

**First-hand reports during the French Revolution by one of Paris's greatest observers  
bound in stunning contemporary parchment and paste-paper boards**



**MERCIER (Louis-Sébastien).**  
*Le Nouveau Paris.*

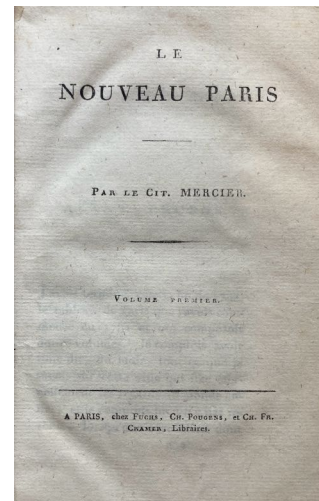
**A Paris, Chez Fuchs, Pougens et Cramer,  
S.d. [1799].**

6 parts in 3 vols. (21 x 12 cm). 8°: [2], XXXVIII, 220 pp. ; [2], 254 pp. ; [2], 248 pp. ; [2], 256 pp. ; [2], 256 pp.; [2], 252 pp. Contemporary half parchment spine and corners over paste-paper covered thin boards, smooth spine, with title labels in red morocco and gilt, untrimmed, some occasional browning, as usual, otherwise a near fine and lovely copy. The First edition, with the date "10 Frimaire An VII" at the end of the preface.

\$2,900

Composed of short independent chapters of first-hand anecdotes, portraits, reflections, short stories, describing Paris during the French Revolution, 1789-1799. The six volumes of *Le Nouveau Paris* constitute a sequel to the twelve volumes of *Le Tableau de Paris*, published by Mercier 1782-1788.

A companion piece to Mercier's popular previous work, the present work is "much more a political text than a work of [straightforward] observation." The structure between the two works is similar, both rely on Mercier's astute observations: entries, anecdotes, portraits, reflections, etc., presented similar to entries in an encyclopedia. As Lacombe rightly observes, Mercier's descriptions are at times "full of the phraseology and bombast of the time," but the particularity "does not prevent this book from being very interesting for those who know how to consult it." (Lacombe 388).



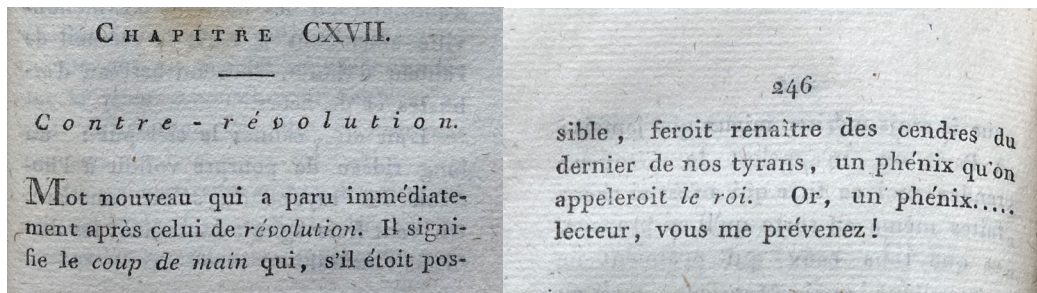
**Mercier: keen social critic & neologist: a new language for a new reality**

As seen in Mercier's *Néologie* (1801), which is not a dictionary so much as it is a model of word-making as an act of creation, *Le Nouveau Paris* too is exceptionally concerned with the manner in which language determines the force of reality. The following entries are illustrative: [*the bookseller's translation in italics*]

**"Capitaliste:** a word barely known under the ancient régime, a monster of fortune with a heart of stone who loves only metal...";

**"Citoyen actif:** according to a decree by the national assembly, one must be an active Citizen, that is, own property in order to vote, a requirement that would have excluded Socrates, Corneille, and J.J. Rousseau were they living. **We see that the adjective [active] kills the substantive [citizen].** The true active citizen are those who took the Bastille, those who took the Tuileries..." ; and,

**“Contre-révolution:** A new word which appeared immediately after that of revolution. Which signifies the coup de main which, if it were possible, would raise from the ashes the last of our tyrants, a phoenix, who is called the King, or, a phoenix.... Reader, warn me!” (Vol. 3, pp. 245-246).



The author described his work as follows: “I had finished, towards the end of 1788, *Le Tableau de Paris*, which I had begun in 1781 and which consisted of twelve volumes. I counted on having said everything, at least everything I knew about this city which eternally fixes the eyes of the whole world; and I was counting on not going back there when a revolution, the memory of which will never perish and will influence the future destinies of the human race, came to upset the mores of a peaceful people, to change its habits, its laws, its customs, its police, its government, its altars and inspire them alternately with the most heroic courage and the most cowardly ferocity. How great they were! how abject they were! How impetuous they were! How patient! (Avant-propos, pp. III-IV).

The writer, polymath, and graphomaniac Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740-1814) is known for his proto-science fiction utopian novel *L'An 2440* (1771), the celebrated *Tableau de Paris* (12 vols., 1781), *Néologie* (1801), in many ways his literary testament. The work offered here, *Le Nouveau Paris*, is an essential piece in understanding Mercier's oeuvre: one that ties the act of language creation to the act of living itself. His perspective on the events of the French Revolution is an invaluable testimony to both the phenomenon of neologisms and as one critic has written, “There is no better writer to consult if one wants to get some idea of how Paris looked, sounded, smelled, and felt on the eve of the Revolution.”