

Introduction: *Interpreting Louis XIII*

A perplexed historian once wrote: "Louis XIII was one of those persons whom we do not know how to judge; it is not possible to make pronouncements about him if one wishes to be scrupulously accurate and fair."¹ What perplexed that scholar makes this seventeenth-century Bourbon king of France an engrossing challenge for a historical biographer. For Louis XIII was driven by the contrary impulses of personal insecurity and determination to rule; and by an exalted sense of royal authority that was undermined by unkingly tendencies to be taciturn, morose, suspicious of others, and backbiting. He was known to his age by the sobriquet "Louis the Just"; but a few historians have called him sadistic, and even some contemporaries thought him a bit cruel. These personal contradictions and paradoxes would be sufficient cause to investigate his life even if his reign had not been important.

But his reign *was* important; and, not surprisingly, it contains paradoxes stemming from his baffling personality that beg to be resolved. How do we reconcile Louis's habitual dependence on others with his decisive acts against those persons when they thwarted his authority? Surely this man—who sprang a coup d'état against his mother that ended in the assassination of her political favorite, then fought two wars against her, and eventually humiliated her into fleeing from his realm—was not a weak monarch. Nor does he appear so dependent on others when we learn that as his reign wore on he dismissed every successive personal favorite who interfered with his

2 Introduction

policies. And could a royal weakling rebuff his mother, wife, and brother in standing by the best minister of his reign?

More fundamentally still, how do we explain the fact that a ruler deemed by his contemporaries and historians incapable of holding sophisticated goals presided over basic political changes in his French state? Is it enough simply to assume that these were the doing of the celebrated chief minister of Louis's mature years, Cardinal Richelieu? If one pauses to reflect for a moment, it must seem odd that this monarch so jealous of his authority had little or nothing to do with the great authoritarian acts of his personal rule. So we ask: what role did this bundle of personal and political contradictions play in his own government's severe disciplining of the French nobility and other social and institutional elements of his realm, the destruction of the Protestant "state within the state," and the breaking of the encirclement of Bourbon France by the Austrian and Spanish branches of the rival House of Habsburg?

The strangest paradox of all is that Louis XIII has had only one full-dress biography, and few scholarly studies of specific aspects of his life.² While his reign is one of the best-known periods of French history, he is almost terra incognita in his own land. Indeed, when I began work on his life history I had to introduce him to acquaintances with a witticism: "Louis XIII was best known as the father of Louis XIV"; or, worse still, link him to the work of fiction most critical of him, with the remark "He was the king in *The Three Musketeers*."

This biography is designed to make Louis XIII sufficiently intelligible that we will no longer have to consider him an enigma, or an anomaly in his own reign. Rather than assuming that there was little connection between his person and his reign, I will pursue the theme of their intimate connection. My thesis is that, far from being the do-nothing king ridiculed in Alexandre Dumas's *Three Musketeers* or, as recent serious scholarship has reinterpreted him to be, the shadowy "collaborator" of his great minister Richelieu, Louis XIII was a highly effective monarch. Louis's sternly moralizing but hesitant nature, which earned him the lifelong sobriquet Louis the Just, led him inexorably to a very particular mode of governing that both suited his personality and worked. This same personality, moreover, lay behind the specific policies he formulated and implemented with his ministers, especially Richelieu. Ironically, however, the king's mode of governing made him look personally weak, thereby misleading both his contemporaries and later historians about his real political role. Equally

ironically, his determined stand on principled policies was at the sacrifice of his own feelings, and gradually of his physical and emotional health, making him look even less attractive to his age and later scholars.

To do justice to both Louis's life and my interpretation, I have allowed his life history to unfold chronologically, while keeping my eye on the connections between Louis's personality, governing style, and policy making. Part One centers on the "formation" of the young Louis's personality from birth to age thirteen (1601–15); Part Two concerns the adolescent king's search for a mode of governing as he overthrew his mother and began his personal rule (1615–24); Part Three is on the adult ruler's policy making in collaboration with his chief minister, Richelieu, down to the formal outbreak of the war with the Habsburgs (1624–35); and finally, Part Four looks topically at the political, cultural, and personal legacy of Louis's reign by focusing on the last years of his life, the period of open war and what I call the warfare state (1635–43).

