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Apprenticeship in 18th and 19th-century France: Surviving the End of the Guilds

Clare Crowston, Claire Lemerrier

Much of what historians know about apprenticeship in eighteenth-century France derives from guild records: statutes and notarized contracts drafted in accordance with those statutes.¹ Our understanding of the outcome of apprenticeship, similarly, derives from guild or police registers that record mastership receptions and the use of apprenticeship as a credential for entry. Reliance on these (abundant and accessible) sources gave rise to the view, still dominant among non-specialists, that guilds strictly controlled vocational training in urban areas and, as a corollary, entry to skilled labour markets. Reception records suggested in turn that guilds rigidly policed the training of would-be masters and thus that apprenticeship was merely the first step towards guild membership. Apprenticeship appeared to be inextricably bound to the corporate system and it has been studied almost exclusively within the horizon of guilds, specifically their regulations, their labour markets, and their reproduction.

In addition to shaping studies of the Old Regime, these documentary biases produced a vision of the nineteenth century cast in the shadow of the corporate system. Most historians have long considered, like contemporaries, that apprenticeship did not survive the abolition of the guilds in 1791. Few written contracts exist after 1791 and without the guilds' strict requirements, it has been assumed that apprenticeship withered in the face of the economic and social transformations that occurred in the early nineteenth century. For this period, the only obvious sources referring to apprenticeship consist of discursive laments about its decline. Indeed, nostalgia for apprenticeship was expressed earlier and more widely than for any other element of the corporate system. The few memoirs of nineteenth-century French workers that mentioned apprenticeship thus modelled their accounts on Old Regime templates.²

In contrast, our own research – as well as recent work on other European cities and states – demonstrates how complex the practice of ‘apprenticeship’ was in the eighteenth century and how nuanced its relationship to the guild system was. This complexity cuts in two directions. First, guild control over apprenticeship, and over the labour market and production in general, while loudly declaimed was in practice challenged in myriad ways across different trades, locales, and forms of employment. Many forms of training existed outside of and across corporate boundaries, particularly

1 Research for this chapter was funded by an American Council of Learned Societies Collaborative Research Fellowship and Sciences Po (‘SAB Learning How’). Information from the sources was inputted by the authors, Nicolas Berthelot, Sylvain Brunier, Élodie Charié, Katherine Godwin, Michael Green, and François Lambert.

2 On nostalgia, É. Anheim, ‘The History and Historiography of Guild Hierarchies in the Middle Ages’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 68 (2013), 1027–1038; C.H. Crowston, ‘Du corps des couturières à l’Union de l’Aiguille: les continuités imaginaires d’un corporatisme au féminin, 1675-1895’, in S.L. Kaplan and P. Minard, eds., *La France, malade du corporatisme ? XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (Belin: Paris, 2004), pp. 197–232. On memoirs, Y. Lequin, ‘Apprenticeship in Nineteenth-Century France: A Continuing Tradition or a Break with the Past?’, in S.L. Kaplan and C.J. Koepp, eds., *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization, and Practice* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1986), pp. 457–474

for female youths. And yet, even the most apparently informal type of vocational training often existed in a symbiotic relationship with the guild system.

Second, most apprentices who trained within the corporate system – that is with a guild master under the terms of a notarized contract – did not themselves become masters. Apprenticeship as normatively defined and controlled by the guilds thus rarely achieved its ostensible purpose (producing future masters). Guilds themselves relied on multiple forms of reproduction.

For the nineteenth century, even a cursory look at sources closer to actual practices of vocational training show that apprenticeship had not disappeared, in spite of the collapse of guild regulations. Population censuses reveal that apprenticeship survived as a term frequently used to describe the position of working teenagers. Moreover, other forms of documentation reveal that many of these apprentices entered contracts that retained features of Old Regime apprenticeship, such as a limited terms of service or the exchange of training, and often lodging, on the master's part for the labour of the apprentice. For example, in Paris, an exhaustive inquiry by the Chamber of Commerce in 1848-51 found approximately 19,000 apprentices, that is one for every 17 workers, and probably one for every four teenagers; 6,000 were apprenticed for four years or more, almost 11,000 lived with their masters, and almost 13,000 were not paid.³

After 1791 apprenticeship offered no specific claim on becoming a master, and, until the twentieth century, no formal credential. Yet many parents, masters and mistresses still entered into apprenticeship contracts, even if the majority were not written. Why would they do so? Any answer must take into account the normative weight of guild apprenticeship as a template, which certainly survived the abolition of the guilds. It must also, however, acknowledge that the variety of ways in which this template was applied was not an invention of the (liberal or industrializing) nineteenth century, but a continuation of diverse Old Regime practices.

In this chapter, we first summarize official regulations defining apprenticeship before and after the French Revolution, with a focus on contracts and the related laws. We then describe the diverse types of 'learning and working' that, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, existed beyond contractually enshrined apprenticeship. Both before and after 1791, most teenagers were not apprentices; apprenticeship was neither the only way to learn a trade, nor a necessary condition to create a business. Yet guild apprenticeship was a crucial template that, at its most basic, provided a model for learning a set of technical skills while simultaneously being socialized and mentored, over a set number of years, in a context infused with paternal (or maternal) connotations.

Finally, we show that, just as many 'apprenticeships' were not standard guild apprenticeships, many guild apprenticeships did not lead to the normative outcome of several years working as a journeyman followed by entry to the guild. Observing the diversity of outcomes of apprenticeship helps us understand the motivations of the parties involved, especially the parents, in initiating an apprenticeship. It questions the almost exclusive emphasis that has been placed, in the wake of general debates on the economic

³ *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris résultant de l'enquête faite par la Chambre de Commerce pour les années 1847-1848*, (Guillaumin: Paris, 1851). The last number is our estimate. On the limitations and possible uses of this source, see C.H. Crowston, S.L. Kaplan and C. Lemercier, 'Apprentissages parisiens (XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles)', forthcoming.

effects of guilds, on apprenticeship's importance to the transmission of technical skills or social reproduction.⁴

Apprenticeship and the End of the Guilds: An Unlikely Survival

As corporate bodies, Old Regime guilds possessed monopoly privileges over well-defined economic sectors with the right to control the entry of new members and the duty to police quality standards and satisfy regular and extraordinary royal fiscal demands. Royal edicts of 1581, 1597 and 1673 required artisans and merchants in all cities where guilds existed to form themselves into corporations and submit statutes for royal approval. In Paris in 1600, there were approximately 85 guilds, which rose to over 110 corporations by the early eighteenth century, in part because of the 1673 edict vigorously promoted by Controller General Jean-Baptiste Colbert. In the 1720s, a contemporary estimate put the number at 32,000 guild masters in a population of approximately 500,000.⁵ Between April 1755 and December 1775, the register of the royal procurator of the Châtelet of Paris, who held jurisdiction over the guilds, show that almost 28,000 men and women became guild members.⁶ Other cities and towns had much smaller corporate systems. In Caen, 69 new masters and mistresses entered a total 25 different guilds in 1720, and 113 entered 28 guilds in 1748.⁷

Monitoring apprenticeship was a crucial task for guild officers, given the importance of protecting their trade monopolies, policing the labour market, and ensuring the orderly reproduction of the corporation. As a rule, guild statutes required new masters (other than sons of masters and sometimes their sons-in-law and the husbands of masters' widows) to fulfil a set period of apprenticeship, varying from three to eight years. A 1691 royal edict stated that apprenticeships must occur within the framework of a notarized contract underwritten by guild officials. Guilds generally prohibited masters from taking more than one apprentice at a time; they also forbade masters from hiring journeymen who had not completed a formal apprenticeship. In 1755, another royal edict overturned the long-standing corporate practice of forbidding apprentices from becoming masters anywhere but the city where they had trained. Only the cities of Paris, Rouen, Lyon and

