

MARIE MADELEINE JODIN
1741–1790

FELICIA GORDON AND
P. N. FURBANK

MARIE MADELEINE JODIN 1741–1790
ACTRESS, *PHILOSOPHE* AND FEMINIST

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Preface and Acknowledgements

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A book of this nature, which crosses over a number of disciplinary boundaries, as well as over various national boundaries, has led us to seek advice from many friends and colleagues who have been generous in sharing their expertise. We wish to acknowledge the kind assistance of the following: Dr Mary Abbott, Professor Tim Blanning, Count Frantz Bernstorff-Gyldensteen, Dr Richard Butterick, Alex Cain, Dr Anne-Marie Chouillet, Dr Máire Cross, Professor Richard J. Evans, Dr Robert I. Frost, Professor Therese Kostkiewiczowa, Dr J. T. Lukowski, Bridget Morris, Tom Morris, Professor Karen Offen, Judy Bibbins, Dr Thomas Munch-Petersen, Count Fritz von der Schulenburg, Professor Jacek Staszewski, Dr Don Watts and Professor David Williams.

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Introduction

Briefly notorious in her own lifetime, Marie Madeleine Jodin has since been almost lost to history, save as a footnote to Diderot studies. However, her life story forms an arresting narrative, opening, as it does, new perspectives on the world of eighteenth-century women, on the feuds and politics of European court theatres, and, above all, entailing the discovery of an important, and previously almost unknown, French feminist. We find that in 1790, Jodin, a former actress and protégée of the philosopher and playwright Denis Diderot, published a treatise entitled *Vues législatives pour les femmes* (*Legislative Views for Women*), the first signed, female-authored, feminist treatise of the French Revolutionary period.

Central to Jodin's story is her relationship with Diderot, a remarkable friendship between the volatile younger actress and the ebullient Enlightenment philosopher, recorded in the series of letters written to her by Diderot between 1765 and 1769, when she was in her mid-twenties. They have long been a subject of interest to eighteenth-century scholars, and are included in full in this study.¹ Saint-Beuve enthused about them as an 'admirable little course in practical morality', though he fell into a slightly patronising strain, not uncharacteristic of many scholars' treatment of women stage performers, when discussing Jodin: 'a pretty actress, a good and frank person, but volatile, turbulent and amorous'.²

Even with nothing more than Diderot's letters as evidence, one is intrigued by Marie Madeleine. For all of what Diderot called her follies and the 'violence' of her character, he clearly felt she mattered and took infinite pains to advise her on her acting, her morals and her financial affairs. Her vitality, intelligence, warmth of heart and impulsiveness emerge strongly from his letters. Other sources reveal a career of the most dramatic contrasts: a devastating upbringing; an agonising relationship with her father and an intense love-hate relationship with her fond, but foolish, mother; an early adult life passed in the back streets of Paris and in its prisons; a brief, but successful, career in court theatres; a growing participation in the intellectual culture of the newly emerging Republic of Letters; and finally, authorship of *Legislative Views for Women*. In Marie Madeleine we perceive a rebellious adolescent who eventually, after a contentious career on the stage, was, partly through the influence of her mentor, to turn *philosophe* herself. It was her intellectual passion combined with a wide experience of life, involving love affairs, scandals, libels and lawsuits, that eventually qualified her to write her *Legislative Views*. A contemporary of those other great eighteenth-century feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges, Marie Madeleine Jodin attempted to make women's rights and duties as citizens central to the legislative concerns of the Revolution.

Jodin's life also offers valuable insights into what is termed 'history from below'. Whilst memoirs and biographies of aristocratic women and upwardly

mobile *salonnières* like Mme Geoffrin and Mme Roland abound, the chronicles of women lower down the social scale are far fewer in number, their lives often undocumented in contemporary records.³ The traces of Jodin's rebellious career have to a great extent been preserved not in memoirs of polite society, but in police and other official files. Jodin, we learn, was the daughter of a Genevan watchmaker working in Paris, who shared her father's impatience with the dominance of birth over talent in the society of her day. Her childhood and adolescence exemplify the terrible effects of forced religious conversion as well as the fate of those women who refused to accept the discipline of the family, the convent and the morals police. As an actress she experienced both celebrity and public obloquy. Though fond of employing the tropes of feminine weakness and vulnerability in her writing, she demonstrated a ferocious tenacity in pursuit of her rights. We shall see that she was far from fulfilling the passive, feminine ideal of the period.