Many readers will be as impatient as I am to launch immediately into this royal life history. But in the case of a life as difficult to interpret as Louis XIII's, it is important first to say something about the way I have gone about that task. In the course of the biography I will refer to relevant work by other historians, noting where I agree and disagree. Here in the introduction it is appropriate to focus on the way primary sources, secondary accounts, and general assumptions by the historical profession and society in general have shaped my study, both as catalysts and as challenges and obstacles to this reinterpretation.

My greatest problem stemmed from the sources that Louis and his age left behind. For one thing, Louis was normally reticent to say anything, and what he did communicate by pen (sometimes pencil!) and voice was brief and cryptic.³ Moreover, when he did speak or write, we are apt to wonder whether he was speaking his mind or saying what came to him from others, since he was notorious for leaning on others: first his mother, Marie de' Medici; then his political favorite Luynes; and finally his chief minister Richelieu. Third, there is a crucial absence of minutes for royal council meetings, so we rarely know Louis's role in formal decision making. Fourth, although Louis and Richelieu met or corresponded almost daily, their correspondence reveals precious few clues as to exactly how they interacted in the give and take of policy formulation. Finally, since Louis's com-

4 Introduction

ments were brief and largely made in response to Richelieu's memos, scholars have generally been tempted to assume that Richelieu was totally in charge.⁴

Other well-known sources have traps of their own for the unwary historical detective. I am thinking primarily, for Louis's early years, of the famous manuscript diary by Louis's physician, Héroard, and its nineteenth-century abridged published version⁵ and, for the later years, of Richelieu's papers, notably his *Mémoires*, and his voluminous letters (in their nineteenth-century edition by Avenel, as well as the twentieth-century Grillon compilation, which also includes other ministerial correspondence).⁶

Elizabeth Marvick has written about some of the dangers posed by too ready reliance on Héroard, who did not merely record Louis's actions and words but interjected himself continually into his royal patient's life. Héroard also left exasperating gaps, both because he did not keep his diary all the time and because even when he did, some things escaped his notice or interest. Yet many an unwary scholar has taken Héroard as an objective and complete source for the life of the young Louis for, as Marvick notes, "in Western literature there is no document that gives us as complete a record of the development of an individual."⁷

As for Richelieu's papers, they are so carefully and powerfully ordered that one might easily be overpowered by them. Yet that ordering is a clue to be wary. Richelieu's *Mémoires* are not the objective history of the time that they appear to be, but a very particular narrative order, with distortions of his rivals' achievements when he was out of power and singular omissions of others' proposals and roles when he was in power. And his letters are only one-half of what Orest Ranum calls a "telephone conversation."⁸

I have used a number of devices to control these sources rather than let them control me. My first conscious strategy was to begin my research with the years when Louis was least under the influence of others, so that I could judge for myself the way he thought, felt, and acted. And my tactic was to look for situations that would betray his innermost thoughts, as well as those that revealed what he thought he "ought" to say. This part of my research was something like a controlled experiment in scientific research.⁹

From that vantage point I looked back into Louis XIII's childhood, to see how the person with whom I was now familiar had come into being. This involved confirming what Louis's physician had to say with evidence from other well-informed sources. Frequently a close

reading of Héroard and his contemporaries led to unexpected conclusions. Rather than being simply manipulated by his entourage, young Louis appeared to have deeply ingrained, indeed innate traits that interacted with his environment. I also looked for clues to Louis's formation from known but overlooked sources—pamphlets, contemporary histories, even medallions and triumphal arches—which told me what royal virtues Louis's subjects sought to bring out in his character.¹⁰

Now it became possible to tread with some confidence on the most treacherous ground of my research; the period of “two-headed monarchy,” when Richelieu dominates both in histories and in the sources—at least as usually read.¹¹ From his pre-Richelieu days I brought the king's penchant for standing on principle (his particular moralizing stand of tolerating Protestant Huguenot worship while opposing Huguenot rebellion, for example; and his dislike of Spaniards) and his interactions with and emotional reactions to other human beings. Knowing these factors about Louis allowed me to read the Louis-Richelieu correspondence in a way different from that of all the great Richelieu scholars, who rarely “knew” Louis.

