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Political Strategies of Laughter in the National Convention, 1792-1794

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by

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Acknowledgements

This thesis evolved from a combination of curiosity and fascination with the various colourful personalities and characters who were elected to the National Convention. I have been led to this topic through my struggle to understand the rhetoric of the French Revolution, which at times can be incomprehensible, as well as a desire to appreciate the extraordinary circumstances and choices the men who spoke such a language were faced with.

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All mistakes and errors are my own.

Contents

Introduction

The Importance of Strategies, Emotions and Laughter in the Convention

Laughter in the Convention

On 23 September 1792, Maximilien Robespierre stood at the tribune of the National Convention and delivered his first speech in the Republic. His intention was to alleviate the suspicions of his compatriots; some had said he had orchestrated the September Massacres in a ploy to become dictator of France. Robespierre denied the accusations and made clear his resentment at being treated as a criminal. Indeed, he claimed his persecution was the result of a secret cabal from within the Convention that conspired against not only him, but the people. The deputies laughed at his audacious claims. Robespierre, in retaliation, rebuked this strategy of ridicule: "Je demande que ceux qui me répondent par des rires, par des murmures, se réunissent contre moi, que ce petit tribunal prononce ma condamnation, ce sera le jour le plus glorieux de ma vie." The *conventionnels* may have laughed at Robespierre's denunciations in order to reject their credibility, but Robespierre drew attention to the unseemliness and conspiratorial qualities of laughter to prove his own point.[1]

This vignette demonstrates that the deputies in the National Convention, although aware of the gravity of their mission, were not averse to ridiculing each other for the sake of political gain. It also shows how the nature and function of laughter were disputed by the patriots. Nor is this example featuring Robespierre an isolated incident. In just over 22 months, from the inception of the Convention on 21 September 1792 to the fall of Robespierre on 27 July 1794 (9 Thermidor), laughter occurs on 394 separate occasions by my count in response to the multitudinous situations the deputies experienced. This number is based upon the records of the *Archives Parlementaires* and does not include additional anecdotal or eyewitness accounts of laughter from participants and witnesses.[2] At no other time do politicians of the revolution laugh more in the assembly of France than in the first two years of the Convention.[3]

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[1] AP 52:133.

[2] *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860, première série (1787 à 1799),* 99 vols; vols 1-82 (Paris: P. Dupont, 1879-1914); vols. 83-99 (Paris, 1961-1995). The volumes of the National Convention I am concerned with are numbered 52-93, and will be abbreviated to AP, as seen above.

[3] These 394 bursts are comparable to Antoine de Baecque's research concerning laughter in the National Assembly, which he says occurred 408 times, reaching an average of 14 times per month from May 1789 to September 1791 (a 28 month period). Therefore, the *conventionnels* laughed marginally

Therefore, such numbers are substantial enough to suggest laughter played an important political role even during the terror, a period in which the historian might have expected to find 'Robespierrean prudishness' rather than indecent laughter.[4]

A retracing of such laughter, as Robert Darnton famously proposed, can provide a gateway into understanding a culture, allowing us to access how people behaved and thought in the past.[5] In this manner, *Strategies of Laughter* asserts that a study of laughter can reveal a deeper insight into the political thought and intentions of the deputies who sat in the National Convention. Furthermore, by ascertaining which groups laughed most at certain points in time, which topics of debate drew unanimous hilarity, and what facets of revolutionary language were ridiculed, the historian can discern the limits of political discourse, trace the wider developments in political ideology, and provide an outlook into the day-to-day business of politics, in addition to the shifting power relations between the factions. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how laughter was used in its multifarious ways as a political strategy from the confines of the National Convention during the first French Republic. Laughter, it will be asserted, was a practical weapon of protestation, approval, persuasion and surveillance. On occasion, laughter could also have a detrimental effect on the political credentials of those who laughed depending on the circumstances, which were always shifting even within sessions. An examination of this nature seeks to answer the recent call for an emphasis on the 'mechanisms and practices of republican politics' in revolutionary historiography.[6]

The Problems of Representative Democracy and Progress

This inquiry will argue that strategies of laughter had much to do with the problem of revolutionary legitimacy and representation. First, the issue of their own legitimacy

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more in the Republic at nearly 18 times per month, although there is a marked disparity within this time frame: before the purge of the Girondins on 2 June 1793, laughter occurs 296 times; this is in contrast to just 98 bursts thereafter. Laughter decreased because the factional disputes which facilitated its usage had been eradicated. See A. de Baecque, 'Parliamentary Hilarity inside the French Constitutional Assembly (1789-1791)', in J. Bremner & H. Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour* (Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 1997), 180.

[4] J. R. Censer, 'Social Twists and Linguistic Turns: Revolutionary Historiography a Decade after the Bicentennial', *French Historical Studies*, 22, 1 (1999), 152. This quotation is part of a review of de Baecque's work.

[5] R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 262.

[6] C. Hesse, 'The New Jacobins', *French Historical Studies*, 32, 4 (2009), 666.

was problematic for the *conventionnels*. Unlike the parliament of Britain, the republicans did not have a sovereign ruler or constitution to legitimise their powers.[7] As a result, they increasingly resorted to appealing to public opinion as a means to justify their actions.[8] It is in this sense that the revolution, according to Linton, was an entry into modernity, because deputies had to persuade the audience of their own integrity, much like modern day politicians.[9] Accordingly, cultivating the ideal image was achieved by numerous means: even revolutionary dress or bodily gestures could add – or detract – from the legitimacy of representative authority, especially since 'opinion was the soul arbiter of the correctness of the conduct of politicians'.[10] Recently, Lynn Hunt has noted that historians cannot rely solely on linguistics as the definitive method of making sense of a new era in view of public opinion; the world is constructed through 'embodiment, gesture, facial expression, and feelings, that is, through nonlinguistic modes of communication that have their own logics'. While the history of certain 'buzzwords' have been explored in depth by historians of the revolution, thereby improving our understanding of language and its relationship to power, Hunt posits that other means of expression need to be understood when considering the politicisation of the everyday. Events moved quickly in the revolution, and words could not keep up as a means of explanation, unlike other communicative modes.[11] Moreover, exhibitions of emotion are more easily understood by those who share in the same culture, because emotions are a culturally specific phenomenon

[7] J. Cowans, *To Speak for the People: Public Opinion and the Problem of Legitimacy in the French Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 88.

[8] For the development of public opinion in the eighteenth-century, see K. M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 167-202; A. Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France*. Translated from French by R. Morris (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994). Farge argues public opinion emerged, ironically, from government attempts to oppress the people. See also, S. Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: the Causes Célèbres of Pre-revolutionary France* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1993).

[9] M. Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship, and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6. Jon Cowans follows the view proposed by Keith Baker, and denies that actual public opinion had a noticeable effect on revolutionary politics. Rather, he frames public opinion as a rhetorical concept, advocating that the failure of the deputies to form a consensus over its meaning seriously harmed their representative authority. See Cowans, *To Speak for the People*, 189.

[10] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 5. For behaviour and public roles for the body, see D. Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). For dress, see R. Wrigley, *The Politics of Appearances: Representations of Dress in Revolutionary France* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002).

[11] L. Hunt, 'The Experience of Revolution', *French Historical Studies*, 32, 4 (2009), 674.

susceptible to change.[12] Laughter, therefore, can be considered a useful substitute for reasoned arguments, particularly in democracies were it can 'add colour' to proceedings.[13] In essence, I argue that emotional expression – in particular, laughter – justified and substantiated arguments just as much as verbal discourse in the Convention and was a valid means for representatives to maintain their patriotic believability in the eyes of the people.

The assertion that laughter and ridicule became a useful means to conduct politics is problematic because it appears to expose the notable disparity between the identity the politicians professed and the reality in which they practised politics. The revolutionaries placed emphasis on virtue, transparency, and *bienfaisance,* positioning themselves as selfless beings in contrast to the deceitful and corrupt world of the aristocracy.[14] Some historians have argued that the political culture of the republicans was defined by a feeling of *sensibilité*; this was a melodramatic 'cultural mood' which David Andress argues reached its brief apogee in the terror. It involved communicating honesty through emotion while professing consideration and sympathy for others. *Sensibilité* emerged in part from the literary construction of the *vraisemblable*, a concept borrowed from the arts which, it is claimed, was used to solve the problem of representation because it entailed the requirement of the audience to suspend its disbelief so as to understand, through empathy, the general truth communicated by the performer.[15] For this reason, the politicians put on a show of sentiment to achieve their aims. Lynn Hunt argues that in order for the rights of man to have become self-evident, the communication of tears was paramount in fostering the collective conviction of fraternity.[16] This relates to Ute Frevert's claim that eighteenth-century western civilization prioritised empathy over other emotions; for instance, the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the assertion of universal rights in 1789

[12] See the argument built by S. Beam, *Laughing Matters: Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 1-3.
[13] J. Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 12. For emotion and its suitability to political life, see U. Frevert, *Emotions in History – Lost and Found* (Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2011), 5-6.
[14] For the importance of virtue see M. Linton, *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); for transparency see L. Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 44-45; for *bienfaisance* see C. Walton, 'Between trust and terror: patriotic giving in Revolutionary France', in D. Andress (ed.), *Experiencing the French Revolution* (Oxford: SVEC, 2013), 47-68.
[15] D. Andress, 'Living the Revolutionary Melodrama: Robespierre's Sensibility and the Construction of Political Commitment in the French Revolution', *Representations,* 114 (2011), 105.
[16] L. Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights, A History* (New York and London: Norton, 2007), 27-32.

prescribed feelings of social sympathy and compassion.[17] William Reddy has argued that sentimentalism became a matter of civic duty in the Republic; a 'warm, intimate tone' dominated the culture of patriots.[18] Nevertheless, he evinces that the failure among the revolutionaries in demarcating between those who expressed this language out of genuine love for the *patrie*, and those who employed it to hide their conspiratorial designs against the revolution, led to excessive declamations and the scrutiny of others' emotional performance in Year II, culminating in the paranoia and self-destruction of terror.[19]

Analogous to the prioritisation of *sensibilité*, a popular narrative of revolutionary historiography has advocated that revolutionaries consciously employed theatrical 'scripts' to enact meaning on the world around them.[20] In essence, these scripts were bodies of discourses appropriated from the theatre which provided 'the logic of revolutionary political action' to audiences who could readily understand such representations.[21] Before the king's flight to Varennes in 1791, Lynn Hunt, among others, has claimed that the patriots utilised an optimistic script of 'comedy', in which the sins of aristocrats and the king were forgiven and opponents of France were encouraged to integrate themselves into the fold of reason and liberty. After the disheartening realisation the king would not conform, the comedic script was displaced by an alternative group of discourses that was to engender another 'dramatic conclusion, though now through the language and rhetoric, and the epistemological frame of tragedy.'[22] Antoine de Baecque depicts a comparable narrative. Before September 1792, the revolutionaries used laughter as a weapon to

[17] Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 198.
[18] W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Feelings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 147.
[19] Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 195-199. Marisa Linton disagrees with Reddy, stating that the Jacobins needed to 'stifle their innate sensibility' in order to use terror. This is an argument I largely agree with. See Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 245.
[20] For the merging of aspects between theatre and politics, see P. Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 2002); M. Huet, *Rehearsing the Revolution: The Staging of* Marat's *Death, 1793-1797*. Translated from French by R. Hurley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); S. Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy and the French Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); J. Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French political Culture, 1680-1791* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[21] L. Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1984), 10-11.
[22] M. S. Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets: The French Revolution in the Making of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 60. It must be emphasised that Hunt places a third script of 'romance' between comedy and tragedy.

attack the bodily image of the aristocrat. This was a strategy employed to reform the privileged orders, rather than to alienate them. Hence, 'the laughter of the Revolution turns into political sensibility.'[23] However, with the dawn of the Republic, the protagonists 'were dressed for tragedy', meaning that concepts of heroism, martyrdom and a narrative of wounds were thrust centre-stage as a means to convey the teachings of the revolution.[24]

It is contended here that the conceptualisation of emotional discourse as genres which developed into a straightforward linear progression is too simplistic. The republicans never confined themselves to one 'script' of sentimentalism as a means to convey legitimacy – after all, laughter is often a tool to humiliate others, rather than a means for reflective introspection. Therefore, this study will argue that there were two dominant systems of emotion in the Republic which the deputies applied to different situations, exemplifying a degree of agency in the struggle to affirm representative authority. *Sensibilité*, it is claimed here, was not a universal disposition; it competed with *mépris*, another emotional framework which contained those discourses that encouraged citizens to scorn and disdain fellow human beings, as opposed to empathising with them. This code of *mépris* developed from the realities of politics, the ideology of classical republicanism, and the need to justify unscrupulous actions in the face of emerging crises. As Marisa Linton points out, the revolutionaries often failed to live up to the exacting standards they professed. They were motivated by self-interest, personal loyalties and ambition; they delivered polemical and misleading speeches; they came to agreements behind closed doors; and they acted impulsively upon their emotions, whether positive or negative.[25] If the deputies could undermine the legitimacy of their opponents and gain an advantage in the tumultuous debates through mockery and humiliation then they would do so. However, because of the added complexion of public opinion, it was necessary to justify such a practice. Fortunately, because laughter is by nature an expression of ambiguous emotion and could readily be retooled retrospectively, patriots could strategically assert their own meanings onto laughter so as to control their own image. They fluctuated between making laughter appear within the sentimental framework, or, on occasion, as part of

[23] A. de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*. Translated from French by C. Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 248.
[24] De Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 279, 280-307.
[25] Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 3.

scorn. This argument does not mean to deny the importance of *sensibilité* as a cultural mode capable of extruding authority. However, there were auxiliary factors to consider when determining how best to explicate the emotional significance of laughter to the people. By accessing the expression of laughter, it is the purpose of this study to analyse the ebb and flow of sentiment and scorn – *pitié* and *mépris* – to gain a greater understanding of the revolutionary dynamic and how emotions were prescribed by deputies in reaction to events. The deputies were governed by a set of unspoken emotional rules that became more stringent as the Republic wore on, and that are necessary to comprehend in order to uncover the political culture of revolution.

The issue of representation and legitimacy relates to the second argument of the thesis: laughter was a weapon in selectively repudiating the past and affirming the new values of the Republic. In this way, laughter contributed to the wider process of reshaping society and lent to the new political order a sense of identity. Lynn Hunt calls this the 'mythic present', that is, the foundation of a new community and nation based on an entirely different identity and origins from the *ancien régime* which attempted to present a timeless utopia.[26] Certainly, laughter was only one tool in this wider strategy. For instance, the revolutionary calendar, the projection of a 'utopian origin of new time', was an attempt to end the threat of contestation and competing narratives while legitimising the republic as a foundational event in history.[27] Additionally, de Baecque has shown how the revolution was modern politically in its 'self-representation' of abstract principles, namely through the metaphor of the body, to disrepute the past and create a new future.[28] Thus, humour, argues Mechele Leon in a study of Molière, was retooled so the people had a system in which they could laugh at aristocrats rather than with them.[29] Paradoxically, the revolutionaries could not erase the past totally, and some have argued the revolutionary era was continuous of

[26] L. Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 26-27.
[27] S. Perovic, *The Calendar in Revolutionary France: Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12.
[28] A. de Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 15; See also S. Desan, 'What's After Political Culture? Recent French Revolutionary Historiography', *French Historical Studies,* 23, 1 (2000), 169-170.
[29] M. Leon, *Molière, the French Revolution, & the Theatrical Afterlife* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 74-99.

the old regime because it needed that past 'to legitimate its invention'.[30] The formulation of new values meant appropriating and adapting discursive meanings onto old institutions, artefacts, practices and symbols.[31] Laughter was therefore a strategy of pedagogy, propaganda and illusion, serving to make events and actions appear more miraculous, positive or inevitable than they actually were. On the other hand, laughter was also a powerful weapon for those who wished to reject the claims of rupture and the new meanings they were confronted with. In this way, laughter was a means of negation, negotiation and contestation. This strategy of dissent was not just confined to counterrevolutionaries; even within the Convention, laughter was a means for some deputies to question the prevailing semiotic meanings. In addition, while the deputies believed 'history was on their side', they also urged each other to be vigilant since there was a possibility progress might stagnate through ignorance or intentional misdoings.[32] Conspiracy was the foremost explanation the patriots used to interpret the failures of revolution.[33] Laughter, on occasion, was categorised as a sign of such misdeeds. Consequently, how laughter was applied either pejoratively or approbatively to certain actions, practices or objects gives us an idea on how the revolutionaries viewed themselves and how others viewed them and their ideas.

Addressing the Influence of the Enlightenment towards a Typology of Laughter

The nature of the influence of Enlightenment in shaping the attitudes and culture of laughter in the Republic is an issue that needs to be addressed. When it comes to political influence, it is Rousseau who is commonly cited as the philosopher the revolutionaries followed most closely.[34] His writings on laughter come chiefly from his

[30] Leon, *Molière,* 5. Framing the revolution as invention has been noticeably argued by François Furet, who was influenced by Tocqueville's interpretation of the revolution as continuous. See F. Furet *Interpreting the French Revolution*. Translated from French by E. Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 14-28.

[31] For a similar study, instead focusing on visual signs, see R. Clay, *Iconoclasm in Revolutionary Paris: the Transformation of Signs* (Oxford: SVEC, 2012), 37. Clay argues that Parisians 'knew that adding new visual signifiers to old ones, or removing original signifying elements in part or entirely from a sign, allowed the representation of newly prominent meanings.'

[32] M. Shaw, *Time and the French Revolution: The Republican Calendar, 1789-Year XIV*, (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/The Boydell Press, 2011), 27

[33] M. Linton, ''The Tartuffes of Patriotism': fears of conspiracy in the political language of Revolutionary government, France 1793-1794', in B. Coward & J. Swann (eds.), *Conspiracies and conspiracy theory in early modern Europe: from the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing), 235.

[34] For works on eighteenth-century French laughter see the special edition of laughter in, L. Andries (ed.), 'Le rire', *Dix-Huitième siècle,* 32 (2000); A. de Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire: La Culture des rieurs au XVIIIe*

Lettre à M. d'Alembert, wherein he criticised theatrical comedy for espousing vice while sentiment and virtue went unrewarded.[35] Because theatre satisfies the prevailing opinion of society, Rousseau explained, it cannot challenge existing morals; in this manner, ridicule is an oppressive tool utilised to maintain existing hierarchical structures. The theatrical comedy hardens the hearts of man, is unnatural, and, in the words of Jean Goldzink, 'détruit le fondement de la sociabilité'.[36] This argument has come to be seen by some as highly influential when the revolutionaries came to construct a framework of laughter. As Robert Darnton writes, from August 1792 to July 1794, the 'Rousseauistic current swept everything before it. The Jacobins denounced Voltairean wit as a sign of "the aristocracy of the mind," and Robespierre banished laughter from the Republic of Virtue. They knew what they were doing, and it was serious business, nothing less than the reconstruction of reality.'[37] Darnton argues that humour was opaque, hard to understand, and eschewed in favour of a more plain-speaking style of communication in the Republic. But as Anne Chamayou observes, just because Rousseau was dismissive of comedy does not mean he opposed laughter altogether.[38] In the same vein, the patriots may have denounced laughter in certain situations, but they were not governed by enlightened ideas. Colin Jones argues that historians have become too obsessed with the "scripts" of Enlightenment and their effect, which has caused the neglect of the actual political history of the revolution and the choices made by revolutionaries.[39] The revolutionaries have ranged from pure emotional beings acting out of 'an unconscious internalised legacy of intolerance', in the eyes of Patrice Higonnet, to painstakingly applying the philosophies of the Enlightenment (to devastating effect) according to Jonathan Israel.[40] This inquiry

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siècle (Calmann-Lévy, 2000); A. Chamayou, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou le sujet de rire* (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2009); A. Richardot, *Le Rire des Lumières* (Paris: H-Champion, 2002).

[35] On Rousseau and his discussion of Molière in relation to comedy and laughter, see: Leon, *Molière*, 78-84; Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts*, 74-125; P. Woodruff, 'Rousseau, Molière, and the Ethics of Laughter', *Philosophy and Literature,* 1, 3 (1977), 325-336.

[36] J.-J. Rousseau, *La Lettre A D'Alembert sur les Spectacles* (Paris: Garnier, 1889), 153-157. J. Goldzink, *Comique et Comédie au Siècle des Lumières* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), 40.