4 In trying not to automatically equate apprenticeship with traditional transmission of skills and child labour with modern exploitation, we follow E. van Nederveen Meerkerk and A. Schmidt, 'Between Wage Labour and Vocation: Child Labour in Dutch Urban Industry, 1600-1800', *Journal of Social History*, 41 (2008), 717-36. On the economic effect of guilds, see S.R. Epstein, 'Craft guilds in the premodern economy: a discussion,' *Economic History Review* 61 (2008), 155-74 and S. Ogilvie, 'Rehabilitating the guilds: a reply,' *Economic History Review* 61 (2008), 175-82. Similarly, the few historical papers on post-guild apprenticeships mostly frame it against the alleged de-skilling caused by the 'industrial revolution,' e.g. W. Knox, 'Apprenticeship and De-Skilling in Britain, 1850-1914', *International Review of Social History* 31 (1986), 166-184; K.D.M. Snell, 'The apprenticeship system in British history: the fragmentation of a cultural institution', *History of Education* 25 (1996), 303-21.

5 This figure is based on membership numbers furnished in the 1720s to Jacques Savary des Bruslons by the Parisian guilds. See D. Roche, *The People of Paris. An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century*. (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1987), p. 71. On the organization of guilds, S.L. Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*. (Fayard: Paris, 2001).

6 Archives nationales de France (henceforth AN) Y 9329-32.

7 Archives départementales du Calvados 1B2034 and 1B2046.

Lille were permitted to continue this discriminatory practice; all other guilds had to accept the training credentials of other municipalities.⁸

The relative accessibility of notaries, even for families of modest means, and the legal requirement to use them resulted in the survival of copious apprenticeship contracts in the notarial archives of early modern France. These contracts are both highly routinized, containing a relatively standard set of mutual promises and obligations, as well as enormously variable in the details of age, length, prestations, cost, etc.. They provide an opportunity to investigate simultaneously what people believed and valued about apprenticeship and how they practiced it, thereby revealing tensions within the guild system between the moral economy and the market.

A few key elements of apprenticeship – as enshrined in standardized phrases approved by guilds, sanctioned by the state, and reproduced in notarial manuals and pre-printed contracts – are worth underlining. The first is the domestic and patriarchal authority exercised by masters. This included the prerogative to use corporal punishment for infractions.⁹

In return, masters were to act as father figures, treating youths humanely with the conduct appropriate to a paternal relationship, imparting vocational skills, inculcating social control and extracting obedience. Families entrusted masters with the task of transforming their adolescent children into adults capable of supporting themselves financially and reproducing the social order. Numerous police regulations called on apprentices – like domestic servants – to show deference and obedience.¹⁰ Mastership was explicitly assumed to be a male role; the unquestioned authority of female guild mistresses over their apprentices underlines the way that corporate privilege could trump gender difference under the Old Regime.¹¹

Framed by these basic principles, the negotiations between the various parties involved in the contract – parents, youths, masters, guild officials and municipal and royal authorities – produced tremendous variety. Exhaustive indexes of Parisian notarial archives for 1751 and 1761 show that between 1,800 and 2,100 apprenticeship contracts were signed in the city each year. One hundred years earlier in 1650, there had been fewer than 900 contracts. The vast majority of these apprentices were boys, but a significant minority (approximately 15%) were girls, mostly seamstresses.

A sample of close to 700 contracts from 1761, representing 70 trades, reveals that apprentices were on average seventeen years old; however, the youngest were only twelve years old and the oldest in their mid-thirties (standard deviation=4). The shortest contracts were for three years and the longest for eight, with an average of four years

8 Arrest du Conseil d'Etat du Roi, 25 mars 1755.

9 *Traite des minoritez, des Tutelles et des curatelles*, 200-1.

10 The domestic authority of the masters was in keeping with the overall familial structure of guilds, in which sons of masters inherited guild status and journeymen who married masters' widows and daughters often had easier access as well. Another indication of the patriarchal and domestic conception of the masters' authority is the fact that widows of masters could inherit their husband's business, as a form of marital property, but could not take on new apprentices in France. Janine Lanza's study of artisanal widows suggests the difficulties women faced in exercising authority over workshops dominated by male journeymen. J. Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

11 See C.H. Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France* (Duke University Press: Durham, 2001).

(median=4). The vast majority of apprentices (over 95%) originated from Paris or the surrounding region, but most lodged with their masters and received food and sometimes clothing. Fully 69% (561 of those with available information) did not pay for apprenticeship; those who did paid a wide range of fees, from 24 to 1,200 livres. The only apprentices paid for their work were roofers, who tended to be much older, given the need for strength and the danger involved.

Apprenticeship contracts were crucial for many reasons: they made explicit the expectation of effective training, humane treatment, and good faith from all parties. They stipulated exactly what the apprentice and his or her family would provide and what they could expect from the master (sometimes down to the precise amount of bread each day). They also served as vital credentials for finished apprentices who wished to enter the skilled labour market and perhaps one day the guild. Once signed by the notary and the guild officials, the master kept the original copy of the contract, the *brevet d'apprentissage*. The moment when he (or she) handed it to the apprentice at the end of the contract was a rite of passage allowing the youth freedom to seek employment as a journeyman.

The importance of guild apprenticeship as a means of social reproduction is underlined by the efforts of charitable institutions to secure apprenticeships for artisans' children whose families were unable to do so. This was particularly common among Parisian parish foundations, who often used charitable endowments to place children with guild masters. For example, the foundation of Saint-Jean-en-Grève parish paid for the apprenticeship of at least fifty youths from 1711 to 1717, divided evenly between boys and girls. The 25 boys entered 14 different trades, from humble cobblers to high-status textile-merchant-manufacturers. Six trained with cobblers and five with shoemakers. Richer trades, including gilders and cloth-makers, received only one or two boys each. Twenty-four of the twenty-five girls were apprenticed to a seamstress; the twenty-fifth to a linen-worker (another legally constituted female trade).¹²

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the parish greatly widened the scope of trades in which girls were indentured, including occupations – such as tapestry-making and embroidery – dominated by male guilds in which female labour was prohibited. These contracts resembled the others in all particulars, except that they tacitly destined the girls for a future of illegal labour. As this demonstrates, the line between normative 'guild apprenticeship' and the types of alternative training discussed below was barely perceptible to contemporary parish elites, masters, and working families.

