

COURTNEY M. BOOKER

Histrionic history, demanding drama: The penance of Louis the Pious in 833, memory, and emplotment¹

For a peg, unless it is very strong and attached to
something stronger than itself, quickly falls
with everything hanging upon it.
– Hincmar of Reims, *De ordine palatii*

On the feast day of Saint John the Baptist, June 24th, in the year 833, Emperor Louis the Pious readied himself for battle against a terrible foe. Amassed in the distance stood an armed coalition led by his three elder sons, Pope Gregory IV, and part of the Frankish clergy. Dismayed over what they alleged was Louis's negligence and increasing misconduct, his sons Lothar, Pippin, and Louis the German had for years sought to preserve their grandfather Charlemagne's great empire of western Europe through more peaceful means. Yet because all their entreaties had failed to make Louis aware of his many sins, ill feelings only continued to escalate. Now the two factions found themselves squared for battle upon a ferrous red plain aptly – and in the present context, ominously – called the Rotfeld. It appeared that the familial dispute would be settled by nothing less than civil war.

Unfortunately for Louis, this precarious stalemate was soon resolved neither by battle nor by diplomacy, but by treachery. One night, during the week-long course of negotiations on the russet plain, most of the emperor's sworn *fideles* furtively abandoned his camp. Bereft of support, Louis dispatched his sole term of surrender: that his young wife, Judith, and youngest son, the ten-year-old Charles, remain unharmed. His captors readily complied and spirited Louis away from the Rotfeld – known shortly thereafter as the *campus mentitus*, the Field of Lies – to the city of Soissons, where he was left under strict custody.²

Three months later, following a summer of game-hunting, Lothar met with a great assembly of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries, led by the archbishop Ebbo of Reims. After much discussion, the group moved within the abbey church of Saint-Médard in Soissons, gathering there with a large number of the general populace. Soon the captive emperor came forward. Prostrating himself on a haircloth before the altar, Louis confessed in tears to a whole host of crimes and referred to himself as nothing less than a violator of divine and human laws. He had scandalized the church, forsaken oaths, and compelled his people to do the same, he admitted, and now was seeking absolution for these and still other misdeeds through the performance of a public penance. Divesting himself of his noble raiment, the contrite emperor then assumed both the humble garb and status of a penitent. Henceforth, Louis was excluded from those martial activities that defined a Frankish warlord and king. He had forsaken them for a life of penance and prayer, with the hope that he might still win salvation, both for himself and his people. Or so ends the episcopal narrative of the proceedings at Saint-Médard in October of 833.³ Yet, despite its tidy conclusion as scripted by the attendant bishops, the story of Louis's abandonment,

¹ I am grateful to the following individuals for their generous suggestions and advice: Kevin Attell, Alejandra Bronfman, Jason Glenn, Clementine Oliver, Paige Raibmon, Jay Rubenstein, Eugene Sheppard, and Mark Vessey.

² Many contemporary sources provide an account of this event. See Johann Friedrich Böhmer/Engelbert Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii I. Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern, 751–918* (Innsbruck 1908; repr. Hildesheim 1966) 366–368; and Bernhard von Simson, *Jahrbücher des fränkischen Reiches unter Ludwig dem Frommen 2* (Leipzig 1876) 45–54. The best modern discussion remains Thomas F. X. Noble, *Louis the Pious and the Papacy: Law, Politics and the Theory of Empire in the Early Ninth Century* (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University 1974) 321–352.

³ *Episcoporum de poenitentia, quam Hludowicus imperator professus est, relatio Compendiensis* (ed. Alfred Boretius/Victor Krause, *MGH Capitularia regum Francorum 2*, Hannover 1897) 51–55; and Agobard of Lyon, *Cartula de Ludovici imperatoris poenitentia* (ed. Lieven van Acker, *CCCM 52*, Turnhout 1981) 323–324.

penance, and abdication was far from over. On the contrary, the contest over establishing the “correct” tale of 833 had only just begun.⁴

At an address to his fellow savants in 1863, Auguste Ingold argued that the events of 833 had, “without doubt, deeply captured the imagination” of contemporary witnesses.⁵ Over the course of a millennium, he explained, it was the intense memory of the betrayal of Louis the Pious on the Rotfeld that, in particular, had been passed down among the local populace of the site from generation to generation, appearing during his own day in the blurred form of legends and vague traditions. Most striking in this regard was the toponym of a field not far from the Alsatian town of Cernay, a place that, as Ingold pointed out, was believed by many to be the actual “Field of Lies” itself. Called “Der Lügner”, The Liar, its very name still evoked the infamy of the event.⁶ Moreover, noted Ingold, on the neighboring heath of Ochsenfeld local legend had it that a terrible crime once occurred, one so heinous that even the land itself had cried out for vengeance from heaven. God, in His just anger, said the tale, had responded to this terrestrial appeal by cleaving the bowels of the earth and hurling those who were culpable into its foul depths. For centuries, the guilty – entire battalions of men, clad in iron – slumbered in the vast caverns beneath the plain. But occasionally, at certain hours of the night, these same ancient warriors awoke, rose to the surface, and toured the stretches of the Ochsenfeld, led at their vanguard by a certain “Prince Charles”. Those travelers unlucky enough to have chanced upon this phantom army, Ingold reported, told of being overcome by their plaintive cries of despair – macabre laments that ceased only upon reaching the outskirts of the haunted plain.⁷

Other manifestations of this same legend, continued Ingold, could also be found within various local traditions. For instance, when a man passed from life to death in the region, he was said “to have gone to join the soldiers of Prince Charles.” Similarly, the people of the nearby town of Cernay were, according to an ancient, popular nickname, themselves known as the “Ochsenfeld-Ritter”, the knights of Ochsenfeld. In 1852, little more than a decade before Ingold’s lecture, a laborer was digging a reservoir for the local mills and happened to unearth the remains of some ancient weapons. A rumor immediately ran through the surrounding countryside that it was the “armor of Prince Charles” which had just been discovered.⁸

Interpreting these strange vestiges of the past, Ingold suggested that the legend of Prince Charles and his phantom army was an imaginative way of accounting for Louis the Pious’s abandonment by his men in the middle of the night. How to explain the fact that on that fateful June evening in 833 there had been two armies, while the next day there had only been one? Evidently the local populace believed that God Himself had joined the struggle, explained Ingold, and cast into the earth those men who were in the process of breaking their sworn oaths of fidelity

⁴ For a full catalog of contemporary sources documenting the penance, see Böhmer/Mühlbacher, *Regesta Imperii* 1, 369–371; and Simson, *Jahrbücher* 2, 63–78. The most important modern analyses are Louis Halphen, *La pénitence de Louis le Pieux à Saint Médard de Soissons*, in: *Bibliothèque de la Faculté des Lettres de Paris XVIII, troisièmes mélanges d’histoire du Moyen Age* (Paris 1904) 177–185; reprinted in: id., *A travers l’histoire du Moyen Age* (Paris 1950) 58–66; Henri-Xavier Arquillière, *L’Augustinisme politique: Essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen-Age* (Paris 1955) 170–189; Walter Ullmann, *Ecclesiology and Carolingian rulership*, in: id., *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship* (London 1969) 43–70, especially 64–70; Edward Peters, *The Shadow King: Rex Inutilis in Medieval Law and Literature, 751–1327* (New Haven 1970) 30–80; Konrad Bund, *Thronsturz und Herrscherabsetzung im Frühmittelalter* (Bonn 1979) 405–423; Mayke de Jong, *Power and humility in Carolingian society: The public penance of Louis the Pious*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992) 29–52; and ead., *Sacrum palatium et ecclesia. L’autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790–840)*, in: *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 (2003) 1243–1269. See also Courtney M. Booker, *Writing a Wrong: The Divestiture of Louis the Pious (833) and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles 2002).

⁵ “Les scènes auxquelles le peuple venait d’assister ont sans doute vivement frappé son imagination.” Auguste-Marie-Pierre Ingold, *L’Ochsenfeld: Ses antiquités, ses traditions*, in: *Bulletin de la société pour la conservation des monuments historiques d’Alsace*, second series, 1 (1863) 138–143, at 142. See the art. Ingold, Auguste-Marie-Pierre, in: *Dictionnaire de biographie française* 18, ed. Michel Prévost et al. (Paris 1994) 171–172.

⁶ Ingold, *L’Ochsenfeld* 141. See also Georg Pertz’s comment in his edition of the *Annales Bertiniani: Annales Bertiniani a. 833* (ed. Georg H. Pertz, *MGH SS* 1, Hannover 1826) 419–515, at 426 note 13; Johann Daniel Schöpflin, *L’Alsace illustrée*, trans. Louis-Waldemar Ravenèz 3 (1751; Paris 1849–1852; reprinted 1974) 320–323; X. Boyer, *Le champ du mensonge: An 833*, in: *Revue d’Alsace*, second series, 13 (1862) 49–108; and Camille Oberreiner, *Le champ du mensonge*, in: *Revue d’Alsace*, second series, 56 (1905) 345–349.

⁷ Ingold, *L’Ochsenfeld* 142. See also Gabriel Gravier, *Légendes d’Alsace* 1 (Belfort 1986) 69–72.

⁸ Ingold, *L’Ochsenfeld* 143. Georges Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines: War, Religion, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (1973; Berkeley 1990) 171, would make similar observations regarding the infamous Battle of Bouvines: “confused memories of massacres, of dead heroes, associated with ... some ‘rusted old metal’ debris which surfaced on major ploughing days. These are the vague and tattered remnants of memories which are always drifting over the theaters of ancient battles.”

by furtively abandoning their lord, Louis. Behold, in the morning there was now but one (much larger) army – that of the sons. All those faithful to Louis had disappeared! Moreover, continued Ingold, because the young Prince Charles (known later as Charles “the Bald”) had caused the discord between his father and his half brothers in the first place – the need for a kingdom of his own had ultimately led his father to confront his elder brothers on the Rotfeld – it was this same Charles who was forever damned to lead the army of traitors across the cursed plain.⁹

On the 18th of June, 1809, Napoleon called to his chambers at Saint-Cloud a number of his French and Italian bishops whom he suspected of collusion and treason with the pope.¹⁰ Upon entering the room, the bishops beheld not just Napoleon but an audience consisting of Empress Marie Louise and her attendants, the viceroy of Italy, and several other high-ranking officials. Finishing his coffee as though on cue, Napoleon strode swiftly with choreographed steps to a nearby table, reached for a prop he had readied there, and confronted the startled bishops. Brandishing the day’s newspaper as evidence of their “treason”, the emperor suddenly burst into a rage, hurling insults and accusations while wringing the paper in his hands. As Talleyrand, Napoleon’s senior advisor, would later recount with distaste, “the excited countenance he assumed, the violence and confusion of his expressions and the attitude of those whom he addressed, made of this singular conference a scene such as he delighted in playing, and in which he displayed his brutal coarseness.”¹¹

Incensed over the outcome of the bishops’ initial meeting with the pope as reported by the newspaper, Napoleon first attacked Cardinal Fesch, his maternal uncle, launching into a confused tirade about “proper” ecclesiastical principles and customs. Fesch’s behavior at the council, he proclaimed, obviously betrayed a plot to elevate himself within the church and cow any opposition through his kinship with Napoleon. Wounded, the cardinal responded firmly that the emperor’s melodramatic notion of a plot was the result of a simple misunderstanding – as the archbishop of Lyon, his assumption of the title “Primate of Gaul” at the council was a traditional, well-precedented, and hardly exceptional episcopal practice. Yet even after Fesch explained the truth of the matter and was supported in this explanation by the unanimous agreement of the other bishops, Napoleon refused to listen. Rather, it only served to make matters worse, for the emperor, now irked and becoming defensive, threw one of those violent tantrums for which he was infamous. (Fig. 1) According to Talleyrand, the seething, exasperated emperor

continued to talk for an hour with an incoherence, which would have left no recollection other than astonishment at his ignorance and his loquacity, if the phrase which follows, and which he repeated every three or four minutes, had not revealed the depth of his thought. “Messieurs,” he exclaimed to them, “you wish to treat me as if I were Louis le Débonnaire. Do not confound the son with the father. You see in me Charlemagne. ... I am Charlemagne, I, ... yes, I am Charlemagne!” This “I am Charlemagne” recurred at each instant.¹²

Only fatigue finally brought an end to this ranting, which had carried on until midnight. At that point, concluded Talleyrand, of those witnessing the scene each one went his way, carrying from Saint-Cloud strange impressions. Just what these impressions were one can only guess, but the events of 833 likely loomed large in the depth of Napoleon’s thought – that his own bishops, like those on the Rotfeld, had betrayed their oaths of fidelity and were plotting with the pope against him. Desperately wanting to be seen as Charlemagne, the insecure emperor was wracked by fears that he was rather being seen as Louis the Pious, and that his bishops were acting on this appearance. He, however, would not be “treated”, i.e., humbled, like the debonair son. “I am Charlemagne”, he announced again and again – words that were meant both as an attestation and a threat. There would be no confusion over their respective roles in the present drama. He would make certain of that.

⁹ Ingold, *L’Ochsenfeld* 142. Perhaps it is not surprising that the local popular memory of Louis’s abandonment was anti-Charles (if one accepts Ingold’s interpretation), for the territory remained, throughout the ninth century, in the hands of Charles’s half brothers and their sons. For a useful map, see Janet L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London 1992) 320–321. Another early report of the legend has Louis himself, after discovering the desertion by his men, calling down a curse upon both the traitors and the field that “witnessed” their betrayal; see Friedrich J. Kiefer, *Die Sagen des Rheinlandes* (Köln 1845) 289–291.

¹⁰ For what follows, I have largely paraphrased the account of this episode as reported in the memoirs of Charles Maurice de Talleyrand (1754–1838), bishop of Autun before the French Revolution and later a senior diplomat. See the *Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand 2* (ed. Duc de Broglie, trans. Raphaël L. de Beaufort, New York 1891) 75–77. See also the comments of Robert Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France: A Thousand Years of Mythology*, trans. Catherine Tihanyi (1997; Notre Dame 2003) 261.

¹¹ *Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand 2*, ed. de Broglie, trans. de Beaufort 75.

¹² *Memoirs of the Prince de Talleyrand 2*, ed. de Broglie, trans. de Beaufort 77.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END?

Much like their presence in the popular imagination, the events at the Field of Lies along with Louis's contrition before the feet of his clergy at Saint-Médard have together long been stamped into the scholarly imagination, appearing as central to many historical narratives concerned with the decline or disintegration of the Carolingian realm. Traditionally seen as a moment of crisis for the Carolingian monarchy, they are consistently invoked by historians to mark the beginning of a steady dissipation of its "universal" sovereignty. Despite the fact that Louis would quickly regain the support of most of his sons and magnates the following year, and be reinstated as emperor in 835 by having the judgment of penance officially overturned at assemblies in Thionville and Metz, still in the eyes of generations of historians his rule would never again be the same. For example, in 1765 the Abbé de Mably's description of Louis, following the events of 833, was nothing if not ominously foreboding: "... confused by his good and bad fortune, he was more timid than ever."¹³ Equally dire was J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi's languid portrait of Louis nearly a millennium after the emperor's "deposition": "... [after 833] his character appeared still weaker than in the preceding period, his policy more vacillating, and his projects, almost all abandoned before they were put in execution, were less worthy of remembrance."¹⁴ For James Prichard, Louis's penance at Soissons was simply the emperor's "greatest error of all", while for Thomas Greenwood the "detestable transaction" on the Field of Lies was the "starting-point of one of the boldest experiments upon the credulity of mankind ever devised." The remainder of Louis's reign following that "instructive chapter in the history of human depravity" upon the Rotfeld, he concluded, could "be dismissed in a few sentences."¹⁵

Twentieth-century historiography saw little to change in this inveterate characterization of Louis and the ruinous effects of 833. Arthur Kleinclausz, at the turn of the century, could still describe this fateful year as a "grave" moment in the history of the Carolingian empire, a description Ferdinand Lot would support in 1948 by representing Louis in his years after 833 as a monarch both "incorrigible" and "incurable."¹⁶ Nearly a decade later, Theodor Schieffer estimated Louis's abandonment and fall at the hands of the bishops as having been the "heaviest blow" to the empire and monarchy, an event whose "irrevocable" consequences were described by Jacques Boussard and Robert Folz shortly thereafter in terms of "chaos" and "confusion."¹⁷ Even after a major reevaluation in 1990 of Louis and his problematic career, one that sought to "expose the inadequacy of the clichés with which the reign of Charlemagne's heir has customarily been dismissed", many scholars have continued to paint Louis's later years in bleak and dismal tones.¹⁸

In short, for modern Carolingian historiography "833 tends to appear as definitive", observes Janet Nelson, a fateful year signaling "the fall of monarchy; the end of peace and concord; a trauma from which neither the Carolingians nor the Franks ever recovered."¹⁹ Yet this definitive appearance is deceiving, for, as Nelson has

¹³ "... confondu également par sa bonne et sa mauvaise fortune, était plus timide que jamais." Gabriel Bonnet de Mably, *Observations sur l'histoire de France* II, 4 (1765; ed. François Guizot 1, Paris 1823) 145.

