

The House of Aumont and Blake's *French Revolution*

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1 **I**N William Blake's *French Revolution* (1791) there is a minor character who is identified only as "Aumont."¹ He makes his first appearance in lines 159-67, where he informs King Louis XVI and the nobles that the Abbé de Seyes has left the assembly hall and is making his way to the palace to speak to them.² Aumont is mentioned a second time in lines 198-201, when Seyes actually arrives. In W. H. Stevenson's annotated edition of Blake's poetry, a footnote identifies this character as "the Duke of Aumont, later a commander of the National Guard in Paris, and in charge of the troops leading Louis from Versailles to Paris on 5 October [1789]—which B[lake] probably saw as a pro-revolutionary act, contradicting Aumont's earlier membership in the Second Estate of Nobility."³ Stevenson's notes have

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1. *The French Revolution* may have been "a poem, in seven books," as the proofs state, but only the first book has survived. Book 1 was issued in page proofs, dated 1791, by the radical printer Joseph Johnson, but it was never published. It consists of 306 verses.

Except as noted, all citations of Blake's poetry are to the Erdman edition. I cite *The French Revolution* (pp. 285-300) by line number. For other works, I give plate and line numbers, as well as Erdman page numbers using the shorthand E.

2. Although the king and the assembly were based at Versailles in July 1789, Blake locates both in Paris. He refers to Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748-1836), the Abbé de Sieyès, using an alternative spelling, Seyes. In this article, I use Sieyès for the historical figure and Seyes for the character in Blake's poem.

3. See Blake, *Complete Poems*, ed. Stevenson, 140, note on line 159. Alicia Ostriker has a similar note in her edition (896). "5 October"

been of great use to me over the years, but I have doubts about the usefulness of this particular note. For starters, I am not convinced that Stevenson has identified the right member of the House of Aumont, and even if he has identified the right individual, I feel confident that he has not selected the most relevant episode from that person's life to highlight.

The Brothers Aumont

2 There were actually two members of the House of Aumont who were active in French political affairs during the early years of the revolution—Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont (1732-99) and Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont (1736-1814). These men were both sons of Louis Marie Augustin d'Aumont de Rochebaron, fifth Duke of Aumont (1709-82).⁴ The elder son, Louis-Marie Guy, succeeded his father as Duke of Aumont, supported the revolution, commanded a unit of the national guard, and led soldiers loyal to the French Republic. The younger son, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste, succeeded his father as *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi* (first gentleman of the king's bedchamber) and was given a ducal title of his own, Duke of Villequier Aumont; he opposed the revolution, remained unwaveringly loyal to Louis XVI, and eventually served in the court in exile of Louis XVIII. The former is the person identified by Stevenson; the latter is a rival candidate I wish to bring forward for consideration in this essay.

3 These two men have confusingly similar names, and they held many of the same noble titles at different times in their lives. It is therefore difficult to write about them without causing confusion. I will attempt to minimize that confusion by using either their full names or the ducal titles that they held and chiefly used in 1789 and early 1790, when Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont was the Duke of Aumont and Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont was the Duke of Villequier Aumont.

Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont (1732-99)

4 As the elder surviving son of a peer of the realm, Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont was raised in wealth and splendor.⁵ He was married at the age of fifteen to a thirteen-year-old

in Stevenson's edition is an error: the king's forced journey from Versailles to Paris was actually undertaken the next day, 6 October 1789.

4. For substantial biographical accounts of the fifth duke, see Hamy 203-19; Woelmont de Brumagne 18-22; and Levantal 426-28. Although all members of the family used the name Aumont de Rochebaron, I have omitted de Rochebaron in subsequent mentions to avoid needless repetition.

5. Biographical information on the Duke of Aumont comes from various reference works listed in the works cited under "Aumont, Louis-Marie Guy" and "Aumont, Jacques," and also from Sellier 230-31;

cousin, Louise-Jeanne de Durfort de Duras, Duchess of Mazarin, and thus became the Duke of Mazarin. As a young man, he served in the army, frequented the theatre, and gained some notoriety for his extramarital liaisons with actresses and opera singers. He was also known for walking with a pronounced limp and for imitating the manners, speech, and dress of the “patriot king,” Henri IV.⁶

- 5 Louis-Marie Guy d’Aumont’s first wife died in 1781, and his father passed away in 1782. He succeeded his father as Duke of Aumont, but not as *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi*. That honor, which would typically have passed to him as the elder son, went instead (along with some others) to his younger brother.⁷ This led to a situation in which the elder son was the Duke of Aumont and titular head of the family, but the younger son was *premier gentilhomme*, with vastly superior access to the monarch. The unusual division of honors between the brothers seems to foreshadow—and may have contributed to—a subsequent division between the two on political issues.
- 6 In the late 1780s, the Duke of Aumont was a prominent member of a group of nobles who were at odds with Louis XVI and the royal court. The central figure in this group was the king’s cousin, the Duke of Orléans. In the spring of 1789, the Duke of Aumont was one of a handful of peers who enthusiastically supported the unification of the three estates and the reforming initiatives of the newly formed National Constituent Assembly. During the summer of that year, while the assembly was still meeting at Versailles, he hosted a series of soirées for members at his country house in Viroflay, a mile or two away. Reform-minded representatives would gather there in the evenings to discuss the events of the day and make plans for the next day’s session. Some of the regular attendees began referring to themselves as the Society of Viroflay, and this society eventually evolved into the Breton Club, which, in turn, became the Jacobin Club.⁸

Hamy 219; Woelmont de Brumagne 23-25; Levantal 428-29; and the website *Les premiers seigneurs d’Aumont*.

6. The *Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture* has this to say about his imitation of Henri IV: “Il était boiteux et contrefait, ce qui ne l’empêchait pas de pousser jusqu’au ridicule la prétention d’imiter, sinon la démarche, du moins les manières, les bons mots et le costume du roi Henri IV, avec lequel on lui avait persuadé qu’il avait quelque ressemblance” (54: 302). According to the *Biographie nouvelle des contemporains*, the Duke of Aumont was “[un] imitateur puéril de la démarche et des habitudes de Henri IV, telles que la tradition nous les a transmises, il répétait jusqu’à ses mots consacrés, qui accompagneront toujours la mémoire de ce prince” (1: 317). See also Sellier 231; *Biographie universelle et portative* 1: 171; *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle* 1: 946; and Woelmont de Brumagne 24.

