

Nicholas Hammond, *The Powers of Sound and Song in Early Modern Paris*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. ix + 203 pp. Maps, tables, figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$89.95 US (hb). ISBN: 978-0-271-08471-8; \$32.95 US (pb). ISBN: 978-0-271-08472-5.

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The recent turn towards the study of soundscapes and song in the early modern period has resulted in a rich body of scholarship that permits modern scholars to appreciate the centrality of orality and aurality for a largely illiterate populace.[1] Some of this research has focused on the soundscapes, particularly of the urban setting:[2] other research has concentrated on song, particularly street songs and ballads.[3] In this wide-ranging monograph, Nicholas Hammond brings both of these perspectives to his exploration of the sound worlds of Paris during the period of Louis XIV's assertion of his absolutism in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Hammond examines obviously oral genres such as songs, sermons, and trial speeches; genres such as private letters that were regularly read aloud; and events such as public executions and firework displays that were rich in the soundscapes they produced. In elegant prose, the book urges its reader to turn for a moment from the intensely visual way in which the splendor of the Sun King's reign is usually described, to appreciate its other sensory aspects, particularly its aural dimensions. This approach leads us to an understanding of how sound interacted with the vast homosexual subculture of seventeenth-century Paris, a path already trodden by Hammond in his 2011 monograph, *Gossip, Sexuality, and Scandal in France (1610-1715)*, which explored how gossip about same-sex desire was communicated via song.[4]

One of the strengths of the book is how Hammond repeatedly demonstrates the porous nature of the boundaries between elite and commoner, and in particular, how the promiscuity of sound meant that information in the form of song, verse, and speech ignored social limitations, sometimes with fatal consequences. I use the term "promiscuity" here deliberately. Indeed, one of the key arguments of the book centers around the wildly different outcomes for two men mentioned in a single four-line song found in the Chansonnier Maurepas, "Grands Dieux" (vol. 23, fol. 369). Both men were involved in same-sex relations with other men, but while Jacques Chausson, a former customs officer, was burned in the Place de Grève in December 1661 for sodomy, only three days later François de Comminges, sieur de Guitaut, a known "sodomite" and favorite of the Grand Condé, was elevated by the king to the Ordre du Saint Esprit. Hammond explores how two men from such different backgrounds could find themselves side-by-side as the subjects of a song on the Pont Neuf, using evidence, once again from songs, to support the theory that there was a busy traffic in men of all ranks procuring young pages from the royal household for sex.

It could be argued that the title of the book is slightly misleading, and that it should instead have been called "Sound, Song and Same-Sex Desire in Early Modern Paris," such is the focus on the homosexual subculture that Hammond evokes so vividly. Purchasers of the book who expect merely an overview of French song may be surprised by the centrality of songs about this particular topic, although historians of same-sex sexuality in early modern France will welcome this new approach.[5] These case studies in the history of sexuality are found in

the second part of the book, however; the first part builds a picture for the reader of the varied elements that made up the sound worlds of Louis XIV's Paris.

Chapter one evokes what might be described as the bustling "noise-scape" of early modern Paris, described by every contemporary commentator. The sounds of clattering carriages, screaming coachmen, braying animals, crowded bridges, church bells, and ambulant vendors crying their wares were deafening. The Pont Neuf, built in 1604 without buildings on it (an innovation at the time), and with its extraordinary "Samaritaine" water pump that sounded with chimes and bells at regular intervals, was a particularly noisy place, attracting all kinds of street performers and quack vendors who could install themselves in one of the bridge's many niches, where hundreds thronged to watch and listen. Hammond makes note of the censorship of the street singers in particular, who were the source of many of the politically subversive songs that attacked figures such as Cardinal Mazarin, the loathed adviser to the regent, Anne of Austria. While Mazarin collected thousands of these songs himself (known as Mazarinades), it is the collections of songs by the royal genealogist Pierre Clairambault, later augmented by the comte de Maurepas in his thirty-volume *Chansonnier Maurepas*, which Hammond uses as source material for his study. The caustic and satirical nature of many of these songs, especially their attacks on the debauchery of the court, reveals that criticism of elites, and the inequalities from which they benefited, was a vibrant activity on the streets of early modern Paris.

The street singers who sang these political songs and their listeners are the focus of chapter two. Here, Hammond uses two of the best-known, because self-documented, figures from these categories as case studies. The first is Philippot le Savoyard, the blind, self-proclaimed "Orpheus of the Pont Neuf," who not only composed and sang his songs on the bridge but, somewhat uniquely for France, also had them printed for sale.[6] Along the way we also meet some of the other performers who would have been found on the Pont Neuf, such as Guillaume de Limoges, "le Gaillard Boiteux," whose limp is a reminder, like Philippot's blindness, of the universal association of disability with street singing and performance. Someone who was likely to have heard Philippot sell his wares was the marquise de Sévigné, whose abundant correspondence Hammond exploits to reveal how much she mentions songs, singing, and the soundworlds of Paris. Importantly, Hammond reminds us of the oral nature of these letters, which were usually read aloud to listeners in the early modern period. Sévigné's letters are full of amusing anecdotes about salacious songs she has heard on the Pont Neuf, sermons she has attended, and executions she has witnessed. She discusses opera airs that she is familiar with, the parodies of which were just as widespread as the originals in early modern Paris, moving continually between the streets and the theaters.[7] This is one of the most important contributions of the book: the constant reminder of how much of popular culture, and especially music and song, was shared by all social classes, despite the vast inequalities of the time.

