The British Reception of Two French Revolutionary Songs: *Ca ira* and the *Carmagnole*, from 1789 to Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

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It is often agreed that "Ça ira", the "Carmagnole", and the "Marseillaise" constitute the musical heritage of the French Revolution. Most of the many songs of that stormy period are now mostly forgotten, although French historians during the Third Republic have collected and annotated more than 3000 of them. Constant Pierre has shown how a repertoire of songs commissioned by the authorities, e.g. composers Méhul's and Gossec's hymns for revolutionary festivals, coexisted with over 3,000 popular songs, largely political lyrics sung on pre-existing, popular tunes and modified to fit the rapidly shifting political situation. "Ça ira" was the most famous of those songs which Frenchmen and women sung in workshops and in the fields, in markets, taverns, theatres and still other places. Songs were strong means of communication among the masses, through communal singing and the reuse of popular tunes with lyrics responding to the rapidly shifting political situation. This article argues that the potency of singing was further enhanced by its exportation to Britain, where "Ça ira" became a rallying cry and a symbol of the Revolution, for better and for worse. This was achieved by performances of the songs by British sympathisers of the Revolution, but also by cross-media adaptations, the song's title serving as a political marker in graphic caricature, on objects and as slogan in pamphlet and oratory.

While the "Marseillaise", and, in Britain, "God Save the King" and some lesser-known songs like "Britons Strike Home", have been the object of critical study, little is known of the international reception of "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole". This paper is an attempt to remedy this situation, offering a case study in the international reception of those two songs. While British reception offers a fruitful field of enquiry, a fully transnational, global study could further encompass Ireland and the United States, where the songs were known from the 1790s, as well as several European countries. "Ça ira" was ubiquitous in Britain at the time: it was certainly sung, but it was also written on graphic caricatures, printed on objects, and quoted in letters and pamphlets and in different media forms. In this paper, I suggest that "Ça ira" especially, but also the "Carmagnole" to a lesser extent, had a capacity for immediately signifying revolution and served as ready signifiers for both revolutionaries and conservatives. The songs left a long memory, and the Victorians, two generations after the revolutionary

climacteric, still had their uses of them as they grappled with revolutionary upheavals on the continent (the 1848 Springtime of the Peoples) and radical movements at home.

The reception of "Ça ira" in Britain goes beyond mere singing and playing. In its breadth, variety, and complexity, it takes on an "intermedial" dimension. Paul Pickering, in his study of the "political uses of God Save the King", (Pickering 113) notes the "transmediality" of songs, understood as their availability across multiple platforms at the same time, as slip songs, radical newspapers, and songsters. That was true of "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole", because those media could also give access to their tunes and lyrics. More broadly, other specialists, such as Peter Wagner and Frédéric Ogée, have used the word "intermediality" to study the relationships between text and image, for instance the intertexts of Hogarth's or Gillray's drawings. Such a narrow definition, however, excludes songs and any form of orality, music or sound. In keeping with recent research on forms of orality, music and dance (Jon Mee's work on conversation, Paul Pickering and Kate Bowan on songs, or studies on soundscapes and dance), this article explores the interplay between music and text, and the use of "Ça ira" across many oral, written and visual forms, ranging from the everyday mundane to the elaborate and the artistic, from intimate practices to public performances. "Ça ira", and to a much lesser extent Carmagnole, became a tag, a slogan that British, Irish and Americans remembered easily and used in a variety of contexts and media.

While intermediality is now a central concept in many fields of research in the humanities, the editors of a recent handbook on the topic remind us that "questions of intermediality and the relationship between art forms are not wedded to modernity" (Rippl and Rippl 4). This article will make it clear that "Ça ira" was enmeshed in many medial relations that challenged the classical notion of the "sister arts" and pointed toward a Romantic politics of emotions.[1] What is meant here by "intermediality" is the use of the phrase "Ça ira" in the theatre, in toasts, in print, in graphic caricature and in still other forms. "Ça ira" evoked a number of connotations, but still more roused a wealth of emotions in the reader, spectator or listener. Those connotations varied according to class and place – possibility according to gender, but this has yet to be explored – and changed as the Revolution unfolded, and then progressively retreated into history and memory. This French tag became a synonym of the French Revolution, and it took on various shades of meaning, both positive and, increasingly, negative, entering into circulation in a variety of domains. It may well be that the phrase was so successful because it was easy to spell and easy to pronounce, contrary to "carmagnole", a more difficult word, or

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the “Marseillaise”, for the same reason, and because, like the French national anthem, with lyrics loaded with ideology which made it less malleable for parody and appropriation.

The “Marseillaise”, was never used in the same way. There were many imitations of both title and lyrics (the Irish Marseillaise, the Polish Marseillaise) but no parodies and no derived slogan. Laura Mason, the historian of French revolutionary songs, wrote that “Rouget [de Lisle] reputedly produced his hymn in a single night after hearing Strasbourg’s Mayor Dietrich and other local elites complain that “Ça ira” and “La Carmagnole” were vulgar songs unfit for proper soldiers” (Mason 94). The “Marseillaise” had a proper pedigree, an author, certified lyrics, even a date of birth; but “Ça ira” and the “Carmagnole” emerged from the crowd, as orphans. They were utterly unrespectable. They served to figure the initial enthusiasm of the Revolution, and the disgusting, ignoble crimes of the mob, the darkest part of the Revolution, while the Marseillaise represented lofty ideals and the State: the part that the Girondins wanted to reclaim, accepting 1789 while rejecting the crimes of the Terror.[2]

It is important to recover some of the early messages of “Ça ira” which were later forgotten and overlaid by the violent turn taken by the Revolution. Correspondingly, there was an illocutory, pragmatic force associated with it that radicals and reformers sought to deploy against their conservative opponents, as a battle cry of provocation and defiance.

