

MAN OF VIRTUE, MAN OF VICE,
MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE
AND MODERN MANHOOD

By

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Abstract

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Since his death in 1794, Maximilien Robespierre's legacy has been debated by scholars and non-scholars alike. Some have called him a blood-thirsty dictator who used his political power to execute innocent citizens who crossed him while others have called him the living embodiment of the French Revolution. This study will examine Robespierre using the lens of gender. The French Revolution was not just a time of great social and political upheaval; it was a time in which concepts of masculinity were transitioning from a focus on aristocratic honor and male beauty to bourgeois sensibilities. Through his belief in restraint in a man's personal life—including moral behavior, religion, and relationships with women—loyalty to the Revolution, and the willingness to sacrifice one's life, Robespierre serves as a model of the transition of masculinity that resulted from the French Revolution.

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Chapter 1

On What Wings Dare He Aspire?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?
--William Blake, 1794.¹

There are few figures in the French Revolution who are as contrasting as Maximilien Robespierre and Georges Danton. Robespierre was a prim idealist who was known for his incorruptibility and devotion to Virtue. In contrast, Danton was known for his zest for living and is reported to have said that Virtue was what he did with his wife every night.² The contrast between these one-time friends is best represented in a scene from Andrezej Wajda's film *Danton* (1983). It begins as a clock strikes the top of the hour and Robespierre (Wojciech Pszoniak) enters Danton's (Gérard Depardieu) dining room. Before the two men even speak, the difference between them dominates the viewer's perception. Robespierre is stiff, powdered and sickly-looking, wearing an immaculately pressed black tail-coat and lace cravat. In contrast, Danton looks almost comical in a sloppily applied wig and a flashy red tailcoat that gives the impression of having been slept in. As the scene progresses, Danton refers to his friend by the affectionate name "Maxime" and

¹ William Blake, "The Tyger," in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 148.

² Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 279.

offers him ornate dishes and wine as if cajoling Robespierre to relax and enjoy himself. One gets the impression that in the earlier and brighter days of the Revolution, Robespierre would not have been as reluctant to accept Danton's offers, but the film is set in the spring of 1794—the height of the Reign of Terror—and Robespierre's idealism would not allow him to succumb to the temptation of fine foods.

Later in the scene, Danton fills two glasses to the brim with pale red wine, which is symbolic of the blood that will be spilled during the film's climax. Robespierre then states that he and Danton have little in common anymore due to the fact that he, Robespierre, is more concerned with the happiness of the People on the streets than with his friendship with Danton. "You know nothing about the People!" The hitherto soft-spoken Danton roars. "How could you know? Look at you! You don't drink, you're powdered, swords make you faint, and they say you've never had a woman! Who do you speak for? Make men happy! You're not a *man!*"³ It is at this point that Danton seals his fate which becomes apparent to all, but his rant towards his former friend raises questions that the film cannot answer. What did it mean to be a *man* during the French Revolution? If there were standards for manhood, what were they and which revolutionary figures, if any, fulfilled them?

More than any other event in modern history, the French Revolution was the event that initiated the demise of a corporate society and the birth of the individual

³ Jean-Claude Carrière, *Danton*, DVD, directed by Andrzej Wajda (Paris: Gaumont, 1983).

Robert Darnton, "Film: Danton and Double Entendre," in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 40.

by transforming the political landscape in France and establishing a society that was, theoretically, based on individual merit rather than the privileges of birth. It was also a transitional period in terms of gender roles and expectations. In the case of masculinity, the transition is best described as one from the aristocratic model that emphasized honor based on privilege and distinction and the bourgeois model which promoted honor based on restraint and individual merit. This transition is best represented by *L'Incorruptible*, Maximilien Robespierre, who, although dressed like an aristocrat, believed in personal restraint, loyalty to the Republic or Virtue, and the desire to sacrifice his life in the name of the Republic. In the historiography of the French Revolution, there is no figure quite as paradoxical as Robespierre. He was a supporter of simplicity and moderation in personal behavior, yet he was known for wearing fine, even dandyish, clothing and powdered wigs long after they were out of vogue.⁴ Furthermore, he gave a speech in 1791 in which he condemned public executions as “cowardly assassinations, nothing but solemn crimes committed not by individuals, but by entire nations using legal forms.”⁵ Yet, in the spring and summer of 1794, he allowed for the executions of 1,376 Parisians in order to protect the People.⁶ Essentially, Robespierre was a

⁴ Germaine de Staël, *Considerations On the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, Newly rev. translation of the 1818 English ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 2008), 372.

⁵ Maximilien Robespierre, "On the Death Penalty," Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1791/death-penalty.htm>.

⁶ Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 328. According to Ruth Scurr, during the forty-seven days between June 10, 1794 and July 28, 1794 1,376 people were hastily tried and executed in Paris. This period is widely believed to be the Terror's bloodiest period.

young, prim student of Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose idealism allowed him to justify the Terror as a means of protecting the People. This study will take a nuanced approach in discussing Robespierre and will not attempt to answer the question of whether or not he was good or evil for two reasons. The first reason is that the question of good and evil is relative. In punishing those who threatened his beloved France, Robespierre believed he was acting in the best interests of his People and country, while others saw him as a bloodthirsty tyrant out for his own personal gain. The second is that this dichotomy has largely run its course and it is time for historians to study Robespierre not as a great man of his time, but as a man who was thrust into one of the greatest events of human history.

Many scholars have chosen to examine Robespierre solely in terms of his political career, though they argue that he was largely inseparable from the times in which he lived. In the mid-twentieth century the historian Alfred Cobban argued that in order to understand Robespierre, one must understand that he was a man of his time who held a utilitarian view of humanity. In his article “The Fundamental Ideals of Maximilien Robespierre,” Cobban presents three ideals that he believed were crucial to understand Robespierre’s actions during the French Revolution. The first is that a good and Virtuous government should be based on ethical principles rather than privilege and intrigue. The second is that the People as a whole are intrinsically good and that the principles of public morality were inscribed within each individual. This principle highlights Robespierre’s concern with the whole of mankind rather than individuals—a point that will be reiterated throughout this

study. Finally, because the People were inherently moral, their “single sovereign will” needed to be what guided society.⁷

Georges Lefebvre also viewed Robespierre as a man of his time. In his “Remarks on Robespierre,” Lefebvre argues that Robespierre stood as the “resolute and faithful representative of the Revolutionary mentality” and his place in history is that of defender of the principles of the Revolution.⁸ Another scholar who saw Robespierre as embodying his times is David P. Jordan. In his intellectual biography *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*, Jordan argues that Robespierre shaped his political image by seeing the Revolutionary struggle as “a struggle to the death between the Revolution and the counterrevolution, ‘them and us;’ virtue and vice.”⁹ Again, these studies focus primarily upon Robespierre’s political career and do not venture into the personal life of Maximilien the man.

Ruth Scurr’s biography *Fatal Purity* provides, to date, the most complete picture and analysis of Robespierre. Scurr argues that rather than being a Revolutionary saint or a blood-thirsty fiend, Robespierre was the living embodiment of the most frenzied phase of the Revolution who used his beliefs about Virtue and the creation of an ideal society to justify the Terror.¹⁰ Though Scurr examines the nuances of Robespierre’s personality, idealism, and even his love-life, she still

⁷ Alfred Cobban, “The Fundamental Ideas of Robespierre,” *The English Historical Review* 63, no. 246 (1948): 31-32.

⁸ Georges Lefebvre and Beatrice F. Hyslop, “Remarks On Robespierre,” *French Historical Studies* 1, no. 1 (1958): 10.

⁹ David P. Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*, (New York: Free Press: 1985), 2.

¹⁰ Scurr, 6.

keeps his political career at the forefront of her argument. It is the goal of *this* study to examine Robespierre as a cultural, rather than a political, figure in order to highlight the transformation of masculinity during the French Revolution. He was *not* the living incarnation of the most violent phase of the Revolution, as was argued by Scurr. Instead, through his beliefs regarding moderate behavior (including morality, deism, and love), Virtue, and the desire to abandon his life for the Cause, Robespierre embodied the changing culture of the French Revolution.

In order to fully understand the transitional nature of masculinity during the French Revolution, it is important to understand what is meant by “gender” and “masculinity.” Most gender theorists would argue that gender is a socially agreed upon construction of differences between men and women.¹¹ Masculinity—how men showed their manhood—was seen as an achieved status that was always at risk of being destroyed by “deviant” behavior, and many gender theorists have argued that it has been in a constant state of crisis.¹² That is, men have always sought to assert their masculinity while distancing themselves from what was seen as “feminine.” Because the standards of masculinity have always been shifting, men have often been insecure about their own masculinity and have coped by accusing men of other occupations and social classes of being effeminate. George

¹¹ Raewyn Connell, *Gender (Polity Short Introductions)*, 2 ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 73.

¹² George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

Christopher E. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5.

Mosse argues that concepts of masculinity were often based on social and political ideologies which can be seen in the differences between the old Aristocratic Model of masculinity and the Bourgeois Model that emerged during the French Revolution.

In his book *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor*, Robert A Nye explores the transition of masculinity from an Aristocratic Model to a Bourgeois Model from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century. According to Nye, the Aristocratic Model initially focused on honor that was based on aristocratic military service during the Middle Ages.¹³ During the Early Modern period, aristocratic male honor was based on a man's beauty and reputation, though military service continued to be a factor that marked men as "masculine."¹⁴ According to Christopher Forth, this model also valued male companionship and many believed that men who were constantly surrounded by women were effeminate because they avoided the company of men.¹⁵ In an article in the *Chronique de Paris* from 1792, the Marquis de Condorcet criticized Robespierre's political abilities precisely by observing that he, Robespierre, was always surrounded by women which, implied that he avoided the company of men.¹⁶

The eighteenth century gave rise to the Bourgeois Model of masculinity and in the nineteenth century, it was cemented as the dominant model.¹⁷ Like its

¹³ Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 13

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Forth, 32

¹⁶ *Chronique de Paris*, 1792.

¹⁷ Mosse, 3.

predecessor, the Bourgeois Model was concerned with honor, though bourgeois honor differed from aristocratic honor because it was based on character, action, and state service. The rise of capitalist society in the early modern period created a new class of rich, educated, middle-class merchants and professionals who combined the aristocratic concept of honor with the bourgeois values of frugality, self-control, self-control, and an interest in the public good.¹⁸ This redefinition of honor and societal values is seen in Robespierre's concept of Virtue—unwavering loyalty to the Revolution and the Republic—and took hold after the Revolution. Prior to the financial meltdown of the late 1780s that sparked the French Revolution, many members of the bourgeoisie aspired to *become* nobles and emulated their behavior and manner of dress.¹⁹ In his youth, Robespierre called himself Maximilien *de* Robespierre, associated with the upper class of Arras, and dressed in fine clothing in an attempt to act like a nobleman.²⁰ Yet, in his final speech to the National Convention on July 26, 1794, Robespierre pleaded with the People of France to denounce the aristocratic attempts to destroy the Revolution.²¹ Robespierre was a complex, ambiguous figure in the transitional times in which he

¹⁸ Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 90.

¹⁹ Nye, 13.

There are several terms that will be capitalized in this study. Virtue and the People were capitalized by Robespierre in his original works. Other terms such as the “Bourgeois Model” “Aristocratic Model” and the “New Man” are my terms that are capitalized to show emphasis.

²⁰ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1989), 23.

²¹ Maximilien Robespierre, "II. His Last Speech by Maximilien Marie Isidore Robespierre. Continental Europe (380-1906). Vol. VII. Bryan, William Jennings, ed. 1906. The World's Famous Orations." Bartleby. <http://www.bartleby.com/268/7/24>.

lived. The ideal bourgeois male was best described as being on the middle ground between the excesses of the aristocracy and the members of the laboring classes. In his book, Nye provides a useful chart created in the nineteenth century by J.B.F. Descuret which highlights ideas of masculine virtues and vices.²² What separated the ideal bourgeois (center) from aristocrat (left) and *sans-culotte* (right) was the fact that he was moderate in his conduct, sexuality, and religion and placed the love of country above the love of self.

Vices or Defects

Weakness
Apathy
Fear
Nonchalance
Indifference
Avarice

Disgust for study

Incredulity
[Impotence]

Virtues

Force
Calm
Courage
Activity
Emulation
Economy

Love of Study
Religious faith
[Procreation]

Vices or Defects

Violence
Anger
Temerity
Turbulence
Envy
Prodigality

Study Mania

Fanaticism
[Satyriasis, Nymphomania]¹

²² Nye, 66.

In addition to this emphasis on proper behavior and bourgeois values, the New Masculinity changed relations between the sexes. Enlightenment thinkers debated , for example, the importance of female orgasm and marital love.²³ The sexuality of the New Man was defined by restraint and moderation. Debauched and excessive sexual appetites were seen as distracting to men whose primary concerns should have been business or state building. On the other hand, total abstinence from sex meant that there would be no sons to take over the family business or law firm. However, the enjoyment of sex was by no means frowned upon—during this time that *coitus interruptus* was being utilized in order to prevent pregnancy—as long as it was within the confines of marriage.²⁴ This change in the nature of marriage was not exclusive to French couples. Companionate marriages amongst members of the English gentry and bourgeoisie were often love-matches rather than arrangements which shifted the nature of spousal relations from obedience to mutual love and respect.²⁵ The mid-eighteenth century also marked the emergence of the concept that men and women occupied separate “spheres” of existence. Women, the more “civilized” of the two sexes, occupied a domestic sphere in which they could act as a civilizing agent for their sexually weaker male counterparts.²⁶

²³ Anna Clark, *Desire: a History of European Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 102.

²⁴ Nye, 37
Clark, 102

²⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 325.

²⁶ Nye, 49.

In her book *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Merry Wiesner-Hanks describes the transition in femininity through the French Revolution. She states that the Protestant Reformation served as a major turning point in the history of femininity. Protestants considered women to be spiritually equal to men and were equally capable of being predestined for God's grace.²⁷ However, this spiritual egalitarianism did not extend beyond the churches, and women were still expected to be subordinate to their fathers and, later, their husbands. Unlike Catholicism, which heralded celibacy as the ultimate act of godliness, Protestants valued love, marriage, and procreation though women were still expected to be virtuous and remain sexually pure until marriage. Wiesner-Hanks states that marriage was seen as "a woman's highest calling" and the greatest transition of her life, though it robbed her of independence.²⁸ In addition, Protestants believed that *all* believers needed to read the Bible, which led to a spike in literacy amongst members of the largely-Protestant bourgeoisie. Though the rise of Capitalism perhaps was not a direct result of the Reformation, they were mutually reinforcing ideas that shaped the culture of the European bourgeoisie in the early modern period. Both emphasized the elevation of individualism over corporate society and stressed the individual's role in his own advancement. As a consequence the model of femininity that took hold in the nineteenth century can be seen as the reformation of Protestant and bourgeois sensibilities.

²⁷ Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 32.

²⁸ Ibid.

Another important turning point in the definition of gender roles is the Enlightenment, which Wiesner-Hanks calls a “self-conscious intellectual movement that advocated using reason and knowledge against the darkness of prejudice, blind belief, tyranny, and injustice.”²⁹ A crucial element of the development of Enlightenment thought was the *salon* where Nobles of the Robe—new nobles whose families had bought positions in the royal government—and wealthy bourgeois met to discuss politics, literature, and philosophy. The leaders of these meetings, *salonières*, were usually wealthy women who opened their parlors and directed conversations.³⁰ Wiesner-Hanks notes that hosting *salons* was viewed as a career choice for educated women, and it usually began by attending the *salons* of older women.³¹ At these meetings, the separation of the sexes into distinct spheres was overlooked and men and women discussed gender differences and the possibility of gender equality.³² Some men, like the Marquis de Condorcet, argued that equality between the sexes was crucial to human progress and happiness while some like Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed that *salons* complicated the gender dynamic by feminizing women and making men more masculine.³³ The construction of femininity, of course, cannot be described without reference to masculinity, which was simultaneously evolving.

²⁹ Ibid., 139.

³⁰ Ibid., 165

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 41 & 165.

An important attribute of the New Masculinity that Robespierre exemplified was the devotion to male heroism in the Classical tradition. Revolutionaries oftentimes adopted public personas to emphasize their dedication to the cause of Revolution—Maximilien from Arras would become Robespierre, *L'Incorruptible*.³⁴ Within the Revolutionary culture, male heroism was often tied to the concept of self-sacrifice in the name of liberty; martyrdom, like masculinity, had moved to the public sphere. According to Dorinda Outram, out of the fifty-eight members of the National Convention who were guillotined, seven of them attempted to commit suicide, including Robespierre.³⁵ This devotion to self-sacrifice will be discussed further in Chapter Four. When Robespierre's masculinity is examined, it is important to remember that he did not define himself in terms of the "old" or "new" masculinity. These are strictly modern terms, though his conduct, actions, and beliefs mark him as a transitional figure in the history of French manhood.