¹⁴ Jean Charles Leonard Simonde de Sismondi, *The French under the Merovingians and the Carolingians*, trans. William Bellingham (1821; London 1850) 309.

¹⁵ James C. Prichard, *The Life and Times of Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims* (Oxford 1849) 67; Thomas Greenwood, *Cathedra Petri. A Political History of the Great Latin Patriarchate* 3 (London 1859) 143, 146–147.

¹⁶ Arthur Kleinclausz, *L'Empire carolingien. Ses origines et ses transformations* (Paris 1902) 318; Ferdinand Lot, *Naissance de la France* (Paris 1948) 408. Cf. also Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon (1939–1940; Chicago 1961) 192.

¹⁷ Theodor Schieffer, *Die Krise des karolingischen Imperiums*, in: *Aus Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift für Gerhard Kallen*, ed. Josef Engel/Hans Martin Klinkenberg (Bonn 1957) 1–15, at 13–14, "... der schwersten Erschütterung des Reiches und der Monarchie"; Jacques Boussard, *The Civilization of Charlemagne*, trans. Frances Partridge (New York 1968) 203, "... [the] events were confused by every sort of political intrigue. The chaos finally destroyed the monarchy"; Robert Folz, *The Coronation of Charlemagne 25 December 800*, trans. J.E. Anderson (1964; London 1974) 189, "The general confusion in men's minds was then at its height ...".

¹⁸ For the quotation, see the editors' preface in *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) VII–VIII, at VIII. To cite just a few examples of such bleak portraits: Joel T. Rosenthal, *The public assembly in the time of Louis the Pious*, in: *Traditio* 20 (1964) 25–40, at 31; Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300–1000* (New York 1991) 299–300; Philippe Depreux, *Nithard et la 'res publica': Un regard critique sur le règne de Louis le Pieux*, in: *Médiévales. Langue, textes, histoire* 22/23 (1992) 149–161, at 152; Thomas F. X. Noble, *The papacy in the eighth and ninth centuries*, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History 2: c. 700–c. 900*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1995) 563–586, at 572; Ivan Gobry, *Louis I^{er}: Premier successeur de Charlemagne* (Paris 2002); and Armin Koch, *Kaiserin Judith. Eine politische Biographie* (Husum 2005) 143.

¹⁹ Janet L. Nelson, *The last years of Louis the Pious*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 147–159, at 148. This statement by Nelson is, of course, a generaliza-

shown, the last seven years of Louis's reign following 833 were hardly those of an ineffectual "shadow king." On the contrary, they were filled with Louis's continuous efforts to keep his eldest son Lothar out of Francia and reassert his own control over the imperial succession – arduous activities whose success did much to restore the confidence and commitment of Louis's magnates and faithful men.²⁰ Indeed, in the face of what contemporary stargazers took to be a dire portent, Louis, like his father Charlemagne before him, was even optimistic about the later course of his reign, interpreting the appearance in 837 of what would later be dubbed Halley's comet as a salutary admonition from God, an auspicious sign compelling all to hasten in the improvement of their knowledge and ability.²¹ Why then, in light of such observations, have scholars continually focused on 833 as the definitive moment signaling the commencement of Carolingian decline?²²

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY OF THE END

Certainly the most influential factor contributing to the allure of 833 has been the long historiographical shadow cast by the events of that year.²³ Throughout the past millennium of their telling and retelling, the circumstances of Louis's abandonment and penance have repeatedly been the subject of emplotment by historians, beginning with the Carolingians themselves.²⁴ Whether interpreted as a tragedy or a comedy, the events of 833 have nearly always been organized and expressed as some kind of drama, one which, for the purposes

tion. See the remarks by Paul E. Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline in the Carolingian Empire, 800–887* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto 1981) 43–50, for the notable exceptions of modern scholars who – while still having thought in terms of an overarching Carolingian "decline" – argued for causes and moments of crisis other than 833 and the "ineptitude" of Louis.

²⁰ Nelson, *The last years* 159. For the special problems posed by the filial resentment of aging royal fathers, see Paul E. Dutton, *Beyond the topos of senescence: The political problems of aged Carolingian rulers*, in: *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, ed. Michael M. Sheehan (Toronto 1990) 75–94; revised as *A world grown old with poets and kings*, in: Paul E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York 2004) 151–167.

²¹ Nelson, *The last years* 148–149; and Scott Ashley, *The power of symbols: Interpreting portents in the Carolingian empire*, in: *Medieval History* 4 (1994) 34–50. For Halley's comet and Louis's optimism regarding it, see the account by one of Louis's biographers, known to modern historians only as the "Astronomer" (so-called because of his self-professed astronomical learning), *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* 58 (ed. Ernst Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. in usum schol. 64, Hannover 1995) 279–555, at 518–525. The Astronomer himself was hesitant to offer his opinion on the comet. Cf. the pessimistic reaction of the nobleman Einhard to the same comet, *Einhard, Epistola* 40 (ed. Karl Hampe, MGH Epistolae 5, Hannover 1898–1899; reprinted München 1978) 129–130; engl.: (trans. Paul E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier. The Complete Einhard, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures* 3, Peterborough 1998) 160–161; and the ambivalent reaction of Abbot Lupus of Ferrières, *Epistola* 20 (ed. Peter K. Marshall, *Servati Lupi Epistolae, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Leipzig 1984) 28; engl.: (trans. Graydon W. Regenos, *Letters of Lupus of Ferrières*, in: *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, ed. Paul E. Dutton, Peterborough 2004) 458–467, at 460. For the "brilliant meteor" of 810, and Charlemagne's optimism (as well as Einhard's pessimism) toward it, see Einhard, *Vita Karoli magni* 32 (ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. 25, Hannover 1911) 36; engl.: (trans. Paul E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Courtier. The Complete Einhard, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures* 3, Peterborough 1998) 15–68, at 36–37.

²² Egon Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* (Darmstadt 1996) 203, „... wurde die Monarchie in eine tiefe Krise gestürzt. Der Autoritätsverlust war unübersehbar und sollte sich durch die folgenden Ereignisse noch vergrößern. Auch die Außenwirkung war ohne Zweifel katastrophal.“ See also Koch, *Kaiserin Judith* 143, „Die Vorgänge dieses Jahres [833] sind fraglos als negativer Höhepunkt der Regierungszeit Ludwigs anzusehen.“ Cf. the neutral assessment of David Ganz, *The debate on predestination*, in: *Charles the Bald. Court and Kingdom*, ed. Margaret T. Gibson/Janet L. Nelson (Aldershot 1990) 285, "The deposition and penance of Louis the Pious was a turning point in the development of society because it showed the intelligentsia that a society regulated by penance could not always find favour in God's sight."

²³ Nelson, *The last years* 148. See also the remarks of Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300–1450* (London 1996) 42–43, on the "long shadow" cast by the misinterpreted Augustinian theory of rulership, dubbed by Henri-Xavier Arquillière "L'Augustinisme politique." Arquillière saw this theory realized most fully in the events of 833, an observation that has cast a long shadow of its own; see Léon Levillain, *Review of Arquillière, L'Augustinisme politique* (Paris 1934), in: *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 96 (1935–1936) 383–390; Henri-Xavier Arquillière, *Réflexions sur l'essence de l'augustinisme politique*, in: *Augustinus Magister. Congrès international augustinien, Paris, 21–24 Septembre 1954*, 2 (Paris 1954) 991–1001, at 994; id., *L'Augustinisme politique* 146, 200. On Arquillière and "L'Augustinisme politique," see Alain Boureau, *Des politiques tirées de l'écriture: Byzance et l'occident*, in: *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 55 (2000) 879–887, at 881–883.

²⁴ Nancy F. Partner, *Hayden White (and the content and the form and everyone else) at the AHA*, in: *History and Theory* 36 (1997) 102–110, at 108, has provided a succinct definition of emplotment: "Described after the fact (which is the only metaphorical 'place' from which description can take place) emplotment is a rationalizing and organizing activity which follows logically upon the collection and contemplation of the 'events to be narrated.'" See also ead., *Hayden White: The form and the content*, in: *History and Theory* 37 (1998) 162–172. On the cool reception of White's work by scholars of the early Middle Ages, see Matthew Innes,

of modern historians, eloquently showcases those pernicious elements that would appear with ever greater frequency over the course of the ninth century, ultimately leading to the downfall of the realm.

In the following pages, I shall briefly survey the long, shadowy tradition of emplotment connected to the “dramatic” events of 833, and evaluate the considerable influence it has exerted upon modern attempts to understand the transformations taking place during the ninth century. That is, rather than explore what the events of 833 can tell us about broad patterns of continuity and change within Carolingian culture *per se*, I shall trace the enduring memory of Louis the Pious’s abandonment and penance over the succeeding centuries and plot a history of remembrance revealing broad patterns all its own.²⁵ A striking recent example from this other history can cast some light back into the depth of its shadows: Louis’s public penance, claims one noted scholar, was nothing less than a tragic, Stalinesque show-trial.²⁶ While this is surely not a satisfactory model for understanding what happened in 833, it sets in bold relief two features that are common to many modern depictions of Louis’s troubles: an anachronistic projection of present concerns upon the events, and a prescriptive representation of them as a travesty and a tragedy.²⁷ Such categorical features, the uses to which they are put, and the memories of which they form a part, speak far more eloquently about the historical consciousness of the later persons engaged in their remembrance and use than they do about the events and the era in which they occurred.²⁸ But they also say something specific and important about why the events of 833 have long received special attention.

In sum, and to at once foreshadow and momentarily dispel deeper shadows to come, I will show that the meaning of Louis’s ritual humiliation was rapidly transformed by a contemporary theatrical mode of interpretation and emplotted in accordance with the generic demands of a tragedy or a comedy. And through a strange sort of resurrection, it is this meaningful, demanding drama that has been rehearsed repeatedly since at least the eighteenth century to epitomize and explain the larger story of the Carolingian achievement and its failure.

WRITING A WRONG

Before undertaking any survey of the stories about 833, it is imperative to recall that Louis the Pious quickly regained the throne. Rescued from his captors within months, the emperor crushed the rebellion and was ritually reinvested with his regalia by February of 835, less than two years after his desertion and public penance.²⁹ Moreover, Louis retained firm control over the empire for another five years; only his death by illness in the year 840 would wrest it from him again.³⁰ This fact of Louis’s swift recovery and triumph over the rebellion is significant, for it has profoundly influenced both the particular perspective as well as the dramatic “height” from which the events of 833 have nearly always been viewed.³¹

Shortly after Louis’s restoration to the throne, several contemporary apologists composed in quick succession a number of vivid, sensational narratives on the emperor’s behalf. And it was with the composition of these loyalist narratives that Louis’s supporters set three precedents in the tradition of representing the events of 833

Introduction: Using the past, interpreting the present, influencing the future, in: *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzhak Hen/Matthew Innes (Cambridge 2000) 3–8.

²⁵ On this approach, which Robert Darnton has dubbed “incident analysis”, see Darnton, *It happened one night*, in: *The New York Review of Books* 51, 11 (24 June 2004) 60–64; Courtney M. Booker, *Review of Gabriel Piterberg, An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley 2003), in: *Comitatus* 35 (2004) 265–271; Alain Boureau, *The Myth of Pope Joan*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago 2001); and Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines*.

²⁶ Elisabeth Magnou-Nortier, *La tentative de subversion de l’État sous Louis le Pieux et l’oeuvre des falsificateurs* (2^e partie), in: *Le Moyen Age* 105 (1999) 615–641, at 640.

²⁷ See Courtney M. Booker, *The demanding drama of Louis the Pious*, in: *Comitatus* 34 (2003) 170–175; and Booker, *Writing a Wrong* 1–338.

²⁸ Cf. Amos Funkenstein, *Collective memory and historical consciousness*, in: *History and Memory* 1 (1989) 5–26; and Peter Seixas, *Introduction*, in: *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. id. (Toronto 2004) 3–20.

²⁹ Ludger Rid, *Die Wiedereinsetzung Kaiser Ludwigs des Frommen zu St. Denis (1. März 834) und ihre Wiederholung zu Metz (28. Februar 835)*, in: *Festgabe Alois Knöpfler zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres*, ed. Heinrich M. Gietl/Georg Pfeilschifter (Freiburg im Breisgau 1917) 265–275.

³⁰ Nelson, *The last years* 147–159.

³¹ Here I deliberately use metaphors of viewing to underscore the traditional “Inszenierung” of the events within the many narratives depicting them; cf. Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley 2003) 77–79, 167–168; and Booker, *Review of Piterberg, An Ottoman Tragedy* 270.

that would long inform the pattern of their remembrance. First, the apologists' accounts quickly became the predominant narrative through their wide dissemination and endorsement by the victorious party, thereby securing with the written word multiple, enduring records of the events that were sympathetic to Louis and hostile to the rebellion.³² Second, Louis's defenders cast their accounts in an extremely impassioned and dramatic style, lending a stirring, poignant tone to their representations of Louis's abandonment and divestiture.³³ Third, while Louis's supporters all devoted great attention to the events at the Rotfeld and Soissons in their larger accounts of Louis's reign, the story they each told was still their own – one conceived and rendered in accordance with their individual experiences and immediate concerns.³⁴

For example, at some point soon after Louis's victory in 835, an anonymous annalist of Louis's court, whose work is now called the Annals of Saint-Bertin, recorded the various events of the early 830s.³⁵ That is, rather than following the typical practice of noting each year's important events annually, the author composed the annal's entries for the years of Louis's fall and restoration all at once and afterward, retrospectively and retroactively spinning a revealing story out of those deeds, one that told of right over wrong: of equity over iniquity, clemency over severity, and patience over reckless haste.³⁶ Indeed, the degree to which the events of these years were emplotted by the annalist becomes all the more apparent if one compares his representation of these years with that provided by another contemporary annalist. In the "Annals of Xanten", for instance, the following entry appears for the year 833:

Then, in the summer, the sons of the emperor – Lothar, Pippin, and Louis – met in the region of Alsace, bringing Pope Gregory with them. And there the emperor's men disregarded their oaths, and, leaving him alone, they turned back to Lothar; [and] pledged an oath of loyalty to him. The emperor – by their command deprived at the same time of his wife and his kingdom – distressed and grieving, came into the control of [his] sons. They sent him into public custody in Soissons, and a similar thing was done to his wife. And since their plans had been brought to completion, the realm

³² See, for example, the statement made by the first annalist of the annals of Saint-Bertin regarding the wide dissemination of the news about Louis the Pious's restoration in February 835: *Annales Bertiniani a. 835* (trans. Janet L. Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, Manchester 1991) 32; Rosamond McKitterick, Introduction: Sources and interpretation, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History 2: c. 700–c. 900*, ed. ead. (Cambridge 1995) 3–17, at 6. See also the textual transmission and influence of the biographies of Louis the Pious by Thegan and the Astronomer, plotted and mapped in Ernst Tremp, *Studien zu den Gesta Hludowici imperatoris des Trierer Chorbischofs Thegan* (MGH Schriften 32, Hannover 1988) 209; id., *Die Überlieferung der Vita Hludowici imperatoris des Astronomus* (MGH Studien und Texte 1, Hannover 1991) 157; together with id., Thegan und Astronomus, die beiden Geschichtsschreiber Ludwigs des Frommen, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 691–700.