This article adopts a chronological progression in order to show the historical development of the reception and uses of the French revolutionary songs. It starts with “Ça ira” in the context of the fight between loyalists and radicals in 1790s Britain, assessing the different uses and meanings attached to the song as the perception of the French Revolution evolved and ideological conflicts hardened. One generation later, by the time of the Peterloo massacre (1819), “Ça ira” had retained a powerful symbolic force, an illocutionary force that radicals tried to wield on their enemies. The ideological and social conflict was continuing under changed conditions in post-war Britain and “Ça ira” was a reminder of the relevance of the French Revolution and its violence. Finally, in the early Victorian period, “Ça ira” lost its appeal to radicals and Chartists. From Carlyle to Dickens, it became a symbol of evil and irrational forces, continuing its course as the unrespectable, irredeemable part of the Revolution.

Ça ira in the intermedial ideological contest of 1790s Britain

The “Carmagnole” originated in an Italian round dance and it became popular around the time of the Storming of the Tuileries in August 1792. “Carmagnole” was a polysemic word, referring

[2] “La Terreur” should not be taken at face value. Some historians today are writing the history of the retrospective construction of this concept, denying the existence of one single homicidal plot laid by Robespierre. (Biard and Linton)

also to a jacket worn by *sans culottes* and other revolutionaries, including members of the French assemblies. Authorship of words and music is unknown. Somewhat more is known about "Ça ira" though it is also largely a song of anonymous, collective origin. The original "Ça ira" was a ditty, favoured by La Fayette, which expressed wishes of peace and harmony when it became popular in the summer of 1790, during the preparations for the Festival of the Federation. As the historian Antoine de Baecque wrote, it was hardly a revolutionary song, but new versions, parodies and adaptations to more violent times soon emerged. (Baecque) By the spring of 1791, the famous cry – 'Les aristocrates à la lanterne' was on the Parisians' lips and was firmly linked to the song. As Michelle Biget noted in her history of music during the Revolution : "la Révolution devait… faire un abondant usage du procédé du *timbre*, consistant à adapter à des textes nouveaux la césure musicale d'airs connus" (Biget 98). Jamais la musique n'aura été aussi polysémique! "Ça ira" was a prime example of such adaption of a popular tune to new socio-political uses.

In 1790, during the halcyon days of the Revolution, those Englishmen and women who played and sang "Ça ira" were drawn from the nobility and the middling orders, not the rabble. The curiosity generated by the Federation meant that "Ça ira" was soon known, published, and performed in England. It was performed in particular in the play *The Picture of Paris*, a self-proclaimed faithful rendering of the Federation, and Londoners could buy the *libretto*, which included the lyrics with a score for the harpsichord.[3] Another spectacle based on the Festival of the Federation (14 July 1790), *The Paris Federation* also included "Ça ira" among its songs and "expressed far more radical sentiments than the chauvinistic platitudes of Covent Garden", denouncing the nobility and celebrating rather than patronizing the achievements of the French (Taylor 63).

The song even entered, ever so briefly, the long catalogue of stock characterizations of the French in comedies. In November 1791, a comedy entitled *Notoriety*, a performance based on "whim and eccentricity" rather than a coherent plot, contained a song in broken *franglais*, comprising the phrase "Ça ira" in the burden:

With their petit Chanson, Ça ira, Ça ira, Ma brook,

Mermington, and their dans votre Lit -

By the Pow'rs they're all nonsense and bodder, agrah! to our didero, bubburo - whack, Langolee.[4]

[3] The song was also sold as a single folio sheet in Dublin, where the *Picture of Paris* was also played: *Ça ira. A Celebrated French National Air As Sung in the Picture of Paris* (in English and French), Dublin: Hime, [1790?], British Library H.1601.g.(13.).
[4] *Times*, 7 November 1791.

Almost one year to the day after the publication of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, at least one stage-manager found nothing frightening about "Ça ira", adding it to the long list of ridiculous clichés about France.

Helen Maria Williams, a keen observer of French realities, also propagated the notion of "Ça ira" as a jaunty song of revolutionary reconciliation. Her multivolume *Letters from France* form a chronicle of the Revolution, from the Festival of the Federation to 1796. In the first volume, the best known and most successful one, she recounted the Festival of the Federation on 14 July 1790 and chronicled life in Paris and Orleans in the summer, in a picturesque, sentimental mode. She was aware of the diversity of French songs and knew, for instance, that the women marching on Versailles in October 1789, were singing *Vive Henri IV*. "Ça ira" is part of this charming tableau of liberty regained. The song "is sung not only at every theatre, and in every street of Paris, but in every town and village of France, by man, woman, and child." It is "everywhere the signal of pleasure". Even serious political conversations, she added, were punctuated with "a sportive assurance, in allusion to this song, que "Ca ira!". (Williams, *Letters Written in France* 102) Williams noticed the overlap between the song and the common French expression, an everyday utterance as common as *Bonjour* or *merci*. "Ça ira", expressing easy-going confidence in the revolution's outcome, had woven itself into the fabric of human life because it was a common expression – or it could be said that the song had politicized a phrase of everyday life. In later volumes, Williams wrote vivid vignettes of Parisian festive life, one of which features *Ça ira*. "On Sunday last, after vespers, the tree of liberty was planted, with great rejoicings, in the middle of the square in which we live." After paraphrasing the orator's speech, she added that this formed "a most picturesque groupe. [sic] – There was something in the scene which gave me an idea of the simplicity of ancient times" (Williams, *Letters from France* 195). "[T]he people danced with all their hearts and souls" to the tune of "Ça ira", a song which Williams always associated with light-hearted gaiety. The song partakes of the spirit of "ideal civic communication, celebrating the rule of law" (Bohls 122). The festival, aestheticized as a self-contained unit, presents the Revolution as the prelude to democratic government. Williams's composition, the vignette, is significant because it celebrates and embellishes popular joy, even as it also frames and contains popular agency, as if William saw the oceanic crowd found in other representations of the Revolution, as something that could be either sublimely good or supremely bad.