Sévigné's correspondence is then used in chapter three because of her detailed commentary on one of the most high-profile trials of the period: that of Nicolas Fouquet, superintendent of finance under Mazarin. After Mazarin's death, Fouquet assumed that he would be named the king's new first minister, but instead, he found himself accused of corruption and eventually exiled in solitary confinement. Hammond opens the chapter with some of the songs around the death of Mazarin, and a section on Louis XIV's preacher Bossuet, whose sermons were full of rhetorical panache, reminding us once again that these were meant to be heard rather than read. Perhaps the most striking part of the chapter, however, is the description of the lavish festivities that Fouquet threw at his palace of Vaux-le-Vicomte in August 1661 in a

misplaced attempt to honor the king. Hammond evokes the fireworks, fountains, waterfalls, and violins playing music by Lully, in a reminder of how such a magnificent event would have been a feast for all of the senses, not just sight. It is Fouquet's trial that is the real focus of the chapter, however, and Sévigné's letters relate not only the speeches by the lawyers, judges, and Fouquet himself, but also the growing public disapproval with the unfair persecution (driven by Colbert) of Fouquet. The judges who voted for a death sentence were mocked in street songs, revealing once again how, despite the risks of censorship around political song, the people of Paris were both informed about machinations at court and willing to publicly criticize them. Hammond moves easily from court to street and back again, demonstrating how much knowledge about the court at Versailles was shared on the streets of Paris, and vice versa.

The book then moves to part two, which uses a four-line song as a jumping-off point to explore the homosexual subculture of seventeenth-century Paris and the inequalities of treatment both before the law and in wider society that could be expected for those of noble birth and lesser-ranked subjects. The two men named in the song, Chausson and Guitaut, are a perfect example, the song argues, of how a vice—sodomy—can send a man of lesser birth to be burned at the stake while the other receives the kingdom's highest honor. Chapter four concentrates on Chausson's interrogation, comparing it with other trials for sodomy. Intriguingly, one of the accusations that features in these trials is the singing of "chansons impies" or "dissolues," revealing how seriously song was perceived by authorities because of its subversive potential. The most powerful section of this chapter is the description of Chausson's execution, a hauntingly evocative and sensuous description of an event that an entire city would have come out to witness. Chausson's execution made such an impression that his name became a codeword for sodomite, and Hammond traces the use of this term through multiple other songs and verses for another century and a half. He also carefully notes how sodomy was a crime that was associated with sins of blasphemy; Chausson had his tongue cut out first, and Le Petit, a writer who criticized Chausson's treatment in a sonnet, had his hand amputated before his own execution for sodomy a year later. Sodomy was a vice linked indelibly in the minds of the authorities with the spoken and written word, ironic given its appellation as "the sin that could not be named," to the point where even the records of trials for sodomy were supposed to have been burned along with the convict.

This moving description of a public execution is followed in chapter five by its polar opposite: an account of the lavish investiture of the Knights of the Order of the Holy Spirit three days later in the *Église des Grands-Augustins*, where Guitaut received his honor. Hammond explains Guitaut's rise to such heights through his association with Louis de Bourbon, better known as the Grand Condé. The homosexual tendencies in the group of young men with whom Condé surrounded himself, known as "petits-mâîtres," seem to have been fairly widely recognized, despite Condé's public reputation as one of the kingdom's greatest warriors. It is in song, poetry, and letters from one member of this courtly clique to the other that Hammond finds a great deal of evidence for a culture of same-sex desire and physical intercourse that clearly goes beyond the language of love that is so prevalent in letter conventions of the early modern period. This is despite the secrecy that often attached to such behavior, which Hammond also recognizes through his inclusion of the letters Guitaut and Condé sent to each other, which regularly express longing to share secrets in person rather than in written correspondence—a reminder once again of the aural and lack of privacy even in intimate letters in the period.

The final chapter becomes a kind of detective case. Hammond first uses details from various sources he has already analyzed, such as interrogations of various men for sodomy, songs, and poems, to reveal that the homosexual subculture of seventeenth-century Paris was another world where elite and commoner mixed company. Another song criticizing the injustice of Chausson's execution claims that he was prosecuted because he was having an affair with a page of the prince of Conti, Condé's younger brother. Page boys, Hammond reveals, figured regularly in the interrogations of men suspected of sodomy in the period, as well as in songs satirizing men known to engage in same-sex relations. The argument of this chapter is that the outrage expressed around the two contrasting treatments of men involved in the same vice is not because they belong to different worlds, but that, in fact, they belong to the same world. Hammond claims that "although sexual activity between masters and page boys seemed to be almost the norm in princely or aristocratic households, certainly never leading to prosecution, those cases where more lowly ranked men were said to be having sexual relationships with page boys inevitably led to much more severe punishments" (p. 149). In the next piece of detective work Hammond speculates on who may have been the author of the "Grands Dieux" song around which the entire second part of the book is structured, offering as potential candidates: Le Petit, the writer executed a year after Chausson; Bussy-Rabutin, a member of Condé's circle who resented Guitaut's position as favorite; and Chausson himself, a suggestion that is possible given the accusations against him of singing "impious songs." Hammond concludes with the observation that in the years following Chausson's execution, Louis XIV took strict measures to control the Parisian soundscape, setting up a police force in 1667 under Nicolas de la Reynie to catch people singing songs just like that.[8]