Debates on women's exclusion from 'the Rights of Man' in the French Revolution have primarily focused on women's clubs, on women of the Paris crowd and on militant individuals. However a study of this actress/intellectual gives us an insight into the political and civil marginalisation of other socially excluded groups, such as Protestants, actors and prostitutes in *ancien régime* France. Jodin's citizen's manifesto for women, written at the close of her life, was not an anomalous document by an actress bizarrely turned philosopher, but the mature product of a turbulent life devoted both to drama and to learning. Her final project was to turn Enlightenment theory into practice, to educate her sex for citizenship. Largely self-educated, she had read widely and experienced the intellectual excitement of the culture of *les lumières*. By her independence of mind, and eventually of fortune, Jodin strikes one in many ways as a very modern woman. The language of rights pervades her discourse. That she should have found it possible to theorise the problem of women's position in eighteenth-century French society demonstrates that she understood her own experiences as emblematic of wider social and political issues.

As the Saint-Beuve appreciation quoted above indicates, Jodin has hitherto been considered almost entirely in relation to the letters which Diderot wrote to her during her periods as an actress in Warsaw, Dresden and Bordeaux. In these he expanded, with great brilliance, his theory of a 'fourth-wall' concept of the stage, advocating a naturalistic style of acting. His advice to Jodin turned upon the notion that acting was a school of ethics. Nor, as Diderot was aware, was the theatre at all tangential to evolving political culture. The relationship between aesthetic theory and theatrical practice, developed in these letters, lies at the heart of eighteenth-century debates about morality, political representation and the moulding of good citizens.

Jodin's *Vues législatives pour les femmes*, like Diderot's letters, has never been available in English, and neither is there, either in French or in English

any extensive analysis of its arguments. Jodin has received only the briefest mention in the numerous studies of early French feminism of the Revolutionary period. Whilst her career in Warsaw (1765–66) has been sketched in histories of Polish theatre (see Chapter 3), none of this material has been available in English, and Polish scholars seem to have been unaware of her subsequent evolution as a *philosophe*/feminist. Jodin's stay in Dresden (1767–68) has never been chronicled, neither has her love affair with the Danish envoy to Dresden, Count Werner von der Schulenburg XXV, nor the brouhaha and diplomatic fall-out it eventually provoked. Paul Vernière has written a sympathetic study of Jodin in the context of Enlightenment thought, but did not have access to the extensive archival material recently discovered by the present authors.

It must be admitted that one of the enduring if frivolous pleasures of archival research is the feeling that one is engaged in unravelling a detective story. Clues emerge from one archive which may be explained by documents in another place many miles away. Some mysteries, of course, remain unsolved. Diplomatic discretion, or the destruction of archives by fire and war, have obliterated important evidence, including the loss of the one known painting of the actress. But enough remains to construct a coherent portrait of a distinctive, powerful and disruptive personality, as well as to experience the feelings of alarm, exasperation and admiration that she inspired in her contemporaries. Much of our archival material takes the form of letters: the Jodin/Dutertre family's letters of accusation against Mme Jodin and her daughter; Diderot's letters to Jodin; Jodin's emotionally charged letters to the Court Chamberlain in Warsaw, pleading for justice and financial assistance; and diplomatic letters between the Saxon and Danish courts concerning the scandal surrounding Jodin and her lover, Werner von der Schulenburg. Jodin's biography, one feels, could easily have taken the form of an eighteenth-century epistolary novel.

This book is a collaborative work. It began as a project by P. N. Furbank to publish an English edition of Diderot's letters to Jodin and a translation of the *Vues législatives*, with accompanying commentary and notes. Subsequent archival research by Felicia Gordon revealed the possibility of writing a greatly expanded contextual biography. We have corresponded continuously over points of interpretation and we have had, amicably, to agree to disagree regarding Diderot's theories about the theatre. In other respects, our text demonstrates the way seemingly straightforward events are sometimes coloured, sometimes doctored and sometimes suppressed, both when they occurred and subsequently. We have occasionally been obliged to adopt a stance of speculative uncertainty before the archival evidence, but fortunately for the historian and the reader, the voices of the actors in Jodin's drama call out clearly to us across the distance of nearly two and a half centuries. We begin with the *cri de coeur* of her unhappy father.

Notes

1. The letters, twenty-one in number and first published in 1821, are reprinted in Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, ed. Georges Roth, V–IX (Paris: Editions de Minuit 1959–63). Roth has also written an analysis of the letters, ‘Diderot et sa pupille Mademoiselle Jodin’, *Lettres nouvelles* (December, 1956), pp. 699–714, as has Paul Vernière, ‘Marie Madeleine Jodin, amie de Diderot et témoin des Lumières’, *Studies on Voltaire*, 58 (1967), pp. 1765–75.
2. C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits littéraires* (Paris: Didier, 1852).
3. For an analysis of *salonnières* in eighteenth-century France, see Roland Bonnel and Catherine Rubinger, eds, *Femmes savantes et femmes d’esprit: Women Intellectuals of the French Eighteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

‘This accursed child’

On 16 February 1757, Jean Jodin, a Genevan watchmaker domiciled near Paris, wrote a despairing letter to his sister, Marie Jodin, painting his domestic circumstances in the blackest terms:¹

My dear sister,

I do not know how to describe my situation to you. You will judge my state best by the cruel but indispensable course of action that I am taking, rather than by the best-expressed and most moving narrative.