This contrasts with the vision of the crowd at a civic festival, published in the *Manchester Herald*, 28 April 1792, inspired by Watt and Cooper, two English radicals who had gone to Paris to liaise with the Jacobins:[5]

[5] On Watt and Cooper: (Goodwin 201–03)

> I saw at least 50,000 people dancing at once to Ca ira – I heard repeatedly 100,000 voices cry out *Vivent les Anglois*. I was witness to sentiments from the mouths of the multitude, which an English philosopher would be applauded for, by philosophers – I saw, that the people have capabilities which despotism and aristocracy have too long hidden – [...] this glorious day [...] will stand a lasting monument of the virtue of the PEOPLE when left to the honest effusion of their own sentiments and unshackled by the satellites of despotism.

This representation of the Revolution and revolutionary enthusiasm is more "democratic" than Williams's, in the sense that the narrator, an English supporter of the French Revolution, immerses himself in the immense crowd, and though he is still a spectator ("I saw"), contrary to Williams he does not frame and contain the revolutionary activity but imagines its cosmopolitan reach, encompassing even the English in its dynamic.

Ça ira" became a way of showing one's ideological goodwill in a diplomatic play between English and French élite revolutionaries, especially during visits across the Channel. In August 1790, Français and Bougon, two delegates from the Jacobin club of Nantes (*Société des Amis de la Constitution*), were entertained by the Whig magnate Lord Stanhope. They remember how well they were entertained at Stanhope's country house:

> Madame *Sheridan*, une des plus belles femmes d'Angleterre, nous a chanté, avec sa sœur, s'accompagnant du clavecin, des chansons patriotiques et Françaises.[6]

"Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole" were probably among those French patriotic songs. (Madame Sheridan would be the wife of Thomas Brinsley Sheridan, Irish playwright and a member pillar of the Whig establishment). English supporters of the French Revolution also played "Ça ira", especially during dinners and when there were French guests. This was the case of the Revolution Society, a radical society, which played the song on 4 November 1791, at a commemorative dinner with the mayor of Paris as guest of honour.[7]

Caricaturists used the words "ça ira" as a convenient tag to signify revolution. Caricaturists addressed a mostly aristocratic and middle-class educated public. While some historians like James Baker argued that caricature had an influence among the lower orders of London who could not read, others, such as H.T. Dickinson and Ian Haywood noted that they were produced at the instigation of aristocratic patrons and collected by a few aristocrats and middle-class men.[8] It would be rash to conclude that, because anybody could see caricatures exhibited in printshop windows, caricatures could educate or politicize the people. Most caricatures, and

[6] *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* n°47, pp.385-386.
[7] Chapter 2, p.26.
[8] For a discussion of the social reach of caricature see Dickinson; Haywood 7–8.

those using "ça ira" as a trope, relied on a discursive and visual literacy few possessed; enjoying the intermedial and intertextual relations within caricatures was reserved to a happy few. The caricaturists must have chosen "Ça ira" because their target audience would have read about it in the press, or even heard it in the theatre. The phrase was short and could be written on various papers or objects. In several caricatures, "Ça ira" serves to typify stock characters as French. More interestingly, "Ça ira" also mocked the Foxite Whigs, this dwindling faction of the party that followed Charles James Fox in opposition to Pitt and in support of the French Revolution, especially Stanhope, Lansdowne, and Grey. *Mr Burke's pair of spectacles for short sighted politicians*[9] shows Sheridan holding up "an extinguisher at the end of a pole (as used in the theatres), saying, Ça ira." The tag *Ça ira* has pride of place in two other caricatures. Rowlandson's *Philosophy run mad or a stupendous monument of human wisdom* is a general satire on the French Revolution and more pointedly on the Girondin's aggressive foreign policy; it borrowed its title from a phrase by Fox, and *Ça ira* appears as a dominant principle of revolutionary havoc.[10] Perhaps the most effective use of "ça ira" in caricature is Gillray's satirical portrait of Fox, *A Democrat, -or- Reason & Philosophy*.[11] The speech bubble saying "Ca ira" puts the finishing touch to Fox's *sans-culotte* attire; Gillray played with the reference to the French Revolution, of course, and possibly to the meaning of the sentence, suggesting Fox was a reckless gambler who still hoped in the future despite his dire situation. Caricaturists used the "Carmagnole" to a lesser extent, but there was a graphic potential to the round dance around the tree of liberty. In *Hollandia regenerata: Dansons la Carmagnole ! Vive le son ! Vive le son ! &c*,[12] William Humphrey satirized the spread of trees of liberty in Holland following the French invasion, and the necessity for the Dutch to ape (with a monkey centre stage) French revolutionary customs. Conversely, *Suwarrow giving the French directory a taste of the knout* (1799) was a fantasy of French defeat, the lean Frenchman getting a sound whipping from the Russian ogre telling him "This is the dance a la Carmagnole!"[13]

Caricature, then, suggests the plasticity of the signifier "Ça ira", which could be put to various uses. In other cultural fields, the actors' motives or ideology are difficult to decide precisely. On 18 February 1792, John Philip Kemble's revival of *Macbeth* at Covent Garden was interrupted calls for "Ça ira" from the pit and gallery. George Taylor prudently suggests that

[9] James Sayers, *Mr Burke's pair of spectacles for short sighted politicians*, British Museum [henceforth BM] 7858, George, vol.6, p.790.
[10] BM 8150.
[11] BM 8310, George, vol.7, p.16. See also Cruikshank's *A Right Honourable alias A Sans Culotte* (BM 8142, 20 December 1792), representing Fox cleft in two by the English Channel, saying 'Ça ira, Ça ira, Ça ira' on the left-hand, French side, and 'God Save Great George Our King' on his right-hand side.
[12] BM 8846. George, *Catalogue*, vol.7, p.283.
[13] BM 9393. George, *Catalogue*, vol.7, p.556.