Like a detective, I sought out political acts previously attributed by historians to the chief minister which looked suspiciously like acts the king himself might have approved or undertaken. Of course, I always looked for direct proofs of Louis's involvement and precise role to confirm my indirect, inferential suspicions. I was likewise willing to be surprised by aberrations or alterations in Louis's behavior that did not fit what I was sure I knew about him. Then finally, after looking at every other source, I consulted Richelieu's *Mémoires*. By keeping that source in reserve until the end, I could use it to complement other sources and thereby determine the ordering of events on my own, rather than using it as a chart of the course of history as so many others have.

Like the problem-ridden sources just discussed, the work of historians and fiction writers related to Louis XIII has often proved as much a challenge as an aid to understanding his life and rule. Yet every past interpreter of Louis has helped shape my own interpretation. I would like to record these intellectual debts, including some to friends whose work has stimulated me to differ and to others personally known and unknown who have led me to ideas that would startle the authors who acted as their catalysts.

I have learned much, first of all, from Dumas's half-historical, half-fictional view of Louis as a flawed man and a do-nothing king, and

6 Introduction

from the modification of it by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars of Louis's government and society who see the king as Richelieu's weak collaborator. Equally important in forcing me to think creatively have been the few biographical reexaminations of Louis, ranging from conventional studies to medical and psychological analyses. These have tended to make Louis XIII look either intellectually and emotionally too "normal" to be true or emotionally and physically very "abnormal." Finally, I have had to respond to the most popular kind of professional historical writing of the late twentieth century, which sees political elites, events, and change as relatively unimportant in the general scheme of history. One can conveniently divide that approach to history into two categories: one focusing on the popular culture of ordinary people; and the other—represented by the most influential historical "school" of our day, the *Annales*—working from the belief that political leaders are controlled largely by underlying economic, social, and mental "forces," which in turn provide historical continuity.

As I read about Louis XIII, the ghost of Alexandre Dumas was always at my shoulder. Dumas was not only a prolific writer of historical novels, but also a competent historian who knew the standard sources and even wrote a half-serious history of Henry IV and Louis XIII. Furthermore, his writings were part of an interpretive tradition, going back to Tallemant des Réaux just after Louis's demise, that drew on the king's well-known flaws in character to paint the picture of a pathetic incompetent.

Many readers will recall Dumas's clever caricature of Louis in *The Three Musketeers*. In his historical work *Great Men in Their Bath Robes*, Dumas openly declared his wish "to force history to call kings by their true names, and instead of saying Louis the Chaste or Louis the Just, to say Louis the Idiot or Louis the Miserable."¹² According to Tallemant's earlier version,

the late king did not lack sense; but as I have remarked elsewhere, his mind bent in the direction of backbiting; he had difficulty in speaking, and, being timid, that caused him to act even less on his own. . . . He was a good horseman, could endure fatigue if called upon, and was good at arranging an army for battle. . . . He was a little cruel, as is the habit of most dissemblers and those with little heart, for the good sire was not valiant, although he wished it appear so. At times he reasoned passably well in a council meeting, and even appeared to have the advantage over the Cardinal. Perhaps the latter was shrewdly giving him this little satisfaction. 'Do-nothingness' [la fainéantise] was his undo-

ing. P[ujisieux governed for a while, then La Vieuville, superintendent of finances, acted as a sort of minister, before the great power of Cardinal Richelieu, destined to outrage everyone.¹³

I began to reflect: if the Tallemant-Dumas interpretation was based on one-sided evidence (showing only the king's flaws) and a shaky assumption (that a flawed royal character necessarily produced a weak ruler), a closer look at the evidence might lead to a different interpretation. Perhaps I could find that Louis's strong traits canceled out his weak ones and made him a stronger king than was assumed or, alternatively, that his character flaws themselves gave the reign some of its strengths.

