

Le sentiment d'un début

Patrick LaGrange

Translated, with Notes, by Julien Anglais-Écurie

With a new Preface by Owen Hughes

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Preface

*“History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation.”*¹

So begins this beguilingly slim volume which, through word-of-mouth in the intellectual ferment of post-war Paris, became a classic of French historiography almost immediately after the author's untimely death in 1953. Yet despite its fame within France, as well as a brief moment of notoriety—mostly confirmed to university campuses—in the United States and Great Britain following a hastily executed 1954 translation, this remarkable work still remains largely unknown outside of its country of origin. With this new translation, meticulously researched and tenderly rendered by Julien Anglais-Écurie, LaGrange's masterwork—his only published work—can now be experienced by the English-speaking reader in all its strange power.

It has perhaps always been the narratives surrounding *Le sentiment d'un début* and its author which have attracted the most attention outside of (and even in) France: the infamy and rage, their tragic outcome, and the enduring mystery of the man and his work are indeed of a caliber seldom found in such placid topics as historiography, even in the histrionic atmosphere of French intellectual life. When Michel Foucault famously described *L'affaire LaGrange*, as the entire controversy was to become known, as "that densest of onions, whose core is madness,"² it was unclear if he was referring to LaGrange himself, his book, or both together. Yet behind the purely sensational aspects of LaGrange's life sit ideas of genuine merit to the philosophy of history. It is these ideas, which have become obscured by the "unique style," to put it gently, with which LaGrange expressed them, that Anglais-Écurie herein attempts to elucidate.

To this end, this translation is replete with copious notes explaining both the

¹ « L'histoire est cette certitude produite au point où les imperfections de la mémoire rencontrent les insuffisances de la documentation. »

² « Cette plus dense d'oignons, dont le trognon est la folie » (Foucault, *Les Temps modernes*, July 23rd, 1972) It was a bastardized version of this quote, recklessly shortened to just "The maddest of onions!", which ungracefully graced the cover of the 1954 Schuck translation and inspired much mockery of French academia on American university campuses.

historical/historiographical references made by LaGrange as well as those more unsavory, and ultimately deadly, plagiaristic passages. Yet Anglais-Écurie has made the bold—and I think prudent—decision to pass no judgement on LaGrange's action in his translation or notes. Those lines which so offend academic sensibility will be duly pointed out but, besides where absolutely necessary, the reader will be left with only such basic information as the source and, where LaGrange translated passages from foreign books into French, the original text as printed in the editions he had available to him.

This approach is wholly new to the nascent field of English LaGrange studies, such as it is, and is even radical when compared to the several annotated editions of *Le sentiment d'un début* available in French. It will certainly be a shockingly barebones—but hopefully more intellectually fulfilling—experience for those English-speaking readers whose only previous LaGrange experience comes from the salacious 1954 Schuck translation, a work which sits somewhere between academic translation and tabloid sensational. Produced while *L'affaire LaGrange* was still ongoing in Paris, the Schuck translation only identifies around half of the purloined lines in the book, to say nothing of its missing several of LaGrange's numerous, and important, historical allusions and references; on the whole, it appears more interested in describing the scandalous proceedings in France than actually transmitting LaGrange's ideas accurately. That this edition—written by *une vache espagnole*, to use what was reportedly one of LaGrange's favorite insults—has been for over thirty years the only English translation of LaGrangian thought is a crime against reason thankfully corrected in the present publication.³

Given the fact that the notes in this volume will avoid such distracting details, it seems pertinent to provide here an unadulterated and unvarnished description of LaGrange's life and

³ If the only purpose of this new translation was to correct the many mistakes and omissions of the aforementioned horrendous translation than it would be performing a noble task. In fact, there have also been several *new* discoveries in LaGrange's notes and papers—which weren't accessible to researchers until the entire *L'affaire LaGrange* was wrapped up in the early 1970s—which shine new light on, and at times challenge, some of the most basic tenets LaGrangian historiography. Take, for example, that most famous line, quoted at the start of this preface, which has come to serve as a slogan of LaGrange's work in general. It was discovered that, for the first several drafts of the work, LaGrange instead had « L'histoire est cette certitude produite au point où les imperfections de la mémoire *affrontent* les insuffisances de la documentation. » —"the point where the imperfections of memory *confront* the inadequacies of documentation." Such scholarly information will also be included in Anglais-Écurie's notes.