When the National Assembly abolished guilds in 1791, the fate of apprenticeship was unclear. The law was passed in the context of political attacks on all sorts of associations (trade unions and business associations remained forbidden until 1884). It opened a long period of free entry to almost all occupations and to establishing an independent business. With a few exceptions, such as bakers and butchers in Paris, and goldsmiths across France, the revolutionary government prohibited trades from establishing a *numerus clausus* or any other barrier to entry. Few occupations demanded formal credentials, and the only official requirement for opening a business was the payment of a modest tax (the *patente*). While many attempts were made to re-establish

12 AN LL 801.

guilds to provide collective representation, training and socialization, almost no one seriously considered re-imposing legal barriers to entry.¹³

Despite lamentations over the loss of apprenticeship, the practice of using formal apprenticeship contracts did survive the guilds. For example, in Lyon ca. 250 notarized contracts were made in 1807. In Laval (Mayenne), a town with 15,000 inhabitants, more contracts were made in 1807 (60) than in 1780 (33).¹⁴ In mid-century Paris, the Chamber of Commerce counted 4,000 written contracts. While somewhat shorter than the eighteenth-century norm (around three years), 82 were for six to nine years. They also began earlier, typically when girls and boys were thirteen years old. As in the eighteenth century, most did not involve fees to the master, but a small portion (n=242) did. In 1848, the Paris labour court for the cloth industries approved the custom of the cloth design firm Laroche to have apprentices create a costly masterwork that was then left to the firm.¹⁵

These documents prove that apprenticeships, and even notarized contracts, did not completely disappear after 1791. Indeed, the law on industry of 22 germinal an XI (1803) recognized the existence of specific apprenticeship contracts in one of the seven articles on workers that it added to the general law of contracts. Apprentices were thus considered similar to workers, but not identical, because the 1803 law explicitly prohibited contracts lasting more than one year for workers, except for foremen. Workers were essentially subcontractors (or sub-sub-subcontractors): the person who hired them supplied the raw materials, but workers frequently used their own tools, and were free to summon auxiliaries as long as they were able to pay them. This was quintessentially true in the context of urban luxury and fashion industries and rural proto-industrial workshops, but also very frequent in the first factories. Sharp divides existed between skilled workers, day labourers, and servants (who possessed only limited citizenship rights).¹⁶

In this context, it is surprising to find apprenticeship contracts and one might wonder why they survived. The 1803 law only mentioned apprenticeship contracts to state that they could legitimately be broken if a party did not act as promised, if the master abused the apprentice, in case of misconduct of the apprentice, or if the duration was in excess of ‘the ordinary price of apprenticeships.’ (All good reasons for breaking contracts in the Old Regime courts.) The very fact that nothing was said about the contents of the mutual promises of the parties implied that everybody knew what a contract of apprenticeship was and what type of exchange it entailed. Through the numerous cases brought before magistrates and labour courts (special courts whose

13 Kaplan and Minard (eds.), *La France*; M.P. Fitzsimmons, *From Artisan to Worker. Guilds, the French State, and the Organization of Labor, 1776-1821*. (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

14 Archives départementales du Rhône, 3Q/14/18*-19*, 3Q17/26*-28*, 3Q20/12*-13*. Archives départementales de Mayenne, 2C/1628*-30*, 153Q/24*-25*. We thank Gilles Postel-Vinay for sharing pictures of these sources.

15 *Statistique... 1848*; Archives départementales de Paris (henceforth ADP), D1U10/379, 24 November 1848.

16 A. Cottureau, ‘Sens du juste et usages du droit du travail: une évolution contrastée entre la France et la Grande-Bretagne au XIX^e siècle’, *Revue d’histoire du XIX^e siècle*, 33 (2006), 101–120. P. Lefebvre. ‘Subordination et ‘révolutions’ du travail et du droit du travail (1776-2010)’, *Entreprises et histoire*, 57 (2009), 45–78.

judges were elected skilled workers and heads of workshops), lawyers over time compiled a jurisprudence that complemented this very short law.

This jurisprudence was codified by the law of 22 February 1851, a law specifically devoted to apprenticeship that remained in force with few changes until 1928. The law of 1851 was one of the first in France that limited the discretion of parties in a contract in order to protect the weaker side, albeit in a limited way. The law did not require contracts to be written; there was no limitation on the number of apprentices per master and no exam to test the quality of masters or apprentices. Much of the law consisted of rather vague statements describing an ideal apprenticeship, for example: ‘The master must act toward the apprentice as a good father should, watch his conduct and mores, inside and outside the house’ (*Le maître doit se conduire envers l'apprenti en bon père de famille, surveiller sa conduite et ses moeurs, soit dans la maison, soit au dehors*). Numerous lawyers and charitable societies later printed model contracts inspired by such stipulations.¹⁷ This law can be read both as the symptom of the survival of an Old Regime template and of its adaptation to new situations.

The fact that written contracts were not compulsory made apprenticeship invisible to some contemporaries. When asked about practices in their departments in the late 1870s and early 1880s, many prefects answered that there were no apprenticeships, because there were no contracts. Some added that children certainly learned with their parents. Yet where prefects bothered to look for apprentices, rather than notarized contracts, they found them, and in surprisingly diverse places (often just one or two apprentices per village). For example, 170 contracts, 124 of them verbal, were counted in 1880 in rural Allier. In 1883, in Ille-et-Vilaine, officials reported 1,131 apprentices, scattered across 57 trades, with one significant concentration of 337 slipper-makers (*chaussonniers*).¹⁸

These cases demonstrate that, even though few apprenticeship contracts existed in writing, and apprenticeship offered no formal credential, let alone the right to the status of master, large numbers of teenagers were still ‘apprentices.’ Moreover, their contracts were enforceable. In Paris, ca. 2,000 cases per year were brought before the labour courts in the late 1850s (for ca. 20,000 apprentices); in Lyon, the rate was even higher (it was much lower in most towns). Labour courts, at least in the capital and some other big cities, were an important force in shaping legal and social norms about apprenticeship. And they, like the 1851 law, tended to favour a traditional model: apprenticeship in small workshops, but not so small that the master would not have enough work or expertise; personal teaching by the person who signed the contract; lenient penalties; parent-like

17 On laws and jurisprudence see O. Tholozan, ‘Le débat parlementaire de 1851 sur le contrat d’apprentissage ou la liberté contractante acclimatée’, *Cahiers de l’IRT*, 9 (2001), 207–222, L. Montazel, ‘La résolution judiciaire des conflits en matière de contrat d’apprentissage aux XIXe et XXe siècles’, in S. Dauchy, B. Dubois, F. Lekéal, and V. Demars-Sion (eds.), *Histoire, justice et travail* (Centre d’histoire judiciaire: Lille, 2005), pp. 277–298, and for a synthesis C. Lemerrier, ‘Apprentissage’, in A. Stanziani (ed.), *Dictionnaire historique de l’économie-droit, XVIIIe-XXe siècles* (LGDJ: Paris, 2007), pp. 23–34. For examples of lawyers compiling jurisprudence and in effect modeling legal and social norms, Léopold, *Manuel des prud’hommes*, (Patris et cie, Blanchard et cie: Paris, 1811); François-Étienne Mollot, *Le contrat d’apprentissage expliqué aux maîtres et aux apprentis*, (L. Colas: Paris, 1847).

18 AN F12/4831-3. Specifically in F12/4831: Préfecture de l’Allier, 6 May 1881. In F12/4832: Préfecture d’Ille-et-Vilaine, 22 March 1884.

moral supervision; not too many domestic duties for the apprentice; and respect for the master. They especially emphasized the need for the apprentice to stay with the master until the end of the contract, by imposing much heavier fines on those who left than eighteenth-century courts had.