[37] R. Darnton, 'What was Revolutionary about the French Revolution?', *Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures* (Waco: Baylor University, 1989), 47. See also the review of this literature by Leon in *Molière*, 76. She writes that, within this argument, 'Seriousness, sincerity and transparency became the marks of good citizen comportment in a climate influenced by the philosophy of Rousseau'.

[38] Chamayou, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 19. 'Il y eut, quoi qu'on en pense, un Rousseau comique, enclin à la satire et à la fantaisie'.

[39] C. Jones, 'Twenty Years After', *French Historical Studies*, 32, 4 (2009), 683.

[40] P. Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4; J. Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French*

asserts that the Enlightenment theories on laughter did feature in revolutionary rhetoric and had an influence on the political culture of revolution. However, the patriots picked out which threads of thought they required to further their own agenda. The theories were not reiterated unquestioned and emotions were not acted upon unconsciously, but were melded into an original line of reasoning which complimented the demands of the Republic.

It is also a fallacy to suggest the Republicans actively discouraged jokes. Patrice Higonnet has argued that, if empathy was the glue attaching the individual to the community (a position espoused by Hunt),[41] then the purpose of the terror was the elimination of dissent and the establishment of a single coherent voice. For this reason, he claims that the Jacobins abhorred jokes because they were equivocal and abstruse while the Jacobins themselves were 'unambiguously fraternal'.[42] Indeed, an example of Higonnet's argument can be seen in the Convention, in which a proposal for public education by Antoine-Hubert Wandelaincourt advocated a ban on "les mauvaises plaisanteries" that could injure a young citizen's proclivity for charity and modesty.[43] On the other hand, Higonnet's evidence for the general apprehension surrounding jokes is based on the charters of a few provincial Jacobin clubs and not on what the Jacobins actually said. This type of source analysis which focuses too much on theory and not enough on practice has been decried by Hunt.[44] In actuality, jokes built a sense of fraternity in the Paris Jacobin club; bonds were built between brothers through ambiguous jests at the expense of the foreign enemy. Moreover, ridicule was a way to denigrate and threaten adversaries. When Collot d'Herbois said he wanted to silence the inflammatory voice of a rival, Louis Pierre Manuel, he used the ambiguous word *étouffer*; this induced laughter in the Jacobin club because it implied a violent means in quietening Manuel.[45] This challenges the view presented by Lise Andries, who writes that '[l]a Montagne préfère l'austérité et la régénération des mœurs à

Revolution from The Rights of Man *to Robespierre* (Oxford & Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 20. 'Radical Enlightenment' writes Israel 'was not just the intellectual cauldron of the Revolution but, equally, its principled social and cultural factor, for it was primarily this package of interlinked concepts that channelled, organized, armed, and mobilized the great mass of endemic, long-standing, popular disgruntlement, frustration, resentment and ambition.'

[41] Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights,* 65.

[42] P. Higonnet, *Goodness beyond Virtue,* 184.

[43] AP 68:233 (3 July 1793).

[44] Hunt, 'The Experience of Revolution', 674.

[45] F.-A. Aulard (ed.), *La Société des Jacobins. Recueil de documents pour l'histoire du Club des Jacobins de Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris: Jouaust, 1889-1897), vol.4, 460 (5 November 1792).

l'ancienne gaieté.'[46] While the revolutionaries did indeed invest in the philosophies of classical republicanism and ancient antiquity, these lines of thought did not exclude laughter from their communicative repertoire.[47]

It is Antoine de Baecque who has done the most to enhance our knowledge of eighteenth-century laughter. He attempts to show that the revolution was a culmination of the traditions of laughter in the Enlightenment, wherein factions used their own styles determined by distinctions of class and culture against each other in the revolutionary assemblies. For this reason, de Baecque's typology associates each individual type of laughter with a specific type of group, and is more concerned, like Anne Richardot, with the revolutionary period up to 1791, and how aristocrats, constitutional monarchists, and republicans fought with each other.[48] Studies of laughter in history have often been drawn to its dissenting quality amid totalitarian or autocratic regimes. This is not surprising – joking is, after all, a 'risky business', as recent events in France have shown.[49] De Baecque challenges the traditional presumptions that republican society in the terror negated laughter, and argues laughter was fuelled by a mixture of fear and the grotesque, engendering a type of *rire inquiet* among the populace.[50] Mike Rapport frames laughter as a subversive tool available to those without power to 'limit the impact of repression'.[51] However, as Hans Speier has argued, political jokes and laughter are more likely to arise from those at the top as a strategy to maintain existing practices rather than as a form of resistance.[52] In contrast to this focus of laughter from below and the conceptualisation of laughter as a psychological response to the horrors of revolution, this study intends to focus on the deputies who operated within the Convention and intentionally used

[46] L. Andries, 'État des Recherches: Présentation', *Dix-Huitième siècle,* 32 (2000), 18.
[47] For the influence of antiquity, see H. T. Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries: A Study in the development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965). For classical republicanism, see Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 34. According to Linton, classical republicanism provided much of the outlook on politics, offering models of behaviour and language to portray virtue and 'make sense of events'.
[48] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 8-9.
[49] E. Oring, 'Political Jokes under Repressive Regimes', *Western Folklore*, 63, 3 (2004), 210.
[50] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire,* 292-298. De Baecque's assertion, based on Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque and carnival, has been criticised because of the lack of evidence provided. See J. D. Popkin, '"Post-Absolutism" and Laughter in Eighteenth-Century France', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35, 2 (2002), 297.
[51] M. Rapport, 'Laughter as a Political Weapon: Humour and the French Revolution' in A. Chamayou and A. B. Duncan (eds.), *Le Rire Européen* (Presses Universitaires de Perpignan: 2010), 243-244.
[52] H. Speier, 'Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power'. Translated from German by R. Jacknall (ed.), *American Journal of Sociology,* 103, 5 (1998), 1353.

different types of laughter as a means to achieve various political goals. They were not confined to just one type of laughter appropriate to their class and status.

There were three primary types of laughter in the Convention. Each type is defined by the subject area which precipitated laughter. The three types are:

1. The laughter of regeneration/rupture. This is the laugh that was heard when the revolutionaries listened to the miraculous acts of virtue, patriotism and social equality the revolution had enabled France's citizens. It signalled utopia and progress and looked forward to an imagined future which was considered inevitable.
2. The laughter of repudiation. This is the laugh that mocked the practices, symbols, morals and institutions of the past, making clear that the enemies of the Republic – priests, aristocrats, and monarchs – were not to be feared. Crucially, this laugh was aimed at obvious enemies and not those hidden. Like the first type, it was also a laugh of progress, but compared the fruits of the present to the evils of the past.
3. The laughter of surveillance/denunciation. Like the second type, this laughter is a form of ridicule, but it was aimed at fellow patriots in the Convention. It stemmed from incongruous statements, humiliating jokes, and dissenting views. It was framed initially as polite and conciliatory but developed into a form of denunciation.

A laugh in the Convention could cross boundaries over two types. For instance, there were often humorous letters sent to the Convention depicting citizens as morally superior to their adversaries, who were inept because they still lived under archaic tyrannical regimes. Moreover, all types of laughter were contested by the factions of the Convention. For example, the deputies differed over what behaviour and morals constituted the regenerated man and which aspects should be laughed along with. They also disagreed on what emotions laughter should express, who the enemies of the Republic actually were, and what facets of the past should be ridiculed. With this typology in place, Chapter 1 will examine the explosion of laughter in the first three months of the Convention and will show how the Girondins used laughter as a strategy to legitimise their ministry and denote a particular form of progress, which was linked indelibly to the revolutionary war. Chapter 2 will analyse how ridicule developed in the Convention as a strategy of surveillance to negate the discourse of conspiracy, in addition to the languages of *sensibilité* and classical republicanism. We will ask how successful ridicule was in mollifying these dissenting strategies. Chapter 3 will look at the wider strategies of satire in newspapers and compare these to the arguments in the Convention regarding the moral worth of satire, which was at the forefront of factional disputes during the trial of the king. For some, the very fact satire still existed was evidence enough in demonstrating that the revolution had some way to go in

perfecting the morals of citizens. On the other hand, satire was defended by others as a valuable component of liberated nations. Chapter 4 will centre on the Montagnards, tracing their development as a minority in the Convention to a group which could severely disrupt sessions. Laughter was a huge part of this progression, and the Mountain used the strategy of laughter to denounce and intimidate their fellow patriots. Chapter 5 shines the light on how strategies of laughter operated in the terror and argues that the inconsistencies over the meanings of laughter were emblematic of the wider contradictions of terror as a whole. Finally, the Epilogue will highlight how Robespierre attempted to limit specific types of laughter among his fellow deputies in the final months of his reign, and how this contributed to his downfall. The thesis follows a largely diachronic path because, as the political dynamic evolved, the rules of laughter became more rigid and controlled, reflecting the greater surveillance of emotions in general. Additionally, certain strategies were only prominent at specific moments in time; such was the fast-paced nature of the revolution. A chronological structure can convey this to full effect.

The Problems of Analysing Laughter: Sources and the Factions of the Convention

The major source that underpins this work is the *Archives Parlementaires* which documents the detailed debates of the National Assembly.[53] Bursts of emotion in the Convention are marked in parentheses to indicate the responses of the audience to the orator. The most common directions when denoting laughter are: *on rit*, *éclats de rire, rires satiriques*, and *rires ironiques*. Additionally, laughter was usually recorded as a collective action; only very rarely do the *Archives* draw attention to an individual laughing. Occasionally the *Archives* designate which side of the Convention laughter emanates from; in other instances it is difficult to determine which faction laughed. Sometimes it is unclear if laughter was an intended product of a joke by the speaker, or whether the laughter was ridicule aimed at him. While historians possess the transcripts, it is nearly impossible to determine the impact of gestures and vocal tone on a humorous delivery made by a deputy. This is why the accounts of eyewitnesses and newspaper reports are important to supplementing our knowledge. These journals and memoirs bring their own pitfalls, however, due to their 'far from transparent'

[53] Patrick Brasart adjudges that although the *Archives* are very useful for historians, they must also be treated cautiously since the provenance of speeches is usually omitted. See P. Brasart, *Paroles de la Révolution: Les Assemblées Parlementaires*, *1789-1794* (Paris: Minerve, 1988), 189.

nature, along with the clouding of memory or political motivations for those writing in retrospect.[54] Another reservation is that the historian places his or her trust in the stenographers who documented the debates, often haphazardly.[55] This applies not just to the Convention, but also the Jacobin club. Indeed, the stenographer in the Jacobin club, Deflers, was physically removed from the debates on 23 December 1792 because some felt he was manipulating the transcription of speeches to make members appear ridiculous.[56] Certainly, one method to remedy this partiality is to read more than one version of a speech. Finally, because laughter is ethereal in nature, there is a very real possibility it occurred more times than has been recorded, because it may have been lost in the midst of applause, or could have been deemed too insignificant to have been included in the record of debates.

When analysing these sources, it is important to remember that the disparate locations of politics, with their own set of social practices, audiences and expectations, was a crucial factor in determining how politicians behaved emotionally.[57] A speech in the Jacobin Club could earn the laughter of approval if it mocked a prominent Girondin, but the same oration would have been treated with *murmures* or *déclamations* in the Convention. Equally, in private, patriots almost certainly let their guard down and laughed at a wider-range of topics, some taboo. In the political sphere, emotion was largely staged and rarely sincere; the *conventionnels* were too aware of their status as representatives of the people.

Until March 1793, when the deputies relocated to the Salle des Machines, the Convention met in the Salle de Manège in the Tuileries, an unsuitable environment for public-speaking. Many of the deputies who sat in it had been friends before September 1792, but had succumbed to their differences and divided into two warring

[54] J. S. Allen, 'Navigating the Social Sciences: A Theory for the Meta-History of Emotion', *History and Theory*, 42, 1 (2003), 92.
[55] Marcel Reinhard, an editor of the *Archives,* says the *Procès des débats*, the official journal detailing the sessions of the Convention, are too short to have recorded all the debates in each session. Equally, secretaries did not detail the events in order, so there was often incongruity in the final chronology. See AP 83:VIII.
[56] L. Whaley, *Radicals: Politics and Republicanism in the French Revolution* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 112.
[57] See B. H. Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions', *Passions in Context*, 2 (2010), 11. Rosenwein advocates the notion of 'emotional communities', that is, the idea that different social institutions required and expected different systems of feeling.

factions, known commonly as the Girondins and Montagnards.[58] There have been a lot of debates surrounding the constitution of the factions in the Convention, most notably by M. J. Sydenham and Alison Patrick, with the former even denying the Girondins existed.[59] Certainly, these 'factions' did not operate along the same line as the cohesive political parties we know today. Each side, particularly the Girondins, did not vote consistently on the many issues debated, for instance. They were more a group of friends than a party in the modern sense.[60] I follow Leigh Whaley's example in arguing that divisions in the Convention developed gradually over a period of a few months until the trial of the king, and that these divisions were born from tactical and personal choices. Additionally, I also propose that ideological disagreements over the nature of the revolutionary trajectory were also an important consideration.[61] Laughter reveals a differing aspect to the political dynamics of factionalism in the Convention, going beyond the traditional uses of statistics and voting patterns. Those who laughed loudest in the Assembly and in the greatest numbers had the tightest grip on political supremacy.

I use the term 'Girondin' and 'moderate' interchangeably to denote those who were either friends or supporters of Brissot and Roland and the executive branch of government, or those who opposed the extremism of the radical left. The term 'Montagnard' denotes those who opposed the Gironde and sat on the left hand-side of the Convention. Importantly, I employ the term 'Jacobin' when referring to the opinions and actions of those who debated in the Jacobin club. On many occasions, their make-up is almost indistinguishable from the Montagnards (commonly called the Mountain), but the distinction is nevertheless important, as, increasingly, the Jacobin Club became ardently Robespierreist, while the Mountain had members that were antagonistic to Robespierre.

[58] For the personal dimension of politics, see M. Linton, 'Fatal Friendships: The Politics of Jacobin Friendship', *French Historical Studies*, 31, 1 (2008), 51-76.
[59] M. J. Sydenham, *The Girondins* (London: Athlone Press, 1961); A. Patrick, *The Men of the First French Republic: Political Alignments in the National Convention of 1792* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).
[60] G. Kates, *The* Cercle Social *the Girondins and the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 191, 270.
[61] L. Whaley, *Radicals,* IX.

Interpreting Laughter: The Problem of Emotions

Strategies of Laughter, as the name suggests, puts the focus on how laughter was used, rather than what laughter is. Through this conceptualisation we avoid the problem of attempting to define an emotion and asking if our idea of that emotion existed in the past. This has been a methodological criticism levelled at works looking to delve deeper into the history of emotions.[62] Lynn Hunt, for instance, has attempted to recover the political unconsciousness of the revolutionaries through an examination of Freudian conceptions of the family, while Barry Schapiro claims that, through a psychological betrayal by the 'father' (Louis XVI), the revolutionaries (the children) became radical after suffering a traumatic shock.[63] Rebecca Spang has complained that histories such as these have opened the door for others to all too easily revert to psychological factors, such as desire, as causal explanations without justification.[64]

A study of laughter brings its own set of problems because it is a product of emotion, rather than the emotion itself. Laughter is often the result of humour but is not indicative of it.[65] People can laugh at things they fear, or when they are anxious, just as much as at something they find funny. This thesis does not claim to understand the deeper emotional mechanisms of laughter and will not apply psychoanalytical theories or science. As Joanna Bourke points out 'there is no reason to privilege a turn-of-the-century psychoanalytical prototype over (for instance) mid nineteenth-century evolutionary psychology or late twentieth-century psycho-neurology.'[66] As useful and illuminating theories of laughter have been, notably from Bergson, Freud and Mary Douglas, this thesis does not overly concern itself with the nature and properties of laughter, but rather the effect that laughter had politically. Thus, we will not conclude that laughter was a result of subconscious emotion as so many have done, because such an interpretation can be a recycling of Freud's projection of tendentious jokes

[62] For the various proposals on how to study emotions see, J. Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns', *History and Theory*, 49 (2010), 237-265. See also, B. H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *The American Historical Review*, 107, 3 (2002), 821-845.

[63] L. Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); B. M. Shapiro, *Traumatic Politics: The Deputies and the King in the Early French Revolution* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University press, 2009).

[64] Spang, 'Paradigms and Paranoia', 127

[65] J. Bremner & H. Roodenburg, 'Introduction: Humour and History' in J. Bremner & H. Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 1997), 1.

[66] J. Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', *History Workshop Journal*, 55 (2003), 116.

which asserts the ability of laughter to discharge excess energy.[67] These arguments are as 'problematic as they are pervasive'.[68] Studying emotions as a strategy is beneficial because we are more assured in identifying what actors thought about emotion and how they used it than what they actually felt.[69] As Barbara Rosenwein has identified, emotions are better identified as 'social signals' in which a person purposefully displays an emotion hoping that others recognise it.[70] Sometimes deputies strove to hide signs of certain emotions; for instance, fear was heavily discouraged.[71] Emotions are 'expressions of power relations' and link the individual into the social community.[72] This is extremely relevant to the revolution, when patriots were mindful to how they would be perceived. The Convention had a system of feeling with its own 'modes of emotional expression' that were expected, encouraged or denounced. Emotions and their veracity were constantly assessed, contested and changing in this political theatre.[73]

The predication of laughter as a strategy places the spotlight onto the agency of the deputies themselves, because strategies, by their very definition, are the conscious means devised to achieve a specific goal by individuals or a collective movement. It is important to understand why the patriots laughed and what aims they hoped to achieve. In this way, the revolutionaries are treated here with the capacity to enact individual choices and speak their own mind. This is in contrast to François Furet's poststructuralist 'linguistic turn', which posits that the course of revolution depended on language and the patriots' ability to use it.[74] By the breakout of revolution, Furet declared, France was dominated by the language of Rousseau and a predilection with popular sovereignty and the general will. Terror was present in 1789 because of the unstable political culture and the nature of ideological discourse. In addition,

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[67] E. Oring, 'Political Jokes under Repressive Regimes', 219. Oring aims his criticisms at M. L. Townsend, *Forbidden Laughter: Popular Humor and the Limits of Repression in nineteenth-century Prussia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992) 109. For Freud's explanation of tendentious jokes, see S. Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (London: Penguin, 1991), 132-137.
[68] Oring, 'Political Jokes', 220.
[69] Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety', 121.
[70] Rosenwein, 'Passions in Context', 21. 'If an emotion is the standard response of a particular group in certain instances, the question should not be whether it betrays real feeling but rather why one norm obtains over another'.
[71] AP 66:449 (12 June 1793). For example, Thuriot said Brissot's attempted flight from Paris was proof of his guilt; others shouted "la peur!"
[72] J. Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety', 113.
[73] Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions', 842.
[74] J. R. Censer, 'Social Twists and Linguistic Turns', 140.

Robespierre's rise was explained by positioning him as Rousseau's most faithful mouthpiece.[75] In this framework language was created first, while the ideas, descriptions and meanings followed. Therefore, discourse was impervious to any social determinants (particularly experience and emotion); the ramifications were that, not only were the revolutionaries constrained and controlled by language, their actions were inevitable.[76] Work since has shown that 'there was no vacuum of power filled exclusively by the rhetoric of speaking for the people who had no real existence'.[77] Dissatisfied with both Marxist and revisionist schools denying individual agency to the actors of revolution, historians have sought to recover the lived experience of revolution and the choices the actors made.[78] Consequently, politics is not defined as the 'vocabulary of political philosophy', as it once was, but is viewed as the factional rivalry of revolution along with the machinations, dealings, and manoeuvrings that this entailed.[79] This thesis aims to match the 'disembodied discourses' to 'identifiable human actors' and place them into the context of the events of the revolution and clarify how they were used as a strategy and political weapon.[80]

[75] F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 31-35 for Rousseau. For Robespierre and his relation to terror, see 61: 'Robespierre is an immortal figure not because he reigned supreme over the Revolution for a few months, but because he was the mouthpiece of its purest and most tragic discourse.'
[76] J. M. Smith, 'Between *Discourse* and *Experience*: Agency and Ideas in the French Pre-Revolution', *History and Theory*, 40 (2001), 116.
[77] Hunt, 'The Experience of Revolution', 671.
[78] This trend began with the seminal work of T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a French Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
[79] Spang, 'Paradigms and Paranoia', 124.
[80] Spang, 'Paradigms and Paranoia', 135.