7. Hamy 7.

8. For an up-to-date general history of the French Revolution, revisionist in its intellectual orientation but reliable for dates and basic

7 In July 1789, Louis XVI dismissed his reform-minded prime minister Jacques Necker and began to mass troops on the outskirts of Paris. Many Parisians were convinced that the king was preparing to use force to disperse the assembly and declare martial law. Some decided to arm themselves in anticipation of an attack. They poured out onto the streets, seizing weapons and ammunition and capturing the Bastille. The Duke of Aumont supported the people in these actions and so became a favorite of the revolutionary party.⁹ When the assembly called for the formation of a new, bourgeois militia—the national guard—the Duke of Aumont was offered the command. He hesitated and, as a result, was passed over in favor of the Marquis de Salle, who was himself soon replaced by the Marquis de Lafayette.¹⁰

8 Although the Duke of Aumont was not given supreme command of the national guard, he did lead the sixth division, a reserve unit that was called into service only in times of crisis.¹¹ He and the men who served under him played a role in several important events. For example, they supported the Parisian protestors during the women’s march on Versailles in October 1789, accompanying the citizens on 5 October and escorting the king back to the capital the next day, in accordance with the will of the people.¹² Throughout 1789 and 1790, the Duke of Aumont consistently displayed loyalty to the people and the assembly.

9 On 4 August 1789, the assembly passed a set of laws known as the August Decrees, abolishing many traditional privileges of the nobility.¹³ Louis-Marie Guy d’Aumont supported the decrees and declared that he wished to be known simply as “citoyen Jacques Aumont.”¹⁴ When the assembly

facts, see Simon Schama’s *Citizens*. For the Duke of Orléans and the opposition to the court, see Ambrose. For the meetings at the Duke of Aumont’s house and the Society of Viroflay, see Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary* 133; Wick 94-95; Espinhal 5, 230; Woelmont de Brumagne 24; and *Les premiers seigneurs d’Aumont*.

9. For an interesting report on the Duke of Aumont’s response to the famous “Aux armes!” speech delivered by Camille Desmoulins at the Palais Royal on 12 July 1789, see La Marle 257-58.

10. Some reports indicate that the Duke of Aumont declined the position; others say that he merely requested twenty-four hours to consider and was then passed over, since the matter was felt to be extremely urgent. See *Annales Parisiennes* 23; Woelmont de Brumagne 24; Sellier 231; and *Révolutions de Paris* 18. Extracts from the last of these were translated and printed in British papers, including the *Weekly Entertainer* for 27 June 1791.

11. See *Biographie universelle et portative* 1: 170-71; *English Chronicle* for 12-15 September 1789.

12. For the Duke of Aumont’s role in the events of 5-6 October 1789, see Gottschalk 1: 340-47; Lamartine 2: 453; Sellier 231; Montjoie 2: 9-10; Poisson 1: 136; Le Roi 2: 84; and *Pièces justificatives* 22-23.

13. For a discussion of legislation against the nobility, see Doyle 204-36.

14. On citizen Jacques, see Mazas 4: 259n2; Woelmont de Brumagne 24.

went one step further on 19 June 1790, doing away with all titles and orders of hereditary nobility, he became a *ci-devant* (former) duke.¹⁵ During the same year, the periodical *Lanterne magique nationale* published vignettes of some remarkable scenes in the progress of the revolution. In one, the *ci-devant* Duke of Aumont is described, walking with a limp and vowing “death to all aristocrats.”¹⁶

- 10 In May 1791, Louis-Marie Guy d’Aumont was appointed to a new position as a lieutenant general in the army (a separate entity from the national guard).¹⁷ He happened to be in Paris on 21 June, preparing to report to his new commanding officer, when he was caught up in the riots provoked by the flight of the royal family and seized by an angry mob who believed that a unit of the national guard under his command had stood guard at the Tuileries Palace the previous night and allowed the royal family to escape. As an English paper reported, “The populace had got hold of him in his way to the Hotel de Ville [city hall], and had already prepared the fatal lanthorn [the lantern on which he would be hanged]; nor was he rescued till the greatest part of his hair was torn from his head, and he had received several wounds.”¹⁸ Saved by the timely arrival of a unit of the national guard with Lafayette at its head, he wrote a statement in his own defense,¹⁹ in which he declared that he had not been guarding the king the previous night and had in fact been near the king’s person on only two occasions in the past several months, on days when his division was called up for active service. He signed the statement on 21 June, Lafayette certified the truth of its contents the same day, and the next day it was presented to the mayor of Paris and the city council. Louis-Marie Guy d’Aumont appeared before the assembly a few days later and swore an oath of loyalty to that body. His declarations were accepted, and he went on to serve in the army, retiring from military service in 1793. He was arrested during the terror and held in jail for a few weeks in 1794; he secured his release, however, in the early days of the Thermidorian reaction by representing

15. A list of demoted nobles, with the Duke of Aumont second and the Duke of Villequier fifth, was printed in several London papers, including the *Public Advertiser* for 9 July 1790. Villequier’s name is misspelled and the name of his paternal family is wrongly reported as Le Tellier (his wife’s family name).

16. *Lanterne magique nationale* no. 3 (1790): 4. The Viscount de Mirabeau (1754–92), editor of this journal, was the brother of the revolutionary politician Honoré Mirabeau.

17. For his military career, see the *Dictionnaire ... des généraux français* 1: 245–46; *Les premiers seigneurs d’Aumont*.

18. The account is from *Woodfall’s Register* (London), 28 June 1791. See also the *Whitehall Evening Post* for 27 June 1791; Lenotre, *The Flight of Marie Antoinette* 108 and n1; Godechot 137; Lenotre, *Le drame de Varennes* 132–33; Hamilton 21; Compté 185; Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 98 and n22; Vaissière 292; and *Les premiers seigneurs d’Aumont*.

19. *Déclaration de M. d’Aumont* 1–5; *Archives parlementaires* 27: 406.

himself as citizen Jacques, a simple farmer.²⁰ In November 1794, he remarried, joining himself to a member of the third estate who is referred to in contemporary documents as “citoyenne Marie-Louise Klein,”²¹ and he lived out his last few years in the country, playing no further role in military or political affairs.

Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d’Aumont (1736–1814)

- 11 Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d’Aumont was the younger brother of Louis-Marie Guy d’Aumont.²² From 1774 until the death of his brother in 1799, he was known mainly as the Duke of Villequier, but also as the Duke of Villequier Aumont.²³ Villequier Aumont was the official form—and the one he used when signing documents—but Villequier was much more widely used, perhaps in part because it helped to distinguish him from his brother. In this paper I will refer to him, as his contemporaries did, mostly as the Duke of Villequier but occasionally as the Duke of Villequier Aumont.²⁴
- 12 As a young man, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d’Aumont served in the military, fighting in the American War of Independence and rising to the rank of lieutenant general.²⁵ During the first few years of the revolution, he was known as a courtier and one of the closest advisors of Louis XVI; as we have seen, he followed in his father’s footsteps as one of the *premiers gentilshommes de la chambre du roi*.

20. His arrest was reported in English papers, including the *Sun* for 8 February 1794; for his release, see Woelmont de Brumagne 24; Gendron 8; Poisson 4: 6; and *Les premiers seigneurs d’Aumont*.

21. On this marriage, see Levantal 438; Woelmont de Brumagne 25; Turquan 1: 10; and the account in the *Dictionnaire de biographie française*.

22. Biographical information on the Duke of Villequier comes from various reference works listed in the works cited under “Aumont, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste” (with spelling variations, and with and without certain hyphens) and “Villequier”; see also Sellier 231–32; Woelmont de Brumagne 24–29; *Annuaire de la pairie* 93; Bouchet 15–16; and “Maison de Villequier-Aumont.” His name is sometimes given as Louis-Marie Alexandre d’Aumont; I suspect that this is a result of confusion between him and his son, Louis-Marie Céleste d’Aumont (1762–1831), who was the Duke of Piennes during the period under examination in this article.

23. Although not the firstborn, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste appears to have been a favorite, both of his father—who arranged for him to succeed as *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi*—and of the Bourbon kings. Louis XV established a hereditary duchy for him in 1774, renaming the town of Genlis as Villequier Aumont and making him the Duke of Villequier Aumont.

24. After the death of Louis-Marie Guy d’Aumont in 1799, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d’Aumont succeeded his brother as Duke of Aumont. To minimize confusion, I do not connect him with this title at any other point in this essay.

25. For details of Villequier’s military career, see the entry in the *Dictionnaire ... des généraux français*.

- 13 In 1789, the Duke of Villequier accompanied Louis XVI on two occasions when the king believed that his life might be in danger. He rode in the coach with the king on 17 July, when Louis felt that it was his duty to leave Versailles and travel to Paris to try to calm the riotous mobs, and again on 6 October, when the women's march and storming of the palace at Versailles compelled the king and queen to abandon Versailles and take up permanent residence at the Tuileries in Paris.²⁶ The journey of 6 October is a moment of particular interest as far as this paper is concerned, since both brothers traveled from Versailles to Paris: the Duke of Villequier inside the coach with the nervous king, and the Duke of Aumont on horseback outside, in the company of the revolutionaries who had broken into the palace the night before. Some of the "escorts" who marched alongside were waving pikes decorated with the heads of royal guards who had been decapitated.
- 14 While these revolutionary events were occurring, Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont was also serving as a member of the assembly. He was elected to the Estates General in 1789 as a representative of the nobility of the Boulonnais region. As a legislator, he took a very different line from his brother, opposing the merging of the three estates and most of the initiatives of the constituent assembly after the merger. He resigned on 15 December 1789, nominally for health reasons, but perhaps mainly because he disagreed with the assembly's revolutionary reforms and wished to serve the king without distractions or conflicts of interest.²⁷
- 15 During the last months of 1790 and the first few months of 1791, the Duke of Villequier was involved in a series of incidents that contributed to a deterioration of relations between the court and the people. In September 1790, Jean Sylvain Bailly, the mayor of Paris, received an anonymous letter from Rouen warning him of a plot to carry away the king from Paris to Rouen and launch a counterrevolution. The writer reported that the Duke of Villequier and his sister, the Duchess of Villeroy, were two of the main architects.²⁸ Villequier was said to have persuaded Marie-Antoinette that Louis XVI would be dethroned if he did not flee the capital. It was alleged that the conspirators had assembled a "flying camp" of 3000 royalists to defend the king

and had made arrangements to hang Jacques Thouret, the president of the National Constituent Assembly, and display both Lafayette and Bailly in iron cages. This plot was known as the Villeroy conspiracy.²⁹

- 16 On 28 February 1791, the Duke of Villequier played a leading role in a mysterious event that supporters of the revolution dubbed "La Journée des Poignards" (The Day of Daggers). He gave admission tickets to several hundred nobles who flooded into the Tuileries, armed with pistols and daggers. They claimed that they had come to the palace because the national guard had left the king unprotected, but many people speculated that they had mobilized to help the king escape and/or to launch some sort of counterrevolution. The episode ended when Lafayette and his unit of national guardsmen returned and, with the king's cooperation, persuaded the nobles to hand over their weapons. At the close of the day, Lafayette spoke sharply to Villequier and made it clear that he was suspicious of the duke's motives.³⁰ Villequier responded by writing an indignant open letter to Lafayette, which was printed and discussed in the papers.³¹
- 17 Less than two months later, on 18 April, Villequier was embroiled in another incident, when the royal family attempted to leave the Tuileries to celebrate Easter week at the Château de Saint Cloud. The king was eager to quit Paris because of religious scruples related to the newly implemented civil constitution of the clergy. If he stayed, he would be forced to recognize priests who had sworn an oath of loyalty to the government and were considered schismatics by the pope. By contrast, if he went to Saint Cloud, he would be able to attend holy week services performed by priests who had declined the oath and were acknowledged by the pope. His intentions were understood, however, and he and other members of the family were prevented from leaving by a mob. The ensuing standoff lasted for the better part of two hours and led to a physical altercation in which Villequier and another of the *premiers gentilshommes*, M. de Duras, were assaulted and nearly lynched

29. *Extrait d'une lettre écrite de Rouen*, published in Paris in late September or early October 1790. The conspiracy was discussed in various French newspapers and at least four English papers. See, for example, "The French King's Intended Flight to Rouen," *Times*, 11 October 1790; *Public Advertiser*, 11 October 1790.

30. On the Day of Daggers, see Rossi; Charavay 228ff.; Imbert de Saint-Amand 93-98; Montjoie 2: 527-29; Hézecques 343ff.; Carlyle 2: 66-68; Caiani, *Louis XVI and the French Revolution* 94-95; and Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 42ff. For coverage in the British press, see the *General Evening Post*, 5-8 March 1791, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* 61.3 (March 1791): 269. Accounts of the events of this day differ on several important points.