II: Apprenticeships Beyond Guilds: Diversity of Forms of Training, Female Labour, and the Saliency of the Template

If we take as our starting point not the contract, but the acquisition of occupational skill, it becomes clear that a much wider set of possibilities already existed in the Old Regime than the apprentice clutching his *brevet d'apprentissage*, signed by notary and guild officials. Across France, many trades were not organized into approved guilds, despite royal edicts. Even in trades for which guilds existed, many skilled artisans worked in rural areas, in privileged manufactures, or in urban enclaves free from guild control, such as the notorious faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris. Moreover, sworn masters themselves often ignored the rules, by hiring workers without guild-certified training, keeping more than one apprentice, or sub-contracting to non-guild workers. Women's labour, most often overlooked by historians whose vision of work remains constrained by guild-generated documentation, constituted a significant portion of the workforce both within the guilds and the economically-vital grey or black-market labour force.¹⁹

Given the complex ties binding guild masters to multiple varieties of 'illegal' and 'free' labour, it is impossible to draw clear lines between corporate and non-corporate work or to quantify precisely the portion of production and exchange that took place outside the guilds. For the city of Bordeaux, to give one example, a 1762 inquiry revealed that 1,600 masters worked in 40 'sworn trades' (that is guilds possessing royal letters patent), roughly 250 in 10 'regulated trades' (corporations recognized by the municipality), leaving the majority, around 2,150, working in 38 'free trades'; illegal workers were not counted.²⁰ The line between 'incorporated' and 'free' work was blurry; gradations of corporate status existed and even so-called free labourers were surveilled and taxed by the municipality as collective trade-based associations. In the north, and in Paris in particular, corporate organization was more pervasive. Nevertheless, given the size and importance of the faubourg Saint-Antoine, the city's handful of other free areas,

19 See S.L. Kaplan, 'Réflexions sur la police du monde du travail, 1700-1815', *Revue historique*, 261 (1979), 17-77; 'The Character and Implications of Strife among Masters inside the Guilds of Eighteenth-Century Paris', *Journal of Social History*, 19 (1986), 631-48; 'La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail à Paris au XVIIIe siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 36 (1989), 361-412; M. Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). More recently, see J. Horn, *Economic Development in Early Modern France: The Privilege of Liberty, 1650-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

20B. Gallinato, *Les Corporations à Bordeaux à la fin de l'Ancien régime* (Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 1992), p. 286. There was no clear rationale for the designation of trades among these categories: butchers, bakers, saddlers and weavers were 'regulated' trades and clockmakers, second-clothes dealers and barrel-makers were 'free'. In Paris, and many other cities, all these trades belonged to guilds.

and the importance of illicit labour, the majority of production and exchange in Paris probably took place outside of guild control.

This variability in the forms of labour organization extended to the multiple varieties of ‘apprenticeship’ that can be traced in notarial archives, the records of orphanages, charitable schools and other institutions. Alternative forms of vocational training existed across a broad spectrum. Some were conducted completely outside the guild system, others operated in intense competition with guilds, while others assumed guild support and assistance for the project of enlarging the circle of skilled and self-sufficient artisans. They all, however, implicitly or explicitly took guild-based apprenticeship as the normative form of trade training, a standard to emulate or a tradition to be rejected. Perversely, the high quality training associated with ‘apprenticeship’ in its most formal, corporate manifestation, inspired many non-credentialing, brief and informal modes of training to seek legitimation by describing the children involved as ‘apprentices’.

A first category of ‘apprenticeship’ absent from the notarial contracts described above consisted of informal training by masters of their own sons, and quite possibly their nephews, cousins and other family members (with the important caveat that only their sons would be qualified to join the guild). As a rule, guilds exempted masters’ sons (and mistresses’ daughters in the small number of female and mixed sex guilds) from formal apprenticeship, on the assumption that they would learn from their parent. Jacques-Louis Ménétra, a master glazier’s son, briefly learned from his father but then transferred to his uncle’s workshop to escape paternal violence. He ended as a guild master, but one bitterly opposed to corporate officialdom. Between 1766 and 1775, 26 per cent of new masters and mistresses in Parisian guilds were the sons or daughters of guild members (approximately 3,500 individuals, mostly male).²¹

Sharply opposed to these informal training processes in terms of institutional significance was *allouage*, a distinctively French form of training. The *allouage* contract was a notarized document governing vocational training. In practice, these contracts closely resembled apprenticeship: training in the home of the master, requirements for humane treatment and effective education on the one hand and obedience and hard work on the other, accompanied by a fee from parents to master that varied from very little (often nothing) to quite substantial sums. The decisive difference was that the *allouage* contract provided no formal credential upon completion. A finished *alloué* gained practical skill and possibly social connections, but no claim to guild membership. Not surprisingly, these contracts represent a small minority of training contracts in notarial archives. Our sample from 1761 consists of 677 apprenticeship contracts and forty-three *allouage* contracts. Many of the contracts reveal the close conceptual overlap between ‘real’ apprenticeship and *allouage*, with a number stating that the youth was entering ‘apprenticeship in the quality of an *alloué*’.²²

For masters, *allouage* presented the obvious advantage of allowing them to exceed the guild quotas of one apprentice each. The real question is why parents would go to the expense and trouble of obtaining a notarized contract that denied the possibility of mastership. We can imagine that many of the same motivations (explicit promises,

21 Archives nationales Y 9329, Y 9330, Y 9331 and Y 9332; J.-L. Ménétra, *Journal of my life*, ed. D. Roche (Columbia University Press: New York, 1989).

22 On *allouage*, see S. Kaplan, ‘L’Apprentissage au XVIIIe siècle’, art. cit

possibility of legal recourse for default) were at work as for apprentices. We must also conclude that for these parents, the prospect of guild membership seemed if not unimportant, at least unrealistic. It seems safe to assume that these formal contracts represent the tip of a much larger iceberg of informal training arrangements, the vital necessity of obtaining skill outweighing the distant dream of becoming a guild master.

From the sixteenth century onwards, a number of charitable institutions took up the cause of helping poor children acquire craft skills. Parish foundations provided funds and social connections to place children in apprenticeships with Parisian masters. The hôpital de la Trinité instead provided in-house apprenticeships, without a formal contract, to a select group of children who had lost at least one parent (usually the children of guild masters). Hospital administrators recruited journeymen (not masters) to teach the children a trade; after six years of supplying training the journeyman was entitled to claim membership in his guild. Such journeymen represented 3% of new masters between 1766 and 1775. Finished Trinité apprentices enjoyed the same status as those emanating from the guilds. Gaining access to these parallel systems of training was usually a sign of insider-status, a reward for good conduct or faithful service among the established poor, a recognition of social ties in the form of friendship, neighbourhood, and kin, rather than simply a form of oppression or coercion of the destitute.²³

Girls constituted a major preoccupation of alternative training programs, given their lack of opportunities in the guild system. Roughly 300 girls began apprenticeship with a mistress seamstress each year in the eighteenth century. This was a major outlet for girls to learn transferrable skills in needlework. However, it was far from enough to satisfy demand. Most girls could expect to work in waged labour for eight to ten years, starting around age 16 in order to accrue a small dowry for marriage at age 25 or 26. In the late seventeenth century, several female lay communities formed with the mission of continuing poor girls' education once they had passed the age of schooling in charity schools. In Paris, communities devoted to female vocational training included the Soeurs de la Communauté de Sainte-Geneviève, the Filles de l'Instruction chrétienne, the Filles de Saint-Joseph, the Filles de Sainte-Agnès, and the Filles de Sainte-Anne.

The most important was the Filles de Sainte-Agnès, established in 1678 with four members and forty or fifty students. The original sisters were a tapestry-maker, two linen-drapers and a seamstress. By 1729, the community numbered forty-five sisters, forty adult boarders, thirty-five child boarders, and almost four-hundred-and-fifty 'poor children and external students for instruction and work.' The school was divided into seven classes: two for religious education and five for vocational instruction, with one for linen work, one for embroidery, another for lace making, and two for tapestry making. The community possessed all the equipment and tools necessary, including looms for tapestry weaving. With a number of sisters devoting their time to administration, cooking and housekeeping, there would have been less than one mistress for every ten students.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Filles de Sainte-Agnès earned approximately two thousand livres per year from the tapestry, lace, linen, and embroidery workshops, which the sisters declared was barely enough to cover expenses. As they stated in

23 On hôpital de la Trinité and alternative apprenticeship in general, see C.H. Crowston, 'L'apprentissage hors des corporations. Les formations professionnelles alternatives à Paris sous l'Ancien régime', *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales*, 60 (2005), 409–41.

explaining the low revenue, ‘these trades can only be learned by practice and not by theory[,] we thus cannot dispense with undertaking this work to be able to instruct them and form their hands’. Training pupils in large, institutional workshops was far from the guild model, yet the sisters called their charges ‘apprentices’ and believed their task was – like a guild master – to guide apprentices through hands-on training from initiation to mastery of a trade.²⁴

A similar range of forms of training existed in the nineteenth century. Our ambition here is to give an idea of the diversity of situations, not just that of Laroche’s pupils producing masterpieces as opposed to flower-makers starved and overworked by the Anfriens (a couple whose workshop only employed apprentices)²⁵, but those of teenagers who learned by working generally. This diversity is organized around the same axes as in the eighteenth century: most of the variants that we have listed above had nineteenth-century equivalents.