death for those readers unfamiliar with the basic events. While this biography will be fairly short, it will not leave out many of the major details of LaGrange's chronology as we know it today: for a death which caused so much writing and discussion, shockingly little is known of the life before the publication of that fateful book. Most of the information below is taken from Jacque Henri-Abel's *LaGrange: Une vie dans les murmures du passé* (1963), which is still the most comprehensive biography of LaGrange available and draws directly from an unpublished memoir-pamphlet LaGrange was working on in the year before his death:

Patrick LaGrange was born Patrick Louis Jean-Luc LaGrange in 1899 in the city of Valence, south of Lyon. His father, Édouard Michel LaGrange (185?-1916), was a cemetery caretaker who as a young man had had his right hand blown off during the Franco-Prussian War, an experience which left Édouard embittered with and suspicious of all political activity; his one strong political stance was a vehement, almost fanatical anti-war sentiment.⁴ The lessons in political cynicism transmitted from the pessimistic Édouard to young Patrick were to have an outsized effect on LaGrange's early thinking, if for no other reason than through a total lack of familial political engagement; LaGrange was later to say that it wasn't until he was in the army in his early teens that he heard adults speak of matters other than "food, family, and finances."⁵ His mother, Marie-Coralie Archambeau (1879-1899), died in childbirth, leaving the young LaGrange and his father more-or-less alone; Édouard had four children from a previous marriage, three of whom still lived in Valence, but Patrick was Édouard's last child and, by that time, the only one still living at home. They lived quietly in a small but well-made cottage on the outer grounds of the *Cathédrale Saint-Apollinaire de Valence* where Édouard worked. LaGrange would go on to remember the house as physically comfortable but intellectually unstimulating for a precocious child such as himself, calling it "a place without books."⁶

Indeed, it was this lack of stimulation that led LaGrange, at the tender age of fifteen, to

⁴ Édouard perhaps had other, more historical, reasons to be suspicious of political engagement: the Valence LaGrange's could trace their family line back to the disgraced fortune teller Magdelaine de La Grange (1641-1679), who was arrested in 1677 and later executed as part of the *affaire des poisons*, a poisoning and witchcraft scandal that ultimately left thirty-six people dead, several from the inner circle of Louis XIV.

⁵ « norriture, famille et finances » (Henri-Abel, *LaGrange*, 14, 1963)

⁶ « un endroit sans livres » (ibid., 15)

leave Valence unannounced in the middle of a warm August night and bike almost sixty-five miles, over the course of two days, to Lyon to enlist in the French Army. Placed into the Fifth Army under General Louis Franchet d'Espèrey, LaGrange, through a series of clerical mistakes, was immediately given a spot on a troop convoy moving towards the front and, without receiving any sort of military training, was thrust into combat in the autumn of 1914. It is through such confounding circumstances that LaGrange found himself holding a rifle for the first time in his life, participating in the *miracle de la Marne* and pursuing German troops toward the Aisne River; it is also, even more confoundingly, in the bloody fields of northeastern France that LaGrange the historian was born.

On the morning of September 10th, LaGrange received a letter from his father for the first time since his midnight decampment several weeks prior; he had written Édouard a short note while waiting with the troop convoy in Paris and fully expected his father, despite his general anti-war feelings, to praise his youngest son for valiantly seeking to serve his country. Instead, Édouard, writing uneasily with his remaining, non-dominant hand, told his son that it was clear he had not listened to a word of advice his father had ever given him and that he would do well to not return to Valence if he somehow survived the war; whether or not he continued living—and Édouard opined he would not—he was dead to his father. "Despite cleaning the blood off my boots with dirty water the night before," LaGrange would later say of his reaction to the letter, "it was not until I read those words that my childhood truly died."⁷ Abandoned by his only close family, the devastated LaGrange wandered to the outskirts of the camp and, looking out over the Aisne, had his leg grazed by a sniper's bullet. The horrific casualties suffered by the Fifth Army during the Battle of the Marne meant that staffing for officers was constantly being depleted and LaGrange, whose mostly superficial wound merely limited his mobility, was forced to spend most of his recovery working in the tent of one Sergeant Maurice Cointreau; it was in Cointreau that LaGrange was to find a surrogate father and first mentor.