31. *Lettre de Messieurs Alexandre d'Aumont, ci-devant duc de Villequier, et Amédée de Durfort, ci-devant marquis de Duras* (Paris, 1791).

26. For Villequier's trip to Paris with the king on 17 July, see Hue 70; Hézecques 301; Lamartine 2: 110; and English press coverage in the *London Gazette*, 18-21 July 1789, and the *English Chronicle*, 23-25 July 1789. For his role on 6 October, see Montjoie 2: 31.

27. For Villequier's resignation, see *Archives parlementaires* 10: 574; Woelmont de Brumagne 27.

28. The Duchess of Villeroy (or Villeroy), Jeanne-Louise-Constance d'Aumont, was the elder sister of the Duke of Aumont and the Duke of Villequier. Some account of her is given in the *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, under "Villeroy (Jeanne-Louise-Constance d'Aumont de Villequier, duchesse de)." See also Oberkirch 1: 238-39.

by the crowd. The king was compelled to abandon his plan and came to understand that he was in fact a prisoner at the Tuileries.³²

- 18 After the events of 18 April, Louis XVI seems to have committed himself wholeheartedly to escaping from the capital. He accepted the resignations of Villequier, Duras, and several other prominent courtiers. Outwardly this was done to comply with the wishes of the increasingly vocal citizens, many of whom believed that he was being led astray by his aristocratic advisors. In fact, the king seems to have urged his closest supporters to leave Paris (and perhaps also the country) because he was concerned about their safety.³³ Villequier moved out of his rooms at the Tuileries and paid a visit to England in late April and early May 1791.³⁴ His absence proved to be a material benefit to the king and queen, because it provided them with a new and unsuspected means of egress. On the night of 20 June, members of the royal family used the recently vacated chamber of Villequier to evade the national guard and slip out of the Tuileries unnoticed. Arrangements had been made for a series of carriages to convey them to an army outpost at Montmédy, but the fugitives made it only to the little town of Varennes, where they were apprehended. The flight of the royals and their subsequent apprehension proved to be an important turning point in the revolution; the debacle led to an uptick in radicalism and increased hostility toward the royal family and the monarchy as an institution.³⁵
- 19 As noted, some angry Parisians imagined that the Duke of Aumont had helped the royal family to escape. The documentary record suggests that they were wrong, but there can be no doubt where the Duke of Villequier's sympathies lay. He had made it abundantly clear that he was the king's man, and, after the flight of the royals, he was denounced in the assembly. He emigrated and settled in Brussels, where he helped to organize the royalist community. In 1792, his holdings in France were sequestered and sold. He went on

32. On the aborted excursion to Saint Cloud, see Hue 188-91; Imbert de Saint-Amand 121-26; Charavay 230-32; Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 44ff.; Doyle 252-53; Schama 549-50; Caiani, *Louis XVI and the French Revolution* 95; and Caiani, "Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette" 322. Some accounts say that Duras was assaulted; others say Villequier. For English press coverage, see (among others) the *St. James's Chronicle* and the *General Evening Post* for 23 April 1791.

33. On the dismissal of Villequier and Duras, see Hue 193-94; *Bombelles* 5: 108; Carlyle 2: 68n3; Woelmont de Brumagne 27. For the English press, see the *Whitehall Evening Post* for 23 April 1791.

34. For his trip to England, see Berry 1: 303; Vinot; *General Evening Post*, 26 April 1791; *Northampton Mercury*, 30 April 1791; *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 6 May 1791; *Evening Mail*, 3-6 June 1791.

35. On the flight of the royal family, see Charavay 239-40; Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* 57ff.; Schama 550ff.; Dumas 28-29. For reports in the English papers, see the *General Evening Post*, *St. James's Chronicle*, and *Whitehall Evening Post* for 2-5 July 1791.

to serve Louis XVIII, the king in exile, in offices civil and military for almost two decades, and did not return to France until shortly before his death in 1814.³⁶

Aumont in Blake's *French Revolution*

- 20 If we turn from these historical figures to the fictional Aumont in Blake's semihistorical poem, one of the first things we notice is that Blake describes this character in a remarkably negative way: he is described as a "pale" figure with a "chaos-born soul / Eternally wand'ring" and he is compared to "a Comet"³⁷ and "swift-falling fire" (lines 159-60). A few lines later, we are told that "a cold orb of disdain revolv'd round him, and covered his soul with snows eternal" (line 199). It would be too strong to say that Aumont is the prototype or inspiration for Urizen, but it is undeniable that many of the negative terms that Blake would use to characterize Urizen in his poems of 1793 and later are brought together and used to describe Aumont in this 1791 poem.³⁸
- 21 Perhaps the most startling aspect of the description of Aumont is the effect that he has on another character. When Seyes makes his way from the assembly hall to the palace, he is accompanied by "King Henry the Fourth" (lines 163-66)—or rather, by the spirit of Henri IV (1553-1610). Comparisons between Henri IV and Louis XVI were quite common in France from the inauguration of the latter in 1774 until the second half of 1791, when affection for the

36. Villequier's post-1791 life is discussed in Vinot. For the seizure of his property, see "Maison de Villequier-Aumont."

37. For early modern ideas about meteors and comets, see Genuth 20-22, 99-114, et passim. Blake connects comets with disaster in his early poem "Gwin, King of Norway," where he describes the king's men as "like blazing comets, scattering death" (line 83, E 419).

38. Words and concepts used for both Aumont and Urizen are pale, ice, snow, orb, comet, meteor, chaos, and disdain.

For examples of Urizen's paleness, see *Urizen* 4.41 (E 72); *Ahania* 3.2 (E 85); and *The Four Zoas* p. 23, lines 11-15 (E 313).

For passages where he is associated with frigidity, ice, or snow, see *America* 16.2-11 (E 57); *Urizen* 3.27-33, 7.5, 10.19-24 (E 71, 74, 75); *The Four Zoas* p. 61, line 4, 69.1-6, 73.26-29, 75.25-26, 78.1-3 (E 341, 346, 350, 352, 353); and *Milton* 18.51 (E 112). The phrase "Snows eternal" occurs in *The Four Zoas* p. 74, line 20 (E 351), but it is not clear to me whether it refers to Urizen or Tharmas.