Chapter 1

Laughter, Progress, and the Regenerated Patriot

The first month of the Republic was the peak of laughter in the Convention. Between 20 September and 26 October 1792 there were seventy-two individual bursts – a number that had never been heard before and would never be matched again in the revolutionary assembly. Of these instances, forty-six can be considered to be non-aggressive, in the sense that they were a collective response to jokes, anecdotes and letters which did not aim to ridicule any members of the Convention. Instead, these bursts of laughter served to indicate the triumphs of the Republic and the positive transformative effect the declaration of a new era appeared to have on the French citizens and the revolutionary war. This strategy of laughter was part of a wider belief that the progress of time had begun, in terms of the moral regeneration of the people and the proliferation of republican values. Additionally, laughter was used as a strategy to repudiate the past values of the *ancien régime*, including the period immediately before the declaration of the Republic. The practice of laughter also appropriated new semiotic meanings onto old symbols. It is these two strategies that form the central focus of this chapter.

Ultimately, the amount of laughter categorised under the two strategies steadily decreased throughout the year. It will be argued that, in part, the laughter signalling the formation of a regenerated being was used as a strategy of pacification and self-promotion by the prominent Girondins in order to quell resistance and assert their own dominance. Those few who did not laugh along to the victories of the Republic and, instead, voiced their own concerns that joy was not conducive to good legislation, were designated as miserable outsiders who diverged from the opinion of the majority. However, the promotion of a happy exterior as the natural disposition of a liberated people was highly dependent on the fortunes of war and the general contentment of the Parisian *sans-culottes*. When unrest heightened and conditions for the people did not visibly improve, it was no longer a viable strategy.

The National Convention Assembles, Progress Commences

The deputies of the Convention encouraged the notion that the fall of the monarchy had allowed for the regeneration of the people. Letters from the provinces inundated

the Convention on this subject: "[p]uissent les commencements de la République française devenir l'époque du ralliement de tous les esprits et d'une régénération universelle dans la politique et la morale."[81] Regeneration, as Ozouf points out, became in the revolution 'a program without limits, at once physical, political, moral, and social, which aimed for nothing less than the creation of a "new people".'[82] The dominant interpretation of regeneration at this time was that the announcement of the Republic had achieved a purification of morals in society in which liberated citizens had become aware of their imprescriptible rights and were more superior to those still subdued by despotism. Ozouf calls this the 'language of miracle'.[83] In this conception, regeneration was seen as instant and natural, and progress inevitable; it was a by-product of the miraculous events of the revolution. Equally, there was no fear of degeneration, for the patriots had been overcome with 'enthusiasm and energy'. For this reason, there were few calls for moral education or instruction because the revolution had followed a 'natural course'.[84] The revolution could only propel forward, so laws of censorship and restriction were curtailed to foster liberty. While the people had been morally regenerated, laws passed by a galvanised political body were considered the means to regenerate the institutions of the old regime, as the minister of the Interior outlined in his opening speech to the Convention.[85]

The revolutionaries tasked themselves with the matter of communicating the new era to their audience. However, they resorted to old literary genres such as the pastoral to accomplish this task because these forms could be more readily understood in depicting a 'timeless, static world' than newer invented modes.[86] One of the strategies to communicate regeneration in a new era was through the embodiment of *gaieté*, a romantic discourse emphasising the lightness and sociability of the French spirit, and emblematic of the attempt to place semantic meanings on the body in the eighteenth-century.[87] The body was a discursive tool, and the Girondins

[81] AP 52:242 (30 September 1792). See also AP 52:609 (22 October), AP 52:653 (24 October).
[82] M. Ozouf, 'Regeneration' in F. Furet & M. Ozouf (eds.), *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution.* Translated from French by A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Princeton University Press, 1989), 781.
[83] Ozouf, 'Regeneration', 783.
[84] *ibid*
[85] AP 52:106 (23 September 1792). See also AP 52:245 (30 September) on the same theme.
[86] Perovic, *The Calendar in Revolutionary France*, 55.
[87] J. Huchette, 'La « Gaieté Française » ou la question du caractère nationale dans la définition du rire, de *L'Esprit des Lois* à *De la Littérature*', *Dix-Huitième siècle,* 32 (2000), 97. Richardot, *Le Rire*, 22.

encouraged laughter to indicate the regenerated society. Traditionally, *gaieté* was framed as a disposition exclusive to France, determined by the country's climate, history and political institutions, and was defined as the most natural way to laugh, born from no ill-feeling, unlike aristocratic satire and ridicule. As Anne Chamayou has outlined: '[p]ure de toute ambiguïté grâce à la ligne claire et immédiate de son discours ou de ses gestes, de toute suspicion soit de méchanceté soit d'amour-propre, la gaieté offre l'occasion d'un abandon sans risque aux formes de l'humeur joyeuse.'[88] In the *Encyclopédie*, the Chevalier de Jaucourt positioned *gaieté* as a utopian model natural to those who were free and happy with the political conditions of the nation: "la *gaieté* est le don le plus heureux de la nature. C'est la manière la plus agréable d'exister pour les autres & pour soi… Elle a souvent pour compagnes l'innocence & la liberté."[89] This view was similar to that purported by the Jesuit, Jean-Baptiste Blanchard, who wrote "c'est la gaieté, cette amiable effusion de l'âme, qui tient souvent lieu d'esprit dans la société, de compagne dans la solitude, & de remède dans les maladies." Blanchard equated *gaieté* to sober Christian morality, "pure & constante", which "doit avoir sa source dans le contentement de l'esprit & dans la tranquillité de la conscience."[90] *Gaieté* was an idealised laugh of joy that was agreeable, and formed a kind of social cohesion signifying acquiescence with the political regime.

Jocelyn Huchette presents the eighteenth-century as a crisis of self-representation in France, and the debates around national character were at the heart of this.[91] In the eighteenth-century, dissenters who challenged the hierarchy advocated that true *gaieté* had been lost and replaced by an artificial form of laughter encouraged by aristocrats to blind the people to its slavery. Future patriots posited that true *gaieté* could only be realised if social conditions were to change. John Moore, a British witness, observed that this characteristic was subdued: "the affability, the ease, and peculiar gaiety of the French nation left a very pleasing impression on my mind, and I

[88] Chamayou, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou le sujet de rire*, 103.
[89] "Gaieté" in D. Diderot & J. d'Alembert (eds.), *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers,* vol.7. University of Chicago: ARTF Encyclopédie, <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu>, 423.
[90] J.-B. Blanchard, *L'école des mœurs, ou Réflexions morales et historiques sur les maximes de la sagesse*, 1782 (Lyon: Bruyset, 1798), vol.3, 243.
[91] Huchette,' La « Gaieté Française »', 100. On the perceived properties exclusive to different European nations see Richardot, *Le Rire,* 129-137.

often regretted that a people so formed for enjoying and communicating happiness, should labour under the impression of an arbitrary government, and unequal laws."[92] Aristocratic culture represented a sinister and false world in which laughter functioned as the 'salt' of conversation to enliven social occasions, and was associated with the degenerate libertine.[93] Aristocrats were also seen to laugh down at their inferiors in an attempt to reassert the *status quo* in the face of ambitious social mobility. For an emerging and enlightened counter-culture, therefore, laughter took on pejorative connotations, with philosophers applying the argument noticeably espoused by Thomas Hobbes: laughter was the product of a feeling of superiority and functioned to humiliate those on the receiving end of it.[94] Anne Richardot has suggested that laughter was largely condemned in some quarters because, in an age in which everything was deconstructed, categorised and reasoned over, the practice seemed to defy simple explanation.[95] In consequence, some eighteenth-century philosophers attempted to purify laughter from its malignant capacity to humiliate, and prescribed the correct ways in which to laugh. As Richardot argues, towards the end of the century, 'de nombreux esprits s'attachent à réinventer une gaieté qui ne doive plus rien aux grimaces et aux codes tyranniques de la noblesse, une gaieté roturière et fraternelle, commune.'[96] In essence, *gaieté* was an idealised laugh that expressed happiness and liberty.

Antoine de Baecque has traced the development of *gaieté* from a mythic temperament to an important literary and political tool of humour; from the 1760s onwards, this form became a stylistic strategy of persuasion by a group of writers who extolled the virtues of laughter and its relation to monarchical constitutionalism. *Gaieté* was in its style a political strategy; its language was framed as more honest than aristocratic laughter, while a great deal lighter in tone than the severe writings of a patriot.[97] The Jesuit and revolutionary, Joseph-Antoine Cérrutti, developed his conception of *gaieté* from earlier theoretical works on Christian eutrapelia which

[92] J. Moore, *A Journal during a Residence in France from the beginning of August to the middle of December, 1792* (London: 1793), vol.1, 1-2.
[93] Richardot, *Le Rire*, 142.
[94] For Thomas Hobbes' denigration of laughter see T. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 125; See also R.E. Ewin, 'Hobbes on Laughter', *The Philosophical Quarterly,* 51, 202 (2001), 29-40.
[95] A. Richardot
[96] Richardot, *Le Rire,* 147.
[97] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 153-201.

designated laughter as a mixture of joy and modesty, and not excessively ridiculous.[98] *Gaieté* was most natural in a constitutional monarchy, because this condition was when a French subject was at his most natural: "[l]es Français sont toujours riants, toujours enjouées", wrote Cérrutti in early 1792. "La gaîté semble être leur élément, ils l'apportent ou la cherchent en tout lieu: elle préside à tous les repas, à toutes les fêtes, à tous les cercles."[99] Conversely, without a figurehead to take on the important responsibilities of legislation, republics were always severe, because the people had to concern themselves with stately matters. Equally, amid despotism, the people could never laugh freely as they were susceptible to the whims of the tyrant. The Céruttians adopted this position because they disproved of the language emanating from the Jacobin club which was grossly exaggerated – everything was either "merveilleux" or "terrible" – and, consequently, they supported the Feuillants in the early factional struggles of the revolution.[100] As well as an expression evoking a mythic past, *gaieté* was also a political language.

The claim that *gaieté* had returned to France was therefore not a strategy unique to the Girondins in 1792. It had been used throughout the revolutionary period as a strategy to designate the legitimacy of many different timelines in the revolutionary narrative. As Sanja Perovic has argued, the history of the revolution was constantly rewritten by the patriots themselves; from the storming of the Bastille to the *Fête de la Fédération*, the moment of regeneration was constantly modified and contested. These numerous timelines, according to Perovic, 'suggests that orientation in time was a challenge and that no one time line played the role of a historical absolute. After all, unless the Revolution had come to an end, how could its true beginnings be ascertained?'[101] In 1789, Desmoulins encouraged his fellow patriots to laugh as a mark of regeneration and civility.[102] Similarly, various journalists envisaged that the revolution would end with the emergence of the "citoyen idéal, incarnation de la

[98] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 160.
[99] J.-A.-J. Cérutti, *Discours sur la question proposée par l'Académie des Jeux floraux pour l'année 1761: La lumière des lettres n'a-t-elle pas plus fait contre la fureur des duels, que l'autorité des lois ? Seconde édition, augmentée d'une lettre sur les avantages et l'origine de la gaieté française* (Paris: Desenne, 1792), 47.
[100] Cérutti, *lettre sur les avantages,* 53. See also, de Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 191.
[101] Perovic, *The Calendar in* Revolutionary *France*, 87.
[102] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 252.

« gaieté patriotique ».”[103] In the early years of revolution, the patriots, according to Richardot, understood the value behind bursts of laughter and acclamations of joy in consolidating the new political edifice.[104] However, the king's betrayal in 1791 changed everything, according to Louvet, who wrote that “[l]es jours d'une révolution sérieuse étaient donc arrivés.”[105] Historians have reiterated this opinion in analyses of the language of the revolution. The Republic brought about a culture of severity in response to the crisis of war.[106] Yet, this assertion is misleading; the declaration of the Republic precipitated a renewed effort to end the revolution, and bursts of laughter were a strategy to communicate this. Taken as a seductive quality of persuasion coupled with its connection to French identity and character, *gaieté* was a potent strategic tool for the patriots in the Convention in terms of redevising memory and history to establish the Republic as the source of the definitive regeneration.

Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the pivotal personality in forming the republican executive government, was dismissive of *gaieté* conceived as a characteristic exclusive to the French, but he did retain emphasis on the political aspect relating to the regenerated being. Writing in 1788 on the moral character of the Quakers, Brissot designated *gaieté* as a characteristic common to all free men who had been unbound from their chains, regardless of nationality. “Nous avons, nous autres François, la réputation d'être gais, de rire de tout, de nous consoler d'un malheur par un Vaudeville; c'est folie”. *Gaieté* was an unequivocal manifestation of joy, which indicated that an individual was at ease with the conditions around him. It was not just applicable to the French, but all free people. “Le rire est le signe de la gaieté; la gaieté est la signe extérieur de sensations agréables, ou d'un état d'aise, ou d'opinions et d'idées qui réveillent ces sensations agréables.” Brissot stressed that true laughter only came from a *gai* disposition. “On ne doit être gai que lorsqu'on est heureux. Un homme gai, au milieu du malheur est un fou; un homme serein et imperturbable est sage. On ne doit être accablé par le malheur; mais il ne faut pas en rire: l'un est d'une âme faible,

[103] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 257.
[104] Richardot, *Le Rire*, 165.
[105] J.-B. Louvet, *Mémoires de Louvet de Couvrai sur la révolution française*, vol.1, 26.
[106] Peter France, for instance, has claimed that the first weeks of the Convention were defined from the outset by a 'high seriousness'. See P. France, 'Speakers and Audience: the First Days of the Convention' in J. Renwick (ed.), *Language and Rhetoric of the Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 54-57.

l'autre est un acte de démence ou de stupidité."[107] The implications were clear: when times were happy it was necessary to laugh; when misfortune struck, the man of virtue was to confront his travails with an inner calm.

For Brissot and his followers, there was no greater cause for optimism than the events of the summer of 1792. On 12 August, his newspaper, *le Patriote français,* announced that the people had been emancipated from the chains restraining the nation: the king had been suspended from his official functions; the court had been dispersed; and a national convention, to which the social body had pleaded for (according to the paper), was to be convoked. The paper towed what was to be a familiar Girondin stance on this particular upheaval, claiming that the events of August had released a manifestation of unbridled joy in Paris because "une plus complète révolution" had taken place that would right the wrongs of the past.[108] The newspaper revelled in its announcement that the nobles had been expunged from the state; the people were now the focal point of revolutionary representation and the representatives themselves were galvanised by a new sense of purpose and direction. The revolutionaries, reported the paper, felt they had finally triumphed after many false starts over despotism, and had returned France to a golden age of history: "Les Francais sont enfin des hommes, des FRANCS".[109]

The judgement that the French had returned to a utopian conception of the past was a common model to use when talking about the future. This is because the deputies 'needed to be able to visualise a possible future in order to give shape to their projections'.[110] Yet, this language was also a rhetorical strategy deployed to strengthen a political position in the present; the assertion of a particular memory added weight to political claims on power and was a means of challenge and contestation in order to win over the public.[111] To allay the fears and suspicion that the declaration of a Republic might bring, the deputies assured the public that the ideal societal conditions had been created for the path in which progress could be stimulated. While Brissot

[107] J.-P Brissot, *Nouveau voyage dans les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale, fait en 1788* (Paris: Buisson, 1791), vol.2, 180.
[108] *Le Patriote français*, no.1093 (12 August 1792).
[109] *Le Patriote français*, no.1139 (22 September).
[110] M. Linton, 'Ideas of the Future in the French Revolution', in M. Crook, W. Doyle & A. Forrest, *Enlightenment and Revolution: Essays in Honour of Norman Hampson* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 153.
[111] K. M. Baker, 'Memory and Practice: Politics and the Representation of the Past in Eighteenth-Century France', *Representations*, 11 (1985), 134-135.

may have suggested the Franks as a model of the future, this evocation of the past was rare in the revolution, primarily because it had been an approach frequently used by the noble *parlementaires* to appear concerned for the rights of the people against the escalating power of the monarchy.[112] Therefore, the evocation of the Franks among others – the *Chronique* insisted the French were Gauls, as did Prudhomme, and Gaulish culture was considered the epitome of French *moeurs* and joyousness according to some philosophers– suggests that the patriots were searching for a suitable historical model to appropriate to the revolution of August 1792 in order to differentiate it from 1789 or 1790 and cement the regime's legitimacy.[113] In a similar manner, emotions took on a vital importance in relation to representative politics in the Republic because deputies could attach to expressions a wide-range of meanings since they are a form of non-verbal social communication.[114] Consequently, both tears and laughter – expressed in the right context – were signs of the regenerated man in the Convention. Both expressions could be used to communicate either *sensibilité* or *gaieté*.

Refuting the Past

The key difference between laughter in the Republic and the early period of the revolution was that the patriots had seemingly triumphed over the other estates after September 1792. Previously in the revolution, the patriots had used caricatures to belittle the aristocrats, contrasting their own virtue with the immorality of these privileged orders.[115] This humour had a serious political point, argues Rapport, because it was a combative means to turn popular opinion against the nobles as well as a way to vent anger.[116] Furthermore, as Zeldin has argued, humour is a strategy to symbolically reorder the existing hierarchies and imagine a more ideal existence.[117] However, the Republic had actualised this restructuring of society; there was no need to imagine the misery of the nobles and the loss of their privileges when it was really happening. Instead, laughter operated to communicate the rules of Republican culture and consolidate the gains made.

[112] Linton, 'Ideas of the Future in the French Revolution', 156.
[113] Prudhomme (ed.), *Révolutions de Paris*, no.170 (29 September-6 October), 99. See also De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 180-181; Richardot, *Le Rire,* 186.
[114] Chamayou, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou le sujet de rire*, 69.
[115] A. de Baecque, 'Le Discours Anti-Noble (1787-1792) aux origines d'un slogan: « Le Peuple contre les Gros », *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine,* 36 (1989), 3-28.
[116] Rapport, 'Laughter as a Political Weapon', 245.
[117] Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity,* 68. See also, Rapport, 'Laughter as a Political Weapon', 248.

The patriots removed themselves from the recent past through laughter. Although the revolutionaries laughed in previous assemblies, in the Convention they looked back to the pre-August days with a smile at their naivety, before regeneration had occurred.[118] In particular, they laughed at the constraining customs and prerogatives they were forced to adhere to under monarchical rule.[119] For instance, a deputy was made the victim of a joke when he suggested the speaker must always have his hat on, in an attempt to reverse the aristocratic custom of removing headwear in the presence of the king. This proposal led another member to retort that the assembly had witnessed the return of Monsieur de Brézé in reference to the former master of ceremonies, inducing laughter.[120] The *Chronique de Paris* reported that the titles and privileges of Louis Capet had disappeared to the bursts of laughter from the nation because equality had been achieved.[121] The revolutionaries, in their new world, were determined not to be constrained by custom, ritual and titles which were considered an affront to their dignity.[122] The destruction of the symbols of the old regime afforded the deputies a chance to laugh. A proposition to erase Louis XVI's image from coins caused laughter, particularly since the wording by the deputy was ambiguous, carrying the implication he should be executed.[123] As Critchley has observed, jokes and laughter are 'anti-rites' – they attack symbols and make them lose their meaning.[124] For instance, the Imperial eagle, prised from the steeple of Namur, was placed on an open carriage and 'drawn in the most ostentatious manner' to the doors of the Convention, complete with a chain around its neck.[125] A deputy noted its extended wings and called it an "emblème insolent de la domination autrichienne." Subsequently, deputies took turns to ridicule the eagle, suggesting that its wings be clipped or the beak sawn off.[126]

[118] AP 56:171 (2 January 1793). The deputy Dartigoëyte told the Convention that he smiled at his naivety in 1789.
[119] In the Jacobin Club before the events of the summer, Antoine Sergent told his fellow patriots that he and his friends had laughed at attempts to force them to bow to aristocrats. See Aulard (ed.), *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 36 (22 June 1792).
[120] AP 52:202 (28 September).
[121] *La Chronique de Paris,* no.277 (25 September).
[122] Richardot, *Le Rire,* 83.
[123] AP 53:7 (27 October 1792) "Chambon: J'ai encore à vous parler de Louis XVI, mais c'est pour le supprimer. (*Rires et applaudissements.*)" For other examples of laughter from the destruction of the old symbols of power see 52:587 (20 October 1792); 54:8 (1 December 1792).
[124] S. Critchley, *On Humour*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.
[125] Moore, *A Journal during a Residence in France,* vol.2, 241.
[126] AP 54:7-8 (1 December).