³³ For a systematic (if cursory) analysis of the literary representations of the events of 833 within contemporary sources, see Walter Kern, *Der Streit Ludwigs des Frommen mit seinen Söhnen im Lichte der augustiniischen Geschichtsauffassung* (Ph.D. inaugural dissertation, Universität Greifswald 1922); and P. Chevallard, *Saint Agobard, Archevêque de Lyon: Sa vie et ses écrits* (Lyon 1869) 208–213. I have examined these representations in depth in Booker, *Writing a Wrong*. On the importance of recognizing and explicating the particular rhetorical elements at work within any given narrative representation of ritual performance, see Philippe Buc, *Ritual and interpretation: The early medieval case*, in: *Early Medieval Europe 9* (2000) 183–210; and id., *The Dangers of Ritual. Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton 2001).

³⁴ This is a process far more complex than what some scholars summarily explain with the phrase *causa scribendi*. Cf. Karl G. Heider, *The Rashomon effect: When ethnographers disagree*, in: *American Anthropologist 90* (1988) 73–81, whose observations are equally relevant to historians past and present. See also Peter Burke, *History of events and revival of narrative*, in: *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. id. (Cambridge 2001) 283–300; Innes, Introduction: Using the past; Darnton, *It happened one night*; and Timothy Reuter, *Pre-Gregorian mentalities*, in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History 45* (1994) 465–474.

³⁵ The so-called Annals of Saint-Bertin (the name stems from the provenance of the earliest extant manuscript that contains them) are the continuation by some author of the royal palace in 830 of what are known as the Royal Frankish Annals, an "official" log of Carolingian activities whose author seems to have ceased his recording of events in 829 (as attested by the number of extant manuscripts of these annals that continue with other works after this year). See *Annales de Saint Bertin* (ed. Felix Grat/Jeanne Vieillard/Suzanne Clémencet, Paris 1964) V–XVI, XXIIff.; Janet L. Nelson, *The annals of St. Bertin*, in: *Charles the Bald. Court and Kingdom*, ed. Margaret T. Gibson/Janet L. Nelson (Aldershot 1990) 15–36, at 24; and ead., *The Annals of St-Bertin 5*.

³⁶ In the last two decades, the understanding of the method of composition in early medieval annals has changed, having moved from the idea of contemporaneous year-by-year composition to the notion of retrospective composition and compilation covering a period of several years. See Nelson, *The annals of St. Bertin* 25; Rosamond McKitterick, *Constructing the past in the early Middle Ages: The case of the Royal Frankish Annals*, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, sixth series, 7* (1997) 101–129, at 117; ead., *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge 2004); Roger Collins, *Charlemagne's imperial coronation and the annals of Lorsch*, in: *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester 2005) 52–70, at 55.

of the Franks was divided into three, and the lord pope returned to his fatherland. Lothar remained in Compiègne, but the rest [of the people] returned [home], each to his own.³⁷

Unlike this typical passage by the Xanten annalist, which provides a pithy record of royal politics during the early 830s, the annalist of Saint-Bertin chose to “narrativize” the events in considerable detail, shaping and linking them into a dramatic story – one which had heroes and villains, told of good kingship and bad, and at once illustrated and declared the nature of proper and improper relationships between father and sons.³⁸ To the annalist, Louis had been another Jacob. Scorned and mistreated by his jealous elder sons because of the special love he showed for his young Joseph/Benjamin (i.e., Charles), the devoted, forgiving father had achieved reconciliation with his children in the end.³⁹ Here was an underlying typological model from Scripture that gave meaning and form to the annal’s contents.⁴⁰

Another loyalist narrative about the events of 833 was composed by Thegan, a nobleman and bishop, whose chosen genre was biography.⁴¹ Employing literary devices such as foreshadowing to intimate to his readers that the pious emperor would be wronged,⁴² the biographer highlighted the betrayal on the Rotfeld and underscored Louis’s charity, concern, and self-sacrifice through the use of direct speech. Within a striking passage, Thegan gave rare voice to the taciturn emperor, whose care for his people outweighed any desire for their now-pointless support: “Leaving their tents [on the Rotfeld], Louis’s men crossed over to his sons. On the next day those who remained came to the emperor, who admonished them, saying ‘Go to my sons. I do not wish any

³⁷ *Tempore enim aestivo convenerunt filii imperatoris in pago Alisacinse, Lutharius, Pippinus et Ludewicus, adducentes secum Gregorium papam. Ibi que leudes imperatoris coniurationes suas postposuerunt, reliquentes autem eum solum, reversique sunt ad Lotharium, ei fidem iuramentis sponderunt, et imperator verbo illorum coniuge simul et regno privatus, merens adflictusque in dominium filiorum advenit. Qui miserunt eum in custodiam publicam in Suessionis civitate similiterque coniugem illius. Collatione autem eorum peracta, tripertitum est regnum Francorum, et domnus papa rediit in patriam suam, Lotharius mansit in Compendio. Ceteri vero reversi sunt unusquisque in sua.* *Annales Xantenses a. 833* (ed. Reinhold Rau, *Quellen zur karolingischen Reichsgeschichte 2, Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters 6*, Darmstadt 1966) 339–371, at 340. On these annals, see Heinz Löwe, *Studien zu den Annales Xantenses*, in: *Deutsches Archiv 8* (1951) 59–99.

³⁸ I do not mean to deny the Annals of Xanten their own measure of narrativity; rather, the difference between them and the Annals of Saint-Bertin in this regard is one of degree rather than kind. Cf. the fact that the annal entry for 833 in the Annals of Xanten consists of 88 words, while the Annals of Saint-Bertin’s entry contains 424. On the tendency towards narration and emplotment in medieval annals and chronicles, see Sarah Foot, *Finding the meaning of form: Narrative in annals and chronicles*, in: *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy F. Partner (London 2004) 88–108; McKitterick, *Constructing the past 117–129*; and John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *The Franks and the English in the ninth century: Some common historical interests*, in: id., *Early Medieval History* (Oxford 1975) 201–216, at 202. Nelson has examined the literary and ideological aspects of a later section of the Annals of Saint-Bertin (for the year 873); see Janet L. Nelson, *A tale of two princes: Politics, text and ideology in a Carolingian annal*, in: *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History, new series*, 10 (1988) 105–141.

³⁹ Ganz, *The debate on predestination 285*, has alleged that the specific typological model used by the first annalist in rendering his account was the Biblical story of Job. However, the themes and particular vocabulary utilized by the annalist bear far more resemblance to the Biblical tale about the aged patriarch Jacob, his covetous elder sons, and his younger, favorite sons Joseph and Benjamin by his second wife, Rachel (Genesis 29–50); cf. the use of the following words in both the annal for the years 830–835 and the book of Genesis: *commota* (43:30), *compellere* (33:11), *custodia* (39:22, 40:4, 42:17), *machinatus* (42:11), *perterritus* (32:7, 41:8, 45:3), *pertinatio* (49:7). Moreover, Louis’s second wife, Judith, and their son Charles had only recently been referred to as “Rachel” and “Benjamin” by the court poet Walahfrid Strabo in 829; see his poem *De imagine Tetrici 147–148* (ed. and trans. Michael W. Herren, *The De imagine Tetrici of Walahfrid Strabo: Edition and translation*, in: *Journal of Medieval Latin 1* [1991] 118–139, at 127, 136. See also Mayke de Jong, *Bride shows revisited: Praise, slander and exegesis in the reign of the empress Judith*, in: *Gender in the Early Medieval World. East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker/Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge 2004) 257–277, at 263. Louis himself had a special interest in the book of Genesis, according to Michael Gorman, *Augustine manuscripts from the library of Louis the Pious: Berlin Phillips 1651 and Munich Clm 3824*, in: *Scriptorium 50* (1996) 98–105, at 104. The annalist, to my knowledge, does not quote any specific passages from Scripture in his account of Louis’s travails, except perhaps *lentus gradus* (Tob. 11:3).

⁴⁰ On the typological structure of medieval thought, see the cogent remarks of Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore 1997) 91–95; Richard K. Emmerson, *Figura and the medieval typological imagination*, in: *Typology and English Medieval Literature*, ed. Hugh T. Keenan (New York 1992) 7–34; and, above all, Erich Auerbach, *Figura*, in: id., *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York 1959) 11–71; John D. Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley 2002) 83–137.

⁴¹ See Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris* (ed. Ernst Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. 64, Hannover 1995) 167–277; Tremp, *Studien zu den Gesta Hludowici*; and id., *Thegan und Astronomus, die beiden Geschichtsschreiber*.

⁴² E.g., Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici 28*, ed. Tremp 216: *Iam tunc imminabat ei infidelitas*. On Thegan’s literary skill, see Matthew Innes, “He never even allowed his white teeth to be bared in laughter”: The politics of humour in the Carolingian Renaissance, in: *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge 2002) 131–156.

of you to lose your lives or limbs on account of me.’ And they, filled with tears, withdrew from him.”⁴³ Even more striking is Thegan’s description of the public penance, for he assures his audience that the great emperor patiently endured his trials like another Job. Unlike the annalist’s understanding of Louis as Jacob, a devoted father betrayed by his spiteful children, Thegan saw Louis as a just man whose faith had been tested by God. Here was another interpretive Scriptural model.⁴⁴ Yet Thegan discerned a crucial difference between the experiences of Job and Louis. Whereas God had chosen kings to play the role of Job’s tormentors, the mastermind of the rebellion against Louis, in Thegan’s view, was the detestable Ebbo of Reims, an archbishop who had been lowborn, but was “unnaturally” elevated by Louis to a dignified and noble office.⁴⁵ This was the greater truth that Thegan – himself of noble blood – sought to reveal: that the events of 833 had been the sorry consequences of such continuing transgressions of status.⁴⁶ In 837, Thegan could only hope that the emperor, with the counsel of his biography, would now recognize this wrong and right it.⁴⁷

In 841, only a year after Louis’s death, another biography of the pious emperor was written, this time by an anonymous nobleman who referred to himself within the text as an “astronomer”.⁴⁸ Most remarkable about his complex work is the particular language he chose to describe his story’s turning point:⁴⁹ the events of 833, according to the Astronomer, were nothing less than “an almost unheard-of tragedy” (*pene inaudita tragedia*) – this being the *locus classicus* for the explicitly “tragic” characterization of the entire affair.⁵⁰ Now to an audience of the twenty-first century steeped in the countless melodramas of Hollywood, the perception of 833 as a tragedy hardly seems surprising.⁵¹ But in the early Middle Ages, with its scraps and vague notions of classical drama, the term *tragoedia* was rarely invoked, as Henry Kelly has shown.⁵² The Astronomer’s specific use of it

⁴³ ... *tentoria eorum relinquentes pervenerunt ad filios. In crastinum aliqui, qui remanserant, venerunt ad imperatorem; quibus praecepit dicens: “Ite,” ait, “ad filios meos. Nolo ut ullus propter me vitam aut membra dimittat.” At illi infusi lacrimis recedebant ab eo.* Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici* 42, ed. Tremp 228–230, trans. J.R. Ginsburg/Donna Lee Boutelle, *Thegan’s Life of Louis*, in: *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, ed. Paul E. Dutton (Peterborough 2004) 159–176, at 170. Direct speech appears only three times in Thegan’s biography, including Louis’s speech upon the Rotfeld. However, of the three instances (Charlemagne’s dying words, chapter 7, ed. Tremp 186; Louis’s colloquy with newly elected Pope Stephen, chapter 16, ed. Tremp 196; and Louis upon the Rotfeld, chapter 42, ed. Tremp 230), only Louis’s Rotfeld speech is “original” – that is, it is the only one of the three given by Thegan that is not a quotation from Scripture. As I discuss in Courtney M. Booker, *A new prologue of Walafrid Strabo*, in: *Viator* 36 (2005) 83–105, at 94, Thegan is using this striking anecdote specifically to rebut the charge made by the rebellion in 833 that Louis’s greatest sin had been in bringing his people together on the Rotfeld “for the purpose of their mutual destruction.” On the rhetorical function of direct speech in general, see Joaquin M. Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto 1989) 62–108.

⁴⁴ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici* 44, ed. Tremp 236. Ganz, *The debate on predestination* 285, has also observed that the specific Biblical model used by Thegan was the story of Job. For a useful examination of the understanding of Job in the Middle Ages, see Lawrence L. Besserman, *The Legend of Job in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge-Mass. 1979), and 166–167 note 1 for authors of the ninth century. Innes, *He never even allowed* 148–154, has argued that Thegan sought to depict Louis as acting in direct imitation of Christ.

⁴⁵ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici* 44, ed. Tremp 238. Cf. the comments of John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford 1983) 237. On Ebbo, see Stuart Airlie, *Bonds of power and bonds of association in the court circle of Louis the Pious*, in: *Charlemagne’s Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 191–204, at 200–204; and Peter R. McKeon, *Archbishop Ebbo of Reims (816–835): A study in the Carolingian empire and church*, in: *Church History* 43 (1974) 437–447.

⁴⁶ Cf. Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici* 20, 44, ed. Tremp 204–209, 232–238. See Tremp, *Studien zu den Gesta Hludowici* 82f.

⁴⁷ On the intended audience of Thegan’s text, see the comments by Janet L. Nelson, *History-writing at the courts of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald*, in: *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Anton Scharer/Georg Scheibelreiter (VIÖG 32, Wien/München 1994) 435–442, at 438f.; and Matthew Innes/Rosamond McKitterick, *The writing of history*, in: *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1994) 193–220, at 209.

⁴⁸ See Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici* 58, ed. Tremp 518–522; Tremp, *Die Überlieferung der Vita Hludowici*; and id., *Thegan und Astronomus, die beiden Geschichtsschreiber*.

⁴⁹ Walter Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter 3. Karolingische Biographie: 750–920 n. Chr. (Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters 10, Stuttgart 1991) 230.*

⁵⁰ Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici* 49, ed. Tremp 480.

⁵¹ See Alan M. Dershowitz, *Life is not a dramatic narrative*, in: *Law’s Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks/Paul Gewirtz (New Haven 1996) 99–105; and Anthony Lane, *This is not a movie: Same scenes, different story*, in: *The New Yorker* (24 September 2001) 79–80.

⁵² Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1993) 50–61, has documented the sparing and generally confused usage of the term *tragoedia* in the early Middle Ages, but is unaware of its employment here by the Astronomer. See now Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor 2004).

here to sum up Louis's abandonment and divestiture thus not only reveals his broad learning and the depth of his sympathy, but also signals the presence of a particularly sophisticated interpretive scheme.⁵³ In fact, what we find in the biography is Louis cast in the role of Christ, whose terrestrial life the Astronomer considered a tragedy.