One may ask why Robespierre was chosen from the pool of French Revolutionary figures to represent the changing ideals of masculinity in the eighteenth century. Why not use Louis de Saint-Just, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, or Georges Danton as models instead? This answer is multifaceted. Robespierre was, and remains, one of the most recognized figures of the Revolution, though several portions of his life remain obscure. In addition to this, he has come to represent—rather than *embody*—the Revolution due to his loyalty to his moral principles.³⁶ He

³⁴ Nye, 53-54

³⁵ Outram, 90.

³⁶ Scurr, 6.

was a man who, at his very core, detested those who oppressed the helpless, yet he was one of the most outspoken advocates of the Terror. In Robespierre's view, monarchs utilized the gallows as a tool of oppression whereas the People utilized the guillotine as the just punishment for those who would oppress them. Once a man was moral in his private life, he would adopt the principles of public Virtue. This dedication could ultimately cause a man to develop a willingness to sacrifice his life for the Great Cause.

Louis de Saint-Just was also a member of the Committee of Public Safety who was and a close friend of Robespierre executed on 10 Thermidor, but unlike Robespierre he was not representative of the change in masculinity. Though he and Robespierre shared many of the same principles, Saint-Just was often-times more radical than Robespierre, who emphasized the importance of moderation in thought and conduct. Also, Saint-Just was a decade younger than Robespierre and did not begin his political career until a few years after the Revolution began. Georges Danton was not selected for more practical reasons. Few works written by Danton have survived which would make original research on his life and ideas incredibly difficult. Though Robespierre did not leave a personal diary behind for posterity, his political speeches and early works of poetry provide a wealth of information about the man history remembers as *L'Incorruptible*. These works allow the reader to understand the standards of behavior, morality, and Virtue to which he ascribed and that he desired to see in all Frenchmen. One is also able to trace

how Robespierre's ideas evolved and solidified from his early years in the Literary Society of Arras until two days before his death on July 28, 1794.

After he loses his temper in the face of the Stoic and unyielding Robespierre, Danton, as portrayed by Depardieu in Wajda's film, immediately realizes the error of his outburst. He pleads with Robespierre to see reason and to relax his principles and save their friendship rather than spare his life. Danton then kneels in front of Robespierre and forces him to grab his head—a head that will be held up for a crowd at the end of the film.³⁷ Even this plea does not sway the resolute Robespierre, who believes that tolerance for an *indulgent* like Danton would lead to the downfall of the Revolution and an end to his personal power. He leaves Danton alone in his well-furnished dining room, shutting the door on friendship, tolerance, and all rationality. The historic Robespierre's motivations were vastly different from his Polish counterpart's. Robespierre believed that mercy for his former friend, and anyone who opposed the justice of the Terror, would lead to the destruction of the Revolution and the oppression of the masses. It was better to execute a handful of enemies of the Republic than allow for the death of one *true* patriot

³⁷Jean-Claude Carrière, *Danton*.

Chapter 2

The Master of Himself

“He who is not master of himself is made to be the slave of others.

—Maximilien Robespierre³⁸

Thirty years after the events of 9 Thermidor, Charlotte Robespierre wrote her memoirs in order to counteract what she called the slanders against her “good and unfortunate brother Maximilien.”³⁹ Writing in a loving yet regretful tone, Charlotte recounts her memories of the child who begat the man that history would come to know as The Incorruptible. The young Maximilien Robespierre had been like most boys his age, “heedless, unruly, lighthearted” and with few troubles, but after his parents’ deaths, Maximilien’s childhood came to an abrupt halt.⁴⁰ The once lively and playful seven-year-old found himself head of his family and adopted the studious and austere nature that would later become crucial to his actions and beliefs during the French Revolution.⁴¹

According to his sister, Maximilien spent much of his time alone, dedicated to his schoolwork and reflection, taking breaks only to oversee his younger siblings’ games and to care for his treasured pigeons and swallows.⁴² For some time, Charlotte and her younger sister Henriette begged their brother to allow them to

³⁸ Maximilien Robespierre, "On the Enemies of the Nation by Robespierre 1794" Marxists Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/enemies.html>.

³⁹ Charlotte Robespierre, “Mémoires de Charlotte Robespierre sur ses deux frères,” in *Charlotte Robespierre Et Ses Mémoires: Édition Critique Précédée d'une Introduction, Accompagnée de Notes Et de Documents Nouveaux Ou Inédits Tirés Des Archives Nationales* (french Edition), ed. Hector Fleischmann (Lexington, KY: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001), 181.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

care for one of his birds, and he only relented after having made them swear that the bird would receive all the care he needed. Unfortunately, this oath was not upheld and the unfortunate bird died after having been left outside in the garden during a rainstorm.⁴³ When he discovered that despite their oaths his sisters had neglected his prized pigeon, Maximilien reacted by never trusting them to care for his birds again. Distrust was one of the traits that would reemerge during the Revolution, especially in the last year of his life. As he grew into an adult and read the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he formed ideas about moderation in personal behavior, religion, and relationships which allowed him to serve as an example of the modification of masculinity that occurred with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution.

In the decade before he spoke about the inherent morality of the People, Robespierre was an up-and-coming lawyer who wrote poetry for the Rosati, an exclusive literary society in Arras.⁴⁴ The image of Robespierre-the-poet stands in stark contrast to the austere and stoic Robespierre that emerged during the Revolution. His poetry for the Rosati revealed much about his ideas of proper comportment. In one poem entitled "*L'homme champêtre*" — "The Rural Man"— Robespierre described the qualities that were most important to him by discussing the daily experience of the "Rural Man". It is important to note that this man is *not* the same as the ideal bourgeois man. Instead, the rural man is best described as an idealized peasant that was also imbued with the morals that were an integral part of Bourgeois Masculinity. The "Rural Man" is honest, generous, and hard-

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 48.

working, but more importantly he is innocent. His innocence means that he has not been corrupted by society, which is an idea that Robespierre inherited from Rousseau. Throughout the poem, Robespierre utilizes themes of Nature that highlight the innocence of the “Rural Man.”

Robespierre writes that the “Rural Man” is “rich! He is happy/Who lives in poverty” and does not live an opulent life—the ideal state of being for a *real* man.⁴⁵ By praising poverty and the simple life, he was indirectly criticizing the opulence and excesses of the nobility and, in turn, their idea of manhood.

His pure heart never knows
Fears, the torment of a miserable miser.
If a job is too long the dangerous excesses
Fatigue, exhaustion, well! Night repairs
All the evils that the day has made.
He does not see in dreams a frightening image
And murder and robbery.
It ensures wisdom; He sleeps in peace.⁴⁶

Unlike members of the nobility, the men of the Third Estate reveled in hard work, which is reflected in the “Rural Man’s” attitudes towards his work. Rather than taking pride in intemperance and idleness, this idealized man was made stronger by his dedication to self-sufficiency. Like the bourgeois man, who relied on his hard work rather than inheritance to make his living, the “Rural Man” dedicated his life to work in order to survive. The “Rural Man’s” diligence went beyond the need for survival. It was in his nature to work simply for the sake of working rather than working for material goods that would set him apart from his fellow men. Rousseau,

⁴⁵ Maximilien Robespierre, “L’homme champêtre.” In *Quelques Poésies de Robespierre*, edited by Jean Bernard. (Paris: Georges Maurice, 1899), 66. Translation by the author.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*,67.

and thus Robespierre, believed that it was only when distinctions arose between men that inequality and despotism began to corrupt him.⁴⁷

According to Robespierre, the “Rural Man” had no need for excess and was left uncorrupted.

What does he desire? Nothing. Throughout the course
The longest day of his life, he lives, works, and sings.
He alone can be happy and he always is.⁴⁸

Though “The Rural Man” was written before the 1789, it reflected qualities that Robespierre and other Revolutionaries would value as the Revolution progressed. In addition, it serves as a criticism of what he saw as the vices of the nobility whom he believed were fundamentally unhappy and poor in spirit. Robespierre believed that man was most pure, most true to himself, in this idealized state of Nature. In a later work, he expressed his admiration for a new type of man who was the bastion of morality—Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

After the eruption of the French Revolution in the summer of 1789, Robespierre wrote a dedication to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and called for the establishment of a society and, in retrospect, for a kind of masculinity based solely on principles of morality. “It is to you, that I dedicate this writing, the *mânes* of the citizen of Geneva! That if called to see the day, he places himself under the aegis

⁴⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 113.

⁴⁸ Robespierre, “L'homme champêtre”, 68.

of the most eloquent and virtuous of men.”⁴⁹ Robespierre adds that it was in those uncertain early days of the Revolution morality and temperance were most needed. This was because a society in flux could easily abandon its principles and regress to a corrupt and divided society.⁵⁰ As was the case with “The Rural Man,” this dedication depicts the qualities that were characteristic of the ideal bourgeois. These include rationality, moderation, and stoicism. What sets this writing apart is the fact that Robespierre personalizes it. He states that it was Rousseau who taught him to understand and appreciate his nature at a very young age and to “reflect on the great principles of social order.”⁵¹ Robespierre implies that without the teachings of Rousseau he would not have practiced the morality that came to influence his actions. Again, Robespierre did not speak in terms of the “old” or “new” masculinity. Rather, his actions and beliefs allow him to serve as a model of masculinity.

Criticism of proper behavior and manhood was not exclusive to members of the Revolutionary bourgeoisie. Though the aristocratic code of manhood was in its death throes, members of this class still accused others of effeminacy. In an article written in the the *Chronique de Paris*, the Marquis de Condorcet observed that “Robespierre censures, he is angry, grave, melancholic, exalts in coldness following his thoughts and conduct.”⁵² Condorcet interpreted Robespierre’s dedication to morality as extreme and cold which marked him, Robespierre, as

⁴⁹ Maximilien Robespierre, “Dédicace aux mânes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” In *Oeuvres par Maximilien Robespierre — Miscellaneous* (1901), Project Gutenberg, December, 2011. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/30654/pg30654.html>.) Translation by the author.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Chronique de Paris*, 1792.

zealous and effeminate. In addition to this, he believed Robespierre's image of austerity and the "holiness" of his morality was *only* an image that he utilized to build his own power and reputation. Condorcet drew other distinctions between the Aristocratic and Bourgeois Models of masculinity. He wrote that Robespierre "seeth little and knowth not physical needs."⁵³ Aristocrats saw this devotion to simplicity and aversion to the excesses of human appetites as unmasculine. Robespierre and the Bourgeois Model of masculinity saw restraint and moderation as the mark of a *real* man. By sacrificing vice for virtue, and ease for hard-work, the ideal bourgeois man showed a moral fiber that the aristocracy apparently lacked.

Condorcet was not Robespierre's sole critic. Manon Roland—the famed *salonierre* and victim of the Terror—presented a picture Robespierre that was a far-cry from his persona of *L'Incorruptible*. In her *Memoirs*, she recounted that at meetings of her *salon*, Robespierre often spoke little and kept to himself.⁵⁴ When he did speak, his remarks were often snide and rarely original, though he often argued his point of view when no one else would, which was one of few qualities she admired in him.⁵⁵ She wrote that during the years before the Terror, she believed him to be "a genuine libertarian" and attributed his faults to excessive zeal rather than malevolence. "He has a kind of reserve" which she saw as being either a manifestation of the lack of self-confidence or paranoia.⁵⁶

What sets this account apart from Condorcet's is the fact that Madame Roland knew Robespierre personally and, according to Charlotte Robespierre, had

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Evelyn Shuckburgh, *The Memoirs of Madame Roland: a Heroine of the French Revolution*. (Mount Kisco, N.Y.: Moyer Bell, 1990): 81-82.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

been an admirer of his before 1791.⁵⁷ One must remember that Madame Roland wrote her memoirs in prison after she had been arrested for her sympathy to the Girondin cause and would not have looked upon her former friend—an ardent *Montagnard*—with much kindness.⁵⁸ Instead, she chose to highlight the superior morality, and thus the masculinity, of the men of her faction including Petion and Buzot. In 1791, she praised Robespierre for “his conduct in the legislative body”, but by 1793, she saw the quiet and timid Robespierre as shifty and effeminate.⁵⁹ She opined that “it is easy enough, when one is prejudiced in a person’s favor, to interpret the worst signs as signs of grace.”⁶⁰

In her memoirs written after the French Revolution, Germaine de Staël agreed with Madame Roland about Robespierre’s fanaticism. She remarked that she believed it was Robespierre’s overly-zealous nature rather than his talent or eloquence that would cause him to be remembered.⁶¹ “His political fanaticism had a character of calmness and austerity which made him feared by all his colleagues.”⁶² In this light, Robespierre’s devotion to his moral principles and the Revolution appear to be a ploy to gain power rather than genuine belief. In addition to this, the qualities that make Robespierre representative of Bourgeois Masculinity are dismissed as the characteristics of a coward.

One person who held Robespierre as the bastion of proper behavior and, thus, masculinity was his younger sister Charlotte. She recalled that as a young

⁵⁷ Charlotte Robespierre, 220.

⁵⁸ Shuckburgh, 30.

⁵⁹ Charlotte Robespierre, 220.

⁶⁰ Shuckburgh, 82.

⁶¹ Germaine de Staël, *Considerations On the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, Newly rev. translation of the 1818 English ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 2008), 372.

⁶² *Ibid.*

lawyer in Arras, her brother was sought after by the town's upper-crust, including members of the nobility.⁶³ "If my brother had loved fortune and honors," she writes, "it is certain that he could have satisfied his passion by marrying one of the rich heiresses of Arras"; however, it was not in his character to promote himself or gain a fortune.⁶⁴ Robespierre's integrity prevented him from joining the aristocracy. In his mind, if he joined the Second Estate it would mean abandoning the principles of bourgeois morality—though by all accounts he often aspired to imitate the nobility in his style of dress.⁶⁵ Even before the Revolution, Robespierre appeared to want to serve the virtuous People rather than the decadent nobility.

Charlotte also addresses the charges that her brother was proud and arrogant, writing: "Proud! He who saw all men as his brothers! He who was the most ardent disciple of democracy."⁶⁶ She argues that those who charged her brother with arrogance had, at one point, been ignored by him because he chose not to associate with those of lesser moral fiber. His enemies saw him as self-righteous while Charlotte saw him as devoted to his principles. According to Charlotte, this devotion to morality and proper behavior caused others to resent him, writing that "it is men who do not forgive merit in other men as certain women do not pardon beauty in other women."⁶⁷ Robespierre's devotion to his work, both before and during the French Revolution, caused him to be single-minded to the point that he would be lost in thought and often passed friends on the street without

⁶³ Charlotte Robespierre, 202.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ de Staël, 372

⁶⁶ Fleischmann, 203.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

saying hello.⁶⁸ While the charges of arrogance and pride may or may not have been true, what is apparent is that Robespierre's dedication to morality and proper comportment allow historians to see him as a model of the new bourgeois masculinity. While behavior was important to the ideal bourgeois man, it did not spring from thin-air. According to Robespierre, a man's morality was the direct result of his faith in the Supreme Being.

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The morning of Sunday June 8, 1794—formerly Pentecost on the Catholic calendar—was one of much excitement.⁶⁹ Barely a month had passed since the purge of the Dantonist faction from the Convention and Paris was abuzz with anticipation for the day's festivities. That Sunday was not to be dedicated to the elimination of enemies of the *patrie*; rather, it was dedicated to the celebration of all that was pure and beautiful in society. Even the guillotine was given a day off from her ghastly work and was moved from her usual home in the Place de la Revolution and relocated to the site of the Bastille.⁷⁰ None of the excitement in the streets could compare to that of Robespierre, who Thomas Carlyle would later describe as the “sea-green Pontiff” “frizzled and powdered to perfection.”⁷¹ That morning, he had dressed himself in a silk coat of robin's-egg-blue and bright yellow breeches and wore a sword at his side—an obvious thumbing of the nose at the noble code

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 307.

⁷⁰ Ibid 307-308.

⁷¹ Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, (New York: The Modern Library of Classics, 2002), 728-729.

of honor of the *Ancien Regime*.⁷² Some decades before, it would have been easy to mistake that well-dressed lawyer for a nobleman, but on June 8, 1794, Robespierre was dressed in an effort to fulfill his dual role as president of the Convention and high priest of the Festival of the Supreme Being.⁷³

Some months before, a rift had developed in the Convention between the atheist Hebertist faction—who consecrated their belief that death was an eternal sleep with their own Festival of Reason—and the Robespierrist faction who placed their faith in the Supreme Being—the great clock-maker. More than any other religious movement, deism was the most influential among Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Paine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Jefferson.