Cointreau, like many French officers, was a man of middle-age and high social standing;

⁷ « Bien que j'ai laver le sang de mes bottes avec de l'eau sale la nuit précédente, ce n'est que lorsque j'ai lu ces mots que mon enfance est vraiment morte. » (ibid., 22) Édouard's letter turned out to be ironically prophetic: death would indeed mean that father and son would never reunite, though it would be his own, not Patrick's; Édouard died of inflammation of the stomach a little over a year before LaGrange would leave the army and return to Valence again.

born into a moderately wealthy merchant family, he was, by the outset of the war, a well-respected history professor at the Sorbonne. What's more, he was known for being absolutely devoted to his chosen subject, and to that end he had brought a selection of his vast library with him to the front, intent on letting the war affect his research as little as possible. Even just in seeing him negotiating the clerical duties of an officer's tent—taking dictations, reading telegrams, pouring champagne—Cointreau was able to sense the deep, untapped intelligence in LaGrange, an intelligence that in Valence had always pushed up against the surface but had yet to break through. Perhaps his aim was to regain some of the academic atmosphere he so dearly missed during his separation from his beloved Sorbonne, or maybe he was just looking to escape, however briefly, the Hellish vistas of human suffering encountered daily outside the flaps of the tent: whatever the reason, Cointreau decided to take the young LaGrange as a pupil. LaGrange, in turn, proved to be more adept than Cointreau initially expected: LaGrange remembered how, "the first time I asked 'but how do the common people fit into all this?', bombs exploding outside and shaking the canvas of the tent, a strange look came over Mr. Cointreau's eyes, followed by a mad flash of joy."⁸ Eventually, after LaGrange's injury healed, Cointreau was to go as far as transferring the young man permanently to his staff for the sole purpose of continuing their lessons and discussions, a position LaGrange kept for the remainder of his time in the war.

It was through such improbable events that LaGrange ended up spending many of his nights as a soldier studying to the sound of shellfire and dogfighting. Cointreau and he read through and discussed many major works in French history and historiography, from the classics of the late 19th century—such as Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France* and Hippolyte Taine's *Les Origens de la France Contemporaine*—to more contemporary works, such as François Alphonse Aulard's recently published *Études et leçons sur la Révolution française*. Cointreau, despite his wealthy background and officership, was also interested in more radical historical work, as well as the burgeoning idea of "history from below"⁹, and he had with him on the front such

⁸ « la première fois que j'ai demandé : « Mais comment les gens du peuple s'intègrent-ils dans tout cela? », les bombes explosant à l'extérieur et faisant trembler la toile de la tente, un regard étrange apparut dans les yeux de M. Cointreau, suivi d'un éclair fou de joie folle » (ibid., 24)

⁹ A phrase which comes from French historian Georges Lefebvre: « *histoire vue d'en bas et non d'en haut* » Lefebvre used the phrase in a 1932 review of a work by Albert Mathiez, a prominent member of the *Annales* school with which LaGrange would later identify.

provocative titles as the recently assassinated socialist Jean Juarès' *Histoire Socialiste*, then barely a decade old.

These books, and the accompanying discussions with Cointreau, were to become the seeds of LaGrangian thought; even where LaGrange's views diverge from the turn-of-the-century works he studied with Cointreau, as they often do, these texts can always be located as the starting point, the beginning of the theoretical discussion. So too can the violence—the abject horror of death, decay, and confusion—in which these initial forays into historical thought took place: "Take my work to be a house: the parapets were carved in university by Bloch and Febvre," LaGrange would say in a 1950 letter to his publisher, "while the foundation was laid by Cointreau in Hell."¹⁰

In May of 1917 the Fifth Army, including Cointreau and LaGrange, again found themselves on the Aisne River, just west of the commune of Lœuilly, taking part in the Second Battle of the Aisne. On the night of May 5th, an hour after sundown, Cointreau and LaGrange were discussing Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. Cointreau got up to retrieve a book from his desk and was walking with it along the wall of the tent when a shell exploded outside, mere feet from where he was standing; he was obliterated instantly. LaGrange, sitting several meters away, received burns on a significant portion of his body, a large piece of shrapnel in his right thigh (which caused him to walk with a limp for the rest of his life), and a concussion from the remains of Cointreau striking him in the head. "One second [Cointreau] was walking and moving his hands emphatically to make some point, and the next he was splashed upon my face and body, the pages of his book sticking to my skin."¹¹ This injury was effectively the end of the war for LaGrange: he spent the remainder of 1917 recovering in a military hospital and returned to Valence in the spring of 1918 to find an empty house and his father's grave in the cemetery he had cared for his entire adult life.

The injury, and Cointreau's death, also mark the end of reliable autobiographical

¹⁰ The other historians mentioned are Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, two of the co-founders of *Annales*.

