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Author(s): Colin Jones

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The King's Two Teeth

by Colin Jones

Hyacinthe Rigaud's famous swagger portrait of Louis XIV in full regalia presents 'Louis the Great' at the height of his powers, framed in an ostentatiously theatrical setting. Painted in 1701, displayed at the Paris Salon in 1704, the work dazzles the viewer with sumptuous ceremonial display.¹ Crown, sceptre, great sword of state, and heavy, fleur-de-lisée ermine robes evoke the putatively timeless nature of the French monarchy. The king's posture is unfazed, relaxed, mildly disdainful. He inverts the royal sceptre playfully as though it were a walking stick, or a child's toy – or the swagger-stick of a military commander; the gesture magnifies rather than diminishes his grandeur. Strongly featured are his sculpted legs, which the chronicler, the duc de Saint-Simon, a far from sycophantic aficionado of court life, adjudged the finest he ever saw. They painstakingly replicate the pose which Louis, as a young man, had adopted when dancing as Apollo in court ballets as his own Premier Dancer, at a time when the Sun King was in the ascendant.² The king's lofty and impassive gaze, almost dictating reverential obeisance from the humble spectator, emerges from a body polished, primed and more than a little prettified for the occasion. The calf-muscles are scarcely those of a sextuagenarian: especially one often crippled by gout and habituated to being pushed round in a wheelchair. The red-heeled courtier shoes lift the ruler well above his scarcely impressive five foot three inches. The copious curls of a towering black wig obscure the fact that Louis was precociously bald. And the unruffled forehead displays a ruler with scarcely a care in the world – even though when it was painted Louis was embarking with heavy heart on what would be his last, ruinous war, the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14). Yet in this mythologizing and mendacious portrait which seeks to erase the passage, even the existence, of time, one feature stands out – and shocks – for its stark naturalism: hollow cheeks and wrinkled mouth reveal a ruler with not a tooth in his head.

* * *

It is difficult to say quite what Rigaud was intending by portraying the royal mouth in this hyper-realistic manner – a rather extraordinary gesture in fact in a period in which toothlessness had rarity value in paintings depicting men and women of power. 'Warts and all' was unusual and emphatically not the Louis-Quatorzian way. Over Louis XIV's long reign (1643–1715), moreover, portraits of the king increasingly presented the royal body in glorificatory, mythologizing ways which made light of transient corporeal features. The king was thus painted consorting with pagan gods and

goddesses, for example, or else hovering symbolically over battlefields and sieges more like a tutelary deity than a commander stripped for battle.³ At times, this representational symbolism seemed on the point of erasing the doctrine of ‘the king’s two bodies’ which, as Ernst Kantorowitz has shown, was at the heart of the ritual logic of French monarchy from the Middle Ages onwards.⁴ According to this doctrine, the king possessed both a body that was eternal and ceremonial and one that was also biological and transitory. Kings might die but kingship never did. Rigaud’s portrait overtly subscribes to the mythologizing aesthetic whereby Louis the Great rises above human affairs and defies the passage of time, and at first sight it may appear that the painter is showing the king’s ceremonial body transcending and annulling the monarch’s biological frame. Yet the toothless mouth is a kind of covert reminder of and homage to the doctrine of the ‘king’s two bodies’. Although it would be utterly unseemly – for reasons which we will explore – for Rigaud to have shown the king’s mouth open revealing his toothlessness for all to see, the artist nevertheless contrives to caution viewers to be wary of the painting’s overt overblown claims. Kings (even Louis XIV) were men not gods, and aged accordingly.

In this paper, I have accepted what I take to be Rigaud’s invitation to recall the biological body of the king. While remaining heedful of what Kantorowicz might have called the ‘king’s two teeth’, my aim will be to consider the place of the teeth (and to some extent, the mouth) in representations of royalty and in wider political culture over the last century of the Ancien Régime, and also to follow the vagaries of the teeth themselves – not simply their representation or evocation – in the mouths of kings and their subjects. This, then, will be an article about royal teeth in late seventeenth and eighteenth-century France: their presence, absence, display, concealment, care, pleasures, pains, loss, extraction, appearance and attraction.

By the time that Rigaud painted this portrait, his royal sitter had long since transformed into his representational signature this impassive royal visage, which combined royal hauteur, lordly *sprezzatura*, physical nonchalance and bodily (and notably mouth) control. Following the emulative penchant of court societies finely analysed by Norbert Elias,⁵ the calmly tranquil and mildly disdainful royal gaze became the default expression for any aspiring denizen of Versailles. Louis XIV’s courtiers slavishly followed princely behaviour in everything which related to the body. Even the king’s anal fistula, which prompted a surgical operation in 1686 which mingled in equal proportions operational success and sheer ghastly horror, triggered a mimetic response at Versailles. The court surgeon Pierre Dionis recounted how the condition of having an anal fistula became ‘very fashionable’ in the months following the operation, citing around thirty cases of courtiers who approached him confidentially. Each of them ‘had mild cases involving a weeping wound on the anus or even just haemorrhoids [but they] did not hold back from presenting the surgeon with

their behinds for him to make incisions'. Furthermore, a puzzled Dionis recorded, 'they appeared upset when I told them there was no need for them'.⁶ If the courtiers at Versailles were not averse to sacrificing their behinds in the cause of royal emulation, they would certainly do as much as regards their face.