That daughter [of mine], or rather that monster clothed in a human face whom you have protected, each day gives me new causes for alarm. Every day this accursed child breaks another link in the chain that ties fathers and mothers to their children and whenever I come home, I find myself wondering whether I will find my daughter battered to death by her mother, or her mother dying from her daughter’s blows. Indeed, I do not know whether death would not be preferable to the harsh treatment that this best of all mothers suffers several times a day. Finally, I am threatened with seeing my good name publicly reviled. This prospect terrifies me. I could not survive it and it is to prevent this misfortune that I beg you, my dearest sister, in the name of everything sacred and respectable, to get rid of this object of iniquity and torment for me by placing her in a house of correction. Time presses, and I keep her here, fearing she may escape. She must not sleep in our lodging tonight, which thought leads me to suggest the following.

You must immediately beseech les Dames des Nouvelles Catholiques to take care of her for a few days and during this time we will together make the necessary arrangements to remove her as far away as possible, so that her pension can suffice for her board and lodging and if the ladies’ answer to this request that you present to them is favourable, you will have the sisterly goodness to come and fetch her this evening at twilight with your servant and a carriage to take her to her destination. I will not be at home because I feel that I may be less of a Stoic than I thought and at the moment of finishing this letter, I am paying to Nature a tribute from which I had thought to have freed myself. I embrace you with all my heart and am with all the most sincere friendship.

My very dear sister,

Jean Jodin

Jean Jodin had moved to Paris around 1730, where he made a distinguished name for himself in watchmaking. He became a friend of Denis Diderot and a contributor to the *Encyclopédie*. In this remarkable letter, Jean Jodin describes scenes of acute domestic violence, engaged in by both mother and daughter, in which the daughter is described as a ‘monster’ and ‘object of iniquity’, the mother as ‘the best of mothers’. Both, according to the father, threaten to kill the other. Jean Jodin gives no *reason* for these horrific scenes, but he does express the fear that his good name will be reviled. Did he not know of the

charge laid at the mother's door by relatives and neighbours that she, his wife, prostituted their daughter for gain? Was it possible that he could be so ignorant of his family's circumstances? Does he not reveal his knowledge of the activities by admitting that he fears for his good name? Finally the rhetorical flourish with which he closes: 'I am paying to Nature a tribute from which I had thought to have freed myself', a circumlocution for giving way to tears, has a markedly controlled and literary flavour, as though Jean Jodin paused in the midst of his domestic crisis to convey an emotive effect. The entire letter, from its meticulous planning of how to surprise his daughter and carry her off to the convent, to the dramatic rendering of the domestic scene, reads like one of Diderot's *dramas*, though one which lacked a happy ending.

That 'object of iniquity and torment', that 'monster clothed in a human face' was Marie Madeleine Jodin (1741–90), then aged sixteen.² Her father's cry of despair forms part of the dossier of letters of denunciation from Marie Madeleine's uncles, aunts, cousins and neighbours which led to the incarceration of the girl and her mother in la Salpêtrière Prison in 1761 for approximately two years.³

Marie Madeleine Jodin initially engaged the interest of historians thanks to a series of twenty-one letters written to her between 1765 and 1769 from Denis Diderot, the philosopher, art critic and dramatist.⁴ From these we learn that 'the monster' had, by 1765, been metamorphosed into a successful actress, joined the Comédie-Française, and had been engaged in the troupe of the entrepreneur, Carol Tomatis, to play in Warsaw. Diderot's letters, which are of absorbing interest in themselves, offered Marie Madeleine Jodin professional and personal advice, showing him in his role of moral tutor and practical philanthropist at the same time as they developed his own aesthetic on acting and the theatrical illusion.

In 1790, twenty-one years after the close of Diderot's correspondence, Marie Madeleine Jodin published what is probably the first signed and female-authored feminist treatise of the revolutionary period, *Vues législatives pour les femmes, adressées à l'Assemblée Nationale, par Mlle Jodin, fille d'un citoyen de Genève*.⁵ One of the questions that naturally arises in considering her career is how did the teenage hoyden, described in Jean Jodin's letter, become first a successful actress and subsequently a well-educated intellectual?

