and with little money and no post to sustain him, he came to rest in the large expatriate French colony in Vienna. Destitute, he turned to writing as a means of eking out a living, and at the same time, expiating his demons over the failures of his career and the wreck of the way of life he had enjoyed. His books were written in French and published in Germany. His great success was a novel called *The Émigré* in 1797.<sup>23</sup> However, he also wrote his own explanation of the progressive erosion of authority in French society and government entitled *Of Government, Morals and the Conditions in France Before the Revolution with the Character of the Principal Personages of the Reign of Louis XVI*.<sup>24</sup> The elaborate tale of the intrigue by which Machault and d'Argenson were dismissed in favor of Choiseul as told in the *Journal de Madame du Hausset* is almost identical to the description of this incident as one of the "causes" of the French Revolution cited in Sénac's *Du Gouvernement*.

A letter of 1796 written by Sénac to the English diplomat F. Drake reviews the terms of negotiations they had discussed in person in Vienna for Sénac to purchase a British annuity from the proceeds of the publication in England of two works: *L'Émigré* and a proposed six- or seven-volume *Mémoire du Maréchal de Richelieu pour servir à l'histoire du XVIIIème siècle*. While Sénac asserts that owing to support from the Empress (presumably of Austria) he has no immediate need of money, he asks extraordinarily high prices for his texts. He also reminds Drake that he is continuing with a considerable number of other writings. The English subvention of the campaign of anti-Revolutionary writing among the expatriate French community is a subject which deserves further study. In any event, the letter makes clear Sénac's preoccupation with establishing some kind of financial security through sale of his writings.<sup>25</sup>

Sénac expanded his critique of France via biographical sketches which he entitled *Portraits of Distinguished Personages of the Eighteenth Century*. The first version of his *Portraits* was included as part of his *Philosophical and Literary Works*. In this, he included a brief sketch of Madame de Pompadour.<sup>26</sup> Sénac's description of Madame de Pompadour in the *Portraits* uses many of the same turns of phrase

to be found in the journal of *Madame du Hausset*.<sup>27</sup> There is a disdain for fact in the *Portraits* that is worthy of a yellow journalist of the late nineteenth century and perfectly consistent with the career of the pornographer and literary opportunist that Sénac had become. The entire character sketch is about sexual and financial opportunism, which Sénac attributes to commoners as though it were a genetic trait. The theme has several strands. The first asserts that Madame de Pompadour's mother formed her for no other purpose than to be the "piece" of the king ("morceau de roi"). The second motif is that once embraced by Louis XV as his mistress Pompadour immediately mixed herself up in the financial affairs of government. The third line is that Pompadour was promiscuous and deceived Louis XV with other lovers, citing a pseudo-correspondence between Madame de Laraguais and the Duc de Richelieu as evidence.<sup>28</sup> The last theme is that Madame de Pompadour had no real claims to charm. He states:

Madame de Pompadour was pretty, but her physiognomy was cold and without expression. She had little spirit [esprit], and never could catch the tone and manners of the court. . . . She was neither good nor naughty and more susceptible to infatuation than attachment. She was without gaiety and pleasure in her spirit [and] her conversation was arid and laced with bourgeois and coarse expressions. She filled all the jobs, governed the State, without having a guiding ambition.

These accusations against Madame de Pompadour had been asserted in political tracts of the period of the Seven Years War.<sup>29</sup> The purpose had been to discredit Louis XV as a weak leader who was dominated by bourgeois financiers through the agency of Madame de Pompadour and others. That the royal mistress lacked charm, intelligence, and good breeding helped to display how low the King had fallen. Without belaboring the point here, Voltaire and others have attested to quite contrary readings of the accomplishments of Madame de Pompadour. Contrary to Sénac's claims, contemporaries who knew her comment upon the brilliance of her conversation derived from an intelligence nourished by extensive reading of serious texts. Her charm, talent, and wit are rather the paradigm of the eighteenth-century woman.

Sénac was writing for an audience who neither knew her nor was disposed to think well of her. For Sénac set himself up as the voice of the victimized émigré aristocrats whose ideal world had been destroyed, according to them, not by the failings of the nobility but rather by the ambition of the bourgeoisie and a king who was a traitor to his class.

Sénac's journal of *Madame du Hausset* was both a very elaborate invention of firsthand evidence of Madame de Pompadour's conspiratorial nature and habits of speech and action as well as a mischievous entertainment for a new generation of readers sympathetic to the old aristocracy. The declaration of the Empire of Napoleon I in 1803 made it possible in the ensuing years for aristocratic émigrés to return to France. The creation of a new Napoleonic aristocracy changed attitudes toward the survivors of the old regime. A new, romantic reading public craved popular literature that exploited the pathos of the extinct court and satisfied the curiosity of a new bourgeoisie for the "true story" of the infamous and decadent figures whose extravagant existence and loose morals had given the French Revolution the beneficial cast of a therapeutic purification. Sénac did manage to sell his manuscript to Quentin Craufurd to ease his desperate financial condition in 1801 or soon thereafter.<sup>30</sup> He was never able to savor a return to France. He died in 1803 in Vienna.