In Blake's works, orbs, caverns, and similar spaces are often related to the fallen state of man and the limits of fallen man's perception. Albion's angel, a reactionary ally of Urizen, is described as a "scale bound orb" (*America* c.11, E 59); Urizen's brain is gradually "inclos'd / In an orb" (*Urizen* 10.33-34, E 75; cf. *The Four Zoas* p. 54, lines 9-10, E 336); and the eye of fallen man is "a little narrow orb, clos'd up & dark, / Scarcely beholding the Great Light" (*Jerusalem* 49.34-35, E 198; cf. *Milton* 5.21-22, E 99).

Urizen sends forth comets in *The Four Zoas* p. 75, lines 28-30 (E 352); he glows "like a meteor" in *Europe* 3.11-12 (E 61); he is associated with chaos in *Urizen* 3.26 (E 71); and he is characterized as disdainful in *The Four Zoas* p. 106 (second portion), lines 35-40 (E 382).

monarch began to decline. During the early years of Louis's reign, it was widely hoped that he would show himself to be a patriot king, a kindhearted ruler who took an interest in the well-being of his people, as Henri IV had done. The two kings were often depicted in tandem in engravings, statues, and other works of art; for example, several engravers produced allegorical scenes in which the spirit of Henri IV appears to Louis XVI to offer guidance.³⁹ This historical and iconographic tradition would seem to explain Henri IV's presence in the poem, but it is interesting to note what precipitates his departure. When Seyes and the ghost of Henri reach the palace and catch sight of Aumont, the old king promptly leaves:

Aumont went out and stood in the hollow porch, his
ivory wand in his hand;
A cold orb of disdain revolvd round him, and covered his
soul with snows eternal.
Great Henry's soul shuddered, a whirlwind and fire tore
furious from his angry bosom;
He indignant departed on horses of heav'n.
(lines 198-201)

S. Foster Damon writes that the spirit of Henri IV "sweeps into the council" (78). This is incorrect; the old king never actually enters the palace and never catches sight of the reigning king. In fact, he never comes face to face with any member of the court except Aumont, yet this encounter has dramatic consequences. The disdainfulness, coldness, and "snows eternal" of Aumont cause Henri to "shudder" and depart in indignation and disgust.⁴⁰

- 22 Aumont is cold, disdainful, and "chaos-born." The mere sight of him is sufficient to make the old king "furious," "angry," and "indignant." This is strongly negative lan-

39. On Louis XVI and Henri IV, see Schama 423; Chéry; and Reinhard. For examples of the parallel in the visual arts, see "Allégorie du compte rendu au roi, par M. Necker en 1781" (1781); "Apparition d'Henri IV à Louis XVI, ou la vérité découverte" (1789); "Projet d'un monument à ériger pour le roi" (1790); and "Époque de la liberté française" (1789). The last engraving is of particular interest, as it illustrates precisely the historical moment that Blake dramatizes in *The French Revolution*—the point when Louis XVI reinstated Necker and decided against using military force to break up the assembly. It is possible that Blake saw one or more of these prints when he was planning or writing his poem.

40. Of the critics who have written at some length on *The French Revolution* (including Butter, Damon, Erdman, Fallon, Halliburton, Halloran, Hobday, and Ritz), few have had much to say about Aumont. A notable exception is David Fallon, who argues that Aumont represents the forces of reaction that threaten Seyes and his revolutionary coadjutors. He also suggests that Aumont can be seen as an eighteenth-century parallel to François Ravaillac, the Catholic extremist who assassinated the benevolent, consensus-seeking Henri IV. See Fallon 78.

guage, and we ought to ask ourselves what might account for all of the hostility. If we focus on what is in the poem, we won't find many clues. Aumont is clearly a courtier, but he doesn't speak out against the revolution or urge the king to take military action against the assembly, as the Duke of Burgundy and the Archbishop of Paris do. He doesn't take a position on any of the political questions debated. In fact, he hardly speaks at all. His only actions in the poem (at least in the part that has survived) are to announce that the Abbé de Seyes is coming to the palace, step out of the room to welcome Seyes, and escort the visitor inside. Why would Blake heap so much angry editorial judgment on a figure who seems to be nothing more than a royal chamberlain? Since the poem itself does not supply an answer, we should consider the possibility that there was an external impetus. Aumont may be a mostly historical character (like Necker, Lafayette, Sieyès, Orléans, and Louis XVI) rather than a mostly fictional character (like the Duke of Burgundy and the Archbishop of Paris), and Blake may have lashed out because there was an actual historical individual whose actions had irritated him greatly. As I have already noted, there are two candidates for this individual—the Duke of Aumont and the Duke of Villequier. In the next two sections, I will set out the case for the Duke of Villequier and then consider some objections that can be raised against this theory.

The Case for Villequier

- 23 As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, W. H. Stevenson concluded that Blake based his character Aumont on the Duke of Aumont. It is certainly understandable why Stevenson reached this conclusion, since this was the man who bore the ducal title Aumont in 1789. Nevertheless, there are some problems with this identification.

- 24 First and foremost, it is difficult to fathom why Blake, who supported the revolution in its early phases and even wore a *bonnet-rouge* on the streets of London (Gilchrist 1: 94), would have been angry at the Duke of Aumont. As we have seen, the Duke of Aumont was a champion of the revolution. He was never a courtier or an advisor to Louis XVI; on the contrary, he was a member of the opposition, a supporter of the assembly and the people of Paris, a leader of the national guard who served under Lafayette, and an ally of the Duke of Orléans. Thus he was closely associated with two of the heroes of Blake's poem.⁴¹ In other words, the Duke of Aumont was on the same side as Blake, and it

41. Seyes and Orléans are the main spokesmen for the revolutionary party in *The French Revolution*. Erdman goes so far as to describe the speech of Orléans in lines 179-94 as a speech by "Blake-Orléans" (*Prophet against Empire* 170).

therefore seems highly unlikely that this friend of the revolution could have been the inspiration for the courtly, reactionary, proto-Urizenic character that we find in the poem.⁴²

25 That is why I believe we need to consider the Duke of Villequier as a rival candidate. Villequier was not just a courtier; he was one of the most powerful courtiers in the country, a *premier gentilhomme de la chambre du roi*. He was a prominent and controversial supporter of the king who played an important role in the Villeroy conspiracy, the Day of Daggers, the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, and the unsuccessful flight of the royal family. From Blake's point of view, Villequier was on the wrong side of all of these events: he was a man who sided with the king and the nobles against the people, a man who was trying to impede the inexorable advance of history. This is a man whom Blake would have disliked—someone who could have inspired the poem's very negative description of Aumont.