This study will construct a series of portraits of Marie Madeleine Jodin in the context of her work as an actress and her intellectual life drawing on archival sources and eighteenth-century social and intellectual history.⁶ It will link the 'monster' of Jean Jodin's account with the daughter's turbulent stage career, culminating in an analysis of her feminist convictions. Yet the idea that she only became a feminist at the end of her life is implausible. If being a feminist meant demanding the same rights of citizenship and social recognition for women as for men, one can find evidence that Jodin's fiery personality was not one to accept her status as being one of inferiority, either as a woman or in any

other capacity, even in her early youth. Though there are lacunae in the chronological account of Jodin's life, her ebullient if mercurial character, her energy, her tendency to sarcasm and her love of conflict emerge consistently, both from her own sparse writing and the possibly biased, but nevertheless convincing, accounts of others. One can construct an archaeology of a troubled but talented individual who at the end of her life transformed both her traumatic experience of prison and her dramatic talents into a closely reasoned and socially conservative plea for women's right to control their own lives, hence the *Legislative Views for Women*. Women were to become not only citizens, but to legislate for themselves and their particular social needs.

The Jodin family was of French Protestant descent originating from Blois. Jean Jodin's father, Louis Jodin emigrated to Geneva about 1704 and gained the right of domicile on 8 June 1711. His domestic life, like that of his descendants, does not appear to have been exemplary. He was called before the Consistory Court for gaming (1708) and reproached with maltreating his wife and cohabiting with a maidservant (1714). Two of Louis Jodin's sons, Jean (born 12 June 1713) and Pierre, re-emigrated to Paris where they successfully continued the family trade of watchmaking, working under the aegis of a maternal uncle, Jean Baptiste Dutertre, master watchmaker, who had a prosperous workshop on the Quai des Orfèvres.⁷

Jean Jodin came into the public eye in 1754 when he published a technical treatise on watchmaking, *Les Echappemens à repos*, which incorporated a critique of the patronage and training system for watchmakers and pointed to the need for state encouragement for technical branches of knowledge.⁸ It is evident, both from Jean Jodin's letter of 1757 and his *Echappemens* that he was a man of some culture as well as possessing technical gifts. Jean Jodin's treatise brought him to the attention of Denis Diderot whose work on the *Encyclopédie* had led him to cultivate literate artisans.⁹ He drew 'on the help of artists [i.e. Craftsmen], because there are many precious and knowledgeable men among them, though, for reasons of social status, the doors of academies are shut to them.'¹⁰ The *Encyclopédie* entry for 'Artisan' (page 745) elevates the status of watchmakers in particular and may have been an indirect tribute to Jodin: 'ARTISAN, masculine noun by which is designated those workers who practise those mechanical arts which are presumed to require the least intelligence. One says of a good cobbler, that he is a good *artisan*; and of a skilled watchmaker, that he is a great artist'. Jodin's treatise formed part of a larger polemic waged in the pages of the *Mercure de France* on the technical merits or demerits of watch mechanisms (the ancients in this quarrel backed the *échappement à recul*, the moderns, the *échappement à repos*), which brought him the honour of a letter in the *Mercure* (August 1754) from the academician and astronomer Lalande, attacking his work. In the second edition of his *Echappemens* (1756), Jodin retaliated with a broadside at Lalande.

In his letter Lalande had raised not only technical objections to Jodin's thesis but had argued that a mere artisan would not have the necessary scientific and mathematical knowledge to theorise about the best watchmaking mechanism, no matter how skilled he might be in his craft. Having suggested that Jodin was by his trade and station in life excluded from scholarly debate, Lalande concluded by praising those very 'mechanical skills' which though remarkable nevertheless entailed severe intellectual limitations: 'I believe that M. Jodin is one of those most able to do honour to a profession as distinguished as that of watchmaking, in which one can both shine at invention and cleverness of execution and in the depth of thought and of resourcefulness in carrying it out.'¹¹

Jodin replied to this compliment, which he interpreted as condescending, with ill-advised gusto. He was drawn to wax satirical (a tendency passed on to his daughter) at Lalande's expense. He challenged the Academician's *de haut en bas* attitude. Lalande, Jodin claimed, would be incapable of actually *making* a watch, but was happy to tell others how to do it. Though watchmaking derived from mathematics, a mathematician could not make a good watch. Watchmaking required practical experience as well as theoretical knowledge. Jodin showed particular annoyance at what he saw as Lalande's tendency to patronise him because the former was a member of the Academy of Sciences:

I shall break one more lance against this Champion [Jodin wrote] purely because of his title Academician with which he is decorated. The manner in which he attacks me and the arguments he puts forward would not merit a response without this sublime quality [of Academician] which might impress people. In any case, a Worker, in combat with an Academician of the Royal Academy of Sciences, would be a struggle where even defeat would be honourable. What would it be like to be lucky enough to win?¹²