The francophile Scot, Quentin Craufurd, met Sénac in Vienna in 1799, renewing an earlier acquaintance dating back to the glory days of the reign of Louis XVI. Craufurd had established himself in Paris as an international businessman who had made a fortune in the Philippines as an agent of the British East India Company. Retired and wealthy while still young, Craufurd was a gallant who became an intimate of Marie Antoinette's circle.<sup>31</sup> When the crisis of the revolution came, he played a personal role in the disastrous flight of the royal family, which resulted in the arrest at Varennes. The enormous coach used for the escape had been hidden in the courtyard of Craufurd's Parisian house<sup>32</sup> in the days before the attempt. He rode a saddle horse accompanying Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and their children and acting as an advance scout going ahead to make arrangements. In this way he was separated from the royal family at the moment of their arrest and was able

to effect his own escape. Forced to emigrate, he moved in the expatriate circles of disenfranchised French aristocrats.

After 1803, he exploited the climate in France favorable to the returned émigrés. Craufurd was able to establish himself as an authority on intimate matters relating to the Bourbon monarchy, especially on the affairs of women. Craufurd exploited his role as the gallant friend to Marie Antoinette. Craufurd's literary enterprises are linked to his monarchist sympathies. Craufurd was an undisguised apologist for Louis XVI, blaming instead his predecessors for the fall of the Bourbon monarchy.<sup>33</sup> Craufurd published Sénac's manuscript six years after its acquisition in Vienna as part of his campaign to defend the honor of Marie Antoinette. Craufurd added his contribution to the posthumous expiation of the death of the last queen of France under the *ancien régime* by attacking Madame de Pompadour, the bourgeois mistress of Louis XV, as one of the root causes of the French Revolution. In Craufurd's construction, the excellent family relationship of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette did not have sufficient time to reverse the moral debasement of France caused by Louis XIV and Louis XV.

One of the most striking puzzles about the collection of anecdotes that make up the journal of *Madame du Hausset* is why it was ever believed to be authentic! By every measure of historical evidence it screams its origins as a creation by émigré survivors in the post-Revolutionary era in which a renewed sympathy and interest in the *ancien régime* made their recollections and experience of interest once again. A fresh reading of the text in this light makes the political foreknowledge that forms its bias transparently evident.

Sénac created the most enduring of all of the forgeries, the *Journal de M[adame du] H[ausset], femme de chambre de Madame de Pompadour*. It supplied subsequent generations of credulous journalists and biographers with intimate anecdotes of the most carefully guarded and secretive private apartments in the center of the court at Versailles—all phony, all a hoax. The journal of *Madame du Hausset* should be treated in future as a clever historical novel of the early nineteenth century written by a man who had played as a child in the hallways of Versailles.

The willingness with which the inventions of Sénac de Meilhan were believed says much more about the early nineteenth century than about the mid-eighteenth. The reluctance to challenge or question them tells volumes about French attitudes to history in the balance of the nineteenth century and, indeed, in the twentieth century as well.

## APPENDIX

Partial chronological list of publications derived in whole or in large part from 1809 Hausset hoax.

1809, Anonymous, implied authorship of Nicolle Colleson du Haussay [Sénac de Meilhan, Gabriel?]. *Journal de M. H. (Madame du Hausset), femme de chambre de Madame de Pompadour*. In *Mélanges d'histoire et de littérature*, edited by Quentin Craufurd. Paris: 1809.

1824, *Mémoires de Mme D. H. (du Hausset), femme de chambre de Mme de Pompadour, avec des notes et des éclaircissements historiques [par Quentin Craufurd]*. Vol. 53, *Collections des mémoires relatifs à la révolution française*. Paris: Baudouin frères, 1824.

1828, *Mémoires de Madame du Hausset*. Reprint with introduction in Charles-Marie Dorimond de Féletz, *Mélanges de philosophie, d'histoire et de littérature*. (6 vols.) Vol. 4, 369–82 [in which Sénac de Meilhan is identified as the "friend" of Marigny who secured the manuscript]. Paris: Grimbart, 1828–30.

1830, [Marin, Scipio], *Mémoires de Madame la Marquise de Pompadour*. 2 vols. Paris: Mame et Delaunay-Villée, 1830.

1850, September 16. "Madame de Pompadour: Mémoires de Madame du Hausset, sa femme de chambre." In C.-A. Sainte-Beuve. *Causeries du Lundi*. 5th ed. Vol 2. Paris: Garnier Frères, n.d. Originally published as a serial on September 16, 1850.