Two scholars living in the late seventeenth and mid eighteenth centuries hinted at those two alternatives only to dismiss them. Pierre Bayle mused about Louis's weaknesses in a footnote of his famous *Critical and Historical Dictionary*: "What a remarkable thing that under a prince who exercised neither authority himself nor full freedom, royal power was more firmly established than it had been under the monarchs who were least dependent on their ministers and the most adept in the art of governing." In the end, Bayle's addiction to the prejudice of his times against kings ruling with the aid of favorites (unlike his own monarch, Louis XIV) prevented his skepticism from turning Louis XIII's personal liabilities into political assets.¹⁴

Father Griffet's scholarly three-volume history of Louis's reign went farther in historical revisionism, for he saw genuine strengths in the king's character. That eighteenth-century Enlightenment historian did not, however, feel that Louis's most positive quality, his will, was sufficient to offset his flaws:

He was not capable of forming grand designs, or of thinking of the ways to make them succeed. . . . [Yet] if he sometimes lacked insight and ability [*de génie et de capacité*], at least in the affairs of state he had resolve and the will of a great king. . . . While the all but unlimited authority, which he let Cardinal Richelieu usurp, was the crowing glory of his reign, it obscured at the same time the merit of his person. He was never viewed as a great king, because he had a great minister; . . . content to let [the latter] know from time to time that he was the master, he yielded almost always to the superiority of his insight.¹⁵

In the last hundred years, serious scholars of Louis XIII's government and society have made Louis look even more appealing than Griffet thought possible. But while encouraging me that I was on the right track in focusing on Louis's character, even the finest political

historians did not prove that the king's good points in themselves explained major developments of his reign.

In large part, political history today remains wedded to the partial revisions drawn by Marius Topin in his 1876 edition of Louis-Richelieu correspondence. Topin proved once and for all that Louis not only expressed his will to uphold his authority but also paid continuous attention to the details of policy making, and actually insisted on military decisions at variance with Richelieu's recommendations.¹⁶ Unfortunately, these discoveries tell us little of the king's political ideas, or of the interacting of king and minister in major political matters.

Michel Carmona's 1984 revisionist summation of Louis's role retains Topin's mixed message. This distinguished biographer of Richelieu and Marie de' Medici takes Louis's will one stage further than Topin by breaking it down into the twin categories of authority and grandeur. But those grand-sounding themes turn out to be nothing more than the vague royal aims of being obeyed at home and respected abroad. We are still left with Louis having a will without a way of his own. As Carmona admits,

it is certain that Louis XIII did not find in himself the moral resources necessary to satisfy his double ambition of authority and grandeur. Too inconstant and lacking tragically in perseverance, he would require strong personalities around him in order to impose a continuity of views and a coherence of action in governmental policy, to face obstacles and adversity, and to translate expansive and vague aspirations into precise, concrete steps.¹⁷

Orest Ranum's seminal *Richelieu and the Councillors of Louis XIII* shows us how difficult it is to get beyond the old picture of a weak monarch by studying his government directly. Ranum blazed a new trail by examining unpublished correspondence between Richelieu, his fellow ministers, and Louis, and he concluded that Richelieu was the initiator of policy and Louis in essence the reviewer, whose moods had to be watched for the favorable moment to secure his approval.¹⁸ Similarly, all the other premier scholars of Louis's reign, from Tapié to Carmona and Pagès to Treasure and Méthivier, speak of Louis and Richelieu as collaborators, of their work as an association, of a two-headed monarchy and a duumvirate; but they continue to assume that this was the "Age of Richelieu."¹⁹

