Friendship and Politics in Post-Revolutionary France

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When Joseph de Maistre coined the term “individualism” in 1820, he described the problem as being political in nature. He stated that the ideological tensions in France had led to “the profound and terrifying division of souls, this infinite division of doctrines, this political Protestantism which is pushed to the most absolute individualism.” Here, de Maistre managed to get in a dig at Protestantism, with its stress on an individual’s relationship with God and the necessity of reading the Bible for oneself. Only Catholicism could hold society together. But the major problem for him was the clash of ideologies. The overwhelming variety of political beliefs possible in the post-revolutionary era made concord impossible because no one shared the same ideological position. De Maistre was not alone in his conclusion; many understood that social relations were so strained during the period between 1815 and 1848 due to the nature of post-revolutionary politics. In the early nineteenth century, trust and cohesion were difficult to find, and particularly so in the public realm. Associational life was weak and both politics and the marketplace were understood to be arenas where no permanent forms of attachment were possible. The deep factional divides of the Restoration also led to an outpouring of negative emotions and made politics especially divisive. Indeed, elites of the Restoration had good reason to feel isolated from and distrustful of one another, given the political upheaval of 1815 and the prevalence of spying and denunciation in this era. During the July Monarchy, ideological divisions quieted down, but many came to see the social and political order as being based on isolating self-interest. Thus, although the sources of distrust were somewhat different, social relations in both regimes were regarded as deeply troubled.
Yet trust and connection were still possible to imagine, if only in private life. This chapter ends with a discussion of Honoré de Balzac’s *Illusions perdues*, a work written during the July Monarchy but set in the Restoration, which centers on the corrosive effects of factionalism and self-interest. Here, though, Balzac imagines a solution to these sources of division and to the problem of individualism: the utopian space of friendship. In this novel, ideal friendship leads men to act with generosity and cease their ideological hostilities. Yet if friendship could serve as a source of connection, it could only do so in a partial fashion and among chosen intimates, as love was private and no longer public.

**Distrust and Division in the Restoration**

The notion that after the Revolution, ideology divided the nation is a standard trope of histories of the early nineteenth century and was a commonplace among authors of the time. On one side lay those who had made gains since the Revolution, including individuals who bought land that had been nationalized during the Revolution, or Protestants and members of the bourgeoisie who benefited from the new forms of legal equality. On the other side, there were émigrés whose lands had been nationalized, or those whose status had been harmed by the Revolution, including aristocrats and Catholics. This notion of division and of the “two Frances” is regarded as a constant feature of modern French society and was particularly prominent in the Restoration because of the deep factional divides that came to the surface and crystallized after 1815. These ideological divisions were seen as unleashing a torrent of hostility into French society and led citizens to denounce one another, a phenomenon that many felt further poisoned social relations. And because the government felt itself to be on such shaky ground and had so much distrust for the citizenry, it doggedly policed elites; the practices of surveillance were also held responsible for a heightened sense of suspicion within society. In this environment, trusting others could be a dangerous prospect.

Napoleon’s internal peacemaking fell apart in a dramatic fashion in 1815, a year that reignited factional violence, and one when many men and women learned to distrust one another and even themselves. In particular, Napoleon’s return during the Hundred Days reopened the ideological divisions of the Revolution. When he landed in France in March 1815, every citizen had to make a choice between an allegiance to him or to the Bourbon monarchy.
In contrast to the situation in 1814, when few looked forward to the prospect of continued imperial rule, the Napoleon of 1815 had considerably more appeal. In their short time on the throne, the Bourbons had not proved very popular. But Napoleon returned from Elba promising liberalization. He gave assurances of freedom of the press and a broader franchise than the one that the Bourbons had offered, and he successfully attracted prominent liberals to his cause. Most notably, Benjamin Constant wrote the Acte additionnel, the new constitution of the Hundred Days. This was despite the fact that he had attacked Napoleon in an 1814 pamphlet titled “De l’Esprit de conquête et de l’usurpation” and had previously supported the return of the Bourbons as the best hope for liberty. The most famous case of such shifting loyalties, however, was that of Marshal Ney, a Napoleonic officer who had encouraged Napoleon to abdicate in 1814. At the beginning of the Hundred Days, Ney swore to Louis XVIII that he would bring Napoleon back in an iron cage—but he quickly went over to the emperor’s side and urged others to do so as well. Even the king went back on his word; he had vowed that he would stay and fight Napoleon—but then fled to Ghent. On a less spectacular level, many officeholders switched their allegiance from Napoleon to the Bourbon monarchy and then back again to the Empire. These men who seemingly so easily changed their loyalties from one regime to another were called “girouettes” or weather vanes. After the Hundred Days, there was a spate of books that listed these men, their variable allegiances, and the positions they had held under different regimes.3

All this tacking back and forth from regime to regime led to a sense that no one’s promises could be trusted. In the words of Chateaubriand, “This era, when no one was honest, shook the soul: everyone took oaths as if they were footbridges thrown down to cross the problems of the day; then once the obstacle was cleared, they changed direction.” Because of “this disagreement between words and actions, one felt seized by disgust for the human race.”4 The events of 1815 had shown that professions of loyalty were meaningless, a mere tactic to be used to advance one’s career. The fact that each successive regime required those who served it to take an oath of loyalty magnified this problem of distrust. The men who switched their allegiance from regime to regime went back on their word, a violation of the male honor code.5 Yet the problem of trust went beyond an inability to have faith in others. After the Hundred Days, many individuals came to feel that they could not trust themselves. While they might intend to be loyal to one regime, when push came to shove they might quickly go back on their promises. Hence, the instability of
1814–15 convinced many that public life was an unpleasant realm of constant betrayals.⁶

After the Hundred Days, those on the right—those who would become ultras—came to feel that Napoleon’s return had revealed the true duplicity in the hearts of men. This belief profoundly shaped the conservatism of the Restoration. Although Chateaubriand stated that 1815 spoke badly about everyone, many of his fellow conservatives had a slightly different response. In their minds, only those who had protested the emperor’s return by resigning or following Louis XVIII into exile could be trusted. As one ultra deputy stated, the Hundred Days “traced a dividing line between good and bad citizens.”⁷ Thus, when many hard-core royalists looked out on to France, what they saw was a dispiriting sight, as the vast majority of citizens were immoral and untrustworthy. As a result, the ultras began this new era of parliamentary monarchy with a sense of estrangement from all those who did not follow their particular—and strict—path.