"These witticisms, such as they are, afforded great entertainment" wrote Moore.[127] Telling jokes at the expense of nobles or kings was a strategy to ensure being heard in the Convention. It created a favourable impression, a chance for a deputy to prove his patriotism and to get noticed amid the noise of sessions.[128] But this humour also played a larger strategic role. As Richard Clay has shown, such an action demonstrates the government's efforts to assert ultimate control over 'iconoclastic action' and 'public space' at the expense of the Parisian radicals. The bursts of laughter at aristocratic symbols, sculptures and values were a method in transforming the 'meaning of royal signifiers' into a discursively derogatory sense, thereby establishing the legitimacy of the ministry while also serving as a 'resource' for agency in an attempt to limit the radicalisation of revolution.[129]

In his essay on political wit, Hans Speier argues that laughter is often aimed at groups or institutions that have a contested social position.[130] In this respect, laughter functioned to undermine the Church. Although the Enlightenment was diverse, the majority of philosophers – from Voltaire to Diderot – saw the Church as an obstacle to the progress of man.[131] An article in the *Chronique* outlined these sentiments, emphasising how, in the past century, the priests had subjugated the people by claiming they spoke for the irrefutable power of God. In the Republic, the people were no longer to be governed by priests as it had for centuries, but by their own will. [132] The article expressed hope that the Church would return to its glory days, when it was founded on fraternal spirit and charitable works rather than hierarchical despotism and hypocritical luxury.[133] Consequently, curbing the power of the Catholic Church and returning it to its former glory based on equality was a priority. Laughter in the Convention emerged from laws like the reduction of the pensions of non-juring priests and the riches seized from the higher clergy.[134] As de Baecque argues, anti-clerical

[127] Moore, *A Journal during a Residence in France,* vol.2, 242.
[128] Moore, *A Journal during a Residence in France,* vol.2, 68.
[129] Clay, *Iconoclasm in Revolutionary Paris*, 191-192.
[130] Speier, 'Wit and Politics', 1353.
[131] J. McMillan, 'Reason, Revolution and Religion: Grégoire and the Search for Reconciliation', in Crook et al (eds.), *Enlightenment and Revolution: Essays in Honour of Norman Hampson* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 134.
[132] *Chronique,* no.291 (9 October 1792).
[133] The same arguments can be seen in Linton, 'Ideas of the Future', 159.
[134] AP 52:180 (27 September); AP 52:684 (26 October).

laughter was a mark of the patriot; it was an expected means for a deputy to appear patriotic.[135]

The majority of *conventionnels* did not seek to eradicate the Church at this time, only its abuses. Some prominent deputies came from Christian backgrounds, while many more believed in providence or a deity of nature, as outlined in the writings of Rousseau. Rather, the aim was to sweep away "l'histoire ancienne" to create "l'histoire moderne".[136] The *Chronique* did not advocate the removal of priests from the Republic altogether. It urged clerics to adapt to the new conditions of France, to be full of civic pride, and have no master above the law. A priest could serve the people by teaching the values of the Republic. As Lakanal said to the Convention, the Republic must teach men how to be free rather than how to be a capuchin.[137] The *Patriote français* encouraged laughter towards the "cultes" as a means to naturally transform them. The new history was to be based on science rather than superstition; soon religion would be replaced by the cult of liberty.[138] While patriots had been regenerated instantaneously, institutions would take time to develop. Some deputies feared the ridicule of the Church might lead to the open persecution of its practitioners.[139] Grégoire foresaw as early as 1791 that the ridicule of priests could easily turn into the persecution of religion itself.[140]

According to the deputies, the Republic had engendered a reversal of fortune. The Convention laughed at stories exhibiting the misfortune clergymen, émigres and aristocrats were suffering at the loss of their privileges: "il y a ici une quantité de pauvres malheureux Français dans la plus grande misère, qui ont vendu tous leurs bijoux (*Rires.*)."[141] This was not represented as cruel laughter, however; moderates were more likely to argue that nobles were to be pitied for mourning a corrupt regime, since they were blind to the benefits of the revolution.[142] The deputy and journalist,

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[135] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 230-231.
[136] *Chronique de Paris,* no.291 (9 October).
[137] AP 52:610 (22 October 1792)
[138] *Le Patriote français*, no.1196 (18 November 1792).
[139] *Le Thermomètre du jour*, no.317 (12 November 1792);
[140] McMillan, 'Reason, Revolution and Religion', 149.
[141] AP 55:69 (15 December 1792). There are three other examples of misfortune experienced by aristocrats on this page.
[142] In his influential essay, the sixteenth-century philosopher Laurent Joubert explicitly denied that laughter could be an expression of pity. See G. de Rocher, *Rabelais' Laughters and Joubert's Traité des ris* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 28.

Dulaure, published a letter from Holland in his newspaper, with the correspondent urging free peoples to treat aristocrats with a worthy sentiment: "on les plaint, et *l'on commence à leur rire au nez*".[143] Humorous stories were circulated centring on the humiliation of the revolution's enemies. An anecdote telling of émigrés suffering beatings from German officers precipitated the laughter of sentiment at the naïveté of these poor souls. [144] These kinds of jokes also asserted the utopian nature of the Republic by contrasting it with the brutality of other regimes. The assertion that enemies should be pitied offered a sense of optimism, because there was still hope aristocrats and émigrés would see the error of their ways and acclimatise to the new conditions of liberty. Indeed, the *Patriote français* regaled an anecdote in which the sons and daughters of aristocrats had found worthwhile jobs in service of the *patrie.*[145] Historians have shown how 1789 was characterised by the sense of optimism that the nobles would embrace the reforms of revolution, only for this optimism to be replaced by a more scornful opinion.[146] This same belief in conciliation had returned with the onset of Republic, and jokes and laughter from the Girondins propagated this viewpoint.

During this time, the Prussian and Austrian troops were also treated with the laughter of pity because they had been misled by their masters. Their efforts to stem the tide of progress were seen as comically futile; laughter was purportedly filled with sensitivity because the revolutionaries felt sorry for them, but it was believed that the very presence of a free army would give a liberating awareness to the enemy rank-and-file who were suffering the conditions of slavery the French had once endured. Consequently, laughter in the Convention emerged from letters which highlighted the taste for regeneration among the enemy soldiers, such as the Austrian preference for French civility rather than the baton and stories of enemy soldiers who wanted to defect and fight for the Republic.[147] Jard-Panvillier described how some rebels in Châtillon had been persuaded to fight against the revolution because they had been told the bullets of patriots would not hurt them, leading to a burst of laughter. Jard-

[143] *Le Thermomètre du jour,* no.303 (29 October 1792).
[144] *Le Patriote français*, no.1143 (26 September); *Le Patriote français*, no.1149 (3 October).
[145] *Le Patriote français*, no.1163 (16 October).
[146] P. Higonnet, *Class Ideology and the Rights of Nobles during the French Revolution,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 69. De Baecque, 'Le Discours Anti-Noble (1787-1792)', 5.
[147] AP 52:394, 402 (8 October 1792).

Panvillier told this joke in order to persuade the Convention to grant the prisoners an amnesty because they were more worthy of *pitié* than severity. To this statement he was greeted with murmurs, proving there were limits to how far pity could go.[148]

Alternatively, the misfortunes suffered by French patriots in the war were a cause for tears. In this manner, tears in the Convention were a show of compassion and sentiment, and were inclusive as a communion between beings and nature, fostering a family feeling.[149] These 'tears of admiration' were the appropriate reaction from deputies in response to touching scenes, but they were also an expression of regret for those citizens who had sacrificed their lives for the *patrie* in order that others could be happy.[150] Crucially, the practice of crying, much like laughter, was done collectively, as opposed to the "passions individuelles", which were discouraged.[151] Tears could also be an expression of the regenerated man, because it was a show of joy. A deputation of Savoyards contrasted the mourners under despotism to those who wept under liberation. "Cette fête, vraiment triomphale, présentait un caractère tout nouveau. Celles qui suivaient les victoires des despotes étaient souillées par l'ignominie dont ils couvraient les vaincus, et par les larmes qu'ils leur faisaient répandre: la nôtre, bien différente, n'a vu couler que des larmes d'amour, de joie et de reconnaissance."[152] Much like laughter, tears were a strategy to promulgate the image of a regenerated man. Tears were spilt over the sacrifice of French citizens, rather than the similar misfortunes enemies experienced that were laughable.

Nevertheless, other patriots were not so forgiving and advocated the view that laughter was filled with scorn, or *mépris*, for the émigrés. Another letter to Dulaure focusing on the émigrés in London endorsed this view, carrying the perspective that the émigrés had betrayed France, had nothing to live for and might as well commit suicide: "[i]ls sont d'une lâchete à exciter le rire du mépris."[153] This type of laughter was an oppositional discourse against the conciliatory policy of the ministry. Prudhomme, for example, criticised the lack of strict measures against émigrés and aristocrats. "Observez donc que prêcher la tolérance a cette-heure-ci, c'est inviter déjà

[148] AP 52:291 (3 October 1792).
[149] Richardot, *Le Rire,* 73-74.
[150] AP 52:246 (30 September); AP 52:390 (8 October), AP 52:391. See also A. Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears: Sensibility and Sentimentality in France* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), 87.
[151] AP 53:408 (14 November).
[152] AP 52:501 (14 October).
[153] AP 55:317 (12 November).

au relâchement, à la désorganisation." The government was right to outline the distinctive character of the free man, he wrote. But they were neglecting to add to it, "la surveillance inexorable, la sévérité."[154] Prudhomme expressed an alternative attitude towards regeneration in which the whole past had to be undone. Those who feared progress had no place in the Republic; regeneration could only be achieved with painstaking effort in which a 'discouraging interval' between the present and the future had to be dealt with.[155] Therefore, policies such as proscription, exclusion and violence had to be legitimised against those with intolerable ideas. It is these two competing interpretations of regeneration and their relation to time that dominated the disputes regarding the revolution. At this early stage, the Girondins'conception of progress prevailed, but its success depended greatly on the war.

The Laughter of Regeneration

As well as a repudiation of the past, laughter was a strategy to indicate a better future. Indeed, when Lasource announced, "il faut donner un caractère distinctif à la révolution de 1792", laughter represented as *gaieté* – a characteristic of a regenerated man – was a method in which the deputies could convey this.[156] A key narrative in building legitimacy for the Republic was the claim happiness had been achieved. While the first half of the eighteenth-century extolled the pursuit of private, personal pleasure based on Epicurean ethics, as argued by Thomas Kavanagh, this soon gave way to conscious morality founded on the collective well-being and the happiness of all, reminiscent of Rousseau's *Social Contract*.[157] Almost all *conventionnels* were in agreement that their vocation was to helm the course of revolution towards the ultimate goal of happiness for all participants of virtuous citizenship.[158] "Lorsqu'on travaille pour le genre humain, la seule ambition est de faire son bonheur" announced Pétion.[159] Minister of the Interior, Roland, emphasised that happiness emanated from obedience to the law, which was the indestructible base of the Republic and the

[154] Prudhomme (ed.), *Révolutions de Paris*, no.168 (22-29 September).
[155] Ozouf, 'Regeneration', 784-785.
[156] AP 52:80 (22 September).
[157] T. M. Kavanagh, *Enlightened Pleasures: Eighteenth-Century France and the New Epicureanism* (Yale University Press, 2010), 212.
[158] K. M. Baker, 'Political Languages of the French Revolution', 639-640.
[159] AP 52:68 (21 September).

safeguard of liberty.[160] For this reason, the process of law making was cause for patriotic joy and enthusiasm, most notably with the abolishment of the monarchy that precipitated "acclamations de joie" and prolonged cries of "*Vive la nation!*" Enthusiasm, said Dubois-Crancé, created the decrees which had saved the Republic.[161] Witnessing these scenes, John Moore was sceptical of the process of legislation determined by fits of enthusiasm rather than reflection, contrasting it unfavourably to the British parliament, while the deputy Antoine-Clair Thibaudeau regretted that he and his compatriots, blinded by the joy of the moment, did not have the foresight to realise the effect these laws might have on France, pertinently the discontent that led to civil war.[162]

The patriots imagined a utopian future founded on a liberated Europe. The revolutionary war, therefore, was indelibly linked to the regenerated man. Buzot, in a speech against Robespierre, urged the deputies to excite and regenerate the people to war in order to make this body realise its "gaieté native".[163] The deputies heard from a dispatch that the people of the Savoy had been regenerated upon its liberation.[164] For Brissot, writing in January 1792, war would help stabilise the country, influence the destiny of Europe, and precipitate "le progrès de l'esprit public et le perfectionnement du caractère nationale".[165] Initially, this belief did not live up to reality in the early months of 1792. The disorganisation in the army, the lack of equipment, and the emigration of experienced officers ensured the war was a disaster.[166] One general, Théobold Dillon, was lynched, and the Brissotins attempted to allay criticism by denouncing a supposed undercover Austrian conspiratorial network within the government.[167] However, a dramatic reversal of fortune coincided with the declaration

[160] AP 52:154 (26 September). See also AP 52:637 (24 October). The President: "Citoyens, la Convention nationale applaudit à votre soumission à la loi."
[161] AP 53:509 (21 November). According to Mercier, it was only natural that the deputies should feel happy: "Jamais on n'opéra de si grandes choses avec de si faibles moyens; jamais un État ne se trouva dans des circonstances aussi difficiles; divisée dans l'intérieur, attaquée par l'Europe entière, déchirée par le fanatisme des factions, la Convention nationale a triomphé de tous ces obstacles réunis". See Mercier, *Nouveau Paris*, (Paris: 1797), vol.1, 92.
[162] Moore, *A Journal During a Residence in France*, vol.2, 47; A.-C. Thibaudeau, *Mémoires sur la Convention et le Directoire* (Paris: Ponthieu, 1824), vol.1, 9.
[163] AP 57:733 (28 January 1793).
[164] AP 52:587 (20 October 1792).
[165] *Le Patriote français*, no. 874 (1 January 1792).
[166] Whaley, *Radicals,* 56.
[167] S. Reynolds, *Marriage & Revolution: Monsieur & Madame Roland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 180.

of the Republic. After the victory at Valmy (which occurred on the same day as the opening of the Convention), Custine crossed the Rhine, Montesquiou conquered Savoy while Anselme advanced in Belgium. Finally, Dumouriez achieved a famous victory at Jemappes on 6 November. It was a propaganda coup for the Gironde and a validation for their ministry. They presented the war effort as a victory for humanity, liberty and happiness but it undoubtedly strengthened their position.[168]

This turnaround had an important effect on the revolutionaries. Not least, it precipitated a brief period in which the rhetoric of conspiracy and denunciation as a rhetorical strategy was largely nullified because enemies of the revolution were perceived as inconsequential and impotent. The fall of the monarchy, claimed the *Patriote français*, had eradicated the threat from the interior; now France could concentrate on its exterior enemies.[169] At this point, French interest in the well-being of the foreigner was at an all-time high. Filled with the vigour and fortitude the Republic had yielded, the deputies promised they would no longer be distracted from freeing the peoples of Europe.[170] In this respect, the revolutionaries presented themselves as heroes wherein they could save humanity from the injustices of despotism.[171]

It was clear the deputies did not preside over a republic based on the boundaries of the French territory. Rather, it was decreed that the Republic was founded on the principles of the people and built on their unity of spirit, one and indivisible.[172] It was with this that the *conventionnels* justified their imperialistic ambitions. Delacroix, addressing a deputation from the Savoy, announced that they would share in the *mœurs* already experienced by the French. "Maintenant que vous êtes libres comme nous, vous serez nos frères et nos amis. Vous partagerez nos sentiments: l'amour de la liberté, la haine des rois, la paix aux peuples, la guerre aux tyrans."[173] With these sentiments also came *gaieté* – not exclusive to the French, but an expressive hallmark of a liberated people. Lasource praised the ardour of the generals who had spread it

[168] AP 52:313 (4 October 1792). See speech by Vergniaud.
[169] *Le Patriote français*, no.1151 (4 October 1792). "L'expérience le prouve: jusqu'au 10 août, le succès a toujours couronné nos armes. La raison en est manifeste, c'est qu'à présent nous n'avons pas plus à combattre que les ennemis extérieurs."
[170] AP 52:162-163 (26 September).
[171] L. Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (University of California Press, 1992), 79.
[172] AP 52:143 (25 September).
[173] AP 52:501 (14 October).

among their troops, concluding, "[j]amais guerre ne s'est faite avec plus de gaîté et d'activité que celui-ci."[174] Generals sent back dispatches to the Convention, confirming the progress of Europe; republican armies were regenerating those who had been oppressed by despotism.[175] General Miranda, for instance, wrote that the French had entered Savoy "au milieu des acclamations de tous les habitants, qui, dans leur joie, appelait *la liberté,* et bénissaient les Français porteurs de ce bonheur. (*Applaudissements.*)" Furthermore, the French troops had behaved in a manner appropriate to a liberated citizen. "Nos troupes se sont comportées, tant dans les marches que dans les passages difficiles des rivières, et l'attaque des ennemis, avec une bravoure, une constance, une subordination et une gaieté qui caractérisent de vrais républicaines. (*Applaudissements.*)"[176]

It was 19 November 1792, the day the Convention decreed to aid peoples who wished to recover their liberty, which marked the apogee of political cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism. Afterwards, the myth of *gaieté* was increasingly difficult to justify when victory became rare. The Girondin, Jean Debry, moved to calm the fears of the Convention in December after counterrevolutionary forces had made ground against the French. "Non, les scènes affreuses dont tu as été le témoin et souvent l'objet, n'ont point changé ton antique caractère; nos vœux sont te le voir reprendre. La gaieté française est sœur de la liberté; toutes deux doivent faire fleurir cette terre hospitalière qui redeviendra."[177] When the war went badly and when those 'liberated' in Europe rejected the revolution, the language of *gaieté* largely disappeared, to be replaced by a more xenophobic attitude.[178] It was then that the second type of regeneration came to the fore.

