

THE BETRAYAL
OF THE
Duchess

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ALSO BY MAURICE SAMUELS

The Right to Difference

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The Spectacular Past

THE BETRAYAL
OF THE
Duchess

THE SCANDAL THAT UNMADE THE BOURBON
MONARCHY AND MADE FRANCE MODERN

MAURICE SAMUELS

BASIC BOOKS
New York



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For my friends





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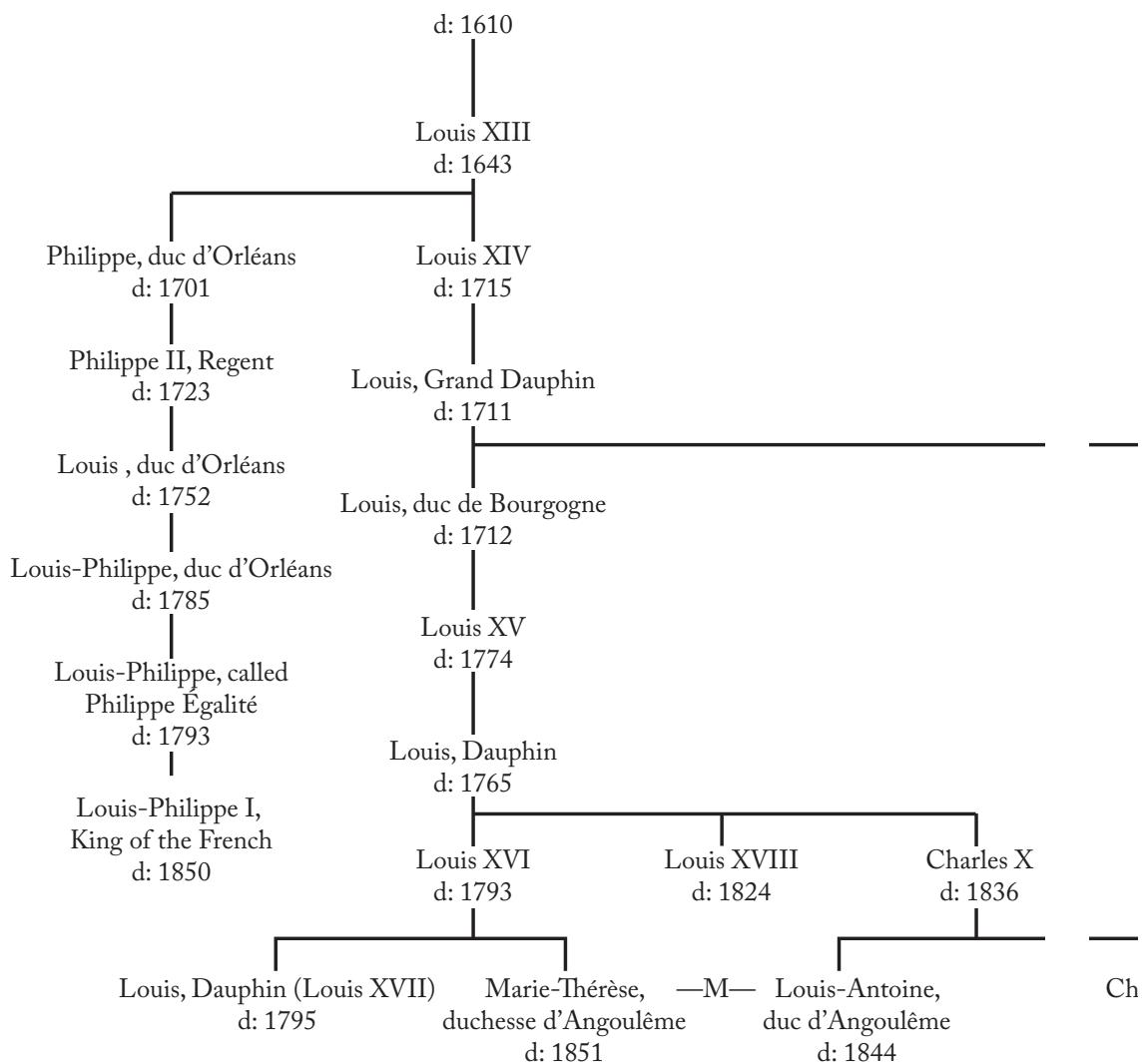
If in the course of centuries to come, historical novels are still in fashion, a new Walter Scott will have a difficult time finding a more poetic subject than the expedition of Madame la duchesse de Berry in France during the years 1832 and 1833.