Robespierre, a child and student of the Enlightenment, believed that man's natural moral principles depended upon the belief in God, though he denounced belief in the Catholic Church as slavish devotion to a king in Rome.⁷⁴ The ideal bourgeois man, moderate in his personal conduct, walked a middle path in his religious faith: he was neither a devoted slave to the Catholic Church nor an atheist who believed in the futility of morality. Deism, the belief that an all-powerful god set the world in motion then stepped back and allowed it to run guided by the principles of natural law, found a follower in Robespierre. He created his Cult of the Supreme Being in an attempt to show the People their inherent morality. After giving a rousing speech, calling upon the People to act upon their Virtue and morality, Robespierre

⁷² Stanley Loomis, *Paris in the Terror: June 1793-July 1794*. (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964):272

⁷³ Scurr, 327.

⁷⁴ Maximilien Robespierre, "The Political Philosophy of the Terror." World Future Fund. <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Communism/ROBESPIERRE'S%20SPEECH.htm>.

proceeded to set ablaze the statue of Atheism, thus severing himself from both atheism and Catholicism and placing himself firmly amongst those exemplars of the New Masculinity.

Robespierre's belief in a deistic god preceded the Revolution by some years. In "The Rural Man" Robespierre attributes the goodness of his idealized man to his faith in god. He writes that this "rich" man who lives in poverty addresses his wishes, hopes, praises, and fears to the heavens; nonetheless he works to obtain his goals.⁷⁵ This god is very much present in the Rural Man's mind, though he does not intervene on his behalf; rather, this predecessor of the Supreme Being who was publicly worshipped in 1794, instilled in the Rural Man morality and self-sufficiency. Robespierre did not see tithing, sacraments, or devotion to the Pope as markers of morality. Instead, both the Rural and Bourgeois man worshipped God through their hard work and by practicing their innate morality.

By the spring of 1794, the non-intervening god that had imbued the Rural Man with a modest and diligent character had become the guardian of the principles of the French Revolution. As he stood on a cardboard mountain (symbolic of his place on "The Mountain" in the National Convention) overlooking the People, Robespierre stated that "the day forever fortunate has arrived which the French people have dedicated to the Supreme Being."⁷⁶ He continued by stating that the Supreme Being had created men to be compassionate and love one another. Prior to the day of the Festival, however, all that He had seen was the

⁷⁵ Robespierre, "L'homme champêtre."

⁷⁶ Maximilien Robespierre, "Speech On the Festival of the Supreme Being," Marxists Internet Archive., <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robspierre/1794/festival.htm>

supremacy of “baseness, pride, perfidy, avarice, debauchery, and falsehood.”⁷⁷

Further inspection of the speech reveals that Robespierre believed that the Catholic Church and monarchy were the sources of man’s degradation.

In 1789 the members of the lower clergy had largely been in favor of the Third Estate, but after the issuance of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in the summer of the 1790, the French Church’s relationship with the Revolution had become strained.⁷⁸ Robespierre, ever the supporter of liberty, believed that the Church was largely responsible for the corruption of men because of its support of counterrevolutionary riots and, more importantly, because the Church was aligned with monarchs. Robespierre believed that the Supreme Being “did not create kings to devour the human race. He did not create priests to harness us like vile animals, to the chariots of kings.”⁷⁹ To Robespierre, the Church’s emphasis on submission to both a heavenly and earthly king went against the principles of the Revolution as well as Bourgeois Masculinity. The bourgeois ideal of masculinity, which Robespierre stands as a model of, did not condone blind acceptance or subordination. The New Man did not bend his knees in submission to a Church controlled by the debauched monarchs of Europe who sought to enslave him. Instead, the New Man practiced deism and was able to revel in his innate morality while remaining free from the enslaving dogmas of the Catholic Church. Earlier that

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ Press: 2001): 61.

⁷⁹ Robespierre, “Speech on the Festival of the Supreme Being.”

year in his “Speech on the Enemies of the Nation” Robespierre warned that “Whoever is not master of himself is made to be the slave of others.”⁸⁰

Ever the supporter or her elder brother, Charlotte Robespierre saw the Festival of the Supreme Being as man’s realization of his own morality and the righteousness of the Great Cause. She recalled that in creating the Cult and, later, the Festival of the Supreme Being, her brother “showed that he wanted to found the Republic on morality and morality on the consoling idea of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.”⁸¹ She, like her brother, believed that in praising this deistic god, man would attain liberty from immorality, though not everyone shared this opinion. Germaine de Staël did not reserve her criticism for Robespierre’s character. In her memoirs, de Staël regards the “impious festival” as being “the most indecent irreligion.”⁸² Rather than being an event that celebrated the god that created men with the sole purpose of doing good, de Staël claimed that Robespierre was “flattering himself doubtless, with being able to rest his political ascendancy on a religion arranged according to his own notions; as those have frequently done who have wished to seize the supreme power.”⁸³

This denunciation of Robespierre’s intentions is prevalent among those who sought to tarnish his reputation, and thus his manhood, before and after his death. In stating that Robespierre’s piety towards the Supreme Being was but a ruse to control the People, de Staël calls into question the integrity and honesty that are integral to the ideal of the New Man. It must be noted that de Staël—the daughter

⁸⁰ Robespierre “On the Enemies of the Nation”

⁸¹ Charlotte Robespierre, 274.

⁸² de Staël, 373

⁸³ Ibid.

of Louis XVI's comptroller general—was opposed to the radicalization of the Revolution and would have regarded any manifestation of its principles as anathema. Charlotte Robespierre would counter this point by arguing that it was her brother's enemies in and out of the Convention that unleashed the rumors of his insincerity about the Supreme Being.⁸⁴

Two days before his execution on 10 Thermidor, Year II (July 28, 1794), Robespierre delivered his final speech to the Convention. This final speech predicted the Incorruptible's demise at the hands of his enemies, but it also warned the People of the threat posed by aristocratic ideologies, including atheism. "O Frenchmen! O my countrymen!" he cried. "Let not your enemies with their desolating doctrines degrade your souls and enervate your values."⁸⁵ Robespierre believed that atheism was Catholicism's opposite, but equally destructive, force. Whereas Catholicism reinforced the inequality of mankind, atheist's rejection of the Supreme Being meant the rejection of the principles that the Supreme Being instilled. It is this belief in god that separated the ideal bourgeois man from the debauched characters in the works of the Marquis de Sade. In *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Sade has a character proclaim that God was "a weak fellow" and ask his audience if there existed "a criminal more worthy of our hatred and our implacable vengeance than he!"⁸⁶ In contrast, Robespierre believed that if men denied the existence or competency of God, they would abandon the principles of moral and

⁸⁴ Charlotte Robespierre, 274.

⁸⁵ Maximilien Robespierre, "II. His Last Speech by Maximilien Marie Isidore Robespierre. *Continental Europe* (380-1906). Vol. VII. Bryan, William Jennings, ed. 1906. *The World's Famous Orations*." Bartleby. <http://www.bartleby.com/268/7/24>.

⁸⁶ Marquis de Sade, "Philosophy in the Bedroom," in *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, 1st Evergreen ed., trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 211.

sexual restraint that were crucial to the New Masculinity. If human appetites were allowed free rein, men would lose all control and would become slaves once more to their passions.

As he concluded his final speech, Robespierre reminded his *concitoyens* that death was not an eternal sleep and that life was *not* utterly meaningless. He implored them to “efface from the tomb that motto graven by sacrilegious hands.”⁸⁷ If all Frenchmen embraced their innate morality, they would create a society based on moral principles and would thus bolster their own manhood and would serve as a model for the rest of the world. In acknowledging the belief in a deistic god and the immortality of the soul, Robespierre walked a line between the extremes of Catholicism and atheism. He saw the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church as emphasizing the distinction of the few, reinforcing the oppression of the masses, and threatening to eliminate the gains of the French Revolution. Equally destructive to masculinity was the complete rejection of God. Robespierre saw atheism as a force that would lead to debauchery and apathy towards man’s innate morality, and would create weak and effeminate men. This moderate stance between two extremes is not only seen in Robespierre’s beliefs about personal conduct and religion, it is also apparent in his views on other human impulses including love, and especially sex.

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In his article in the *Chronique de Paris*, written soon after the September Massacres, Condorcet recalled an incident in which Robespierre was forced to

⁸⁷ Robespierre, “His Last Speech.”

defend himself against charges of aspiring to be a dictator.⁸⁸ Rather than focusing on the content of Robespierre's speech, Condorcet emphasized the fact that Robespierre had a large following of women who blocked the hallways to the Convention.⁸⁹ He mused that his readers "have sometimes asked why there are so many women in Robespierre's suite at the Jacobin Club, at the Cordeliers, and at the Convention? It is because the French Revolution is a religion and Robespierre has created a sect. He is a priest who has followers."⁹⁰ A year and a half before the Festival of the Supreme Being, Robespierre was seen as having created his own "cult" that worshipped seriousness and austerity that women eagerly consumed. It is important to note that Condorcet, an aristocrat in the *Ancien Régime*, was not paying Robespierre a compliment—quite the opposite. To Condorcet, Robespierre had acquired such a following of women not because he was sexually potent and virile but because he wanted to be *one of them*—he was effeminate. The ancient code of aristocratic male honor stated that a *real* man surrounded himself with other men in order to affirm the masculinity that could be easily stripped from them.⁹¹ To Condorcet, Robespierre was an effeminate, though ascetic, leader of a cult and was thus idolized by feeble-minded women.

One must remember that the mid-eighteenth century gave rise to the belief in separate-spheres of existence for men and women.⁹² Men belonged in the active public sphere and were entrusted with matters of state and business. In contrast,

⁸⁸ Scurr, 237.

⁸⁹ *Chronique de Paris*.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 16.

⁹² Christopher E. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 32.

women belonged in the separate but nominally equal domestic sphere where they cared for their families and created a new generation of Republican men.

Rousseau argued that this had been the order of existence since the beginning of human civilization; men hunted while women stayed home and tended to the family.⁹³ Though he was an avid student of Rousseau, Robespierre's writings to and about women do not reflect this belief that women belonged in a separate, but equal, domestic sphere. Instead, Robespierre's writings emphasize that women were equal partners in relationships and served as civilizing agents to their men. His writings suggest that the Incorruptible was not as austere in his relations with women as some may think. Robespierre, a man known for being incorruptible to his core, had a hidden soft spot for modest brunettes with sweet and mischievous dispositions.

Not all of Robespierre's poems that were written for the Rosati praised the virtues of rural life or condemned the evils of political intrigue. Several love poems dedicated to various women exist, though it is unclear whether their subjects were based on one or many women from Arras or were merely figments of Robespierre's imagination. What *is* clear is that these love poems provide readers with a wealth of information about what Robespierre, and bourgeois men as a whole, viewed as the ideal characteristics of women. One poem entitled "*Madrigal dédié à miss Ophelia Mondlen*" exemplifies this point. In a tone that reflects care and romantic love, Robespierre writes to the object of his affection:

⁹³ Rousseau, 88.

Believe me, young and beautiful Ophelia
Despite the world and your mirror,
Be content to be beautiful and to never know.
Always guard your modesty.
The power of your charms
Remains alarmed.
You will only be better loved
If you fear you are not.⁹⁴

This particular poem not only establishes Robespierre's belief in the importance of female modesty, it also reflects the same moderation that was so integral to bourgeois masculinity. While "Ophelia" is implored to always maintain her modesty, Robespierre does not tell her to hide away from the world in order to protect her chastity, something the ancient code of chivalric honor would have emphasized.⁹⁵ Though he does not write of sexual desire for her, Robespierre *does* state that she would be "better loved" if she would only respond to his affections. In this way, "Ophelia" was neither the cold, chaste, unaffectionate woman of chivalric times, nor was she debauched like Marie Antoinette. Instead, Robespierre's attitudes towards the object of his affection exemplify the changing nature of romantic relations between the sexes.

"Ophelia" was not the only subject of Robespierre's literary affections. Two poems entitled "*Chanson*" and "*Chanson adressée à Mlle Henriette* —" address a woman Robespierre calls "Henriette."⁹⁶ Robespierre does not lecture "Henriette"

⁹⁴ Maximilien Robespierre, "Madrival dédié à miss Ophelia Mondlen," In *Oeuvres par Maximilien Robespierre — Miscellaneous*, (1901), Project Gutenberg, December, 2011.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/30654/pg30654.html>.

⁹⁵ Nye, 19.

⁹⁶ Her last name was obscured by an inkblot, preventing her from being positively identified. It is possible that this was done by Robespierre on purpose.

about the virtues of modesty, nor does he implore her to open her heart to love as he did with “Ophelia.” Instead, he appears to use mythological themes in order to tease “Henriette” about the effect her beauty has upon him. He brings the “Chanson adressée à Mlle Henriette—” by asking her:

Do you know, to wit, O charming Henriette
That love is the greatest of all gods.
By that wonder he extends his conquest
In hell, Earth, and Heaven.⁹⁷

Like “Ophelia,” “Henriette” is described as being sweet and beautiful, with pale skin that is thrown into relief by black hair, but Robespierre does not address her with the same tone of kind concern; rather, he expresses physical desire for her without being overly explicit by describing the physical traits that the god of Love created in her:

For all his gifts deployed the riches
Of one thousand traits he adorns your pretty face.
In your beautiful eyes he painted tenderness
And formed the most touching voice.⁹⁸

Robespierre’s praises do not end with a description of her physical characteristics. He continues this poem by telling her and the reader that the naked form of Venus could not compare to Henriette’s beauty.⁹⁹ This statement causes one to wonder if “Henriette” was indeed based on a real woman, had she and Robespierre been

⁹⁷ Maximilien Robespierre, “Chanson adressée à Mlle Henriette,” In *Oeuvres par Maximilien Robespierre — Miscellaneous*, (1901), Project Gutenberg, December, 2011.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/30654/pg30654.html>

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid.

lovers, or if he was merely describing her facial beauty. This is a mystery that remains for historians to unravel.

Though it is apparent that Robespierre was quite smitten with “Henriette’s” physical characteristics, it is important to note that her sexual appeal was only secondary to her character. Though she was not as shy as “Ophelia,” “Henriette” exuded the qualities that made up the ideal bourgeois woman, including modesty and sweetness. “He gave you the smile of graciousness/In all these traits he marked goodness/...And in your step he fixed gaiety.

He arranged your black hair
To lift the paleness of your tint.
Venus has even removed her sash
And it has equaled your divine hand.¹⁰⁰

The ideal bourgeois woman was neither a frigid woman who recoiled at the thought of intimacy, nor was she a libertine who took her pleasure wherever she could find it. Instead, she like the ideal bourgeois man, was marked by her moderate behavior.

It is also interesting to note that in this particular poem, the God of Love plays a hand in giving “Henriette” the traits that mark her as ideal, much like the Supreme Being created men with the sole purpose of doing good and loving one another. Even in his descriptions of women, Robespierre could not escape the themes of personal conduct and deism, which were crucial to his character and that of the ideal bourgeois man. Together, the sweet, kind, and beautiful “Henriette” and her virtuous man would be able to start a family and help build a society based on

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

morality and equality, although the ideal of the model Republican family would not be prevalent until the commencement of the French Revolution.

Henriette also makes an appearance in a poem that Robespierre simply called “*Chanson*.” Whereas the “*Chanson adressée à Mlle Henriette*—” focuses on “Henriette’s” physical characteristics and disposition, “*Chanson*” is devoted to the effect that those things have on Robespierre’s heart and mind. Again, he writes in a playful tone and laces his poem with sexual innuendoes. The question he poses in the first stanza has less to do with “Henriette” than Robespierre’s opinion of himself:

You want, charming object,
My docile spirit
To derive verses
From my sterile spirit?¹⁰¹

Robespierre acknowledges the grave and austere personality that history has come to attribute to him, but in this particular poem he appears to be willing to lay it aside in order to win over his “charming object” with this “ditty” that she “dictated in [his] heart.”¹⁰²

This poem implies that women have the power to humanize their men, more so than “*Song Dedicated to Mademoiselle Henriette*.” Robespierre portrays himself as cold and distant, but under the influence of his “amiable Henriette” he found himself to be lighthearted and happy. He found tenderness and affection and

¹⁰¹ Maximilien Robespierre, “Chanson.” In *Oeuvres par Maximilien Robespierre — Miscellaneous*, (1901), Project Gutenberg, December, 2011, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/30654/pg30654.html>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

confessed to her that “your mouth commands my heart.”¹⁰³ It was romantic love coupled with respect and admiration that were responsible for the transformation of the cold and distant lawyer into a tender lover.

I do not care that everywhere
The fruit of my vein
Be tasted by nine sisters.
I will laugh easily
From Helicon
To Apollo and
If your eyes of a prosperous regard
See this sincere honor
Of my heart.¹⁰⁴

These poems dedicated to the mysterious “Henriette” show that beneath the mask of the proto-Incorruptible was a man who shared similar desires with other men of his social class. He desired love and happiness, both of which seem commonplace in the twenty-first century but were still novel concepts in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁵ In another poem Robespierre further explored the importance of love and sexuality in marriage as well as the role of the bourgeois wife.