As well as sentimental, the laughter of the regenerated citizen was also innocent. The Republic, positioned as the first year of liberty, was the moment according to the deputies in which time passed linearly rather than in a cyclical fashion.[179] As this was a new era, the revolutionaries considered the younger generations to be happier and

[174] AP 52:316 (4 October).
[175] *Le Patriote français*, no.1155 (9 October). See also *Le Thermomètre du jour*, no.277 (3 October), which details the march into Chambéry.
[176] AP 55:69 (15 December 1792).
[177] AP 55:382 (24 December).
[178] M. Rapport, *Nationality and citizenship in revolutionary France: the treatment of foreigners 1789-1799* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 5-6.
[179] This decision was not passed without debate, as deputies argued for other events in the recent history of the revolution to be the founding moment of liberty. See AP 52:80-82 (22 September).

naturally more virtuous because they had never known despotism. By extension, children were assumed to be more capable of making good laws when they were older, filled as they were with patriotism. As one deputy of the Convention noted, the children of the Republic would understand "plus facilement les principes de notre politique nouvelle, et nos quatre années de révolution ont plus fait, pour l'éducation de notre jeunesse, que n'auraient fait dix années d'étude sous le régime ancien."[180] Public education was one means to ensure progress; the school was the 'appointed place' to create happy and useful citizens 'promised by regeneration'.[181] Rabaut-Saint-Etienne stressed that the patriots must inculcate a sense of *gaieté*, liberty and nature into public instruction so that children would become quintessential republicans.[182] Republican humour reflected the belief that virtue was strongest in children, and was based in contrasting a figure of important social status with the light, playfulness of a child who understood the values of liberty better than a man of high office. For example, a deputy told the Convention that a seven year-old boy had presented to his fellow citizens the French flag; the population quickly bowed before him. The deputies laughed at this example of regeneration.[183] This story reflects the belief of the Girondins that school was necessary but not sufficient enough on its own to create the patriots of the future. Regeneration was to be spontaneous, free from coercion and political authority, and a responsibility of the public to behave that way itself – though this was inevitable because the conditions of the Republic had allowed it to be so.[184]

The focus on youth as a utopian model for the future harkened to a mythic golden age based on pastoralism.[185] This was a developing trend in the eighteenth-century. The first chapters of the *Confessions*, for example, are marked by Rousseau's idyllic early years, in which he was surrounded by nature, leading him to laugh often.[186] Laughter, childlike and innocent, was free from accusations of vindictiveness. Rousseau's childhood was paradise because it followed a 'discourse of happiness'; the

[180] AP 52:404 (8 October).
[181] Ozouf, 'Regeneration', 787.
[182] AP 55:134 (18 December)
[183] AP 55:78 (16 December).
[184] Ozouf, 'Regeneration', 786.
[185] Linton, 'Ideas of the Future' 163.
[186] See in particular the incident with Madame Clot. Rousseau, *Les Confessions, Préface de J.-B Pontalis* (Gallimard, 1959) 39. See also, Brissot, *Mémoires,* 6, "On est toujours meilleur quand on est près de la nature, quand on est sans cesse en présence du ciel et de ses grands phénomènes".

community benefited from living together while in harmony with the natural world.[187] Caraccioli, another eighteenth-century writer concerned with *gaieté,* perpetuated this image. “Les gens de la campagne semblent nés pour avoir la gaieté en propre”, he wrote, partly to show how the corruption of the city was detrimental to morality in contrast to the open-air and spacious environment of a village fete, in which *gaieté* can flourish.[188] Furthermore, pastoral tales in the revolution were underpinned by a desire for unity, offering readers ‘models of behaviour appropriate to the new social and political circumstances’.[189] With the emphasis on community, jubilation and fraternity, the village celebration resembled more a large family sharing the same sense of fraternity rather than a regimented spectacle marked by artifice.[190]

Clerics were also encouraged to build their familial and societal ties because a celibate man was an unnatural being enclosed from the world around him: “Quand on tient à la femme, à ses enfants, à ses parents, à son domaine, on tient à son pays, puis à son propriété, puis à son sûreté, puis aux lois qui les protegent.”[191] There was laughter in the Convention when the deputy and bishop of Evreux, Robert Lindet, confirmed his marriage. Such acts strengthened the public spirit, said Manuel.[192] For the Abbé Grégoire, the political body was akin to a family, composed of all peoples bound into a common social tie.[193] Consequently, the birth of patriots was also a cause for celebration and laughter, such as when a deputy, immediately after Lindet’s announcement, declared his wife had given birth.[194] The Republic had allowed civic virtue, common empathy and joy to reign, and so the deputies laughed.

The *Chronique* was clear that the language of *gaieté* was undoubtedly propaganda. Yet it was also necessary as a defence against the hatred of kings, to propagate republican principles and to convince the people of their rights.[195] Beyond this simple reasoning, however, there were other motives to the affirmations of joy. Bursts of collective laughter were a strategy to indicate an endorsement of satisfaction with the

[187] P. France, *Rousseau: “Confessions”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 76-78.
[188] L.-A. Caraccioli, *De la Gaieté* (Frankfort & Paris: Gille-Cœur, 1762), 32.
[189] K. Astbury, ‘*Une chaumière et un coeur simple*: Pastoral Fiction and the Art of Persuasion 1790-1792’, *Nottingham French Studies*, 45, 1 (2006), 13-15.
[190] Richardot, *Le Rire*, 160.
[191] *Chronique de Paris,* no.292 (10 October).
[192] AP 53:575 (24 November).
[193] AP 53:610 (27 November).
[194] AP 53:575 (24 November).
[195] *Chronique de Paris*, no.304 (24 October).

current political conditions. This was a central tenet of *gaieté*: the people were at peace with the body politic and themselves. As Armand-Gaston Camus declared, "[i]l est temps que la loi reprenne son empire, il est temps que les mouvements de la Révolution finissent et que les citoyens jouissent de tous les avantages qu'elle doit assurer".[196] For the Girondins, the turbulent disturbances which had been necessary to bring about the revolution had to be ended for the people to enjoy its gains. Brissot's newspaper outlined that it was crucial to destroy the instruments that had made the revolution possible – specifically the criminal tribunal.[197] Lasource encouraged the people to relinquish their vile emotions which had been a necessary evil in precipitating the fall of tyrants. The law was now the expression of the public will.[198] Uprisings and riots were declared to be illegal. Protestors were described as being in a minority and possessing "agitations convulsives".[199] These protests undermined the Girondins' assertion that regeneration had been a miraculous event in which citizens were instantly imbued with good morals. Consequently, they argued that some citizens had not experienced the same regeneration as others, but this would be rectified in time. Yet, even this was detrimental to the ministry because the allowance that more time was needed to regenerate those not at the height of patriotic feeling was decidedly not the 'time of the miraculous'.[200]

Letters to the Convention: Truth without the Facts

The eighteenth-century saw a great movement of cultural change, not least in literature which emerged as an increasing influence in the political sphere because it had an autonomy of its own, 'naturalizing a reigning ideology and at other times imagining new social identities or even bringing them into existence.'[201] Letters were a critical component in allowing writers to create an identity for their own ambitions. As Dena Goodman argues, letter-writing is 'dialogue with reflection', meaning the writer is aware that such a practice involves a correspondence with other autonomous beings; consequently, that person becomes aware of their own individuality and

[196] AP 52:392 (8 October 1792).
[197] *Le Patriote français*, no.1207 (30 November).
[198] AP 52:652 (24 October). In response to this report, Marat shouted "C'est indécent!"
[199] AP 53:199. Speech from Roland. See also AP 53:14, speech from Gensonné.
[200] Ozouf, 'Regeneration', 789.
[201] S. Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth-Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 7.

autonomy through that conversation.[202] The boundaries of privacy often dissolved when producing letters; men of the eighteenth-century realised they could generate publicity for ideas through the circulation of letters which appeared to divulge their most private thoughts on a public forum, giving their arguments more weight.[203] This technique carried itself into the revolution. Private, passionate accounts were laid bare for all to digest, so the author could reveal his honest intentions and appear more transparent.[204]

Of the seventy-two bursts of laughter in the first month of the Convention, forty-three (61%) emerged from the details within letters sent from the provinces and the front to the assembly. The reading of letters formed an important facet in the day-to-day experience of the debates and became central to the democratic process. It was a communicative method in which deputies could be seen to be discussing and taking action on the important issues of the day for the sake of transparency. The *Patriote français* emphasised that the letters read in the Convention were not "vains compliments que le peuple fait à ses mandataires" but an expression of the sovereign will which found no imitators in the world.[205] However, Brissot's followers had good reason to extoll this democratic process. In the early stage of the Republic, the Girondins had filled the Committee of Petitions and Correspondence with their own men. Because of this control, the letters that found their way to the speaker's rostrum reflected the values, goals and political aims that the Gironde considered necessary to communicate and publicise, to the chagrin of others.[206]

Robespierre immediately recognised the importance of the Committee, and attacked the Gironde for using it to control the Convention. It was an immensely dangerous institution, reported his newspaper, because it corrupted the public spirit.[207] Robespierre was familiar with this strategy – he had also denounced Brissot in early 1792 when the latter had taken control of its Correspondence Committee in an effort

[202] D. Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 2-3.
[203] D. Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 138.
[204] Higonnet, *Goodness Beyond Virtue,* 306.
[205] *Le Patriote français*, no.1150 (3 October).
[206] For more on this committee, see M. B. Castellà i Pujols, 'Métamorphises d'un comité: le Comité des pétitions et de correspondance sous la Convention nationale*', La Révolution française*, 3 (2012), 2-28.
[207] M. Robespierre, *Œuvres de Maximilien Robespierre* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910-1967), vol.5, 210.

to monopolise propaganda associated with the revolutionary war.[208] Robespierre had good reason to be wary, particularly since the Gironde made efforts to ban the reading of letters which had not been vetted by the Committee first. One deputy's attempt to read out a letter addressed to him personally, detailing the Austrians ongoing siege of Montmédy, was quickly silenced because he was offering news that challenged the conventional narrative of the *gaieté* in which French troops liberated Europe.[209]

The generals were keen to emphasise their victories in their letters, which were characterised by patriotic bravado and miraculous scenes. For instance, Anselme wrote that he would inevitibly be successful in his campaign because the enemy were fleeing to the highest mountains to avoid the virtuous French.[210] This type of language more often than not drew laughter. Letters also emphasised the terror the French army had inspired in the enemy. Cannons had been abandoned without being spiked; such was the haste in which the enemy had fled, wrote Anselme: "c'est une terreur panique dont je profite (*Rires et applaudissements*)".[211] In contrast, the regenerated defenders of France exhibited the opposite behaviour, as exemplified by the *Chronique's* description of citizens bombarded in Lille. "Tel est le premier effet des sentiments républicains, qu'on ne craint plus la mort, & qu'on rit de ses traits impuissants."[212]

While the destruction of enemies was cause for celebration, so too was the way French citizens handled the adversities of war. One of the earliest to document this was a letter sent by a council member of the besieged city of Thionville, and read by Merlin de Thionville in the Convention. Merlin declared that Thionville had suffered a bombardment of 11,000 bombs over a period of two hours and that many houses had been set ablaze. As with many of the details contained in letters, this was probably a gross exaggeration; the bombardment, according to the *Chronique*, actually lasted fifteen minutes with only three bombs launched.[213] Far from being crippled by terror, the besieged reacted with *gaieté*, singing the *ça ira* loud enough for the Prussians to hear while dancing around the liberty tree. Each citizen of the city hoped that their

[208] Whaley, *Radicals,* 51.
[209] AP 52:185 (27 September).
[210] AP 52:380 (7 October).
[211] AP 52:380-381. For other bursts of laughter concerning the fear experienced by the enemies of the Republic, see AP 52:402-403, 467 (12 October 1792), 558 (17 October 1792) among others.
[212] *Chronique de Paris*, no.281 (29 September).
[213] *Ibid*

own properties would be hit by the bombardment because of the honour the misfortune would bring. “On n’a jamais vu une ville assiégée, aussi tranquille et aussi gaie” said Merlin.[214]

The pragmatic importance of this letter was in its idealistic portrayal of republican citizenship and the espousal of patriotic sentiment. The people loved their country to the degree that they were ready to sacrifice themselves for the public good. These letters served as a pedagogical tool to make citizens aware of how patriotism, a political discourse which espoused an ‘emotional and moral commitment to the good of the community’, should be expressed. [215] Indeed, the moral qualities and actions gleaned from the siege of Thionville would be celebrated in the theatre on 14 June 1793, wherein the spontaneous revolutionary enthusiasm exhibited in this letter was transferred to the theatre and encouraged among the populace.[216] Enthusiasm was seen as the ‘motor’ for spreading revolutionary values through a process of ‘dynamic momentum’.[217] It was persuasion through unbridled emotion with the belief the optimistic mood could catch on, especially in Europe. Through the medium of letters, the deputies could promote these fabulous occurrences of patriotism and virtue to allay fears.[218] Letters were also a means for Generals and deputies to legitimise their positions by ‘proving’ through a transparent medium that their actions had regenerated Europe. These stories of French troops and liberated citizens sharing in joy were delivered to the Convention in the style of *gaieté*. As de Baecque argues, *gaieté* was also a style of language that aimed to persuade because it created imagined and amusing scenarios that functioned as a pedagogical tool to teach the people on how to behave.[219] Essentially, it was a strategy to induce conformity and obedience through the perpetuation of a mythic present.

The feats of citizens were received with laughter as a strategy to indicate the progress of man. Letters written by the enemy to the Convention were also received with laughter, this time indicating values and institutions that belonged to the past.

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[214] AP 52: 184 (29 September 1792).
[215] P. R. Campbell, ‘The Politics of Patriotism in France (1770-1788)’, *French History*, 24, 4 (2010), 553.
[216] M. Darlow, *Staging the French Revolution: Cultural Politics and the Paris Opéra 1789-1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 337-344.
[217] Darlow, *Staging* the French Revolution, 343.
[218] For other examples of the defiance of French citizens precipitating laughter see AP 52:394 (8 October 1792).
[219] De Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, 194.

On the 1 October the negotiations between Dumouriez and the Duke of Brunswick were read aloud. Brunswick promised to not interfere with the government of France as long as royal dignity – a contradiction in terms as one deputy noted – was re-established.[220] The reactions of the deputies bore similarity to the rhetoric in the famous Brunswick Manifesto of July 1792; a declaration intended to scare France into submission but was actually received with laughter and general apathy.[221] The *Patriote français* iterated that the deputies laughed at these "inepties" because the enemy was so naïve to think the deputies would fall for such duplicitous overtures.[222]

Correspondence that had been seized afforded the Convention the chance to laugh. This was because the sentiments expressed by diplomats, monarchs and enemy generals seemed to confirm their delusions and malignant character. The best received correspondence in terms of laughter was a series of letters between Choiseul-Gouffier, French diplomat of the old regime based in the Ottoman Empire, and the *ci-devant* king's brothers. Adding to the amusement was the date of the correspondence – the 10 August. The significance of this was lost on Choiseul-Gouffier. To bursts of laughter, his letter was filled with suggestions as to how the émigrés could take back their homeland; the moment within the letter when Choiseul-Gouffier confirmed he was working for the émigrés was met with laughter and cries of "*Ah! Ah!*"[223] Choiseul-Gouffier also regaled his superiors on his efforts to repulse the citizen Semonville, who had appeared at the Ottoman court with documentation from the Republican government claiming to be the new ambassador. "L'existence de M. Semoville est dangereuse dans tout pays, car il est Jacobin (*Rires prolongés*)."[224] Hérault de Séchelles, the secretary appointed to read the letters, announced that the calumny contained in them was further proof that the court had always conspired against the revolution and had never supported it (even those 500 leagues away were involved). But the joke was on the conspirators because nothing could stop the "marche

[220] AP 52:272 (1 October 1792). This dispatch caused two bursts of laughter. For other examples of laughter towards these types of letters see 52: 315 (4 October 1792), which has two bursts of laughter
[221] E. Cross, 'The Myth of the Foreign Enemy? The Brunswick Manifesto and the Radicalization of the French Revolution, *French History*, 25, 2 (2011), 192.
[222] *Le Patriote français,* no.1149 (2 October 1792). See also AP 53:495 (20 November 1792) for an offer of truce from the Austrians that was also received with laughter.
[223] See AP 52:614. If the letters were to be believed, Choiseul-Gouffier was negotiating with the Austrian diplomat, Knobelsdorf, with the hope of sending a combined force of French and Austrian troops to Paris to bring the Jacobins to heel. There were *Rires prolongés* when this conspiracy was unveiled (52:615).
[224] AP 52:616.

éternelle et invariable" of liberty.[225] The amusement of the deputies emerged from listening to the aristocrats cope without the power they had become accustomed to and their presumption that they would soon destroy the patriots. If Choiseul-Gouffier was waiting for the émigrés to produce a brilliant victory against the patriots then "il attendra longtemps".[226]

There were plenty of other examples of this kind that garnered laughter: Louis-Stanislas-Xavier assured other émigrés they would be rewarded handsomely when they victoriously march back to Paris;[227] the diplomat Vibraye wrote to the aforementioned Stanislas to declare that he held no authority without the king;[228] and there were two bursts of laughter when Prince Frederick-Eugene of Wurttemberg wrote to inform the Prussian command he was retreating.[229] Commonly, these letters contained the themes of loss and anger among the antagonists, as they realised they could not reverse the revolution. Strategically, these letters were read in the Convention as a means to escape the 'rigorous prison of the plausible narrator'; that is, the deputies used these letters to perpetuate a certain image of regeneration and progress. As English Sholwater affirms, the 'lost and intercepted letter' was a credible means of discovering the inner thoughts of others. It was a means of dramatic revelation, but also a mode which could accommodate satire.[230] While this provided entertainment, the message was also pedagogical. "Ces lettres prouvent que la barbarie, l'immoralité, l'impudicité, sont encore plus le partage des princes que de toute autre class d'hommes" reported the *Patriote français*.[231] Letters could legitimise the deputies and their government in a convincing manner. In contrast to the citizens in Thionville, who enjoyed working for the greater good, the perfidious men of the court put their personal interests before the will of the collective. Such correspondence was read to reveal their malevolent character and absence of civic virtue, as Dulaure assured his readers:

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[225] AP 52:614 (22 October).
[226] *Le Patriote français*, no.1170 (23 October).
[227] AP 52:317 (4 October).
[228] AP 52:283 (2 October).
[229] AP 52:641 (24 October). See also AP 52:315 (4 October 1792) for two bursts of laughter in similar vein; 53:364 (11 November 1792), for laughter towards Lafayette's misfortune and 54:9 (1 December 1792) laughter towards a discovered spy network and 54:368 (5 December 1792) from an old letter by Laporte on how to save the king which precipitated three bursts of laughter.
[230] E. Showalter, *The Evolution of the French Novel, 1611-1782* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972), 186.
[231] *Le Patriote français*, no.1169 (22 October 1792).

> C'est dans leur correspondance, dit-on, que l'on connait les *grands hommes*. Si ce proverbe est vrai, rien n'est moins grands que les fiers hommes de la France, rien n'est plus petit que leurs projets, rien n'est n'vrai que leur détresse. C'est dans les effusions de l'amitié, qu'ils se confient mutuellement leur faiblesse dans les effusions de l'amitié et leur désespoir.[232]

Authenticity, or rather the appearance of authenticity, was a priority for the revolutionaries. Historians have recently striven to show how theories of performance from the theatre, in particular, the concept of *vraisemblance,* transferred to the political stage. But this strategy for conveying truth can also be found in the developments in literature. *Vraisemblance* was the opposite of realism: while both techniques aimed to persuade the reader, the former did this through allegory in which the use of highly improbable stories was 'justified in the name of an abstract moral truth.'[233] While the content of letters was *vraisemblable,* the form of the letter itself was realist. Robert Darnton has shown that Rousseau played no small part in revolutionising how people read books in the eighteenth-century; he wished for readers to become dedicated to the books they read and absorb them into life. Rousseau was innovative: he broke the fourth wall by directly addressing the reader in the *Confessions*. He also developed a style of verisimilitude that can be clearly seen in his epistolary novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, wherein the letters were presented in such a way that people actually wondered if the story was true.[234] Theodore Zeldin explains this phenomenon: '[a]s the yearning for more intimate conversation grew, and the obsession with sincerity became more absolute, only letters seemed an adequate refuge for the pondered exchange of private thought.'[235] Armed with the weapon of sincerity, Rousseau instructed his readers on how to read his books. 'He guided them into the texts, oriented them by his rhetoric, and made them play a certain role'.[236]

Moralist literature required the reader to extract the principled message from the fiction. In the revolution, political propaganda often took the form of fiction because it was the 'most effective method of persuasion'.[237] Political testimonies, while classed

[232] *Le Thermomètre du jour*, 301 (27 October 1792).
[233] Sholwater, *Evolution of the French Novel, 1611-1782*, 47.
[234] Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre,* 229-252.
[235] Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity*, 37.
[236] Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre,* 228
[237] M. C. Cook, 'Politics in the fiction of the Revolution, 1789-1794,' *Studies of Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century*, 201 (1982), 237-366.

as non-fiction, also included flights of fancy, and the real and fictional blurred because of the writer's burning desire to persuade the reader. The letters which precipitated so many reactions (laughter was the most common, but there were also tears and movements of horror) were often embellished, as William Murray has made clear, when describing the strategies of journalists: 'If information was in short supply, or if a journalist wanted to win a point regardless of the truth, there was always the expedient of inventing letters.'[238] Charles Villette, writing in the *Chronique*, described the effect letters could have on the *Conventionnels* if they included added flourish. "Les détails font plaisir, ils ajoutent à l'authenticité des évènements."[239] Merlin de Douai, expressed this viewpoint after he had read a letter "[s]i le style de cette dernière lettre n'est pas infiniment correct, les sentiments qu'elle exprime sont dignes des vrais amis de la liberté".[240] Truth was not conveyed through accuracy, but through documenting the actions, morals and behaviour that were applicable to those who had not been regenerated and those who had in the Girondins' conception of regeneration. Indeed, letters in Republican culture were often rejected on the basis of their tone rather than their content.[241]

Additionally, imagining the plots of enemies in which real public figures were situated in fictitious, humiliating situations precipitated laughter, thereby placing the revolutionaries in a position of superiority – a characteristic of the laughter of regeneration.[242] The Minister of War, Lebrun, for example, claimed to have intercepted a letter from a Prussian soldier to the Minister Bischoffverder in which the soldier claimed that morale was low because the Prussians were displeased that the king had them march against a free people.[243] Enemies of the revolution were rendered as comedic figures through these readings. There were other examples of this invention through letters: Isnard, for example, asked to read a letter he had written in a burst of patriotic enthusiasm to the French citizens regarding the

[238] W. J. Murray, *The Right-Wing Press in the French Revolution: 1789-92* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Dover: Boydell Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1986), 73.
[239] *Chronique*, no.281 (29 September 1792).
[240] AP 52:187 (28 September).
[241] See, Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 353 (30 September). "Le ton pusillanime de cet écrit en fait soupçonner l'authenticité."
[242] For these ideas, see O. Elyada, 'La mise au pilori de l'abbé Maury: imaginaire comique et mythe de l'antihéros pendant la Révolution française', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 341 (2005), 5.
[243] AP 52:471 (12 October).

reorganisation of the army - a request which he was granted.[244] The strategy of conveying political ideas through a letter was thought to carry greater authority than communicating them through normal means; deputies could assure their audience that revolutionary arguments carried more weight because they had been written spontaneously in a moment of revolutionary fervour.