As Walter Berschin has noted, the casting of Louis's life by the Astronomer in terms of a tragedy is even adumbrated in the very prologue of the biography. At once admiring (*ammirari*) and celebrating (*celebrare*) the four cardinal virtues that so epitomized the emperor's character – sobriety, prudence, justice, and fortitude – the Astronomer closed his introductory profile by suggesting Louis's single fault (*culpa*): that he had been too mild (*nimis clemens*).⁵⁴ Here, suggests Berschin, is the emperor's tragic flaw around which the entire biography subsequently turns.⁵⁵ The Astronomer himself – in an evocative challenge – may have left it to the reader to ascertain the veracity of this fault: “Whether these things [namely, Louis's virtues and fault] are true or not, whoever reads this [work] carefully should be able to discover.”⁵⁶ But the clues the biographer left within his text nevertheless strongly suggest the conclusion he wished his reader to reach; “It will become clear (*claruere*), after a few [more words],” confided the Astronomer, that the rebels, to whom Louis showed clemency by sparing their lives, had demonstrated their gratitude by bringing nothing but “the greatest slaughter of which they were capable against him.”⁵⁷ Here, it seems, was the truth of the tragedy: Louis, the most orthodox and Christian emperor, had paid the price for his excessive *clementia* with a reign characterized by revolt – a bitterly tragic irony that was not lost on the Astronomer, who implored the reader, for Louis's sake, to join with the apostle Paul in his sardonic request to “forgive him this wrong!” (cf. 2 Cor. 12:13).⁵⁸ In fact, this mordant appeal with the words of Paul is the key to understanding the Astronomer's narrative; if being too forgiving was Louis's only “fault” – one which, he adds, was ascribed only “by the envious” (*ab aemulis*)⁵⁹ – then this reflected not an imperfect emperor who had been too mild, but rather the utter depravity of the times, an age when Louis's tender clemency had brought him nothing but ridicule and scorn.⁶⁰ For those who would read

⁵³ On tragedy as an interpretive model in the Middle Ages, see the comments of Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Interpretation of genres and by genres*, in: *Interpretation: Medieval and Modern*, ed. Piero Boitani/Anna Torti (Woodbridge 1993) 107–122; Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen, *History, tragedy, and fortune in twelfth-century historiography, with special reference to Otto of Freising's Chronica*, in: *Historia: The Concept and Genres in the Middle Ages*, ed. Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen/Päivi Mehtonen (Helsinki 2000) 29–49; Reinhold Kaiser, *Guibert de Nogent und der Bischofsmord in Laon (1112): Augenzeuge, Akteur, Dramaturg*, in: *Bischofsmord im Mittelalter/Murder of Bishops*, ed. Natalie Fryde/Dirk Reitz (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 191, Göttingen 2003) 121–157; and Philippe Buc, *Noch einmal 918–919: Of the ritualized demise of kings and of political rituals in general*, in: *Zeichen, Rituale, Werte: Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster*, ed. Gerd Althoff (Münster 2004) 151–178, at 168–169.

⁵⁴ *Astronomus, Vita Hludowici, Prologus*, ed. Treppe 280–284. As Treppe has noted (284 note 15), the Astronomer here quotes Virgil, *Aeneid* IV, 19, for his suggestion of Louis's *culpa* in the specific sense of “weakness.”

⁵⁵ Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil* 3, 230.

⁵⁶ *Sed haec utrum vera necne sint, perlegens quisque scire poterit*. *Astronomus, Vita Hludowici, Prologus*, ed. Treppe 284, trans. Allen Cabaniss, *Son of Charlemagne* (Syracuse 1961) 31.

⁵⁷ *... post pauca patebit, cum claruerit, quomodo pro vite beneficio summam ei, quantum in se fuit, inportaverint cladem*. *Astronomus, Vita Hludowici* 42, ed. Treppe 444. The Astronomer also describes Louis's commutation of the rebels' death sentence in 831 (*ibid.* 45, ed. Treppe 464) as “a milder procedure than was fitting (*quam debuit*), as it seemed to many, although kindness and clemency were his custom.” Cf. *ibid.* 33, ed. Treppe 396–400 (Louis's clemency works against legal norm and precedent); *ibid.* 39, ed. Treppe 426 (Louis shows clemency towards a Breton leader, who subsequently foments rebellion).

⁵⁸ *Nos autem cum apostolo dicamus talibus: “Dimittite illi hanc iniuriam!”* *Astronomus, Vita Hludowici, Prologus*, ed. Treppe 284. On the irony of this passage, see Helena Siemes, *Beiträge zum literarischen Bild Kaiser Ludwigs des Frommen in der Karolingerzeit* (Ph.D. inaugural dissertation, Universität Freiburg 1966) 96–97. The Astronomer's understanding of this “fault” not as a weakness but as a strength is supported by the immediate Scriptural context from which he draws his quotation of Paul (2 Cor. 12:9–10, Douay-Rheims version): “And He said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am powerful.”

⁵⁹ The Astronomer's use of the term *aemulus* only serves to underscore the Pauline context and associations of this passage, as it is a word especially prevalent in Paul's epistles (cf. Rom. 10:2, 10:19, 11:11, 11:14, 13:13; 1 Cor. 10:22, 12:31, 13:4, 14:1, 14:12, 14:39; 2 Cor. 7:7, 7:11, 9:2, 11:2, 12:20; Gal. 1:14, 4:17–18, 5:20; Phil. 3:6).

⁶⁰ Cf. *Astronomus, Vita Hludowici* 44, ed. Treppe 458, trans. Cabaniss 90, “Since he always lived kindly (*benigne*) toward others, the emperor was depressed (*laborabat*) by [the rebels'] unjust hatred which was so great that they loathed the very existence of him by whose favor (*benefitio*) they were alive and without whose favor they would have been justly and lawfully deprived of life.”

carefully, this was the deeper truth. Like Christ, Louis had been a perfect king born in an imperfect era.⁶¹ That was both his ironic and tragic fate (*imperatoris infortunium*).⁶²

We should pause for a moment to consider the dramatic configuration of the events by the Astronomer, for only within recent years have a handful of scholars pointed out the marked increase of allusions to drama and theater that occur in Europe specifically during the late eighth and ninth centuries.⁶³ Unfortunately, what such references and their relative frequency might tell us about interpretive modes and the people who used them in the early Middle Ages has largely been overlooked in the rush to determine their value as evidence of actual theatrical performance.⁶⁴ Doubtless the disparaging references to actors and theater by Carolingian ecclesiastics are, for the most part, nothing more than rhetorical commonplaces, themselves dependent upon a tradition of moralizing which stretches back at least to Church Fathers such as Jerome or Augustine, if not earlier.⁶⁵ Theater and drama had long since disappeared as a living art. Yet the sum of this textual evidence about drama – despite remaining unreliable as testimony of contemporary practice – nevertheless stands as a powerful and revealing statement about Carolingian culture: drama and actors were frequently, if but figuratively, on the minds of many among the literate and learned.⁶⁶ But if this was so, then what did they make of their inherited miscellany of ancient theatrical texts and images, such as the masked and togaed actors of Terence?⁶⁷ (Fig. 2) When Einhard noted that a woman once yawned so widely that her jaw locked and, to her dismay, “she looked more like a mask (*persona*) than a human being,” one wishes he had said more.⁶⁸ For like Averroes, in Jorge Luis Borges’s famous tale, who puzzled over Aristotle’s strange words comedy and tragedy,⁶⁹ early medieval

⁶¹ For a similarly striking contemporary account using irony to stress the depravity of the times, see Einhard’s concluding estimation of the tongue-lashing delivered by the demon Wiggo: Einhard, *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri III*, 14 (ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS 15, 1, Hannover 1888) 238–264, at 253–254, trans. Paul E. Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Courtier. The Complete Einhard* (Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 3, Peterborough 1998) 69–130, at 104–105.

⁶² On the Astronomer’s cautious employment of the terms *fortuna* (Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici* 2, ed. Tremp 288), *infortunatus* (ibid. 20, ed. Tremp 342), and *infortunium* (ibid. 2, ed. Tremp 288; ibid. 49, ed. Tremp 482), see Siemes, *Beiträge zum literarischen Bild* 92–93; and, in general, Lehtonen, *History, tragedy, and fortune* 29–49. Perhaps the Astronomer is here betraying the influence of Boethius; cf. Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio* II, 2, 12 (ed. Ludwig Bieler, CCL 94, Turnhout 1957) 20, *Quid tragoediarum clamor aliud deflet nisi indiscreto ictu fortunam felicia regna vertentem?* (“What else does the clamor of tragedies bewail but Fortune overthrowing happy kingdoms with an unexpected blow?”).

⁶³ Stuart Airlie, *Private bodies and the body politic in the divorce case of Lothar II*, in: *Past and Present* 161 (1998) 3–38, at 29–31; Michael Richter, *The Formation of the Medieval West: Studies in the Oral Culture of the Barbarians* (Dublin 1994) 125–145; Karl Morrison, “Know thyself”: Music in the Carolingian Renaissance, in: *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell’alto medioevo occidentale* 1 (Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo 39, Spoleto 1992) 369–483; Jörg O. Fichte, *Expository Voices in Medieval Drama* (Nürnberg 1975) 6.

⁶⁴ Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre*, provides a good historiographical survey of this tradition. See also Ronald W. Vince, *Ancient and Medieval Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport-Conn. 1984).

⁶⁵ See Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre*; Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy*; Heiko Jürgens, *Pompa diaboli: Die lateinischen Kirchenväter und das antike Theater* (Stuttgart 1972).

⁶⁶ See the stimulating remarks on the presence of theater and *personae* in Carolingian thought by Morrison, “Know thyself.”

⁶⁷ For a general survey of medieval attitudes towards Terence, see Julia Bolton Holloway, *Slaves and princes: Terence through time*, in: *The Influence of the Classical World on Medieval Literature, Architecture, Music, and Culture*, ed. Fidel Fajardo-Acosta (Lewiston-New York 1992) 34–53; Paul Theiner, *The medieval Terence*, in: *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge-Mass. 1974) 231–247; Edward K. Rand, *Early mediaeval commentaries on Terence*, in: *Classical Philology* 4 (1909) 359–389; and Max Manitius, *Beiträge zur Geschichte römischer Dichter im Mittelalter*, in: *Philologus: Zeitschrift für das klassische Altertum* 52 (1894) 546–552. Perhaps the most remarkable use of Terence in the early Middle Ages was by Paschasius Radbertus, an abbot of Corbie during the ninth century, in his *Epitaphium Arsenii* (ed. Ernst Dümmler, *Philologische und historische Abhandlungen der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 2 [1900]) 1–98; see Booker, *Writing a Wrong* 90–98. On Carolingian illuminated manuscripts of Terence, see Charles R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Gestures and the Roman Stage* (Cambridge 2000); together with David H. Wright, *The organization of the lost late antique Terence*, in: *Medieval Manuscripts of the Latin Classics: Production and Use*, ed. Claudine A. Chavannes-Mazel/Margaret M. Smith (Los Altos Hills 1996) 41–56; and Leslie Webber Jones/Charles Rufus Morey, *The Miniatures of the Manuscripts of Terence Prior to the Thirteenth Century*, 2 volumes (Princeton 1930–1931).

⁶⁸ *personae quam homini similior effecta*, Einhard, *Translatio et miracula III*, 16, ed. Waitz 254, trans. Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Courtier* 106. On the theatrical connotations of the term *persona*, see Mary H. Marshall, *Boethius’ definition of persona and mediaeval understanding of the Roman theater*, in: *Speculum* 25 (1950) 471–482.

⁶⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Averroes’ search*, in: id., *Labyrinths. Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York 1964) 148–155. On this story, see Jon Stewart, *Borges on language and translation*, in: *Philosophy and Literature* 19 (1995) 320–329.

authors often devised rather creative definitions for these unfamiliar terms.⁷⁰ It is extremely regrettable that we do not know the identity of the Astronomer,⁷¹ for it might shed light on his intended meaning of tragedy, and consequently on the demands that this concept made on the configuration of his narrative.⁷² Certainly he used the term with a degree of technical precision beyond what Karl Young once enumerated as the three basic criteria understood in the Middle Ages to constitute tragedy: that the story should begin happily, but end with misfortune; that it should be written in an elevated style; and that it should treat weighty events in the lives of eminent persons.⁷³ As we have seen, the Astronomer saw Louis's "unheard-of tragedy" as a Christological passion. Here, Biblical typology was being fused specifically with a genre of ancient drama to provide keen insight, a method that has important implications both for the historiography of the ninth century and for that of the modern era as well. While John Matthews, Timothy Barnes, and T. P. Wiseman have recently asked similar questions about drama and its influence upon the interpretive modes of the ancient and late antique Romans, and Gabriel Piterberg of the early modern Ottomans, no one has yet examined the Carolingians in this light, despite their clear fascination with drama, a fascination that – like so much else – sets them in bold relief by comparison with the rest of the early Middle Ages.⁷⁴

PERFORMING THE PAST

These ninth-century narratives influenced representations of 833 for the next eight hundred years in accordance with the three precedents noted earlier: first, memories of 833 tended to be sympathetic to Louis; second, largely due to the extraordinary vividness of the ninth-century accounts, the events often received special attention in later narratives; and third, such sympathetic, vivid representations generally served to comment

⁷⁰ See Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre*; Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy*.

⁷¹ Over the years, scholars have made many guesses regarding the identity of the Astronomer, ranging from the long-held medieval conviction that he was Einhard (cf. Tremp's introduction to the edition: Tremp, *Einleitung* 53ff.), to the notary Hirminmaris (Johann Georg von Eckhart, *Commentarii de rebus Franciae orientalis et episcopatus Wirceburgensis* [...] [Würzburg 1729] 323), to the archchaplain Hilduin (Max Buchner, *Entstehungszeit und Verfasser der ‚Vita Hludowici‘ des ‚Astronomen‘*, in: *Historisches Jahrbuch* 60 [1940] 14–45), to the Irish monk Dicuil (Philippe Depreux, *Prosopographie de l'entourage de Louis le Pieux [781–840]* [Sigmaringen 1997] 114) to archbishop Jonas of Orléans (Matthias M. Tischler, *Einhard's Vita Karoli. Studien zur Entstehung, Überlieferung und Rezeption* 2 [MGH Schriften 48, Hannover 2001] 1109). I find it surprising, however, that no one, to my knowledge, has suggested Walafrid Strabo as a possible candidate. He is known to have been at court for a decade (829–838), to have remained firmly loyal to Louis and Judith, to have read and carefully edited the biographies of Charlemagne by Einhard and Louis the Pious by Thegan at about the time the Astronomer's text was written, and to have kept a *vademecum* filled with extracts and notes concerning medical and astronomical matters (about which the Astronomer proudly displays his learning in his text); see Booker, *A new prologue*. Note also that the Astronomer and Walafrid both characterize Louis as a lover of *aequitas*: cf. Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici* 23, 38, 54, 59, 60, ed. Tremp 354, 424, 504, 526, 530; and Walafrid Strabo, *Ad eandem* [sc. Judith] *de quodam somnio* (ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* 2, Berlin 1884) 379–380.

⁷² On the narrative demands made by such interpretive modes, see Dershowitz, *Life is not a dramatic narrative*; and Hayden White, *Historical emplotment and the problem of truth*, in: *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge-Mass. 1992) 37–53, at 42–43, "a specific plot type ([such as a] tragedy) can simultaneously determine the kinds of events to be featured in any story that can be told about them and provide a pattern for the assignment of the roles that can possibly be played by the agents and agencies inhabiting the scene thus constituted." Cf. the comments of Carlo Ginzburg, *Proofs and possibilities: In the margins of Natalie Zemon Davis' The Return of Martin Guerre*, in: *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 37 (1988) 114–127, at 118–119.

⁷³ Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* 1 (Oxford 1933) 6.