For those who were not hard-core royalists, the response to the perceived betrayals of the Hundred Days provided plenty of reasons to be suspicious of conservatives. After Waterloo, both the state and ardent royalists launched a wave of reprisals in the form of the White Terror. Although the first Restoration had been relatively pacific, the return of the Bourbons in 1815 unleashed a series of trials, executions, and extralegal violence against those who had declared their loyalty to the emperor. In some cases, those who had benefited from the Revolution, such as individuals who bought nationalized Church land or priests who had married, were targeted. The most horrific violence was in the South, where confessional divisions overlapped with political allegiances and where mobs of citizens out for revenge killed approximately three hundred persons. For instance, Marshal Brune, a Napoleonic officer, was brutally murdered in Avignon; after he died, his body was thrown into the Rhône. Alternately, in Toulouse, General Ramel was assassinated in August for his loyalty to the emperor. In a less spectacular fashion, the government tried and executed four Napoleonic officers, imprisoned thousands more, and purged between fifty thousand and eighty thousand fonctionnaires from its ranks.⁸

Even those who were not directly affected had reason to fear that they might be. The ultra politician François Régis de La Bourdonnaye proposed that anyone who had occupied a post in the upper administration or military command during the Hundred Days should be executed, while any regicides who had shown loyalty to the emperor should be exiled. If he had had his
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way, 1,200 people would have been affected. La Bourdonnaye was also famous for a speech in which he proclaimed that those responsible for the Hundred Days should be subject to “irons, execution, [and] torture.” Thus, just as the Hundred Days gave those on the right a sense that all others were dishonorable traitors, those on the left had good reasons to distrust conservatives. Ultras, some of whom were thought to be involved in the extralegal violence, had shown themselves capable of brutality. They had turned on their adversaries with great savagery: what was to stop them from doing so again?

Those on the left also leveled charges of disloyalty at ardent monarchists. Liberals saw the supporters of the Bourbons as bad citizens who had betrayed their country. Many émigrés had served in the Allied armies during the Revolution and thus had fought against French troops. Additionally, because an Allied military occupation accompanied the second Restoration, many conservatives welcomed the success of the invading armies and the losses of the French military. In his autobiography, Béranger writes of seeing foreign troops lead a group of wounded and captured French soldiers through the streets of Paris. The good workers of Paris were concerned about their injured compatriots, but royalists in better-off neighborhoods cheered the foreign soldiers. This, he said, was not only unpatriotic but betrayed “a lack of humanity,” as the wealthy had no pity for the wounded. Throughout the Restoration, politicians on the left continued to maintain that they were the true patriots and that their conservative opponents were bad citizens who were indebted to foreign powers. Once again, those on the opposing side were cast as having character defects, as the France that had supported Napoleon during the Hundred Days felt estranged from the France that was loyal to the Bourbons.

Of course, such mutual charges of immorality and betrayal are a perfect illustration of the idea that the inability to imagine a loyal opposition is characteristic of French political culture. Ultras were unable to conceive why anyone would not be entirely devoted to the Bourbon monarchy, while men such as Béranger found it hard to understand the appeal of an Allied occupation. Yet in 1815, the problem of the loyal opposition was not just one of the political imaginary. Both sides felt they had incontrovertible proof that their political opponents were not to be trusted.

The Hundred Days and the White Terror had a profound effect on the politics of the Restoration. At the most basic level, the events of 1815 formed the two most important political factions of the Restoration: the ultras and the liberal opposition. The ultras were those who wanted to return to the Old
Regime and the days of absolute monarchy (at least in theory, for they did not always agree with the relatively moderate Louis XVIII). Although there were those who had been opposed to any reform of the monarchy since the very beginning of the Revolution, the ultras’ sense of the urgency of their mission was largely a product of 1815. The ultras were also defined by their tone. What René Rémond calls their “immoderate excesses and verbal violence” can best be understood as part of their response to the Hundred Days. Moreover, Napoleon’s efforts to liberalize the Empire were the crucible in which the liberal opposition was forged. Unlike the ultras, this faction had little ideological coherence to it. It included adherents of liberalism, such as Constant, as well as republicans and Bonapartists. What united these men was largely the Hundred Days, for Napoleon’s overtures to liberals fused liberalism and Bonapartism, two ideological currents that had been opposed to each other before 1815.

Historians have argued that these early days of the Restoration ultimately weakened the regime by polarizing opinion between left and right and by making any reconciliation impossible. With or without the events of 1815, it was inevitable that a sharp division between left and right would emerge in the new parliamentary system. After all, even if Napoleon had not returned from Elba, and even if liberals had shown a more consistent attachment to the Bourbons, the monarchy that men like Constant wanted was not the same as the one that ardent ultras desired. Yet the effects of the Hundred Days made these political divisions particularly apparent and rancorous.

Observers of the time also described how all this political upheaval unleashed a torrent of negative emotions into French society. For example, in his 1819 Vues politiques, the moderate liberal Narcisse Achille de Salvandy stated that after 1815, France had been split into “two opposing camps” marked by “their mutual hatred.” In his mind, this enmity challenged the sociable spirit of the French. Instead of courtesy and refinement, there was now only hostility and bitterness. He writes, “With its violent irritations, I no longer recognize this society which used to be so gracious and polite, where civil war finds a refuge in comments, where those of different opinions despise each other.”

Mme de Montcalm provided another similar—and more personal—view in her diary. She was an on-again/off-again friend of Chateaubriand and the sister of the duc de Richelieu, leader of the government during the early years of the Restoration. Like her brother, she was a moderate, but as a salonnière in the aristocratic and conservative Faubourg Saint-Germain, she was surrounded by ultras. In her journal, she repeatedly wrote of the hostility of
the society in which she circulated. In one entry from July 1815, she stated, “Bitterness quickly establishes itself between those who do not have exactly the same opinions. One ends up being unhappy with oneself and others and a fatal sadness, an absolute disgust enters into one’s soul; yet one still feels a desire for different emotions.” As in Salvandy’s and de Maistre’s accounts, the political climate made it impossible for those who had even minor differences of opinion to get along. And likewise, the political upheaval of the time had the effect of releasing a series of negative emotions into society—bitterness, unhappiness, sadness, and disgust. Used to an atmosphere of polite sociability, she felt a need for connection to others. But the newly rancorous tone of Parisian high society made this impossible.