26 *The French Revolution* contains some details that might point directly at Villequier. Blake describes his Aumont as carrying an "ivory wand" (line 198), which is perhaps a way of identifying him as a royal chamberlain or gentleman of the bedchamber. It does not seem that a white wand or staff was a symbol of office for the *premiers gentilshommes* under the old regime in France, but it unquestionably was for the royal chamberlains of England. According to Kimber's *Peerage of England* (1766), the Lord Chamberlain of the royal household carries "a white staff in his hand, as a badge of his office, and wears a gold key," which declare that he has authority to admit visitors to the court—or turn them away. The Lord Chamberlain was (and still is) the second-ranking dignitary of the British royal court and the man responsible for all state ceremonies. "All invitations to court are sent out in his name by the command of the sovereign, and at drawing rooms and levees he stands next to the sovereign and announces the persons who are approaching the throne. It is also part of his duty to conduct the sovereign to and from his carriage."⁴³ Blake might have learned about the white staff of the Lord Chamberlain from his reading, or by perusing paintings or engravings. Godfrey Kneller's portrait of Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset (see *illus.* 1),

42. At this point, it may be worthwhile to present a summary of the differences between the two Aumont brothers given by Madame Campan, a friend of Marie-Antoinette and a committed royalist. She describes the Duke of Aumont as "a brother of the Duc de Villequier, who ... joined the revolutionary party; a man of no weight or respectability, who desired he might be called *Jacques Aumont*; a far different man from his brave brother, who always proved himself entirely devoted to the cause of his King" (Fortescue 2: 57n3).

43. Details about the Lord Chamberlain and the symbols of his office come from Kimber 244-45 and the "Royal Household" entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

shows a Lord Chamberlain with a white staff, but so do many other period portraits.⁴⁴ Although it is certainly possible that Blake gave Aumont a white staff by mistake because he had only limited knowledge of the French court, it is also possible that he did so deliberately in order to communicate with English readers, who would have been more likely to recognize and understand English symbols of office. If this is in fact the case, it would be a strong indication that Blake was thinking of the Duke of Villequier.

27 It is worth noting that the Aumont of Blake's poem not only carries the staff of a Lord Chamberlain, but also performs the duties of that office. When Seyes makes his way to the palace, it is Aumont who goes to the door to welcome him and escort him inside. It would not be plausible for a character based on the Duke of Aumont to announce visitors, for the Duke of Aumont had been unwelcome at the court of Louis XVI for several years, even before he agreed to serve in the national guard. On the other hand, it would be perfectly plausible for a character modeled on the Duke of Villequier Aumont to act in this way.

28 Furthermore, Blake's description of Aumont as a cold, disdainful man would not make much sense if he were trying to create a version of the Duke of Aumont, a passionate revolutionary and an ardent (if unlikely) democrat who cheerfully set aside his titles and wished to be known as citizen Jacques. The word "disdain" would make a lot more sense in relation to citizen Jacques's brother, the Duke of Villequier, who stood in unrepentant solidarity with his fellow nobles and viewed both the assembly and the new-fangled principles of equality with traditional aristocratic hauteur. Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont was clearly proud of his ducal title and continued to use it even after such titles were officially abolished. Although he dutifully referred to himself as Alexandre d'Aumont, *ci-devant* Duke of Villequier, on several occasions in 1790 and 1791, he dropped the prefix and reverted to calling himself the Duke of Villequier

44. A Google image search will produce many examples of Lords Chamberlain with white staves. I will mention only a few here: Robert Bruce, first Earl of Ailesbury, who was Lord Chamberlain in 1685, as depicted in a mezzotint by John Smith after Sir Peter Lely (1687); Charles FitzRoy, second Duke of Grafton, Lord Chamberlain from 1724 to 1757, as depicted in a mezzotint by John Faber the Younger after Jean-Baptiste van Loo (1740); and George Montagu, fourth Duke of Manchester, Lord Chamberlain from 1782 to 1783, as depicted in a mezzotint by John Jones after Gilbert Stuart (1790). See also a 1795 political cartoon by James Gillray titled "Polonius."

White staves appear in several places in Blake's works. One is mentioned in *The French Revolution*, lines 144-45, where the Archbishop of Paris imagines (with horror) a future in which the "ivory staff / Of the ruler wither[s] among bones of death." The beadles in Blake's "Holy Thursday" poem (*Songs of Innocence*) also carry white staves, which seem to be badges of authority in general rather than symbols of royal authority in particular.



1. Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset, holding the staff of the Lord Chamberlain of Great Britain. He held the office from 1689 to 1697. Undated mezzotint by John Simon after Sir Godfrey Kneller, 35.7 × 25.4 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. B1977.14.9891.

when he visited London in April and May 1791, thus tacitly rejecting the authority of the assembly. He continued to use this abolished title (as well as others) throughout his years of exile, right up to his death.⁴⁵

- 29 By way of summary, I would say that the case for the Duke of Villequier rests mainly on what statisticians call goodness of fit. The fit between this historical figure and the character in Blake's poem is certainly much better than the fit between the Duke of Aumont and the character.

Objections and Replies

- 30 Some readers may find the arguments in the previous section convincing; others may not. In this section, I would like to set out four objections that might be raised by the unconvinced, and then do my best to reply to those objections.

- Objection 1: If it was Villequier that Blake was reading about in the newspapers and it was Villequier who angered him, why, when he picked up his pen, did he complain about Aumont?

Reply: To answer this question, it is necessary to say a few words about a massive change in naming and nomenclature that was taking place in France at this time, as a result of the revolution. The abolition of hereditary titles in June 1790 led to a new situation, in which the name Aumont could be applied to several persons as opposed to just one. Prior to the abolition of hereditary titles, there was really only one person in France who could appropriately be called Aumont—the Duke of Aumont. Subsequently, Aumont became what it is today—a name that can be shared and used simultaneously by many members of a family. Thus, a situation was created in which the Duke of Aumont was an Aumont, but so too was the Duke of Villequier.