⁷⁴ John Matthews, Peter Valvomeris, re-arrested, in: *Homo Viator. Classical Essays for John Bramble*, ed. Michael Whitby/Philip Hardie/Mary Whitby (Bristol 1987) 277–284; Timothy D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (Ithaca-New York 1998) 11–19; Timothy P. Wiseman, *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter 1998); Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*. Indicative of this Carolingian lacuna is the fact that the massively erudite and comprehensive second volume of the *New Cambridge Medieval History* 2: c. 700–c. 900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge 1995), covering the Carolingian period has no index entry for "drama" or "theater", let alone "comedy" or "tragedy." Modern Carolingian studies are also devoid of "performativity" as a category of analysis, which is particularly regrettable, given that members of the royal court regularly communicated using classical and Biblical bynames; see Mary Garrison, *The social world of Alcuin: Nicknames at York and at the Carolingian court*, in: *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court*, ed. Luuk A. J. R. Houwen/Alasdair A. MacDonald (Groningen 1998) 59–79. For a good example of the fruitful results produced by the conceptual lens of performativity, see Virginia Burrus, *In the theater of this life: The performance of orthodoxy in late antiquity*, in: *The Limits of Ancient Christianity. Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn/Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor 1999) 80–96.

on contemporary concerns. In other words, as time passed and new narratives about the events were written, the old precedents were consistently followed while the original needs that had set them faded away. This had an impact on how the events of 833 were remembered chiefly in the sense that, while Louis's abandonment and penance remained a colorful and stirring tale over the centuries, they became increasingly incidental. No longer the central focus in and of themselves, the events of 833 were selectively and creatively remembered in each later case to meet a more pressing priority, whether as part of a tenth-century account of a relic translation evincing the intercessory power of a monastery's patron saint,⁷⁵ or as part of an eleventh-century saint's life justifying the ecclesiastical monitoring and prohibition of marriage among the nobility,⁷⁶ or as part of a twelfth-century *chanson* celebrating the glory that comes of unconditional devotion to one's lord,⁷⁷ or as part of a thirteenth-century chronicle testifying to the heavenly rewards bestowed upon French kings for their adamant faith.⁷⁸ In short, once freed from the moorings of their original context, in which their meaning was hotly contested and immediately vital, Louis's difficulties moved with the currents, proving at once both highly alluring and particularly adaptable to the historical consciousness and concerns of generations of authors.⁷⁹

Although this "contextual drift" would quite suddenly come to an end in the seventeenth century with the fortuitous rediscovery of certain justificatory texts written by members of the rebellion, the relatively minor controversy they caused would ultimately have little effect either upon the inveterate reputation of Louis as a benign king,⁸⁰ or upon the entrenched narrative about the iniquity of the conspirators.⁸¹ The loyalist narratives of Louis's

⁷⁵ Odilo of Saint-Médard, *Translatio sancti Sebastiani* 44 (ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15,1, Hannover 1887) 377–391, at 388–391 (BHL 7545); abridged French trans. Berthold Zeller, *La succession de Charlemagne: Louis le Pieux 814–840* (Paris 1883) 91–94. For the full Latin text, see PL 132, 575–622. For a critical discussion of the work, see Ernst Müller, *Die Nithard-Interpolationen und die Urkunden- und Legendenfälschungen im St. Medardus-Kloster bei Soissons*, in: *Neues Archiv* 34 (1909) 689–722, at 700–708; and Denis Defente, *Saint-Médard. Trésors d'un abbaye royale* (Paris 1996) 29, 92–94.

⁷⁶ Odbert, *Passio Friderici episcopi Traiectensis* (ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15,1, Hannover 1887) 342–356 (BHL 3157). On Odbert's text, see the excellent study by Patrick Corbet, *Interdits de parenté, hagiographie et politique. La passio Friderici episcopi Traiectensis* (ca. 1024), in: *Ius Commune: Zeitschrift für europäische Rechtsgeschichte* 23 (1996) 1–98.

⁷⁷ *Le Couronnement de Louis: Chanson de geste du XII^e siècle*, ed. Ernest Langlois (Paris 1925), trans. Nirmal Dass, *The Crowning of Louis: A New Metrical Translation of the Old French Verse Epic* (Jefferson-NC 2003). On the *Couronnement*, see Jean Frappier, *Les chansons de geste du cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, 3 volumes (Paris 1955–1983); Ernst R. Curtius, *Über die altfranzösische Epik IV: Zum Couronnement Louis*, in: *Romanische Forschungen* 62 (1950) 342–349; Alfred Adler, *The dubious nature of Guillaume's loyalty in le Couronnement de Louis*, in: *Symposium* 2 (1948) 179–191; Jean Frappier, *Les thèmes politiques dans le Couronnement de Louis*, in: *Mélanges de linguistique romane et de philologie médiévale offerts à M. Maurice Delbouille* 2 (Gembloux 1964) 195–206; Dominique Boutet, *La pusillanimité de Louis dans Aliscans: Idéologie ou topos de cycle? Topique, structure et historicité*, in: *Le Moyen Age* 103 (1997) 275–292.

⁷⁸ *Grandes chroniques de France* 4 (ed. Jules Viard, Paris 1927) 112–117. On the *Grandes chroniques*, see the series of studies by Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline-Mass. 1978); ead., *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley 1993); ead., *The Past as Text*; together with Anne D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the Grandes Chroniques de France, 1274–1422* (Berkeley 1991).

⁷⁹ On the relationship between history and memory in the Middle Ages, see the work of Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton 1994); id., *Geschichte als Erinnerung?*, in: *Kontinuität und Wandel: Geschichtsbilder in verschiedenen Fächern und Kulturen*, ed. Evelyn Schulz/Wolfgang Sonne (Zürich 1999) 115–140.

⁸⁰ On the general memory of Louis, see Rudolf Schieffer, *Ludwig „der Fromme“*. Zur Entstehung eines karolingischen Herrscherbeinamens, in: *FMSt* 16 (1982) 58–73; and Nikolaus Staubach, *„Des grossen Kaisers kleiner Sohn“*. Zum Bild Ludwigs des Frommen in der älteren deutschen Geschichtsforschung, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 701–721.

⁸¹ While several texts written by members of the rebellion in 833 were rediscovered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the episcopal narrative of Louis's confession and penance, printed by Pierre Pithou in 1588; the "political" texts of Agobard of Lyon, printed by Jean-Papire Masson in 1605; the *Apologeticus* of Ebbo of Reims, printed by Luc d'Achéry in 1666; and the *Epitaphium Arsenii* of Paschasius Radbertus, printed by Jean Mabillon in 1677), only the texts by Agobard would create any controversy, and only then due to the fact that Agobard had long been venerated uncanonically in Lyon as a saint. Slandered by monarchist historians, who employed Agobard's new texts to reveal his "shameful" role as the apologist for the rebellion, Agobard's reputation was defended by devoted writers from Lyon, who in response began to characterize Louis the Pious in severe terms. This rebuttal by Agobard's defenders initiated a debate over the respective culpability of Agobard and Louis that would serve to make the developments of 833 a center of attention rather than just another *exemplum*. Yet, while the debate brought the events under closer scrutiny, it never quite moved beyond the personal, *ad hominem* level to have an impact of any significance upon the traditional historiographical representation of 833 as an infamous year synonymous with treason and disgrace. See Chevallard, *Saint Agobard* 212–222; and Adrien Bressolles, *Saint Agobard: Evêque de Lyon (769–840)* (Paris 1949) 11–18.

supporters had long since established their interpretive place of precedence as the truth about the events of 833, providing a trusted story against which the rebels' texts could and would be summarily judged and condemned.

It was not until the eighteenth century, under the banner of the Enlightenment, that the great shift in attitude toward the events of 833 truly took place. At that time, savants, in their crusade for progress, first began to consider the underlying reasons for the overarching decline of the Carolingian empire.⁸² To such new concerns about the collective achievement of European – and more specifically, French – society, the events of 833 were deemed especially crucial. They were prevalently viewed not only as the key to understanding the historical case of Carolingian decline, but – far more importantly – as an isolated episode or example, a crisis in which to discern the general social factors and causes that were considered detrimental to the progress of Western civilization.⁸³ Hardly incidental, the events of 833 were resurrected and examined once again for their own particular merits, but this time as a revealing part of a troubled whole, a useful synecdoche. Moreover, Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Mably, in keeping with the Carolingian loyalist tradition, once more began to characterize the participants involved in the now-critical events of 833 as ruthless performers in an opprobrious drama. It was largely from within what they called the “spectacle” of Louis’s abandonment and public penance that certain elements were discovered, abstracted, and generalized onto a broader plane of analysis, there to be used as evidence of the destructive causes and principles responsible for the decline of civilization – be it Carolingian or otherwise.⁸⁴ No longer the result of God’s disfavor with a morally bankrupt society, the decline of the Carolingians now began to be conceived in terrestrial – and thus in more empirical and predictable – terms of cause and effect.⁸⁵ For example, to the political philosopher Montesquieu (1689–1755), who sought to understand the relationship between law and changes in the French monarchy, 833 simultaneously demonstrated the behavior that characterized a poor lawgiver (prodigality, imprudence, and precipitate action), the great cost of being a poor lawgiver (deposition and “revolution”), and the nature and identity of those parties who would not hesitate to collect on this debt (an ever-avaricious nobility and clergy).⁸⁶ Voltaire

⁸² See Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline* 28; Peter Burke, *Tradition and experience: The idea of decline from Bruni to Gibbon*, in: Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ed. Glen W. Bowersock/John Clive/Stephen R. Graubard (Cambridge-Mass. 1977) 87–102; Randolph Starn, *Meaning-Levels in the theme of historical decline*, in: *History and Theory* 14 (1975) 1–31, at 7; Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York 1953) 50–51.

⁸³ See Randolph Starn, *Historians and crisis*, in: *Past and Present* 52 (1971) 3–22; and Lionel Gossman, *Anecdote and history*, in: *History and Theory* 42 (2003) 143–168, at 148, “the drama and the short story are, like a certain kind of anecdote, condensed forms representing a critical moment in which the ‘essence’ of a situation or character is supposed to be made visible.”

⁸⁴ Cf. the definition of “spectacle” in the *Dictionnaire de l’académie française* 2 (Paris 1835) 775, “Spectacle, se dit particulièrement d’Une représentation théâtrale donnée au public.” On the eighteenth-century notion of a spectacle in general, see Robert M. Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York 1986); Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London 1967) 97. See also the helpful remarks of Paul Hernadi, *Re-presenting the past: A note on narrative historiography and historical drama*, in: *History and Theory* 15 (1976) 45–51, at 45, on the dual aspect of historical vision: “[The historian] wants to re-present [the past] with hindsight, disclosing patterns of cause and purpose of which the participants in the original events could not have been fully aware. But the skillful historian does not turn enacted drama into narrated tale by standing in front of the closed curtain, so to speak, with his back turned on the dramatis personae whose own sense of identity relies on their relationship to each other. He knows that we expect him to make us see the past from within and from without at the same time – as evolving drama and as the fixed target of distanced retrospection.”

⁸⁵ Burke, *Tradition and experience* 97.

⁸⁶ Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des loix* XXXI, 20–34 (1748; ed. André Masson, Paris 1950); engl.: (trans. Thomas Nugent, *The Spirit of the Laws*, New York 1949) 246–261. How should one understand that, by 852, “all that could be expected then was to repair in general the injuries done both to church and state” (ibid. XXXI, 23, trans. Nugent 251), when, under the earlier rule of Charlemagne, “the whole [empire] was united by the strength of his genius?” (ibid. XXXI, 18, trans. Nugent 244) Montesquieu found the causes for this decline in the reign of Louis the Pious, and stressed the revelatory quality of 833: Louis “flung his family into a disorder which was followed by the downfall of the monarchy” (ibid. XXXI, 20, trans. Nugent 247); Louis alienated both the nobility (by promoting non-nobles and upstarts such as Ebbo of Reims and Bernard of Septimania) and the clergy (by his severe religious reforms), which led to his abandonment at the Field of Lies (ibid. XXXI, 21, trans. Nugent 248–249); in 833 the clergy warranted the “revolution” because they were falsely promised unheard-of privileges by Louis’s sons (ibid. XXXI, 20, trans. Nugent 247); Louis is told “in a judicial manner” that he was being deposed because he had violated the oath and the promises he had sworn on his coronation day (ibid. XXXI, 20, trans. Nugent 247); the civil wars with which the life of Louis had been embroiled were the “seed” (le germe) of those which followed his death, especially that of the Battle of Fontenoy in 841, which was truly the “ruin of the monarchy” (XXXI, 23, 25, trans. Nugent 250, 254); likewise the seed of primogeniture among the French kings could be seen in letters from Agobard in 833, which justified the rebellion on the right Lothar could claim to the imperial succession (ibid. XXXI, 33, trans. Nugent 263). On Montesquieu’s general view of decline and progress, see John B. Bury,

(1694–1778) saw in the events of 833 – which he described as an “extraordinary enterprise” – the culmination and sorry result of a practice that had begun in Louis’s time, and thenceforth been the cause of all the great disasters that had befallen Europe: the granting of worldly power to those who had renounced the world. He could not help but be “secretly pleased”, Voltaire confessed, that Louis’s petulant sons had ultimately shown their ecclesiastical cronies Abbot Wala and Pope Gregory IV scarcely more gratitude than that which they had bestowed upon their own deposed and disgraced father.⁸⁷ For the Abbé Mably (1709–1785), who wished to expose the causes of the continual “revolutions” in the government of the French, 833 clearly revealed the pernicious factors that Charlemagne had been able to stave off, but which had taken their revenge upon his weaker son: namely, corruption by wealth, the preference for the private over the public, and the confusion of license with liberty.⁸⁸ In short, the “spectacular” events of 833 were now being singled out again and again, yet in each case they revealed different causes of decline to each Enlightenment thinker.

What was so special about the events of 833 that isolated them in the minds of these analysts? One suspects that the vivid, dramatic accounts provided by authors of the ninth century resonated with an historical consciousness of the eighteenth century that was particularly attuned to theater and drama. Theater of the Enlightenment, such as the Comédie-Française, is today widely recognized as having deeply influenced, and having been influenced by, French public and intellectual life.⁸⁹ I would suggest that historians of the time, who were a minute but avid fraction of the over 160,000 annual theater-goers in France, were not immune to this influence, and that a sense of such contemporary theatricality subtly informed the way they apprehended and understood the past.⁹⁰ For example, of the three Enlightenment thinkers surveyed above, all were in some way deeply involved with the theater, either as critics or as playwrights. Not only was Montesquieu well acquainted with the contemporary French theater and its celebrities, but he was also well versed in the dramatic genres themselves, even trying his hand early in his career at writing plays.⁹¹ For Voltaire, as Marvin Carlson reminds us, “the theatre maintained a central position in his interest and affection from the beginning to the end of his career ... He created a total of fifty-six [plays], and there was rarely a period in his long life when he was not actively working on a theatrical

The Idea of Progress (New York 1932) 144–148. On his specific view of Carolingian decline, see Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline* 28; together with Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France* 206–210.

⁸⁷ Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs et esprit des nations, et sur les principaux faits de l’histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu’à Louis XIII*, 23 (1756; ed. René Pomeau, Paris 1963) 371, Charlemagne had hardly gone to his tomb, Voltaire explained, when civil war desolated both his family and his empire. More specifically, Voltaire characterized the history of this decline as nothing more than a “history of crimes”; *ibid.* 23, ed. Pomeau 372, one of the sources not just of “Louis the Weak’s” (Louis le faible) misfortune, but of all the greatest disasters which had afflicted Europe since that age, was an abuse that had commenced in the period of Louis’s own lifetime: the granting of worldly power to those who had renounced the world; *ibid.* 23, ed. Pomeau 374, Abbot Wala had been the chief author of all Louis’s troubles (le premier auteur de ces troubles); *ibid.* 23, ed. Pomeau 374, Voltaire admits his secret feelings of pleasure over the coarse treatment of Wala and Gregory IV; *ibid.* 23, ed. Pomeau 375, the events of 833 are characterized as an “extraordinary enterprise” that needed an example to support it. On Voltaire’s general view of decline and progress, see Bury, *The Idea of Progress* 148–153. On his specific view of Carolingian decline, see Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline* 29; together with Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France* 203–206.

⁸⁸ Mably, *Observations* II, 4, ed. Guizot 1, 153, for Mably, it was a general “anarchy”, and not the specific Battle of Fontenoy, that had led to the decline of the state; *ibid.* 152, during the reign of Louis the Pious, he explained, the state had hurled itself into anarchy, wherein justice was obliged to give way to force; *ibid.* 146–152, this state of anarchy had arisen because Louis was weak, susceptible to superstition, and had allowed the ambition, audacity, avarice, intrigue, caprice, and inquietude of both Judith and his sons to overcome him; *ibid.* 144–145, Mably then notes, referring to the events of 833, how “it was natural that a war started by domestic disputes should conclude by a ridiculous intrigue.” On Mably and this work, see Johnson K. Wright, *A Classical Republican in Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Thought of Mably* (Stanford 1997) 142–161. On Mably’s specific view of Carolingian decline, see Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline* 28–29; together with Morrissey, *Charlemagne and France* 210–216.