Numerous authors also discussed how the factional hatreds of the Restoration destroyed personal ties. For instance, Charles Louis Lesur’s La France et les français en 1817: Tableau moral et politique, précédé d’un coup d’oeil sur la révolution set out to describe the France of his day. He detailed its population, its social classes, its political institutions, and its place in a post-Napoleonic Europe. In a chapter titled “Des Moeurs et des opinions,” he told the tale of two friends who had not seen each other since the Revolution. One had remained in France and was left-leaning, hence his name of Démophile. The other—the more aristocratically named Altamor—had emigrated and was on the right. After decades of separation, the two men were overjoyed to be reunited, but they quickly found they had little in common and could no longer be friends. Altamor thought Démophile to be a bloody republican hiding under a mask of liberalism, while Démophile saw Altamor as a prejudiced fool who wanted to drag France back to the Middle Ages. Of course, this story was a parable for what had happened in France since the Revolution—the polarization of opinion and the fragmentation of society. But for Lesur, the tale of these two men provided a model of what factionalism had done to social relations. As he said, “How many miserable heartaches did this party spirit unleash into families! How many sacred bonds and happy unions did it destroy! How many children were torn away from their fathers, how many friendships were torn apart!”

And indeed, many long-standing relationships were destroyed in the wake of the events of 1815. Béranger, for instance, ended two friendships because of politics, one with the composer Marc Antoine Désaugiers and another with the artist Pierre Narcisse Guérin, who would go on to paint idealized portraits of the leaders of the Vendée uprising. Béranger also belonged to a group of songwriters and authors called the Caveau that broke up in 1817 over politics.
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Both Mathieu Molé, a prominent official during the Empire and politician during the Restoration, and the marquis de Lafayette had love affairs that ended after 1815 because of differences of political opinion. In Lafayette’s case, he and his mistress had been together since the days of the Revolution, but their relationship could not withstand the tumult of the Hundred Days and White Terror. Chateaubriand, too, found himself cut off from others. He and Guizot had maintained a cordial—if formal—correspondence during the Empire, but the advent of the second Restoration severed this bond. During the Empire, Chateaubriand was particularly close to Mme de Montcalm, but his opposition to her brother troubled their friendship. In turn, Montcalm’s relationship with her best friend, Mme d’Orglandes, an ardent ultra, foundered over politics. For Montcalm, a woman who was a committed if difficult friend, this made her doubt whether friendship itself was truly possible. In a journal entry from January 1816, Montcalm stated, “I tell myself with despair that after so much unhappiness and heartbreak, I must regard friendship as one of the number of treacherous illusions that is briefly offered so that one feels the painful absence of it more deeply.” For her, like for so many others, unhappiness and profound feelings of estrangement inaugurated the Restoration.

Thus, in the early years of the Restoration, politics was the great social dissolvent as elites had good reason to feel distrustful of and alienated from one another. The Restoration is often described as France’s apprenticeship in political modernity, as it was the nation’s first sustained period of parliamentary government. Yet many observers felt that something had been lost in the shift to a representative system. The process of politicization had torn apart French society. The Restoration may have educated political elites in the ways of representative government, but the lesson for many was that politics was a nasty, brutal, and divisive business.

Distrust and the Restoration Police State

In the years following 1815, observers suggested that neither the intense politicization of society nor the atmosphere of suspicion went away. One reason that the divides between right and left could not heal was that politically motivated denunciation came back into fashion. Many authors feared that denunciation prevented individuals from forming connections with others, and that it spread distrust within society. The Restoration state also continued
many of Napoleon’s practices of surveillance as well as his control of associational life. This state intervention was seen as responsible for putting individuals on their guard and further troubling social relations. Hence, the Restoration was a period when the sources of suspicion from the Revolution came together with those from the Napoleonic era.

After 1815, anxieties about denunciation spread through society, particularly among those who were not confirmed ultras. Numerous works of the time discussed this practice. The liberal dramatist Emmanuel Dupaty even wrote a book in 1819 titled Les Délateurs; ou, Trois années du dix-neuvième siècle, which was critical of the regime and the conservatives who supported it. That this work went through three editions in two years suggests that it found a ready audience. Like many others, Dupaty saw factionalism as driving denunciation. Individuals denounced their political opponents in order to advance their own position, and Dupaty accused ultras of denouncing those on the left in retribution for their perceived disloyalty during the Hundred Days. Because ardent royalists could no longer physically attack their political opponents, they fed information about members of the liberal opposition to a suspicious state. Of course, this denunciation of denunciation was itself politically motivated, as it was a way to attack ultras as being mean-spirited and vengeful. But even those who were not especially politically engaged repeated the idea that the epidemic of denunciation had its origins in factionalism. Mme de Genlis, for example, held that the outbreak of denunciation in the Restoration was the sign of a divided society.

Despite the widespread belief that denunciation was a common practice during the Restoration, it is difficult to assess its prevalence or frequency. Certainly, the police files reveal that denunciation did occur. There are, for instance, anonymous letters reporting on conspiratorial activity and assassination attempts against members of the royal family. Yet not all such notes were necessarily preserved, and no doubt many individuals denounced others orally. Nor did such notes detail the motives of those who supplied information to the police. In some cases, the roots of denunciation were entirely personal, as denouncers leveraged the state’s concern about the loyalties of its citizens to satisfy their private grievances. In other cases, however, the political motivations are clear. One thick police file concerns Mme Roger, an ardent royalist who fed the government a steady stream of information about Bonapartist activity. She was from Toulouse, where the violence of the White Terror had been particularly brutal and where political passions ran exceptionally high. In her reports to the police, she claimed that she befriended...
the wife of an exiled Napoleonic general in order to gain her confidence. (To do so, Roger stated that she had to conceal her political views.) Roger then relayed the information she gained about the general to the government. This was a clear betrayal of trust. Roger positioned herself as the confidante of a woman who possessed information about Napoleon’s former collaborators. The general’s wife trusted her, but Roger’s obligations to the regime outweighed any loyalty to her supposed friend.