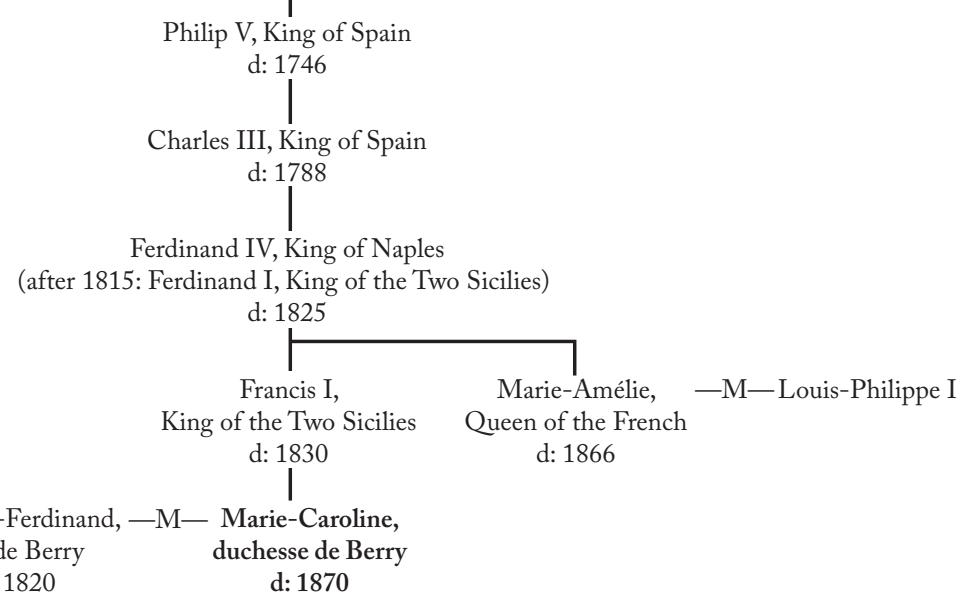
—ADÈLE D'OSMOND, *COMTESSE DE BOIGNE, MEMOIRS*

Twenty years ago, everyone would have known even the most minor details that we are about to recount. Today everyone has forgotten them. History moves so quickly in France!

—ALEXANDRE DUMAS, *MY MEMOIRS*

BOURBON FAMILY TREE, HENRI IV, KING OF FRANCE







Map of the Vendée







Introduction

• • AT HALF PAST five on the evening of November 6, 1832, police raided a house in a quiet residential enclave of Nantes, the largest city in France's western region. Shoving past frightened servants, they moved methodically from room to room, overturning beds and rifling through wardrobes as twelve hundred soldiers—two entire army regiments—filed into the dark cobblestone streets below to make sure that nobody could escape out the back. They were searching for the duchesse de Berry, the most wanted woman in France.

The mother of the heir to the throne, she had been forced into exile with the rest of the Bourbon royal family after the Revolution of 1830, only to return two years later to launch a bloody civil war. Her dream was to reconquer the kingdom for her eleven-year-old son. All through the spring she had commanded a guerrilla army in a series of battles against the government, but by the early summer she was on the run. And now, after six months of evading capture, the luck of the four-foot-seven duchess was coming to an end.

The police had been tipped off by the duchess's confidant, a seductive yet volatile man named Simon Deutz. He had pledged undying loyalty to her cause, then turned against her once it appeared that her campaign would fail. For a large cash reward, he had agreed to lead the police to her hiding place in Nantes. But when the agents forced their way into the house, the duchess was nowhere to be found.