In the poem entitled “*Vers pour le mariage de Mlle Demoncheaux*” Robespierre, a lifelong bachelor, presents an image of the ideal bourgeois marriage. The subject of his poem is the “Amiable Emelie,” who is to be married to “a mortal too envied.”¹⁰⁶ As he did in the poems dedicated to “Ophelia” and

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 325

¹⁰⁶ “Robespierre, Maximilien. “Vers pour le mariage de Mlle Demoncheaux,” In *Oeuvres par Maximilien Robespierre — Miscellaneous*, (1901), Project Gutenberg, December, 2011.
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/30654/pg30654.html>

“Henriette,” Robespierre describes her as a kind and beautiful young woman though she appears to be naïve like “Ophelia.” What sets this poem apart from the others is the fact that Robespierre *openly* discusses sexuality and its place in bourgeois society, describing “Emelie’s” virginity as “the yoke of the hymen.”¹⁰⁷

But of this god that we slander
Do not fear his eternal empire
Against his laws, although he punishes
The hymen is not a cruel god.¹⁰⁸

What is particularly telling about this description of the “god” Hymen is that he, like the Christian god, punishes and is simultaneously merciful. *This* god’s punishment is reserved for those who violate the laws of pre-marital chastity. The ideal bourgeois woman was not expected to remain a life-long virgin or to detest lovemaking—quite the opposite. She was encouraged to enjoy sex in marriage which is likely why Robespierre remarked that “the hymen is not a cruel god.”¹⁰⁹

After Robespierre discusses society’s expectations of her virginity, he then shifts his focus to “Emelie’s” nameless and faceless fiancé in order to further discuss her role in marriage. He calls man a “formidable sultan,” who was often praised outside the walls of his home.¹¹⁰ As he did in “Song”, Robespierre explains the humanizing power that a woman held over her husband, though “Emelie’s” power is different from that of “Henriette.” The latter had the ability to warm the heart of a cold and distant lawyer, while “Emelie” created a home environment that

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

would counteract the barbaric public sphere—a model that would cement itself in the nineteenth century.

Man, This formidable sultan
Whose majesty is praised
By the voice of an amiable wife,
Lays down his pride.¹¹¹

In this stanza, Robespierre sees men, himself included, as prideful and weak, though he appeared to be “a formidable sultan” in public.¹¹² It was the love of a woman that had the power to strengthen him. In return for this strength, it was the duty of “Emelie’s” fiancé to teach her the pleasures of lovemaking. In a suggestive tone, Robespierre states that “the husband of the sweet Emelie will always be a tender lover.”¹¹³

Robespierre concludes his poem by discussing the feelings of an outsider looking in on this future marriage and describes himself as:

The fickle child of Cythera
Of whom you were always the support
For fear of exciting your rage
Will not dare betray the hymen.¹¹⁴

It is apparent that Robespierre desires Emelie romantically and sexually. He is *not*, and has not been, her lover though he expresses the desire to be so. What is important to remember about this particular stanza is that it is an expression of the restraint that defined bourgeois masculinity. Robespierre is *not* unfeeling or

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid

impotent; instead, he understands the boundary of “Emelie’s” condition. Had they been aristocrats in an arranged marriage or she an immoral woman, the violation of her virginity and marriage vows would not have been as important. Instead it was Robespierre’s adherence to the male bourgeois code of honor prevented him from acting on impulses which could have destroyed his and “Emelie’s” reputation.

The aspiring lawyer did not reserve his love and admiration for the figurative women of his poems. According to his sister, in his youth Robespierre was incredibly popular with the women of Arras, many of whom “felt for him more than in the ordinary sense.”¹¹⁵ One woman who was particularly important to him in the years prior to the Revolution was Robespierre’s cousin by marriage, Mademoiselle Deshorties. Charlotte recalls that Mademoiselle Deshorties and Maximilien were in love with one another, courted for several years, and were unofficially engaged. Unfortunately, all plans for marriage were put on hold when Robespierre was elected as a delegate to the Estates-General in 1789.¹¹⁶

Though love and marriage were important to the bourgeois man, they were secondary in the face of civic duty. Robespierre left Arras without marrying Mademoiselle Deshorties. This sacrifice of pleasure for duty was an action that would be repeated in various forms throughout his political career. Though he temporarily abandoned their love affair in order to serve the People, he expected her to remain faithful in his absence. Upon returning to Arras after the closure of the National Constituent Assembly in 1791, Robespierre discovered that his one-

¹¹⁵ Charlotte Robespierre, 202.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

time lover had married another man, thus breaking her oath of fidelity.¹¹⁷ Charlotte noted that that this betrayal “affected him with great difficulty” and caused him to lose faith in love.¹¹⁸ By all accounts, Robespierre was an unforgiving, even vindictive, man who gave no second chances after he had been injured. He never forgave Mademoiselle Deshorties for her indiscretion, just as he never forgave his sisters for accidentally killing his pigeons.

With his emphasis on moderation and restraint in regards to personal conduct, religion, and relationships with women, Robespierre fulfilled the personal qualities that were integral to the transition of masculinity emerging with the advent of the French Revolution. His relationship with Mademoiselle Deshorties reflects two other qualities that were important to the bourgeois male ideal. The first is an emphasis on loyalty and honesty: two qualities that, when applied to civic life, would be the crux of his concept of public Virtue. The violation of *any* oath, whether private or public, was regarded as blasphemous to Robespierre and would fully emerge as the French Revolution entered its most frantic phase. The second quality is that of self-sacrifice. In 1789, Maximilien Robespierre was willing to sacrifice love and marriage in order to serve the People of France, but by the spring of 1794, this devotion to sacrifice took on a much more sinister tone. Not only was he willing to lay down his own life to protect the People, Robespierre was willing to sacrifice the lives of those he believed were not sufficiently devoted to liberty, including Georges Danton and Camille Desmoulins. By abandoning life with

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

a woman who loved him and potentially could have tempered his ardor,
Robespierre took his first steps towards the scaffold and immortality.

Chapter 3

A Brilliant Madness

“Heroes of the fatherland, your generous devotion is not a brilliant madness.”

—Maximilien Robespierre¹¹⁹

Upon his arrival in Versailles for the Estates-General in the spring of 1789, Maximilien Robespierre was not much more than an idealistic, fresh-faced lawyer from Artois. Few, including Etienne Dumont, could predict that within a few years Robespierre would become one of the leading voices among the Mountain—radical revolutionaries in the French government. In his *Recollections of Mirabeau*, Dumont provides an account of Robespierre’s political debut in 1789. Robespierre’s speech “coincided so well with the passions of the time” but his wordiness and reedy voice won him little applause.¹²⁰ Dumont recalled that after Robespierre concluded, several people asked who the young, unknown speaker was, but “it was not until some time had elapsed, that a name was circulated which, three years later, made France tremble.”¹²¹ M. Reybaz, who was sitting next to Dumont, stated that despite the flaws in his presentation, Robespierre’s words and bitterness towards oppression set him apart from the crowd.¹²²

¹¹⁹Maximilien Robespierre, “Speech On the Festival of the Supreme Being,” Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/festival.htm>

¹²⁰ Etienne Dumont, *Recollections of Mirabeau and of the First Two Legislative Assemblies of France*. (London: Edward Bull, 1832), 51.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Two years later, the Royal Family fled the Tuilleries Palace, which sent the radical revolutionaries, including Robespierre, into a panic. The following day— June 22, 1791—Robespierre delivered a speech to the Jacobin Club in which he denounced Louis XVI's disloyalty to the Revolution and the Legislative Assembly's policies towards the king. "It is not to me that the flight of the first public functionary should appear to be a disastrous event. This day could have been the most beautiful day of the Revolution."¹²³ The king, Robespierre stated, waited until the Revolution was at its most crucial point to flee the country in order to stir up trouble. But what particularly angered Robespierre was the fact that France's most dangerous enemy came from within, from those who wore "the same mask of patriotism."¹²⁴ These false patriots were in league with Louis and foreign kings, he argued. Robespierre denunciation was likely to cause trouble but it did not bother him; the protection of the People and Virtue was more important than living a long life. This theme ran throughout his political career.¹²⁵

Given Robespierre's beliefs about civic Virtue, he can be seen as a transitional figure in the evolution of manhood during the French Revolution. The ideal bourgeois man by cultivating his morality through moderate and rational behavior, hoped to selflessly dedicate himself to the greater good and a more virtuous society. Robespierre's fervent belief in Virtue and revolutionary morality entailed a bipartite view of humanity that held that the People were naturally good

¹²³ Maximilien Robespierre, "On the King's Flight by Robespierre 1791," Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1791/kings-flight.htm>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ This is best defined as Robespierre's belief in the utmost importance of loyalty to the Republic and the Revolution.

and innocent. Because of this, they were under constant threat of being corrupted and re-enslaved by aristocrats and counterrevolutionaries. The duty of all good patriots was to protect the People at all cost, which is exemplified in Robespierre's words and actions during the Terror.

While the concept of civic Virtue was widely held throughout France, it was not defined the same by all French men. Instead, what constituted Virtue was largely determined by one's political affiliation and social class. For a reactionary in the Vendée, Virtue was defined by a willingness to fight against the Revolution using any means possible. Members of the former aristocracy and ministers of the king's government undoubtedly argued that a man proved his civic honor by defending the system of orders and privilege. In contrast to both of these, the new revolutionary bourgeoisie believed that a man was only *truly* a man when he defended the principles of the Revolution and promoted an egalitarian society. However, even the members of this revolutionary group did not possess the same model of Virtue. The relatively moderate Girondin faction heralded men like Alexandre Brissot and Jacques-Pierre Pétion as examples of Revolutionary manhood, while the more radical Montagnards lionized men like Robespierre. Both factions argued that their men held the principles of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité* closer to their hearts and were more dedicated to the Cause than the other. Like competing religious sects, these two factions had their own saints that epitomized their concept of Virtue, which sprung from their personal morality. The conflict between the Old and New Models of manhood that emerged in the mid-eighteenth century spilled into the public arena and came to color political discourse.

Denunciations of Robespierre's sincerity were common among those who were politically opposed to him and usually followed one of several ideas. The first was that he was in politics solely for his own political gain, and the second was that he was fanatical in his dedication to the Revolution and his own concept of Virtue. Robespierre's opponents also claimed that *L'Incorruptible* was cowardly and would run and hide if situations grew to be too tense. All of these qualities are diametrically opposed to the bourgeois male idea and were utilized by his opponents to question his manhood. Another way that opposing factions called their opponents' civic Virtue into question was by portraying them as sneaky and dishonest, which were qualities that made a man effeminate and untrustworthy. The Marquis de Condorcet cast Robespierre in this light in his article in the *Chronique de Paris* from 1792, and not only criticized Robespierre's following of women but also delivered glowering criticism of *L'Incorruptible's* political conduct. Although Condorcet and Robespierre belonged to different social classes under the *Ancien Regime* and possessed different ideals of honor and masculinity, both models of masculinity did value sincerity and courage while scorning cowardice. By calling Robespierre's courage and sincerity into question, Condorcet denounced Robespierre's dedication and, thus, his manhood. Condorcet writes that he believes Robespierre's sole ambition in the newly formed National Convention is to speak and be heard rather than to serve the People, as Robespierre claimed.¹²⁶ In addition, he writes that Robespierre constantly stirred up fury and fear among the Jacobins if he thought there was an opportunity to make divisions among them and

¹²⁶ *Chronique de Paris*, 1792.

was “quiet when it might expose his credit.”¹²⁷ Condorcet saw him as being deceitful and concerned with his own advancement rather than a dedicated servant of the People. He claimed that Robespierre did not care at all about the People and Virtue because he never took places within the government that allowed him to directly serve them.

The content of Robespierre’s speeches about the importance of Virtue refutes Condorcet’s charges against him. In actuality, Robespierre accepted positions within the Estates-General (and later the legislative bodies) because he believed that was the best way for him to be of service. Saying that Robespierre was solely driven by ambition is false. He adhered to the new bourgeois code of honor and believed that protecting the People and Virtue was the mark of a *real* man. Condorcet, a member of the deposed aristocracy, held a more traditional notion of the ideal man and opposed Robespierre’s new social prominence in Revolutionary circles. Moreover, he was opposed to the political events that men like Robespierre welcomed. The monarchy had fallen three months before on August 10 1792, and the September Massacres had recently ravaged Paris.¹²⁸ Monarchists sought an outlet, a scapegoat, against whom they could vent their frustrations. In November 1792, Robespierre had begun his political ascent in the Convention and was a viable target for Condorcet.

Condorcet’s article also reflects the accusations of self-righteousness that Charlotte Robespierre addresses in her memoirs. He states that Robespierre “has

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1989), 436.

made a reputation of austerity that aspires to holiness; he ascends the banks, he speaks of God and Providence.”¹²⁹ Condorcet believed that although Robespierre acted sincerely and self-righteously at the Convention, he was cowardly when confronting opposing factions.¹³⁰ Condorcet writes that Robespierre “disappears before danger and we do not see him until the danger has passed.”¹³¹ Robespierre, Condorcet argued, lingered in the political arena for the glory and praise of his peers after he delivered a speech, but was plagued by effeminate cowardice when it truly mattered. This view of Robespierre was shared by two of Paris’s most famous *salonières*: Germaine de Staël and Manon Roland.

In her recollections of the French Revolution, Germaine de Staël, the daughter of Louis’s XVI’s comptroller general Jacques Necker, provides her readers with an account of Robespierre’s early career in the National Constituent Assembly. She states that he “was already in its ranks, and Jacobinism was preparing itself in the Club” and that “no one really paid attention to him, and whenever he rose to speak, those democrats who had any taste were ready to turn him into ridicule.”¹³² In spite of this, de Staël acknowledges that his speaking improved over the course of his rise to “power.”¹³³ At this point, she regarded Robespierre as an annoyance rather than a danger. She saw him as a gnat that

¹²⁹ *Chronique de Paris*.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Germaine de Staël, *Considerations On the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, Newly rev. translation of the 1818 English ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 2008), 204 & 277.

¹³³ Though some claim that the Terror was the height of Robespierre’s “power,” it is more accurate to view this period as the height of his *influence*. This is because Robespierre never held an office of immense power and his political clout was shared by others in the National Convention. Even his two-week stint as the President of the National Convention in 1794 did not provide him with the type of executive power some have tried to attribute to him. He was the leader of the governing body rather than the leader of France. See Lynn Hunt, “For Reasons of State,” *The Nations*, May 29, 2006, 25.

buzzed around her ear rather than a stinging wasp, although she alludes to the fact that he would one day play a role in the Terror. By dismissing Robespierre's speaking abilities, she doubts that the sincerity of his intentions in the various legislative bodies. "Danton," she wrote "was factious, Robespierre was hypocritical. Danton was fond of pleasure, Robespierre only of power."¹³⁴ To her, there was honesty in Danton's brutishness, while Robespierre's austerity was crafted for the sole purpose of hiding his "true" intentions of power and domination.¹³⁵ Again, she repeats the accusation that Robespierre only sought political influence as a goal in and of itself. *That* was a trait of the decadent nobility who used their power to oppress the People, she implies.

De Staël, fails to recognize that gaining influence was a way for Robespierre to protect the People by putting forth policies that would promote Virtue. As a result, those who opposed him saw his actions as those of an aspiring tyrant rather than a protector of the People. Not only did de Staël believe that Robespierre was power-hungry, inept, and selfish, she believed he was conniving and that his dedication to Virtue was contrived. "Robespierre," she argued, "had acquired the reputation of high democratical virtue, and was believed incapable of personal views: as soon as he was suspected, his power was at an end."¹³⁶ She saw Robespierre as having no political views of his own—a belief that will be revisited. Neither de Staël nor Condorcet had much personal interaction with Robespierre—both made their attacks based on what they had seen in the Convention or heard

¹³⁴ de Staël, 372.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 373.

about him. In contrast, Manon Roland had once been a friend of his—though this was downplayed in her *Memoirs*—and provides the reader with a more personal account of his ideas about Virtue and his personality.

In her *Memoirs*, Madame Roland drafts character sketches of various figures of the Revolution, including Brissot, Danton, and Robespierre. Though her criticism of Robespierre was not as venomous as the one she wrote for Danton, Roland *does* reiterate what others said about his political character. Like de Staël, Roland believed that Robespierre held few, if any, political convictions of his own and only said what others wanted to hear in order to bolster his own political power. She did not believe his claim that political influence was a means to create a better society and saw it was a way for him to gain *power*. In her *Memoirs*, Roland also emphasizes his poor speaking voice—reedy and tainted with the nasal tones of Arras—and delivery, without mentioning that his speeches were written with much passion. She acknowledges that Robespierre was able to defend his principles “when there were very few others still on the side of the People.”¹³⁷ Though she appears to dislike him as she penned her *Memoirs*, she respected him for his convictions.