Authors of the time also described how denunciation spread distrust and ruptured personal bonds; anyone who had anything to hide lived in a state of anxiety and suspicion. For instance, in his *Les Délateurs*, Dupaty stated that denunciation “destroyed all ties, divided all hearts,” and that “Everyone bottled up the secrets that oppressed them / Friends feared each other, the lover feared his mistress! / Brothers no longer considered themselves related to one another.” For Dupaty, the necessity of living in a state of constant suspicion took a terrible emotional toll, as it made it impossible for individuals to unburden themselves to those around them. Salvandy maintained much the same thing in his *Vues politiques*. He writes, “Denunciation . . . dissolves the ties of affection or the bonds of family, and corrupts public morality by constantly showing how many of the oppressors [i.e., those on the right] are actually cowards who defect [transfuge] in order to spare themselves from becoming victims.” As in Dupaty’s account, the fear of denunciation strained the social fabric. Yet Salvandy went beyond a discussion of the reshaping of intimate relations to consider how denunciation compromised public life as well. Many individuals—presumably those on the left—renounced their true views and became more conservative to avoid being reported to the police. Such charges were not that different from those leveled at “girouettes” during the Hundred Days and its aftermath. Once again, the political struggles of the day were leading individuals to switch sides out of convenience. Only this time, it was liberals who accused their opponents of betrayal. The use of the word “transfuge” is also significant. This term can be used for someone who changes sides, as well as someone who deserts from the military—in other words, someone who goes back on his commitments. Thus, both the events of 1815 and the climate of denunciation that followed led to a belief that politics was a realm of dishonorable betrayal and that political loyalties were a matter of convenience, not true conviction.

The state had its own ways of gathering information about citizens. Throughout the Restoration, the government spied on both legal and illegal forms of political opposition out of fears about the loyalty of the citizenry.
After the Hundred Days, the government knew it did not have the allegiance of all French men and women or even all those in its own ranks. To carry out this surveillance, the Restoration regime adapted the Napoleonic police state to its own purposes. Indeed, the first minister of the police was Fouché. Far too tainted by his collaboration with Napoleon, he lasted only a few months. Élie Decazes, Louis XVIII’s favorite and a man allied with the doctrinaires, replaced him. Like Fouché, Decazes sent spies into cafés and salons. He also gave the position of head of the postal service to his protégé Dupleix de Mézy so that he could have access to personal correspondence. Decazes was concerned with both those on the left and those on the right. He kept a close eye on Napoleonic soldiers who might still be loyal to the emperor, as well as on the ultras who regarded him as a dangerous liberal. The police paid special attention to Chateaubriand; two of his servants reported on his activities and copied his ingoing and outgoing correspondence. They also detailed his relationships with both Claire Louisa Rose Bonne Lechal de Ker-saint, duchesse de Duras, and Juliette Récamier, née Bernard. Decazes, who became minister of the interior in 1818 when the Ministry of the Police was dissolved, lasted as royal favorite until a fanatical Bonapartist assassinated the duc de Berry in 1820, after which the government shifted to the right. Once the ultras were in power, the police focused their attention squarely on members of the liberal opposition. Police officers followed noted figures like Lafayette, Constant, Manuel, and Casimir Périer. Their reports to the minister of the interior remarked on the comings and goings of these men and with whom they traveled and met. Spies were even sent on vacation to spas like Plombières and Baden to report on those with whom liberals were taking the waters.

To obtain information, the police paid servants to report on their employers. Spies also listened at doors and windows and occasionally went undercover to track a particular individual. For instance, in 1822, the police wanted to gain access to the house and garden of a banker who hosted gatherings of liberals. To do so, they claimed that they were interested in buying some of the orange trees that the gardener was selling. Or they went to the homes of prominent liberals and pretended to be Napoleonic soldiers in need of money. Authors of the time also stated that members of high society regularly reported to the police and that the government sent spies trained in the ways of elite sociability into salons, although these claims may speak more to the anxieties of the moment as opposed to the realities of Restoration-era police work.
All of this surveillance was widely known and was the subject of considerable debate inside the Chambers.\textsuperscript{45} These tactics of policing gave men and women good reasons to distrust those around them. Anyone asking for information about a neighbor or a friend might be a spy. The man who claimed to be a down-on-his-luck soldier asking for money might be telling the truth—or he might be working for the police. Speaking openly at a salon was also inadvisable. More generally, anyone who was a stranger was a potential spy and should be met with distrust and dissimulation. As in the Napoleonic era, many authors stated that the presence of spies created an atmosphere of suspicion. The liberal dramatist Étienne de Jouy spoke for many when he stated that “morality disavows spies; they destroy trust between citizens, the gentlest element of the social bond.”\textsuperscript{46} Here, Jouy’s words echo the discourse of social dissolution, as individuals are estranged from one another, and social relations are under enormous strain. Jouy’s statement also bears similarities to Salvandy’s description of the effects of denunciation. Both men describe a lack of trust within the public realm. In this case, Jouy’s use of the term “citizens” locates the problem as one that is essentially civic and political. That is to say that in his account, individuals are suspicious of and disconnected from those whom they encounter in the public realm, and they find it impossible to attach themselves to the nation as a whole. After all, those who engaged in politics often found themselves under surveillance, particularly if they were in the opposition. Undoubtedly, too, the fear that any stranger could be a spy could lead to the weakening of generalized trust among the members of society.

The Restoration also inherited much of the Napoleonic regime’s attitude toward associational life, which compounded the problems of distrust and public cohesion. In general, the regime was generally more tolerant of associations than Napoleon was, but it did use article 291 of the Penal Code to dissolve one association—the Société des Amis de la presse—and refused to give permission to another—Aide toi, le ciel t’aidera—both of which were designed to promote liberal causes.\textsuperscript{47} Other societies came under government scrutiny for a variety of reasons, including a liberal philanthropic association the doctrinaires founded and the Cercle de l’Union, a social club for conservative aristocrats from the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The former was suspect for its political leanings and for the presumed atheism of its members, while the latter was thought to be a center of gambling.\textsuperscript{48} Not surprisingly, the police seemed to be particularly concerned about Freemasonry, and police records contain both detailed information about who attended Masonic
reunions as well as transcriptions of conversations at the lodges. Even outside the problem of government oversight, associational life in the form of social clubs was relatively weak during the Restoration and did not take off until the mid-nineteenth century.