the audience knew about "the political sympathies of authors and theatre managers", but in this case definite conclusions about the meaning of the song are elusive.[14]

Did singing "Ça ira" evince a commitment to violent revolution? Perhaps not, but certainly voicing sympathy for the French was an act of defiance of the established order. There is evidence that "Ça ira" was sung in the English and especially Scottish reform societies that spread rapidly after the publication of the second part of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, from early 1792. The radical milieu was instrumental in publishing versions of "Ça ira" in various forms, making it a transmedial song in Paul Pickering's sense. Radical publishers published the songs as slips or among collections.

However, "Ça ira" was never hegemonic; it was one song among many, and sat alongside established English songs, like "God Save the King", that radicals subverted. There was no attempt to simply impose new French tunes. There was no popular, federative radical song for the British radicals: in short, no such thing as a radical "Marseillaise". The radicals therefore fought on the loyalists' terrain to either reclaim or subvert "God Save the King".(Scrivener 36) Literary and ideological subversion were at the centre of the activities of Thomas Spence, whose periodical *Pig's Meat* (1793-1794) regularly published parodies of "God Save the King" and other canonical texts, including Biblical verses, to serve his project of a utopian, agrarian republic. (Wood; Beal) Kate Bowan and Paul Pickering could write that, "with the exception of *Ça ira*, opponents of the revolution and Spence drew upon an identical corpus of songs for their tunes." (Bowan and Pickering 45) Spence and other radicals used well-known tunes for two main reasons: because their very familiarity ensured the subversive lyrics were easy to sing, secondly, because they could exploit the song's customary emotional force, its connotations of good-fellowship and very familiarity to ease the ideological message into the texture of everyday life. In response, radical lyrics turned the song around, sapping loyalty from king, established church and aristocracy. "Ça ira", then, achieved a special status as a song that immediately signified revolution and frightened loyalists, better than any English song could.

Members of the London Corresponding Society would sing "Ça ira" (and other songs) at sociable evenings. This was the case for instance on 2 May 1794, when some 300 persons (probably all men) celebrated the society's second anniversary at the Crown and Anchor. "During the dinner, and between the toasts, a numerous band played the popular tunes *Ça ira*, the *Carmagnol*, the *Marsellois* March, the Democrat, and a new piece of music, called the "FREE CONSTITUTION.""(*The Trial of Thomas Hardy* 119). The dinner was replete with French revolutionary principles and phraseology (a toast to Lord Stanhope was corrected to Citizen

[14] (Taylor 70) See the report in the *Morning Chronicle*, 20 February 1792: https://londonstagedatabase.uoregon.edu/event.php?id=47689

Stanhope). Such dinners were exceptional, but it is probable that "Ça ira" could be heard more often in smaller dinners, which does not mean they were altogether private. "Private" is a difficult term to use, given the breakdown of the private-public barrier in radical circles, due to both politicization of all aspects of life, and to government surveillance (Barrell). In such semi-private settings, the radical John Horne Tooke charmed his friends with his interpretations of the song (Bewley and Bewley 123).

The expression "Ça ira", then, became part of the phraseology of the LCS. Some fledgling Scottish societies also adopted French forms and styles. A first convention of delegates held in December 1793 became notorious for the use of words like "citizen" regrouped in "sections" and granting "honours of the sitting" or making "patriotic donations". One report was even dated 3 December "1st year of the British Convention, one & indivisible" with the addition of "Ça ira, ça ira".[15] The British government took a stern view of such French phraseology and the prosecution brought it up as evidence in the state trials of 1794. A seal with the words "Ça ira" was found on the person of Thomas Muir, a leader of the Scottish Friends of the People (Meikle 133). Narratives of the trial published in the immediate aftermath (he was condemned to fourteen years of transportation) mentioned that he spoke ill of the monarchy, and that a girl charged him with giving money to an organist to play "Ça ira". The prosecution declared that "[a]ll these circumstances go to prove incontestably, that France and French principles were continually in his view, and that aimed at the destruction of the present government" (Muir 98).

The criminalization of "Ça ira" led to further cultural production among radicals. The owner of *Politics for the People*, one of the boldest republican papers of the time, Daniel Isaac Eaton, fell foul of the law:

> For ordering *Ça ira* to be played on a barrel organ, &c is to be transported for fourteen years, after being confined in irons and set to labour with felons, on board the hulks at Woolwich (Eaton 145).

A satire on punishment for playing "Ça ira" also appeared in Belfast: the Irish radical songwriter William Sampson serialized a satire, "The KING versus HURDY GURDY", in the *Belfast Northern Star* in July and August 1794, providing a satirical running commentary on the trial representing the outrageous sentence meted out to Muir as incurred for playing "Ça ira" (Thuente 23–24). Radical newspapers repeated the story for decades, insisting on the iniquity of the law when in the hands of a corrupt oligarchy.[16]

[15] National Archives of Scotland, JC 26/280; (Brims 506)
[16] "Beauties of the Law!", *The Reformers' Gazette*, no.71, 8 September 1832, p.168.