Jodin's polemical tone and the threat of further debate so alarmed Lalande that he complained to the official censor, Malherbes, in November 1755, alleging harassment by a mere watchmaker and asking that Malherbes exert his authority to prohibit publication of any further attacks from Jodin:¹³

You will be only too well aware of how the impudence of a watchmaker has caused me annoyance some three months ago, not to wish to spare me any recurrence. Today, Sir, I have learned that when M. Lepaute's book in which I have published some observations appears, Jodin, along with the son of M. le Roy, prepares for my benefit some writings as tasteful as their first efforts.

Lalande's alarm seems to have won a sympathetic hearing from Malherbes. No more was heard from Jean Jodin in print. His despairing letter to his sister dates from two years after the Lalande affair and by the time of his death in 1761 the family appears to have been destitute. One wonders whether Lalande's enmity and influence had been sufficiently powerful to deprive Jodin of his livelihood.

This quarrel can be read in the broader context of the eighteenth-century debate on the importance of the practical arts and technologies. Jean Jodin defended experience or experiment over mere theory while admitting that for the artisan practitioner who must develop his expertise over many years of committed application, the leisure for speculation was difficult to obtain. 'One ceases necessarily to study when one works; one ceases to work when one studies ... One is reduced to consecrate those short intervals available in handicraft labour to the study of principles that it is essential to know thoroughly ...'.¹⁴

Though clockmaking in the eighteenth century was at the cutting edge of both pure and applied science, the artisan theorist was caught between the desire to innovate and the necessity of maintaining the traditional skills of his craft by constant application. The practical difficulties Jodin faced in innovation were, he claimed, compounded by the closed nature of the profession. Only those who had done their apprenticeship in Paris were eligible for the title of *Maître Horloger*. Foreigners were not admitted, even though Swiss clockmakers formed the backbone of the profession in France. Jodin's exclusion from the ranks of *Maîtres Horloger* could help to explain his precarious financial position. He was obliged to function as a workman, though as Lalande himself remarked; he was among the most skilled of his profession. Nor was the *Echappemens* without its political dimension; it included a patriotic paean to the 'industrious subjects of my Republic [Geneva] who have contributed so much to the advancement and excellence of watchmaking in France over the past thirty years'. In an age when rank and deference still were taken for granted, Jean Jodin displayed a republican impatience with both. This spirit of independence and a wider culture than that of the artisan's workbench was the principal inheritance he left to his daughter.

What is known of Madeleine Dumas Jodin, Marie Madeleine's mother and her role in her daughter's upbringing?¹⁵ She was born in 1705 at Lunel, in Provence, the daughter of a French Calvinist refugee in Geneva. Married young to a M. Lafauzes, she was already widowed by the age of twenty-five when the impressionable Jean Jodin met her in Lyons. After her first husband's death, she had been imprisoned in Geneva for two years in a house of correction for 'libertinage', presumably prostitution. According to the unflattering and probably unreliable account of her brother-in-law, Pierre Jodin, she was a sexually experienced and designing young woman who, meeting Jean Jodin, then aged about fifteen, 'captivated and debauched him' and persuaded him to take her to Paris where he joined the workshop of his maternal uncle, Dutertre. The Dutertre family strongly disapproving of Jean Jodin's irregular union, insisted that he must leave the woman, or marry her, or quit his uncle's employ.

Jean Jodin chose marriage. As we see from his letter of 1757, he considered, or claimed to consider his wife 'the best of mothers' although Diderot later suggested to Marie Madeleine that the watchmaker had a poor opinion of his

wife's character: 'She is, I think, the most unfortunate creature that I know. Your father thought that she had no capacity to feel anything; he did not know her well enough.'¹⁶ Diderot and his wife showed great kindness towards Mme Jodin and evidently were fond of her. Mme Diderot, who was intensely respectable, would have been unlikely to include her in the family circle had she believed Mme Jodin had prostituted her daughter. In addition, as the same and subsequent letters testify, her daughter remained desperately committed to her mother. On the other hand we have the family depositions denoting terrible arguments between the two. Did Mme Jodin sell her daughter into prostitution and profit from her earnings as the family alleges? Certainly the inability to manage her finances seems to have been a source of anxiety for her family. Diderot charged her with extravagance and with being gullible in money matters. This could help explain the alleged exploitation of Marie Madeleine as a young girl and Jean Jodin's financial ruin.