1855, *Mémoires de Mme D. H. (du Hausset) et extraits des Mémoires historiques et littéraires de Bachaumont, de l'année 1762 à l'année 1782, avec avant-propos et notices par F. Barrière*. In *Bibliothèque des mémoires relatifs à*

*l'histoire de France pendant le 18e siècle*, edited by F. S. Barrière. Vol. 3. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1855.

1885, *The Secret Memoirs of Madame La Marquise de Pompadour*, collected and arranged by Jules Beaujoint. London: Remington, 1885.

1891, *Mémoires de Madame du Hausset*. With preface, notes and tables by Hippolyte Fournier. Paris: 1891.

1904, *Secret memoirs of the courts of Louis XV and XVI*. Edition de luxe. 2 vols. London: Grolier Society, 1904.

1910, Tinayre, Marcelle. *Mme de Pompadour, d'après le journal de sa femme de chambre*. Paris: 1910.

1927, Audiat, P., ed. *Madame D. H. (du Hausset), Mouffle d'Angerville. Mme de Pompadour. Le Temps passé*, Vol. 3. Paris: 1927.

1928, *Memoirs of Madame de Pompadour, by Madame du Hausset, her waiting-woman*. Translated by Frank Stewart Flint, Broadway Library of XVIII Century French Literature. London: G. Routledge, 1928. This translation based upon the 1855 F. S. Barrière text.

1942, [Hausset, Madame du]. *La Reine Pompadour. Journal d'une femme de chambre. Contient en outre: Louis XV vu par Balzac; Mémoires et anecdotes sur la Cour, par le baron de Besenval; Conversation de la marquise de Pompadour et du président de Meinières*. Paris: 1942.

1985, *Mémoires de Madame du Hausset sur Louis XV et Madame de Pompadour*. Introduction and notes by Jean-Pierre Guicciardi. *Le Temps Retrouvé*, 44. Paris: Mercure de France, 1985.

1996, Grégoire, Ménie. *Le Bien-Aimé: Mémoires apocryphes de Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour*. Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1996.

Madame de Pompadour to be entitled *The Creation of the Myth of Madame de Pompadour*.

2. In a scholarly generation given to interpretation, the need to vet primary sources for authenticity has not been aggressively practiced. Thorough scholars have increasingly recognized the need for critical evaluation of eighteenth-century sources. Some have pursued the issue from the biographical dimension of the authors who originate the texts, for example Paul and Pierrette Girault de Coursac, *Histoire, Historiens & Mémorialistes*. Others approach the issue from the broad social dimension of the study of public opinion and of the history of the press and the book trade, as in the work of Robert Darnton or Arlette Farge. Note in particular Arlette Farge, *Dire et Mal Dire*. See the Bibliography for complete references to these and subsequent citations.

3. [Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan?], *Journal de M. H. (Madame du Hausset)*. For a list of editions, republications, translations and variations of this text from 1809 to 1996, see the appendix to this paper. When referring generally to the text (rather than to any specific edition) in this article, the abbreviated italicized title *Madame du Hausset* will be used.

4. The francophile Craufurd, who was born in 1743 and died in 1819, declined to use the anglicized spelling Quintin Crawford.

5. See appendix.

6. Grégoire, *Le Bien-Aimé*. See appendix.

7. Gaxotte presented a paper at the Institut de France in October 1954 questioning the authenticity of the memoirs and attributing them to Sénac de Meilhan. A summary was published in *Intermédiaire*.

8. Gaxotte, "Les Mémoires de Mme du Hausset."

9. Guicciardi, *Mémoires de Madame du Hausset*. The collection is called *Le Temps retrouvé*, and includes an introduction and notes by Jean-Pierre Guicciardi.

10. Thierry, *La Marquise de Pompadour*, 116-18.

11. Guicciardi, *Mémoires de Madame du Hausset*, introduction and note 115. Guicciardi acknowledges that the long anonymous letter mentioning the three ministers Machault, Argenson, and Choiseul is out of sequence in the text and was probably inserted by Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan (1736-1803) who figures prominently in the improbable explanation of the history of the journal before its publication. Guicciardi still asserts that Sénac only inserted an authentic letter of political substance into the manuscript of Madame du Hausset and that this in no way undermines the authenticity, in his eyes, of the larger text.

12. Escoube, *Sénac de Meilhan*.

13. Nicolle Colleson du Haussay is mentioned in several legal documents both in the inventory of the estate of Madame de Pompadour, but also in surviving letters and documents forming the papers of Madame de Pompadour's brother, the Marquis de Marigny. See, for instance, Cordey, *Inventaire*, 75 and in receipts in the Bibliothèque Historique de La Ville de Paris, Fonds Marigny, N.A. 106bis.