In such a rich study of soundscapes I was surprised to see so little analysis of music and, in particular, the musical instruments that regularly accompanied street singers in Paris. Most pictorial representations feature a fiddle, and at one point, Hammond describes a singer using a "vielle," employing the Cotgrave definition that simply refers to it as a "harsh-sounding instrument" (p. 41). This is, of course, a hurdy-gurdy, an instrument particularly used by French street performers, and whose extraordinary droning sound would have made the streets of Paris sound very different to, say, the streets of London. This absence of musical discussion is balanced, however, by the accompanying Parisian Soundscapes website, [www.parisiansoundscapes.org](http://www.parisiansoundscapes.org), where each of the songs mentioned in the book has been recorded by the period instrument group, Badinage. The recordings are wonderful, although just as valuable are the "Song-Tune Recordings," where the tunes that are the musical basis for the thousands of songs in the Chansonner Maurepas are recorded, such that anyone, musically trained or not, can listen and learn to sing along with the words of the chansonner. Indeed, my only quibble with the recordings, featuring the mezzo-soprano Katie Bray (winner of the Dame Joan Sutherland Audience Prize at the 2019 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World, no less), is that they are, perhaps, *too* accomplished to give a sense of what street songs would have sounded like on the Pont Neuf. While there may have been very talented singers selling their wares on the streets of early modern Paris, there is also plenty of evidence that singers lived a hand-to-mouth existence and turned to song-selling as only one of many, often seasonal, jobs they undertook.[9] It was unlikely that any of them were professionally trained, and the same can be said for the other performers of street songs: their consumers. Street songs, set to familiar tunes, were designed so that anyone could perform them, and it would be welcome to see more projects like this one also use folk performers, in the way that the AHRC "Hit Songs and their Significance in Seventeenth-Century England" project has done with the Carnival Band (<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/projects/100ballads/>), rather than courtly arrangements that privilege the Versailles experience over that of the Pont Neuf.

It is because this book is so successful at showing how sound blurred the boundaries between elite and lower-class activities in seventeenth-century Paris that I make such an appeal. *The Powers of Sound and Song* should encourage all historians to re-evaluate their approach to elements of the past that, at first glance, may seem ephemeral or unknowable, and to view the subjects of their enquiries through all five senses, not just visually. A book that will be valuable not just to music historians and cultural historians, but to historians of sexualities as well, *The Powers of Sound and Song* shows us how to listen to Paris, a model that will be valuable for urban historians too.

## NOTES

[1] Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2011); See the AHRC Early Modern Soundscapes Network (<https://emsoundscapes.co.uk/>); the Early Modern Songscapes Project (<https://ems.digitalscholarship.utoronto.ca/>)

[2] Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance: Sound, Architecture, and Florentine Urban Life* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016); David Garrioch, “Sounds of the city: the soundscape of early modern European towns,” *Urban History* 30, no. 1 (May 2003): 5-25; Aimée Boutin, *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[3] The literature on balladry is vast; for a selection see Patricia Fumerton, *The Broadside Ballad in Early Modern England: Moving Media, Tactical Publics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Tom Cheesman, *The Shocking Ballad Picture Show: German Popular Literature and Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); Jenni Hyde, *Singing the News: Ballads in Mid-Tudor England* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Éva Guillourel, *La complainte et la plainte. Chanson, justice, cultures en Bretagne (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes/Dastum/CRBC, 2010).

[4] Nicholas Hammond, *Gossip, Sexuality, and Scandal in France (1610-1715)* (Pieterlen, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2011).

[5] Lewis Seifert, *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Jeffrey Merrick, *Sodomites, Pederasts, and Tribades in Eighteenth-Century France: A Documentary History* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

[6] This trend has been recorded in Italy but rarely documented elsewhere. See, Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2014).

[7] This phenomenon is a subject of some excellent recent studies, including, John Romey, “Songs That Run in the Streets: Popular Song at the Comédie-Italienne, the Comédie-Française, and the Théâtres de la Foire,” *The Journal of Musicology* 37, no. 4 (2020): 415–458; Judith le Blanc, *Avatars d’opéra: Parodies et circulation des airs chantés sur les scènes parisiennes* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014).

[8] This surveillance informs Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[9] See the multiple essays on street singers in *Renaissance Studies* 33, no. 1 (2018), Special Issue: “Street Singers in Renaissance Europe,” eds. Massimo Rospocher and Luca degl’Innocenti.

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