Thus, in political studies, Louis XIII still appears more as an intruder in his own government than as a head of state central to its

working. More than willpower on Louis's part must be found if a causal relationship between the ruler's positive qualities and the reign's achievements is to be established; and it is equally essential to grapple more creatively with his unseemly characteristics if the negative Tallemant-Dumas inferences from them are to be overturned. Political historians are premature in announcing the death of the "myth of the *roi-fainéant*," as Carmona does in citing Pierre Grillon's magnificent new edition of Richelieu's state papers. Grillon repeats a familiar litany: Louis XIII had a strong conscience about his obligations as a sovereign, was scrupulous in informing himself on policy issues, and did not hide his irritation at ministerial negligence. Yet Grillon concludes mildly and almost negatively: "Such a sovereign was surely not a master who could be easily manipulated"—implying that he could be manipulated, and perhaps had to be if anything of major importance was to be accomplished.²⁰

In my quest for more convincing positive qualities in Louis XIII than direct studies of his government provide, I turned to biographical analyses of his personality. But biographers of the king, like sympathetic biographers in general, have tended to gloss over the weak points of their hero and to exaggerate more appealing characteristics. Thus, although Louis Batiffol brought to his several studies of Louis XIII an erudition that may never be surpassed, that early-twentieth-century scholar resembles his interpretive opposite, Dumas, in his selective use of undifferentiated sources. Batiffol's monumental *Louis XIII at Twenty* and other studies make the king too normal and strong to be convincing. Charles Romain's briefer *A Great Misunderstood King* suffers from the same weakness; and in addition it does not say enough about the king's person to prove that he was either misunderstood or great. Vaunois's year-by-year account of Louis's life is more careful in its positive pronouncements, but it flattens the king's life like an appointment book.²¹

The one genuinely comprehensive biography of Louis, by Pierre Chevallier, uses the unpublished dispatches of foreign ambassadors at the French court to show both the strong and the weak points of the king in great detail. But Chevallier's Louis XIII is essentially the same blend of contradictions that we have seen in other revisionist interpretations of the reign. He calls Louis a "Corneillian king," meaning that Louis resembled the characters of the contemporary playwright Corneille in his will to live up to his station, but he needed Richelieu to help him find the way: "Thus neither his relatives, nor the Huguenots, nor the *grands* of the robe and sword . . . could ever

divert Louis XIII from his determination to be obeyed. . . . Most certainly, it was the good fortune of this king, who had more willpower and resolve than political capacity, to meet on his path Cardinal Richelieu."²²

The most promising reinterpretation of Louis XIII's personality comes not from explaining away his blemishes but from exposing them to a searching analysis. The author Elizabeth Marvick brings to the study of her royal patient the techniques of Freudian psychology. To date she has emphasized Louis's first years, the period of his life on which we have the greatest information about the conflicts at work within his person. She is also the first scholar to make extensive use of the diary of Louis's physician in its original massive manuscript volumes.

Other historians have anticipated Marvick's work by assuming that the young Louis was a bright child with potential for ruling, but that he lost his abilities somewhere between childhood and adulthood.²³ Marvick, however, has gone deeply into that childhood to see precisely what happened to that potential. Marvick's analysis is far more penetrating than Philippe Ariès's celebrated *Centuries of Childhood* and the lesser known *Parents and Children in History* by David Hunt, both of which examine Louis's early experiences out of context in their eagerness to generalize about childhood in early modern France and Europe.²⁴ Her work also towers above earlier analyses of Louis's medical history whose authors did not know how to proceed after calling him "neurasthenic" and "susceptible to hating coldly to the point of criminal intent, incapable of affection, and absolutely without sufficient willpower to be his own master."²⁵

In Marvick's view, Louis began life intelligent and healthy, only to have his natural growth emotionally and physically stunted by the manipulations of his parents, physician, nurse, and governess. The product of that unhealthy formation was a very unattractive adult Louis. He not only was both willful and dependent, as other historians had discovered, but he also had a malevolent side, with a "capacity to cruelty" devoid of "the horror many of his contemporaries felt at the bloody destruction" his French armies inflicted on other Christian populations.