Hence, the Restoration was a period when public solidarity was difficult to imagine and when men and women had good reasons to be distrustful of one another. Speaking one’s mind was an imprudent act, as the state made public forms of cooperation difficult. Both the regime and its supporters were actively engaged in trying to ferret out the secrets of those it suspected. The factional divisions of the era destroyed personal relationships and opened up a flood of bitterness and rancor. Those on opposing sides of the political spectrum thought of each other as fundamentally disloyal and immoral—and in some cases, ready and able to commit violence in order to pursue their quest for ideological purity.

If the politics of the Restoration disrupted private relationships, such as those between lovers and friends, it also led to a particular understanding of public life. Any generalized sense of trust that extended to all members of society was impossible. Politics was understood to be a hostile world of betrayal. Those who engaged in politics did so with the knowledge that their activities made them a ready target for denunciation and police surveillance. In the Restoration, then, the political struggles of the regime fed the sense of dismay at a crumbling social order.

THE JULY MONARCHY AND THE PROBLEM OF SELF-INTEREST

After 1830, some of the sources of division and suspicion became less prominent. Politics became less factionalized as many elites realized that the threat was not so much from one another, but from the lower classes. The state also policed high society less severely than it had before. Yet the sense of atomization and distrust did not go away in the July Monarchy. After all, once trust is destroyed, it is hard to rebuild. And this regime saw a new set of concerns about social relations—ones related less to ideological disagreements and more to the problem of self-interest. Now it was greed that was seen as responsible for destroying the social order and for isolating individuals from one another. Thus, while the sources of division were understood as being different in the July Monarchy than in the Restoration, trust and cohesion were still regarded as impossible in public life.
During the July Monarchy, the government no longer took to spying on its elites—although many still suspected that police agents circulated in high-society gatherings. For example, in his memoirs, Rémusat discussed the reach of the police when he wrote of his short tenure as minister of the interior in 1840. Here, he took great pains to set the record straight about whether there were spies in high society. He stated that the Ministry paid servants in men’s clubs for information. But otherwise, he maintained, the government did not send spies to report on elite social gatherings, despite what was generally thought. The regime did crack down on associations, however, as it feared that clubs were hotbeds for political and social unrest. Thus the government passed an 1834 law tightening restrictions on associations and introducing stiffer penalties for violating article 291. While associational life grew in strength in the 1830s and 1840s, it was weakest among those studied here: Parisian political elites. Elite men’s clubs were numerous in the provinces but less so in the capital, where salons continued to exert a powerful hold over elite social habits.

The factionalism that was so prominent in the Restoration also began to wane after 1830. There were still clear ideological divides. Many ultras became legitimists who dreamed of returning the Bourbons to the throne, for example. Meanwhile, the liberal opposition during the Restoration split apart into a number of different factions. Some of these men aligned themselves with the juste milieu and became ardent supporters of the Orleanist regime. Others remained in the opposition and advocated for an enlarged franchise or even for a republic. Politics in the July Monarchy, however, were largely organized around personalities and patronage networks as opposed to sharp ideological distinctions. For instance, Guizot and Adolphe Thiers were two chief rivals during the 1830s and 1840s, but their political disagreements related primarily to differences over foreign policy and France’s standing in Europe.

Despite the slackening of ideological tensions, politics could still be a force for division. The political shifts that occurred after 1830 reorganized individuals’ social networks. Béranger, for instance, found that he could no longer be friends with many of those to whom he had been close during the Restoration. Despite his professed republicanism, he initially supported the July Monarchy because he thought that a republic was not possible and that Louis-Philippe was the best hope for France. But after the king’s conservatism came to the fore, Béranger found himself estranged from some of his friends who supported the regime. He broke off relations with Barthe and
Dupin, both of whom had defended him during his trials in the 1820s, when they moved to the right during the 1830s. In addition, his relationship with Thiers, to whom he had been close in the Restoration, was considerably strained. During the July Monarchy, the two continued to socialize with each other, but some of Béranger’s letters to his other friends—and particularly those on the left—indicate that he felt personally and politically estranged from Thiers. Others, as well, found that politics was still divisive. Guizot and Rému sat were close in the 1820s, but in the 1830s the latter balanced an attachment to the doctrinaires’ center-right position with sympathies to Thiers’s center-left politics. Their friendship ended dramatically in 1840 when Rému sat joined a left-leaning cabinet led by Thiers, one that Guizot came to oppose. Political divides still led to social ones.

Politicians also continued to regard their work as a nasty business, existing in a realm where trust was impossible. For instance, in 1837, Guizot wrote the following to his mistress, the princesse Dorothea von Lieven, née Benckendorff:

> Between us, I have more than once regretted that I could not be as cordial, as benevolent with my political opponents as I would have liked. I know more than one whom I could have befriended or at least had a pleasant relationship with, were it not for politics. But my concern for my personal dignity, my duty to my cause, the demands and the suspicions of my allies, all that creates a coldness, a hostility between men, often without personal grounds. I must resign myself; it is the law of warfare, because politics is a war.

According to Guizot, he would have liked to have been friends with some of his adversaries, but he was too intimately involved with political struggles to do so. He had to remain antagonistic to those who disagreed with him or else he would lose the fight. This statement can be read on a number of levels. For one, it was meant to reassure Lieven that the fact that she cultivated relationships with some of his rivals, including Thiers and Mathieu, comte Molé, did not bother him. It is also entirely true that Guizot had problems being friends with men whose views he did not share, and that his close male friends in this era were his political allies. Here, though, Guizot was talking about friendship not just as a meaningful personal relationship but also as a metaphor. It was not so much the possibility of friendship that was missing but the possibility
of trust or open communication. After all, Guizot did not really want to be friends with men like Molé (whom he hated) or Thiers (for whom he had little respect).