As the Republic progressed and a concerted block emerged in the Convention to oppose the Gironde, more deputies questioned this strategy. Danton's close friend, Osselin, criticised a letter which had been sent to the Convention to convince the *conventionnels* of the peace and obedience in France, complaining it was read to give more "authenticité à l'information qu'elle renferme."[245] Marc-Antoine Jullien called the tactic an "etiquette servile."[246] The first month of the Convention was a period in which the Girondins were in a position to claim the truth for themselves. As the months went by, the monopoly of communication and the way in which letters were presented would be challenged.

Growing Discontent

Restif de la Bretonne, in *Les Nuits des Paris*, wrote that just and moral societies were inclined towards gravity. This did not make the population sad. On the contrary, it made citizens happier: "l'on n'aneantira pas ses plaisirs, on en changera le genre." The world was a fundamentally more virtuous place without laughter because its pleasures "sont presque toujours fondés sur la méchanceté".[247] A serious nation, Restif wrote, would be able to occupy itself with more worthy pursuits. Certain members followed this line of thought; they felt that the laughter in the Convention was unseemly and undignified.

Satisfied with the victories of the republic, not many deputies questioned the *gaieté* of the first few days in the Convention.[248] Even Robespierre conceded that the situation seemed "assez heureuse", although he warned of apathy and urged for severity. Very quickly, however, the strategies of laughter, and the contrived manner

[244] AP 59:122 (28 February 1793).
[245] AP 55:48-49 (14 December 1792).
[246] Reported in *Le Patriote français*, no.1148 (1 October).
[247] Restif de la Bretonne, *Les nuits de Paris, ou Le spectateur nocturne* (Londres, 1788-1794), vol.6, 1307.
[248] See 52:74. Only Bazire had opposed the laughter and applause when the monarchy was abolished. He, instead, pleaded for a solemn discussion.

in which they were precipitated, were met with concern and suspicion among prominent figures of the left-wing. Desmoulins, in the prospectus for his paper *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, alerted his readers that, as a deputy, he had been tasked to give France the constitution it deserved. This meant the foregoing of the relaxed and frivolous style of his previous papers. Just like Rousseau, who was once young and jocular but woke up one day to renounce worldly pleasures, Desmoulins stressed the time was right to become serious. Consequently, he issued a disclaimer on the style to expect: "si le lecteur ne retrouvait pas la gaieté et l'imagination qui l'a attaché quelquefois aux *Révolutions de Brabant* [Desmoulins' previous paper], car l'esprit et cette fleur d'imagination passé comme toutes les autres, on est bien sûr de retrouver au moins, dans cette feuille, la franchise et *l'impartialité*, beau mot que n'a pu déshonorer le club des impartiaux".[249] As far as Desmoulins was concerned, *gaieté* was a style of language which hid intrigue – he confessed he had nearly been taken in. The Republic needed a relentless surveilling eye on these machinations.

Equally, although Robespierre never referred directly to laughter, he condemned the "plus viles passions" and "brouhahas indécent" in the Convention which drowned out the first safeguard of liberty: the general will. The tumult of cheering along with abuse and declamations, he wrote, enabled certain facets of the representative body to exert its authority over the sovereignty of public opinion. "La véritable mesure de l'insouciance pour la chose publique, de l'égoïsme et de l'incivisme, c'est le désordre qui règne dans une assemblée chargée des plus grands intérêts de l'humanité."[250] Robespierre warned that these conspiratorial elements in the Convention had "affecté d'attribuer ces abus au caractère national". He feared that, while the Girondins claimed their *gaieté* was emotionally warranted because it reflected the general mood across France, this happiness was not seemly for legislators. In contrast to the Convention, Robespierre disclosed the natural reaction of the people to discussing such important matters. "Voyez le peuple, lorsqu'on lui parle de ses droits et de ses intérêts, voyez s'il n'est pas grave et attentif." Disgusted at the "scandaleuse légèreté" of debates, Robespierre encouraged "calme et majasteuse" silence so that deputies could be penetrated with the grandeur of their mission, in a similar fashion to the

[249] C. Desmoulins, *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* (Munich: Krauss-Thomson, 1980), vol.9, 'Prospectus (30 September 1792)', 3-4.
[250] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.5, 127-128.

senators of the Roman Republic.[251] In summary, laughter was unbecoming of a man of virtue. Joviality gave a negative message to the watching public. Marat, the other thorn for the Ministers, was in agreement. The Convention was "loin d'avoir le calme d'une assemblée de sages, appelés à traiter des grands intérêts du peuple et à faire les destinées de l'Etat. Peut-être n'auront-elles jamais ce caractère de dignité qui convient à des hommes éclairés et intègres, représentants d'une grande nation.'[252]

Robespierre shared many of the same attitudes as his rivals. He was fervent, like many others, in his belief that laws had an educational quality.[253] Like his contemporaries, he also held the views that the young were innocent and virtuous; they were closer to nature, even more so when born outside tyranny. But unlike his fellow deputies, Robespierre was sceptical that tyranny had been vanquished. He had always believed corruption came from inept and dangerous social institutions, which could sully the most virtuous being. Robespierre could see no prospect of progress in the ministry of the Gironde, primarily because of their tyrannical aspiration to dictate the public spirit, but also because the king still lived, no matter how politically impotent he may have been.[254] He later claimed in 1793 that the war effort had been merely a distraction set in place by the Gironde to mask the abuse and inequality in France.[255] Robespierre was part of a small but growing number of deputies that felt the break with the past had not gone far enough. They demanded a complete regeneration of institutions – any committees or commissions which existed before August 1792 had to be repealed to begin this excision.[256]

In 1793, Madame Roland offered an alternative view on laughter, suggesting that the unescapable French lightness of spirit was to blame for the laughter in the Convention:

> Les Français ne savent point délibérer, certaine légèreté les entraine d'un objet à l'autre sans leur permettre de procéder avec ordre, et de conduire jusqu'au bout l'analyse d'aucun; ils ne savent point écouter; celui qui parle abonde toujours dans son sens et s'occupe plus de développer sa pensée que de répondre à celle d'autrui. Leur attention se

[251] *ibid*
[252] J.-P. Marat, *Œuvres Politique*, *1789-1793* (Bruxelles: Pole Nord, 1995), vol.8, 4870.
[253] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.5, 207.
[254] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.5, 209-210.
[255] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.5, 243.
[256] AP 52:72-75 (21 September).

> fatigue aisément, l'envie de rire s'éveille sur un mot, et une plaisanterie renversée toute la logique.[257]

But Robespierre also rejected this argument: "On a affecté d'attribuer ces abus au caractère national. Ils n'appartiennent qu'aux vices des individus. Voyez le peuple, lorsqu'on lui parle de ses droits et de ses intérêts, voyez s'il n'est pas grave et attentif."[258] According to Robespierre, the people took their rights seriously; the Convention, on the other hand, revealed its contempt and apathy in urgent times.

While Robespierre was occupied with the behaviour of his adversaries and the true character of the nation, Marat was also greatly concerned with this development but, taking a different route, he attacked the veracity of the letters sent to the Convention.[259] He highlighted inconsistencies and contradictions in what the generals wrote. For instance, Kellermann and Dumouriez had sent letters regaling how the enemy battalions had fled in a disorderly fashion to all corners before the unstoppable French troops. Yet the very next week, they reported that the enemy had undertaken on orderly retreat to settle on a more advantageous position in case of attack. By implication, Marat questioned the true intentions of these letters and suggested they had been written in the offices of the Ministry, rather than by a general in the midst of war.[260] In one edition of his newspaper, he challenged Roland to produce the original copy of these letters. There was only one reason for these letters: to deceive the people. "[C]'est qu'il n'est pas possible à un homme sensé d'ajouter foi entière à ces lettres de nos généraux qu'on nous lit à la tribune, tant il est vrai que le peuple sera toujours, à toutes les bonnes nouvelles, trompé."[261] The English witness to the debates, John Moore, was also sceptical, observing that matters were not as they seemed in the war dispatches. For instance, he was astonished to listen to the positivity spun in a report from Dumouriez which rather casually mentioned that his army had been attacked during a march and the rearguard had fled in blind panic: "[Dumouriez] writes in a style of the greatest confidence" wrote Moore. "It may be highly proper in a General to write in this manner to the last; but I can hardly think that

[257] M.-J Roland, *Mémoires de Madame Roland* (Paris: Plon., 1905), vol.1, 202.
[258] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.5, 128-129.
[259] Robespierre believed the letters to be of little consequence; he said they were only read to provoke applause and to fortify an absurd spirit. Robespierre, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.5, 67.
[260] Marat, *Œuvres Politique*, vol.8, 4901.
[261] Marat, *Œuvres Politique*, vol.8, 4871.

he has the confidence he pretends. What dependence can be had on men who rob their own convoys, and run away at the sight of the enemy?"[262] The Jacobin club also drew attention to these letters. "Une seule preuve doit vous suffire, elle est frappante; c'est le ton assuré, c'est la perfide joie et le soin exact avec lesquels vos ennemis publient les moindres lettres écrites par de leurs agents répandues dans quelques autres sociétés."[263]

Marat implored his audience to understand the strategies involving letters in the Convention. The Gironde looked to spread joy, so they silenced news which could have a disruptive effect. The letters with positive news, such as victory from the front or a deputation praising the ministry, were always read by the secretary who had the loudest voice. Letters which carried criticisms and that had to be read, such as letters from the commune, were read as quietly as possible in the hope they went unnoticed. Equally as perfidious was the practice, at the moment when a debate was turning against the supporters of the ministry or when an undesirable speaker was at the rostrum, of letters carrying good news being quickly hurried out to break up the session, or, in some cases, to stop the unwanted debate altogether. The deputies, Marat explained, often forgot what they were discussing because they were lapping up the words, drunk on their own success. Marat also wrote of the efforts taken to represent him as unpatriotic due to his discouragement and negative attitude towards the war effort. "Pitoyable sophisme! Je ne veux point que l'on sème le découragement, mais je veux que l'on ne trompe pas le peuple par de brillantes nouvelles qui sont bientôt démenties, qui font toujours succéder la tristesse à la joie et qui produisent toujours en effet contraire à celui qu'on en attendait."[264] Marat likened himself to a scarecrow, proclaiming to readers that his "présence troublait la gaîte" of the Gironde.[265]

As the weeks went by, and the novelty of the Republic had worn off, many deputies were becoming tired by this enforced happiness. When details of another letter from Dumouriez emerged, the Girondins attempted to issue yet another testimony of

[262] Moore, *A Journal during a Residence in France*, vol.1, 435.
[263] Milscent, *Le Créole patriote*, no.159 (10 December 1792).
[264] Marat, *Œuvres Politique*, vol.8, 4901.
[265] Marat, *Œuvres Politique*, vol.8, 4960.

approval, to which they were received by cries of "Pas encore!"[266] Others were more fervent in criticising the glorification of generals. "Plus j'ai de succès contre les ennemis extérieurs, plus la colonne de mes ennemis intérieurs doit se grossir," complained Dumouriez.[267] A number of deputies also found the celebration of battle unsettling since so many patriots had lost their lives. Vergniaud countered by evoking progress; some men may have perished, but it was so others would no longer have to – each death was a step towards peace, humanity and the happiness of all peoples.[268] Despite this, by late November an organised faction was taking shape to challenge the perceived deceptive language of *gaieté*, and those who used it. On 29 November, the Jacobin Lequinio, in a torrid session on sustenance, blamed the Ministers for the unsatisfactory circulation of grain. While the government purported a myth of happiness, the people starved. For this reason, "l'adulation doit mourir avec le gouvernement despotique, le vrai républicain doit parler sans détours." Saint-Just also echoed these sentiments, announcing the people were in a state of uncertainty and misery.[269] The war of words intensified, as both sides argued their opponents used a language which corrupted the political body.

But the mutterings of dissension against the ministry of the Gironde were represented as abnormal in a regenerated society. In the Convention, Pétion reported the widespread happiness of the people and labelled those who claimed they were hungry as "pervers".[270] Barbaroux complained of the pessimism among certain deputies who tried to convince their fellow citizens the Republic was lost. Those who despaired merited death, Barbaroux warned, but this would afford them too much importance.[271] Birotteau also warned against those who denounced the Republic, because they were jealous of the happiness of the people.[272] Brissot, in a pointed message to the detractors in the Convention, eulogised the celebrations of citizens in the departments who drank, feasted and danced with *gaieté* because of the dawn of a new era. These people were in stark contrast to "les corps constitués avec leurs pompes froides et militaires", who did not understand how to behave in the

[266] AP 52:283 (2 October).
[267] AP 53:401 (14 November).
[268] AP 53:133 (3 November).
[269] AP 53:657 (29 November).
[270] AP 52:500 (14 October).
[271] AP 52:157 (26 September).
[272] AP 52:307-308 (4 October).

Republic.[273] Dulaure published a sarcastic advertisement for a play entitled *Grande trahison du Général Dumouriez* by Marat, centring on the general's perfidious victory at Jemappes which could only lead France to ruin.[274]

Ultimately, there were two facets of French Republicanism on view here, one more dominant than the other. The Girondins emphasised the unrelenting and irrefutable progress of history, first, because they believed in the perfectibility of humankind, and second, because it was politically expedient to do so to legitimatise the Republic and their own role within it. In the first month of the Convention, optimism triumphed over pessimism because the common consensus was that corrupt elements would have no effect on the immune body politic and, by consequence, on the glorious future.[275] Recent work has described how conspiracies were 'integral to every phase of the Revolution'.[276] At this early stage of the Republic, conspiracy and denunciation – soon to be ubiquitous in political life – were largely laughed at, as demonstrated with the many 'discovered' letters by the revolution's enemies. In this sense conspiracies were integral – but only as a revealing device of their futility and laughable nature. In this way, the revolutionaries exhibited their unfailing belief in progress rather than employing denunciations as a strategy to create fear and anxiety.

However, frustrated by the Girondin machinations to control the Convention and unsatisfied with the conception of the Republic, dissenting deputies countered the propaganda by drawing upon a second discourse from republicanism, that of crisis. These proponents of severe morality justified this language because they regarded the strategy of *gaieté* as a premature flaunting of triumph when there were still despotic elements to excise. This line of thought would engender the 'terror as a means to secure the liberty promised by nature but hitherto denied by history'.[277] The strategies of repudiation and regeneration, enacted through laughter, did not go far enough in establishing a rupture in time, meaning the complete rejection of the past and starting

[273] *Le Patriote français*, no.1158 (11 October).
[274] *Le Thermomètre du jour*, no.303 (29 October 1792).
[275] K. M. Baker, 'Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France', Journal of Modern History, 73, 1 (2000), 32-53.
[276] P. R. Campbell et al, (eds.), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution,* 11.
[277] T. E. Kaiser 'Conclusion: Catilina's revenge – conspiracy, revolution and historical consciousness from the ancient regime to the Consulate' in, P. R. Campbell (eds.), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 189.

anew.[278] Marat and Robespierre were the loudest voices and, at the start, found themselves largely alone in voicing their dissatisfaction in the Convention. There were many reasons for this. Marat's links to the commune and his violent language made him few friends. The influential Danton was attempting to distance himself from the September massacres, while Girondin supporters were trying to make a deal with him. Brissot was still a member of the Jacobin club, and his removal on the 12 October had only been decided after a long and protracted debate. Other Girondins, such as Pétion, were prominent in the club's debates and held a measure of influence there, although this was gradually eroded by Robespierre. Future Montagnards had yet to acclimatise themselves to the day-to-day operations of the Convention and had still to make their decision on who to support. For example, Robespierre's accomplice in the terror, Couthon, betrayed no indication he might be such a radical deputy in the future.[279] For a few short weeks, then, it seemed that optimistic progress had overcome pessimistic crisis.

Yet, dissenting voices grew inside and outside the Convention. Increasingly, deputies found their feet in Parisian politics, acquiring contacts and integrating into networks. Some joined with the dissenting deputies and added their voice to the calls for absolute freedom and an end to Girondin tyranny. Republican virtue was serious in character, not *gai*. The philosophical divide between the proponents of laughter and those of serious virtue reached a clear demarcation with Anarcharsis Clootz's *Ni Marat, ni Roland.*[280] Despite some misplaced judgements, wrote Robespierre, the tract was imbued with virtue and stylistically succeeded in communicating the truth because of its grave tone. More importantly, Robespierre praised Clootz in his attacks on a different, more harmful type of laughter that was quickly superseding *gaieté* in nullifying and reproaching "le ton serieux" the dissenters spoke.[281] The Girondins responded with a different tactic. They began to openly mock the dissenters in an effort to silence them.

[278] See Perovic, *The Calendar in Revolutionary France* for an exploration of this ideology.
[279] Whaley, *Radicals.*
[280] A. Cloots, *Ni Marat, ni Roland. Opinion d'Anacharsis Cloots, député de l'Oise à la Convention nationale* (Paris: Desenne, 1792).
[281] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.5, 87.

Chapter 2

The Strategy of Surveillance

High Ideals, Harsh Reality

This chapter focuses on ridicule – specifically, the aggressive laughter aimed at fellow patriots – and will analyse the subsequent effects it had on the political dynamics from September to December 1792, the period of relative Girondin dominance. Amid the laughter of progress in these early months, ridicule was used by the Girondins as a strategy of surveillance. They employed laughter to police those they perceived as their greatest threat, namely Marat and Robespierre, the two most outspoken critics of the Girondin ministry. Initially applied as a strategy to control the multitude of opinions, it will be argued that ridicule was self-defeating because it served to strengthen the legitimacy of Robespierre and Marat, who harnessed vituperative laughter aimed at them as a means to garner sympathy in their portrayal as victimised heroes based in classical republicanism.