14. Saintville, *La Confidante de Mme de Pompadour*.

15. *Ibid.*, 49 n. 1. I believe the date given for this letter of 13 April 1747 should be treated with caution.

16. *Ibid.*, 131.

17. Cordey, *Inventaire*.

18. Abel-François Poisson de Vandières, Marquis de Marigny

## NOTES

1. The author is currently completing the manuscript of a book dealing with the phenomenon of fabrications about

et de Menars, memoranda, "Inventaire des 'Papiers à Garder'"; "Inventaire des cartons"; and "Inventaire 'Sommaire inventorié de tous les papiers que je reporte de Menars à Paris en décembre 1773 pour être mis en ordre,'" Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Fonds Marigny, N.A. 106bis, Nouvelles Acquisitions, Pièces 10, 11; 12, 13; 16.

19. Kalker and Kalker, *The Encyclopedists as Individuals*, 21, 151, 213, 382, 384.

20. The eighty page illustrated poem, *La Foutromanie, poème lubrique*, was published anonymously in 1780 "aux dépens des amateurs" with a fictitious imprint in mythic Sardanapolis. It was attributed to Sénac by Barbier and the only known copy is kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale's special collection of erotica with call numbers that begin with the word *Enfer* (Hell) (BN Enfer 541). Sénac's invented *Mémoires d'Anne de Gonzague, princesse palatine* was published in 1786 with the apparatus of a fifteen page introduction announcing a 267 page text.

21. Published anonymously and attributed to Sénac by Barbier, the 389 page *Considérations sur l'esprit et les mœurs* has a false London imprint for its original 1787 edition and was reissued in 1789 under the imprint Londres, Paris, Prault, 1789. The 503 page *Considérations sur les richesses et le luxe* was also published anonymously in 1787 and attributed to Sénac by Barbier. Barbier also attributed the anonymously published *Les Deux cousins, histoire véritable* to Sénac.

22. Sénac de Meilhan, *Prospectus*, in-fol., 9 p.

23. Sénac de Meilhan, *L'Émigré*, in-12, plates. (Published under the name M. de Meilhan.)

24. Sénac de Meilhan, *Du Gouvernement, des mœurs, et des conditions en France, avant la Révolution, avec le caractère des principaux personnages du règne de Louis XVI* (Hambourg: B. G. Hoffman, 1795), in-8°, vi-216 p., reissued in Paris, Maradan, 1814, in-8°, viii-245 pp. The book was reissued in the later nineteenth century (1862) in a French edition as Sénac de Meilhan, *Le Gouvernement, Les Mœurs et les Conditions en France Avant La Révolution: Portraits des personnages distingués du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, avec un introduction et des notes par M. de Lescure.

25. British Museum Library, London, Drake Papers, 15, General Correspondence of F. Drake, 1796-1802, MS Add 46,836. Copy of a letter from Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan to Drake from Vienna dated 26 September 1796.

26. Published, like *L'Émigré*, under the name M. de Meilhan, *Oeuvres philosophiques et littéraires de Mr. de Meilhan*, in-8°.

27. Others have noted linguistic similarities between Sénac's *L'Émigré* and the *Journal de Madame du Hausset*. Pierre Escoubé in his biography cites the analysis of André Vielwahr, *La Vie et l'Oeuvre de Sénac de Meilhan*.

28. Madame de Pompadour, the most famous mistress in history, was completely faithful to Louis XV and there is no basis for suggesting otherwise. Some rumors of the period asserted that she was the opposite of promiscuous and was frigid.

29. The attacks on Madame de Pompadour and Louis XV from the period of the Wars of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War are beyond the scope of this paper. They form a significant part of the creations of the myth of Madame de Pompadour currently under study by the author. Many were foreign products, especially English.

30. Escoubé has traced the transaction through a surviving

letter from Sénac to the Prince de Ligne in which he discusses his financial distress. Escoubé, *Sénac de Meilhan*, 300-303.

31. Craufurd was born in 1743 and died in 1819. He was in the service of the British East India Company and amassed his fortune before his return to Europe in 1780. He formed an art collection and entertained lavishly. The flight to Varennes occurred in December 1791.

32. The Hôtel Rouillé-d'Orfeuil in the rue de Clichy. Escoubé, *Sénac de Meilhan*, 300.

33. Among Craufurd's other publications was his *Histoire de la Bastille* in 1798, which discusses the famous case of the unidentified "man in the iron mask" from the reign of Louis XIV, which would become the subject of Dumas fils's novel in the nineteenth century. Craufurd's other anecdotal publications, beyond the collection in which Sénac's text appears, are the anonymously published *Essais sur la littérature française*; and a tell-all account of Louis XIV's mistresses entitled *Notices sur mesdames de la Vallière, de Fontanges et de Maintenon*. Craufurd also wrote on Hindu religion and customs, on Periclean Greece, and on episodes in English and Scottish history.

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