The language of this passage is also telling. In Guizot’s mind, politics follows the same laws as warfare and is thus a realm with clear allies and enemies; the ultimate goal is to defeat the other parties. However, Guizot’s view of politics as warfare was not an accurate or astute understanding of parliamentary life in the July Monarchy. Alliances between factions were a central element to the political maneuverings of this era. For example, in 1836, Guizot aligned himself with the center-right Molé, while two years later he joined with the center-left Thiers and Odilon Barrot, the leader of the dynastic left, to oust Molé from power. Thus politics was transacted at this time by both fighting against and allying with other factions. In other words, politicians often needed to cooperate with one another. But rather than adapting intellectually and politically to the new ways of the regime, Guizot relied on a Restoration-era understanding of politics: political adversaries were implacable foes with whom no compromise was possible. Guizot’s inability to be friends with politicians from different factions or to imagine that he could trust them should be seen as one of the continuing legacies of the Restoration.

Yet when individuals of the 1830s and 1840s talked about the strain placed on social relations, they tended to focus less on ideological concerns and more on the issue of self-interest, which was in turn infecting the political realm. Many authors maintained that France was a nation entirely consumed by greed, one in which citizens engaged in brutal forms of competition with one another. Interest destroyed social bonds and made it impossible to connect with others. Despite this fundamental shift from a concern about politics to one about money, the problem was still a lack of trust and cohesion. Individuals no longer betrayed one another because of ideological conviction, but because being loyal was not in their interest. Maintaining any connection with others was simply not worth it.

These concerns about the destructive nature of self-interest were part of a larger set of anxieties about the effects of economic growth in the early nineteenth century. For many, this new, wealthier society offered a depressing sight, as they held that money had become the exclusive preoccupation of the French. In turn, this pursuit of self-interest was corroding the political realm. Many authors maintained that the very foundation of the government was self-interest—the bourgeois king Louis-Philippe was ruling because the bourgeoisie benefited from his rule. The royal family, despite their vast
wealth, was frequently accused of being corrupt and consumed by greed. In turn, this self-serving government was teaching its citizens to be avaricious and materialistic. For example, the salonnière Virginie Ancelot suggested that the motto of the July Monarchy should be “The king serves our interest and we serve the king!” In her account, too, money had become the nation’s only guiding principle.

Thus, for many observers, the problem of the July Monarchy was not factionalism, but the degree to which political life had become bound up in questions of self-interest. This shift from a concern about the divisiveness of ideology to the corrosive nature of greed is aptly portrayed in an 1840 short story by Honoré de Balzac titled “Z. Marcas.” Part of Balzac’s Scènes de la vie politique, this work condemns the regime for its mediocrity, its exclusion of the youth of France, and its materialism. Set between 1836 and 1838, it tells the tale of Zéphirin Marcas, a journalist of intense ambition. Marcas is poor and dreams of obtaining power through his innate intelligence and political skill. He allies himself with a rich deputy in the hope that his patron will enable him to acquire enough property to become a deputy himself. But the unnamed deputy fears that if Marcas becomes too prominent, he will outshine him and so decides to hinder Marcas’s career and oust him from any position of influence. Marcas is forced to eke out his living as a copyist and resides in a boardinghouse for students, where he meets the narrator and tells his tale to him. At the end of the story, Marcas’s patron rehires him and then just as quickly dismisses him again. Marcas dies soon afterward, worked to death and impoverished.

As a tale about political life, “Z. Marcas” has a somewhat surprising understanding of politics. First, ideological questions are hardly the point. The reader gets no sense of what Marcas’s politics are, or where his patron lies on the ideological spectrum. Nor does conviction drive Marcas; the reason he enters politics is that he sees it as a path to influence and riches. In Balzac’s words, “When he dreamed of power, he also dreamed of luxury.” Indeed, the narrator mentions this very lack of ideological commitment on Marcas’s part. In describing his entry into political life, the narrator states that Marcas did not “espouse the doctrines of a man in the opposition, as they would later hinder him if he came to power.” For Marcas, the appeal of politics is that it is a path to upward mobility. In this, he is no different from the narrator, an aspiring lawyer, or Juste, the narrator’s roommate, who wants to become a doctor. All three are from modest provincial families and all came to Paris to make their fortune and satisfy their ambitions. This notion that
politics is an arena of personal advancement can also be seen in the description of the difficulties that the narrator and Juste face in their quests for positions. The narrator details the frivolous lifestyle of the two roommates and then states:

The reason for our dissipation was related to the most serious political problems of the time [politique actuelle]. Juste and I could not conceive of establishing ourselves in the two professions that our parents forced us to take up. There are a hundred lawyers, a hundred doctors for one place. The crowd blocked these two paths which seemed to lead to fortune and which are really two arenas in which one kills, one fights, not with steel and fire, but with intrigue and calumny.\(^66\)

This is the first mention of the word “politics” in the story. Yet the problem that the narrator describes seems to be an economic—not a political—one, as it is a situation of too many applicants for too few spaces. After all, these men’s chosen professions did not require one to work for the state. Why, then, should the difficulty of upward mobility be tied to politics? One reason is that the limited prospects for ambitious young men mirrored the electoral structure. In the narrator’s account, any available positions went to those with family connections or money, as opposed to the most capable applicant. Likewise, in the July Monarchy, electoral rights and political positions were limited to the wealthy, shutting out men like Marcas. The talentless oligarchy that took up all places in the political system monopolized all other positions. In Balzac’s view, such a regime can only lead to revolution. As Marcas states, because so many young men are shut out of the system, they “are pushed into being republicans because they think that the republic will liberate them.”\(^67\) In other words, for both the supporters of the regime and its opponents, interest is the motor of politics.