From her letters, it is clear that Mme Jodin was less well educated than her husband. Although she could read and write, her spelling was almost entirely phonetic. However, in an age when literacy among women was very limited and spelling was not well taught to girls, it is perhaps more surprising that she was literate at all. Thanks to her husband's friendship with Diderot, Mme Jodin benefited from his protection, from 1765, when Marie Madeleine went to Poland, until her return to France in 1768. As indicated above, Diderot's views on Mme Jodin did not remain entirely positive. He came to appreciate the fact that she was a hopeless spendthrift and advised her daughter to be strict in apportioning an allowance. One may suppose that Jean Jodin was, as his brother alleges, captivated by the young widow in Lyons, who may have possessed considerable beauty, a legacy which was passed on to her daughter. Nevertheless, the central charge alleged against her by the family (and vigorously denied by Marie Madeleine and her mother) was that she prostituted her daughter and lived off her immoral earnings.

Jean Jodin's analysis of the economic disabilities suffered by Swiss nationals in France pointed to another key trauma in his daughter's childhood – her early abjuration of the Protestant faith. In 1750 at the age of nine, Marie Madeleine Jodin converted, or was converted, to Catholicism, which gained her a yearly pension of 200 *livres*, not a fortune but a respectable addition to the family's modest income. We can suppose that consent was not seen as an issue initially but that it became an issue because the child rebelled dramatically against the religious teaching and regime of the convents in which she was placed. While her parents settled at Saint-Germain en Laye, outside Paris, Marie Madeleine was put under the guardianship of her aunt, Marie Jodin and sent to the first of many convents, la Congrégation de Vernon, for instruction.¹⁷ In the course of the next seven years, apparently resisting violently the disciplines of convent life and her conversion, she was expelled from one institution after another. By

1751 she was the subject of an *Ordre du Roi*, the equivalent of, or substitute for, a *lettre de cachet* and forcibly removed to the Maison des Nouvelles Catholiques in Paris, the same convent to which her father wished to send her in 1757.¹⁸ Subsequent moves took her further and further away from Paris, ultimately to Auxerre in Burgundy. Marie Madeleine was returned to her parents in 1756, the despair of the convents and of her aunt, but the home environment did not, as we have seen from her father's letter, provide a happier solution.

Marie Madeleine Jodin's disruptive and rebellious youth is both personally and socially revealing. Her experiences as the daughter of a Protestant in eighteenth-century France reflect some of the major religious tensions of the period, which in their political impact formed an important strand in undermining royal authority.¹⁹ This ferocious Protestant child, offering an instinctive rebellion against the disciplines of religion and the family, illuminates on an individual level the status of Protestants in eighteenth-century France. Though subjects of the King, they were not citizens. To convert to Catholicism was to make as much a civil as a religious choice in favour of the capacity to enjoy full civil status. So in Marie Madeleine's conversion, aged nine, we see mirrored some of the practical consequences of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (18 October 1685), which meant that from now on all French subjects must be registered at birth, at marriage and at death, according to Catholic ritual. Protestants had no civil route by which they could attain legal status for their families. Non-Catholics were excluded from public office and various professions. In effect, Protestants, apart from being forbidden to practise their religion formally, lacked a legal identity and could not pass on property to their descendants. Protestant parents were under great pressure to allow their children to convert: 'The authorities ... sometimes sequestered Protestant children in Catholic schools to preserve them from the errors of their parents, in spite of protests that this practice violated the principle of paternal authority upon which the crown itself rested.'²⁰ It was even alleged that the police kidnapped Protestant children, a belief that provoked riots in Paris in May 1750, the year Marie Madeleine was 'converted'.²¹ It is therefore entirely possible that her conversion was not even willed by her parents, though clearly the pension of 200 *livres* would act as an emollient form of persuasion.

We may assume a clear link between the child's rejection of religious indoctrination as evidenced by her expulsion from six convents and the terrible rages which her father records in his letter of 1757. Jodin's tendency to outbursts of anger continued as a feature of her adult life, attested to by contemporaries in Poland and Diderot's remonstrances in his letters. Yet in spite of the humiliations of her arrest and imprisonment, she exhibited a strong sense of her own worth in terms of her intellect and pride in her birth. She made much of her status as the daughter of a citizen of Geneva which, like Rousseau, she felt conferred dignity on its bearer. She included this designation 'fille d'un

citoyen de Genève' on the title page of her published work, the *Vues législatives*.²² As Diderot said to Jodin in his first letter to her in Warsaw: 'you are an unhappy child, but a well-born one'. It would seem that Jodin identified with her father's republican and intellectual heritage and must never have known of his letter of denunciation included in the Bastille file. Ironically, as an adult, she fulfilled, with Diderot's encouragement, the role of dutiful daughter which her youth had done so much to disrupt.