Next, Roland switches from a broad character sketch to anecdotes that emphasize Robespierre’s shifty character in order to contrast it to the upstanding men of her own political faction. After the Royal Family fled to Varennes in June of 1791, Madame Roland went to visit her friend Pétion at his home and overheard

¹³⁷ Evelyn Shuckburgh, *The Memoirs of Madame Roland: a Heroine of the French Revolution*. (Mount Kisco, N.Y.: Moyer Bell, 1990), 82.

Robespierre discussing his fears and suspicions about the monarchy. Robespierre, recalls Roland, believed that the King could have escaped Paris *only* if there were people in the city who were on his side and willing to destroy the Revolution from within.¹³⁸ She recalled that Robespierre believed that he was going to die at the hands at one of these false-patriots. His fear stood in stark contrast to the bravery of Pétion and Brissot, who believed that the Flight to Varennes was the end of the monarchy, *not* of the People. Reading this account seems to provide proof of Robespierre's cowardice and, thus, his effeminacy. But we must keep in mind that Madame Roland wrote her memoir during her imprisonment after the purge of the Girondins from the Convention in 1793. It therefore reflects the venom she felt towards members of the Mountain.

In order to further separate Robespierre from Brissot and Pétion, Roland writes how the former two believed it was time for the formation of a Republic while Robespierre began "sneering as usual and biting his nails."¹³⁹ He then asked what was meant by a Republic, seemingly ignorant of the concept.¹⁴⁰ Her interpretation of this behavior and statements seems misguided for several reasons. First of all, Robespierre had been trained in the Classics at Louis-le-Grand and was certainly familiar with the concept of a republic either from reading Plato or from histories of the Roman Empire. In addition, it is unlikely that whisperings of a republic had not previously reached his ears. Roland's statement can be seen as her way of accusing Robespierre of being nervous and fearful for biting his nails. In addition,

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

she saw him as a leech for clinging to an idea he did not fully grasp in 1791. She continues by mentioning that Robespierre was elated by the King's arrest in Varennes, even though many in the Girondin faction believed it would bring about counterrevolution.¹⁴¹ In early summer of 1791, many Jacobins began calling for the execution of Louis XVI and demonstrated at the Champs de Mars, the site of Lafayette's Massacre of the People.¹⁴² It was after the Massacre at the Champs de Mars that Robespierre began to fear for his life, claiming that he heard rumors of his arrest and "of some plot being hatched against him and the authors of the Jacobins' petition" of death for Louis.¹⁴³ Examination of Robespierre's speeches from June 1791 and later in his career does not support the accusation that he acted cowardly in the face of these rumors. To the contrary, Robespierre *wanted* to sacrifice his life for the Revolution and was *proud* of his defiance towards the monarchy. To him, the fact that he was deemed a worthy target for assassination was proof of his Virtue and a badge of pride. Madame Roland's emphasis on Robespierre's cowardice was her way of promoting the bravery of the men from her Girondin faction—Brissot, Buzot, and Pétion—while casting Robespierre in the role of the effeminate upstart.

Once again, Charlotte Robespierre serves as her brother's most ardent defender, even as his enemies' slanders continued to plague him from beyond the grave. She writes that her brother was devoted to Virtue and only sought to serve the People. She asks "what were the morals of those men who vowed to kill the

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 84.

most ardent democrats?”¹⁴⁴ Charlotte believed that because he was utterly devoted to Virtue, her brother epitomized Bourgeois Manhood. She recalls events surrounding the September Massacres by discussing the friendship between her brother and Pétion before the latter was elected Mayor of Paris. She recalls that the two were once close and were “both leaders of the Republican opposition.”¹⁴⁵ After Pétion was elected mayor, he ceased talking to Robespierre because his office and “honors that perhaps developed in him the germ of ambition” caused him to abandon his old ideals and friends for power.¹⁴⁶ In this account it is the Girondin Pétion, rather than Robespierre, who is portrayed as untrustworthy, disloyal to the Cause and, thus, un-masculine. In turn, Robespierre is portrayed as being utterly loyal to his friends and the Revolution, the complete opposite of Roland’s portrayal of him. Robespierre is said to have criticized Pétion for not using his position as mayor to protect the People of Paris from the carnage of the September Massacres. Pétion coldly responded “what I can tell you is that no human power could have prevented this.”¹⁴⁷ Robespierre described Pétion as being in love with the power of his office failing to use its power to protect the masses. Instead, he hoarded and exploited his power.

Even Manon Roland could not escape Charlotte’s notice unscathed. The heroine of the Girondins was charged with “playing patriotism” and it was written

¹⁴⁴ Charlotte Robespierre, “Mémoires de Charlotte Robespierre sur ses deux frères,” in *Charlotte Robespierre Et Ses Mémoires: Édition Critique Précédée d'une Introduction, Accompagnée de Notes Et de Documents Nouveaux Ou Inédits Tirés Des Archives Nationales* (french Edition), ed. Hector Fleischmann (Lexington, KY: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001), 184.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 218.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 219.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

that she “passed for an ardent *Républicaine*.”¹⁴⁸ Robespierre was an occasional guest at Roland’s *salon* and she apparently “greeted him with a particular thoughtfulness.”¹⁴⁹ Charlotte recalls that Roland and her brother had once been good friends, though the latter denied it in later years.¹⁵⁰ After Monsieur and Madame Roland left for Rhône-et-Loire, she sent Robespierre a letter in which she praised him for “his conduct in the legislative body.”¹⁵¹ Charlotte believed that Madame Roland later “made common cause with aristocrats and was among the enemies of [her] brother.”¹⁵² Her recollections provide an alternative to Madame Roland’s account of events and her characterization of Robespierre.¹⁵³ Many students of the French Revolution have examined the contents of Madame Roland’s *Memoirs*, though few have read Charlotte’s nor have they read own words in order to understand his unflinching dedication to Virtue. His dedication to the People and Virtue as well as the fact that he did not seek executive power in the government is what allows him, rather than Pétion or Brissot, to serve as the model for the New Bourgeois Masculinity.

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At the advent of the French Revolution, Robespierre believed in the bright future that would come from *citoyens* using their innate morality to create a society based on the principles of moderation, reason, and restraint. In his view, the Virtue of the People was enough to sustain all of France from the oppression of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 220.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

unrepentant aristocrats. After all, it had been the tenacity of the Third Estate that had led to the swearing of the Tennis Court Oath and the creation of the National Constituent Assembly. Unfortunately, Robespierre did not retain this optimistic vision throughout his political career. By 1793, France was deeply mired in a series of foreign and civil wars that Robespierre believed would unravel the democratic victories of the Revolution.¹⁵⁴ Fear was palpable amongst many members of the Mountain and more moderate members of the Convention.

That spring, the deputies of the Convention passed a series of emergency laws that would bolster national security including the establishment of the Revolutionary Tribunal that would provide swift justice to enemies of the Revolution.¹⁵⁵ Danton played a hand in its creation and, in an ironic twist of fate, found himself at its mercy one year later.¹⁵⁶ More importantly, the Convention established the Committee of Public Safety as an emergency wartime government.¹⁵⁷ As the wars progressed through the early months of 1794, Robespierre's fear of external and internal enemies evolved into an all-consuming siege mentality that led to the strengthening of the Terror and his own death on 10 Thermidor. During his speech at the Festival of the Supreme Being on June 8, 1794, Robespierre proclaimed that the People's "generous devotion [was] not a

¹⁵⁴ Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ Press: 2001), 86.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Stanley Loomis, *Paris in the Terror: June 1793-July 1794*. (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964), 234.

¹⁵⁷ Censer and Hunt, 86.

brilliant madness”; rather, it was the vigilance of Virtue that would result in the destruction of counterrevolution.¹⁵⁸

In February of 1794, Robespierre stood in front of the Convention and delivered a speech in defense of the Terror, arguing that Terror was a reaction against the foreign and domestic enemies that threatened the Revolution. He believed that the wars’ “resulting policies needed to be guided by the love of good” and the realization of France’s goals instead of the desire for individual advancement.¹⁵⁹ In continuing to pursue the policies of the Terror, the government would be implementing policies that not only would “return the destiny of liberty to the hands of truth” but also delivered it than into the temporal hands of man in order to reveal and remove treachery and corruption.¹⁶⁰ The goals of this new and purified French society begat by the French Revolution were peace, liberty, equality, eternal justice, and the creation of laws inherent to the People.¹⁶¹ These eternal principles, Robespierre said, were present “even in that slave who forgets them, and that tyrant who denies them.”¹⁶² Robespierre wanted to reshape the social climate in the Fatherland so that ambitions for individual advancement would be replaced by the desire to serve the nation. In his idealized society, the People would be made happy and good by their Republican sentiments rather than by the

¹⁵⁸ Maximilien Robespierre, “Speech On the Festival of the Supreme Being,” Marxists Internet Archive., <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/festival.htm>

¹⁵⁹ Maximilien Robespierre, "The Political Philosophy of the Terror ." World Future Fund. <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Communism/ROBESPIERRE'S%20SPEECH.htm>.

This study will utilize two translations of this speech from two websites: the Marxists Internet Archive and the World Future Fund.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

social distinctions of the *Ancien Regime*. Robespierre then moved from a discussion of his idealistic vision of the future to a realistic view of France's circumstances. By the winter of 1794, France was engaged in foreign wars in order to protect its democratic principles. He and other members of the Mountain believed that it was France's dedication to her Revolutionary principles that inspired the anger of Europe, but that it would ultimately be her salvation.¹⁶³ He argued that because Virtue—"nothing other than love of country and its laws"—was at the soul of the Republic, political conduct should be defined by efforts to establish and maintain these principles.¹⁶⁴

In this regard, Robespierre can be seen as applying rationality and restraint, the principles of private morality the foundations of the New Masculinity, to public life in order to create a stronger society and, thus, a stronger generation of French men. It was then the task of the deputies of the National Convention, primarily comprised of members of the bourgeoisie, to change sentiments in the Nation. The representatives of the People were entrusted with creating an atmosphere of love and devotion to the Revolution and the nation, "purifying morals," and "elevating souls" in order to direct individual desires towards the public good.¹⁶⁵ The only way these things would happen was if the deputies of the Convention took drastic measures to eliminate both foreign and domestic enemies before they destroyed the Revolution. Though the Terror had been around in various forms since 1792

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Maximilien Robespierre, "On the Principles of Political Morality," Marxists Internet Archive., <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/political-morality.htm>.

¹⁶⁵ Robespierre, "The Political Philosophy of the Terror."

with the September Massacres, it was not until 1794 that the Terror would reach a fever pitch.

The Convention, Robespierre argued, had two means of ensuring the survival of the Revolution. The first was that the representatives of the Republic must lead the People through reason, an intrinsic characteristic of the ideal bourgeois male. By appealing to all that was moral in the People, the Convention was ensuring Virtue and protecting itself from destruction.¹⁶⁶ In contrast, enemies of the Nation would feel the heavy-handed wrath of the Terror, but it was important that the Terror be guided by Virtue rather than a desire for revenge. “If the mainspring of popular government in peacetime is Virtue,” Robespierre proclaimed, “Amid revolution it is at the same time Virtue and Terror: Virtue, without which Terror is fatal; Terror without which Virtue is impotent.”¹⁶⁷

He continues by reiterating his utilitarian views towards government and its role in society. In Robespierre’s mind, the Terror helped a larger number of people by eliminating those who would kill all patriots, if given the opportunity. Robespierre’s views towards government, Terror, and both private and public morality are linked by this utilitarian viewpoint. When a government abandoned its dedication to the principles of personal morality and civic Virtue, the People nonetheless would still have their Virtue and would continue to build the strong society that government could not.¹⁶⁸ If the People became corrupted by counterrevolutionaries and lost their Virtue, however, it would mark the beginning

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

of the dictatorship of Vice. If Virtue became corrupted, it would mean the disintegration of morality and would lead to an effeminate society. Again, Robespierre believed that Virtue was the public emanation of private morality and was thus inherent to the People. He stated that “a nation is only truly corrupted when having by degrees lost its character and its liberty, it passes from democracy to aristocracy.”¹⁶⁹ *That* would be the death of Virtue, which would lead to the oppression of the masses. Robespierre believed that it was his duty to be severe towards himself and the government and to remain confident in the People’s innate morality.¹⁷⁰

As Robespierre gave this speech to the Convention, France was literally surrounded by enemies who wanted to defeat and destroy the Revolution while civil war was raging in the Vendée and Lyon. Robespierre genuinely believed that Terror guided by Virtue was the only solution to these crises. “We must smother the internal enemies of the Republic or perish with it.”¹⁷¹ It was important that France destroy its enemies before they had a chance to destroy the People and Virtue. In order to do so, the People’s delegates needed to use reason and Terror to guide society down the righteous path. “Terror,” he claimed, “is nothing other than justice prompt, severe, and inflexible” which he believed would be the salvation of France.¹⁷² Unfortunately, the escalation of the Terror only served to isolate Robespierre from other members of the Convention.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

Some individuals in modern times believe that these measures have earned Robespierre a place among modern dictators, but that stance neglects the nuances of the French Revolution, especially the climate of fear created by war.

Robespierre saw himself as unwaveringly loyal to France and the People. Because of this, he exemplifies the devotion to the Nation that was so important to the Bourgeois Model of masculinity. As he continued his speech, Robespierre addressed concerns about the despotism of the Terror. He was unapologetic and argued that if the Terror was, in fact, despotic, it was because “the government of the Revolution [was] the despotism of liberty against tyranny.”¹⁷³

Robespierre’s speech reached its climax as he offered a chilling and prophetic warning to the Convention. As one reads Robespierre’s words, it is possible to hear the steely edge of his reedy, nasal voice—so much like the guillotine—cutting through the distance of time. Even now his words resonate: “To punish the oppressors of humanity is clemency; to pardon them is barbarity. The rigor of tyrants has only rigor for a principle; the rigor of the republican government comes from charity.”¹⁷⁴ This statement is particularly important in order to understand his devotion to Virtue. If the enemies of the Revolution were punished by the swift blade of the Terror, the lives of innocent patriots would be spared. Only *then* would the People be allowed to perpetuate Virtue and bolster their personal morality. If the enemies of the Revolution were spared the wrath of justice, the fear was that they would regain strength and would proceed to slaughter those who were faithful to Virtue.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

To Robespierre, the Protector of the Innocent and the model of the New Man, it was better to let the enemies of the People perish in order to preserve the People. Thus, the Terror can be seen as the implementation of the utilitarianism that was crucial to Robespierre and the New Masculinity. A Republic of Virtue would preserve the morality of the People. His dedication to the Terror did not mean that Robespierre was without mercy or that he liked violence for the sake of violence. He was a strict believer in mercy for all those who were threatened by counterrevolution and vice, though it did not extend to any victims of the Terror. "No!" he cried, "mercy for the innocent, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for humanity!"¹⁷⁵ His unwillingness to show mercy towards counterrevolutionaries did not stem from Robespierre's hatred of those who were less radical or even from his inability to admit that he was wrong. Rather, he believed that the Revolution would *never* kill the innocent. He pitied those who suffered at the hands of kings, war, and an unjust society, but reviled those who promoted injustice. He warned that all those who dared to create fear of the Terror amongst the People would soon feel the cool wrath of the guillotine's stinging blade.¹⁷⁶ If there was only *one* man in France who was devoted to Virtue, Robespierre and his allies would protect him from the oppression of vice.¹⁷⁷

Robespierre concluded his speech by imploring the Convention not to rest on the laurels of a few military victories.¹⁷⁸ Instead, he believed that in times of war, vigilance against the enemy was the greatest weapon of all. During wartime,

¹⁷⁵ Robespierre, "On the Principles of Political Morality."

¹⁷⁶ Robespierre, "The Political Philosophy of the Terror."

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

counterrevolutionaries would increase their efforts of spreading lies to the People in order to pollute their morals and Virtue. Again, his voice reaches across the span of time as he tells his *concitoyens* and those in modern society to never relinquish their principles. “In deceitful hands, all the remedies for all our ills turn into poisons. Everything you can do, everything you can say, they will turn against you.”¹⁷⁹ To these enemies, nothing was sacred, “even the truths which we came here to present this very day.”¹⁸⁰ The enemies of the People were lying in wait, watching for a moment of weakness in the Convention so that they could manipulate the public by distorting the truth of Virtue. These internal enemies could only be defeated by the vigilance of men like Robespierre and were as threatening as the kings that battled against the Revolution.