This description of the “most serious political problems of the time” also brings up the central issue of competition. The young men who crowd into Paris with dreams of fame and fortune are all fighting with one another because there are only a few places for many aspirants. As the narrator states, such combat is profoundly vicious—the wounds that these men inflict on one another can be mortal, even if they fight with words and not physical blows. The same is true in politics, with Marcas as a prime example. He and his patron are locked in a struggle that only one can win. If Marcas becomes too prominent, the deputy will become a nonentity.
Marcas’s patron is both dependent on Marcas and needs to destroy him, as he eventually does. As a result, these men are tied together but bear an intense animosity toward each other. In the narrator’s words, “These two men, though they seemed united, hated each other.” Politics was shot through with anomie and distrust. For instance, at the end of the story Marcas’s patron, now a cabinet minister, attempts to win Marcas back after realizing that he needs him. To do so, the minister makes a host of promises: “He gave his word to make a place for Marcas in the administration, to help him become a deputy; then he offered him a prominent position by telling him that from now on, he, the minister, would be the subordinate.” Although Marcas goes back to work for his patron, the minister never follows through. Returning to the boardinghouse, Marcas is more embittered than ever. The fact that this politician is never named—the reader is only told that he is a prominent one—means that he could in effect be any political figure. As a result, he becomes all of them. In Balzac’s telling, the politicians of the July Monarchy are all untrustworthy. Their promises cannot be believed because self-interest will ultimately win out over any sense of loyalty or honor.

As in the Restoration, politics is a vicious, brutal business marked by inconstancy and distrust. Interest may have overtaken factionalism as the source of this problem, but in both cases political life is atomizing. The last words of the story highlight this problem, as the narrator ends his tale with the pronouncement, “We all know more than one Marcas, more than one victim of political devotion, rewarded by betrayal or oblivion.” In this case, “political devotion” is an utterly ironic phrase, for no such thing exists. Instead, the desire for self-advancement makes any bonds between political actors impossible and makes politics particularly cruel.

The overwhelming materialism of the early nineteenth century was a consistent theme of Balzac’s work. He regarded it as a central feature of the new society he set out to examine in the *Comédie humaine*. Throughout his works, greed so consumes his characters that they cannot maintain any social ties and do not have the least hesitation about betraying those who stand in their way. His work *Illusions perdues* perfectly illustrates this model of an anomic and hostile society, especially in the section from 1839 titled *Un Grand homme de*
province à Paris. Balzac, writing during the July Monarchy, chose to set his critique of Parisian social relations in the Restoration, and he depicts how both political tensions and the search for material gain pulled individuals apart. In this novel, Balzac also uses friendship as an idealized relationship that could heal political divisions and reestablish solidarity in an interest-dominated society. At the same time, discussions of this bond function as a way to illustrate the difference between the morally pure characters and the corrupt ones.

In this novel, friendship becomes a utopia—an impossible ideal separate from the modern world. Friendship unites individuals and quells political tensions, and thus establishes a positive form of individualism that includes self-development and free choice but excludes atomizing competition and destructive self-interest. Friendship thus becomes a prescription for a laundry list of ills that were seen as plaguing the social order of the early nineteenth century—suspicion, factionalism, individualism, and greed. Yet idealized friendship is always exclusive, for it can incorporate only a small group of individuals who were committed to excising political tensions and economic concerns from their affective lives. In essence, if public life was an arena of hostility, then trust and connection could exist only in private and among a select few.

Illusions perdues is the story of Lucien de Rubempré, an aspiring poet from Angoulême. From a poor family, Lucien moves to Paris with his aristocratic mistress and hopes to make his name through her connections in high society. Once in the capital, she abandons him and he is forced to make his way by his wits alone. He is quickly presented with two choices. The first, devoting his life to his literary works, involves a slow, laborious process and years of poverty, but it might ultimately lead to the full development of his talent. The second is to become a journalist. At least in the short run, this option could allow him a life of ease. But it comes at a very high price. Lucien ultimately succumbs to the temptations of journalism and becomes destitute, betrays his principles and his friends, and watches his teenage mistress die.

In Illusions perdues, Balzac’s characters confront the two forces seen as destructive of the early nineteenth-century social fabric: politics and self-interest. As a novel set during the Restoration that takes place among journalists, Illusions perdues contains a number of references to the poisonous political atmosphere. When Lucien thinks about switching his affiliation from liberal to ultra because he imagines it would speed his path to success, his friends warn him against this by referencing the deep political divisions in the country and the legacy of the White Terror. One friend tells him that if he starts professing
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ultra views in his writings, liberals will destroy him, and that he “will be carried away by the rages of factionalism which is still at a fevered pitch; only the fever has passed from the brutal actions of 1815 and 1816 to the realm of ideas and verbal struggles in the Chambers and debates in the press.” Polit- ics, then, leads individuals to seek one another’s destruction.

Lucien’s shifting political affiliations and France’s ideological divisions are not the focus of Illusions perdues, but they are used to illustrate the degree to which Lucien will do anything that he thinks might advance his career. Instead, the problem of greed is more central to the novel, which details how the pursuit of material success destroys social bonds, particularly among journalists who inhabit a world inextricably bound to the marketplace. Indeed, what initially attracts Lucien to this career path is the opportunity for gain and the apparent luxury that journalism affords him. Balzac writes that at a dinner full of journalists and actresses, Lucien “enjoyed the first delights of wealth, he fell under the spell of luxury, under the empire of good food; his capricious instincts revived, he drank good wines for the first time, he came to know the exquisite dishes of haute cuisine.”

Such luxury comes at a very high cost, however, for journalists sacrifice their personal ties to self-interest. As Lucien is introduced to this world, his contacts repeatedly warn him that friendship is impossible. One journalist advises Lucien, “I see that you are entering the literary and journalistic word with illusions. You believe in friends. We are friends or enemies according to circumstances.” Later, the newspaper publisher Finot gives Lucien the following advice about his comportment as a journalist: “Don’t overwork yourself. And above all, don’t trust your friends.” The journalistic profession is so competitive—and the path to success so narrow—that the only way to survive is to exploit and betray others. This is precisely what Étienne Lousteau, Lucien’s mentor in journalistic affairs, does as he quickly sacrifices Lucien in order to maintain his own status. At the dinner party during which Lucien is definitively seduced by the worldly pleasures of the journalistic lifestyle, Balzac writes that Lucien looks at Lousteau and thinks, “There’s a friend! without suspecting that Lousteau already feared him to be a dangerous rival.” And so Lousteau decides to deny Lucien any chance of real success; he “resolved to remain Lucien’s friend and come to an agreement with Finot to exploit such a dangerous newcomer and keep him in need.” In these instances, Balzac uses friendship as a signifier of morality. The fact that journalists are incapable of true friendship indicates that they cannot escape from their own greed, naked ambition, and ruthlessness.
In contrast to this world of destruction and self-destruction is the space of friendship, represented by the Cénacle, a group of nine artists and thinkers dedicated to truth and beauty. The fact that these men are all devoted friends is a sign of their moral purity, as friendship serves as a metaphor that stands in for generosity as well as artistic and personal integrity. Indeed these men represent perfect friendship. In describing the bonds among them, Balzac states, “The charming delicacy that made the fable *The Two Friends* [by Jean de La Fontaine] a treasure for great souls was habitual among these men.”