⁸⁹ Frederick W. J. Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France, 1760–1905* (Cambridge 1994); Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy*; John Lough, *Paris Theatre Audiences in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford 1957).

⁹⁰ Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France* 4; Lough, *Paris Theatre Audiences* 174; and above all, Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley 1993) 60–67. Note the important observation by Carlo Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof* (Hanover-NH 1999) 101–102, of the impact that the newly invented medium of the motion picture had on the historical imagination of Marc Bloch, and his conclusion (at 102) that “the very availability of a narrative device can generate – either directly or indirectly, by raising a silent veto – a specific approach to research.”

⁹¹ For Montesquieu’s relationship with the theater, the fundamental study remains Mark H. Waddicor, *Montesquieu and the theatre, in: Studies in Eighteenth-Century French Literature*, ed. John H. Fox/Mark H. Waddicor/Derek A. Watts (Exeter 1975) 307–317. See also Jean Tarraube, *Montesquieu auteur dramatique* (Paris 1982); and Henri Lagrave/André Lebois/Jean Tarraube, *Études sur Montesquieu: Montesquieu, personnage de théâtre et amateur de théâtre* (Paris 1974).

script.”⁹² With Mably, one can even detect striking parallels between his theatrical description of the events of 833 and the critical remarks on theater and opera he had given some twenty-four years earlier. In his description of 833, Mably explains that it had been “domestic disputes” which led to civil war, and, as a result of having had such banal origins, it was therefore “natural” that the war should have “conclude[d] by a ridiculous intrigue:”

It was *natural* that a war started by *domestic* disputes should *conclude* by a *ridiculous intrigue*.

[Il était *naturel* qu’une guerre excitée par des tracasseries *domestiques*, fût terminée par une *intrigue ridicule*.]⁹³

Within a series of letters on opéra written to the Marquise de Pompadour and published in 1741, Mably first criticized the conclusion of Quinault’s tragédie-opera “Proserpine”, and later launched an attack upon the social and political constraints of Greek tragedy. In both instances, he employed language remarkably similar to that which he would utilize in his description of 833:

... and the play [Proserpine], which finally finishes as it started, *is concluded* by a denouement that is not at all *natural*.

[... et la pièce qui finit enfin comme elle a commencé, *est terminée* par un dénouement qui n’est point *naturel*.]⁹⁴

The necessity that they [the Greeks] felt of giving a role to the multitude, in order to flatter those people enamored of free government, compels them to place in the scene only those things relating to the public interest. A tragic deed [for those Ancients] is not at all, such as for us [Moderns], a small *domestic intrigue* that carries on only among five or six people, who, if they are not kings or princes, then merely enact a comedy.

[La nécessité où ils étoient de donner un Rôle à la multitude, pour flatter des peuples amoureux du gouvernement libre, les forçoit à ne mettre sur la Scene que des intérêts publics. Une action tragique n’étoit point comme chez nous une petite intrigue domestique qui ne roule qu’entre cinq ou six personnes, qui, si elles n’étoient pas des Rois ou des Princes, ne joueroient qu’une Comédie.]⁹⁵

In these earlier thoughts about drama, Mably was concerned with what constituted a “natural” or an “unnatural” conclusion, and explained that modern tragedy and comedy, unlike their form in antiquity, each consisted of a small “domestic intrigue”. The only difference between the modern forms themselves, he noted, was that tragedy strictly involved the likes of princes and kings. When he later summed up the events of 833, these same thoughts on drama would lend his summary its dramatic shape: Louis’s “domestic” disputes had “naturally” concluded with a “ridiculous intrigue”. Yet, despite the fact that the intrigue of 833 involved princes and kings, Mably still appears to have understood it in the “ridiculous” terms of a comedy; perhaps Louis and his sons seemed to Mably such poor excuses for royalty that their deeds hardly qualified as the lofty stuff of a tragedy. Then again, perhaps Mably was undertaking what the great eighteenth-century playwright and composer Beaumarchais had insisted was the noble task of the dramatist: “Vices and abuses are eternal and disguise themselves in a thousand ways”, the author of the “Marriage of Figaro” explained. “The noble task of the dramatist is to tear away this mask and expose to public ridicule the evils it disguises.”⁹⁶

⁹² Marvin Carlson, *Voltaire and the Theatre of the Eighteenth Century* (Westport-Conn. 1998) XV.

⁹³ Mably, *Observations* II, 4, ed. Guizot 1, 144–145.

⁹⁴ Gabriel Bonnet de Mably, *Lettres à Madame la Marquise de P... sur l’Opéra* (Paris 1741) 90–91. On this work and its attribution to Mably (it was published anonymously), see Wright, *A Classical Republican* 217 note 3.

⁹⁵ Mably, *Lettres à Madame la Marquise* 110.

⁹⁶ Pierre-Augustin Caron Beaumarchais, *Préface du Mariage de Figaro* (Paris 1785), in: id., *Théâtre complet* 3, ed. Georges d’Heylli/François de Marescot (Paris 1870) 9, as cited in Edna C. Fredrick, *The Plot and Its Construction in Eighteenth-Century Criticism of French Comedy* (Ph.D. dissertation, Bryn Mawr College 1934) 102 note 72. Joseph Calmette, *L’Effondrement d’un empire et la naissance d’une Europe, IX^e–X^e siècles* (Paris 1941) 39, would compare Wala to the character of Basile from the *Marriage of Figaro*.

Given their interest in theater and drama, it is certainly no coincidence that, when combing through medieval annals, chronicles, and narratives, such theatrically minded scholars – many of whom were prolific playwrights themselves – were repeatedly struck, to use the Astronomer’s words, by that “almost unheard-of tragedy” of 833.⁹⁷ Montesquieu, for instance, described the events not only in terms of a “spectacle,” but more specifically in a way that clearly evokes the classic – and in the eighteenth century, contemporary – Aristotelian conception of a tragedy: “the situation of affairs at that time is a spectacle really deserving of pity” (C’est un spectacle digne de pitié de voir l’état des choses en ces temps-là).⁹⁸ Voltaire also opted for theatrical language when referring to the troubles of the 830s; Wala, he noted, had been the one who “started this memorable scene [of the rebellion and Louis’s abandonment and divestiture].”⁹⁹ And when Louis the Pious was involved in a public act of state, the Abbé Mably likewise intimated that such affairs were often a sham by pejoratively describing them as a spectacle: in 822, the bishops were edified by the “spectacle” involving the prostration of Louis, Mably explained, one that “appeared” (semblait) to speak to their great credit, though they in truth deserved none, since it was an act not of Christian humility but of shameful cowardice by their monarch. Later in his reign, Louis was so feeble that he could do nothing but be embarrassed by his slavish role in the spectacle or ruse that his public assemblies had become. Consequently, when Mably finally reached the events of 833 in his narrative, he could only see in them the dramaturgical conclusion of such affected, duplicitous behavior – they were the last act of a “comédie d’intrigue” deserving of contempt.¹⁰⁰

While Louis’s abandonment and divestiture were readily understood by both Carolingian and Enlightenment interpreters in terms of a dramatic intrigue, the specific meaning and importance of that drama differed radically for analysts of each era. These differences must not be overlooked. For Carolingian loyalist authors, the machinations of the rebellion seemed especially appalling and “tragic” because they demonstrated not just an insidious insolence on the part of the rebels, but a brazen, “almost unheard-of” Christian sacrilege:¹⁰¹ the solemn ritual of public penance had been deviously exploited and manipulated, Louis’s supporters insisted, in order to impart upon the innocent emperor the false appearance of a transgressor, wrongfully strip him of his regalia, make the fraudulent deed “irrevocably” binding, and at the same time perversely allow the cruel leaders of the rebellion to play the benign part of Louis’s attentive and salutary “spiritual doctors.”¹⁰² Their appearance and deeds at Saint-Médard had merely been the histrionics of contrived “*personae*” – immediate roles masking ulterior motives. What was worse, the very men who had hypocritically participated in the travesty were, in the eyes of Louis’s defenders, formerly honored alongside the most upright and renowned figures of the realm. In short, feelings ran high among contemporaries when discussing the almost unheard-of intrigue against

⁹⁷ Cf. the remark by Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline* 64, that historians often “unwittingly repeat what they have discovered in Carolingian sources as though ninth-century history [really] was the dramatic story of calamity and dire circumstances which the Carolingians [themselves] tell.”

⁹⁸ Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit* XXXI, 23, ed. Masson 406, trans. Nugent 251. For Montesquieu’s awareness of and adherence to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy, see Waddicor, *Montesquieu and the theatre* 312. For contemporary notions on the relationship between pity and tragedy, see art. *pitié*, in: Joseph de Laporte, *Dictionnaire dramatique, contenant l’histoire des théâtres, les règles du genre dramatique, les observations des maîtres célèbres, et des réflexions nouvelles [...]* 2 (Paris 1776) 429–431. For the genre of tragedy in the eighteenth century, see art. *tragédie*, in: de Laporte, *Dictionnaire dramatique* 3, 290–307, and Eleanor F. Jourdain, *Dramatic Theory and Practice in France, 1690–1808* (London 1921).

⁹⁹ Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs* 23, ed. Pomeau 372, “Vala, abbé de Corbie, son parent par bâtardise, commença cette scène mémorable.”

¹⁰⁰ Mably, *Observations* II, 4, ed. Guizot 1, at 139, 141, 144–145. For contemporary notions of the “comédie d’intrigue,” see art. *pièces d’intrigue*, in: de Laporte, *Dictionnaire dramatique* 2, 425–426.

¹⁰¹ Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici* 49, ed. Tremp 480, calls the events of 833 an “almost unheard-of tragedy” (*pene inaudita tragedia*) and an “unheard-of crime” (*inauditum scelus*). Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici* 44, ed. Tremp 232, says that the rebels “did unheard-of things” (*inaudita fecerunt*) and “said unheard-of things” (*inaudita locuti sunt*) to Louis while they had him incarcerated; this is the only passage in Thegan’s biography where he uses the term *inauditus*. Conversely, the rebels used the same language of horrified astonishment when referring to Louis’s iniquities: *Episcoporum de poenitentia ... relatio* (ed. Boretius/Krause 2, 55), *pene apud christianos inaudito patratu*; Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii* II, 8 (ed. Dümmler 69), *mala ... quae umquam vix sunt audita*.

¹⁰² *Utpote medici spiritales*, *Episcoporum de poenitentia ... relatio*, ed. Boretius/Krause 2, 53. An analysis of this role in performative terms would prove rewarding; see, for example, Geoffrey Koziol, *A father, his son, memory, and hope: The joint diploma of Lothar and Louis V (Pentecost Monday, 979) and the limits of performativity*, in: *Geschichtswissenschaft und “performative turn”*: Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit, ed. Jürgen Martchukat/Steffen Patzold (Köln 2003) 83–103; Burrus, *In the theater of this life*; Innes, *He never even allowed*; and Morrison, “Know thyself”.

Louis, for the sooner and more completely the hypocrisy and sanctimony of the rebels could be revealed, the sooner and more completely their vile charges of impropriety, negligence, and iniquity against Louis could also be exposed as part of the nefarious ruse, and consequently discredited.¹⁰³ In more general terms, for Carolingian authors the significance of the intrigue was immediate, personal, and, above all, religious.

Enlightenment *philosophes*, on the other hand, valued the intrigue for its seemingly timeless and universal secular qualities – qualities that were seen to be the *sine qua non* of drama itself (which thus suggests one reason for drama's great popularity with intellectuals at the time). Within its twists and turns, the pernicious social forces and causes responsible for the decline of civilization had been momentarily unmasked, which made the “spectacle” of 833 an extremely useful didactic drama. Not only had the reasons for the collapse of the Carolingian achievement been evinced in the intrigue, but the impediments to the progress of civilization had been glimpsed as well. Ironically, the Astronomer's Christian tragedy had been resurrected and restaged after nearly a millennium by fervent anticlericalists, thanks to the superficial congruence of a theatrical discourse. The drama's plot, however, now stripped of its religious *mise-en-scène*, was decidedly different.¹⁰⁴

To gain a sense of the extent to which the pervasive discourse of theater and dramaturgy informed Enlightenment thinking about the events of 833, recall, for example, the anecdote by Talleyrand about the dramatic confrontation between Napoleon and his bishops in 1809.¹⁰⁵ In an effort to upstage them, Napoleon had called the bishops before an audience of his choosing and delivered a pompous harangue, making it clear (both by the harangue and the raving into which it rapidly devolved) that he would not be cast as the lead in a re-staging of Louis's humiliating defeat. While Napoleon's performance had its intended effect on his captive audience, other interpreters, free of censure, were quick to adduce his life's dramatic plot. Within five years the philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel, recalling nothing so much as the Astronomer's tragic depiction of 833, would specifically describe the melodramatic Napoleon's defeat in 1814 as a “tragikotaton” (τραγικωτάτον), a most tragic event (here in the ancient Greek sense).¹⁰⁶ And being the Enlightenment intellectual that he was, Hegel prided himself in the fact that his grand theory had accurately predicted this tragedy (or so he claimed).¹⁰⁷ Yet, while Hegel's formidable powers of discernment had allowed him to recognize in Napoleon a “world-historical” figure, one in the grip of forces beyond his control (the “Cunning of Reason”) and ultimately – indeed, tragically – expendable,¹⁰⁸ both men, in their own way, still gripped tightly (and tellingly) to a theatrical metaphor to describe this process, Napoleon from within it and Hegel from without.

¹⁰³ In his loyalist narrative, the Astronomer, by slipping in knowing asides, even foreshadows the failure and eventual exposure of the rebels' scheme during the very act of its telling: Vita Hludowici 48, ed. Tremp 472, the rebels “invoked Pope Gregory under the pretext (*sub ornato*) that he alone ought and could reconcile sons to father. Afterwards, however, the truth became obvious” (*rei tamen veritas post claruit*); Vita Hludowici 49, ed. Tremp 480, “the conspirators ... used an ingenious argument – or so it seemed – with some of the bishops” (*conspiratores ... callido – ut sibi visum est – cum aliquibus episcoporum utuntur argumento*). Cf. the similar use of foreshadowing by Thegan, note 42 above.

¹⁰⁴ On Enlightenment anticlericalism, see the classic work by Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York 1966); together with the qualifications of Stephen J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester 2003).

¹⁰⁵ On the dialectic between French theater and politics in the late eighteenth century, see Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs*; and Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca-New York 2002). To Napoleon, it seems the events of 833 were synonymous with ecclesiastical treason in general, an equation I believe was likely held by many others at the time as well.

¹⁰⁶ See the letter from Georg W. F. Hegel to Immanuel Niethammer, 29 April 1814, nr. 233 (ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, *Briefe von und an Hegel* 2, Hamburg 1953) 28; engl.: (trans. Clark Butler/Christiane Seiler, *Hegel: The Letters*, Bloomington 1984) 307, „Es sind grosse Dinge um uns geschehen. Es ist ein ungeheueres Schauspiel, ein enormes Genie sich selbst zerstören zu sehen. Das ist das τραγικωτάτον, das es gibt.“ (Great events have transpired about us. It is a frightful spectacle to see a great genius destroy himself. There is nothing more tragic.) For Hegel's views on tragedy and drama, see Butler/Seiler, *Hegel* 650–661; Hegel on Tragedy, ed. Anne Paolucci/Henry Paolucci (Smyrna-Del. 2001); and, above all, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore 1973) 81–131.