Just minutes before, she had slipped into a secret closet behind the fireplace in the attic. Created during the Reign of Terror to save priests from the guillotine, the closet was so small that the duchess and her three accomplices could barely stand up straight and there was not an inch of space between them. Praying for a miracle, she tried not to move while the agents sounded the walls and knocked holes in the roof. She could hear the police commissioner cursing on the other side of the thin partition as he ordered his men to reduce the house to rubble in their efforts to find her.

After sixteen hours, the agents were about to give up the search when one of the soldiers standing guard in the room decided to light a fire. As the secret compartment filled with smoke and the walls glowed red with heat, the duchess did her best to endure the torment. Eventually, though, the trapdoor to the fireplace opened, and out crawled the tiny, soot-covered rebel. Straightening her scorched dress and shielding her eyes from the light, she declared in the most regal manner she could summon: "I am the duchesse de Berry. You are French soldiers. I entrust myself to your honor!"

THOUGH LARGELY FORGOTTEN today, the betrayal of the duchess shocked the world at the time. It made international headlines and engrossed the public for months, all the more so when it emerged that the arrested duchess was pregnant, despite not having had a husband for over a decade. The case fascinated the leading writers of the day: François-René de Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo both wrote significant works about it, while Alexandre Dumas *père*, the author of *The Three Musketeers*, returned to the events surrounding

the betrayal in a novel, a historical chronicle, his own memoirs, and a memoir that he ghostwrote for the general charged with suppressing the duchess's revolt.

Beyond its many obvious attractions—a glamorous heroine, a quixotic military campaign, an illicit romance, and a dramatic double-cross—the scandal had major repercussions for French history. It ended the hopes for another Bourbon restoration and helped stabilize the monarchy of Louis-Philippe, who had claimed the throne in 1830 but whose grip on it was still tenuous. But the case also had another, and perhaps even more far-reaching, effect: Simon Deutz had been born a Jew, and his betrayal of the duchess provoked modern France's first major outpouring of antisemitic hatred.¹

Historians often date the rise of modern antisemitism in France to the decade leading up to the Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s. This notorious case, in which a Jewish army officer was falsely accused of treason, is considered a turning point in world history, the moment at which Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, claimed to have concluded that antisemitism made the dream of Jewish integration in Europe impossible. Yet the first real warning bell—the first signal that modernity would not necessarily be good for the Jews—had actually sounded some sixty years earlier, following the betrayal of the duchesse de Berry.²

In 1832 the modern era was just beginning. Charles Darwin's *HMS Beagle* arrived in South America that year on the trip that would lay the foundation for his theory of evolution. A young lawyer named Abraham Lincoln was about to enter Illinois politics, and the start of Queen Victoria's long reign was a mere five years in the future. Recent innovations such as the telegraph were shrinking the world while also speeding it up. Railroads would soon carry passengers between distant cities faster than anyone thought possible.

The changes associated with the birth of modernity gave rise to a great deal of social and political strife, and nowhere more so than in France. By 1832, the country had been fighting over the legacy of the French Revolution for fifty years. France was also in the throes of an

industrial revolution that was no less momentous. The period's unrest was perhaps most vividly captured by Victor Hugo in his epic novel *Les Misérables*. Set largely in 1832, the novel's plot unfolds against the backdrop of a failed political uprising, as idealistic young students and starving workers fight to create a republic but are brutally repressed by the soldiers of King Louis-Philippe. What Hugo barely mentions is that at the same moment leftist firebrands were dying on the barricades, the French government was also attempting to suppress the right-wing revolt of the duchesse de Berry.³

Louis-Philippe—from the Bourbons' rival dynasty, the Orléans—had claimed the throne from the duchess's son during the Revolution of 1830, and she wanted it back. She believed in the Bourbons' divine right to rule, but she also believed that only France's traditional monarchs—and their ally the Catholic Church—could restore stability to a country fractured by revolutionary upheaval. By fighting to bring about yet another Bourbon restoration, the duchess seemed to promise a return to a simpler, better world—a world of religious duties and feudal privileges in which everyone knew their place. This was the key to the force she exerted on those who were engaged in the century-long battle against the French Revolution and the political and economic modernization that it unleashed. Like her idol Joan of Arc, the duchess proposed her own heroic persona as an antidote to the troubles of her time.⁴