¹¹ « Une seconde, [Cointreau] marchait et bougeait ses mains avec insistance pour faire valoir un point, et l'instant d'après, il a été éclaboussé sur mon visage et mon corps, les pages de son livre collant à ma peau » (ibid., 25)

information about LaGrange; the aforementioned memoir-pamphlet, which LaGrange appears to have worked on intermittently throughout 1952, ends abruptly upon his return to Valence. Whether LaGrange had already stopped working on the pamphlet when *L'affaire LaGrange* broke out or ceased writing because of the stress the scandal caused him is unknown. Unfortunately, the end result is that, after the war, LaGrange disappears back into *des masses* he would later so emphasize in his writing.¹² We know only the most basic facts about his life between the end of the time outlined in his pamphlet and the publication of *Le sentiment d'un début*: he tried to enroll at the Sorbonne but, without proof of his connection to Cointreau and no other form of education, he was not accepted and instead studied at the *Université Grenoble Alpes*, then a very small and isolated school. After graduating as a middling student he returned to Lyon and became an instructor of history at the public *Lycée du Parc*, where he taught from 1921 to 1939, all the while learning several foreign languages (he would eventually be proficient in English, Spanish, and German, as well as being comfortable reading Italian, Russian, and Hebrew) and writing prolifically about history and historiography in his free time. Sadly, almost no manuscripts survive for these works, as LaGrange burned most of his papers as his mental state deteriorated in July of 1953. LaGrange also kept an obsessive eye on the work of the *Annales* school, subscribing to their titular journal and reading almost every word published by the members of its first generation, such as Bloch, Hauser, and Febvre. LaGrange, viewing himself as an unknown but important member of the *Annales* school, submitted several essays to the journal for publication, though none were ever accepted.¹³ We know almost nothing of what LaGrange did during Nazi occupation: he quit his job in 1939 and virtually disappears until the publication of *Le sentiment d'un début* in 1952. By 1949 we know he was living alone in a small apartment on Île Saint-Louis, but his source of income and daily activities remain a complete mystery.

And then, as abruptly as he left, LaGrange reappears into history: on November 25th, 1952, a small, unknown French publishing house—*Éditions Scudéry*—released a short work by

¹² There is perhaps no greater cliché in LaGrangian scholarship than pointing out that, yes, the life of the man matches his most famous claim about the nature of history—yet, despite the triteness of this observation, it is so remarkable that it does bear repeating, even if the author does so with some embarrassment.

¹³ Tragically, none of these essays survive either: *Annales* does not keep copies of rejected pieces, and LaGrange's copies burned with everything else.

an equally unknown French historian. It went unreviewed and unmentioned for almost two months until, in January of 1953, someone loaned a copy to Jean-Paul Sartre, Paris' intellectual tastemaker *par excellence*, which he reads, in his own words, "twice a day for a week."¹⁴ On February 2nd, a review is published by Sartre in *Les Temps modernes*, his own journal, in which *Le sentiment d'un début* is called "the most important book for historiography since Carlyle"¹⁵; by the end of that week *Éditions Scudéry* cannot print copies fast enough to meet demand. Paris in the early spring of 1953 is gripped by one central question: Who is Patrick LaGrange? Sartre's review ends with a plea to the author: "Reveal yourself, our modern Herodotus, and all Paris shall be lain before your feet."¹⁶

By the end of February, Paris has its answer: on the 28th, LaGrange walks into the office of *Éditions Julliard*, the publisher of *Les Temps modernes*, and makes his identity known. Soon he is smoking in cafes with Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and their cohort, and eating dinner with history professors from the Sorbonne. In the chic intellectual scene of post-war Paris, LaGrange stood out; as de Beauvoir would later tell Henri-Abel, "his hair was long and matted, his fingernails uncut. He spoke with a heavy country accent and seemed to come almost to the point of tears if someone disagreed with him."¹⁷ LaGrange, for his part, seems to have viewed his sudden fame as both a gift and a natural outcome of his work, something which was always due to find him eventually. Being interviewed on a radio program in April, LaGrange described his sudden contact with the full range of French intellectual culture: "I get kind letters from Camus, angry letters from Merleau-Ponty, and incomprehensible letters from Lacan. I try to answer all of them as promptly as possible."¹⁸

Yet, despite LaGrange's seemingly easy assumption of the role of French historian *du jour*, all was not well with the "modern Herodotus." When Sartre suggested to LaGrange that he start working on a new edition of *Le sentiment d'un début* to be published by *Éditions Julliard* in

¹⁴ « deux fois par jour pendant une semaine » (Sartre, *Les Temps modernes*, February 2nd, 1953)

¹⁵ « le livre le plus important pour l'historiographie depuis Carlyle » (ibid.)