Fixity of expression became not solely an expressive norm at court but was also viewed as an aesthetic desideratum. This was evidenced in the generalized use of face-whitening creams, usually accompanied by strategically-placed blobs of rouge and the occasional 'patch' or beauty-spot. This cosmetic regime of *le fard* valorized uniformity in appearances and blurred physiognomic differentiation. La Bruyère held that courtiers acted as if their faces were all made of marble; they looked like marble too – 'very hard and highly polished'.⁷ There were practical as well as ideological reasons for such immobility. If one wore face paint, even a slight smile was best eschewed, since it risked cracking the mask – physically as well as metaphorically. Smiles were best avoided for another reason too: the metallic base to the creams caused teeth to rot. The courtly mouth was thus best left tight shut. A Versailles smile was little more than a barely detectable twitch of the facial muscles – which was invariably intended as disdainful and contemptuous: one smiled *de haut en bas*.⁸ In the cut-throat courtly atmosphere of favour-seeking, moreover, facial impassivity was also a strategy of survival and promotion: letting one's face betray one's emotions was a sure way of giving rivals an advantage in the quest for preferment. In the same way, Louis himself never wished to betray his feelings to his followers: facial immobility was thus *de rigueur*. In fact, an inexpressive face came rather naturally to Louis XIV, who was renowned for his seriousness. As a lad, the king (Madame de Motteville noted) had rarely smiled.⁹ He loosened up somewhat in adolescence, it is true, becoming an ardent pleasure-seeker for a while. He had serial mistresses; he danced and gambolled; he laughed loud and long at Molière's plays. But as he aged, his outlook became more austere again, and, egged on by the hyper-devout Madame de Maintenon, his morganatic wife, he returned to the sombre, moody temperament of his early years. The curé of Versailles remarked at the turn of the century that the king had above all 'a serious appearance and look'.¹⁰

Seriousness on the canvas, however, owed less to the king's temperament than to his judgement of what constituted appropriate grandeur in the pre-eminent classical idiom of Louis-Quatorzian visual culture. The dispassionate *froideur* of the royal gaze had been endorsed by the rules of artistic expression formulated by Louis XIV's own great Premier Painter, Charles Le Brun. The latter had sought to codify conventions concerning the representation of emotion in painting, drawing on implicit norms within Western art dating back to Antiquity.¹¹ Classical precedent seemed to confirm the need to keep the mouth firmly closed. That this became the staple way for portraitists to depict *honnêteté* – the courtier's behavioural

ideal of polite civility – also owed something to the preachings of a thousand conduct books, which predated Castiglione and found echoes amongst the Ancients.¹² Furthermore, Le Brun's model of facial expression was even more powerful in that it not only endorsed artistic and behavioural conventions seemingly established in Antiquity, but also sought endorsement in the cutting-edge physiology of René Descartes.¹³ Descartes argued that the soul was positioned in the pineal gland, which was located within the head, behind the bridge between the eyes. The gland was where thought and sensation were formed, and this influenced the flow of animal spirits to the muscles – including, importantly, the muscles of the face. It followed that when the soul was calm and tranquil, the face was perfectly at rest. Conversely, when the soul was agitated, this expressed itself on the face – particularly around the eyebrows, the facial feature located closest to the pineal gland. Furthermore, the more extreme the passion the more contorted the muscles in the upper part of the face – and the more the lower part of the face came to be affected too. Rigaud had evidently well digested Le Brun's lessons. There is not a wrinkle to be seen on the royal forehead, the noble part of the royal physiognomy, revealing a ruler whose soul was in a state of perfect tranquillity – thus making the ageing mouth even more of a conundrum.

Rigaud's buccal homage to the doctrine of the king's two bodies (and thereby, the king's two teeth) chose to evoke toothlessness – without showing the insides of the royal mouth. The latter gesture was unimaginable in a portrait of this kind. Opening the mouth in a painting (let alone in a court setting) would reveal a lack of *gravitas* that one found mainly in representations of the insane, of the overly-passionate and of humble plebeians.¹⁴ For Louis to open his mouth would subvert the mythologizing power of the painting as a whole – as well as calling into question the serenity of the royal forehead. Such a gesture was laughable for another reason too – the gaping toothless mouth was a particular target of Rabelaisian humour.¹⁵

In fact, Louis XIV's teeth had had quite a history. At one time, indeed, it had been his teeth which had marked him out to become 'Louis the Great'. In 1638 when he was born, fortune-tellers and soothsayers had had a field-day, for the baby prince was discovered to have two teeth already present in his mouth. This precocious dentition seemed to confirm the hand of God in a conception which had already in fact been widely saluted as miraculous – the lateness of the pregnancy of his mother Anne of Austria (in her late thirties...) had been a source of pan-European wonder. To the somewhat sadistic amusement of the royal court the two infant teeth wreaked havoc on a long line of wetnurse nipples. To contemporaries, this prodigious, gluttonous, voracious pair of teeth seemed to presage the wonders which the hungrily devouring prince would in the fullness of time effect on the map of Europe. At first, moreover, Louis lived up to the expectations of quasi-boulimic rapacity. Yet from the 1680s – just as he was adjusting to major

tooth loss – the victories started to dry up. After 1701 it was with sarcasm rather than wonder that Dutch anti-French pamphleteers would evoke the king's military impotence in the War of Spanish Succession. Louis the Great had transmuted into Louis the Toothless.¹⁶

Long before they lost their metaphorical utility for the French crown, Louis XIV's teeth had lost their physical bite. The royal sitter was to all intents and purposes toothless before Rigaud even picked up his brush. In the late 1670s the detailed health journals kept by royal physicians noted that 'the king's teeth are extremely poor by nature'.¹⁷ The royal mouth, another witness observed, 'became toothless when nearly all [the king's] teeth fell out around his fortieth year' – thus maybe from the late 1670s.¹⁸ Although the Princess Palatine set the fateful moment of the king's complete toothlessness later – it was in 1707, she remarked, that she had found the king 'greatly changed' because of the disappearance of his last teeth¹⁹ – the Versailles curé, Hébert, reckoned that the king was toothless from around 1700.