The most obvious change was the explicit extension of ‘apprenticeship’ to girls – who had been present, but were in many ways marginalized, in guild apprenticeship. The Paris Chamber of Commerce statistics for 1848-51 ostensibly do not provide aggregate numbers of male and female apprentices, but it is possible to establish that one third were girls. Population censuses allow us to map the occupation of teenagers in other places in the same period (Table 1). Some girls were explicitly described as apprentices, even in middle-size towns where apprenticeship was still mostly male. In Lyon, heavily dominated by the silk industry, female apprentices held a clear majority over males (as did female teenagers, probably due to differences in migration).

The apprenticeship of girls was mostly confined to specific trades, as in the eighteenth century. Female apprentices generally served mistresses, who employed few boys. In Paris in 1860, female apprentices were even more restricted, in terms of trades, than were adult female workers. The ten main trades for each sex employed 44% of adult female workers, but just 32% of adult male workers. While only 42% of male apprentices were engaged in the ten main trades, 78% of girls were concentrated in the top ten. Seamstresses alone trained 22% of female apprentices, while they employed less than 4% of female adult workers.²⁶

24 AN S 7047. See C.H. Crowston, ‘An Industrious Revolution in Late Seventeenth-Century Paris,’ in M.J. Maynes, B. Sølund, and C. Benninghaus (eds.), *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 2005), pp. 69–82

25ADP, D1U10/385, 23 October 1857. They were condemned by the labour court after complaints by several families.

26 *Statistique de l'industrie à Paris résultant de l'enquête faite par la Chambre de commerce pour l'année 1860* (Chambre de commerce: Paris, 1864).

Table 1. Occupations of persons aged 13-18 in mid-nineteenth-century censuses

Among girls

Place	Apprentices	Young workers	Agriculture	Servants	At school	No occupation	Total N observed
Lyon	20%	43%	0%	9%	1%	27%	759
Caen	1%	35%	0%	11%	0%	40%	618
Dijon	4%	25%	0%	15%	0%	54%	210
Poitiers	7%	28%	0%	21%	0%	45%	1407
Château-Larcher	3%	16%	32%	27%	0%	22%	37
Lusignan	1%	14%	4%	25%	0%	52%	138

Among boys

Place	Apprentices	Young workers	Agric.	Servants	At school	No occupation	Total N observed
Lyon	15%	43%	0%	1%	13%	28%	565
Caen	5%	46%	0%	7%	1%	46%	684
Dijon	16%	24%	0%	4%	4%	50%	180
Poitiers	15%	31%	0%	11%	3%	38%	1369
Château-Larcher	4%	21%	46%	19%	0%	10%	52
Lusignan	15%	14%	19%	22%	0%	26%	144

Source: nominative 1851 census records, except for Caen (1856); photographs of this source are available on the respective departmental archives website. For Lyon (Rhône): (total population 177,000), random sample of 50 streets (roughly one tenth). For Caen (Calvados): (total population 45,000), random sample of 40 streets (roughly one third). For Dijon (Côte-d'Or): (total population 32,000), random sample of 40 streets (roughly one third). For Poitiers (Vienne) (total population 29,000), Lusignan (Vienne) (total population 2,500), and Château-Larcher (Vienne) (total population 840), exhaustive studies.

Young workers includes youths assigned to specific occupations (artisanal, industrial, shop assistants, etc.). No occupations are mostly youths described as son or daughter. Also includes rare 'others' (e.g. day labourers).

While the destruction of the guilds (almost all exclusively male) meant that female apprenticeship now was openly discussed and applied in a wider range of occupations than before, gender differences remained. It is likely that new uses of apprenticeship, related to the increased division of labour in urban fashion and luxury trades, disproportionately affected girls. Contemporaries often decried such uses as abuses of the institution. In other words, it is perhaps telling that Laroche apprenticed boys whereas the Anfriens employed girls. The urban *fabriques* in Lyon and Paris are famous for the technical innovations collectively produced by their mobile skilled workers/entrepreneurs, which allowed them to resist competition from factories for decades.²⁷ In the nineteenth century, they were also unanimously praised, for example in

27 A. Cottureau, 'The fate of collective manufactures in the industrial world: the silk industries of Lyons and London, 1800-1850', in C. Sabel and J. Zeitlin (eds.), *World of possibilities. Mass production and flexibility in Western industrialization* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 75-153; L. Pérez, 'Inventing in a world of guilds: The case of the silk industry in Lyon in the eighteenth century', in S.R.

reports on world expositions, for the taste of even the most modest female worker. Yet the same reports also demonstrated that a very minute division of labour had been the key to the increase in production and in flexibility (allowing rapid changes in fashion) after the end of guilds. This division of labour implied that some workers, and some apprentices, only wound bobbins of silk, or rolled paper around wire to make the stem of artificial flowers.²⁸

Urban *fabriques* did not only employ skilled workers. In Lyon's censuses, 21% of the female apprentices were 'apprentice silk workers' ('apprentice ... worker' was a rare phrasing, indicative of their non-existent prospects of independence) and 34% were apprentice bobbin winders (at best a sub-subcontractor's occupation, always female). Among boys, 28% were apprentice silk workers, but the rest were in a much more diverse range of occupations, often trades that used to have guilds. This probably indicated practices more akin to the Old Regime template for boys, whereas for many of the girls, 'apprenticeship' meant that they were hired for a few years to perform simple tasks, in exchange for food and lodging. It does not imply that they learned nothing, but the prospect they would be considered skilled was remote.

What the censuses mostly underline is the large number of teenagers employed in trades who the census clerk did not describe as apprentices. Given that apprenticeship was not confined to particularly skilled occupations, did they differ from apprentices by something other than name? Censuses cannot tell us who learned what, and it seems a fair guess that, insofar as learning was informal and perhaps 'stolen' from the masters, the two groups were in similar situations.²⁹ Censuses, however, do provide some clues as to what parents could expect in each situation.

For mid-century Paris, the Chamber of Commerce statistics paint a seemingly clear picture.³⁰ Apprentices are over-represented in small workshops (with a total of 10 workers or less), young workers in larger ones. The few Parisian factories, producing cotton and wool thread, wallpaper and shawls, stated that they had no apprentices, but many workers under the age of 16. The luxury, fashion and food trades, as well as most occupations related to wood and metal, listed few young workers and many apprentices. We should not take these contrasts at face value, though, and conclude that the more traditional the industries, the more apprentices they had. Among the myriad luxury and fashion trades that flourished in nineteenth-century Paris, many were never incorporated (apprentices were especially numerous in Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the privileged neighbourhood where guild regulations never applied). Most trades experienced a

Epstein and M. Prak, eds., *Guilds, innovation, and the European economy, 1400-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 232–263.