The month of Prairial—roughly May 20 through June 18 on the Revolutionary calendar—proved to be a busy month for Robespierre and saw the further radicalization of his ideas about Virtue.¹⁸¹ During this month, Robespierre and his supporters implemented policies designed to reinforce the Republic of Virtue, including the consecration of the Festival of the Supreme Being and the implementation of the Law of 22 Prairial. Again, the Festival was a celebration of all that was good and Virtuous in humanity and was the public manifestation of Robespierre’s dedication to deism—an integral aspect of bourgeois masculinity. In contrast, the Law of 22 Prairial was passed by Robespierre’s supporters in the Convention in order to protect patriots and punish supposed counterrevolutionaries.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Susan Banfield, *The Rights of Man, the Reign of Terror: The Story of the French Revolution*. (New York: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1990): 158.

Between the passage of the Law on June 10 and Robespierre's execution on July 28, 1,376 Parisians were given a hasty trial and execution, all in the name of the protection of the *patrie*.¹⁸² Though these events appear contradictory at first glance, they reflect Robespierre's bipartite view of humanity and highlight the importance of civic Virtue to the new bourgeois ideal of masculinity.

Two weeks before the consecration of the Festival of the Supreme Being, Robespierre delivered his speech "On the Enemies of the Nation" to the Convention. This speech, much like his February speech defending the Terror, condemned both internal and external enemies of France while simultaneously praising the Virtue of the People. He told his *concitoyens*, that "it would be a beautiful subject for conversation for posterity" to see the representatives of the People defeating "the enemies of France and paying homage to the Supreme Being."¹⁸³ He continues by asserting that France would *not* be peaceful in the face of its enemies and would restore order to the world through the simultaneous application of Virtue and Terror. Only those who attempted to "deprave public morality" needed to fear the Guillotine.¹⁸⁴

While Robespierre commends the Virtue of the People, he emphasizes that their representatives *must* be more Virtuous than the masses in order to preserve the integrity of the state and, thus, their own manhood. In his reedy voice of Arras, Robespierre cried, "It is not the pomp of denominations, not victory, nor riches, nor

¹⁸²Ruth Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 6.

¹⁸³ Maximilien Robespierre, "On the Enemies of the Nation by Robespierre 1794" Marxists Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/enemies.html>.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

fleeting enthusiasm that constitute the Republic.”¹⁸⁵ Instead, it was the “wisdom of laws and especially the goodness of mores” that created a society.¹⁸⁶ In order for government to be stable, its members must be morally pure and politically Virtuous. If they were proud or ambitious, they would succumb to vice, which would lead to the oppression of the masses. Again, Robespierre expresses an overwhelming need to eliminate the enemies of France and to create unity between personal morality and public Virtue, but neither was enough to protect the People indefinitely. Terror would be the enforcer.

Robespierre then continues by imploring his *concitoyens* to practice restraint and moderation in their personal lives and Virtue in public. He believed that “whoever is not master of himself is made to be the slave of others” and by not succumbing to their own personal ambitions, his fellows would protect France’s integrity.¹⁸⁷ He then states that there are two kinds of people living in France. The first were the “friends of Liberty”—the People—whose blood had been spilled to create the Republic.¹⁸⁸ It was the duty of the ideal bourgeois male, the Virtuous members of the Convention, to protect them against the oppression and vice of aristocrats and counterrevolutionaries. The second was “a mass of the ambitious and intriguers,” counterrevolutionaries who sought only to bolster their own power.¹⁸⁹ This group stood in stark contrast to the ideal bourgeois who was devoted to the Revolution and the creation of a society based on moral principles.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

As he concluded this speech, Robespierre praised the Virtuous and begged them to be vigilant against vice. The People, he said, must “deploy that unquenchable energy which you need to put down the monsters of the universe against you” then enjoy the times of peace when Virtue would reign.¹⁹⁰ If the members of the Convention were virtuous and restrained, they fulfilled the specifications of bourgeois masculinity. In contrast, counterrevolutionaries were devious and insincere and were, thus, effeminate. If the bourgeois guardians of the Revolution were not vigilant against the enemies of the People, their society would slump into oppression and effeminacy.

Many of Robespierre’s speeches from that crucial year of 1794 focus on the threat of counterrevolution and vice. The “Speech on the Festival of the Supreme Being” is different than many of the others because its primary focus is love for the People, and it is a battle-cry for Virtue. As Robespierre stood on the cardboard Mountain in his sky-blue coat, he told the People of Paris that “the Author of Nature has bound all mortals by a boundless chain of love and happiness. Perish the tyrants who have dared to break it.”¹⁹¹ Again, Robespierre wholeheartedly believed that the People were innately good and were created by the Supreme Being to be free and equal rather than to be the slaves of monarchs and the Catholic Church. The end of the monarchy commenced the new era of Virtue and June 8, 1794, was the ultimate manifestation of that Virtue.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Robespierre, “Speech on the Festival of the Supreme Being.”

The ideal bourgeois man valued loyalty to his nation, a trait that can be seen in Robespierre more than any other figure of the Revolution. By protecting those he believed were more vulnerable than himself, he was playing the role of the elder brother to his *concitoyens*. In order to do so, it was his job—and that of the New Man—to purify the earth and reclaim it for Virtue.¹⁹² This way, the People would not be endangered by vice and would go on to build a just and moral society. Robespierre believed that liberty and Virtue came from “the breast of divinity” and implored the People to defeat their enemies by worshipping the Supreme Being and practicing justice.¹⁹³ By practicing a deistic religion, he would be able to appeal to their principles of morality.

That day—20 Prairial—was a day of rest for the People of France. The guillotine was given respite from its duties to the Republic and was moved to a different location, and Parisians gathered at the Champs de Mars on a former Catholic holiday.¹⁹⁴ That day was their day to worship the Supreme Being who created them and would protect them from oppression.. Robespierre concluded his speech by stating that the next day “we shall return to combat with vice and tyrants.”¹⁹⁵ In doing so, he and the other protectors of the nation would show the world the Republican values that came from the Supreme Being. By practicing Virtue, the People would be doing their part to defeat the enemies of the Revolution. The events of June 10 were a far-cry from that springtime Festival

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Scurr, 327.

¹⁹⁵ Robespierre, “Speech On the Festival of the Supreme Being.”

As the Champs de Mars fell silent and Paris returned to its normal routines, Georges Couthon, a devoted supporter of Robespierre in the Committee of Public Safety, worked frantically. His project, the Law of 22 Prairial, which promised swift punishment to enemies of the Republic, would prove to be the first note in Robespierre's death knell.¹⁹⁶ Though the Committee's initial purpose had been the organization of the war effort, by the spring of 1794, it had become synonymous with the Justice of the Terror.¹⁹⁷ Though it was Couthon, and not Robespierre that drafted the Law of 22 Prairial, it reflected the second half of Robespierre's view on humanity. In addition, the Law served as the *enforcer* of Virtue and simultaneously, of the ideal of the New Masculinity. In order for the ideal bourgeois male to truly express his manhood, it was important for him to remain unwaveringly loyal to the Revolution, even as it began to consume its own. The Law of 22 Prairial expressed an incredibly radical utilitarianism that placed the abstract general good above very real human lives. The New Man should be willing to make sacrifices in the name of Virtue.

At first glance, the Law of 22 Prairial appears to be a standard law of an emergency wartime government, fairly similar to President George W. Bush's Patriot Act, which allowed for wiretapping and the surveillance of those suspected of plotting terrorist activity. The Law of 22 Prairial strengthened the power of the Revolutionary tribunals—created in 1793 by the doomed Georges Danton—in order to punish conspirators. However, one does not have to delve too deeply into the

¹⁹⁶ David P. Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 328.

¹⁹⁷ David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 385.

Law before discovering that, more than anything, the provisions of the Law were written in order to protect Virtue, which created a strong nation and men. Enemies of the Republic were any who sought to “destroy public liberty either by force or cunning” and who “have betrayed the Republic.”¹⁹⁸ This betrayal could mean anything from attempting to destroy the National Convention to reinstating the monarchy, hoarding essential goods, attempting to turn the People against the Revolution, or lying to the public “in order to lead them into undertakings contrary to the interests of liberty.”¹⁹⁹ In other words, those who engaged in deceitful behavior and attempted to corrupt the morality of the People and bastardize the Revolution to suit their own interests were considered enemies. The punishment for these offenses was a swift and public death.

Those accused under this new law were not entitled to defense counsel, though there was a provision allowing for the defense of known patriots. In addition, *citoyens* were encouraged to turn in anyone they suspected of violating this law. While the provisions dealing with the punishment of conspirators sounded as if they were meant to turn neighbor against neighbor and destroy due process, the motives were well-intentioned and much more complex. Like the Terror, the Law of 22 Prairial was the result of the climate of fear inspired by France’s wars with her neighbors and civil wars within herself. Robespierre’s siege mentality had infected those closest to him, and they crafted this Law, believing it was the only way to protect the People. Though there is no doubt that Robespierre believed the

¹⁹⁸ “The Law of 22 Prairial, An II,” The Online Source Book, Accessed March 6, 2011, <http://sourcebook.fsc.edu/history/law22prairial.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

protection of the People was paramount and worth the sacrifice of several thousand lives, modern societies are inclined to argue that the arrest and execution of citizens without due process is never justified, no matter how much danger a nation faces. Moreover, 1376 people were not executed by the Federal Government during the US Civil War, President Lincoln, operating under the same siege mentality that consumed Robespierre, denied the right to due process to supposed conspirators.²⁰⁰ In 1794, Robespierre and his supporters created the Law of 22 Prairial, because they feared the destruction of the new French Revolutionary society.

As a child, Robespierre was forced to adopt the role of father to his younger siblings and as his political career grew, so did his paternal mentality. When he saw that a canker was attempting to consume the People and their Virtue, he felt he had no other choice but to take drastic measures. This devotion caused this once-idealistic lawyer to sacrifice everything that made him human in order to combat the national and international intrigue that threatened them. In his mind, allowing depraved and counterrevolutionary elements of society to live among the People would be an atrocity; not only would chaos rule, but the People would be corrupted, destroyed, and oppressed. It was up to him, the ideal bourgeois man, to slay the many-headed hydra of counterrevolution. In addition, this law presented a cruel dilemma to those opposed to Robespierre and Virtue. France was going to be and would remain a free and equal society based on ethical principles and would be so whether or not conspirators wanted that to be. If they did *not* like Virtue or

²⁰⁰ Lynn Hunt, "For Reasons of State," *The Nations*, May 29, 2006, 25.

the freedom of the People, they would have to learn to like it or suffer the consequence. It is important to note that the Law of 22 Prairial was *not* passed for Robespierre or Couthon's personal benefit; instead, it was a way to eliminate enemies of the nation. Once this element of society was gone, France's epoch of peace could begin, even if Robespierre would not live to see it.

The political infighting that followed 22 Prairial was not about the harshness of the Law, but was about the Law's implementation. The members of the Committee of General Security, the policing body in the Convention, saw this law as a usurpation of power by the Committee of Public Safety and sought to destroy the head of the beast—Robespierre.²⁰¹ Others believed that the Law would lead to an open-season for denunciations and turned against Robespierre to shave themselves. While Robespierre and Couthon's intent was to promote Virtue, the reaction against them had political, rather than ethical, motivations.

In his final speech to the Convention a month and a half after 22 Prairial, Robespierre begged the People not to allow their enemies to degrade and destroy the Virtue that defined them.²⁰² The following day, he was arrested and met the fate he had prepared for and even welcomed since the beginning of his political career. While his enemies saw this as the just punishment for a tyrant who sought to destroy the Revolution, Robespierre viewed his death at the hands of his enemies as the ultimate demonstration of his Virtue and manhood. By sacrificing his life for

²⁰¹ Scurr, 330.

²⁰² Maximilien Robespierre, "II. His Last Speech by Maximilien Marie Isidore Robespierre. Continental Europe (380-1906). Vol. VII. Bryan, William Jennings, ed. 1906. The World's Famous Orations." Bartleby. <http://www.bartleby.com/268/7/24>.

the People he dearly loved, Robespierre saw himself as a martyr for the great principles of *Liberté, Egalité, et Fraternité*.

Chapter 4

The Commencement of Immortality

No, Chaumette, no! Death is *not* “an eternal sleep!”...Death is the commencement of immortality!²⁰³

For over two centuries, *La Guillotine* has stood as a symbol of the decadence that often results from corrupted ideals especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. In the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens painted an image of *La Guillotine* that has lingered for generations: the image of market women led by the vengeful Madame Defarge knitting the names of counterrevolutionaries into an endless fabric. With each click of her needles, Madame Defarge tallied up the dead and listed those who were soon to die, as Sydney Carton gave a grand soliloquy about the Virtue of his sacrifice. Though *A Tale of Two Cities* is a work of fiction from Victorian England, Dickens explored the concept of self-sacrifice in the name of higher principles in a way that others have not. In the French Revolutionary mindset self-sacrifice in the name of the Republic—whether by assassination, execution, or suicide—was a mark of heroism and manhood. The desire for death in the name of higher principles is one that has been seen in various cultures and straddles either side of the Enlightenment. During the Crusades, the Catholic Church and Medieval societies lionized those who lost their lives fighting the Infidels in the Holy Land, while in modern times, Islamist suicide bombers kill and die in the name of Allah.

²⁰³ Maximilien Robespierre, “His Last Speech by Maximilien Marie Isidore Robespierre.” (380-1906). Vol. VII. Bryan, William Jennings, ed. 1906. *The World's Famous Orations*. Bartleby. <http://www.bartleby.com/268/7/24>.

Though the concept of martyrdom in the name of political principles has largely been ignored, it is an essential aspect of the mindset of many during the French Revolution, especially in regards to masculinity.

In the popular imagination, Robespierre has come to represent Madame Defarge's male counterpart—a cold-hearted dictator who was a gleeful witness to the bloodletting of the Terror. Charlotte Robespierre recalled that after her brother's execution those responsible for his fall spread the rumor that the young Maximilien had spent his time decapitating birds with a toy guillotine.²⁰⁴ Fortunately, historians recognize the absurdity of this story, if only for the fact that the guillotine was not perfected by Dr. Guillotin until Robespierre had reached adulthood. Still, some questions about Robespierre's attitudes towards death remain. Some may ask how a man who argued that public executions were “nothing but cowardly assassinations” in 1791 could have reversed his position so thoroughly only three years later.²⁰⁵ His detractors argue that Robespierre only spoke to bolster his own power, but their argument lacks context. As was stated in the previous chapter, France's involvement in foreign and civil wars fed into Robespierre's belief that it was his duty to protect the People and Virtue even if he had to pay for it with his life.

The French Revolution, and especially the Terror, was a time of hero-worship and fueled the belief in the symbolic nature of death. Those men who were

²⁰⁴ Charlotte Robespierre, “Mémoires de Charlotte Robespierre sur ses deux frères,” in *Charlotte Robespierre Et Ses Mémoires: Édition Critique Précédée d'une Introduction, Accompagnée de Notes Et de Documents Nouveaux Ou Inédits Tirés Des Archives Nationales* (french Edition), ed. Hector Fleischmann (Lexington, KY: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001), 190.

²⁰⁵ Maximilien Robespierre, "On the Death Penalty." Marxists Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1791/death-penalty.htm>.

assassinated, executed, or committed suicide for their political beliefs were heralded as heroes of *Liberté* by their respective political factions. For instance, Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Death of Marat* visually praised and memorialized Jean-Paul Marat as a martyr for the Revolution, while royalists regarded Louis XVI as a religious martyr who died for France's sins.²⁰⁶ During Michel Lepeletier's funeral his battered and wounded corpse was laid at the base of a statue of Louis XIV at the Place Vendôme in order to display that his dedication to *Liberté* resulted in his death.²⁰⁷ Much like ancient Greeks, French Revolutionaries believed that sacrifice, and especially self-sacrifice, would "restore harmony to the community" and protect the ideals of the Revolution.²⁰⁸ Robespierre was not immune to Revolutionary hero-worship and likely wanted his remains to be displayed in such a manner. He believed that the ultimate display of a man's Virtue, and thus his masculinity, was his willingness to sacrifice his life to preserve the ideals and country he loved. This was not simply a characteristic that he admired in others; he believed that once he had done all he could for the People he would find himself the target of assassins' knives. This desire can be seen throughout his career and culminates in his final speech to the National Convention on July 26, 1794. By the summer of 1794, Robespierre's involvement with the Terror, especially his support of the Law of 22 Prairial, coupled with his criticism of those he saw as disloyal to the Revolution, ultimately led to his downfall. In an effort to

²⁰⁶ Susan Dunn, *The Deaths of Louis XVI: Regicide and the French Political Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 5.

²⁰⁷ Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 280 & 282.