Parental and royal authority: the legal context

Marie Madeleine and her mother were arrested at their flat on the rue Mazarine and imprisoned in la Salpêtrière on 16 November 1761.²³ What were the legal procedures employed and what were the crimes charged against them? At the core of their situation must be seen the idea of familial authority and the role of the *police des mœurs* (morals police or vice squad) in enforcing that authority.²⁴ Under the *ancien régime* it was not necessary that they should be tried in court or even formally accused. We find, however, that their case was carefully investigated, according to legal requirements, and records were kept of depositions against them as well as their own pleas of innocence. The question of the authority of the family lay at the centre of this domestic tragedy. To read the Jodin/Dutertre family's letters of denunciation of 1761 is to be confronted with what appears to be an almost complete breakdown of family loyalties, in the name of preserving the family reputation. Aunts', uncles' and cousins' depositions and the father's earlier letter of 1757 form a dossier of hostility and despair.²⁵

When in October 1761, the Jodin/Dutertre family applied to the Comte de Saint Florentin, Minister of State, for the incarceration of Marie Madeleine and her mother, an application which had to be supported by signed written statements, the dossier of letters assembled by them as evidence revealed interesting confusions, both in what was being charged and who were the allegedly guilty parties. The Bastille dossier can be summarised as containing the following:

1. Letter, 27 November 1761 to le Comte de Saint Florentin from Madeleine Jodin, *mère*, and Madeleine Jodin, *filie*, pleading for clemency and claiming that the charges brought against them are false.
2. Letter from Jean Jodin to his sister, 16 February 1757, cited above and submitted as contributory evidence by his sister, Marie Jodin.
3. Three letters by Marie Madeleine Jodin, undated, to two male acquaintances, le Comte de Rochemore and M. Picard and presented to the authorities by her mother as evidence of her daughter's immoral life.

4. Joint letter of denunciation against Marie Madeleine Jodin, from Madeleine Jodin, mother, Pierre Jodin, uncle, Marie Jodin, aunt, Dutertre, uncle.
5. Six depositions against the mother and the daughter dated October 1761 from a neighbour, Mme Marbel and the Jodin and Dutertre family.
6. Summary of the case by the presiding police officer.
7. Account of the arrest of mother and daughter, 16 November 1761.
8. A largely illegible letter of four sides on poor paper from Mme Jodin to an unnamed relation or friend dated 2 March 1762, pleading for release into a religious community and out of the 'hospital' or prison. This letter reiterates the mother's and daughter's mutual devotion, as did their plea of 27 November 1761 to the Comte de Saint Florentin.

Though there was no public trial, as indeed was usual with most cases brought by the *police des mœurs*, it is tempting to describe it in terms of the case for the Prosecution and the case for the Defence. What were the safeguards for the accused, who did not appear before a tribunal and who could have no strategy for defence, against purely malicious accusations? Though secretive, the system was not entirely arbitrary. A law of 1708 required that the declarations of the accusers/denunciators be signed and could not be anonymous; that of 1713 required that the accusers swear their depositions on oath. There was also the possibility of appeal against conviction to the Parlement. However, no appeals have been recorded, and the vast majority of cases, like Jodin's own, were summarily judged.²⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that we have the letters of the Bastille Archive duly signed and dated and that the police officer in charge interviewed neighbours and assembled a dossier at least points to a methodical investigation of the charge. Yet the outlook for the Defence in any such case cannot have been hopeful.

The case for the Prosecution is the easiest to mount. The police summary of the Jodin affair offers a version of the shifts of familial strategy towards this troublesome daughter. Initially, the Jodin/Dutertre family, in a letter also signed by her mother, accused Marie Madeleine of refusing conversion, of being a libertine, of having been expelled from six convents due to bad behaviour and of having exhibited murderous violence towards her mother. The mother, Madeleine Jodin, subsequently retracted these accusations whereupon her in-laws, the Jodin/Dutertre families, united in denouncing her, bringing the following charges against mother and daughter:

That her mother conducts herself in as reprehensible a manner as her daughter, that she was a debauchee before her marriage, that she prostitutes her daughter and divides with her her earnings from *libertinage*, that this division gives rise to differences between them which lead them to threaten reciprocally to kill each other, that the profit which she (the mother) gains from her daughter is the only motive which led her to retract her accusations

which she had formerly brought against her, and that finally both equally merit being locked up.²⁷