Peter France has claimed that ridicule was rare in the first week of the National Convention, as were examples of wit and spontaneous jests.[1] This would seem understandable: epigrams, puns, and wordplay – language that was opaque, harmful and insincere – was considered the domain of the aristocracy. "Je ne fais pas plus d'épigrammes", wrote Madame Roland in her memoirs "car elles supposent le plaisir de piquer par une critique, et je ne sais point m'amuser à tuer des mouches".[2] In the early period of revolution, Brissot praised the largely dignified and calm resistance of his compatriots in the face of the 'rire antiparlementaire' of aristocrats.[3] By late 1792, however, the prolific jesters such as the Viscount Mirabeau and Abbé Maury, both of whom used humour to destabilise the functions of the National Assembly, were no longer present to impart their acerbic wit.[4] Yet, to claim the republicans did not laugh at each other because of the absence of aristocrats would be a mistake. Far from being

[1] P. France, *Politeness and its Discontents: Problems in French Classical Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 136.
[2] M.-J. Roland, *Mémoires de Madame Roland* (1793), ed. C. Perroud (Paris: Plon, 1905), vol.2, 39.
[3] De Baecque, *Éclats du Rire*, 232.
[4] For the use of satire and *bon mots* against the patriots in the early period of revolution, see de Baecque, *Éclats du Rire*, 210-226.

expelled, ridicule was prevalent almost every day in the first three months of the Convention.[5]

This is because ridicule is a pertinent strategy of persuasion, especially in the political arena wherein a joke can humiliate, discredit and undermine an opponent's political legitimacy. Ute Frevert has observed that 'Insulting an individual or a group is synonymous with shaming them'.[6] In a similar fashion, laughter creates a coalition between the joker and the audience against the ridiculed, who is forced to conform to the behaviour expected of him. Laughter also has the capability to be an aggressive weapon without being blatantly aggressive, because the layer of double meaning that composes a joke can bypass the accepted rules of parliamentary decorum by incorporating a veiled but widely-understood message that cannot be easily refuted by arguments.[7] Despite their own pleas for seriousness in the National Assembly, prominent Girondists such as Barbaroux, Buzot and Louvet led the laughter during the debates of the Convention, and their journals, including Brissot's *Le Patriote français*, Louvet's *La Sentinelle,* and Gorsas' *Le Courrier*, heaped further ridicule on their political opponents after the sessions had finished. Ridicule was a weapon in controlling the language of parliamentary debate; those who were able to set the agenda determined what people listened to and prescribed how people spoke of the revolution as it developed and evolved.[8] The laughter of surveillance, however, prevented many deputies from speaking, fearful of how they would be treated, as Thibaudeau confessed in his memoirs when recounting the disdain of his peers when he stood at the tribune: "une sorte de timidité enchainaient ma voix".[9] But, as we will see, the Gironde attempted to protect their public image by justifying this aggressive laughter within the parameters of revolutionary ideology.

[5] From the 21 September until 27 December 1792, there were 54 bursts of laughter aimed at other members of the Convention.
[6] Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 5.
[7] Speier, 'Wit and Politics', 1355. These arguments have been applied to the British parliament of the nineteenth-century. See J. S. Meisel 'Humour and Insult in the House of Commons: The Case of Palmerston and Disraeli', *Parliamentary History,* 28, 2 (2009) 228-245.
[8] D. P. Jordan, 'Robespierre's Revolutionary Rhetoric', *Groniek Historisch Tijdschrift*, 3 (2006), 283.
[9] A.-C. Thibaudeau, *Mémoires sur la Convention et le Directoire par A.C. Thibaudeau* (Paris: Ponthieu, 1824), vol.1, 10.

Containing liberty of speech

Considering the constant rhetorical stream of announcements declaring the liberty and freedom of the nation in the first days of the Republic, it is perhaps ironic that there was an augmentation of censorship in the Convention, enacted through jeers, murmurs and laughter. This situation is in contrast to the Enlightenment; Harvey Chisick has argued that, even though it functioned under old regime conditions, the language of the Enlightenment was a 'literature of dialogue' because it did not aim to destroy perceived reactionary institutions in society, rather serving to persuade those institutions, such as the church, to moderate its practices: '[i]n sum, the Enlightenment may have been elitist, but it was humane, progressive, pragmatic, and… committed to an open mode of discourse that worked on the principals of a free exchange of ideas, rational persuasion and consensus'.[10] In the National Assembly prior to the Convention, this dialogue receded. Laughter functioned with an aggressive intention – as a surveilling quality to correct 'out-of-place' comments and to limit opinions which were not conducive to revolutionary values.[11]

The Girondins assured the public that loyalty and adherence to the law would guarantee happiness – "il faut établir le règne de la loi, et réduire au néant tous nos agitateurs".[12] They strove to legitimise their laws by the dissemination of propaganda which it was hoped would raise civic consciousness and extinguish calumny in the nation.[13] In this ideology of regeneration, no deputy could possibly be considered an enemy of the general will because the conditions of the Republic charged that disgruntlement was impossible among patriots, as the *Patriote français* reported: "toute homme qui se souvient qu'il a eu des démêlés avec tel autre, n'est pas un patriote."[14] Girondin outlets reiterated the view optimism reigned; there was no need to punish divergence with coercive measures because the faith in progress annulled any possibility of failure. The overhaul of August 1792, they asserted, had ensured the regeneration of *mœurs.*

[10] H. Chisick, 'Introduction', in H. Chisick et al (eds.), *The Press in the French Revolution* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1991), 8.
[11] De Baecque, 'Parliamentary Hilarity', 184.
[12] *Le Patriote français*, no.1184 (6 November 1792).
[13] C. Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 197.
[14] *Le Patriote français,* no.1151 (4 October).

The moderates believed that patriotism had the ability to negate disputes among like-minded individuals. For this reason, decorum was a sensitive issue because it had been promised that disgruntlement and disorder was impossible in a regenerated society. In the Convention, there were a set of rules that deputies were supposed to abide by. Patriots had to obtain permission from the President before presenting their proposals and interruptions were outlawed; all deputies were deemed equal and addressed as such. The Convention was to be based on simplicity, not grandeur, as Manuel found to his cost when he suggested that the President should reside in the Palace of the Tuileries.[15] There was to be no passion in the Convention other than the one that drove the public good. Whenever there were murmurs or unrest from the galleries the moderates frequently reminded the audience of the required silence. But these high ideals quickly succumbed to factional realities. On the second day of the Convention Danton uttered the first insult. Although President Pétion was widely applauded when he pleaded for dignity and the disavowal of scandalous insults, without an authoritative and universally accepted means to enforce etiquette and order, the Girondins had to find other methods in establishing parliamentary civility. Paradoxically, therefore, ridicule and murmurs, represented as imbued with empathy, were commonplace in Republican politics as a strategy in which to establish order and silence unwanted rhetoricians.[16]

This rigorous censorship in the Republic has led historians to ask, why were divergences in opinion so feared and why was it policed so vigorously? Here, it has been argued that faith in the naturally harmonious and regenerated political body, brought about by the Republic, led the deputies to strive to uphold this image. Similarly, Caroline Weber argues that the republicans were fixated on suppressing plurality because of their need to rally the people around the republican banner. Their insistence on obedience to the general will, founded on Rousseau's *Social Contract*, led to a vicious crackdown on 'divisive heterogeneity'.[17] Plurality found its most potent conduit in self-expression, which encouraged a multiplicity of opinion through the inherent ambiguity and interpretative qualities natural to language and signs. Thus,

[15] AP 52:69-70 (21 September).
[16] AP 52:85 (22 September).
[17] C. Weber, *Terror and Its Discontents: Suspect Words in Revolutionary France* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), XV.

terror, according to the author, was the desire 'to efface all difference for the sake of absolute stability and control'.[18] Equally, Sophia Rosenfeld educes that the fear surrounding the abuse of words in the revolution was palpable; the patriots sought fixed meanings for a modern, happy world, and surveillance was necessary to prevent 'contamination' from the past.[19] Yet, particularly in Weber's case, the postulation that any divergence was feared insinuates that every spoken word could invite death from the outset in the Republic, and gives no room for a gradual process of change; as one reviewer observed, in Weber's argument the terror is conceived as a 'monolith' already present, rather than a process.[20] By analysing ridicule, we can offer a perspective in how the process of parliamentary censorship developed in the year leading to the terror. In fact, many discourses familiar to Year II were actively discouraged in the early months of the Convention, exhibiting that the path to the terror was not inevitable and relied, in part, on the political prowess of certain deputies to overturn the balance of power.

Laughter functioned as both a reminder of Republican principles and a disavowal of the past; thereby exhibiting how one burst could fulfil two types of strategy at once. On 19 October, for example, Antoine Hardy demanded that a deputy who advocated excessive measures against bishops be called to order. When he was received by laughter, it was a signal that his opinion was truly out-of-date, as Louis Pierre Manuel, a moderate himself, warned: "car favoriser le clergé, c'est conspirer contre la République."[21] Jacques-Marie Rouzet was also rebuked with laughter when he attempted to pass a motion stating that the Convention should ensure the safety, security and good health of the *ci-devant* king.[22] This type of laughter was an unspoken refusal to step back into the old world in case of 'contamination', as Rosenfeld argues. Nevertheless, although the patriots were undoubtedly fervent in objurgating the past, opinions favouring these anachronistic groups were rare in the Convention; consequently, so was laughter of this nature.[23] The vast majority of the deputies

[18] Weber, *Terror and Its Discontents*, 3.
[19] S. Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 126-127.
[20] J. Livesay, 'Review', *H-France Review*, 3, 76 (2003), 336.
[21] AP 52:573 (19 October).
[22] AP 53:424 (15 November).
[23] For the only other example of this strategy of surveillance, see AP 53:587 (25 November).

repudiated the past. Therefore, as a function of surveillance, laughter policed more pressing issues.

The problem the revolutionaries faced was how to satisfy their idealism, which emerged as a hindrance in the day-to-day operations of the Convention. At first, freedom of expression was framed as conducive to good laws. Minister of the Interior Roland wrote: "les meilleurs lois ne peuvent résulter que d'une sage et mûre délibération; et celle-ci ne saurait avoir lieu qu'avec la plus entière indépendance, la plus franche liberté des opinions."[24] These conditions of reflection and understanding, it was thought, would provide the deputies with the means to achieve a unified consensus on important issues. Yet, the reality was entirely different: because every deputy had the right to express his view and propose a decree, the sessions became significantly prolonged. The impracticality of debates was particularly pronounced towards December when heated discussions lingered on the issue of food distribution and the acute need of what to do with the king. Deputies invoked their right to an opinion as a strategy to maintain the floor when the President attempted to move the discussion along.[25] Laughter, therefore, was a method in which the *conventionnels* could have the session progress without visibly contravening the problem of free speech. In a long session regarding the rights of émigrés on 23 October, for example, several deputies submitted their opinions regarding the punishment for émigrés, inducing long arguments even over the definition of the word itself.[26] A decree proposition was subsequently delivered by an unnamed member amid "mouvements d'impatience et d'improbation". Some deputies urged the speech to be printed instead of read aloud, declaring that it added nothing original to the previous proposals. When the deputy finally reached the end of his draft, Louis-Joseph Charlier, with an ironic tone, asked for a second reading of the decree to the amusement of the Convention, and the discussion was finished.[27] Humorous comments in response to a speaker – whether through irony, sarcasm, by subverting a word, or interrupting a sentence –

[24] AP 52:236-237 (30 September).
[25] For some examples, see: AP 52:563 (18 October), 634 (23 October), 55:44 (13 December).
[26] AP 52:632 (23 October).
[27] AP 52:634. Charlier said "Je demande une seconde lecture de ce projet de décret. (*Rires.*)"

was an art in making the deputies forget themselves and the issue in hand, thereby circumventing prolonged sessions through the strategy of humiliation.[28]

Setting the rules of combat for the trial of the king was also a tiresome enterprise. When Châles, following successive speakers, climbed to the rostrum to announce abstruse declarations regarding the king, several members expressed their impatience and others laughed in an effort to silence him.[29] This type of laughter exemplified the frustrations of the deputies, serving as a release valve to vent their annoyance at being required to listen to speeches of little consequence. On the surface, it would seem that laughter of this nature was precipitated more by tedium than political considerations. Indeed, Dulaure suggested that a deputy's attitude in regard to what they heard sometimes came down to a simple circumstance of seating position rather than political persuasion, because it was natural to take on the emotions of those sitting nearby. "J'invite mes collègues à faire comme moi, à changer souvent de place", he wrote, in order that a deputy could access his true feelings regarding a matter.[30]

However, for the Girondins, there was political motivation in silencing irrelevant speeches. In the opening days of the Convention deputies expressed their optimism that time would be economised efficiently.[31] In essence, time, said the deputy Mathieu, belonged to the people; it was a "domaine nationale" that was entrusted to the deputies to make best use of.[32] Consequently, while deputies conveyed the inevitable progression of the republic on the one hand, on the other, they communicated the sense of urgency that the Republic was weakest at its birth. Within this alternative discourse, time was a valuable commodity; the people were threatened, not only by the foreign enemy, but by hidden ones that it was thought purposefully wasted the "temps précieux" of the people.[33] It was a language which

[28] Robespierre made the point that laughter and murmurs interrupted his train of thought: "j'invoque, pour un représentant du peuple, la même attention, la même impartialité qu'on met à entendre un ministre. Je lui observe que si elle m'écoute avec d'autres dispositions, je perdrai la cause que je veux défendre. (*Rires ironiques et murmures.*)" AP 53:48 (29 October).
[29] AP 55:45 (14 December 1792). The *Archives* informs us that "*Plusieurs membres témoignent de l'impatience; d'autres rient.*" The actual event of the king's trial was laborious. See D. P. Jordan, *The king's trial: the French Revolution vs. Louis XVI* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 173. Laughter emerged from incongruous comments, particularly during the votes of the trial. These bursts can be seen in AP 55:88, 94 (15 January 1793).
[30] Dulaure (ed.), *Le Thermomètre du Jour,* no.367 (1 January 1793).
[31] AP 52:98, 179, 604.
[32] AP 52:208 (23 September 1792).
[33] AP 52:662 (25 October).

placed importance on the romantic and masculine 'ideal of activity and the restless quest for liberty' as a means to spur the deputies on.[34] Hunt characterises this language as the set of discourses which dominated political culture immediately before the terror because they could best explain the realities of war and the threats to the republic.[35] The language of urgency emerged from the realities of political life, which had led many, like Brice Gertoux, to denounce the "vaines discussions" that preoccupied the Convention while France was at war.[36] The language of urgency was also a useful strategy to justify the restrictions on debate. "Evitez les personnalités" implored the citizens of Montauban to the Convention "écoutez tout autre intérêt que celui du bien public, arrêtez enfin les discussions qui absorbent et font perdre un temps si précieux".[37] However, this type of discourse, which represented the belief that deputies had to intervene to ensure time progressed smoothly, contradicted the establishment of regeneration as miracle; in other words the strategy of surveillance broke the illusion that regeneration had taken place naturally in the Convention.

The *sans-culottes* of Paris particularly exacerbated the notion time was running out by issuing pamphlets such as *Vous foutez-vous de nous?* which essentially threatened insurrection if results were not achieved. "Depuis deux mois et plus que vous êtes assemblé, qu'avez-vous fait?" the pamphlet asked, while progressing to ridicule the deputies' obsession with trivial regulative measures, such as the ruling that sessions should start at nine in the morning with the first two hours spent on deciding the procedures of the king's trial, which was never actually achieved because only around 50 deputies were ever present that early in the morning anyway. The *sans-culottes* warned that their happiness, borne from the joyous proclamations of September, had not lasted long; the only explanation for failure, they said, was that the Convention had been infiltrated by conspirators.[38] An unnamed deputy advanced that while insurrection was inexcusable the essence of the aforementioned argument had merit. Sessions were tedious, debates laborious, and progress seemed to have stalled.[39] A

[34] S. Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 2004), 74.
[35] Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 37.
[36] AP 54:202 (3 December).
[37] AP 53:128 (3 November).
[38] AP 54:49 (Annex 1).
[39] AP 54:27 (2 December). See also AP 54:60 (3 December), and Barère's speech: "Il est des maux urgents dont nos concitoyens souffrent: et leur représentants doivent en rechercher les causes pour les faire disparaître."

series of motions were passed to solve this; for example, letters were to be forthwith sent to their relevant committees, rather than discussed in the Convention.[40] Legendre suggested the employment of a reporter to abridge the multitude of opinions into a shorter reading. Châles agreed, reminding the Convention that "Nous ne sommes pas ici pour y faire briller les talents oratoires".[41] Even in these early months, there was tension and dissatisfaction with the operations of the Convention. The Girondins had continually presented the August Revolution as the dramatic moment that had sealed a new future in which deputies would work together to secure universal liberty, yet the experience of political life had revealed this 'reality' to be an unworkable illusion. The general euphoria had dissipated when it was clear deputies were not unified in their opinions.

The unease on whether the Convention would ever reach a common consensus on key issues was amplified when it was thought others were using the political spotlight to further their own ambitions. The *conventionnels* were aware of their burgeoning negative reputation as actors on the stage competing for the appreciation of the audience.[42] Counterrevolutionaries, opposed to the public nature of politics, represented the assembly as a 'fraudulent body masquerading as legitimate' and ridiculed the theatrical nature of proceedings.[43] Brissot expressed surprise that under the old regime the profession of acting was so stigmatised, considering that the role of the orator had been held in such high esteem. Brissot publicly supported actors and admonished orators: "Quant aux professions d'orateur, elles sont absolument semblables; et s'il y a une différence, elle est à l'avantage de l'acteur. L'un et l'autre emploient les mêmes moyens; le but est quelquefois différent, car celui de l'orateur est souvent de séduire et d'égarer, celui du comédien est presque toujours d'instruire et de rendre meilleur."[44] Brissot criticised orators of the Convention who looked to manipulate the crowd through their rhetorical talents and dramatic posturing,

[40] AP 54:357 (5 December).
[41] AP 54:61 (3 December). See also Lecointre's resistance to discussing draft propositions because it could lead to longer discussions. AP 55:36 (29 December).
[42] A. Goodden, 'The Dramatising of Politics: Theatricality and the Revolutionary Assemblies', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 20, 3 (1984), 193-194.
[43] Friedland, *Political Actors*, 245.
[44] *Le Patriote Français,* no.1145 (27 September).

although it was a possible point of soreness since he was not a talented orator himself.[45]

The attempts of the patriots to represent abstract ideas that had no basis in reality led them to be compared unfavourably to marionettes playing out a farce.[46] In the Convention, deputies ridiculed Maximilien Robespierre for his abstract speeches that did not offer a tangible program for change, only wasting precious time. As David Jordan has highlighted, Robespierre's speeches often contained no concrete policy and were more generally an articulation of principles, abstractions and juxtapositions. This enabled Robespierre to distance himself from the decisions of the Convention while appearing active and moral.[47] In contradistinction to Robespierre's language, patriots placed emphasis on succinctness, as Kersaint warned: "le langage des hommes libres doit être laconique".[48] Shortened speeches were thought to be a more transparent means of communication because there was less opportunity for obfuscation. This was why Robespierre was so often ridiculed. For example, the *dantoniste*, Osselin, became particularly exasperated with Robespierre's lengthy speeches and rebuked him for stealing the centre-stage: "Robespierre, veux-tu finir cette longue kyrielle et nous donner, en quatre mots, une explication franche? (*Vifs applaudissements*)."[49] It is a paradox, however, that revolutionaries were expected to convey their patriotism through words and gestures, yet, at the same time, emphasised 'verbal restraint' in which modes of communication were policed because of their potential to cause 'error and factionalism'.[50] In the early period of the Convention, the Girondins had the control over communication. Owing to this, lengthy speeches by their advocates were permitted and praised for their patriotism; long speeches by opponents, in contrast, were represented as misguided and harmful, and a waste of the people's time. When Robespierre, urged his colleagues to adopt "les lois sages" in his typically vague manner, several members responded: "Donnez-nous-les donc, ces lois sages?"

[45] Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 105.
[46] De Baecque, *Éclats du Rire*, 214-216. Friedland, *Political Actors*, 229-237.
[47] Jordan, 'Robespierre's Revolutionary Rhetoric', 284.
[48] AP 52:586 (20 October).
[49] AP 52:133 (25 September).
[50] Rosenfeld, *Revolution in Language*, 165-166.

Barbaroux sarcastically motioned that "Quand le peuple nous demandera du pain, nous lui donnerons le discours de Robespierre" and the Convention laughed.[51]

Through ridicule, the Gironde highlighted Robespierre's lack of political program, his refusal to impart any practical suggestions, and his fondness for incorporating abstract tropes in his orations. Certainly, the ridicule aimed at Robespierre derived not just from his speeches, but from underlying political tensions regarding his personal split with Brissot, his support of the Commune against the Legislative Assembly in the summer, and the underhand tactics the deputies representing Paris – including Robespierre – were suspected of having employed to get elected to the Convention.[52] His oratory, however, was unappreciated by the Girondins, who were under pressure to deliver on the promises they had made in September. Therefore, the intolerance of opinions was initially born from the exigencies of war, the need to eradicate inaction in the Convention, and the necessity to represent the illusion of a unified assembly in the Republic. This was a conflicting ideology that posited, first, that progress was inevitable – hence the need for the deputies to appear united to uphold this pretence – in addition to an alternative script maintaining that every second was precious in the fight against the armies of Europe, hence the intolerance of superfluous language. Laughter was a strategy in upholding these discursive frameworks that seemed to contradict each other. Nonetheless, while the length of Robespierre's speeches was a cause for concern, this paled into comparison compared to the ridicule another deputy endured.