There was nothing unusual about the condition of the king's mouth. The brutal reality of what we might call the Old Régime of Teeth in early modern Europe was that after a certain age toothlessness was the norm – and not just for kings. 'Individuals who keep all their teeth healthy until an advanced age are extremely rare', noted one more than well-informed source in the early eighteenth century. 'Some of these owe this advantage to a fortunate temperament, others to particular care. But the great majority of individuals have rotten teeth from the earliest age, and lose their teeth long before due time'.²⁰ With teeth vanished good looks. Articulacy suffered too, for talking could transmute into an affair of grunts and whistles. Discomfort, inconvenience, problems with chewing food, facial disfigurement and the impairment of beauty caused by the bad state of the mouth were the substance of everyday adult life. Madame de Maintenon complained that no one understood what she was saying as she got older: 'pronunciation vanishes with the teeth'.²¹ The king himself was similarly fatalistic: Saint-Simon records that once, chatting frankly with the octogenarian Cardinal d'Estrées in 1714, Louis 'complained of the inconvenience caused by no longer having any teeth. "'Teeth, Sire?" replied the Cardinal, "Ah ! Who does have any?"'. Such a reply may have caused courtiers to snigger behind their hands, since, as Saint-Simon noted, 'what was striking in this response was the fact that at his age he had had fine white teeth'.²²

Such exceptions were biological deviations, regardless of wealth or status. Indeed, the king's luxurious lifestyle may even have exposed him more to tooth loss than many of his subjects, through his famously high intake of sugar, still then a luxury commodity. One contemporary claimed that was the main reason for the royal toothlessness: according to the Chevalier Lagrange-Chancel, the king's tooth loss was due to 'the large quantity of sweetmeats that he ate at the end of his meals and in collations'.²³ Louis was especially fond of candied fruit. Yet there is nothing in the journals which

the king's physicians kept on the royal health to suggest that his medical consultants ever made a link between Louis's tooth decay and sugar. They were much more likely to ascribe his problems to the classic determinant of humoral imbalances.²⁴

It was not that Louis had ever lacked for medical attention: indeed, he had the best levels of dental care that an individual could buy. The Royal Household contained a sub-grouping of medical practitioners, hand-picked for excellence. In 1649 there were around forty such individuals – physicians, surgeons, apothecaries and others – composing the 'royal medical household', presided over by the king's Premier Physician (the *Premier Médecin du Roi*).²⁵ The latter's weighty duties covered all aspects of the health and well-being of the ruler. He was present, for example, at the formal ceremonies surrounding the king's waking and retiring (the *lever* and the *coucher*), and he inspected the royal body should the king not feel himself. He oversaw all aspects of the royal regimen. As far as we can tell, he advised the king on mouth-cleansing: washing the mouth out with water and rubbing the teeth and gums with a cloth was about as far as this went. At mealtimes, he ensured that the Master of the Goblet (*Chef du Gobelet*) tested the king's bread, salt and wine – there were some, not unjustified, worries about court poisoning – and proffered to his ruler the regal knife, spoon and toothpick, the latter usually fashioned from a sprig of rosemary or some other aromatic plant.²⁶ Were the king to have toothache, the Premier Physician summoned court apothecaries to supply opiates – thyme and distilled cloves were particularly favoured – so as to keep pain at bay.

Relatively disarmed in regard to prevention and seemingly unaware of the toxic impact of sugar on the royal mouth, university-educated physicians had next to nothing to offer either in terms of hands-on treatment. They still shunned manual operations of any sort: they were the eye and the brain of medical intervention, they held, while the surgeon provided the hand, operating under strict medical instruction.²⁷ For any problems which required manual expertise, Premier Physicians looked to the king's Premier Surgeons. Yet by the late seventeenth century, these too were tending to disdain manual operations upon the mouth. One reason for this, according to the royal surgeon Pierre Dionis, was that the kind of intense wrist pressure needed to extract teeth risked upsetting a surgeon's subsequent capacity for delicate and speedy operational procedures. He also opined that the pulling of teeth was best left to lower-order practitioners, since tooth pulling 'smacks of the charlatan and the mountebank', and was therefore unsuitable for upwardly mobile surgeons.²⁸ Tooth care thus tended to end up in the hands of the semi-artisanal grouping of tooth pullers (*arracheurs de dents*) often known as 'operators for the teeth' (*opérateurs pour les dents*), whose presence within the royal medical household was attested from the 1640s.²⁹ Generally, such figures were poorly esteemed – as Dionis indicated – since they were held to resemble the itinerant tooth pullers who toured the provinces combining public tooth drawing with the sale of

charlatanesque remedies and with theatrical and fairground representations. Such figures had rendered proverbial the expression 'mentir comme un arracheur des dents' – 'to lie like a tooth puller'.³⁰

The tooth operators attached to the king's household were probably responsible for the routine extraction of the royal teeth as the state of Louis's mouth worsened in the 1670s and 1680s. It was a striking sign of the fatalism with which the royal physicians regarded such operations that they did not count such extractions as even worthy of mention in the highly detailed *Journal de santé* that they maintained on the king's health.³¹ It was only when they adjudged that the king's mouth problems had become medically threatening that the physicians became interested. In 1685 Premier Physician Antoine Daquin gravely decided that, given the growing intolerability of Louis' remaining teeth, he should have those teeth remaining on the upper side of one of his jaws extracted. For the operation itself, Daquin seems to have availed himself of the services of Paris surgeon, Charles Dubois, who boasted the title 'opérateur pour les dents du Roi'.³² Unfortunately, in undertaking this task, the hapless menial also accidentally took out much of the king's jaw itself and the surrounding palate. This extraordinary gaffe left a gaping hole within the king's mouth, so that, according to Daquin, 'every time that the king drank or gargled the liquid came up through his nose, from where it issued forth like a fountain'.³³ The fountains of the château of Versailles were of course world-famous, but this was one fountain the king could do without, especially in his public displays of eating. Worryingly, moreover, the hole became nauseously infected. The Premier Surgeon, Charles-François Félix, realizing there was simply no other way, determined to undertake a full-blown operation on the royal mouth.³⁴ Then, primed for the momentous event, in two fearful sessions, with Daquin looking anxiously on, Félix cauterized the king's palate. The red-hot iron which he deployed – which would have caused Louis quite extraordinary levels of pain – did manage to block up the hole, albeit only after an extensive period of healing. The fountain dried up: Louis could henceforth eat normally again. But the mouth whose exterior features Rigaud painted so realistically bore internal stigmata of these and other tribulations only too characteristic of the Old Régime of Teeth.