While Blake was working on and thinking about his poem, the people of France were transitioning between two systems of nomenclature. Some Frenchmen were eager to adopt the new system, while others dragged their feet and clung to the old system—though as the revolution gained momentum, it became increasingly dangerous for nobles to do so. Revolutionary journalists like Marat enjoyed calling out aristocrats, including the Duke of Villequier, who persisted in using their hereditary titles.⁴⁶ In March 1791, after his confrontation with

Lafayette during the Day of Daggers, Villequier signed the letter in his own defense “Alexandre d’Aumont, ci-devant le Duc de Villequier,” in the style of the new regime (although, I suspect, with little enthusiasm). Thus he was placing more emphasis on his family name, Aumont. The ducal title was yielding, under political pressure, to the family name at the very time that Blake was writing. In fact, for many people with revolutionary sympathies, the old title had already given way: the Duke of Villequier had ceased to exist and had been replaced by citizen Alexandre d’Aumont.

We know that Blake adopted the new, more democratic system of nomenclature in some of his writings. In both *The French Revolution* and his manuscript verses on Lafayette's defection (E 499, written late 1792 or early 1793), he refers to the general by the abbreviated form Fayette rather than the traditional La Fayette, as David Erdman has noted.⁴⁷ In short, it seems likely that Blake elected to call the *ci-devant* Duke of Villequier by his family name, Aumont, for the same political reason he chose to refer to the *ci-devant* Marquis de Lafayette as Fayette.

- Objection 2: If the Duke of Aumont was suspected of allowing the royal family to escape from the Tuileries in June 1791, couldn't Blake have been angry with him for that reason?

Reply: Yes, Blake could certainly have been angry with him for that reason. The accusations against the Duke of Aumont were reprinted in several British papers and, although they were probably false, they were never (so far as I can see) corrected or retracted.⁴⁸ So this was one moment when an Englishman, following events in the papers, could have concluded that the Duke of Aumont was an enemy of the revolution. We should not forget, however, that the same reader would have had many more occasions—the Villeroy conspiracy, the Day of Daggers, the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, the flight of the

47. Erdman (*Prophet against Empire* 172) describes Fayette as a “republican” form, but I think democratic is more appropriate. With the deletion of the definite article, the general is no longer the Fayette; he is only a Fayette. In the same way, after 1790, the Duke of Aumont was no longer the Aumont, only an Aumont.

48. Though the Duke of Aumont was quickly cleared in France of involvement in the flight of the royal family, he was evidently not as quickly exonerated in the English press, which reported that he had been suspected of collusion and roughly treated by the mob (see note 18). The *Public Advertiser* even divulged “on the best authority” that he had been hanged (28 June 1791). I have not discovered any vindications in the English papers. My searches of ProQuest's *British Periodicals* database and Gale's *Burney Newspapers Collection* turned up a flurry of mentions of the Duke of Aumont in late June 1791, but nothing relevant for the remainder of the year.

45. British papers, including *Lloyd's Evening Post* for 6 May 1791, note the Duke of Villequier among visitors to court.

46. Marat complained about Villequier in particular in *L'Ami du peuple* no. 395 (10 March 1791).

royal family—to reach the same conclusion about the Duke of Villequier. There is a scenario in which we can imagine Blake getting angry with the Duke of Aumont, but there are numerous scenarios in which we can imagine him getting angry at the Duke of Villequier.

- Objection 3: Since the Duke of Aumont imitated the speech and manners of Henri IV, doesn't the appearance of Henri IV in the poem suggest that Blake probably had the Duke of Aumont in mind?

Reply: That would be one way of explaining why Henri IV is in the poem, but there is another—and I think a better—way of explaining this. As I mentioned earlier, Henri IV was frequently invoked as an exemplary king and a model for Louis XVI. This would seem to be a sufficient explanation for his appearance in the poem.

The presence of “Good King Henry” and his indignant departure in lines 200-01 still make perfectly good sense if we imagine that Blake had Villequier in mind when he was writing his poem. Henri IV helped repair Catholic-Protestant divisions in France; in Blake's poem he stands for the spirit of peacefulness and non-polarization. He seems to have come to the Tuileries to advise Louis XVI because he thinks that Louis intends to follow his example in bringing peace and building consensus. Once he sees the reactionary Villequier controlling access to the monarch, however, Henri IV realizes that Louis XVI is not, in fact, going to be a patriot king and healer of national wounds—and so he departs in indignation.

In interpreting this aspect of the poem, we are forced to choose between two situations that seem somewhat surprising. We may find it hard to believe that Blake knew about the connections that Frenchmen made between Louis XVI and Henri IV, but it would be even harder to believe that he knew about the Duke of Aumont's tendency to imitate Henri IV.

- Objection 4: Isn't it unlikely that Blake would have known so much about these French aristocrats? And, specifically, isn't it unlikely that he would have known that the Duke of Villequier was a member of the Aumont family?

Reply: It is certainly rather surprising. We don't know how much French language ability Blake had at this time—perhaps very little. In addition, there is no evidence—at least none that I am aware of—that he read French newspapers. Given his non-noble upbringing, dissenting religious background, and democratic worldview, it seems very unlikely that he would have been interested in French noblemen. Nevertheless, he could have learned a fair amount about the main movers in the French Revolution by reading the English press; the

London papers carried quite detailed accounts of events in Paris, which frequently refer to Villequier.⁴⁹ Blake was versed enough in French politics to mention in his poem not only major figures, like Necker, Orléans, Sieyès, Lafayette, and Mirabeau, but also less prominent individuals, like Bailly, Target, and Clermont-Tonnerre. Since he knew of these men, he might well have known of Villequier.

Summing Up the Possibilities

- 31 It seems to me quite likely that Stevenson identified the wrong man in his footnote. The evidence suggests that Blake was angered by some action of the Duke of Villequier and added Aumont to his poem as a result, choosing to criticize the *ci-devant* duke under his family name. I believe that this scenario meets the preponderance of evidence standard; whether it meets the more demanding beyond a reasonable doubt standard is a difficult question. By way of summation, I will set out three possibilities and the most important problems I see with each:

- It is possible that Blake was not thinking of anybody in particular when he created the character of Aumont; but, if so, why does he pile so many judgmental epithets and proto-Urizenic traits on this character? And why does he have the patriot king, Henri IV, turn and flee at the sight of Aumont?
- It is possible that Blake had Louis-Marie Guy d'Aumont, the Duke of Aumont, in mind; but, if so, why would he have been angry with a man who was a supporter of the revolution? And why does he depict Aumont as a courtier and Lord Chamberlain, when the Duke of Aumont was neither?
- It is possible that Blake had Louis-Alexandre-Céleste d'Aumont, the Duke of Villequier, in mind; but, if so, why does he refer to him as Aumont instead of Villequier? And how did he come to understand that a man usually referred to as the Duke of Villequier was in fact a member of the Aumont family?