¹⁰⁷ Hegel, letter to Immanuel Niethammer, 29 April 1814, ed. Hoffmeister 28, „Die ganze Umwälzung habe ich übrigens, wie ich mich rühmen will, vorausgesagt. In meinem Werke (in der Nacht vor der Schlacht von Jena vollendet) sage ich p. 547 ...“ (trans. Butler/Seiler 307, “I may pride myself, moreover, on having predicted this entire upheaval. In my book [Phenomenology of Spirit], which I completed the night before the battle of Jena, I said on page 547 ...”).

¹⁰⁸ On Hegel and the “Cunning of Reason” (List der Vernunft), see Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (New York 1956) 29–33; Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago 1949) 52–59; and Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Sci-*

This grip has remained particularly tenacious. Much like Napoleon, Enlightenment historians and their successors up to the present day have been unable to resist thinking of Louis's abandonment and penance as a revealing drama, a melancholy or ridiculous spectacle with despicably duplicitous antagonists playing essentialized, categorical roles.¹⁰⁹ The great historian Michelet, for instance, viewed the abandonment of "the poor Louis", which occurred in the "theater" of the Rotfeld, as a "disgraceful scene", and considered the emperor's subsequent divestiture at Saint-Médard to have been utterly "absurd". Yet, it is in his final estimation of Louis the Pious that Michelet's fondness for the theater – and his special love of Shakespeare – becomes particularly apparent: "poor old Lear", he concluded, "who found no Cordelia among his children!"¹¹⁰ Such dramatic re-stagings of 833 have only increased over the last two centuries, whether configured as a tragedy,¹¹¹ a comedy,¹¹² a tragicomedy,¹¹³ or just a drama.¹¹⁴ The following representation from a modern historical survey

entific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century (Princeton 1986) 202–205. I have also found helpful Samuel Moyn, Amos Funkenstein on the theological origins of historicism, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003) 639–657.

¹⁰⁹ See Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs* 14; and Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven 1995) VII–XX, 1–23.

¹¹⁰ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France 1: Le Moyen Âge*. (1833; trans. G.H. Smith, *History of France 1*, New York 1875) 129. As John R. Williams, *Jules Michelet: Historian as Critic of French Literature* (Birmingham 1987), has pointed out, Michelet gave a great deal of thought to drama. Indeed, Williams demonstrates (at 18) that Michelet even believed the theater to have been "the genre which offered the best possibility ... for reaching the people and giving them direction." On Michelet's fondness for Shakespeare, see Oscar A. Haac, *Les principes inspirateurs de Michelet* (New Haven 1951) 121, and the scattered references in Michelet's journal, *Jules Michelet, Journal, Tome I (1828–1848)*, ed. Paul Viallaneix (Paris 1959) 53, 115, 129. For broader observations on Michelet's view of Carolingian decline, see Dutton, *Awareness of Historical Decline* 35–36.

¹¹¹ Jean-Marie-Félicité Frantin, *Louis-le-Pieux et son siècle 2* (Paris 1839) 45, "c'était sans doute un spectacle lamentable!"; Francis Monnier, *Histoire des luttes politiques et religieuses dans les temps carolingiens* (Paris 1852) 132, "ce lugubre dénouement"; Ernst Dümmler, *Geschichte des ostfränkischen Reiches 1* (Leipzig 1862) 78, „ein trauriges Schauspiel“; Leopold August Warnkönig/Pierre A. F. Gerard, *Histoire des Carolingiens 2* (Bruxelles 1862) 62, "L'histoire de ce triste drame est assez connue"; Boyer, *Le Champ du Mensonge* 49, "l'Alsace, il y a plus de mille ans, a servi de théâtre à l'un des drames les plus tristement célèbres de l'histoire"; *ibid.* 81, "la première station de cette véritable passion"; Engelbert Mühlbacher, *Deutsche Geschichte unter den Karolingern* (Stuttgart 1896) 390, 396, „das tragische Geschick des Kaisers“; Heinrich Fichtenau, *Das karolingische Imperium. Soziale und geistige Problematik eines Grossreiches* (Zürich 1949) 271, „blutigen Tragödien“; Louis Halphen, *Charlemagne et l'empire carolingien* (Paris 1947) 297, "la tragique aventure"; Schieffer, *Die Krise des karolingischen Imperiums* 14, „die Verzweiflung einer Tragödie“; Eleanor S. Duckett, *Carolingian Portraits: A Study in the Ninth Century* (Ann Arbor 1962) 45, "the opening of tragedy"; Jacques-Henri Bauchy, *Récits des temps carolingiens* (Paris 1973) 216, "ces tragiques événements"; Philippe Depreux, *Empereur, Empereur associé et Pape au temps de Louis le Pieux*, in: *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire* 70 (1992) 893–906, at 895, "la tragédie du Rothfeld"; Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* 191, „Ein neuer Akt des Familiendramas began, das nun wahrhaft Züge einer antiken Tragödie annahm“; *ibid.* 210, „tragischen Zusammenstoß“; Karlheinz Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums 5: 9. und 10. Jahrhundert. Von Ludwig dem Frommen (814) bis zum Tode Ottos III. (1002)* (Reinbek bei Hamburg 1998) 80, „christlichen Tragödie“; *ibid.* 91, „traurigen Akt“; Jane S. Ourand, *Louis the Pious and Judith Augusta: In Defense of Sacral Kingship in the Imperium Christianum of the Early Ninth Century* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst 1998) 159, "one of the most dramatic and tragic events of the ninth century"; Koch, *Kaiserin Judith* 143, „Züge einer antiken Tragödie“ (following Boshof above).

¹¹² Jean-Pierre Charpentier, *Essai sur l'histoire littéraire du moyen age* (Paris 1833) 365, "N'était-ce point scène et jeu de comédie?"; Chevallard, *Saint Agobard* 304, "sacrilège comédie"; Halphen, *Charlemagne* 291, "l'odieuse comédie"; Marcel David, *La souveraineté et les limites juridiques du pouvoir monarchique du IX^e au XV^e siècle* (Paris 1954) 119, "une comédie judiciaire"; Paul Zumthor, *Charles le Chauve* (Paris 1981) 65, "une comédie"; Defente, *Saint-Médard* 57, "Saint-Médard était aussi facilement accessible aux principaux acteurs de la comédie qui se préparait, Ebbon l'archevêque de Reims le premier."

¹¹³ Gobry, *Louis I^{er} : Premier successeur* 210, "cette tragi-comédie."

¹¹⁴ Frantin, *Louis-le-Pieux 2*, 55, "ce lieu avait été destiné à servir de théâtre à la dégradation de l'Empereur"; *ibid.*, "cette scène scandaleuse"; Auguste Himly, *Wala et Louis le débonnaire* (Paris 1849) 174, "l'église de Saint-Médard de Soissons, choisie pour servir de théâtre à cette répétition de la scène d'Attigny"; Monnier, *Histoire des luttes* 132, "Compiègne était devenu le théâtre d'intrigues de tout genre"; Mühlbacher, *Deutsche Geschichte* 404, „sie sollte in feierlicherer Weise und genau Akt für Akt, wie sich das Schauspiel auf seiten seiner Gegner abgespielt hatte“; Leopold von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte 3* (Leipzig 1896) 297, „eine dunkle, trübe Scene“; Fichtenau, *Das karolingische Imperium* 264, „einem Theatercoup“; Arquillière, *L'augustinisme politique* 170, "le vrai sens du drame politico-religieux de 833"; Zumthor, *Charles le Chauve* 66, "scène sordide"; Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* 233, "the moral drama of Louis's annihilation"; Egon Boshof, *Einheitsidee und Teilungsprinzip in der Regierungszeit Ludwigs des Frommen*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 161–189, at 189, „den Epilog zum Drama“; Johannes Fried, *Ludwig der Fromme, das Papsttum und die fränkische Kirche*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 231–273, at 266, „das Drama des ‚Lügenfeldes‘“; Roger Collins, *Pippin I and the kingdom of Aquitaine*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir.*

of the Carolingian empire can stand for the rest: “the outcome of this tragedy was nothing more nor less than the overthrow of Louis the Pious, Judith and Charles. The empress was shut up in an Italian monastery and her son at Prüm, whilst the unfortunate emperor was made to go through the show of a voluntary abdication in the sinister comedy staged at Saint-Médard de Soissons by Archbishop Ebbo of Rheims in October 833.”¹¹⁵ Such quotations can easily be multiplied.¹¹⁶

Certainly the notion of theatrical duplicity has long been useful to historians thinking in terms of rise and decline or growth and decay, for if the moment of crisis, or turning point, in their arcing narratives is viewed as a dramatic intrigue, then assigning blame for the onset of decline/decay becomes a matter of casting the drama’s protagonists (whose motives are pure and candid) and casting its antagonists (whose motives are corrupt and concealed).¹¹⁷ Accordingly, ever since the rise of those grand narratives in the eighteenth century concerned with Carolingian decline/decay, Louis’s eldest son Lothar, bishops Agobard of Lyon and Ebbo of Reims, and many others have consistently been characterized as villains who plotted and schemed.¹¹⁸ (Fig. 3) Viewed with hindsight in the harsh light of the empire’s ruin, the rebels’ repeated justification that their bold measures were taken for the good of the realm¹¹⁹ appears to be nothing but a feeble pretext to mask their greed and lust for power, an apparent ruse made all the more contemptible by its disastrous consequences.¹²⁰ Put another way, Louis, Judith, and the leaders of the rebellion in 833 have together traditionally been seen as *dramatis personae* almost too good to be true – as characters not just revealing but virtually embodying those

New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840), ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 363–389, at 389, “the extraordinarily complicated drama”; Rudolf Schieffer, *Die Karolinger* (Stuttgart 1992) 131, „der neue Akt des Familiendramas began damit“; Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* 202, „letzte Akt des Dramas“; Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte* 90, „das schimpfliche Schauspiel“; Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000* (Cambridge 2000) 199, “the next act of the drama unfolded”; Koch, *Kaiserin Judith* 143, „Mittelpunkt eines entwürdigenden Schauspiels.“

¹¹⁵ Folz, *The Coronation of Charlemagne* 189.

¹¹⁶ Worthy of note within these quotations is the clear correlation between the explicitly dramatic emplotment of the events of 833 and Thegan’s report of Louis the Pious’s farewell address to his men on the Rotfeld. It is nearly axiomatic that whenever a narrator includes Louis’s dramatic speech in his account of the events, an explicit reference to the events as some kind of drama is soon to follow (though the reverse is not nearly as often the case). See, for example, Himly, *Wala et Louis* 165; Monnier, *Histoire des luttes* 124; Calmette, *L’Effondrement* 56; Bauchy, *Récits des temps carolingiens* 216.

¹¹⁷ In an important study, Nikolaus Staubach, *Das Herrscherbild Karls des Kahlen: Formen und Funktionen monarchischer Repräsentation im früheren Mittelalter*, part I (Ph.D. inaugural dissertation, Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität, Münster 1981) 30, argues, on the contrary, that the “tragic” configuration of the events is advantageous precisely because it does *not*, in his view, hold a single person or group responsible for the internal crises and controversies that appeared during Louis’s reign. Rather, he contends that a dramatic emplotment simultaneously discloses the basic nature of the conflict and allows one to measure the relative value of the objective for which the characters in the “tragedy” strove – regardless of their ultimate success or failure in achieving it. He concludes that the problem of understanding the internal dynamics of the “tragedy of Louis the Pious” takes on a greater urgency the more its events are assigned a fundamental, broadly enveloping dimension, one that serves to extend the events’ essential historical meaning across Louis’s reign in order to make it comprehensible. As the survey in the preceding pages has shown, I would agree only with the last of Staubach’s claims: the greater the size of the “problem” that the events of 833 have been used to “solve,” the greater has been the urgency to understand the events themselves. In the same study, Staubach refers (at 30) to the “tragedy of Louis the Pious” within quotation marks, being the first person, to my knowledge, to have demonstrated an ironic distance from the traditionally received tragic story about the events of the 830s.

¹¹⁸ This tradition of general demonization of the rebellion has occasionally provoked vehement (and particularly fascinating) retorts; see, for example, Charles Barthélemy, *La déposition de Louis le Débonnaire*, in: id., *Erreurs et mensonges historiques*, fourth series (Paris 1873) 110–148, at 134, who saw the concerns of Agobard of Lyon as “vraiment patriotiques”, and Agobard as a “prélat qui, avec ses collègues, avait encouru jusqu’ici le double reproche de fanatisme et de révolte contre son légitime souverain.” According to a papal letter printed opposite the title page, Pope Pius IX officially endorsed Barthélemy’s work. Janet L. Nelson, *Public histories and private history in the work of Nithard*, in: *Speculum* 60 (1985) 251–293, at 285, has made a cogent critique of such charges of “egoism” against the rebellion and their uncritical acceptance by modern scholars.

¹¹⁹ See the arguments supplied by Agobard of Lyon, *Liber apologeticus* (ed. Lieven van Acker, CCCM 52, Turnhout 1981) 309–319; id., *Cartula*, ed. van Acker 323–324; Pope Gregory IV, *Epistola* (ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH EE 5, Berlin 1899) 228–232; *Episcoporum de poenitentia . . . relatio*, ed. Boretius/Krause 2, 51–55; Ebbo of Reims, *Apologeticus* (ed. Albert Werminghoff, MGH Concilia 2, 2, Hannover 1908) 794–806; Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, ed. Dümmler 1–98. See also Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* 182–191.

¹²⁰ Cf. the observation of Glen W. Bowersock, *Gibbon on civil war and rebellion in the decline of the Roman Empire*, in: *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. id./John Clive/Stephen R. Graubard (Cambridge-Mass. 1977) 27–35, at 31, on the similar way a particular metaphor of decline employed by Gibbon both constrained and compelled him to charge Septimius Severus with having been “the principal author of the decline of the Roman Empire.”

social factors held to be responsible for the decline/decay of Carolingian civilization¹²¹ (and, depending on how one values Carolingian civilization, perhaps responsible for much more).¹²² Indeed, over the last two and a half centuries, the drama of 833 has been the subject of an opera,¹²³ has been dramatized for French and German theater at least three times¹²⁴ (Fig. 4), and has twice been romanticized as an historical novel.¹²⁵ (Fig. 5) The alleged site of Louis's penitential imprisonment became a popular tourist attraction in the nineteenth century¹²⁶ (Fig. 6), while the Field of Lies was, as we have seen, long shunned as a haunted, accursed place.¹²⁷ What is disturbing is that the dramatic, conspiratorial, and ultimately damning interpretation of the events continues to inform not just these popular conceptions but the truth claims made by many historians as well. Just recall the telling words of the modern historian quoted at the beginning of this essay – that Louis's penance was a

¹²¹ E.g., factors usually related to the passions, such as (religious) fanaticism opposed to rationalism, or nature opposed to (human) law (cf. the plays by Marc-Xavier-Victor Drap-Arnaud and Ernst von Wildenbruch cited in note 124 below). On the embodiment of such "passions" in drama, see the remarks of Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun's Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (New Haven 1994) 52–53. More generally, see *Representing the Passions: Histories, Bodies, Visions*, ed. Richard Meyer (Los Angeles 2003).

¹²² That the Carolingians represent *the* pivotal point in medieval, and perhaps all Western history is certainly an overstatement. That they are used to represent *a* pivotal point, however, is evinced by their position as a transitional "bridge" between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages in many grand historical narratives of western Europe (as well as in the curriculum of many survey courses on the history of Western Civilization). Where, then, does this leave the events of 833: as the pivotal moment of Carolingian history, which is itself seen as a pivotal era in the history of the West? Although it is rarely put so explicitly (though see Noble, *Louis the Pious and the Papacy* 352; Ourand, *Louis the Pious* 157; and Karl F. Werner, *Hludovicus Augustus: Gouverner l'empire chrétien – Idées et réalités*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious [814–840]*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins [Oxford 1990] 3–123, at 15), this is what I believe weighs down upon nearly all modern accounts of 833, lending them such gravity and contributing to their urgency and high drama. Cf. the remarks on the relative historical significance of Carolingian civilization by Paul E. Dutton, *Res Carolinae*, in: *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 4 (1997) 99–110; and Richard E. Sullivan, *The Carolingian age: Reflections on its place in the history of the Middle Ages*, in: *Speculum* 64 (1989) 267–306.