* * *

In 1747 the duc de Luynes, assiduous recorder of the movements and the minutiae of Louis XV's court, noted that there was a vacancy in the medical entourage of Mesdames the King's Daughters. It was, he noted, 'for what is called a dental surgeon (*chirurgien dentiste*) or, to use a more common expression, "a tooth puller" . . . For a long time, Capron has had this post in the king's household'.³⁵ The duke was making an offhand reference to the emergence of a new kind of mouth-care specialist. In fact a revolution was already in train. The tooth puller and the tooth operator were now stepping

aside to allow the entry on to the stage of History of a new technologist of the mouth: the dentist.

Luynes had in mind Jean-François Caperon [sic], who had entered Louis XV's medical household in 1719 as 'operator for the king's teeth'. He paid a *brevet d'assurance* (a kind of security guarantee common with posts on the fringes of the system of venality of office) worth 30,000 livres. In return, he received an annual remuneration of 2,000 livres.³⁶ Caperon, who would long keep his place within the royal court (even being ennobled in 1745), was an interested witness in this change in professional semantics.³⁷ The term 'dental surgeon' used so disdainfully by Luynes in 1747 but destined for a long future was in fact a recent neologism, coined in 1728 by the Parisian practitioner, Pierre Fauchard. Up until that time, the latter had worked under the title of 'tooth expert' (*expert pour les dents*), a phrase which the Paris Medical Faculty had approved in 1699.³⁸ The phrase allowed him and others to distinguish themselves socially and professionally from semi-skilled 'tooth operators' like Louis XIV's Dubois or from plebeian tooth pullers and tooth drawers. But in 1728 Fauchard published *Le Chirurgien-Dentiste, ou Traité des Dents*, therewith laying claim to a new professional identity – and effectively kick-starting modern, scientific dentistry. The two-volumed work has long been recognized as the foundational text of modern dental science.³⁹ Both an experienced practitioner and a skilful anatomist, Fauchard revolutionized the practices of mouth care, stressing the arts of prevention and the importance of hygiene. Part of this was a transformation of the technical instrumentation which a 'dental surgeon' used, which allowed a wider range of mouth-services to be offered to the public.

Fauchard was adroit in combining the neologism 'dentist' with the title of 'surgeon'. For Parisian surgery was in the midst of a remarkably dynamic phase, with powerful surgeons such as François de La Peyronie using the support of Louis XV to expand their corporative rights *vis-à-vis* the physicians of the Paris Medical Faculty.⁴⁰ Under the aegis of the Paris Surgical College, the whole class of *experts pour les dents* now abandoned this vocational term and turned themselves into fully-fledged Fauchardian dentists (*dentistes*). By the 1750s there were nearly fifty individuals plying their craft as 'dentists' in Paris alone.⁴¹ Before long, even itinerant fairground charlatans were seeking to get in on the act and changing their puffs to feature themselves as dentists rather than tooth pullers or operators.⁴²

Louis XIV's successors were almost spoiled for choice in selecting for the care of their teeth and mouths individuals from a much more effective and skilful cohort of practitioners. Though, curiously, they did not employ Fauchard (who enjoyed a Europe-wide reputation), they did manage to select as *dentiste du roi* – this term was now becoming current – capable practitioners. Caperon was generally adjudged to be highly competent,⁴³ and used his reputation in skilful self-promotion, managing to be awarded prized lodging in the Louvre and property in the town of Versailles where he

built a mansion.⁴⁴ In 1760 he was succeeded by Paris-based Étienne Bourdet, author of a well-received work of the new dentistry, *Recherches et observations sur toutes les parties de l'art du dentiste* (1757), based on Fauchard's precepts. He too would be ennobled for his services.⁴⁵ In 1783 he passed a contract with one Vincent Dubois-Foucou, whereby the latter became reversionary *dentiste du roi*. Foucou paid the sizeable sum of 120,000 livres for the privilege, four times what Caperon had paid for the same position in 1719. This was a sure sign of the increased levels of wealth that beckoned for individuals charged with stewardship of the king's teeth, and those of his courtiers.⁴⁶ On Bourdet's death in 1789 Dubois-Foucou duly became *dentiste du roi*, though the turn of events made that post something of a poisoned chalice. In December 1792 he was refused permission to visit Louis XVI in the Temple prison where the ex-king was suffering with a cheek abscess.⁴⁷ At the hour of his death, poor Louis XVI was thus suffering toothache – though that was arguably not the worst of his problems. Dubois-Foucou, for his part, managed to survive the opprobrium and perils of being adjudged a political suspect under the Terror because of his royal links. He would end up as imperial dentist to Napoleon.