28 For example N. Rondot, *Rapport sur les objets de parure, de fantaisie et de goût, fait à la commission française du jury international de l'Exposition universelle de Londres*, (Imprimerie impériale: Paris, 1854).

29 P. Wallis, 'Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England', *Journal of Economic History*, 68 (2008), 832–861 usefully summarizes discussions on such processes.

30 *Statistique... 1848*. For details about differences across trades, see C. Crowston, S. Kaplan and C. Lemerrier, art. cit. It is difficult to know if the divide between apprentices and young workers was sharper in the capital, or if this is an effect of the sources. Population census lists, which we use for other places, have been lost for Paris. The Chamber of Commerce was actively trying to differentiate apprenticeship from child labour, and to promote the Old Regime template (although it was hostile to a restoration of guilds).

growing division of labour, so that most workers did not need to master fine skills. Yet they kept, or appropriated, the Old Regime template of hiring teenagers for several years, often without fixed wages, in exchange for food and lodging, or food and gratuities – and possibly some training.

What about other cities and towns? In Table 1, we generally find many more young workers than apprentices – and from their occupations, it is obvious that not all the former worked in factories, which were anyway scarce. In many trades, there were teenage workers as well as apprentices. In some cases, the term was probably the only difference – which in itself is indicative of the survival of older terminologies. Sometimes, young workers were former apprentices.

Caen illustrates differences in terminology: overall, just 5% of boys were apprentices, whereas 46% were young workers, including 22% of clerks and shop assistants – a much higher proportion than elsewhere. This mostly indicates that teenagers who were learning in shops (of hairdressers, bakers, merchants, etc.) rather than workshops were not called apprentices, but ‘*garçon*’ or ‘*commis*’.³¹ Their situations probably resembled apprenticeship in many respects, although we do not know whether they had long contracts, but the word was not used. Similarly, young people in agriculture were either styled cultivators, or had life-cycle occupations such as shepherds, but were never called ‘apprentices’. They learned by doing, as did teenagers employed in factories, but there was no guild template to reference and the word ‘apprentice’ was not used.

This leaves us with the many ‘young workers’ engaged in the same occupations as apprentices. For example, in Lyon there were almost as many apprentices as young workers in the relatively unskilled occupations of silk worker and bobbin-winder. They worked in similar households, in terms of the gender of the master and the number of people employed and lodged. Some ‘young workers’ might simply have completed their apprenticeship before reaching 18 – they would be the younger equivalent of Old Regime journeymen. Table 2 shows somewhat higher median ages among ‘young workers,’ but some were too young to have been apprenticed before.

31 On these variants in several languages, see S. Steffens, ‘Le nom de l’apprenti’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, 79 (2001), 591–617.

Table 2. Median ages of apprentices and young workers in mid-nineteenth-century censuses

Place	Female apprentices	Female young workers	Male apprentices	Male young workers
Lyon	15	16	17	17
Poitiers	14	16	15	17
Dijon	14	16	16	17
Caen	15	16	15	16
Lusignan	13	15	15	18
Château-Larcher	17	15	14	15

Sources: see Table 1.

The main differences between the two categories had to do with the social proximity between teenagers and masters. In Lyon in 1851, 23% of ‘young workers’ lived and worked with their parents, compared to just 5% of ‘apprentices’. It was apparently uncommon to call a son or daughter who worked with a parent an apprentice. It is perhaps obvious that a specific contract was not required to work and learn with a parent, who already had legal authority; it is also consistent with the tradition of the guilds, which considered inheritance and apprenticeship as different paths to the trade. What censuses show through the large numbers of ‘young workers’ is partly that many teenagers worked, and presumably trained with, their parents.

In addition, apprentices had specific geographical and social origins.³² Only 30% of apprentices who subsequently married in Lyon were born there, compared to 60% of young workers. When they married, 45% of apprentices had parents who were alive and living outside Lyon, indicating that the apprentice had migrated alone, not with their family, compared to just 18% of young workers. Although half of young workers did not live with their parents, theirs had generally been a short distance move. Accordingly, 29% of apprentices’ parents were farmers, compared to just 8% of young workers’ parents; conversely, just 4% of apprentices’ parents worked in the silk industry, whereas 12% of the young workers’ parents did. Finding a place in a Lyonnais workshop was not possible for any teenager: servants and day labourers were almost absent from both sets of parents. Geographic and/or social mobility was more common among apprentices. This reflects the fact that migrants more often had long contracts and were mostly paid in kind, whereas local youth could be employed at will. Whatever skills apprentices learned, their contract was, for some, a way to enter the city.

Many teenage girls (and boys in some places) were servants (Table 1). In the nineteenth century, there was a shift in the gendering of domestic service; more generally, servants tended to become less well-respected and to come from lower classes.³³ Being a young servant was less a life-cycle occupation and increasingly

32 Marriage records were found for 86 apprentices and 103 young workers (on the website of Lyon municipal archives). We could not identify a marriage record if the person did not marry in Lyon, or if their name was too common. Those are important biases, but they are the same for our two populations.

33 R. Sarti, ‘Criados, servi, domestiques, Gesinde, servants: For a comparative history of domestic service in Europe (16th-19th centuries)’, *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 16 (2007), 9–39.

preparation for a life of service instead. Apprentices' contracts were closer to those of servants than workers, because of the relationship with the master and the duration. However, distinguishing apprenticeship from domestic service was one of the focal points of jurisprudence, especially for girls, whom some masters and mistresses used to tend to their household.

At the other end of the social spectrum, we find teenagers described as pupils or students – a small minority, almost all boys. These were young bourgeois attending high schools. Discussions on technical education had begun before the Revolution and flourished in the nineteenth century, but actual technical schools were few. In addition, most prepared youths for professions, or careers in the higher ranks of public administration or firms, rather than for trades: there were, for example, schools for nautical engineers and accountants. Design schools (first established in the 1760s) were the main exception, but trained only a minority of designers, or artisans in the luxury and fashion industries. According to the promoters of technical schools, masters did not bother to teach, because they could exploit apprentices, while parents broke contracts as soon as their children could earn some money. Schools now had to provide what masters had done in the past. When the labour movement began to unite in the 1860s, it adopted a similar position. In France, unlike in England, workers rarely complained about competition from apprentices and never asked for limits on their numbers. Instead, they condemned their exploitation by masters, and de-skilling generally. This ultimately led, in the twentieth century, to a new version of apprenticeship, alternating weeks at school and in the workshop; but this only appeared after the 1870 war, when the French turned to German models of education generally. In the nineteenth century, trades were almost never learned at school.³⁴

Finally, as in the pre-revolutionary period, one practice blurred borders between schooling, domestic service, and apprenticeship: charity apprenticeships, which religious institutions (hospitals and convents) continued to provide, with an increased focus on orphans or otherwise marginalized children. There were two types of charity apprenticeships. Patronage, on the one hand, furnished a standard apprenticeship in a workshop, supplemented with control from an association, which devised standard contracts and monitored practices. Patronage was essentially an attempt to move market-oriented practices in the direction of the Old Regime template.³⁵

Alternatively, charity apprenticeships still occurred in workshops established in or around hospitals and convents. For example, in the Lyon census for 1851, we find 19 female 'apprentices', without any indication of trade, aged 8 to 20 (eight were 11 years or younger), living with seven sisters of the charitable order of Saint-Vincent. These charitable workshops 'apprenticed' more children than patronage, but they remained a small minority – especially as girls now had more opportunities to become apprentices in workshops. They made 'apprenticeship' accessible for people who probably would not have found masters otherwise. Yet, as in the eighteenth-century, the experience described by that label was far from the ideal of acquiring skills through one-to-one mentoring.