Such a state of repression led some to play with transgression. Iain McCalman has shown how radical politics, obscenity and moral outrage combined in the sociable forms of dining and toasting to ensure the survival of the Spenceans, the followers of the utopian thinker Thomas Spencer, long after Pitt's Two Acts clamped down on free expression. Long after the London Corresponding Society was disbanded in 1799, "Ça ira" remained one of "[t]he favourites at postwar Spencean meetings". (McCalman 322) This revolutionary song, and others, of a satirical bent in an English tradition of protest, sustained the Spenceans in the face of government repression. Resistance could be individual, and idiosyncratic, rather than communitarian. The antiquary Joseph Ritson loved to use English 'Jacobin' symbols in his correspondence, though the depth, if any, of his ideological commitment (given his professed Jacobite sympathies), remains to be fully probed. In a letter written on 26 December 1792, he excuses himself for not sending "the song or tune of *Ça ira*," because "it is become high treason either to sing or whistle it", he imagines he could stick the sheet between books he will convey to him (Ritson 223). This is not entirely a matter of prudence: Ritson was also toying with the *frisson* of transgression, probably because he knew his social status would shield him from prosecution, or his correspondent would not turn him in. In November 1796, he concluded a letter by: "Ah, ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, &c"(Ritson 234).

Conservative reactions, by 1794, had become extreme. They had followed the arc of the song's connotations, from initial dismissal to fear. In 1790, the *Times* used "ça ira" to dismiss the Revolution and its achievements as fiddle-faddle. In 1792 and during the Terror in 1793-1794, the ministerial press compared French rioters with North American Indians, spreading the trope of savagery:

> "an old Swiss gentleman" incurred the fury of the mob, who burnt his house down; "with their pikes, the sanguinary monsters pinned him there, and insultingly demanded him to sing *Ça ira*, danced around the fire singing themselves, in the true spirit of North American savages." (*Observer*, 16 September 1792).

By the mid-1790s, parody became a staple of anti-Jacobin writing, but "Ça ira" was not so much parodied (because there were no stable lyrics to parody) as quoted in parodic or satirical context, for instance in poems evoking bacchanalian Whig-republican dinners in England.[17] Rather than the French, however, the English loyalists attacked the English supporters of the Revolution.

Edmund Burke is interesting in this respect. He praised the 'Old Whigs' who remained faithful to the party's principle settled in 1688 and lambasted the 'New Whigs' like Fox, who supported the French Revolution. Not without qualms, he seceded from the New Whigs and turned to

[17] Chapter 1, p.63.

Pitt's Tory administration in 1792. He mentions "Ça ira" twice, in 1792 and 1796, after he had rallied Pitt. On 20 December 1792, he answered Sheridan in the debate in the Commons on the situation of the French royal family, telling him that he "might as well have sung Ça ira" as praise the French government. The song was synonymous with utter nonsense.[18] But later on, in 1796, he retorted to the Duke of Bedford that, by dint of supporting the French Jacobins, he would provoke a revolution in Britain and his tenants would destroy his titles of nobility to the tune of "Ça ira":

> They will laugh, indeed they will laugh, at his parchment and his wax. His deeds will be drawn out with the rest of the lumber of his evidence room, and burnt to the tune of *ça ira* in the courts of Bedford (then Equality) House.[19]

"Ça ira" functioned as a reminder of France, and for loyalists in particular a reminder of an extreme and negative memory of the *sans culottes*. In both cases, Burke was answering a Whig grandee, and associating "Ça ira" and insurrectionism with them. After 1793, it conjured up the mob's evil collective actions; while the *Marseillaise* had some grandeur, being the song of soldiers on the battlefield, "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole" were the songs of the *mobile vulgus*, the mob, the commonest men and women in action, marching towards violent, immoral, unnatural goals. This explains the potency of "Ça ira" as a song, and the "Carmagnole" as a dance, in the British imagination of the early nineteenth century. They were performed by radicals to frighten middle-class conservatives, who depicted them in relentlessly negative terms.

Doing things with a tune: Singing and threatening

English loyalists were just as ready as French revolutionaries to believe in the French songs' potential for propaganda and mobilization. In her foundational study festivals, Mona Ozouf contended that French festival planners believed in an empiricist epistemology whereby images (primarily) and sounds (secondarily) directly influenced the masses and shaped their patriotism, while being concerned with the right use of images and music. (Ozouf 203–16) Since Ozouf's 1976 study, historians have analysed the politics of emotions deployed in the French Revolution. William Reddy cogently argued that emotions were as important as reason in revolutionary politics, despite the vision of the eighteenth century of the "Age of Reason" imposed in post-revolutionary times. "Sentimentalism" formed the core of the experience of the Revolution. (Reddy, chap.5; see p.191 for an example described as a "perfect jewel of

[18] Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, vol.30, co.139.
[19] *A Letter from the Right Honourable Edmund Burke to a Noble Lord, on the Attacks made upon him and his Pension in The House of Lords, by the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale*, 13th edn., F. and C. Rivington, London, 1796, p.173-174.

Jacobin sentimentalism") Other historians have demonstrated that verbal and non-verbal communication, reason and sentiment, music and image, as well as discourse and oratory, served to regulate popular emotions.[20] Ironically, the French authorities, especially in the early stages of the Revolution, clung to rather conservative musical forms inherited from ancien regime ceremonials, the *Te Deum* performed at the 14 July 1790 Festival of the Federation being a case of "monarchical fervour". (Biget 64–68) As for the English loyalists, they believed that songsSongs were a powerful tune for influencing and goading the influencable plebsenlisting the passions, because they could be sung in group. The English loyalists tended to see the French Revolution as a plot crafted by a few disgruntled, arrogant philosophers and failed to measure that French revolutionary songs also originated in plebeian writers and in publishers looking for profit (Mason). The loyalists therefore felt that singing worked better on the common people than rational arguments found in pamphlets like those distributed in John Reeves's network of anti-levelling publishers. The example of the French peasant armies rushing to battle while singing alerted them to songs' potential for whipping up and sustaining enthusiasm. Mark Philp quoted a correspondent of Reeves who complained that: "the lower class of people [...] are incapable of reading or understanding any good or serious address to set them right, but through the medium of Vulgar ballads, surely much instruction might be conveyed and much patriotic spirit awakened, witness *Ça Ira"*.[21] Loyalist writers, then, were aware of the power of song, hence their attempts to drive radical songsters from the market and achieve hegemony in both printed songs and in pubs where singing took place. When it came to effectiveness, to the pragmatic force of songs, they had to reckon with French songs, however much they might hate them. *The Patriotic Songster*, a collection published in Ulster in 1815, is a case in point. The collection gathered Protestant, Orangist songs, extolling the Protestant supremacy in Ireland and the memory of William of Orange. The preface highlighted the influence of songs on armies, quoting "Ça ira" during the French Revolution, and "Lillibullero" goading Protestants during the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (*The Patriotic Songster* iv). "Ça ira" appears later in the collection, in a more classic counter-revolutionary fashion, in the song "Satan in hell", presenting a jubilee led by Satan: "Hark! Paris does ring, Ça ira they sing".