Royal support for what one might call – for the first time without excessive anachronism – the dental profession was evident in the increase in the number of posts for such individuals in the king's household, and in the service entourage of members of the royal family and high aristocracy. According to the duc de Luynes, it was Louis XV's practice to choose a different dentist from his own for other members of his family 'so as to stimulate emulation by multiplying the number of posts'.⁴⁸ Thus the position mentioned by Luynes in the entourage of Mesdames the King's Daughters went to Claude Mouton, author of a solid *Essai d'odontotechnie* (1746). Following the mimetic courtly logic we have already observed in reference to everything from top to (literally) bottom, the royal example was soon picked up by other aristocrats, who added a surgeon-dentist to their medical retinue. Claude Jacquier de Géraudly was appointed dentist to the duc d'Orléans, apparently in the 1740s, for example, while Paul Dauvers was permitted the honorific title of dentist to the Dauphine. Another Parisian practitioner, Laudumiey, prided himself on being consultant dentist to king Philip V of Spain, whom he had attended as early as 1715.⁴⁹

The service of dentists was particularly prized for children of the royal family. This was a period of course in which the teething problems of children had to be taken seriously: teething was a major cause of infantile mortality (notably through dehydration in fever). In 1748, for example, the little Marie Thérèse, daughter of the duc d'Orléans, had died during weaning at Versailles, after much suffering caused by a fluxion in the cheek. The autopsy report stated unequivocally that 'teeth were the sole cause of death'.⁵⁰ Luynes reported a related – if more cheerful – incident in the same year. It followed the decision of Claude Mouton, dentist to Mesdames the King's Daughters, to extract one of the teeth of the fifteen-year-old

Madame Victoire. The young princess tried everything to postpone the operation, and managed to defer it for a day at least. However, Luynes recounted,

finally the king decided to [see to the affair, and to] visit them after vespers and he stayed for two and a half hours. The Dauphin was on his knees in front of [his sister] Madame Victoire delivering all the exhortations that affection and good faith inspired, and he also made touching reference to the goodness of the king, who had it in his power to have her held and her tooth taken out by force, and yet who wished to wait and to be sympathetic towards her weakness and unreasonableness. It was important that she should not abuse this goodness of heart. The king indeed could not resolve to give the order to have her tooth pulled out. He kept putting it off, with Madame Victoire making endless signs of affection. She even suggested that the King should pull it out himself. It seemed like a scene from both a tragedy and a comedy. The queen... seeing that the king could not make up his mind to act with authority, represented to him the absolute need for him to act. And Madame Victoire, finally seeing that she only had a little time left to decide, finally let the tooth be extracted, but she wanted the king to hold her on one side and the queen on her other while [her sister] Madame Adelaide held her legs... When the operation had been done, Madame Victoire said, 'The King really is good. I feel that if I had a daughter as unreasonable as I have been, I would not have been so patient'.⁵¹

In this tooth-pulling farrago which set an absolute monarch against a flighty and obstinate child, it was the absolute monarch who eventually just about won the day, even if it evidently pained him. Despite his gloomy reputation for liking nothing better than conversation about 'burials, deaths and surgical operations',⁵² Louis XV was in fact rather squeamish at the sight of blood. On another occasion, when the young Dauphin was having one of his milk teeth pulled out, one of the consultant physicians 'seeing the king go pale, handed him a flask of *eau de Luce* [an antispasmodic] that he had in his pocket'.⁵³

Overall, Louis XV, his family and his court thus benefited from the emergence of dental surgery in the course of the eighteenth century, and the victory of the dental surgeon over the old tooth-pulling 'operator'. This was also true of the ambience of Louis XV's successor. Before she sent her daughter, Marie-Antoinette, to France so as to marry the Dauphin (the future Louis XVI), the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa thought it wise to summon to Vienna the best that Europe could provide to align the princess's teeth so that these would look 'very beautiful and well arranged'. Her choice – of course – fell on a Parisian dentist, Laverand.⁵⁴ A pretty mouth and teeth – usually carefully guarded behind closed lips – were becoming major assets at court. A little after this incident, the ambassador of the Duc of Savoy at Versailles complained to his master about the *toilette*

of the princesse Joséphine de Savoie, who had recently married the comte de Provence, Louis XV's son. The unkempt state of the hair and the teeth of the new comtesse de Provence, he confidentially stressed, left a great deal to be desired. 'These kinds of thing that elsewhere are viewed as minutiae are matters of great essence *dans ce pays-ci*' – that is, at the French court.⁵⁵

That well-groomed hair and pretty teeth had become 'matters of essence' at Versailles would seem to suggest that something significant was happening in the royal court as regards facial appearances. Change was certainly in the air; but pre-existing codes of bodily and facial comportment at Versailles remained remarkably durable and resistant to change. Even though a taste for fashion had begun to penetrate old court convention, it did not overthrow existing modes of behaviour. Wigs changed their forms and styles – but stayed on the head. The empire of *le fard* continued its reign on courtly faces – male as well as female.⁵⁶ In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, court painter Jean-Marc Nattier established a sort of production-line churning out portraits of aristocratic women with identically whitened complexions, blobs of rouge, hair swept back, largely impassive expressions and Antique robes which made them appear virtually interchangeable.⁵⁷ Furthermore, a kind of mental paralysis in the face of change affected both Louis XV and Louis XVI, who remained hyper-faithful to the conventions of protocol established by 'Louis the Great'. In regard to his style of rule, Louis XV's early comment spoke volumes: 'I wish to follow the example of the late king, my great-grandfather, in everything'.⁵⁸ Reverence for Louis-Quatorzian precedent was evident in the fossilization of protocol as regards the king's *lever*, his *coucher*, and the rules over court presentations. Indeed it was even present among the Versailles garden staff, who opposed changes in garden design claiming that 'one could do nothing but respect all that has been established at great expense in the reign of Louis XIV'.⁵⁹ Royal portraits showcased this spirit of fidelity to Louis-Quatorzian precedent. They were often deliberately modelled on Rigaud's swagger portrait and invariably showed off a fine leg, and occasionally a playfully inverted sceptre. But they never highlighted an ageing mouth, as Rigaud had done so powerfully. Louis XV and Louis XVI used Louis XIV-style facial impassivity in order to display regal *sprezzatura*.