¹²³ Georg Caspar Schürmann, *Ludovicus Pius oder Ludewig der Fromme* (1726; ed. Hans Sommer, *Publikation älterer praktischer und theoretischer Musikwerke* 17, Leipzig 1890); Hans Sommer, *Die Oper Ludwig der Fromme von Georg Caspar Schürmann*, in: *Monatshefte für Musik-Geschichte* 14 (1882) 48–51; id., *Zur Schürmann'schen Oper „Ludovicus Pius,“* in: *Monatshefte für Musik-Geschichte* 24 (1892) 137–139. On Schürmann's career and works, see Gustav F. Schmidt, *Die frühdeutsche Oper und die musikdramatische Kunst Georg Caspar Schürmanns* (Regensburg 1933–1934).

¹²⁴ See Louis-Antoine-François de Marchangy, *La Gaule poétique, ou L'histoire de France considérée dans rapports avec la poésie, l'éloquence et les beaux-arts* 2 (Paris 1815) 1–50; Marc-Xavier-Victor Drap-Arnaud, *Louis Premier (Le Débonnaire), ou Le fanatisme au IX^e siècle, Tragédie en cinq actes* (Paris 1822); Karl Robe, *Ludwig der Fromme. Historisches Schauspiel* (Berlin 1862); and Ernst von Wildenbruch, *Die Karolinger: Trauerspiel in vier Akten* (Berlin 1881).

¹²⁵ Gerhart Ellert, *Ich Judith bekenne* (Wien 1952); and Donna W. Cross, *Pope Joan: A Novel* (New York 1996) 174–177.

¹²⁶ So deep was the pathos and impact of Louis's "tragic" imprisonment that, even as late as the nineteenth century, one scholar still found it necessary to argue against the age-old conviction that an enigmatic inscription in the crypt of the monastery of Saint-Médard (the lament of a self-styled "Prince of Sorrow") had been written by the imprisoned and forlorn Emperor Louis himself. According to a letter by Louis Guilbert Cahier written in 1821, published in: *Bulletin de la société archéologique, historique et scientifique de Soissons* 9 (1855) 131–143, at 142, the inscription ran as follows: "Hélas! je suis bien prins de douleur que je dure mourir me ..." The remainder of the inscription was illegible. Cahier's argument against Louis as its author was based upon his observation that the letters of the inscription, which could still be read "easily" in his day, were in a script of a period much later than the time of Louis the Pious's captivity. Much to his dismay, Cahier found that the owner of Saint-Médard, Nicolas Geslin, was capitalizing on the widespread, erroneous conviction about Louis's incarceration (largely based on the tenth-century report of Odilo; see note 75 above) by creating a subterranean passageway to "Louis's prison" and leading tours of the place to the likes of the Duchess of Berry in 1821. Geslin (1758–1832), the monastery's owner as of 1803, was a tanner, who had moved his business onto its grounds. See Cahier, *Bulletin de la société* 132; Letter from Henri Congnet, Dean of Soissons, 15 August 1866, published in: Paul Guérin, *Les petits Bollandistes: Vies des saints* 16 (Paris 1876) 528; and Defente, *Saint-Médard: Trésors* 304, 354. The monastery was purchased from Geslin's heirs in 1840 and converted to a sanatorium for several decades, during which time its storied past was promoted just as vigorously through the sale of souvenirs; see Defente, *Saint-Médard: Trésors* 307.

¹²⁷ See Ingold, *L'Ochsenfeld* 142–143; Kiefer, *Die Sagen des Rheinlandes* 289–291; and Gravier, *Légendes d'Alsace* 1, 69–72.

tragic, Stalinesque show-trial.¹²⁸ Lothar is now being remembered in terms of Stalin and was apparently just as sinister.¹²⁹ Clearly it's time we bring the drama to a close.

But before we do, I would like to note one important consequence of the events' dramatic plotment. Because the traditional narratives about the events are so vivid and demanding, numerous other extant contemporary texts discussing 833 have never been thoroughly examined, while still others have been read only in the distorting light of the loyalist accounts.¹³⁰ For instance, despite its remarkable survival, the rebel bishops' justificatory narrative of their actions has always been seen as a shameful record of an even more shameful intrigue, and thus deserving of little attention.¹³¹ To take its contents seriously, it seems, would be to risk being embarrassed by, or complicit with, the actions it justifies and records. However, with only a little effort, and with an eye not for judging but for understanding, one can find many salient things within these texts and in others related to them: that the loyal poet and scholar Walafrid Strabo had a hand in preserving one of them (the bishops' narrative);¹³² or that the rebel bishops consciously justified their bold actions in 833 in accordance with Saint Ambrose's famous letter of reproach to the emperor Theodosius in 390;¹³³ or that a broader moral-theological binary discourse of *aequitas* and *iniquitas* framed and lent meaning to what Mayke de Jong has rightly called a penitential frame of reference informing Louis the Pious's reign.¹³⁴ But that is all to foreshadow still another story, one characterized more by irony than by tragedy or comedy. A line attributed to Goethe points the way: "tragedy", he is supposed to have said, "disappears to the degree that an equitable settlement is possible."¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Magnou-Nortier, *La tentative de subversion 640*. In 1976, Magnou-Nortier declared that the judgment and excommunication of Louis in 833 was a "genuine tragedy" (*vraie tragédie*), an opinion she repeated in 1995 with the addition that the clerics who orchestrated the drama were the equivalent of "fanatics" (here one is reminded of *Drap-Arnaud's* play of 1822); see Elisabeth Magnou-Nortier, *Foi et fidélité: Recherches sur l'évolution des liens personnels chez les Francs du VII^e au IX^e siècle* (Toulouse 1976) 74; ead., *L'Enjeu des biens ecclésiastiques dans la crise du IX^e siècle*, in: *Aux sources de la gestion publique 2 : L'"invasio" des "villae" ou la "villa" comme enjeu de pouvoir*, ed. ead. (Lille 1995) 227–259, at 247. For critiques of this representation and the thesis it so vividly depicts, see Gerhard Schmitz, *Echte Quellen – falsche Quellen: Müssen zentrale Quellen aus der Zeit Ludwigs des Frommen neu bewertet werden?*, in: *Von Sacerdotium und Regnum: Geistliche und weltliche Gewalt im frühen und hohen Mittelalter. Festschrift für Egon Boshof zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz-Reiner Erkens/Hartmut Wolff (Köln 2002) 275–300; and de Jong, *Sacrum palatium 1245*. For other examples of such presentist projection, see Booker, *The demanding drama* 174.

¹²⁹ As Elizabeth A. Wood has shown, in her illuminating study *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia* (Ithaca-New York 2005), Stalin's show-trials, with their terror, brutality, coercion, and Manichean outlook, must be understood within their particular historical context, as an outgrowth of an earlier practice of "agitation trials" staged to elicit dialogue on social ills and rouse support for the new regime. If there is a parallel to be drawn between the show-trials and Louis's public penance, it would be in their use, however different, of Biblical typology – Nikolai Bukharin was known as the "Benjamin" of the Bolshevik party, while Leon Trotsky was referred to as "Judah-Trotsky"; see Wood, *Performing Justice* 209, 218. I would like to thank Anne Gorsuch for this reference.

¹³⁰ See notes 81 and 119 above.

¹³¹ Karl Joseph von Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, revised by Henri Leclercq 4, 1 (Paris 1911) 87 note 1, "La honteuse Relatio episcoporum de exactione Hlodovici . . ."; Pierre Pithou, *Annalium et historiae Francorum ab anno Christi DCCVIII ad annum DCCCXC scriptores coaetanei XII [...]* (Paris 1588), table of contents, "XIII. Acta impiae et nefandae exactionis eiusdem Ludovici Imperatoris apud Compendium Anno DCCCXXII [sic]." See Booker, *A new prologue* 86–87. Similar sentiments have long applied to the apology composed by Ebbo of Reims, ed. Werminghoff 794–806; and the letter of rebuke to Louis's bishops in 833 from Pope Gregory IV, ed. Dümmler 228–232.

¹³² See Booker, *A new prologue*.

¹³³ On the conflict between Ambrose and Theodosius, see Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley 1994) 291–360. For Ambrose's letter (ex. collect. 11/Maur. 51, ed. Michaela Zelzer, CSEL 82, 3, Wien 1982) 212–218, see Ambrose of Milan, *Political Letters and Speeches* (trans. John H. W. G. Liebeschuetz/Carole Hill, *Translated Texts for Historians* 43, Liverpool 2005) 262–269; and for its disappearance during the Middle Ages – with the important exception of the ninth century – see Rudolf Schieffer, *Von Mailand nach Canossa: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der christlichen Herrscherbuße von Theodosius der Grosse bis zu Heinrich IV*, in: *Deutsches Archiv* 28 (1972) 333–370, at 346–347, 357–358; and Liebeschuetz/Hill, *Ambrose of Milan* 44–45.

¹³⁴ On *aequitas*, see Marco Orrù, *Anomie: History and Meanings* (Boston 1987) 43–45, 55–56; together with the observations on *aequitas* as a virtue of rulership during the reign of Louis the Pious by Eugen Wohlhaupter, *Aequitas canonica. Eine Studie aus dem kanonischen Recht* (Paderborn 1931) 32–35, criticized unconvincingly by Ekkehard Kaufmann, *Aequitatis iudicium. Königsgericht und Billigkeit in der Rechtsordnung des frühen Mittelalters* (Frankfurt am Main 1959) 33. For de Jong's statement, see ead., *What was public about public penance? Paenitentia publica and justice in the Carolingian world*, in: *La giustizia nell'alto Medioevo (secoli IX–XI)* (Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo 44, 2, Spoleto 1997) 863–904, at 882.

¹³⁵ For the quotation, see Martin Jarrett-Kerr, *The conditions of tragedy*, in: *Comparative Literature Studies* 2 (1965) 363–373, at 368. I have begun to tell this other story in Booker, *A new prologue*.



Fig. 3: Sketch by Nicolas Lejeune of an engraving by François-Anne David (late 18th century), bearing the legend: "Ebbon, archevêque de Reims est arrêté comme il emportoit les Trésors de l'Eglise en 835." (Georges Boussinesq/Gustave Laurent, Histoire de Reims depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, 1, Reims 1933, 177)

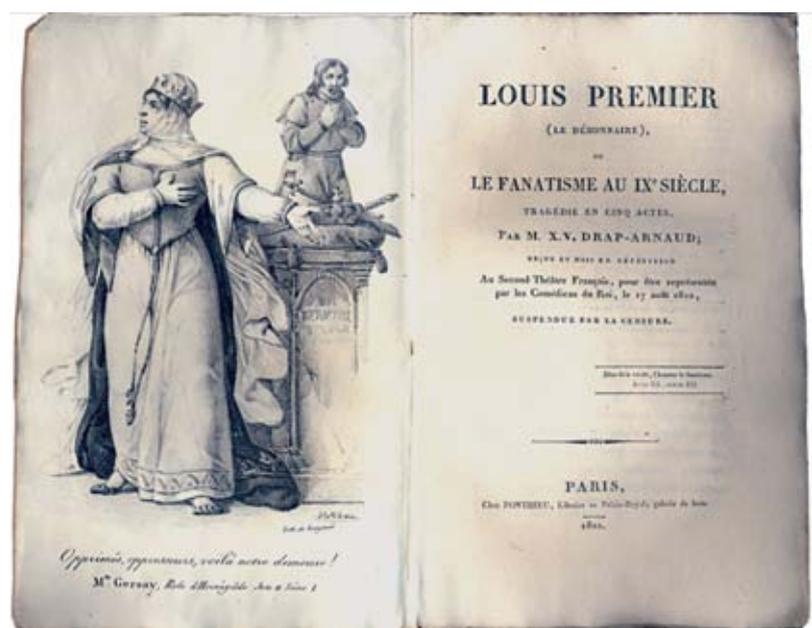


Fig. 4: Frontispiece and title page of Marc-Xavier-Victor Drap-Arnaud, Louis Premier (Le Débonnaire), ou Le fanatisme au IX^e siècle, Tragédie en cinq actes (Paris 1822)



Fig. 5: Gerhart Ellert, *Ich Judith bekenne*: Roman (Wien 1952)

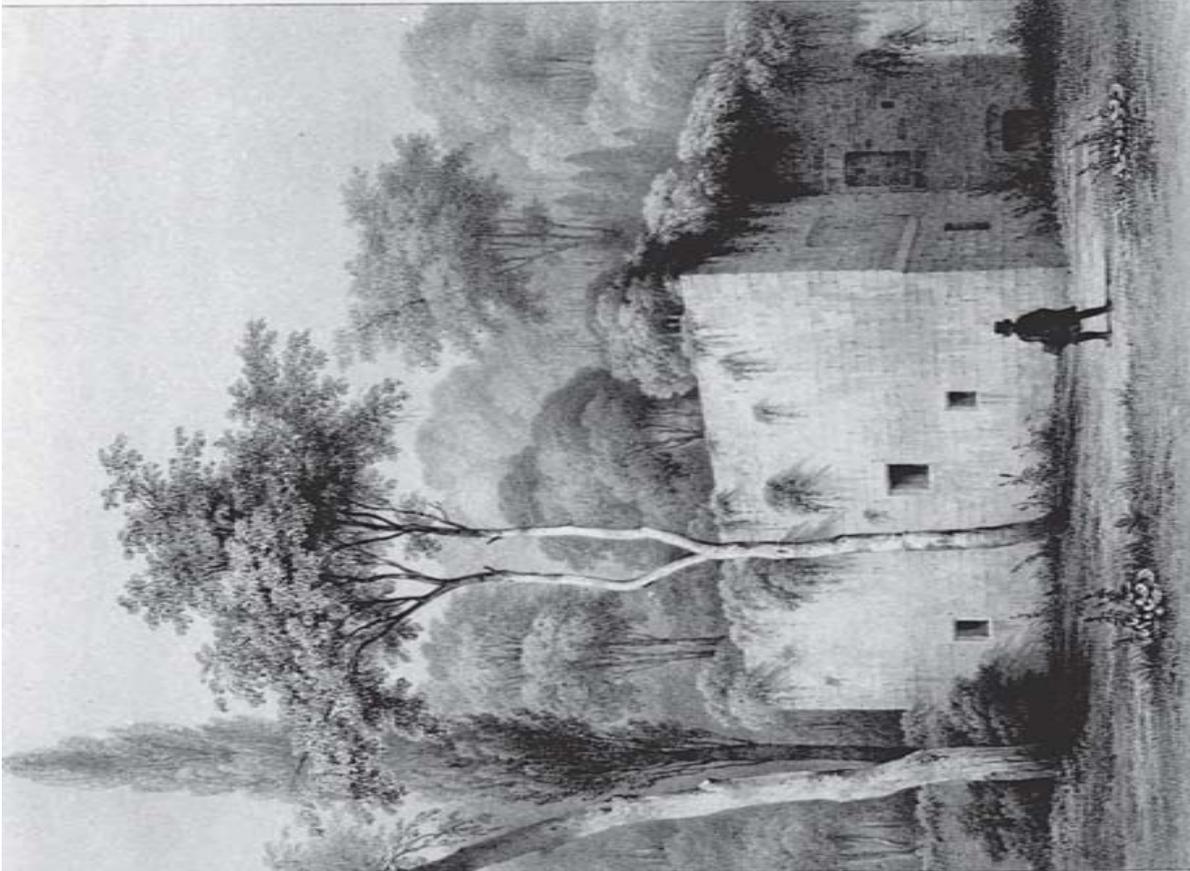


Fig. 6: "Extérieur de la prison de Louis le Débonnaire à St-Médard, Soissons. (Picardie)." Drawing by Danjoy. Musée de Soissons, coll. Beauzée, inv. 90.9.96 (Courtesy of Musée de Soissons)