For Marvick, the person whom contemporaries called Louis the Just was closer to what we might call Louis the Sadist. His was a personality devoid of conscience; his behavior leaned toward emotional solutions involving destructive and self-gratifying acts against others. Intellect and principle, whether personal or societal, seem to be sin-

gularly lacking in Marvick's provocatively somber recasting of the Tallemant-Dumas Louis XIII.²⁶

This does not mean that Marvick draws the same inferences as Tallemant and Dumas about Louis's rule. On the contrary, she stands those authors on their head: in her hands their flawed Louis XIII has been reshaped into an abnormal person whose very abnormalities contributed to significant acts of state. Dumas and Tallemant would have been stunned by such a conclusion. And so will be all of Louis's reinterpreters, who never thought that that king could have been so influential—even through his most attractive qualities, let alone his darker traits. Yet here is Marvick's Louis, who injects into his government's policies a uniquely harsh tone.

While Marvick's work to date concentrates on the early years of Louis's life and rule, this latest biographer of the king also draws examples from the years of his collaboration with Richelieu. Here she focuses on Louis's active involvement in the unusual number of state executions during his personal reign, asserting that he took great pleasure in those undertakings. She shows also that Louis was emotionally involved in aspects of policy making, noting that he contributed to his government's stand against Spanish pretensions based on his own long-standing antipathy to Spain that owed nothing to Richelieu's influence.

Because Marvick's full examination of Louis XIII's statecraft is reserved for a future book on his adult life, our curiosity is aroused as to what she thinks were the precise nature and extent of Louis's participation in his government. In the meantime, her current work contains hints that he was not a full-fledged partner of his famous chief minister. Marvick stresses Louis's emotional involvement in policy making (his dislike of the Spaniards, for example) rather than his political ideas or developed principles. And, in line with other interpreters of Louis, she underscores the king's fretful dependence on Richelieu. In her version, Louis seems at times to have needed Richelieu's emotional support to give full vent even to his feelings. Conversely, her Louis was just as backbiting as previous portraitists have rendered him: he deeply resented his dependency on Richelieu. In Marvick's words, Louis "could be a brutal master but he was also a fractious slave."²⁷

Marvick's focus on Louis XIII's most unflattering character traits requires careful reflection, for it is the most plausible explanation to date of the paradox of an apparently weak ruler and a strong reign. One has merely to look at Louis's behavior to agree with Marvick that,

nasty at times, it was an element in his reign's statecraft. Yet such a paradoxical man as Louis had more to his person than can be explained away by emphasizing his dark side; and his involvement in statecraft was also wrought of more than emotional input. I am, furthermore, unwilling to judge him by our own standards—in Marvick's case, by assuming that what we would call sadistic behavior was judged that way in his own times. Hence, while being impressed with Marvick's technical prowess and command of her material, my reservations about her interpretation parallel my similar questioning of political analyses focusing on Louis's more attractive side.

Unease with the way the paradoxes of Louis XIII's rule were resolved by self-contained political and psychological analyses led me to the *Annales* historians' famous "structures," "conjunctures," and "*mentalité*." To omit those external elements in studying the making of a monarch would be as one-sided as to ignore the ruler's inner ragings. While I was aware that the *Annales* scholars and allied historians of popular culture were hostile to the study of elite politics and persons, I also knew that the things they studied, from society and economy to belief systems, played a role in shaping the lives and actions of political leaders.²⁸