¹⁶ « Révèle-toi, notre Hérodote moderne, et tout Paris sera déposé sous tes pieds »

¹⁷ « Son cheveux étaient longs et emmêlés, son ongles non coupés. Il parlait avec un fort accent campagnard et semblait presque en larmes si quelqu'un n'était pas d'accord avec lui » (Henri-Abel, *LaGrange*, 90, 1963)

¹⁸ « Je reçois des lettres aimables de Camus, des lettres de colère de Merleau-Ponty et des lettres incompréhensibles de Lacan. J'essaie de répondre à toutes ces questions le plus rapidement possible » (ibid., 98)

larger printings—and that he give Sartre copies of the original manuscript so Sartre could write his own introduction and help compile more thorough notes—LaGrange reacted with uncharacteristic anger. Then, on June 13th, a strange comment appeared in *Les Temps modernes*: a French academic, working on translations of Henry James' short stories, had noticed a line in the book which appeared to be an almost direct quotation from the story *Beast in the Jungle*. In the second chapter, § 3 (p. 49 of this edition), the line "history affects us as the sequel of something to which we have lost the beginning"—« l'histoire nous affecte comme la suite de quelques chose dont nous avons perdu le commencement »—bears striking resemblance to James' "It affected him as the sequel of something of which he had lost the beginning."¹⁹ The academic does not think there is anything wrong with the allusion to James, in fact he praises LaGrange for appropriating the quote in such a thematically fitting way, but he kindly suggests that in future editions James be mentioned and that perhaps that instead of LaGrange's own translation, which appears to be the source, his own is used instead.

In the next edition of *Les Temps modernes*, three more comments were received: a Dostoevsky scholar had also noticed an unsourced quotation, this time from *The Possessed* (see p. 23 & fn. 51), a fellow historian a line lifted from Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* (p. 79 & fn. 213), and a musicologist a line that bafflingly seems to have been taken from an aria by the 18th century *opéra comique* composer André Ernest Modeste Grétry (p. 53 & fn. 117). All three echo one another in their rationale for not making their discoveries known sooner: "I thought it odd but not alarming until it was shown he had done it twice." With these innocuous words, the floodgates were opened. By the next week *Les Temps modernes*—and most other prominent Parisian publications—were being sent dozens of claims of plagiarism a day. The list of texts LaGrange pulled from is dizzying in its scope: a vast array of French, German, English, Spanish, and Russian novels (see fn. 2 for an extended note on the novels in LaGrange's personal library); a propagandistic biography of Pierre Laval published by the *Régime de Vichy* (p. 111 & fn. 234); and the mystical devotions of 14th century English anchoress Julian of Norwich (p. 12 & fn. 22), to identify a few of the writer's favorites.

It did not take long for "*L'affaire LaGrange*" to be the headline of most Parisian

¹⁹ (James, *The Beast in the Jungle*, 2, 1903)

newspapers. On an afternoon in late June, Sartre sat down with his copy of *Le sentiment d'un début* and a pen and underlined every credible accusation of plagiarism thus far received. "As the pages blackened with ink, so too did Jean-Paul's face." de Beauvoir would later write, "He spat on the ground and stormed off, mumbling under his breath."²⁰ For Sartre, the very honor and credibility of *Les Temps modernes*—and his own name—had been sullied by a man he would only thereafter call "that damned fool LaGrange."²¹ By this time, LaGrange was no longer leaving his apartment, answering calls, or responding to letters, from Sartre or otherwise. When he did break his silence, LaGrange, a life-long lover of classical music, replied with a now infamous comment in a *France-Soir* column: "Do you object to Brahms containing Bach?"²²

After an additional agonizing month, in which LaGrange burned most of his papers and had all his food and wine delivered to his door by his landlady, he once again slipped out into the indifferent embrace of a warm August night. This time, instead of biking away to protect the future of France, LaGrange quietly accepted what he felt had irrevocably become the end of his own. In the early morning hours of August 15th, 1953, Patrick LaGrange slipped softly into the Seine, his jacket pockets full of stones and trinkets from the first World War.