Her betrayal by Simon Deutz turned her into a martyr instead. In the aftermath of her arrest a legend took shape among the duchess's supporters in which the betrayal became a symbol for the evils that had been ushered in by the French Revolution. This legend was powerful because it told a simple story: a Jew had betrayed the mother of France's rightful king. The story transformed resistance to modernity into a passion play with the Jew as villain and, in so doing, helped make antisemitism a key feature of right-wing ideology in France.⁵

Hatred of Jews, of course, predates modernity. Antisemites have always attempted to define who they were by turning the Jew into the embodiment of what they were not. The biblical figure of Judas,

the betrayer of Christ, reflects the way that ancient Christians already saw the Jew as corrupt and treacherous. But by the time of the Dreyfus Affair at the end of the nineteenth century, antisemitism had come to mean much more. The Right had turned the Jew into a symbol of everything they were fighting against, from industrialization to cosmopolitanism, secularism to revolution. The betrayal of the duchesse de Berry marks a key stage in this transition, the moment at which modern stereotypes of the Jew crystallized in the popular imagination. Simon Deutz represents a bridge between old and new forms of antisemitism. He is the missing link between Judas and Dreyfus.⁶

THIS BOOK IS rooted in history, anchored in a specific time and place. But it also has contemporary relevance. With deindustrialization now taking place in much of the West and globalization concentrating wealth ever more intensely, our own moment is experiencing a transformation similar in scale to that of France in the 1830s. And some of those who feel displaced by changes still blame the disruption on Jews and other minorities.

That certain protesters—in France, the United States, and around the world—have turned antisemitic should come as no surprise. Opponents of modernity have projected their fears and anxieties about change onto Jews since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nor should the antisemitism of radical Islamist movements startle us: they too are at war with modernity, much like the conservative Catholics in the duchess's time. The specifics have changed, but many of the fundamental features that govern how antisemitic hatred operates have not. People still tell stories about Jewish treachery. They still consume paranoid plots to assuage their fears and explain their failures. The discourse of modern antisemitism still performs much the same function for reactionaries and populists today as it did in the 1830s. Resurrecting the forgotten story of Simon Deutz's betrayal of the duchesse de Berry sheds light on this discourse by revealing how it first took shape.

But why does it need resurrecting? If it had such a profound effect on the formation of right-wing ideology and on the development of antisemitism, why has the betrayal of the duchess faded from memory? Historians have perhaps been reluctant to examine the betrayal in recent years because of its unsettling nature. Unlike Dreyfus, who was a model victim, or at least a blameless one, Deutz was actually guilty of betrayal. Even more disturbingly, the duchess's uncommon heroism and alluring wit risk eliciting sympathy for her reactionary politics. The story lacks the clear moral guideposts that make the Dreyfus Affair such a satisfying tale of justice triumphing over prejudice. It offers no "J'Accuse!" moment, no cause for righteous indignation. But this moral ambiguity should not deter us from studying the case; on the contrary, the betrayal of the duchess merits attention precisely because of its ambiguity. It is in the gray areas, the shadows, that history has the most to teach us.

P A R T O N E

The Duchess





CHAPTER 1

The Volcano's Edge

NAPLES CURLS INVITINGLY around its bay, the ochre buildings of the city glittering gold against the deep blue of the water. The culmination of the grand tour in the eighteenth century, this capital of southern Italy lured visitors from colder climes with a mix of sunshine, lush natural beauty, antiquarian curiosity, and more than a hint of danger. The threat came not just from the *lazzaroni*, the rough urban street dwellers thought to lie in wait for unsuspecting tourists, but also from Mount Vesuvius, the giant volcano towering a thousand feet above the city and visible from every point in the dense metropolis, the streets of which were paved with its hardened lava. “Vede Napoli e poi mori” (“See Naples and die”), proclaimed the proverb that visitors interpreted literally as they watched white smoke puff from the volcano’s giant crater. The volcano was particularly active in the late eighteenth century, when seismic pressures of a political nature were also building.