49. References to Villequier-Aumont (with and without a hyphen) appear in numerous French sources, though Villequier alone is much more common. Instances of Villequier are fairly common in the British press for 1789 to 1791, but I have not discovered any examples of the combined Villequier-Aumont form, nor have I found any English writer explaining that the Duke of Villequier was a member of the Aumont family.

Some Thoughts on the Development of the Poem

32 Before closing, I would like to say a few words about chronology and the ways in which *The French Revolution* may have developed. It is generally recognized that Blake began working on the poem during the period of optimism that followed the unification of the three estates and the storming of the Bastille in the summer of 1789, when it seemed to many observers that the revolution was a *fait accompli*, which had secured permanent reform with minimal bloodshed. Many critics have also inferred that Blake eventually abandoned the poem, probably at some point in 1791, because he came to believe that the revolution was not going to be an unproblematic, almost unresisted, triumph of reform after all. In other words, most scholars ac-

cepted a two-phase model that links both of Blake's decisions—to commence and to abandon the poem—to the political events in France.

33 I too accept this model, but I would like to propose an additional, intermediate stage. It seems to me that Blake started work during the initial phase of hopefulness, but became increasingly conscious of resistance to the revolution. The inclusion of Aumont may be an early attempt to respond to evolving events, and the abandonment of the poem at some later point a more drastic reaction to subsequent developments. It would then be possible to distinguish three rough phases in Blake's thinking, each based on the situation in France:

I. Period of unqualified optimism, inspired and sustained by:

Merging of the three estates (June 1789); storming of the Bastille (July 1789); women's march on Versailles (October 1789); abolition of hereditary titles (June 1790); Festival of the Federation (July 1790)

II. Period of more qualified optimism, leading to local modifications of the poem, provoked by:

Villeroy conspiracy (September 1790)? ... Day of Daggers (February 1791)? ... attempted excursion to Saint Cloud (April 1791)?

III. Loss of optimism and abandonment of the poem, provoked by:

Flight of the royal family (June 1791)? ... massacre on the Champ de Mars (July 1791)?

I have placed question marks in the second and third phases to acknowledge that I am not certain which incidents Blake was responding to. I cannot point to textual evidence to prove that there was an intermediate stage, but I think that this hypothesis is consistent with (and grows out of) the evidence rehearsed in this essay.

34 Blake clearly conceived the poem during the stage of optimism, which began with the triumphs of 1789 and continued through much of 1790. In the early months of 1790, many observers, both in France and abroad, assumed that the revolution had more or less run its course; the king had recalled Necker and accepted the national assembly, the national guard, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and it looked like he was prepared to accept the role of constitutional monarch as well. It seemed that the main goals of the revolution had been achieved—and with only a little bloodshed. So it appeared to Richard Price

when he wrote his famous sermon in November 1789 (Price, *Discourse*); to Helen Maria Williams when she attended the Festival of the Federation in July 1790 (Williams, *Letters*); and to Blake as well, I think, when he began and wrote much of *The French Revolution*.

35 Many passages reflect Blake's initial confidence: the defenders of the old order are shown to be anxious and dismayed, troubled by nightmares, while Seyes is all confidence. In his speech to the king and court (lines 206-40), he assumes that the revolution is going to happen, no matter what the king or the nobles might decide: a new France is sure to replace the old France, just as morning drives away the darkness of night. The victory is presented as inevitable, presumably because Blake believed that it had already been achieved.

36 As 1790 wore on and gave way to 1791, some of this optimism started to wear off. A series of events, including the

exposure of the Villeroy conspiracy, the Day of Daggers, and the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, made it clear that not everyone was enthusiastic about the revolution. There were nobles who disliked the new political arrangements, opposed the initiatives of the assembly, lamented the abolition of hereditary titles, and deplored the civil constitution of the clergy. It seems likely that Blake became aware of this opposition and added the character of Aumont during this period, probably because of something that the Duke of Villequier had done. It is impossible to say which incident was the trigger, but I believe that a strong case can be made for the Villeroy conspiracy.⁵⁰

- 37 A few months later, something else happened—something even more serious—that made Blake realize that the revolution was facing not just minor but major resistance. It might have been the flight of the royals in June 1791, or the shooting of protesters on the Champ de Mars in July.⁵¹ It could also have been the breakdown of agreement among the revolutionaries themselves that began to be visible about this time.⁵² At any rate, Blake seems to have concluded that the French Revolution was not going to turn out as he had initially imagined, and, as a result, he decided not to print the poem.⁵³
- 38 An alternative theory is that it was the printer, Joseph Johnson, who pulled the plug, but this seems unlikely. There was no reason for Johnson to panic at this point; Pitt did not crack down on seditious writing in earnest until mid-1792. Therefore, it was probably Blake himself who gave up on

50. At an earlier point in my research, I thought that the flight of the royals in June 1791 might have led Blake to add Aumont, but I now believe that event is more likely to have been one of the episodes that spurred him to abandon the poem. The exposure of the Villeroy conspiracy occurred earlier, at a time when most observers were still buoyant about the outcome of the revolution. The plot was described in the English press, so Blake might well have known about it, and it revealed Villequier to be (at least according to the anonymous informant) actively involved in conspiring against the revolution, as opposed to indirectly involved, as in the attempted excursion to Saint Cloud, or ambiguously involved, as in the Day of Daggers.

51. In “Blake and Lafayette,” Charles Hobday argues that Blake intended to make Lafayette his hero, but decided to abandon the poem after Lafayette ordered his national guardsmen to fire on republican protesters on the Champ de Mars. I find Hobday’s claim quite plausible, but I take a slightly less Lafayette-o-centric view and think that the flight of the royals should also be considered as a possible cause for the abandonment of the poem.

52. By July 1791, the coalition of revolutionaries that Blake praises in *The French Revolution* was falling apart. Lafayette and Bailly were blamed by many for the Champ de Mars massacre. There was tension between Lafayette and Orléans. Clermont-Tonnerre had become a moderate and was already widely regarded as a traitor to the revolution. Sieyès had opposed an absolute veto for the king, which Honoré Mirabeau had supported—and Mirabeau had died in April.

53. See Ritz 374.

the poem, and he probably did so because he realized that, however the French Revolution evolved, it was not going to be the easy victory announced with such supreme confidence by Seyes.

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