Sartre privately expressed hope that the shocking death would quell the controversy but, much to his consternation, LaGrange's suicide had the exact opposite effect. By the time his body was dredged from the bottom of the river the following evening, the fate of the disgraced historian was the sole topic of conversation in Paris. With LaGrange gone, the discussion around *L'affaire LaGrange* turned on all sides more extreme: the majority, who saw the deceased as a fraud and a disgrace to French scholarship, grew more vitriolic in their attacks on his honor, character, and life (that little of it that was known, at least). His activities during the war—or rather, the lack of information about what exactly those activities were—drew immediate suspicion, and the invocation of that most dreaded of epithets: *collaborateur*. On the other hand,

²⁰ « Alors que les pages noircissaient d'encre, le visage de Jean-Paul noircissait aussi. Il cracha par terre et s'enfuit en marmonnant dans sa barbe » (de Beauvoir, *Hard Times*, 238, trans. 1994)

²¹ « ce maudit imbécile LaGrange » (ibid., 241)

²² « Vous opposez-vous à ce que Brahms contienne du Bach? » (LaGrange, *France-Soir*, June 29th, 1953)
Interestingly, the author Françoise Sagan, a friend of Sartre and close follower of *L'affaire LaGrange* initially incorporated this line into an early draft of her 1959 novel *Aimez-vous Brahms?*

there was a minority of French intellectuals—notably historian Albert Mathiez—who defended LaGrange and his work, arguing that the use of unsourced quotations and unclear allusions was in fact exactly the point of *Le sentiment d'un début*, an active demonstration of the meeting of "memory and documentation" the book spends so much time describing. In the hysterical attitude immediately after LaGrange's death these defenders lifted him up to an almost deistic level: the tragic, mad genius of French history who saw what we could not and told us in language too complex for us to understand, only to be killed by the ignorant masses by vicious assaults on his sensitive nature.

There was also, beyond the philosophizing and debating, more practical matters to be settled: how should the money made by the book's sales—which, due to the controversy, were only going up over time—be allocated. Did any of the multitudinous people plagiarized by LaGrange deserve compensation? Normally, a case of plagiarization does not call for a reassessment of the intellectual property rights of a text. Normally. Court officials at the time estimated that up to half of the book's contents were either direct quotations or clear paraphrases to other works.²³ As soon as word spread that there might be money involved in being quoted by LaGrange, the amount of people reporting the theft of their own work increased by an order of magnitude. LaGrange's grocer claimed that he and LaGrange had had many long, involved discussions about the nature of history while LaGrange paid for his vegetables, discussions which LaGrange supposedly copied verbatim as large passages of his book. What began as a scandal about the philosophy of history was now threatening to challenge the most basic tenets of French copyright law. It is beyond the scope of this preface to address the legal arguments made about, and eventual ramifications of, *L'affaire LaGrange* in the French courts:²⁴ suffice to say that it is one of the cruel tragedies of life that the name LaGrange is as known today more by students of French *droit d'auteur* law than it is to students of historiography.

And so, as LaGrange tells us in the opening lines of chapter 4, "history dances on to a rhythm only it can hear;" by the mid-1950s, Paris at large had moved on. The legal battles were

²³ Incidentally, modern scholarship raises this estimate to almost three quarters.

²⁴ Interested readers are directed to Hugh Mundford's article *From all directions at once: droit d'auteur and Patrick LaGrange*, published in the Oxford Law Review Vol. CXI, No. 3, 1979, pp. 43-61

over, as was the initial excitement shown by intellectuals and academics. There were new books, new ideas, and new scandals to focus on, and the name Patrick LaGrange was slowly relegated to certain history courses at the Sorbonne, or the odd mention in an article by a non-French historiographer. Yet there is something enduring about LaGrange's work, something besides the almost unbelievable details of his life and death. He had a prescience—some kind of clouded foresight—into the current information age in which we all live; an age beyond the metanarrative, beyond the comforting idea that there is trail which we can follow through the ruins of time to be illuminated about our past and ourselves. He could see a coming time when the yarn of truth, the very fabric from which history is weaved each day before our eyes, would be bifurcated countless times into a million little individual threads. Regardless of how the plagiarization in *Le sentiment d'un début* makes one feels about LaGrange as a scholar, it must strike true with some chord in the soul listening to LaGrange as a communicator of the *feeling of being alive in the (post)modern world*. The basic fact is that LaGrange's method of presentation was ultimately the one taken up by all the world, despite the objections to him in his time; to be alive today is to turn on the television, tune into the radio, or read the newspaper and find a LaGrangian presentation of both history and our present moment—as a jumbled, polyvocal wall of fragments taken from here and there, assembled intricately and yet incomprehensibly. It is all we can do to try to get *le sentiment d'un début*.

Durham, 1987