Maybe it was as well that the royal face stayed immobile and that the mouth did not edge open. For despite all the opportunities which dentists and dental surgeons now offered, the insides of the royal mouth were still not at all a pretty sight. The dynastic tradition of the king having little concern for his own teeth in the manner of Louis XIV continued unabashed. Louis XV showed affectionate concern regarding the teeth of his children, but no concern at all for his own. In 1742 he had a tooth extracted which was causing him some trouble. This loss, the marquis d'Argenson noted, 'is going to disfigure his face when he talks and when he laughs'. D'Argenson was astonished that Louis seemed utterly insouciant. What irritated the monarch about the whole affair was that it forced him to stay at

home and miss hunting for two whole days.⁶⁰ It was much the same story with Louis XVI. According to one of his pages, the new king had 'a very strong and fine leg' (a Louis-Quatorzian leg, in fact) and 'his face was agreeable'. In contrast, 'his teeth were badly aligned and made his laugh very graceless'. As for the king's brother, the comte d'Artois, the future Charles X, 'he continually had his mouth open, which made his physiognomy look less than intellectual'.⁶¹

Norbert Elias has familiarized us with the idea that the royal court was the *fons et origo* of new forms of bodily comportment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet in regard to behaviour regarding the mouth and teeth at least this does not at all seem to have been the case. A story which d'Argenson recounted about the high-placed future royal minister, the duc d'Aiguillon, suggested a similarly cavalier lack of courtier concern for a pleasing mouth. The duke, d'Argenson noted,

weary with the princess de Conti [his mistress] and she of him, made her take another lover. He himself withdrew to his estates in Vézetz in the Touraine, and called in a tooth puller. Shutting himself in with him, he proposed that the man should take out all his teeth, which were very fine. The tooth puller refused, but the duke threatened to run him through with his sword, and on these grounds the tooth puller operated. M. d'Aiguillon made a packet of the teeth and sent them to Madame the princess. He said that it was all so as to avoid the fluxions which were inconveniencing him. He now looks horrible, hardly talks, and smiles not at all.⁶²

Pace Elias, the royal court was only dimly echoing (where it was not openly resisting) new forms of face and mouth behaviour being generated elsewhere. The real motor of change was neither king nor court but town, or to be more precise, the city of Paris. This is not completely surprising. As Louis-Sébastien Mercier noted on the eve of 1789, the city of Paris had taken over from Versailles as cultural trend-setter. Versailles was now merely a satellite of Paris, whizzing round in its whirlwind. 'In the time of Louis XIV', he continued, 'the court was more developed than Paris; today, the opposite is true.' 'The court has lost its erstwhile ascendancy over the fine arts [and] over letters.' Truly, Mercier held, 'the word "court" no longer has the resonance it did under Louis XIV'. It was from the city of Paris rather than from Versailles 'that the rest of the country's approval or disapproval derives. It is from the city [Paris] that the court has learnt the real value of things'.⁶³

A pleasing smile was in fact fast becoming a significant commodity out in the Parisian medical marketplace. Fifty-odd dentists, as we have noted, were plying their profession in the last decades of the Ancien Régime. They now had the skill to work preventively so as to slow down – or even stop – the precocious loss of teeth which had formed such a significant part of the

Old Regime of Teeth. These practitioners could clean, whiten, align, fill, replace and even transplant teeth so as to produce a mouth that was cleaner, healthier and – in smiling – attractive. The invention of porcelain dentures on the eve of 1789 seemed to promise a booming new industry in false teeth. As the Bastille fell, Parisian newspapers were crammed full with publicity endlessly vaunting mouth cosmetics and instruments of every description (tooth-picks, tongue-scrapers, breath-sweeteners, lipsticks and even – notable innovation – tooth-brushes).⁶⁴

The arts also began to register the change in mouth behaviour. The cult of sensibility, triggered by abbé Prévost's translation of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1742 and then heightened by the appearance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Émile* (1762) legitimated open and unaffected expression of emotion – for both sexes, moreover.⁶⁵ Historians of the movement have highlighted the prevalence of sentimental tears and fainting fits as the most notable expressions of the wave of sensibility – but the movement's impact on the smile was similarly devastating.⁶⁶ The courtier's disdainful, minimalist and *de haut en bas* smirk gave way to warm, expansive and emotive smiling which opened the heart rather than hid the real feelings. The smiling face was responsive, mobile and transparent, not fixed into the deathly mask-like visage of the courtier. Cosmetic styling reflected this change: manufacturers favoured more transparent substances which heightened and enhanced natural colour rather than blanked it out. The substances which composed beauty products were supposed to be more natural too, and they were contrasted with the metallic and toxic character of the *fard* still dominant out at Versailles.⁶⁷

This emergent aesthetic of sensibility and emotional responsiveness had an impact on the face in art too. Madame Vigée-Lebrun's self-portrait, displayed in the Salon at the Louvre in 1787 and showing herself smiling sweetly and opening her mouth to reveal the whitest of teeth, caused shock among the diehard supporters of traditional values in portraiture.⁶⁸ But it was a belated testimony to the growing hegemony that a more expressive and expansive facial register was establishing itself in the wider world and in genre painting. Madame Vigée-Lebrun had excellent teeth – indeed, her smile was an open advertisement for the finest Parisian dentistry. The contrast could not be greater between her openly-displayed teeth and the nightmarish black hole that was Louis XIV's mouth, which Rigaud prudently chose to represent as closed. In addition, moreover, this new kind of smile now had currency in a world in which the former hegemony of the aesthetic of facial immobility associated with the royal court had been overthrown. New forms of facial behaviour were achieving a legitimacy which made the royal court not the leading edge of innovation, as Elias would have had it, but the last bastion of an outmoded aesthetic. The king's two teeth – that is to say, the material existence of those teeth and also their implicit cultural representation – had simply failed

to keep up with the emergence of new ways of feeling and thinking, and of using the mouth.