Maria Carolina Luisa di Borbone, the future duchesse de Berry, was born at the royal palace of Caserta, just north of Naples, on November 5, 1798. Her great-grandfather, the first Bourbon king of

Naples and Sicily, had constructed the enormous palace on a site slightly to the north of the city to shield it as much as possible from the danger of Vesuvius. Modeled on France's palace of Versailles, Caserta spread out over more than two million square feet and contained twelve hundred rooms: a grander building could not be found in Italy. Such neoclassical splendor was meant to convey the power and prestige of the Bourbon kingdom in Italy, but by the time of Carolina's birth, the foundations of the kingdom had begun to shake.¹

The future duchess's grandfather, King Ferdinand, was known as the *Re Lazzaroni*, the Lazzaroni King, because he was beloved by the urban ruffians. Interested only in hunting and fishing, he left the running of the government to his wife, Maria Carolina of Habsburg, a determined woman who, despite her various public responsibilities, bore him no fewer than eighteen children over the course of their long marriage. The first surviving male of this large brood was the future King Francis I, the duchess's father. Another child was Maria Amalia, the duchess's aunt, who would marry Louis-Philippe d'Orléans and become Marie-Amélie, queen of the French, after the Revolution of 1830.²

By the time of the future duchess's birth in 1798, all European monarchies were feeling the aftershocks of the French Revolution as its leading general, Napoleon Bonaparte, spread revolutionary fervor to the lands he conquered. And nowhere was royalist fear more palpable than in the Kingdom of Naples, where the queen had lost her sister, Marie Antoinette, to the guillotine in France and where the monarchs' absolutist policies had ignited a liberal opposition. British admiral Horatio Nelson had little trouble enlisting the Neapolitan Bourbons in the fight to beat back Napoleon's forces in Italy.

After Napoleon conquered Rome in 1798, the queen of Naples and Sicily decided to take no chances. With the help of the British, the Bourbons began moving their treasure from the Royal Palace of Naples onto Nelson's ships waiting in the harbor. The plan was to transport the entire court and its riches to the island of Sicily, the other capital of the twin kingdom, which the British fleet could

protect more easily from French invasion. Once they had been loaded with jewels, gold, paintings, clothing, and cash, the ships moved into deeper waters, out of range of enemy fire, as they waited for the royal family to flee. The transfer of the treasure took place in secret, over the course of several nights, so as not to alert the anxious Neapolitans.³

On the evening of December 21, 1798, the king and queen attended a reception held at the Turkish Embassy. At the height of the festivities, the monarchs slipped out, making their way incognito on foot through the dark streets of the city as their carriages remained in front of the embassy to make it look like they were still at the party. Once back at their palace, they were met by the rest of the royal household. By torchlight, the party passed through tunnels that ran under the palace, directly into the port where British sailors would row them out to the waiting ships.⁴

During this operation, the future duchesse de Berry was a baby, not yet two months old. Her parents were double first cousins and had been married in 1790. They christened their first child, born in 1797, Maria Carolina Luisa in honor of her grandmother, the queen, and called her Carolina. She joined the other members of the royal family on the first rowboat heading toward the British ship, the *Guardian*. It was a terrifying journey out into open water.⁵

A storm delayed their departure for Sicily for two agonizing days. When they did finally set sail, at 7 p.m. on the night of December 23, 1798, the choppy seas made for a gruesome voyage. Most of the passengers were prostrate with seasickness for the entire forty-eight hours that it took to travel to Palermo. The misery was intense. One six-year-old prince began having convulsions shortly after setting sail, and he died later that night of exhaustion. Baby Carolina, however, survived the journey.⁶

Palermo was the other capital of the twin kingdom, but it was not one that the royal family had often visited. They took up residence at the barren and poorly heated Colli Palace amid a snowstorm, which was unusual for Sicily, and let the other two thousand Neapolitan refugees find whatever accommodations they could. "Palermo is in