It is alleged that, as a child, Marie Madeleine refused conversion and indulged in 'libertinage'. This was an elastic term whose meaning ranged from freethinking to insubordination to indulgence in sexual licence. At the core of the concept was the refusal to accept authority, hence the pivotal example of the Don Juan myth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as depicted by Molière and Da Ponte/Mozart, of someone whose sexual profligacy is based on the rejection of familial and godly authority. For women the idea of libertinage included that of disobedience to one's family: 'A girl is a libertine when she does not wish to obey her mother, or a wife her husband'.²⁸ 'Libertine' suggested lack of order, even unreason, in women, and, almost inevitably, loose morals. Though often used as a synonym for prostitution the two were by no means synonymous. A libertine girl might be one who had a lover or lovers before marriage, though not necessarily for gain. The deposition of Marie Madeleine's uncle, Pierre Jodin, who signs himself 'Privilegié du Roi', illustrates this point. Alleging that the evils of the mother's 'libertinage' before marriage were passed on to the children (of whom apart from Marie Madeleine no other mention is made), he described the mother and daughter as: 'an unnatural mother and a perverted daughter. An unnatural mother who while her husband was alive and without his knowing it, had already on numerous occasions prostituted her daughter ... of which fact I learned from the very lips of this daughter with as much sorrow as surprise.' He then goes on to speak of the mother's attempt to oppose her daughter's '*fantasy and libertinage which did not bring in the same advantages*' (my italics).²⁹ This '*fantaisie et libertinage*' must refer to Marie Madeleine's attempts to follow her own fancy and to engage in a love affair, but not for monetary gain. The semantics of 'libertinage', then, are central to Jodin's case. The idea of a young woman leading an independent life and perhaps taking lovers was to be distinguished from prostitution and, from the point of view of both familial and state authority, could be considered as a worse threat to the social order.

The Jodin Bastille file illustrates the adage that under the *ancien régime* society was composed of families rather than individuals. This was particularly true for women who did not have rights over their own person, but were under parental guardianship until married.³⁰ In Marie Madeleine's case, not only was she accused of refusing religious authority but also of rebelling against her mother. Yet if the Jodin and Dutertre relations were telling the truth, the mother had undermined her own maternal authority by prostituting her daughter. There was, however, no disposition by the family, or the authorities, to treat Marie Madeleine as a victim.

Apart from the family's allegations, what evidence is there for the charge of prostitution? The mother, Mme Jodin, submitted three letters written by her daughter as proof of the latter's immoral conduct. The first, addressed to the

Comte de Rochemore, asked for a rendezvous and referred to an unnamed 'project' upon which they were jointly engaged:³¹

I waited for you Sir, the whole day, as you asked me to do. This lack of consideration alarms me for I know that there is little stability in those projects which drag on. Nevertheless, since the work is so advanced, I flatter myself that you will certainly wish to instruct me whether I should continue it. I have not yet planned to show it to anyone and if you repeat your promise to me, I would be pleased to keep it for you, no matter what difficulties that would cause me. Remember that I told you the other day that I was concerned. I will try to satisfy him by the time you have finished since apparently you cannot do it sooner. [This comment is obscure.] I beg you to answer me in person to see where we are at this juncture.

Sir, Your very humble and obedient servant, Jodin. If your business permitted you to call this afternoon, I would be very much obliged.³²

This missive does not sound like a letter of romantic assignation unless it is a highly coded one. Jodin addresses the Count with some formality but speaks as though they were fellow scholars engaged on a joint project. Though one might think that this letter had little that was sinister about it, from a prosecution standpoint a young woman of respectable family did not enter into a clandestine correspondence. It would not have been the content of this letter as much as the fact of having written it that would have seemed suspicious to her family and the police. It is especially tantalising that we do not know the nature of the 'project' to which she refers.

The next two letters (ff. 167 and 170) are addressed to a M. Picard, a merchant draper living opposite the market, rue Saint Honoré. These do appear to reveal a liaison of some kind, since Jodin was giving Picard his marching orders, in a mocking and scornful style. The two former lovers had apparently quarrelled and were threatening each other with exposure. In her letter, Jodin rejects Picard's apparent accusation that, because she fell in love with him, she was a loose woman. Although undated, these letters would seem to be written after her father's death in March 1761:

I am not at all pleased by your treatment. Dare if you like to do me all the harm that you have imagined. I defy you to frighten me. The faults that I may have committed were learned from you. I am not at all concerned as to what all the scum that surround you might say. By their behaviour they are not fit to kiss the tips of my shoes. You advise me to be ruled by others. I have only ever taken advice from my own brain and if I were to follow yours, you would need to act differently. Goodbye, Sir. Don't bother to reply for I will return your letter unopened.

As to the threat I made against you, this is also a police matter. We have the same rights as you.

Though parts of this letter are illegible, Jodin's defiant tone is clear. The remark: 'We have the same rights as you' is particularly striking.

The second letter continues the quarrel but on a lighter note: