The Battle of the Mountains

Repatriating Folly in France
in the Aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars

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Abstract • At the beginning of the Second Restoration, Paris was swept by a mania for roller coasters, which were dubbed montagnes russes after a Russian tradition of sledding on ice hills. Situating this phenomenon in the context of the military occupation of France following the defeat of Napoleon, this article analyzes one of the many plays featuring these “mountains,” Le Combat des montagnes (“The Battle of the Mountains”), and especially two of its main characters, La Folie (Folly) and Calicot (Calico Salesman). The “battle” over the roller coasters, it argues, was really a contest over how to redefine national identity around consumer culture rather than military glory. Through the lens of the montagnes russes, the article offers a new perspective on the early Restoration as an aftermath of war.

Keywords • consumer culture, fashion, Great Britain, occupation, Paris, Restoration, Russia, theater

Two years after the Battle of Waterloo, in the summer of 1817, France was still not at peace. In the northeast, inhabitants continued to endure military occupation by the Allied Coalition according to the terms of the Second Treaty of Paris. Based on reports from local administrators in the occupied departments to officials in Paris, foreign troops were still behaving as if “in enemy territory,” insulting, pillaging, and attacking French subjects. In the Department of the Meurthe, where Saxon troops committed “excesses” on a march, the town of Bourg de Foug was the “theater of disorders that had hardly been seen in the most difficult moments of the first invasion,” according to a subprefect. Farther south near Metz, a brawl broke out between the inhabitants of Marche-la-Tour and the occupying Prussian troops over the type of dance to be performed at a house party; when the Prussians pulled out their swords, the locals armed themselves with sticks, wagon wheels, and whatever other weapons they could find, wounding several of the foreign soldiers, who were transferred to a nearby hospital.1 Well after the defeat of Napoleon, some French remained in conflict with Allied troops.

Meanwhile, in Paris, a very different sort of battle was being waged in parks and in theaters, a battle that—though seemingly unrelated—similarly
illuminated the difficulty of exiting from a generation of warfare. Called the “Battle of the Mountains,” this conflict involved the entrepreneurs of the capital, who, eager for a share of the postwar leisure market, built dueling montagnes russes, or “Russian mountains,” in gardens around Paris. Early versions of roller coasters constructed of wood, these “mountains” were inspired by the Russian tradition of sliding on ice, which had been popular during Carnival since at least the eighteenth century and had been presumably observed by French troops during the invasion of 1812. By late 1816, when the foreign minister’s sister, the Marquise de Montcalm, noted in her journal that they were a “pleasure very much in fashion,” montagnes russes were so popular in Paris that they became the subject of numerous prints and plays. By the summer of 1817, when a new roller coaster was inaugurated at the Folie Beaujon, a pleasure garden at the western end of the Champs-Élysées, the battle between the various montagnes russes had become so fierce that Eugène Scribe and Henri Dupin chose to immortalize it in a play called Le Combat des montagnes, ou La Folie Beaujon (“The Battle of the Mountains, or the Beaujon Folly”), which debuted at the Théâtre des Variétés in mid-July.

In its depiction of the battle for market share between the entrepreneurs of the various “mountains” in Paris, this play features a character called Calicot, who embodies various threats to national identity in postwar France. Referring to the cotton fabric imported or imitated from Indian producers, the term calicot was also used to signify a salesclerk obsessed with fashion. Often donning a military-style costume (of vaguely Russian origin) even though he was too young to have fought in the Napoleonic Wars, the figure of the calicot was widely caricatured for his presumption, materialism, and effeminacy vis-à-vis real war veterans. As depicted in Le Combat des montagnes, this character—played by the famous actor Mira Brunet—provoked the real salesclerks of Paris to “invade” the parterre of the Théâtre des Variétés to defend their reputation. In the weeks following its debut, a real-life “combat” ensued over the play, as these clerks—often armed with leaded canes—threatened other theatergoers, the playwrights, and the actor Brunet himself, who was placed under the protection of gendarmes. Like the Russian mountains themselves, the so-called “calicot war” was inextricably connected to the foreign presence in France in the wake of the Battle of Waterloo.

As the other contributors to this forum have noted, the “mountain-mania” of the mid-1810s may indeed be interpreted in the context of new uses of public space, new ideas about health and hygiene, and new practices of consumer culture and “intermediatization” in France, which are typically dated much later during the Belle Époque. As mediated in periodicals, prints, plays, songs, and poems, the montagnes russes represented a number of themes, including the idealization of nature amid urbanization, the threat of sexual license in public space, the desire to counter postrevolutionary ennui with danger, and the memory of terror also symbolized by a mountain
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(and revived during the “White” Terror of 1815). But the Russian mountains were also a foil for post-Napoleonic anxiety about foreign influence—cultural and economic as well as military.

In this article, I want to highlight the context of military defeat and occupation and therefore to suggest that the battle over the roller coasters was also a battle over how the French should navigate between cosmopolitanism and nationalism as they rebuilt from two decades of war. Inspired by a foreign practice, the montagnes russes were an embodiment of and site for cosmopolitan mixing in the French capital. At the same time, as the many prints and plays about them show, these Russian mountains—and their sidekick, the novelty merchant calicot—generated considerable nationalist sentiment against foreign cultural influence, or what the French labeled étrangomanie (“xenomania”). In the context of foreign occupation, cultural critics sought to domesticate such foreign consumer practices and goods—and fashion itself, in the broad sense of constantly changing styles—as naturally “French.” This link between fashion and identity was by no means new in France, where it had long been connected to the effort to counter foreign—especially British—economic competition. But the effort to define fashion as “French” gained new urgency after 1815, following the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire.

To illustrate this point, I will focus on the play The Battle of the Mountains. In its representation of Calicot, as well as of many other entrepreneurs seeking patents for “mountains” with exotic names, this play critiques the foreign origin of consumer culture in France. At the same time, however, the piece also proposes a way to redefine French national identity in the wake of military defeat via another character named La Folie (Folly), who arrives from exile in England to bestow her favor on the montagne at Beaujon, which she proclaims to be “French.” In The Battle of the Mountains, Folly, who symbolizes fashion as well as madness, evokes the French penchant for frivolity and inconstancy in politics as in mores. In the end, however, what could be interpreted as a vice is celebrated as a national virtue. Repatriated into her home of France, Folly suggests that, rather than military glory, fashion and commerce—and even madness—are now the keys to French national superiority.

“Mountainmania” under Occupation

Although their exact origin in France is unknown, the Russian mountains appeared there in the wake of the second Allied invasion. First noted in Paris toward the end of the year 1816, the montagnes russes were modeled after ramps inclined at an angle of about 50 degrees, 40 to 50 feet high, 800 to 900 feet long, covered in ice, and descended in sleds on the frozen Neva River in St. Petersburg. As the Marquise de Montcalm described in her journal on 22 October 1816:

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It is an inclined plane made of planks of sixty feet, more or less, at the top of which is placed a sled on which one sits and which brings you to the bottom with an extreme rapidity. This pleasure, which is not without danger, may be compared, according to the opinion of several people, to the impression that one would feel if one fell from a fourth-floor window, which does not seem very seductive. These mountains are made of ice in Russia, and one hopes, in spite of the difference in climate, to imitate them in winter; a man said, in speaking of them, that he was surprised that this fashion does not elicit complaint against the influence of Russia, which it is very common today to render responsible for everything.7

As this comment suggests, the fashion for the montagnes russes in France was inextricably linked to the aftermath of war, particularly the military occupation of France. Following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in the summer of 1815, the country was inundated with some 1.2 million troops from most of the rest of Europe. Unlike in 1814, when the Allies had quickly evacuated France, in 1815 they imposed on the country an “occupation of guarantee” against revolutionary unrest. According to the Second Treaty of Paris, signed in November 1815, one hundred and fifty thousand troops from all of the Allied powers were to be stationed in seven departments along the northeastern frontier at French expense, until the Allies had been indemnified for the cost of remobilization. Ultimately lasting three years, until November 1818, the occupation of guarantee devastated the French, especially since it overlapped with a subsistence crisis caused by the “Year Without a Summer” in 1816.8

In the wake of war, France was invaded not just with Allied troops but also with foreign merchants and tourists, from all over Europe and even farther afield, including (as Ian Coller has shown) the Arab world. Many of these visitors were British, who were eager to see the country, and especially its capital, after being cut off from it for nearly two decades. According to the Moniteur universel, almost fourteen thousand British travelers arrived in France in 1815; this number increased steadily over the next few years to over nineteen thousand in 1818.9 This foreign presence fueled a mania—inherited from the First Empire—for “exotic” curiosities, including Cossack equestrians, Scottish bagpipers, Indian jugglers, and the Venus Hottentot, who was displayed at the Jardin des Plantes. Like these other imported amusements, the Russian mountains catered to a widespread desire, among both French and foreigners, to escape the trauma, but also the ennui, of the end of revolution and the loss of empire by indulging in novelty and pleasure.10

Spurred by this demand, within a year of the second Allied invasion the montagnes russes were a ubiquitous form of amusement in the French capital. Quick to profit from the fad, a number of entrepreneurs invested in this new entertainment. For the first montagnes, a device to lift the cars to the top by horse power was designed by an engineer named Delaunoy. By early 1817, the Ministry of Commerce was inundated with requests for patents for tech-
nical innovations to the basic model of the *montagnes russes*. Among others, Pillet de Beaumont and Pierre-Marie Brisou each obtained a patent for five years on so-called *promenades aériennes*, or aerial rides. Some entrepreneurs even brought lawsuits against each other over these patents. In the fall of 1816, for instance, the partnership of Julien, Guerin, and Laurent, which purchased a patent for some “artificial mountains, labeled ‘healthy’” from one Charles Populus, who had himself imported them from Russia, asked the Bureau des Arts in Paris to deny a patent to Vassy de Grammont for an improvement to a similar establishment called *Ramasses* (“Collections”), which they claimed was a mere imitation of their own; this request was denied. Evoking their exotic origin, the so-called Russian mountains were named after a veritable Babel of foreign nations and geographical features, including “Swiss” mountains, “Egyptian” mountains, “Illyrian” mountains, “Aeolian” mountains, and (in perhaps the first water ride) “Niagara Falls.”

The most extravagant of the new coasters was the *promenade aérienne* in the Jardin Beaujon, in the west of Paris outside the Barrière de l’Étoile, on the site of a hospice built in 1784 by a financier named Beaujon (see Park, Figure 4, p. 39 in this issue). Purchased by Reynart and Brisou, the terrain was transformed at great expense into a pleasure garden for high society, earning it the moniker of Folie Beaujon. After being inspected by a special police commission, the *montagnes* at Beaujon were inaugurated on the second anniversary of the second return of the king, 8 July 1817. Surmounted by a belvedere where riders had “the best” view of Paris and surrounded by a lush garden with numerous amenities, including dance halls, lemonade stands, and fireworks, the “mountains” of Beaujon quickly surpassed Tivoli, which had been a popular pleasure garden under the First Empire, as the premier attraction in the capital, despite growing competition from other roller coasters, including Tivoli’s own *montagnes aeoliennes*.

Promoted by journalists as well as doctors, the *montagnes russes* soon became a veritable “mania” in the capital, inspiring countless prints, plays, songs, and even novelty goods and shop signs. At the height of their popularity, they reportedly inspired a pastry shop on the rue Croix des Petits-Champs to put on its sign the words *Aux Montagnes*. Despite persistently cold and rainy weather in both 1816 and 1817, the roller coasters drew thousands of visitors, including foreigners, who had a “marked predilection for this amusement,” according to the *Journal de Paris*. The promoter Dr. François-Frédéric Cotterel, comparing the leisure gardens of Paris under the Restoration to the former capitals of émigrés during the Empire and the Hundred Days, remarked: “Thanks to the lighting that gives it all desired security, the *contre-allée* that extends from Place Louis XV to the Jardin Beaujon, and which one now calls the *Path of the French Mountains*, has become for elite society the Koblenz or the Ghent in fashion, and for the merchants, on festival days at Beaujon, a fair day.” The popularity of these amusements was noted by foreign observers, such as Frances Jane Carey from England, who “could not but wonder at the rage which prevailed for such extraordinary pastimes.”
The popularity of the *montagnes russes* is evident in the number of theatrical works that were produced on the topic. Capitalizing on the mode for these amusements, playwrights penned countless couplets, pantomimes, vaudevilles, and *pièces de circonstances* featuring the entrepreneurs of as well as the visitors to these mountains and playing on words such as *monter* (“to rise”), *descendre* (“to fall”), *dégringoler* (“to tumble”), and *ramasser* (“to collect”). In late 1816, at least two plays entitled *Les Montagnes russes* were produced in Paris, one at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, the other at the Théâtre des Variétés. The first, subtitled *The Temple of Fashion*, features a Russian gentleman named Poussikoff, who is responsible for inspecting the *montagnes*; the second includes a British character named Milord Plum-Pudding. These two plays were followed by *Les Folies parisiennes, ou la Revue des trois montagnes russe, suisse, et de la Folie Beaujon* (“Parisian Follies, or The Review of Three Mountains, Russian, Swiss, and the Beaujon Folly”), which incorporates a vaudeville featuring a popular antihero Fanfan l’Malin on a pleasure party at the *chutes*, or falls, of the Folie Beaujon. By mid-1817, there were a number of productions featuring the *montagnes*. The most successful among both critics and theatergoers was *La Folie Beaujon, ou Une Heure avant l’ouverture* (“The Beaujon Folly, or One Hour before the Grand Opening”), performed for the first time at the Théâtre du Vaudeville on 10 July 1817, which includes an entrepreneur named Duplaisir (“Of Pleasure”) as well as a doctor and a surgeon who both complain that the Russian mountains will hurt demand for their services.14

These dramatic pieces about the different *montagnes* involve some common characters, including a comic antihero variously named Fanfan, Arlequin, or Philibert; one or more doctors to attest to the beneficent effects of these rides; a British or Russian inspector; and male or female novelty merchants, either profiting from or competing against the new pleasure gardens. The various plays about the *montagnes russes* share a number of themes, including the return of pleasure to France after war, the memory of political turmoil symbolized by another type of Mountain, the mixing of different peoples and classes at the leisure gardens, and the promotion of romance (often premarital or extramarital) on the roller coasters. In these plays, a common trope is the sexual threat posed by the rides, especially for young single women, whose *conducteurs* were likely to prey on them.

The *montagnes russes* also constitute a metaphor for the ups and downs of life, including entrepreneurship itself. To suppliers and usurers, the play *Les Folies parisiennes* warns: “Once fortune has thrown you from her car; whatever you do, you will not regain the summit. I offer this advice gratis to these messieurs.” Likewise, the conclusion of the play *Les Montagnes russes, ou Le Temple de la Mode* (“The Russian Mountains, or the Temple of Fashion”) moralizes, in the voice of the Russian gentleman-inspector Poussikoff: “Because in this world, / It is a constant fact, / Each one in his turn / Sooner or later descends. / Come everyone to learn, / To learn / How to descend. / Come everyone to learn / How to descend / Gaily.” This trope also appears in a re-
port on “social news from France” in the winter of 1817–1818 by the Saxon government’s representative in Paris, who, in gossiping that the mountain at Beaujon was frequented by the King of Prussia with “chamber girls and worse,” quipped that the French “are always preparing for this monarch rapid falls,” but that the ride’s horses would bring the king back “to the point from which he departed,” just like the Cossacks during the Napoleonic Wars. Although they do not refer explicitly to Napoleon Bonaparte, such allusions to a sudden fall from fame and fortune certainly would have resonated with viewers who had witnessed the downfall of this Icarian hero.15

In the numerous plays about the montagnes russes, another central theme is the foreign inspiration for and presence at the pleasure gardens of Paris, which now contained the exoticism of the former empire. Noting that the French capital embraced all the peoples of the earth, Les Folies parisiennes, for instance, says that the montagnes are a “way to travel without danger” and at little expense. The vaudeville Les Montagnes russes, ou Le Temple de la Mode includes an air about how these amusements brought Russia to the center of Paris: “Renouncing even the countryside / Of Saint-Cloud and of Passy, / Many a good bourgeois comes here; / And, thanks to our Mountains! / In leaving his suburb, / Believes himself to be in St. Petersburg.” In another fictionalized travelogue, a “Champenois” who complains, “My God! La Folie is sometimes boring,” counters a criticism by an Englishman of the “excess” of this amusement by emphasizing its international character: “And anyway, where is the crowd of French: / I see only foreigners in this immense garden; / Don’t we owe to them these foolish novelties / Which are far from unpleasing to your young beauties!”16 Representing battles between exotic-named mountains, whose fictionalized proprietors and promoters as well as riders came from the different nations of Europe, these plays depict the cosmopolitan culture of the postwar capital.

At the same time, however, these plays highlight national difference, revealing intense postwar anxiety about foreign influence on French culture. By caricaturing the seemingly innocuous amusement of the montagnes russes, these pieces grapple with the very serious question of what it meant to be French after military loss and occupation. For instance, in a short à propos épisodique—timely episode—about the montagnes in 1816, the narrator demands why one must acquire a license to import these amusements from Russia, as if there were no mountains in France, declaring facetiously: “What a nice effect it would have if someone were to transport the Butte Montmartre to St. Petersburg.”17 The vaudeville subtitled Le Temple de la Mode questions the mania for English as well as Russian fashions in France with a chorus exclaiming: “What will become of the women of Paris? / If this continues, one is going / To take them for some miladies. . . . Because one does not recognize genius, / I see that soon it will be necessary for us / All to leave for Russia, / After the Opera. / Yes, as little as I want to, / I could leave for Asoph, / We indeed know many a Russian lord [from the occupations of 1814 and 1815]. / Messieurs Tircoff and Jociss’coff.” Coun-
tering this anxiety, the character La Mode insists that the most seasoned beauties acquire shawls from Siberia, demanding: “What difference does one cashmere make / It’s milord who will pay for it.” With such dialogue, the plays about the Russian mountains critique French reliance on foreign imports and benefactors.18

In these plays, the rise and fall of the montagnes russes often hinge on the caprice of a character named La Mode or La Folie, which since at least the late eighteenth century had personified fashion.19 In Les Montagnes russes, ou Le Temple de la Mode, whose very title characterized the roller coaster as the “temple” of fashion, the Russian Poussikoff emphasizes the power of La Mode, a “young divinity, lively, likable, light, whose whim led her to come establish herself in this garden, and when she goes somewhere, everyone follows after her.” Outfitted in a light Empire-style dress with a crown of flowers, this divinity herself exclaims: “I command . . . and nothing / Without me, is good.” Satirizing the reputation of the French for political as well as sexual fickleness, she adds: “My power, / Even in France, / Could bring favor even to constancy.” In a companion print, La Mode proclaims that, in spite of the fear of mothers and husbands that this pastime would cause young girls to lose their heads (literally as well as metaphorically), the roller coasters would “always remain fashionable [de mode] in Paris,” thanks to her power (see Figure 1). In La Folie Beaujon, or One Hour Before the Grand Opening in July 1817, the success of the roller coaster erected by Duplaisir also de-

Figure 1  Les Montagnes russes, ou Le Temple de la Mode (ca. 1816), BNF.
pends on the whim of a character named La Folie. As he readies his cars in hopes of increasing his revenues, Duplaisir invokes this goddess: “I open my temple to Folly / Under the auspices of the new day / which will return to my patrie / The object of its faithful love. . . . This day will return happiness to France / It must protect its pleasures.” Often calling the Russian mountains themselves “follies,” these plays underscore the madness and whimsy of fashion, which they aim to reappropriate as a French national trait.

The Battle of the Mountains

The role of the montagnes russes as a foil for anxiety about national identity—and a site for its revitalization through folly—in the aftermath of war is best exemplified in the most acclaimed but controversial of the plays about them, a one-act vaudeville called Le Combat des montagnes, ou La Folie Beaujon, penned by the popular playwrights Scribe and Dupin and performed at the Théâtre des Variétés at the height of these amusements in July 1817. Like many of the other plays about the roller coasters, Le Combat des montagnes satirizes the foreign origin of the new vogue for “rising” high above ground. In the first scene, the main character, La Folie, appears at the Beaujon gardens before the Hermit of the Chaussée d’Antin, a well-known but reclusive Parisian journalist, who does not recognize her. Explaining that she had been traveling the world as an exile (or émigré) and is arriving from England, where she received the warmest of welcomes, La Folie remarks:

There, it is true, I was forced to assume a physiognomy so grave, so serious, that many people were tricked, taking me for Reason. . . . But the name is not important; it was always me! I attended cockfights, races at Newmarket, boxing matches! And I did not miss a single one of the political meetings that take place in the taverns of London. . . . But in the matter of follies, the gayest are the best; and I am returning to Paris to rediscover my loyal subjects; I am sure to find them much changed.

In order to revive amusement in Paris, La Folie undertakes the construction of a new Mount Olympus at the Barrière de l’Étoile with the help of a cast of characters on whom she bestows names of ancient gods and goddesses. In this endeavor, she is opposed by another entrepreneur dubbed Titan, whose Russian mountains she abandoned the year before. Carrying a model of his mountains, Titan brings a lawsuit against her for counterfeiting, proclaiming: “Yes, in spite of your tricks, we are going to have a lawsuit regarding my mountains, which are made by Russians.” To this challenge, La Folie replies: “And ours are made by French!” Soon, additional lawsuits are brought against her by the entrepreneurs of a number of other mountains, including the Swiss, the Illyrian, the Egyptian, the Niagara Falls, and even the natural mountain of Montmartre. As they present their claims, Titan exclaims: “More mountains! . . . Ah, then. . . . It is raining mountains!” In response,
La Folie says: “Let them join. . . . We give an audience to everyone. . . . It’s charming to see a trial that will be worthy of me.”

In the end, the battle between the mountains of Paris is won by the new Mount Olympus constructed by La Folie, who overthrows the Titans of the other montagnes, proclaiming: “Those protected by La Folie / always triumph.” While she allows the other roller coasters to continue to operate at least on Sundays, she concludes that by public judgment the Folie Beaujon will remain the busiest as well as the tallest amusement in the capital. Claiming that her mountain is the truly French one, she insists that, in the realm of art and honor, no nation builds more enduring monuments. Naturalizing the Russian mountains and foreign fashions more generally, she concludes: “We want to achieve peace, / But let us forbid anyone ever, / From rising above us.” This identification of the Folie Beaujon as the genuinely “French” mountain was widely endorsed by the French public. During the performance of another play about Beaujon, a line in which the montagnes are declared “French” received enthusiastic applause from the audience, according to the newspaper La Quotidienne.

Alongside La Folie, Le Combat des montagnes includes the new character Calicot, who also serves to critique foreign commercial and cultural influence in postwar France. As played by Mira Brunet in Le Combat des montagnes, Calicot appears vaguely Eastern, sporting a stuffed jacket, Cossack-style pants, spurs, and a mustache; exemplifying the widespread Russomania of the period, he borrows heavily from the accoutrements of Russian officers depicted in popular prints such as Les Valets de chambre russes and Le Goût du jour: La Russomanie (see Davis, Figures 3 and 4, p. 17 and 19 in this issue). Armed with only a yardstick, he is said to frequent the Café Anglais and “never miss a [fashion] novelty.” Dubbed Mercury, or god of commerce, by La Folie, Calicot is satirized as the antithesis of the patriotic soldier whose manners he imitates.

To this satire, the real merchant clerks of Paris took great offense. In late July, two to three hundred of them invaded the parterre of the theater each evening, interrupting performances and inciting brawls. The Marquise de Montcalm explained the commotion in her diary:

They thus found it very bad that one played them on stage, and finding themselves more respectable than doctors, marquis, lawyers, etc., gave each other a rendezvous one Sunday at the Vaudeville; having not even a yardstick to defend themselves (because one had to leave canes at the door), they made a frightening fuss, almost knocked B[runet] down in climbing on the stage, and armed force was necessary to return these men to reason. They had chosen, to display their rage, the moment when Calicot (the name that will remain to them), sings the following couplet: “Yes, of all those that I govern / This is the uniform and one might in the end / Believe himself in a barracks / In entering my store. / But these proud children of Bellona [goddess of war] / Whose mustaches cause us fear / Have a counter for field of honor / And a yardstick for weapon.”22
This battle—which revived a long tradition of violence in the theater from the contested parterre of the seventeenth century to the jeunesse dorée of the Directory—was widely covered in the press. According to the Chronique de Paris, “one half of the human species laughs at the other half. . . . There is talk only of the Combat des montagnes, which would have become a combat to the death if the sage prevention of the police had not restored order.” Over the course of the next few months, this battle inspired a number of commentaries, including a poetic “potpouri” entitled Grand combat du Combat des montagnes, ou La Campagne des calicots, by one “Jérôme, the Peaceful,” who criticized the fashion clerks for taking so much offense at a bagatelle, or trifle. One of the first “news” items exploited by the new technology of lithography, the “war” of the calicots was also depicted in a series of prints. In one, modeled after David’s famous painting The Oath of the Horatii, the calicots take an oath to fight against their “enemies” in the pit at the Théâtre des Variétés. Several other prints, including one subtitled “War in Time of Peace” to highlight the transposition of military into cultural conflict, illustrate the calicots—armed with yardsticks—departing or even charging to defend their honor (see Figure 2). Portraying the outcome of this fight, another print represents the return of Calicot, exhausted and demoralized, home to his female companion. These images in turn provoked more fighting in the streets, endangering the shop window of at least one printseller. Although it may now seem to be much ado about nothing, the “calicots war” concerned the very serious issue of whether French honor could be obtained through (foreign-inspired) fashion and commerce rather than through military valor.

The “calicots war” was resolved only when the writers of Le Combat des montagnes composed a new epilogue to the play, Le Café des Variétés. Depicting the scene at the café outside the Théâtre des Variétés, the epilogue constitutes a peace treaty written in couplets “as spiritual and clever as those that had occasioned the war,” according to one critic. To appease the salesclerks who had taken offense at the characterization of Calicot, it includes a couplet praising commerce as equivalent to war as a means of obtaining glory. Complaining that no profession was safe for comedy, the epilogue ends with a merchant singing to the audience, including the real-life calicots in the pit: “We propose to you / A treaty of alliance: It is not enough / Alas, that the war is over; / By a more gentle noise, Messieurs, prove to us / That the peace is signed.” This “peace” did not fully resolve the “calicots war,” for the salesclerks continued to be satirized for their role in commerce long after the vogue for the Russian mountains waned. But it pointed toward a new path to national honor in the aftermath of war.

**Combatting Xenomania through Industry**

In the wake of war, the “Battle of the Mountains” served to empower the French against foreign influence—at least in Paris, at a safe remove from the
Figure 2  Charge de Mr. Calicot et Comp^re au Théâtre des Variétés: La Guerre en temps de Paix (1817), BNF.
occupation zone. By reclaiming the “Russian” mountains as “French,” plays such as *Le Combat des montagnes russes* reasserted the cultural—if not military—superiority of their nation. In addition to combating xenomania by renaturalizing fashion in France, the “battle” over the roller coasters worked to rehabilitate commerce, literally in the competition between the entrepreneurs who financed these amusements but also figuratively in the caricature of Calicot. The “Battle of the Mountains” was part of a broader effort to redefine national identity around industry—especially in the realm of fashion—which culminated in the organization of a national exposition in 1819.

Long before the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the French had been highly ambivalent about international commerce. Since at least the age of Louis XIV, French elites had embraced exotic fashions, coming mainly from the East, including Persian carpets, Chinese porcelains, and Indian calicoes, as well as European imitations of them. But this foreign competition had provoked concern among French producers and government officials. In fact, *indiennes* became such a threat to the domestic silk industry that the government attempted to ban them on several occasions until the mid-eighteenth century. Exemplified by pamphlets with titles such as *Préservatif contre l’Anglomanie*, this wave of anxiety about foreign competition peaked during the debates over the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786 and again after the Treaty of Amiens in 1802.

But the anxiety about foreign influence resurged with the collapse of the Empire, which opened the country to international—especially Russian and British—economic competition as well as political intervention. In addition to bequeathing a massive debt to the country, Napoleon left France well behind Great Britain in industrial capacity and imperial reach. In the wake of the Battle of Waterloo, French producers and officials were highly concerned about foreign imports, especially from Great Britain and its growing empire. Still under military occupation and its accompanying financial burden, the restored monarchy struggled to “catch up” to British industry.

In this context, French cultural elites worried about what they termed *étrangomanie*, as seen in the contemporary engraving “Xenomania Impugned, or There Is No Shame in Being French,” in which one Frenchman, pointing at a column with a list of French accomplishments in the realms of “Valor,” “Genius,” and “Fine Arts,” says to another: “Let’s take the Russian, the English, for what he is, there is nothing like being French” (see Figure 3). The other, who is seated with a list of the best products of French industry—including porcelains from Sèvres, tapestries from Gobelins, and silks from Lyon—on his lap, replies: “When the English will have done as much, chickens will have teeth.” Under his foot lies a paper reading “Products of Foreign Manufacturers.” In the back, an English civilian and a French soldier fight for dominance. At the top, a female angel blows a trumpet from which flies a banner reading “To Immortality.” Like the “war” surrounding the calicot, this print suggests that the way to counter xenomania and redefine national identity in France is through commerce, especially in luxury goods.
Figure 3  L’Étrangomanie blâmée, ou d’être Français il n’y a pas d’affront (Paris: Charon / Martinet, [1818]), BNF.
This new path to national glory was celebrated in the first French industrial exposition held since the Empire, in 1819. Proposed by the Minister of the Interior Élie Decazes soon after the liberation of the country from occupation, in January of that year, this exposition opened on the king’s festival day, August 25, at the Louvre, which only four years before had been emptied of much of its artwork by the Allies but was now transformed into a “national sanctuary of industry.” Over the next month, well over one hundred thousand visitors, including some twenty thousand English, visited this “sanctuary” to view—and purchase—the wares of over sixteen hundred manufacturers, comprising the latest French innovations to previously foreign products such as calicoes, siamoiseries, and cashmeres. In its official presentation to the king, the jury of the exposition emphasized how far French industry had come since the end of the war: “French industry no longer knows any limits to its emulation: it was a question of national glory and the regards of Europe, it was a question of responding to the august call of Your Majesty. . . . What a spectacle, SIRE! Which was at the same time full of magnificence and of gentleness! What other nation could produce it? What an increase in the public spirit! What a source of prosperity for the present and for the future!”

The quick recovery of industry in France was noted even by foreign observers, such as William Somerville, who in a series of letters on the French Revolution remarked of the Industrial Exposition of 1819: “The disheartened vanity of the French was re-vivified by this admiration of their productions, and the press consequently teemed with extravagant encomiums on the perfection of the arts in France, and on the charms of Paris, as the metropolis of civilization, and the centre of all earthly elegance.” In fact, despite the setbacks of war and occupation, between 1815 and 1820 growth rates in France averaged a relatively high 3.7 percent, while the balance of trade improved in manufactured products, especially indiennes, silks, and ribbons—in other words the very same fashion goods that calicots were selling. Only four years after the humiliating defeat at Waterloo, the nation had redeemed itself on the new battlefield of industry. The validation of commercial over military glory was signified in a print depicting a lone soldier and accompanying child standing in the foreground of the Louvre’s Salle Henri IV, which was crowded with civilian men and women examining displays of machines and products surrounded by ancient statuary (see Figure 4).

By the time this exposition opened, the montagnes russes had begun to disappear from the scene in Paris. Although these attractions continued to be listed in some guidebooks to the capital for several years, most of them closed by the end of 1818. In the early 1820s, Beaujon, like Tivoli, was devoured in a building spree in western Paris, before a bust in 1826 left the area a semi-urban wasteland that became home to gangs of bandits. Roller coasters would not reappear in France until they were reimported, this time from England and the United States, during the Belle Époque.
Why did the Russian mountains fall from public favor so quickly? Safety was one factor; in July 1818, two riders were killed when their car stopped suddenly on the track of the French mountain at Beaujon. Another factor was a reprivatization of leisure after the brief explosion in public sociability following the end of the Napoleonic Empire. However, the decline of the Russian mountains may also be attributed to their connection to the foreign presence in France. Given the anxiety that this presence provoked among the French, it is perhaps not coincidental that the montagnes russes disappeared at exactly the same moment that the army of occupation departed in the fall of 1818.

In the end, the montagnes russes proved to be only an ephemeral monument on the urban landscape of early-nineteenth-century Paris. While they lasted, however, they played a significant role in helping the French recover from a generation of war. The “Battle of the Mountains” constituted a key episode in a broader struggle to redefine national identity in the face of military defeat and foreign occupation. This new, cultural battle was waged by repatriating Folly to France. With her sidekick, Calicot, the goddess of fashion forged a new track to national glory, which was centered not on foreign military conquest but on domestic industrial enterprise. While this goddess
did not manage to make the *montagnes russes* an enduring monument, “always in fashion,” she did help to ensure a peace in which the French could prevail on the field of “art and honor.”

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**Notes**

1. Report from Department of the Meurthe, 7–8 April 1817, Archives Nationales Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (A.N.), F7/9899, and Report from Stagecoach Driver Departing Metz, 19 December 1817, A.N., F7/3826. See also other reports from stagecoach drivers in provinces in A.N., F7/9899—for instance, one from a coach departing Sedan on 29 June 1816—which describe Allied troops behaving as if “in enemy territory.”


3. This point has been developed elsewhere by Peggy Davis in “Entre la physiognomie et les Physiologies: Le Calicot, figure du panorama parisien sous la Restauration,” *Études françaises* 49, no. 3 (2013): 63–85, and “La folie des ‘montagnes russes’ à Paris sous la Restauration: Un moment intermédiair dans la culture de


11. *Brevets d’invention* [patents], A.N., F12/1026/A and 1027/A.


14. [Charles-Gaspard Delestre-Poirson and Henri Dupin, according to the *Annuaire dramatique* of 1817], *Les Montagnes russes, ou Le Temple de la Mode, vaudeville en un acte* [The Russian mountains, or the temple of fashion], performed for the first time at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, 31 October 1816 (Paris: Fages, 1816); Moreau et al., *Les Montagnes russes, à propos épisodique mêlé de couplets* [The Russian mountains, timely episode mixed with couplets] received by censor 17 October 1816, performed 29 October 1816, A.N., F18/625 (Censure: Théâtre des Variétés); *Les Folies parisiennes, ou la Revue des trois montagnes russe, suisse, et de la Folie Beaujon, suivi du vaudeville de Fanfan l’malin* [Parisian follies, or the review of three mountains, Russian, and Swiss, and the Beaujon Folly, followed by the vaudeville Fanfan L’Malin] (n.d.; repr., [Paris]: Imprimerie de Laurens, 1817); *La Folie Beaujon, ou Une Heure avant l’ouverture* [The Beaujon Folly, or one hour before the grand opening], performed 10 July 1817, ms. in A.N., F18/627. See also *Les Montagnes en vaudevilles* [Mountains in vaudevilles] ([Paris]: Imprimerie de Nicolas-Vaucluse, n.d.), and *Petit Imbroglio sur le jeu des montagnes russes, dites de santé* [Little imbroglio about riding the “healthy” Russian mountains], annexed to Cotterel, *Promenades aériennes*.


17. Moreau et al., *Les Montagnes russes, à propos épisodique mêlé de couplets*.

18. [Delestre-Poirson & Dupin], *Les Montagnes russes, ou Le Temple de la Mode, 20–21.


21. *La Quotidienne* [The daily], 12 July 1817.


24. *Chronique de Paris* [The Paris chronicle], August 1817, 171; police reports from sections around theater in Paris in late July 1817, A.N., F7/6844; *Grand combat du Combat des Montagnes, ou La Campagne des calicots; pot-pourri, par Jérôme le Pacifique* [The great battle of the Battle of the Mountains, or the campaign of the calicots; potpourri, by Jérôme the Peaceful] (Paris: Mlle Huet-Masson, 1817); “Caricatures historiques: Calicots—1817” [Historical caricatures: Calicots—1817], BnF Estampes, Ti 48, and “M. Calicot” (collection in which there are four prints regarding the “Combat des Montagnes” in 1817), Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, GD 49950; *Journal des débats* [The journal of debates], 7 August 1817; *Journal général de France* [The general journal of France], 10 August 1817; de Keyser, *Un Thème d’imagerie parisienne sous la Restauration*, 6–9.