Throughout the early nineteenth century, despite the best efforts of loyalists, "Ça ira" was part of the repertoire of radicals, who wielded it in acts of defiance against the ruling oligarchy. James Epstein argued that English radicals used the "constitutionalist idiom", a set of references and practices drawn from English constitutional history, rather than French

[20] On the politics of the emotions during the French Revolution, see, among a vast literature: (Mazeau; Wahnich; a special issue of *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* [n°415, 2024/1] on Emotions politiques: la Révolution françaiseÉmotions révolutionnaires)
[21] Add. MS 16920, fo. 99 r, quoted in (Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain* 66)

revolutionary politics.(Epstein, 'The Constitutionalist Idiom') However, French revolutionary symbols still served a function – they turned heat and pressure on the authorities up or down. The 1793 French festivals, in Sophie Wahnich's reading, functioned as a necessary regulation of popular emotions, that must not be too hot or too cold, spurring the people of Paris into action or consoling them in times of defeat and mourning. "Ça ira" clearly had the "thermostatic function" that Wahnich ascribes to some French revolutionary rituals. "Ça ira" raised the heat, both keeping up the radical troops' morale, and projecting aggression and conflict onto the enemies.

The provocative nature of "Ça ira", due to its association with plebeian violence in 1793, also turned it into a weapon. In 1802, Sir Francis Burdett's election in Westminster was a landmark because he was a radical candidate winning in a key popular constituency. On the last day of the poll, 30 July 1802, Burdett was chaired through the streets of Middlesex in a massive procession involving the singing of "Ça ira" and other songs on the street.(Bowan and Pickering 45) The procession featured revolutionary symbols, including a "No Bastille" poster and the (supposed) keys of the Bastille. "A band of music [...] played "God save the King", "Ça ira", "Rule Britannia", "The Marsellois Hymn, &c."[22] For radicals, the alternation of French revolutionary and British patriotic tunes was no contradiction, because their patriotism appealed to the English liberty and to cosmopolitan solidarity; for them, the values of the French Revolution did not contradict, but complement, loyalty to king and constitution, as they understood it. The loyalists were predictably aghast: "But who can hear, without horror, that this procession was led to the Palace of the Sovereign, before the gates of which a band of music was made to play the gallic revolutionary air–Ça ira! –"(Bowles 45) Still in 1802, in Nottingham, a triumphal procession celebrating the election of a reformer was accompanied by "Ça ira" and the "Marseillaise", but the MP was unseated a year after on the grounds that the crowd had intimidated electors; the election was made "the occasion for introducing legislation strengthening the power of the country magistrates in the manufacturing town".(Thompson 452–53 quotation p.453)

What was at stake was the possibility for oppositional expression in the public space, a central problem for radicals in the period (Navickas). "Ça ira" was heard again in the late 1810s, a moment of crisis that culminated with the massacre of Peterloo in August 1819. Like the cap of liberty, "Ça ira" was a revolutionary object whose meaning was largely indeterminate but whose use lay in its pragmatic dimension of defiant self-assertion, taunting and intimidation. "The decision to display the cap of liberty," James Epstein wrote, "was clearly a calculated gesture, making claims on the control of public space, asserting the right of free expression and assembly, testing the repressive resolve of government and local authority, and signifying more

[22] *Caledonian Mercury*, 2 August 1802.

ambiguously revolutionary intent."(Epstein, *Radical Expression* 74) The same went for "Ça ira": it was a strategic decision for the radicals to play it, and to play it on the streets, whether during Burdett's chairing in 1802 and in subsequent elections, or in northern industrial towns at the time of Peterloo, had great symbolic force. At Burdett's chairing at the close of the 1818 election, the musicians preceding the chair played "Ça ira" while those following the car played "God Save the King", without any sense of impropriety.[23]

"Ça ira" was associated, in loyalist memory, with the memory of 1793 in Paris and mobs advancing for carnage and spoliation, the song was a threat, but it thereby also positioned the group as unrespectable and was therefore a poor choice when it came to highlighting the respectability of the unarmed people (as opposed to the armed mob), as was the case at Peterloo. This is probably why the bands did not play "Ça ira" or the "Marseillaise" at Peterloo but, as Epstein pointed out, ironically reappropriated "God Save the King", reclaiming patriotism and respectability for their own cause.(Epstein, *Radical Expression* 82) But radicals did sing "Ça ira" at dinners at the time Peterloo, for instance when celebrating Hunt's triumphal entry into London following his release from Ilchester gaol after the Peterloo meeting. On that grand occasion (13 September 1819), "the band played Ruled Britannia and Ça ira" and the French song was repeated after a crucial toast to radical reform: "The Universal Suffrage, Annual Parliaments, and Vote by Ballot – the undoubted right of every Briton."(*Peterloo Massacre,* 92, 94) The crowd at Peterloo sang English political songs and showed remarkable restraint before and during the meeting. It may well be that the organizers of the St Peter's Fields meeting refrained from playing French revolutionary songs, because they would be too provocative and would help loyalists characterize the crowd as a lawless mob (which they did anyway), while singing them in dinners sent a more muffled, yet ominous and unmistakeable, threat, since the dinner was semi-public, inside the Crown and Anchor tavern yet in communication with a large crowd outside the building.