²⁰⁸ Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 8.

evade capture and humiliation at the hand of his political enemies, Robespierre attempted, and failed, to commit suicide.²⁰⁹ After he shot himself in the jaw, Robespierre fell under the hands of his enemies and under the blade of the guillotine.

If a man's moral behavior and dedication to Virtue dictated how he lived, these two factors also determined the manner of his death. If a man *truly* lived up to the bourgeoisie's standards of masculinity, he would be willing to meet his death stoically, with his spine steeled. It was only decadent and corrupt men who would die on their knees, begging for their enemy's mercy and further corrupting their souls. This belief in self-sacrifice and the desire for martyrdom allows Robespierre to serve as the model for the New Bourgeois Masculinity.

The flight of the royal family to Varennes on June 21, 1791, proved to be a major turning point in the French Revolution; it was proof-positive that Louis and his cohorts could no longer be entrusted with the People's fate. The image of Louis XVI, the kind but incompetent father of France, had been replaced by that of the counterrevolutionary tyrant. On June 22, Robespierre delivered a speech to the Jacobin Club in which he vocalized his disapproval of the National Constituent Assembly's policies about Louis's flight to Varennes. This speech reflects Robespierre's paranoia about the enemies of the Revolution, those people who spoke the same language as confirmed patriots but could not be trusted. More importantly, the speech provides a glimpse of Robespierre's attitudes towards

²⁰⁹ Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 341.

sacrifice in the name of higher principles.²¹⁰ He believed that his denunciation of the king, the National Convention, and well-disguised counterrevolutionaries would get him into trouble, but that thought did not scare him. He acknowledged the fact that he was willing to risk his life to preserve truth and *liberté*. In speaking out against all those who were corrupt, he incurred the wrath of “all the prideful; I sharpen a thousand daggers, I offer myself to all the hatred,” he told his fellow Jacobins.²¹¹ This seeming desire for death at the hands of his enemies reflects the more radical stance that Robespierre would take in 1794.

He continues by stating that if, in his earliest days in the Estates-General and the National Assembly, “when only [his] conscience was seen” he would have sacrificed his life for the principles he was sworn to protect.²¹² Not only this, but he saw death as a benefit that would prevent him from seeing the degradation of the Revolution. Though France’s wars with Prussia and Austria were two years in the future, as Robespierre addressed the Jacobins, he believed that if the Revolution were not defended by its most virtuous *citoyens*, monarchs would end the Revolution and would enslave the People. In order to prevent this from happening, Robespierre believed that his mission was to arouse the People to do their Revolutionary duty, even if it meant his own death. This brazen Robespierre who addressed the Jacobin Club stands in stark contrast to the timid man that Madame Roland presents in her memoirs. In her telling of events, Robespierre nervously bit

²¹⁰ Maximilien Robespierre, “On the King’s Flight by Robespierre 1791,” Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1791/kings-flight.htm>.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

his nails and expressed his fear of arrest and execution.²¹³ Again, the fact that she wrote her memoirs while in prison might explain her neglect of this speech.

Though self-sacrifice played a minor role in Robespierre's psyche prior to 1793, France's wars with Austria and Prussia brought this desire to the forefront of his speeches and actions. In 1793, he delivered a speech in defense of the Committee of Public Safety in which he argued that the Committee's powers should be renewed and strengthened because it was overwhelmed by war, conspiracy, and counterrevolution. He speaks of the Battle of Valenciennes and states that if he had been one of the soldiers on the battlefield, he "would have never been in a position to deliver a report on the events of the siege."²¹⁴ Instead, he would have been one of the valiant soldiers who died at the hands of the enemies of France. In Robespierre's mind, it was better to die on his feet, fighting like a man, rather than to live on like a slave or worse, an effeminate shell of a man. Death, especially a brave, Revolutionary death, made a man the master of himself and prevented him from being the slave of tyrants. Robespierre saw that it was his duty to fight for the rights and freedom of the People, and he gained the strength to do so from his belief in the Supreme Being.

By 1794, Robespierre's desire for martyrdom had evolved into an obsession with death at the hands of his enemies. During the last six months of his short life, Robespierre became preoccupied with the possibility that enemies of the People

²¹³ Evelyn Shuckburgh, *The Memoirs of Madame Roland: a Heroine of the French Revolution*. (Mount Kisco, N.Y.: Moyer Bell, 1990), 82.

²¹⁴ Maximilien Robespierre, "For the Defense of the Committee of Public Safety ." Marxists Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1793/defense-committee.htm>

were lying in wait for the perfect opportunity to exploit France's weakness. Though he believed that executing false patriots was the best way to prevent the spread of counterrevolution, he believed that the few who managed to escape the Terror by fleeing to Austria or other enemy nations would make an attempt to purge France of her Virtuous defenders. In his speech from February of 1794 in which he laid out his plan to eliminate enemies from France, Robespierre briefly mentioned the Virtue of self-sacrifice in the name of the Republic. As wars raged, causing the amplification of the Terror, some *citoyens* believed that everyone in France should be spared from execution. Robespierre disagreed, stating that protection from the guillotine belonged only to those patriots who were threatened by oppression. "Mercy for the innocent, mercy for the weak, mercy for the unfortunate, mercy for humanity!" He cried.²¹⁵

His belief that all unrepentant aristocrats and counterrevolutionaries should meet their deaths did not endear his enemies to him, causing Robespierre to believe that they were banding together with the sole purpose of assassinating him. Yet, this was not a fate that scared him; instead, he saw it as an honor to be hated by such a vile bunch. Robespierre asked his audience if "the assassins who tear our country apart, the intriguers who buy the consciences that hold the people's mandate," who sought to inspire political rebellion against the Revolution by corrupting the morals of the People were less dangerous than the despots of Europe.²¹⁶ In order to promote a newer, freer France that would serve as a model for other nations against "the terror of the oppressors", France needed to be

²¹⁵ Maximilien Robespierre, "On the Principles of Political Morality," Marxists Internet Archive., <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/political-morality.htm>.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

nourished by the blood of her soldiers.²¹⁷ Robespierre was not implying that the only blood that needed to be sacrificed was the blood of soldiers on physical battlefields. France also needed the blood of those on the intellectual battlefield in the war for *Liberté*. “Let us,” He proclaimed, “in sealing our work with our blood, see at least the early dawn of the universal bliss,” which would result from a freer society. Robespierre saw his fate and the progress of the Revolution as being eternally linked and did not see his life extending beyond the Revolution. The Revolution that put Robespierre in the spotlight of French politics was all that tethered him to life and he believed that someday, the blood that flowed through his veins would need to be spilled in order for the Revolution to live on. As 1794 progressed with a series of politically influenced executions, especially those of his former friend Danton, Robespierre became increasingly critical of his enemies and outspoken in his calls for execution or assassination. In desiring to follow the examples of Greek and Roman soldiers, Robespierre paved his own path to the guillotine and immortality.

Only a few weeks after Desmoulins and Danton were executed for their “indulgent” attitudes towards the enemies of the Terror, Robespierre delivered another speech to the Convention that was rife with calls for execution or assassination. In a tone that would be reflected in his “Speech on the Festival of the Supreme Being,” Robespierre proclaimed that that day, 7 Prairial, was “a spectacle worthy of heaven” and announced that the enemies of France would

²¹⁷ Maximilien Robespierre, "The Political Philosophy of the Terror ." World Future Fund.
<http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Communism/ROBESPIERRE'S%20SPEECH.htm>.

perish after order was restored to the world.²¹⁸ He then shifts to the topic of martyrdom and execution. Tyrants and assassins were determined to destroy the National Convention and the People, but Robespierre believed that the assassination of a few deputies would not stop the Convention. “Without a doubt [enemies] are not foolish enough to believe that the death of a few representatives can assure their triumph.”²¹⁹

He then mentions Brissot, Hébert, and Danton—all of whom died at the hands of the Terror because they were enemies of the People. Enemies, Robespierre argues, could not starve the French People into submission or beat French soldiers in battle because the Revolutionaries’ strength and character were too great for enemies to defeat them. This meant that there was only one course of action available to the Enemies of the Nation—*assassination*. Robespierre then gives several accounts of attempted sabotage by Enemies of the Nation. They had sponsored counterrevolutionary revolts and bragged about it in the English Parliament, but failed to corrupt the Revolution; all they had left was the assassination of all Virtuous men of France.²²⁰ These enemies, Robespierre recalled, had once attempted to corrupt the members of the National Convention by spreading divisive rumors, but the Convention punished them “under the aegis of the French People.”²²¹ Finally, those enemies tried to eliminate Virtue in order to “deprave public morality and to extinguish the generous sentiments” such as love

²¹⁸ Maximilien Robespierre, "On the Enemies of the Nation," Marxists Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/enemies.html>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

of the *patrie*.²²² Robespierre and all true patriots “commended Virtue in the name of the Republic” and *still* all that counterrevolutionaries had at their disposal was assassination.

Though Robespierre felt that he still had much work to do in France, he believed that the fact that his enemies wanted to kill him in order to corrupt the Revolution was a compliment. “Let us then rejoice and give thanks to heaven since we have so well served our country as to have been judged worthy of the daggers of tyranny.”²²³ Robespierre saw his willingness to sacrifice his life as a way to prove his Virtue and dedication to France as well as a way to prove that he was, in fact, a *man*. He was willing to die for his country and his principles, but there was something deeper than that. Only two days before, a young woman named Cécile Regnault made a feeble attempt to murder him, but Robespierre was not satisfied.²²⁴ By giving this speech, he was attempting to bring a fearless assassin to his door—his own Charlotte Corday—who would launch him into immortality.

Paris, he proclaimed, was just as dangerous as the frontlines in that spring of 1794 because of the would-be assassins that loomed at every turn. Though this may seem like the paranoid raving of a madman, to call him such would be simplistic. The climate of fear was real, palpable, and Robespierre’s experience with Regnault convinced him that he would soon meet his fate at the point of a knife. That thought only frightened him slightly. “What man on earth,” he asked, “has ever defended the rights of humanity with impunity?”²²⁵ That is, it was the duty

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ De Baecque, 305-306.

²²⁵ Robespierre, “On the Enemies of the Nation.”

of the bourgeois man to defend his nation, but the consequence of that struggle was the reward of martyrdom. This was the reward Robespierre sought for himself. He told the Committee of Public Safety that if the goals of the Terror, such as eliminating enemies from France, came to pass, then foreign assassins would seek revenge. In Robespierre's case this came to pass. As the Terror escalated, Robespierre became more outspoken in his condemnation of enemies, which eventually did lead to his downfall.

Robespierre then stated that the situation that his enemies had placed him in was "not without its advantages."²²⁶ He believed that the more uncertain and dangerous were the lives of the protectors of *Liberté*, the "more independent they [were] of man's evil."²²⁷ He saw himself and others with strong convictions as being a different breed of man that was stronger and more resolute in Virtue. He stoically accepted that his duty was to protect the People even at the cost of his own life. Death did not frighten him because all he had in life was the love of the *patrie* and justice. Being a childless bachelor, Robespierre was not encumbered by obligations, and he found himself well-suited for martyrdom because of his singular love for France. "To make war on crime is the path to the tomb and to immortality," he cried.²²⁸ By promoting vice and injustice, counterrevolution was "the path to the throne and to the scaffold."²²⁹ Though counterrevolutionaries may temporarily defeat the Revolutionaries and gain power, the blood of martyrs would inspire the

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

People to rise up in rebellion against their oppressors. It was then that kings and aristocrats would be sent to their rightful place—the guillotine.

In his speech of 7 Prairial he repeated his belief that France was comprised of two distinct groups: counterrevolutionaries and false patriots that abused the Revolution and a larger number of true patriots and *citoyens*. Robespierre swore to protect this latter group, whose Virtue would cause them to sacrifice their lives to continue the Revolution. He acknowledges that it was dangerous for him to be so outspoken of his enemies: “I sharpen daggers against myself.”²³⁰ It was the reward of martyrdom that provoked Robespierre to continue his criticism. He wanted to become a martyr for liberty so that his death would incite future Revolutionaries to continue to fight an eternal Revolution for the betterment of society. He saw that it was his mission to warn and awaken the People to the threat of enemies, then die in order to protect them and their freedom. As he saw it, *real* men unabashedly stood up and died in the name of liberty.

Robespierre then began to speak as if he believed his death was imminent. It is important to remember that he did not know that death would find him on 10 Thermidor. Instead, he simply hoped it would be sooner rather than later. He predicted that Virtue and the People would succeed in the face of counterrevolution and that France would thrive and become a beacon of freedom for the world. All that was needed was for someone to hear his call to action. “I have lived long enough,” he lamented, his voice likely soft and slow. “I have seen the French People rise up from degradation and servitude to the heights of glory and

²³⁰ Ibid.

Freedom.”²³¹ It was enough for him to see France rise to be a bastion of freedom and democracy, and he was willing to arouse the anger of his enemies and die doing so. It was the destiny of the People to defeat corruption and evil through Virtue and the blood of Revolutionary martyrs. “You have placed us in the vanguard to bear up under the first efforts of the enemies of liberty.”²³² The People would be worthy of the honor of his martyrdom, and the blood of martyrs would place them on the road to immortality. This speech, more than any seen thus far, speaks to the Revolutionary masculine desire to sacrifice one’s life in the name of liberty. As 10 Thermidor drew closer, Robespierre’s condemnation of his enemies and his desire for a violent death reached a fever pitch. Even the Festival of the Supreme Being saw Robespierre publically praising Virtue while simultaneously calling for his own assassination.

The Festival of the Supreme Being was fraught with Greco-Roman symbolism—women wore loose-fitting white dresses while men wore laurel wreaths in their hats.²³³ That day would bring Robespierre closer to another Greco-Roman tradition, assassination for his political beliefs. As he spoke to the mass of people about man’s innate morality and Virtue, Robespierre commended the bravery of the French soldiers in the face of the enemies of the People. In addition, he urged the People to “be ardent and obstinate in [their] anger against conspiring tyrants” and “imperturbable in dangers, patient in labors, terrible in striking back.”²³⁴ The People needed to be rewarded for their strength and their enemies would be crushed

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Andress, 308.

²³⁴ “Maximilien Robespierre, “Speech On the Festival of the Supreme Being,” Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/robespierre/1794/festival.htm>

militarily and by the strength of the Virtue. Though *La Guillotine*, the mechanism of Revolutionary punishment, did not loom over the Festival that day, her presence was a palpable threat to all those who betrayed Virtue.

As he concluded what is likely his most powerful speeches, Robespierre urged the People to continue their hard work and sacrifice for the Republic. “Our blood flows for the cause of humanity. Behold our prayer. Behold our sacrifices.”²³⁵ In calling upon *citoyens* to fight the enemies of the Republic, with both their Virtue and their blood, Robespierre told them that death did not mean the annihilation of the mind, only a terrestrial death that would pave the way to immortality. “Armed, in turn with daggers of fanaticism, poisons of atheism, kings have always aspired to assassinate humanity” but these dangers did not mean that all hope was lost!²³⁶ Through practicing the ultimate act of Virtue, self-sacrifice, the men of France—soldiers, civilians, and representatives of the People—would be immortal. “Heroes of the fatherland,” Robespierre proclaimed, “your generous devotion is not a brilliant madness.”²³⁷ Instead that madness, the desire to die to protect the fatherland, would be what nourished France and would strengthen it against her enemies.

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In the final month of his life, Robespierre did not attend the sessions of the National Convention.²³⁸ As his suspicion towards the Enemies of the Patrie mounted to an all-time high, so too did his suspicion of all who opposed him. The

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Charlotte Robespierre, 283.

man who had once failed to make an impression during his political debut in 1789 was seen as a threat to France's stability by summer of 1794. On July 26, 1794 (8 Thermidor, Year 2), only a month and a half after his triumphant Festival of the Supreme Being, Robespierre delivered his final speech to the Convention. From its opening line to its furious conclusion, Robespierre's final speech is eerily prophetic and highly revelatory of his desire to sacrifice himself for the good of the Nation. He begins by noting that the Enemies of the People often accused him of being a fraud and a tyrant. "Were I such," he retorted, "they would grovel at my feet" and he would bribe them as they continued to oppress the People.²³⁹ If he was *truly* a tyrant, Robespierre continued, the kings of Europe and their supporters would rush to make an alliance with him rather than condemn him.²⁴⁰ He asks his fellow deputies what tyrants support him and to which faction he belongs. Robespierre quickly answers that he answered only to the People who, "since the beginning of the Revolution has crushed and annihilated so many traitors."²⁴¹ It was to the People and their freedom that he devoted his life, and it was to those principles that he would surrender his life.