* * *

In this paper I have sought to show that teeth – in this case, the king's teeth – are 'good to think with', as Claude Lévi-Strauss might say.⁶⁹ In the last years of the reign of Louis XIV, the king of France found himself as defenceless against tooth ache and tooth loss as the humblest of his subjects. Representations and conventions about the depiction of the mouth following the classic tradition whereby teeth had to be hidden were slavishly followed in the court at Versailles. In court manners, the smile expressed disdain and social distance and the lips stayed shut. In the following century, both of Louis XIV's successors continued to show a marked insouciance about their own teeth, even whilst being influenced by changing mores in regard to the teeth of their families. But the picture of buccal fixity at court contrasted with the much more dynamic situation evident in Paris, where new cultural expectations were fuelled by emergent technologies of the mouth which allowed the better preservation and presentation of the teeth. The development of dental science – surely the last grand narrative still standing unassailed at the turn of the twenty-first century? – plus the replacement of the tooth puller by the dentist and the emergence on the marketplace of a powerful demand for a different kind of mouth all in their different ways highlighted a silent revolution of the teeth and the smile which bade to put paid to the Old Régime of Teeth.

Colin Jones is Professor of History at Queen Mary University of London. He has published widely on French history, particularly on the French Revolution and the history of medicine. His most recent book is *Paris: Biography of a City* (2004), which won the Enid MacLeod Prize. He is currently completing a book manuscript provisionally entitled *The French Smile Revolution: Identity and Dentistry in 18th Century Paris*.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 There is a brief but excellent discussion of this painting in Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France, 1700–1800*, London, 1971, p. 4. See too Stanis Perez, 'Les Rides d'Apollon: l'évolution des portraits de Louis XIV', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 50: 3, 2003.

2 See Régine Astier, 'Louis XIV, Premier Danseur', in *Sun King: the Ascendancy of French Culture during the Reign of Louis XIV*, ed. David Lee Rubin, London, 1992; and my *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon, 1715–99*, London, 2002, esp. chap. 1: 'France in 1715: the King's Leg and the Choreography of Power'.

3 For Louis XIV's tendency to present mythical versions of his body which seem to deny its biological substance, see Louis Marin, *Le Portrait du roi*, Paris, 1981; Jean-Marie Apostolides, *Le Roi-machine. Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1981; Jean-Pierre Neraudau, *L'Olympe du Roi-Soleil. Mythologie et idéologie au Grand Siècle*, Paris, 1986. More generally, see Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, Cambridge, 1992; and

Georges Vigarello, 'Le corps du roi', in *Histoire du corps*, ed. Vigarello with Jean-Jacques Courtine and Alain Corbin, vol. 1, *De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, ed. Vigarello and Daniel Arasse, Paris, 2005.

4 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton, NJ, 1957. Kantorowicz's work spurred a whole genre of 'neo-ceremonialist' history: for example Ralph Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France*, Geneva, 1960; Sarah Hanley, *The Lit de Justice of the Kings of France: Constitutional Ideology, Legend, Ritual and Discourse*, Princeton, NJ, 1983; and Richard A. Jackson, *Vive le Roi! A History of the French Coronation from Charles V to Charles X*, Chapel Hill, NC, 1984. See too the critical approaches of Alain Boureau, *Le Simple Corps du roi. L'impossible sacralité des souverains français (XVe-XVIIIe siècles)*, Paris, 1988; and Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory*, Princeton, NJ, 2001.

5 Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 1, *The History of Manners*, New York, 1978; Elias, *The Court Society*, Oxford, 1983.

6 Pierre Dionis, *Cours d'opérations de chirurgie démontrées au Jardin royal*, 2nd edn, Paris, 1715, p. 342.

7 La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, Paris, 1696, p. 311. The term 'poli' of course signified polite as well as polished.

8 In this it followed classical theories of laughter: see Quentin Skinner, 'Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter', in his *Visions of Politics*, vol. 3, *Hobbes and Civil Science*, Cambridge, 2002.

9 Mme de Motteville, cited in Stanis Perez, 'La Santé de Louis XIV: médecine, pouvoirs et représentations autour du corps du roi', doctoral dissertation, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006, p. 71. I have drawn heavily on Perez's pathbreaking thesis, which covers many aspects of Louis XIV's health. His book, *La Santé de Louis XIV: Une biohistoire du Roi-Soleil*, Paris, 2007, appeared too late for me to incorporate its findings into this article.

10 *Mémoires du curé de Versailles François Hébert (1686–1704)*, ed. Georges Giraud, Paris, 1927, p. 40 (my italics).

11 Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: the Origins and Influence of Charles Le Brun's 'Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière'*, London, 1994. Le Brun's theories were targeted at history painting, but do find their echo in portraiture.

12 See Roger Chartier, 'Distinction et divulgation: la civilité et ses livres', in his *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime*, Paris, 1982.

13 Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions*, pp. 17ff.

14 See Colin Jones, 'Pulling Teeth in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *Past and Present* 166, 2000, pp. 140–2.

15 Jones, 'Pulling Teeth', pp. 128–30. Classically, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1984.

16 Perez, 'La Santé de Louis XIV', pp. 22ff, 433–4; Burke, *Fabrication of Louis XIV*, pp. 39, 139–40.

17 *Journal de santé de Louis XIV*, ed. Stanis Perez, Grenoble, 2004, p. 199; Perez, 'La Santé de Louis XIV', p. 211.

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20 This was Pierre Fauchard, on whom see below: Fauchard, *Le Chirurgien-dentiste, ou Traité des dents*, 2 vols, Paris, 1729, Preface, no page number.

21 Cited in Roger King, *The Making of the Dentist, c. 1650–1760*, Aldershot, 1998, p. 164.

22 Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, vol. xxv, p. 182.