With such words, Balzac situates himself in the canon of French literature as another author constructing an ideal human relationship.

Lucien initially thinks about joining the Cénacle, but decides that journalism is a quicker route to fame and fortune. But before he starts down this path, he is given a sense of what true friendship looks like, and his brief foray into this alternative universe of talented young men allows Balzac to propose his model of friendship. As he discusses the relations among these men, Balzac draws explicit and implicit comparisons between friendship and other types of social ties, with friendship always coming out the clear winner. For instance, he contrasts male friendship to romantic love, writing that “what makes friendships indestructible and doubles their charms is a feeling that is absent in love—certainty. These young men were sure of each other.”

While love always includes doubt (the lover is capable of betrayal or abandonment), friendship is a unique space of trust. It is also an oasis of affection in the otherwise hostile environment of Paris. Lucien comes in contact with the Cénacle through one of its members, Daniel d’Arthez, and when he does so, Balzac writes that Lucien is “happy to have found in the desert of Paris a heart which abounded with generous feelings in harmony with his.” D’Arthez is appealing because he is so unlike the others that Lucien encountered up until that moment, and emotion signifies this difference, given the sentimental vocabulary Balzac employs. Thus friendship exists as a utopia in the middle of an otherwise vicious Paris.

Crucial components of Balzac’s model of friendship are the generosity, solidarity, and unity among the members of the Cénacle. For instance, he writes, “the enemy of one became the enemy of all, they would have broken with their most urgent interest in order to obey the sacred solidarity of their hearts.” Although these men have self-interest, their bonds with one another have primacy as they take on one another’s concerns, even to the point of self-harm. At the end of the novel, these men show that they will defend one another whatever the consequences. When Lucien is forced into
writing a negative review of d’Arthez’s book, one member of the Cénacle, Michel Chrestien, spits in Lucien’s face, provoking a duel. D’Arthez’s enemy has indeed become his enemy, and he is willing to die for his friend. Balzac writes of the smaller, yet constant, sacrifices these men make for one another and the steady gift exchange among them. When Lucien initially befriends d’Arthez, the latter’s first act is to pawn his watch to buy firewood so that he and Lucien can be more comfortable in his quarters. Balzac also describes that on an unseasonably cold autumn day, five of the members of the Cénacle bought firewood to take to d’Arthez’s quarters, where they all meet. Such acts of spontaneous generosity demonstrate the solidarity that exists among these friends, as they share one another’s burdens and sacrifice money for the sake of love. Nothing could be farther from the competitive, atomized world of journalists.

Yet Lucien is unable to integrate himself into this gift economy. When the members of the Cénacle perceive that he is in financial difficulty, they all make sacrifices to come up with 200 F to give him. Lucien imagines that he is conscientious when he pays them back promptly, but they are insulted. One member says to him, “If you loved us like we love you, would you have been so eager and so emphatic in returning to us what we had so much pleasure in giving you?” Another states, “We do not make loans here, we give.” By thinking of the gift as a loan, Lucien shows that he does not share their values and that he can only think in terms of market calculations. Theirs is an economy of sentiment, one that exists outside the realm of self-interest. The problem, however, with this perfect human relationship is precisely that it is a utopia—impossible to achieve, as Lucien cannot understand the rules of these men’s relationships.

If friendship stands in for generosity, Balzac also uses this bond to figure the cessation of ideological hostilities. He states the following about the men of the Cénacle:

Esteem and friendship made peace reign over the most opposing ideas and doctrines. Daniel d’Arthez, Picard gentleman, believed in the monarchy with a conviction that equaled Michel Chrestien’s commitment to his European federalism. Fulgence Ridal made fun of the philosophical doctrines of Léon Giraud, who himself predicted the end of Christianity and the Family to d’Arthez. Michel Chrestien, who believed in the religion of Christ, the divine legislator of Equality, defended the notion of the immortality of the soul against the scalpel of Bianchon. . . .
They had no vanity whatsoever, as they were their own audience. . . . Did it have to do with an important matter? The challenger abandoned his own opinions in order to enter into the ideas of his friend. 87

The views of these men range from the far-right to the far-left. But an ideological flexibility allows them to transcend political divisions. In their discussions, these men help one another out by adopting alternate views, as any one of the members can “enter into the ideas of his friend” to improve the other’s argument. Given Balzac’s reference to the notion that those with opposing political views during the Restoration generally wanted to destroy one another, ideal friendship opens up the possibility of political reconciliation. One reason friendship wins out over politics is the notion of audience. These men are more interested in speaking among themselves than to members of the public, in contrast to journalists who strive for public recognition. Hence, friendship can exist only through some form of privacy and removal from the world.

Here Balzac uses the possibility or impossibility of friendship as a way to describe the problems France was facing. This bond is imagined as an ideal relationship that allows for pleasure, choice, and self-development, and restrains the forces of competition and egoism. In essence, friendship is a model of voluntarily restrained individualism. These men have their own talents and their own views, but they willingly suspend their self-interest for the sake of those whom they love. Friendship becomes a utopia within an individualistic society and is one solution to the anxiety about post-revolutionary social dissolution. It serves as a model of how free and equal citizens could come together, trust one another, and find happiness. Yet ideal masculine love could only be imagined as a refuge from the wider world. The bonds that connect the men of the Cénacle are particularistic and exclusive. Because public life—in the form of either politics or the market—was seen as too isolating and too hostile, individuals could come together only in private.