He continued by stating that tyranny had its means of oppression and asked what tools the "enemies of tyranny" had at their disposal.²⁴² Monarchs, the Catholic Church, and other aristocratic inventions that subjected the People only had temporary power. These forces would one day be defeated by the People's Will and Virtue. The Republic of Virtue and the People who created it were eternal in

²³⁹ Robespierre, "His Last Speech by Maximilien Marie Isidore Robespierre."

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

Robespierre's eyes. "Whither does *their* path tend? To the tomb and to immortality!"²⁴³ Throughout his life and political career, Robespierre had aspired to protect those who were at risk of exploitation and to ensure that France would be governed by moral principles. As the Terror intensified, Robespierre began to see that his enemies were closing in on him and stated that "against me, and against those who hold kindred principles, the league is formed. My life? Oh, my life I abandon without a regret!"²⁴⁴ His prophecy was about to be self-fulfilling. He was willing to abandon his life after only thirty-six years because he felt that his life, his blood, could nurture something eternal—democracy, Virtue, and all other principles of the Revolution. He claimed that he had learned from the past and had discovered what the future held both for himself and France. Robespierre had seen the storm of dissent mounting as he spoke; he had seen it ever since the Festival of the Supreme Being, when Alexis Thuriot—a friend of Danton—said "look at the bugger; it's not enough for him to be master—he has to be god."²⁴⁵

As he continued with his speech, Robespierre asked the crowd "what friend of his country would wish to survive the moment when he could no longer defend innocence against oppression?"²⁴⁶ To him, it was better that he died once his work on Earth has been completed than to continue to live and allow the Revolution to disintegrate and intrigue to "override the sacred interests of humanity."²⁴⁷ The New Man saw that his duty was to his nation first and to himself last. Robespierre was a more zealous adherent to this utilitarian worldview than any other figure of the

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Andress, 310.

²⁴⁶ Robespierre, "His Last Speech by Maximilien Marie Isidore Robespierre."

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

Revolution and was willing to die once he had done his duty to the People of France.

Alas, there was one aspect of death that terrified Robespierre. “I confess that I have sometimes feared that I should be sullied, in the eyes of posterity, by the impure neighborhood of unprincipled men.”²⁴⁸ This sentiment will be seen in another, more personal, piece of Robespierre’s writing. Though the prospect of having his memory warped caused him to panic, it also brought Robespierre a small bit of joy because it meant that those without Virtue had marked him and all *true* patriots as different. He stated that they had “traced deep the line of demarcation between themselves and *all true men*.”²⁴⁹ This statement is one of very few in which Robespierre directly mentions manhood and masculinity. He saw Bourgeois men, especially those aligned with the Jacobin Club, as *real* and *masculine* men. As it has been throughout time, manhood *was not* something that males grew into once they reached puberty. Instead, the bourgeoisie believed that masculinity was a status that was earned by with moral and restrained behavior, Virtue , and the willingness to die to protect these principles. Robespierre, the embodiment of the New Masculinity, understood this concept and used it to question his enemies’ masculinity on the basis that they were not loyal to France and the Revolution.

As he concluded his final speech, Robespierre offered his own ideas of what awaited him in death. “No, Chaumette, no!” He cried, quite possibly losing the composure he was known for. “Death is *not* ‘an eternal sleep!’” He begged the other

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. Author’s emphasis.

deputies and the People of France to ignore that atheist sentiment and to adopt a deistic, Revolutionary view towards death. “Death is the commencement of immortality!”²⁵⁰ His body would die and rot, but he would live on in the form of the principles he held dear. Before stepping down, Robespierre gave his enemies, the oppressors, of humanity, one last testament that suited “one whose career is so nearly ended; it is the awful truth: that his enemies “shalt die.”²⁵¹ Robespierre was *not* speaking of the terrestrial death that he knew would claim him sooner rather than later. Instead, he was referring to the fact that the memory of those who conspired against him—the self-serving individuals who distinguished themselves from *real* men—would die and be forgotten while Robespierre’s name live on. To be forgotten and cast aside by future generations was a fate that Robespierre saw as worse than donating his head to *La Guillotine*.

Charlotte Robespierre was an eyewitness to both her brother’s desire to sacrifice himself, as well as the political intrigue that led to his downfall. She explains that it was during the Festival of the Supreme Being, and especially after his final speech, that his opponents in the Convention came out against him in full-force. “All that was impure and corrupted in the bosom of the Convention” began to voice their opposition to “the Virtuous Maximilien” and his supporters.²⁵² Earlier in her *Memoirs*, Charlotte stated that there were some men who did not like to see Virtue in others. It was in the spring and summer of 1794, when her brother was

²⁵⁰ Ibid

²⁵¹ Ibid.

Robespierre was referring to Pierre Gaspard Chaumette, a radical journalist who preached de-Christianization. He was arrested and executed after the fall of the atheist Hébertist faction. Address, 394.

²⁵² Ibid, 274.

most ardent in his defense of Virtue, that attacks against him became more frenzied.²⁵³ In addition, she explained that the anti-Robespierre faction was comprised of many different groups with various inspirations: aristocrats who were depraved in their morality, moderates who were shifty in their political alliances, and Dantonists who were indulgent to counterrevolutionaries. The moderates, she said, believed that Robespierre had gone too far and that he sought “to drown France in blood, and they made him responsible for all the executions in Paris.”²⁵⁴ In addition, there were ultra-radical supporters of the Terror who saw Robespierre as a counterrevolutionary. These opponents claimed “that he wanted to break the sword with which they fought against the counterrevolutionaries.”²⁵⁵ To these men, Robespierre was nothing but a false revolutionary. Charlotte believed that despite different political affiliations, Robespierre’s enemies were seen as people who either thirsted for his blood or fools who allowed themselves to be lied to.²⁵⁶

Just as her brother Maximilien had predicted in his final speech, Charlotte believed that it was the disloyal members of the Convention that killed him. Both believed that he would be, and was, killed for making sweeping condemnations of his enemies, but that it was crucial for him to do so in order to inform and protect the People. After Robespierre concluded his final speech, his enemies began to formulate a plan to eliminate him. His inability to sway Convention deputies in his direction “was the forerunner of the catastrophe of the following day.”²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 282.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 283

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

As he finished the speech, his supporters—including Saint-Just, Couthon, and Phillipe-François-Joseph Le Bas, whom Charlotte describes as “*Toujours purs*”—received it with enthusiasm and promised to support him against those who were turning against him.²⁵⁸ The following day—9 Thermidor—Saint-Just went before the Convention and tried to speak but was silenced.²⁵⁹ Robespierre also attempted to speak in his own defense, and when he proved inarticulate and could not formulate words, someone called out “the blood of Danton chokes you!”²⁶⁰ Charlotte explains that Robespierre and his supporters were arrested by the enemies of the People but as they were being taken to prison, *citoyens* of Paris rescued them and took them to the *Hôtel de Ville*.²⁶¹ The Convention implemented a “decree of outlawry” against them, even as a crowd of supporters gathered outside the *Hôtel*.²⁶² She writes that her influential brother could have called for a crowd of 100,000 *citoyens* to combat the Convention, but that was not a part of his plan.²⁶³ Robespierre saw himself in the role of the martyr and believed that his death would prove the point that although his body would die, his belief in the goodness of the People would live on. Although Charlotte appears to have believed in the hero-worship of the era, her admiration for self-sacrificing martyrs was tempered by her love for her brother Maximilien.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 284.

²⁶⁰ R.R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of Terror in the French Revolution* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), 377.

²⁶¹ Charlotte Robespierre, 284.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

The Thermidorians sent troops to the *Hôtel de Ville*, in order to arrest Robespierre.²⁶⁴ Had it not been for the arrival of the troops, perhaps Robespierre would have retained the support of the People or at least died with a reputation similar to Danton's. It is here that Charlotte's memoirs fall silent where others have expanded. The thought of her brothers' arrest and execution grieved Charlotte to the point that she could not bear to finish her memories of 9 and 10 Thermidor. As Convention troops burst in the meeting room of the Commune of Paris, Robespierre was shot in the face, causing some to speculate whether it was the troops or Robespierre who caused the injury.²⁶⁵ A suicide attempt seems most likely for two reasons. The first is that his enemies would not have wanted to bypass the spectacle of a public execution, though they did not want to go through the formality of a "trial" at the Revolutionary Tribunal. More importantly, Robespierre's calls for his own death were not merely for public consumption. Rather, his belief in self-sacrifice and martyrdom was genuine, which makes a suicide attempt seem more plausible he would have preferred death on his terms over corruption. The gunshot shattered his jaw and caused him to bleed profusely.

The following day, Robespierre and his supporters were transported in open tumbrels to the *Place de La Revolution*. Robespierre wore the same sky-blue coat that he had worn as he presided over the Festival of the Supreme Being.²⁶⁶ In order for *La Guillotine* to do her ghastly work, the thick bandages that held Robespierre's jaw together were ripped off his face. The resulting scream was primal and

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Georges Pernoud and Sabine Flaissier, eds., "The Agony of Robespierre and His Group," in *The French Revolution*, trans. Richard Graves (New York: Premier, 1965), 330

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

animalistic. In doing this, Henri Sanson—the Paris executioner—deprived Robespierre of the stoic death he desired. It is possible that the death Robespierre may have envisioned for himself involved his body being wrapped in the Tricolor as a patriot placed a laurel wreath atop his head. Instead, his head was shown to the crowd with his shattered jaw grotesquely agape.

Before her brother was led to his death, Charlotte ran through the streets of Paris, looking for both Maximilien and Augustin. She made her way to the Conciergerie Prison in order to say goodbye and hold hands one last time.²⁶⁷ She begged the guards to have mercy on him, but her pleas were met with kicks, insults, and other abuses.²⁶⁸ Soon after, she was arrested and, in order to be spared from the guillotine, signed a document that denounced her brothers. “I do not know” she wrote “if the cowardly Thermidorians made use of this writing” but they *did* destroy Robespierre’s papers and his reputation.²⁶⁹ Ever devoted to her brother Maximilien, Charlotte laments that history would not know the man she had known. Had the Thermidorians executed him without destroying a good portion of his documents, they would not have tarnished his legacy, but that was *precisely* their goal. By telling tales of Robespierre, the blood-thirsty tyrant, the Thermidorians managed to corrupt *L’Incorruptible*. As time has progressed, Robespierre’s message of self-sacrifice in the name of Virtue has begun to support the image of the bloody fiend.

²⁶⁷ Charlotte Robespierre, 285.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 286.

Some years before his death on 10 Thermidor, Robespierre wrote a poem that was a far cry from the songs he wrote to beautiful, mysterious women. In this poem he outlines a fate that was worse than dying at the hands of the People's enemies.²⁷⁰ Whether written in a fit of depression, desperation, or prophetic intuition, "The Only Torment of the Righteous" is undoubtedly Robespierre's most personal and revealing poem and lacks the playfulness of his Rosati-era love poems. He begins this six-line poem by writing that nothing tormented the righteous man except the thoughts in his final hour, a fate that he mentioned in his final speech to the Convention.²⁷¹ Robespierre wrote that "this duty," his self-sacrifice in the name of the People, was an honor as well as a "pale and dark desire."²⁷² Like his view of humanity, Robespierre's view of this sacrifice was bipartite. Self-sacrifice was "pale" because of the good intentions that guided Robespierre—the ideal bourgeois male—and the Revolution. Robespierre, in turn, also sees his sacrifice as "dark" because it was morbid and would only come about through various forms of violence.²⁷³ In writing these lines, Robespierre appears to be torn between his desire to live and his duty to protect the People from corruption and oppression.

The only torment of the righteous,
Is his final hour,
And only then will I be torn
This duty is, in dying, the pale and dark desire,
Distilled over my brow the disgrace and infamy
To die for the People and to be abhorred.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ No date is listed on this poem.

²⁷¹ Maximilien Robespierre, "Le seul tourment du juste,," In *Quelques Poésies de Robespierre*, edited by Jean Bernard. (Paris: Georges Maurice, 1899), 65. Translation by the author.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. In this poem Robespierre switches from the abstract third person to the personalized first person, most likely dwelling on his own demise.

Robespierre was not afraid of death, far from it. Death at the hands of the corrupt would be the ultimate mark of his Virtue and he welcomed it with open arms. The only thing that he feared was the fate that befell him after 10 Thermidor. That day Robespierre, *L'Incorruptible*, was executed as an enemy of the Nation and came to be remembered in popular history that way. It is unknown whether or not the People he loved *truly* reviled him that day, but the voices of his enemies have overshadowed all but a few of his supporters. As Robespierre lay strapped to the guillotine's plank, it is likely that he believed he was shedding his blood so that the Republic, the People, and Virtue could live on forever.

"The Only Torment of the Righteous" shows that Robespierre not only subscribed to the hero- and martyr-worship of the French Revolution, but also that he was not just attempting to craft his words to fit with others in the Jacobin Club. His statement that punishing "the oppressors of humanity is clemency" while pardoning "them is barbarity" pales in comparison to this eerie death poem.²⁷⁵ Here was a man who was so devoted to the cause of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité* that he was willing to lay down his life, only fearing that he would one day be hated by the People that he had loved. He was a man who chose to abandon a quiet life in Arras with a woman who ostensibly loved him in order to serve a faceless People on the eve of the Revolution. Robespierre was without children, many lovers, or a family, and because of this did not exemplify the family unit that was revered by Revolutionary society, nor did he serve as the Revolution's living embodiment. Instead, Robespierre lived his life in a way that exemplified restraint during an era

²⁷⁵ Robespierre, "On the Principles of Political Morality."

of tumultuous upheaval and died under the guillotine in the name of Virtue. Above all, his sacrifice of pleasure, love, and his very life allowed him to serve as the masculine ideal during the French Revolution.

EPILOGUE:

What the Hand Dare Seize the Fire?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee? ²⁷⁶

Maximilien Robespierre's unremarkable birth on May 6, 1758, was a far cry from his public execution on 10 Thermidor. Soon after, the memory of the once bright and inquisitive child who mourned the death of his beloved swallows was deliberately replaced by the legend of the tyrant who bathed Paris in the blood of the innocent. Though there should be no doubt that Robespierre was an ardent supporter of Terror in the name of Virtue and the People, he should not be seen as the sole perpetrator of the excesses of the Reign of Terror. He was but one man on a committee of twelve that oversaw a larger legislative body. His faction, the Mountain, was never an overwhelming majority in the National Convention, and it often had to sway members of the more moderate "Plain" in order to pass the laws that bolstered the Terror. Had it not been for France's wars with Austria and Prussia or civil war in the Vendee, it is likely that the Terror's fury would not have raged as hot as it did from September of 1792 through the summer of 1794. After 10 Thermidor, those enemies of Robespierre who managed to evade the guillotine needed a way to justify their own actions during the Terror as well as their execution of a man who was utterly devoted to the People. There is no statue

²⁷⁶ William Blake, "The Tyger," in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 148.

commemorating the life of Robespierre in Paris as there are for Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and Georges Danton because scapegoats do not deserve humanization. No film on Robespierre's rise and fall has been produced because who would dare portray him as anything but a monster? Only one novel, Anatole France's *The Gods Will Have Blood*, dared to portray him sympathetically.

In the popular imagination, the French Revolution remains a dichotomy of good versus evil: Louis XVI against an anarchist *sans-culottes* mob or Sydney Carton's goodness against Madame Defarge's vengeance. In order to write a history of the French Revolution that is closer to the evasive "truth," one that will be devoid of heroes and monsters, historians must move away from old lines of thinking. The French Revolution was a seminal event in human history that ushered in societies comprised of individual *citoyens* and *citoyennes*, but its impact is far greater than that. Just as the Terror was beginning in 1792, the National Convention passed laws that changed the structure of the family by legalizing divorce and granting equal inheritance rights to girls and illegitimate children.²⁷⁷ In addition, it marked the end of the old Aristocratic Model of masculinity that praised male beauty, and it solidified the new Bourgeois Model of manhood as well as separate spheres for men and women. Robespierre is emblematic of the transition from the Aristocratic to the Bourgeois Models of manhood. He was a man who wore fine clothes and fancied sweets, but rented a room in the house of a cabinet maker and was an ardent supporter of democracy. Though he was, by 1794, a very influential man in French politics, he was neither a giant of history who reigned

²⁷⁷Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ Press: 2001), 95

over an emerging democracy nor a tyrant who reigned over a totalitarian state. Robespierre did not aspire to wealth or power; instead, he sought to change society by helping to usher in a Republic of Virtue, even if his blood had to be shed to nurture it.

In his praise for self-sacrifice in the name of Virtue, the sovereignty of the People, and moral behavior, Robespierre aspired to god-like perfection rather than the flawed goodness of mankind. This led him to condone the use of extreme violence in the name of the Revolution. He should be remembered not as Hercules or the Hydra, but as Icarus— a remarkably intelligent man who, without divinity or super-human strength, acting on behalf of humanity flew too close to the sun, thus melting his wings of wax.

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