34 S. Lembré, *Histoire de l'enseignement technique*, (La Découverte: Paris, 2016). For examples of promotion of technical schools by an entrepreneur and by workers, see C. Loquet, *L'Apprentissage à l'Atelier de l'Industrie Privée et à l'École* (Léon Deshayes: Rouen, 1884); *Séances du Congrès ouvrier de France, session de 1876* (Fischbacher: Paris, 1877), pp. 201–272.

35 Berlanstein

For nineteenth-century teenagers, apprenticeship was part of a continuum of ways of learning, working – and leaving. No more than before the Revolution was it the only way to learn skills, even artisanal skills. The widespread use of apprenticeship contracts was an oddity in a context of commercial labour relations, in which most workers had short contracts and faced no legal barrier to becoming entrepreneurs. The Old Regime template had clearly survived, partly for symbolic reasons – with many contemporaries actually believing that all past apprenticeships had followed guild rules. Long contracts paid in kind also offered practical opportunities for some masters as well as some parents.

III. What was Apprenticeship Used For? Becoming a Master, and Other Outcomes

Could apprenticeship open genuine prospects of upward mobility, especially of becoming an entrepreneur? According to many in the nineteenth century, whereas apprentices could become masters in the eighteenth century, their modern followers would at best earn a living as semi-skilled workers. Our results question both the bright vision of the Old Regime and the grim assessment of nineteenth-century apprenticeships.

From the early modern period through the nineteenth century, many apprentices did not complete their training; France is no exception to the European pattern. For the Old Regime, we used the well-kept registers of the *Grande Fabrique* of Lyon (the guild covering the city's large and prosperous silk industry) to track premature termination of training. Corporate officers recorded children's entry into apprenticeship, often noting the outcome of the contracts in the margins. We analysed three registers, from the late 1680s to the late 1760s, containing information on 5,281 apprentices. They indicate that 18% of contracts were cancelled. Cancellation was most common in the 1680s, occurring in 24% of apprenticeships, mostly because the apprentice had quit (rather than being dismissed by the master). Another 1.2% of apprentices died. In addition, 10-15% of apprentices would interrupt their contract. Of that group, around a third in the 1740s and a quarter in the 1760s would later restart. Another third later cancelled their contracts (of whom a small number had restarted first). We do not know what happened to the final third of apprentices who interrupted. Perhaps they returned to apprenticeship without informing the guild. Perhaps they stayed away. Finally, 27% of apprentices in the 1680s, and 25% in the later period were transferred to a different master during their contracts.³⁶

Most of the cancellations happened during the three first years of the contract in the 1740s, and the two first years in the 1760s, but exits continued throughout the term. There is no clear clustering of departures either at the start or end of the contract. This implies a mix of motivations among apprentices and masters: from resolving a poor initial match to quitting after having learned enough. The notion of a two-stage model of apprenticeship, in which the later period was seen by masters as crucial because only then could they benefit from profitable labour from the apprentice, is not borne out by these registers.³⁷

³⁶The guild's rules on apprenticeship are set out in J. Godart, *L'ouvrier en soie. Monographie du tisseur lyonnais, part 1 (La réglementation du travail)* (Bernoux et Cumin and Rousseau: Lyon and Paris, 1899), pp. 100-133. Our data come from Lyon Municipal Archives, HH 597, HH601, HH602. We thank Patrick Wallis for his work on these registers. For more detailed results, see R. Schalk, P. Wallis, C. Crowston, and C. Lemerrier. 'Failure or flexibility? Exits from apprenticeship training in pre-modern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 48 (2017), 131-158.

³⁷ On this notion, see Wallis, 'Apprenticeship', art. cit.

In the nineteenth century, there were no such registers. As contracts were generally unwritten, it is even possible that the duration was not always strictly determined at the start (although the law and model contracts advised this). Yet the number of unfinished apprenticeships that reached the courts, at least in the main cities, indicates of an even higher share of early exits than in Old Regime Lyon. As mentioned, one tenth of Parisian apprenticeships gave birth to a labour court case in the late 1850s. Most judgments ended the apprenticeship, sometimes because the master was deemed too violent or insufficiently skilled. However, more than 70% of cases were brought by masters and mistresses seeking damages because their apprentice had left prematurely. In a sample of 319 cases in 1848-85, 38% of early exits happened during the first year, 37% in the second year, and 25% came afterwards.³⁸

The frequency of early exits helps explain another striking continuity from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century: very few apprentices went on to become masters or mistresses of their trades. If we compare the names of youths who commenced an apprenticeship or an *allouage* in Paris in 1761 with the lists of individuals entering a guild from January 1766 to December 1775, the number of matches is surprisingly low. Of 1,404 apprentices and 89 *alloués* in 1761 (as well 23 apprentices who moved to new masters by notarial contract that year), only 194 individuals can be said with certainty to have become masters in the trades in which they began training. The rate extends from a minimum of 13% to a potential maximum of around 20%. A comparison of 1751 apprentices with guild records from 1755 to 1775 produces similar results.

Among those who became masters and mistresses, a handful were *alloués*, suggesting that this gloomily exclusionary contract did not necessarily foreclose entry to mastership. In total, apprentices in fewer than 50 of the 106 trades appearing in contracts in 1761 became guild masters. For those who became masters, the time necessary to achieve mastership varied widely, from 5 to 15 years.

The *Grande Fabrique* of Lyon saw similar outcomes. Between 1769 and 1773, 281 of 777 new masters qualified by apprenticeship and another 116 former apprentices qualified via another route, an average of 79 per year. Between 1763 and 1765, the latest years in which these former apprentices could have started training, 1,126 new apprenticeships were registered, an average of 375 per year. If these rates are broadly representative, then around 21% (79/375) of youths who started apprenticeships became masters. Given that at least 18% of apprentices cancelled their contracts, this implies that up to 61% of those who started apprenticeships in silk weaving spent their lives as journeymen – either in Lyon or elsewhere – or changed their trade or place, and that a minimum of 26% (21/82) of those who qualified as journeymen became masters.

Apprenticeship played different roles in the reproduction of different trades. In Paris, for example, among apprentice grocers (*épiciers*), 8 out of the 15 apprentices who began in 1761 became masters, as did 7 of 13 distillers and beverage sellers (*limonadiers-distillateurs*) and 6 of 11 small grain dealers (*grainiers-grainières*, a mixed-sex guild). By contrast, only 8 of 121 apprentice pastry-makers, 6 of 80 apprentice shoemakers, and 2 of 31 apprentice printers became masters. Most apprentices did not become masters, but those in some trades had a much better chance than others.

38 C. Crowston, S. Kaplan and C. Lemercier, art. cit.

For women, the questions of continuity or rupture and ‘success’ and ‘failure’ are even more complicated. Among seamstresses, an average of slightly more than 400 girls began an apprenticeship each year in mid-eighteenth century Paris. In the same period, approximately 110 women entered the guild via apprenticeship each year (of a total of around 140 new mistresses). This means that one in four apprentice seamstresses became mistresses, slightly more than we found for apprentices in 1761.³⁹

We have found marriage records for 86 of the apprentices observed in Lyon in 1851, and 103 of the ‘young workers’. Those who married in Lyon arguably had the most linear trajectories, yet just half of each group remained in the trade they had entered as teenagers. Broadly speaking, locals and those with more bourgeois origins were more likely to have changed occupation, while those who had migrated to Lyon on their own more often stayed in the same trade. Those with better local connections, or more family resources, often used them in order *to not* become entrepreneurs or workers in the trade they first joined.

