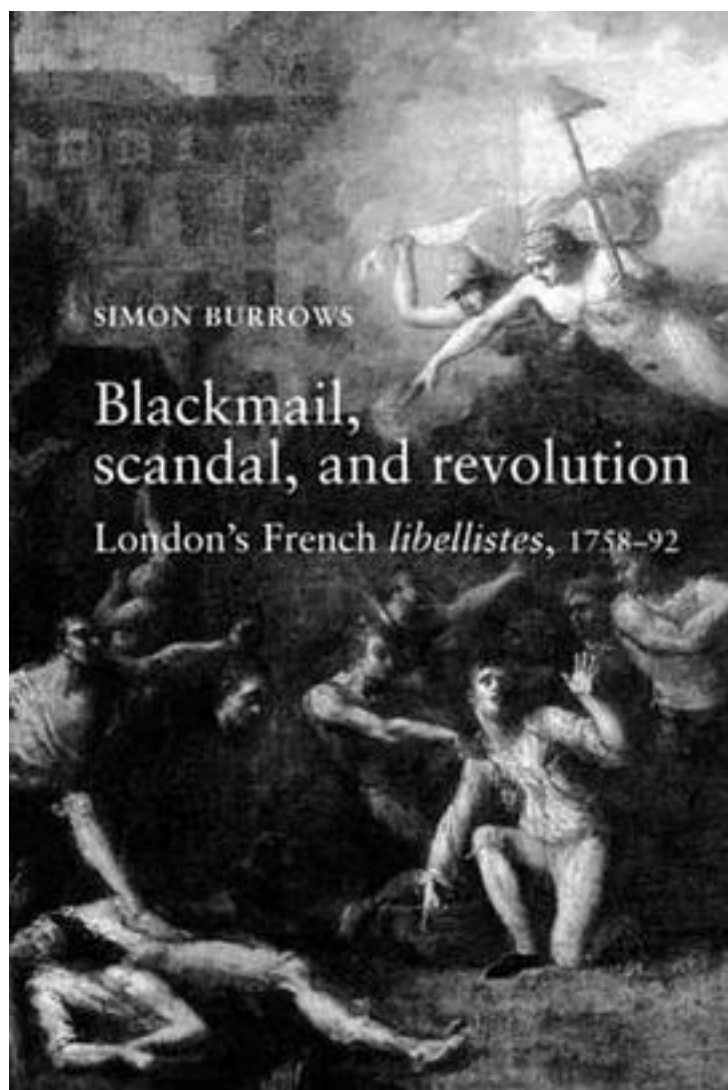


# Blackmail, Scandal and Revolution



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出版者:Manchester University Press

出版时间:2009-03-03

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9780719065279

In *\*Blackmail, scandal, and revolution\**, Simon Burrows examines the activities, adventures, publications, and influence of the most venomous critics of the Bourbon monarchy - French exile libellistes who flocked to London to publish scandalous or sexually salacious pamphlets hoping to extort lavish suppression fees. Smut-mongering pamphleteers are prominent figures in the recent historiography of the French revolution. Many historians now contend that nihilistic, 'Grub Street' authors sapped the foundations of the monarchy with their 'desacralising' and frequently pornographic attacks on French monarchs and their consorts, above all Marie-Antoinette. Such arguments, it has been suggested, amount to a veritable 'pornographic interpretation' of the French revolution. Simon Burrows offers a comprehensive refutation of this interpretation and recontextualises 'Grub Street' pamphleteers within the political life of the ancien regime. In the course of his dissection of the libellistes' life histories, social networks, business activities, literary output, political affiliations, and blackmail negotiations, he demonstrates that political pornographic attacks on living monarchs or their consorts were almost unobtainable prior to 1789. He concludes that the libellistes' primary importance lies in their contribution to factional politics and in the public disquiet aroused by desperate and heavy-handed attempts to kidnap or silence them. With its revisionist interpretation of the pre-revolutionary public sphere, *Blackmail, scandal, and revolution* is essential reading for students of eighteenth-century political culture and the French revolution. However, its colourful and lively cast of perfidious spies, cynical ministers, royal mistresses, a tragic queen, conniving diplomats, and criminal rogues will also appeal to a wider audience.

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目录:

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