Despite the presence of the constitutionalist idiom in most of the radical movement, which placed French symbols in the background, the French Revolution, its cap of liberty, its tricolour flag and its songs still loomed large in the late 1810s and early 1820s. Yet later radicals and Chartists did not take up "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole" in their repertoire, though they were attentive to the singing of such songs in France. "Ça ira", the "Carmagnole" and the "Marseillaise" were seditious songs in France, where they were heard during episodic riots[24] and during the 1830 and 1848 revolutions. The British learnt through the press of incidents involving public singing, a seditious practice that the restored monarchies closely monitored.

[23] "Burdett Procession", *Chester Chronicle*, 17 July 1818, p.4.
[24] On riots, see *The Times*, 8 April 1839, p.5. See also a riot in which the *Carmagnole*, the Marseillaise, the *Chant du depart*: "Latest intelligence", *Bradford Observer*, 11 April 1839, p.2.

On 10 October 1840, the major Chartist newspaper the *Northern Star* noted that "[t]he revolutionary party is beginning to shew itself openly, and to attempt to take the lead" because a part of the audience called for the "Marseillaise" at the Paris Opera and took the advantage of the representation of *William Tell* (a longstanding libertarian theme) "to get up a war-cry"; the police rounded up some of the criers, "a police officer coming forward to state that no song should be sung that was not announced in the bills".

Reactions to Frenchmen singing "Ça ira" and other tunes are indicative of the variety of attitudes towards the revolution of 1848. Paradoxically, "Ça ira" could serve to highlight the reassuring aspect of French revolutions of the nineteenth century, in contrast with the song sung in 1793. This is the case in "Dumoulin; or, the Revolutionist", a sketch of the French revolution of 1830 published in Henry Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine and Humourist* in 1840. Crowds of men, women and children march together singing the "Marseillaise" and "Ça ira". The wine shops are open; "all classes and sexes drank freely". People shout "Ça ira" from their windows, in enthusiasm real or feigned, trying to save their windows.[25] The song turned out to be harmless, just as the damage was minimal. In three days, France could replace an authoritarian monarchy with a liberal one: a vision of peaceful progress (though Dumoulin, a devotee of Napoleon, is something of a misfit).

In 1848, at least one journalist presented "Ça ira" in a harmless guise in an article conjuring up a cacophony of voices singing revolutionary songs. "Ça ira" was drowned in "a fearful charivari of infernal sounds",[26] in a representation of revolution as harmless anarchic incompetence. But Fabrice Bensimon has also shown that, during the 1848 revolution, "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole" still retained their power of frightening in the eyes of conservatives, because the songs represented mob rule and the danger of sinking France into the abyss and propagating revolution abroad. (Bensimon 232) Only a minority in England thought that 1848 would be a repetition of the Terror, but the songs were still topical.

From Carlyle to Dickens: Gothic Carmagnole

As the French Revolution receded into history, the English forgot about the diversity of French songs, remembering only three: the Marseillaise, "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole". Evocations of singing focused on the dance, the body and its movements, rather than music and lyrics. Representations elided the ideological meaning, using instead Gothic tropes of madness or savagery. The "Carmagnole" was presented as a sinister, demented dance.

[25] "Dumoulin; or, the Revolutionist", *New Monthly Magazine and Humourist*, 1840, p.375-382, quotations p.375, 376.
[26] *Times*, 24 April 1848.

Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* was an idiosyncratic, visionary work, which exerted an immense influence, not least on Dickens. In 1835, Carlyle wrote to his brother, then in Paris, asking for "a pianoforte score of *Ça-ira* [...]: the *Marseillaise* we have got here but not the other." He also wanted to know if an elm planted in 1790 as tree of liberty in the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, was still standing(Carlyle, *Letters* 2.532). Carlyle was scrupulous and would look at primary sources rather than second-hand material; but the letter also suggests that an educated middle-class man was unfamiliar with the tune of "Ça ira", nor could he find the score in London. Carlyle used *ça ira* as a verb in the sense of "going on, or marching on in a revolutionary way". He presented singing "Ça ira" and dancing the "Carmagnole" as a transgression, especially of gender roles. Admittedly he did not always present women's political presence in the street as negative, portraying the women who brought back the royal family on the October Days as witty and sensical (Carlyle, *The French Revolution* 1.298-299). Later on, when women burst into the Convention singing and dancing "Ça ira", they are Amazons asking to drill on the Champ de Mars (Part II, Book V, ch. 7) (Carlyle, *The French Revolution* 2.50).

Towards the end of the work, midway in the book "Terror the Order of the Day", the chapter "Carmagnole Complete" (named after a type of jacket worn during the Revolution) presents vivid scenes of desecration set in 1793 during the dechristianization campaigns led by Chaumette and other Montagnards. A group of men dance the carmagnole all night about a bonfire, then set about destroying and plundering holy objects, drinking brandy swallowed out of chalices. "[N]ot untouched with liquor", looters of church property dance the Carmagnole inside the Convention, joined by members of the assembly who dance with "girls flaunting in Priests' vestures." (Carlyle, *The French Revolution* 356) Such scenes have been read as "demonic Eucharist" and a "danse macabre" (Desaulniers 81, 82). They are similar to tropes of madness or intoxication used in the loyalist press of the 1790s to account for seemingly aberrant behaviour. Drink and bodily restlessness, a kind of St Vitus dance, serve to deny any ideological, or rational motivation, explaining aberrant conduct by animality. The role of women, who must be abandoned women or prostitutes, only adds to the transgression, given the dominant ideology of domesticity.