We cannot reconstruct similar trajectories for Parisian apprentices in the nineteenth century (the records were destroyed), but figures published by the Chamber of Commerce for 1848 and 1860 show similarly diverse outcomes across trades. They allow us to compare the numbers of apprentices, masters, well-paid workers, and standard workers for a finely-grained set of trades (more than 300 were recorded). If we assume that these numbers did not change quickly, we can estimate the likelihood of an apprentice becoming a master or mistress or a well-paid worker in the same trade.⁴⁰

Extreme cases are easily found. For example, in 1860, 20 engravers on cameo and fine stones employed 60 (male) apprentices on 3 to 5-year contracts: each year, 12 to 20 apprentices would complete their training. It appears very unlikely that most would open their own workshop in Paris. Similar ratios of 2 to 3 apprentices per master were found in larger trades, like the fine jewellers (1,417 apprentices in 738 workshops). These apprentices were also not likely to become well-paid workers: there were just 24 men making more than 6 francs per day in cameo engraving and 852 in fine jewellery. In such trades, it is likely that former apprentices were either hired as standard workers, with no skill premium, or left the trade or city.

However, other trades had numbers of apprentices that were commensurate with those of masters and well-paid workers: a smooth ascent from apprentice to master could have been a reality in such cases. The 253 industrial designers had 209 male well-paid workers and 103 male apprentices (called ‘apprentice-pupils’), mostly with 3 or 4-year contracts. With one apprentice finishing each year for every ten workshops, at least some had the chance to take over from their master. In 1860, this trade was also noticeable for the low proportion of apprentices living with their master (11%), hinting at mostly Parisian origins. The Laroche workshop, where apprentices produced masterpieces, was part of this trade: all the more reasons for parents to believe in the Old Regime myth.

These findings raise questions about the expectations and aspirations of new apprentices and their families. Why go to the trouble of arranging a formal apprenticeship, when a youth had such a small chance of becoming a master? One possible answer is the limited information available to families contracting

³⁹ C. Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, *op.cit.*, p. 326-328.

⁴⁰ *Statistique... 1848; Statistique... 1860.*

apprenticeship, a particular problem for non-locals and non-artisans. In England, manuals existed from the 1720s that offered advice on the costs involved in establishing a business in different trades and the obstacles one might face. Similar manuals only began to appear in the later nineteenth century in France,⁴¹ meaning that parents may have lacked an understanding of the potential to become a master. However, it is unlikely that information shortages alone can account for the massive numbers of children entering apprenticeships that were unlikely to lead to independent mastership through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Our study suggests, instead, that the terms ‘failure’ and ‘success’ are inadequate to understand the relationship between apprenticeship and guild membership. Given the expense and risk of establishing a business, the freedom of life as a skilled journeyman – which included the ability to travel in search of economic opportunity – may have been appealing to many youths from modest backgrounds. The high rate of non-ascension to guild membership suggests that most families knew in advance that guild membership was highly uncertain. With only one or two in ten becoming masters in many trades, these parents looked to apprenticeship for its other advantages: vocational skills, contacts and know-how to obtain future employment, and a coming-of-age process that readied the youth for the world. Another important factor was that large trades were also those in which parents could most easily (and often more cheaply) locate a master willing to take on their children. Cost aside, the social capital necessary to become an apprentice in one of the mercantile guilds meant that those children were poised for success from the outset. Thus, in drawing broad conclusions we must also keep in mind that the horizon of expectations and aspirations varied greatly between children with sharply unequal forms of capital.

Finally, it is likely that parents knew that some skills could be transferred to other occupations – something the Old Regime template entirely ignored. An apprenticeship contract, even in the nineteenth century, was predicated on the master teaching his or her trade to the apprentice: the only occupation mentioned was the master’s. Yet the division of labour within even small workshops implied that many apprentices were in fact trained by a worker rather than the master. This was seen as a problem in nineteenth-century jurisprudence, but could be an opportunity for some apprentices. Some skills learned with a worker were probably transferable from one trade to another. For example, mechanics were listed in 43 of the 105 main trades in the 1860 Parisian statistics: the increased prevalence of machines made this a transferable skill *par excellence*. Similarly, 29 non-generic male occupations (e.g. fitters, engravers, gilders) and 4 female ones (polishers, silver polishers, gilders, piercers) were listed in 10 separate trades or more. It is also plausible that, even in the eighteenth century, some seemingly unlikely career moves were made possible because specific, transferable skills, rather than ‘the trade’, had been learned – and some parents, knowing this, could have chosen trades that offered such advantages.⁴²

41 One of the pioneers was H. Leneveux, *Manuel d'apprentissage, guide pour le choix d'un état industriel* (Passard: Paris, 1855).

42 On jurisprudence, see e.g. L. Guibourg and L. André, *Le Code ouvrier, exposé pratique de la législation et de la jurisprudence réglant le travail et les intérêts des ouvriers et apprentis* (Marescq aîné: Paris, 1895). *Statistique... 1860* listed occupations within each trade, giving an idea of the division of labour.

Conclusion

From the Old Regime to the twenty-first century, a vision of apprenticeship as a privileged form of social production prevailed, which saw it as a stable system that served to reproduce a given social and economic world. This chapter has challenged this vision of apprenticeship and corporate institutions by demonstrating the great diversity in outcomes of apprenticeship and, by extension, the multiple aspirations and expectations that teenagers and their families brought to vocational training. This analysis repositions apprenticeship not as the determinant of the outcome of children's lives, but instead as one (privileged) choice among several, and as one step in a long series of life stages, each of which had their own strategy, choice, and constraints.

This chapter has emphasized the variety of forms of apprenticeship from the Old Regime through the nineteenth century, emphasizing the durability of the guild template for apprenticeship, even while many other forms of training existed, many of which laid claim to the term 'apprenticeship' despite important divergences from the basic framework enshrined by the guilds. This chapter has provided the first examination of nineteenth-century apprenticeship based on records derived from practice. As we have seen, the patterns that emerged in the nineteenth century were often similar to those of the Old Regime: although the laws had almost completely changed, the ways to learn a trade were quite similar, as were the varieties of expectations leading to, and outcomes emanating from vocational training. Moreover, in both periods, the range of possible trajectories was also similarly shaped by gender and by the range of social resources available to the youths. Even though apprenticeship, before and after the Revolution, could be an escape route from the reproduction of parental occupations, the paths it opened differed according to family resources.

The template of guild apprenticeship was very much present in the minds of social reformers, judges, and probably parents and masters/mistresses themselves in the nineteenth century. Ironically however, this template referred to Old Regime apprenticeship as it had existed in theory, but not necessarily in practice.

However, by 1880 apprenticeships were becoming rare, and, where they still existed, shorter. Reformers, who were increasingly worried about social and economic production and reproduction, tried to revive the guild template by infusing it with some school teaching, which ultimately gave birth to the law of 1928.⁴³ This law arguably revived apprenticeship as a specific contract, and its monitoring by trade associations, which were once more legal. But it had become very different from the guild template: apprentices were entitled to wages, spent a lot of time in schools, and could be employed by a large firm. A precise exploration of these late nineteenth-century transitions is beyond the scope of this chapter. Their timing is, however, a good indicator of the fact that the Old Regime template of apprenticeship, and the diverse trajectories that it allowed, had survived as long as French economic growth had been mostly driven by 'flexible specialization', not large firms.

43 On debates at that time, see S. Lembré, 'La 'crise' de l'apprentissage : de l'échec à la loi (fin XIXe siècle-années vingt)', in N. Coquery and M. de Oliveira (eds.), *L'échec a-t-il des vertus économiques?* (CHEFF: Paris, 2015), pp. 309–318.