23 Perez, 'La Santé de Louis XIV', p. 211.

24 *Journal de santé de Louis XIV*, for example pp. 198ff.

25 [Jean Pinson de La Martinière], *Estat de la France, comme elle estoit gouvernée en l'An MDCXLVIII*, no place of publication, 1649: reprint, Paris, 1970, pp. 85–6. See also pp. 95–6 for the queen's medical personnel. The size of the royal medical household swelled in the eighteenth century. See Colin Jones, 'The Médecins du Roi at the End of the Ancien Régime and in the Revolution', in *Medicine at the Courts of Europe, 1500–1837*, ed. Vivian Nutton, London, 1990. For the routines, see Perez, 'La Santé de Louis XIV', esp. pp. 18ff.

26 Perez, 'La Santé de Louis XIV', pp. 178, 201n. For poisoning fears, see Silje H. A. Normand, 'Perceptions of Poison. Defining the Poisonous in Early Modern France', Cambridge University PhD dissertation, 2004.

27 For the general treatment of the medical community see Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France*, Oxford, 1997. King, *Making of the Dentiste* also provides good general background: esp. chap. 3. For the rise of the surgeons, see Toby Gelfand, *Professionalizing Modern Medicine: Paris Surgeons and Medical Science and Institutions in the Eighteenth Century*, Westport, CT, 1980.

28 Dionis, *Cours d'opérations*, p. 521. For fairground charlatans and tooth-pullers, see Brockliss and Jones, *Medical World*, pp. 230ff. Jones, 'Pulling Teeth', pp. 126–30; and King, *Making of the Dentiste*, esp. pp. 174ff.

29 *Estat de la France*, pp. 85–6.

30 Dionis, *Cours d'opérations*, p. 517.

31 Perez, 'La Santé de Louis XIV', p. 330.

32 Dionis, *Cours d'opérations*, p. 519.

33 *Journal de santé*, p. 225.

34 For the fistula operation, see *Journal de santé*, pp. 230 ff. Cf. Gelfand, *Professionalizing Modern Medicine*, p. 34.

35 Charles-Philippe Albert, duc de Luynes, *Mémoires sur la cour de Louis XV*, 17 vols, Paris, 1908, vol. viii, p. 303.

36 Archives Nationales (henceforth AN) O1 63 (18 Nov. 1719); 68 (14 Jan. 1724). See also AN, O1 79 (13 Dec. 1735). For Forgeron, one of Dubois's successors, and a predecessor of Caperon, see King, *Making of the Dentiste*, p. 175.

37 AN, O1 89 (December 1745).

38 See King, *Making of the Dentiste*, pp. 39ff.

39 Pierre Fauchard, *Le Chirurgien-dentiste, ou Traité des dents*, Paris, 1728; 2nd edn, 1746. The best biography, now long outdated, is André Besombe and Georges Dagen, *Pierre Fauchard. Père de l'art dentaire moderne*, Paris, 1961.

40 See Gelfand, *Professionalizing Modern Medicine*, and Brockliss and Jones, *Medical World*, esp. chap. 9.

41 *Estat de la France*, p. 322.

42 This is evident in royal certificates given to sellers of orvietan and similar itinerants who practised tooth-pulling and other forms of mouth care: See AN, V3 193–5 throughout.

43 King, *The Making of the Dentiste*, pp. 183–4.

44 AN, O1 80 (30 Jan. 1740), 92 (1 March 1748), 94 (19 July 1750), 99 (12 Feb. 1755). See also Luynes, *Mémoires*, vol. xi, p. 265.

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51 Luynes, *Mémoires*, vol. ix, pp. 11–12.

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53 Luynes, *Mémoires*, vol. ii, p. 29.

54 Maurice Boutry, *Le Mariage de Marie-Antoinette*, Paris, 1904, p. 39.

55 Vicomte de Reiset, *Joséphine de Savoie, comtesse de Provence*, Paris, 1913, pp. 58–9. The phrase, *ce pays-ci*, was classic insider jargon at Versailles for referring to the court.

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57 See Xavier Salmon, *Jean-Marc Nattier, 1685–1766*, Versailles, 1999.

58 Michel Antoine, *Louis XV*, Paris, 1989, p. 162. See also Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles. The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550–1780*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 216.

59 Vincent Maroteaux, *Versailles. Le Roi et son domaine*, Paris, 2000, p. 148.

60 René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson, *Journal et mémoires*, ed. Edme Jacques Benoît Rathery, 9 vols, Paris, 1859–67, vol. iii, p. 260. For fuller details, see too Luynes, *Mémoires*, vol. iv, pp. 282–3; and 'Journal de police sous Louis XV', in Edmond Jean François Barbier, *Chronique de la Régence et du règne de Louis XV (1735–58)*, 8 vols, Paris, 1857–66, vol. viii, p. 199.

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62 D'Argenson, *Journal et mémoires*, vol. ii, p. 179.

63 Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 12 vols, Paris, 1782–8, vol. iv, pp. 258, 262–3.

64 Colin Jones, 'French Dentists and English Teeth in the Long Eighteenth Century', in *Medicine, Madness and Society: Essays in Honour of Roy Porter*, ed. Roberta Bivins and John Pickstone, Manchester, 2007; and Jones, 'The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere and the Origins of the French Revolution', *American Historical Review* 101, 1996.

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66 See esp. Anne Vincent-Buffault, *Histoire des larmes, XVIIIe-XIXe siècles*, Paris, 1986; and Anne Coudreuse, *Le Goût des larmes au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1999. In the final section of this article, I am outlining conclusions which will be more fully fleshed out in my book, 'The French Smile Revolution: Identity and Dentistry in Eighteenth-Century Paris'.

67 Martin, 'Consuming Beauty'.

68 See the discussion in Jones, 'Pulling Teeth', pp. 140–2.

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