In Carlyle, the "Carmagnole" takes on a Gothic character; it is a symptom of a deeply sick society and a portent of horrors to come. Dickens once declared reading Carlyle's *History* hundreds of times; he corresponded with Carlyle and *A Tale of Two Cities* is indebted to Carlyle's Gothic, demonic imagery. Dickens's own evocation of the "Carmagnole" is revealing of the way such a dance was reviled, represented the darker, utterly unrespectable side of the French Revolution, but beyond that,: "Dickens recognizes that the dance controls the bodies of those engaged, and by mobilizing and controlling it, unleashes deeper, more irrational

forces."(Philp, 'Music and Movement in Britain, 1793-1815' 408) Dickens's representation goes beyond loyalist tropes stating that Carmagnole dancers must be mad or drunk. It is significant Dickens should have chosen the Carmagnole to figure the dark force of instincts. This is due, most probably, to the dissociation between the Marseillaise, a respectable, even lofty song, and the degraded, abject "Carmagnole". Indeed, Dickens's position was rather liberal: one possible ostensible meaning of the novel was to warn the British ruling élites not to commit the mistakes the French aristocracy did before 1789, but to listen to the people's demands as expressed by the Chartists. The Revolution of 1789, then, was a historic necessity, and was good insofar as it brought down the hateful *ancien régime*. The "Carmagnole" becomes an allegory of the disjointed times and especially the terrifying power of the masses. It serves to warn against the risk that the masses might wrest control of socio-political change. As such it confirms Dickens's "Girondin" stance, which may have something to do with Lamartine. The French poet had published his own *History of the Girondists* in 1847. As a history of the French Revolution, it was popular in Britain (more so than Michelet's, published at the same time). Lamartine called "Ça ira, that Marseillaise of assassins", while narrating a demonstration headed by the female democrat and feminist Théroigne de Méricourt; a few pages later he insisted again. "During this long procession the band plated the demagogical airs of the Carmagnole and the Ça ira, those pas de charge of revolts" (Lamartine 493, 497). Whenever "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole" appear in his history, it is in a narrative of a riot, usually involving women at the forefront, with humiliation of noblemen, violence and pillage. Such scenes from the pen of a respected, successful, poet must have influenced the English public and strengthened the association of the two songs with a strong sense of moral and political transgression reversing English gender roles and social deference. Dickens certainly respected Lamartine, at least as a politician. A week after the outbreak of the February 1848 Revolution, he called Lamartine "one of the best fellows in the world" and confided in his handling of the events.[27] As a politician, Lamartine was to many Englishmen the reassuring liberal who could rein in the worst excesses of the revolution; as head of the provisional government and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lamartine had guaranteed France would not export its revolution through war. Without inferring an influence of Lamartine on Dickens, I would suggest there was a broad alignment between the two, an agreement on the necessity of 1789, the badness of 1793, and a disparagement of "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole" respectively, as symbols of the mob's furious, irrational, terrifying force. The necessity for reform was the lesson to draw from the French Revolution, with "Ça ira" and the "Carmagnole" the abject, unredeemable part of revolution.

[27] (Dickens 216) "I think Lamartine, so far, one of the best fellows in the world; and I have lively hopes of that great people establishing a noble republic." (Letter to W.C. Macready, 2 March 1848).

The trajectory of “Ça ira” and the “Carmagnole” in Britain testify to the flexibility of symbols which appeared under various guises in the heated culture of the 1790s, served as weapons in political conflicts and were then subjected to literary elaborations in the Victorian period. The songs were charming for a few months but soon became oppressively threatening as the French Revolution took a violent turn and veered toward republicanism in 1792. At that tipping point, the song, in British polite opinion, became definitively repellent, associated as it was with the mob of the dregs of the people. The uses of the songs narrowed: after the efflorescence of the early 1790s, when “Ça ira” was ubiquitous and could be the object of irony, the songs became associated with French revolutionary violence and were subjected to a loyalist ban. The irruption of crowds singing French songs in public space, in the occasion of election chairings and mass meetings was construed as a threat to the authorities. Communal singing certainly was a way of building up group solidarity. “Ça ira” became a federative classic signalling the radicalism of the French Revolution as it unfolded: it expressed anti-aristocratic feeling in 1790-1791, republicanism by 1792, regicide and stern virtue by 1793. After 1815, it became an oppositional song in France under the restored monarchy. In Britain, the remembrance of the song lingered, but apart from its catchy title, it is doubtful that many Britons would know the lyrics or be able to sing them. French revolutionary songs evoked fresh recent memories after the return to the peace after Waterloo in 1815. Admittedly, the French songs were not present in the repertoire of the workers that protested for democracy in the social movements that gathered strength and culminated in the tragic meeting of “Peterloo”. However, “Ca ira” could still be deployed strategically in some specific agonistic contexts. One generation later, the Victorians experienced the French Revolution as past – using Maurice Halbawch’s famous distinction, the contemporaries of Carlyle and Dickens experienced the Revolution as written “history”, or romance, rather than as felt, living “memory”(Halbwachs) Yet, the persistence, in French culture, of the contrast between the “Marseillaise”, the national anthem which was bound up with the state, and the plebeian, street-urchin, “Ça ira” meant that both Carlyle and Dickens could use “Ça ira” as emblem of the unredeemable, black energy of the people while salvaging the respectable ideals of the first French Revolution in its liberal, rights-of-man, pre-regicide phase. The deployment of the songs corresponds to a “liberal” reading aligned with Lamartine’s praise of the Girondins. Yet such a reading could barely assuage the fears about mob rules, which lurk in accounts of the French Revolution in the form of the ignoble crowd singing “Ça ira”.

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