How did Louis XIII look from the *Annales* perspective? First of all, he was born into a particular social structure: the deep-seated late-medieval and early-modern hierarchical "society of orders," in which not only the king but every sociopolitical order in his realm, from the great nobility to the peasantry, had its privileged place by law, custom, and sheer power. Second, Louis's accession to the throne coincided with a short-run trend, or conjuncture, in the faltering post-sixteenth-century economy, which cast its shadow across his reign, adding to the traditional problems of an economy not far removed from medieval subsistence. Finally, he inherited from his father's time a political *mentalité*, or mindset, which the French people had developed as they emerged from the anarchical French Wars of Religion. This mindset favored both the institution of monarchy and the person of the monarch, thus offsetting some of the weaknesses inherent in the monarchy's organs of government.²⁹

At first I intended simply to use these *Annales* findings to frame the outer societal limits of what Louis could do as king, somewhat as Marvick used psychoanalysis to determine the inner psychical limits controlling Louis. This meant that as king, Louis could neither change the basic social structure of France nor do much to alter the economic base of either his subjects' existence or the state's treasury. At the

same time, however, observant French people might have expected some increase in royal authority in both areas as a result of popular support for monarchy.

As I looked further into the subject, I saw that the *Annales* approach, far from merely setting the outer limits of what Louis XIII could do, could also shed light on the sort of person he was and what he actually did as ruler. The mentalité, in particular, of Louis's time included ideals, values, beliefs and ideas that were as much a part of Louis's formation as the emotional influences of his immediate entourage studied by Marvick.

In my efforts to discover the precise ideological elements that had influenced Louis but escaped the attention of scholars focusing on his emotions and policies, I took heart from the successes of historians of early-modern popular culture. If a scholar like Carlo Ginzburg could show how an obscure heretical Italian miller adapted the culture of the elite to his way of thinking,³⁰ why could I not do the same thing for an overlooked ruler at the top of the same early modern world? So I looked at Louis not as someone who was simply warped by a manipulative entourage into behaving nastily. Instead, he appeared to me as a particular human being with innate characteristics, into which he fitted not only hostile human influences (and other, more benign human influences studied by Héroard's current editor, Madeleine Foisil)³¹ but also his reading of the political values he was exposed to. Of the latter, I focused on the contemporary royal virtues which French society at court and elsewhere asked him to emulate, in their pamphlets, histories, speeches, medallions, triumphal arches and other didactic sources. Here, to answer a biographer's questions, was a wealth of material relevant to Louis's mind and emotions that historians had never looked at.

Looking at Louis in this broader formative setting, I came to conclusions quite different from those held by either the Tallemant-Dumas tradition or its political and psychological reinterpreters. I began to see Louis XIII as someone with not just the will to rule but a sense of principles that served him both in his council chamber and in tête-à-têtes with Richelieu. I saw him not as a hesitantly self-indulgent inflicter of pain on others but as someone who normally put principle ahead of his own feelings. Piece after piece of the puzzle came together as Louis's willpower and his principles combined with his ideas on a whole host of issues.

The puzzle took shape still more rapidly when I turned to the key piece: Louis's sobriquet "the Just." Here was the most obvious way to

find out what his principles were, as seen by his subjects as well as by himself. Yet no scholar had given the sobriquet anything more than a passing reference. This singular oversight can be explained partly by scholars' narrow documentary focus on purely political sources. A hidden underlying reason, however, is the fact that the early-seventeenth-century term *just* simply did not make sense to historians. From the modern vantage point, Louis's harsh disciplining of subjects bore no relation to our interpretation of justice, that is, with giving citizens the full protection of the law. Scholarly superimposition of psychological frameworks rooted in nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture on the post-religious-war world is also bound to confuse us about the mentalité of Louis XIII and his age, no matter how brilliant the analyst or alluring the analysis.³²

Once I traced the use of Louis's sobriquet "the Just" by himself and his subjects throughout his personal reign, what had seemed an impossible puzzle now became a clear picture. The reader will have an opportunity to follow that journey via everything from triumphal royal entrances into rebel towns all the way to doggerel verses.

I must add that, after working through this maze by myself, I encountered in the work of a brilliant historian of early modern popular culture an apt way of expressing what I had done. Robert Darnton says that when we fail to get the point of a joke or an attitude from early modern times, we know we are on to something very important.³³ How are we to interpret Louis's being hailed as Louis the Just when he inaugurates his personal reign by allowing his friends to kill his mother's "tyrannical" political favorite, Concini? Sadism? Weak-willed act? Or rather the hesitant but principled acting out of the supreme royal virtue of justice! We may not see Louis's acts as just ones, or his statecraft as being principled; but his age saw them that way, and that is the only way we can understand the man—and the king—Louis XIII, called "the Just."

Once we see him that way, his personality looks quite different from the Tallemant-Dumas caricature or any of its variations by historian-interpreters. And once we fit this personality into the king's day-to-day interactions with Richelieu, that relationship changes too. It becomes clear that although Richelieu continually made policy suggestions, these went nowhere unless they fitted his monarch's inner moral world of principles and ideals—indeed, that the clever minister not only looked for the right psychological moment to make suggestions, but he also made the sorts of suggestions Louis himself wanted. The bare documents may tell us only that Louis "reviewed"

policy; the hidden facts of his intellectual-emotional makeup indicate that he was very much involved in formulating and deciding political undertakings, even when he appeared to play a passive role.

This brings me to the last aspect of this interpretive history of Louis XIII: his role in history. My biographical research began with the knowledge that current historical circles either avoid or do not value the study of political elites and the importance of their decisions; it concluded with the satisfaction of knowing that what follows in the chapters ahead proposes quite a different view of things. I use the life history of Louis XIII as a test case of the theory that political leaders do indeed shape their worlds. These leaders are, of course, formed in part by their own societies as well as by their immediate entourage, but they begin life with unique innate characteristics, and the subsequent interchange between them and their environment is decidedly two-way.

Those leaders who ruled as early-modern monarchs governed within a framework well known to recent historical research: one of commonplace patron-client networks, evolving political superstructures, set social structures, and immutable economic conjunctures.³⁴ Yet they acted with some freedom and individuality. In the case of Louis XIII, I will argue that, far from being the prisoner of contemporary structures and conjunctures, he was more influential than they on the process of state building; indeed, it can be argued that in raising taxes to unbelievable heights, he defied the economic conjunctures, just as in eroding the power of individual social orders he worked against the concept of privilege that was one of the mainstays of the social structure.

There is an apt contrast here with the “antibiography” par excellence of the *Annales*. Fernand Braudel’s monumental study of the Mediterranean world in the Age of Philip II contains brilliant character sketches of that supremely cautious late-sixteenth-century Spanish ruler, known appropriately as Philip the Prudent. Had the author wished, he could have used his insight into Philip’s personality to craft a stunning biography, focusing on prudence as the driving force of the reign. Yet Braudel’s *Annales* assumptions made his Philip the Prudent little more than a Polybian-Machiavellian swimmer moving with the tide of Mediterranean socioeconomic trends. This study of Louis XIII is designed to invert the Braudelian scheme by making Louis’s own sobriquet “the Just” central to an understanding of his character and his age.³⁵

In making Louis XIII a test case of the idea that political leaders

shape their world, I not only invert the paradigm of the *Annales* and radically alter the normal use of popular culture, but I also challenge a time-honored Western cultural assumption about political leadership—that is, that only one basic type of political leader substantially shapes history, the so-called great person in history. That person is a charismatic individual in total charge of his or her government, with a clear political vision and well-thought-out policies. The reality, however, is far different, for in fact all heads of state influence their age, whether positively or negatively, by their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Within the ranks of effective leaders, several alternative modes of governing are more common than the charismatic leadership type. Those alternative modes, moreover, are just as strong, even though the leader adopting them lacks the qualities of the “great person in history.” The Louis XIII of the rest of this book was such a person.