Censoring Denunciations

No individual was as attacked, verbally abused, and ridiculed as Jean-Paul Marat, labelled by one historian as 'easily the most unpopular man in the Convention', particularly since many believed he had a hand in instigating the September Massacres.[53] Another scholar has noted that he was 'sincere himself to the point of lacking a sense of humour'.[54] His position as the propagator of bad news left him open

[51] AP 54:47-48 Birotteau also interrupted with a complaint: "Les courtisans du peuple lui donnent des mots, quand il lui faut de pain et quand on cherche des moyens." There were also cries of: "Aux voix, aux voix le projet de Robespierre", the joke being that there was no draft to put to the vote in the first place.
[52] Whaley, *Radicals*, 75-84.
[53] Patrick, *The Men of the First Republic*, 107.
[54] L. Gottschalk, *Jean-Paul Marat: A Study in Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 25.

to obvious attacks of parody and mimicry. One of the reasons he was targeted was because his newspaper often advocated violence as a justifiable method against officials in Paris. "Ce n'est point Marat, représentant du peuple, que je dénonce, c'est le folliculaire, c'est l'homme dangereux" replied one citizen when asked not to insult him.[55] Observing the sessions of the Convention, John Moore wrote that "Marat has carried his calumnies at such a length, that even the party that he wishes to support seems to be ashamed of him; and he is shunned and apparently detested by every body else."[56] On occasion, when Marat climbed to the rostrum deputies quickly evacuated their seats nearby for fear of being tainted by his calumnies.[57] However, the fact Marat was ridiculed so much suggests that deputies were troubled by the potential effects of his language.

In particular, it was the use of denunciation that posed a problem to the Girondins because this strategy challenged their authority and secured Marat a political following.[58] Denunciations, which dominated Robespierre's rhetoric as well as Marat's, incorporated the device of conspiracy. This narrative conveyed the wide-spread belief the revolution was most vulnerable to those who would look to undermine it from within; those who wore a figurative mask to disguise their true intentions. While Brissot continually advocated the need for war to achieve universal liberty in 1791, Robespierre rebuked him, warning his political peers, "le véritable Coblentz est en France".[59] It was not exterior enemies that were a threat, but those on the interior. This discourse of denunciation could also be traced back to Rousseau and his address on the indivisible, sovereign nation. Rousseau argued that although the general will was infallible and part of a natural order, it had the potential to be subverted by disguised enemies who worked for their own selfish ends. These enemies, it was thought, attempted to deceive the general will and create conflict in the natural body politic.[60]

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[55] AP 52:604 (21 October).
[56] J. Moore, *A Journal During a Residence in France,* vol.2, 339. See also, Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins,* vol.4, 613 (23 December 1792). Léonard Bourdon suggested that if the Jacobins distanced themselves from Marat, then more deputies would sit with the Mountain in the Convention.
[57] AP 53:494 (20 November).
[58] De Beacque, *The Body Politic,* 219-220.
[59] Robespierre, *Œuvres complètes*, vol.8, 86.
[60] G. Cubitt, 'Robespierre and Conspiracy Theories', in C. Haydon & W. Doyle (eds.), *Robespierre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 84-85.

Historiographically, scholars inspired by the work of François Furet have painted revolutionary conspiracy theorists as 'paranoid', railing against an 'antithetical other'.[61] Although this argument has been largely labelled as too simplistic, it must be asserted that many of the conspiracies mentioned in the Convention *were* imagined, but at the same time held an ulterior, practical purpose connected to power and persuasion in the sphere of representative democracy.[62] The denunciation was a public act made in full view of the assembly to avoid the stigma attached to the secretive police informer of the *ancien régime*, enforcing the image of transparency while also functioning 'to protect revolutionary representation' and hence justify a deputy's legitimacy through an open dialogue with the people.[63] Although the revolutionaries transmitted the idea the people were sovereign, certain revolutionaries validated their own right to speak for the people by claiming the concept of the general will was still in its advent and, consequently, the people were too naïve to comprehend their own power. This explained why Robespierre warned of "tous ces aristocrates déguisés, qui, sous le masque du civisme, cherchent à capter les suffrages d'une nation encore trop idolâtre, trop frivole, trop peu instruit de ses droits, pour connaître ses ennemis, ses intérêts et sa dignité".[64] As a result, dissenting patriots manoeuvred to attack the prevailing conception of the law as infallible by instilling their audience with the belief the Girondins were out to mislead the people for their own selfish greed. Marat saw this authoritative basis for government – the idea the deputies represented the sovereign will – as hypocritical because it meant the deputies could not be held accountable by the people. As Baker writes, Marat understood that 'individual deputies must be subject to recall by their constituents at will, and their collective decisions must receive popular ratification before they could be regarded as binding. Above all, their actions

[61] F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution,* 55-58. For quotations, which form a thesis against the paranoia argument, see Spang, 'Paradigms and Paranoia', 119-147. In contrast, M. Darlow argues that political performance in the revolution was inherently paranoid because it derived its practices from the theatre, constituting a theatricality which is naturally aware of attention by definition, but also playing to that attention, thereby 'creating a theatrical space between a closed fictional world and the lived experience of the spectators'; M. Darlow, 'History and (Meta-) Theatricality: The French Revolution's Paranoid Aesthetics', *Modern Language Review,* 105, (2010), 385-400. A good overview of the mechanics of conspiracy can be found in, C. Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation in the French Revolution', *The Journal of Modern History,* 68, 4 (1996), 769.
[62] Cubitt, 'Robespierre and Conspiracy Theories', 76.
[63] Lucas, 'Theory and Practice of Denunciation', 774.
[64] Robespierre, *Œuvres Complètes,* vol.7, 171.

had to be subject to constant surveillance'.[65] Therefore, unmasking conspiratorial acts has been positioned by historians as a convincing technique for revolutionaries to exude authority while undermining the legitimacy of others. It was, in effect, the 'illusion of authenticity by means of the exposure of artifice'.[66]

From the opening of the National Convention, conspiracy theories and denunciations were expressed frequently by Marat. However, his declarations were almost always drowned out with laughter, which on the surface appears to invalidate the argument that denunciation was a discourse of power. Marat's tendency to question every decision the Girondin ministry made induced sarcastic comments, such as when he challenged the veracity of a report read by Dufriche-Valazé in the name of the Committee of Sixteen, a group of men tasked with sifting through the numerous royal papers discovered in the Tuileries Palace in August. Valazé, as head of the committee, knew that Marat could not possibly have known what the documents contained, and rhetorically asked the Convention, in a sarcastic aside, how Marat was always so sure of his proclamations given that he never had any evidence.[67] Marat also railed against the reluctance of the Girondins to take the king to trial, alleging that they had all been paid by Louis Capet, and that Brissot and Roland were hesitant to punish him because they feared the *ci-devant* king would reveal their secret pact. At this ridiculous denunciation, laughter, ironic applause and cries of "A Philippe d'Orléans" – a reference to the royal cousin who sat with the Mountain – cowed him from the tribune.[68] There was a sense of inevitability when Marat walked to the rostrum. After listening to another denunciation, one member shouted "Vous nous dites tous les jours!"[69] By November, Marat was enduring laughter and sarcastic applause just for requesting the floor.[70]

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[65] K. M. Baker, 'Political Languages of the French Revolution' in M. Goldie & R. Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 644.

[66] Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets,* 54; See also Friedland, *Political Actors*, 251, and Cubitt, 'Robespierre and Conspiracy Theories', 83-91 on the same theme.

[67] AP 52:307 (4 October).

[68] AP 54:396 (6 December). For other examples of laughter precipitated from Marat's denunciations, see AP 52:562 (18 October).

[69] AP 54:416 (7 December). Bergson argued that the laughable is when the body is repetitive and when it reminds us of a 'mere machine'. See H. Bergson, *Laughter: an Essay on the meaning of the Comic*. Translated from French by C. Brereton (London: Macmillan, 1921), 29.

[70] AP 53:495 (20 November). See also 52:655 (24 October), for another refusal to hear Marat: "C'est une dénonciation contre un ministre que j'ai à faire; c'est un objet qui intéresse le salut public… Oh! Vous

In addition, jokes operated to pass off denunciations as inconsequential and ineffective. As Buzot asked the Convention, referring to Marat, "Que nous importent les ridicule dénonciateurs au milieu d'un peuple éclairé"?[71] As Marat's denunciations lacked proof, Barbaroux jested that it would require a wagon to collect the vast amount of existing evidence implicating Marat in seditious activities.[72] Roland, suspected by many of hoarding important documents, also indulged in jokes at the expense of his accusers. "Ces dénonciateurs sont comme la calomnie; ils ont mis leurs ailes à l'envers, et en voulant s'élever, ils s'enfonçant plus que jamais dans la boue. (*Rires.*)"[73] The Gironde perceived denunciations against them as calumny – especially the "folies Maratiques" – and, through laughter, encouraged the rest of the Convention to disregard them.[74] This ridicule is significant: laughter shows that for a brief period in the afterglow of the declaration of the republic, the notion of conspiracy, framed as central to the authoritative image of the revolutionaries by historians, was vehemently resisted and outright rejected by the majority of the Convention.[75]

One reason for the ridicule was because Marat based his denunciations on a competing interpretation of the past in contrast to the Girondin conception of progress. As Joseph Zizek maintains, Marat often attempted to make historical "sense" of contemporary events, and then impart the lessons of this history as a form of pedagogic instruction to his audience. His interpretations were often pessimistic, and he advised the people to listen to his insight; he had, after all, correctly foreseen the betrayals of the Legislative Assembly, of Lafayette, and of Necker.[76] Now, he was denouncing the Girondin ministry, urging popular will to react before it was too late, or liberty would be lost forever.[77] It was his self-styled and privileged representation as

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m'entendez… malgré vous (*Il s'élève des éclats de rire. – Après quelques débats, Marat obtient la parole.*)"

[71] AP 52:309 (4 October).

[72] AP 52:605 (21 October).

[73] AP 53:511 (21 November).

[74] AP 55:428 (25 December).

[75] In the 'Introduction' to Campbell et al (eds.), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, the limits of conspiracy as a discourse is not discussed in the overview of general issues and debates.

[76] J. Zizek, 'Marat: Historian of the Revolution?', in I. Coller, H. Davies, & J. Kalman (eds.), *French History and Civilization*. *Papers from the George Rudé Seminar* (Melbourne: The George Rudé Society, 2005), 153.

[77] Zizek, 'Marat: Historian of the Revolution?', 157. For examples see AP 52:311 (4 October), 54:414 (7 December), 55:427 (25 December).

both 'interpreter of history' and 'severe instructor of the public' that the Girondins strove to discredit. Furthermore, Marat's ability to correctly identify the flow of history enabled him to see the future: "il ne vous est pas donné d''empêcher l'homme de génie de s'élancer dans l'avenir. Vous ne sentez pas l'homme instruit qui connaît le monde, et qui va au-devant des événements *(Les rires et les murmures continuent et se prolongent.)*." Marat's conception of history – of the fight between liberty and despotism – was deeply influenced, according to Baker, by the idiom of classical republicanism; this was the language inspired by the ancients that emphasised the infallible general will and the surveillance and vigilance of all citizens. The power of classical republicanism as an oppositional discourse was transformed in the revolution because 1789 removed its institutional and intellectual limitations. Yet, although despotism had been weakened, it had not been destroyed in the Republic. Seen in this light, Marat's denunciations were efforts to erase the last vestiges of despotism and create unity.[78] His calls for surveillance against those who made the laws, however, were fiercely resisted, particularly since the Girondins' promoted a type of republicanism inherited from enlightened thought that was optimistic regarding the state of the human condition and its progress, engendered as it was through the modernisation of technology, sciences and arts.[79] For Marat, though, liberty could never be achieved if those who had associated with the king were still in power. He urged for the complete eradication of the past.

Robespierre also gave himself a premier role in enabling the progression of the revolution: "C'est moi qui dans l'Assemblée constituante, ai pendant trois ans combattu toutes les actions. C'est moi qui ai combattu contre le Cour".[80] His pivotal centrality to the success of the revolution was often in stark contrast to a miserable future he envisaged if he should somehow fail in his duty. Matthew Buckley has proposed that Robespierre, through his comparison of past and future, of what had gone wrong and what will come to pass, rhetorically shaped a narrative of tragedy.[81] He styled himself as the defender of the people, likely to be a martyr in his fight against the conspiratorial forces in government. The Girondins sought to convey the

[78] K.M. Baker, 'Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France', *Journal of Modern History*, 73, 1 (2000), 43-47.
[79] Kaiser, 'Catilina's revenge', 189.
[80] AP 52:132 (23 September).
[81] Buckley, *Tragedy Walks the Streets,* 141-142.

perceived ridiculousness of Robespierre's performance, particularly his tendency to grossly subvert the past and discount the role of others. Moreover, his persistent denunciations of insidious characters working to undermine the revolution were counterbalanced by his refusal to explicitly name the conspirators. Robespierre's periphrastic rhetoric operated within such a framework because '[b]y allowing his audience to fill in possible names, he maintains an inexplicit discursive space that functions as a kind of open challenge and annihilating void'.[82] How could the Gironde fight this with reasoned arguments? As John Hardman points out, conspiracy theories 'thrive on paucity of evidence or evidence which is difficult to interpret.'[83] It was clear that rhetoric of this sort was difficult to combat, as Vergniaud revealed when discussing the Jacobin proclivity for denouncing unnamed conspirators, "Il faut les nommer. Il est affreux d'élever de semblables soupçons quand ils sont vagues et indéterminés, c'est un assassinat moral."[84] Without an obvious conspiracy to refute, the Girondins often found themselves laughing at the claims of Marat and Robespierre because it was all they could do.

Although the Girondins may have laughed at denunciations, this did not mean they rejected the use of it altogether. Denunciation was generally considered to be necessary for the revolution to survive. The Girondin deputy Louvet, for example, fired accusations just as regularly as Robespierre or Marat in the Convention and was labelled "l'éternel dénonciateur" by Basire.[85] For Louvet, the rhetoric of denunciation was a regrettable aspect of revolutionary politics, one that caused him great sadness.[86] This was also true of Jean-Marie Roland, the Minister of the Interior, who, when denouncing Parisian disturbances, claimed it was "un sujet qui répugne à mon cœur".[87] The Girondin deputy, Barbaroux, reminded the Convention why denunciation was so important, after one of Marat's outbursts had left the Convention in uproar: "[c]itoyens, nous devons accueillir toutes les dénonciations, et surtout, celles portées contre nous-mêmes. Cette barre doit être constamment ouverte à tous les dénonciateurs: c'est le seul moyen donné au peuple souverain de nous éclairer sur nos

[82] *ibid*
[83] J. Hardman, 'The real and imagined conspiracies of Louis XVI', in P. R. Campbell et al, *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 65.
[84] AP 52:267 (1 October).
[85] AP 53:350 (10 November).
[86] AP 53:52 (29 October).
[87] AP 52:109 (23 September).

devoirs et de communiquer avec nous."[88] The Girondins, like their opponents, asserted that denunciation served as a communicative link with the people; a way in which the deputies could exert their sovereignty and regulate their fellow representatives' power. Yet, the denunciation was conceived by the Girondins as a form of reprimand when a deputy had committed an infraction; it was not an indication of sinister conspiracy. This is because conspiracy denied the possibility of a mistake; if things went wrong then the Girondins were the first to be blamed. Conspiracy was therefore rejected in order to deny Robespierre and Marat a pretext to attack their legitimate mandate.[89]

It is important to note that it was Brissot and his friends who had transformed the language of denunciation into a devastating political weapon in the spring of 1792. To take France into a war with Austria they played on the fears and patriotism of the Assembly by devising a conspiracy involving the 'Austrian Committee'. This power-grab culminated on the 10 March 1792 with Brissot's condemnation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Delessart, as a traitor for not dealing with the supposed Austrian cabal in the heart of French politics. Eventually a formal act of accusation was presented against Delessart eliminating him from the scene even after he had resigned. When Brsissot's acquaintance, Etienne Dumont, asked him why he had done this, Brissot apparently gave a sardonic laugh and justified his actions by saying such fabrications were necessary to outflank the Jacobins.[90] It was at this moment that Marisa Linton has traced the emerging language of terror, because the vague accusations that empowered Brissot and destroyed a rival's political career was in its purpose the same style of language that would end Brissot and his friends in 1793.[91] Yet, by September 1792, the Girondins had achieved their goal in positioning themselves at the forefront of revolutionary politics; to protect their ministry they attempted to stamp out the rhetorical devices that had driven them to power in the first place. The potential for conspiracy in the Republic was rejected while limits were placed on the acceptability of certain denunciations. As the Montagnard deputy Baudot would write years

[88] AP 52:605 (21 October).
[89] T. E. Kaiser, 'Conclusion: Catilina's revenge – conspiracy, revolution and historical consciousness from the ancient regime to the Consulate' in *Conspiracy in the French Revolution,* 189.
[90] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 110-115.
[91] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 135.

later:"[l]es Girondins voulaient arrêter la révolution… mais cette révolution était alors impossible et impolitique dans le temps."[92]

The Girondins lined out in their speeches the correct means to deliver a denunciation. Kersaint confirmed to his compatriots that the Gironde would not tolerate the very same machinations that had brought them to power:

> [J]e propose qu'il soit pris à l'instant des mesures pour s'assurer de la vérité des faits dénoncés. Lorsqu'une dénonciation, qui porte un caractère aussi terrible, éclate dans une assemblée d'hommes sages, dans une circonstance semblable à celle où se trouve la nation, il faut bien se garder d'une détermination… Messieurs, quel garant avez-vous de la vérité de ces dénonciations? La parole des hommes. Eh bien, pour que cette parole entraîne le jugement d'un tribunal comme le vôtre, il faut qu'elle soit confirmée par des preuves et environnée de toutes les certitudes morales qui peuvent en assurer la sincérité.[93]

For a denunciation to have some *existence légale* it had to be accompanied by proof – deputies were not free to let their imaginations run riot; denunciations had to contain a "caractère juridique".[94] Neither could denunciations be vague: "Dans les révolutions, comme on vous l'a dit" said Buzot "les hommes et les choses se confondent; et il est bien impossible de dénoncer les intrigues sans designer les intrigants."[95] The deputy Bailleul went so far as to suggest those who accused without producing evidence should be arrested ("Cela est détestable!" shouted a deputy on the left).[96]

The concerted campaign to place limits on the acceptable use of denunciation extended into the sphere of the press. Condorcet provided explanations for the "Synonimes oubliés" of *dénonciation, délation,* and *accusation* to give linguistic clarity on the acceptable use of this discourse. "L'*accusateur* donne des preuves, il s'annonce avec franchise; le *délateur* rapporte sans prouver, il se cache dans les ténèbres; le *dénonciateur* affirme un fait, & veut en être crue sur la parole. Celui qui *dénonce* sans

[92] M.-A Baudot, *Notes Historiques sur la Convention Nationale, le Directoire, l'Empire et l'Exil des Votants* (Paris: D. Jouaust, 1893), 158.
[93] AP 52:264 (1 October 1792). Rewbell agreed with Kersaint: "je vous le demande, est-il permis de faire une telle dénonciation sans en fournir la preuve? Est-il permis de parler d'une telle liste, sans apporter cette liste?" (266).
[94] AP 53:222 (6 November).
[95] *ibid*
[96] AP 53:75 (30 October).

preuves est un coquin."[97] It was the experience of political debates and the abuse of denunciations which had led to these definitions. Laughter as a form of surveillance was a strategy in achieving what Rosenfeld terms as the "fixing" of language: the idea that, as ambiguity and imprecise abstractions were the natural enemies of the Girondins, words had to be clearly defined and univocally communicated to the Republic for the purpose of 'stabilizing, and, finally, halting the Revolution'.[98] On the other hand, Marat considered laughter and heckling a perversion: "Vous vous déclarez les protecteurs de la liberté des opinions, et vous en êtes les lâches tyrans!"[99] Although laughed at, the denunciation of conspiracy was a potent strategy, not just because it planted the seeds of suspicion in the mind of the public, but also because denunciations disrupted the sessions of the Convention and hampered the ability of the Girondins to dictate the language of revolution.

Charles Walton argues that the problems in policing public opinion were present from the outset of revolution, as a result of the culture of libel and honour inherited from the old regime which 'involved the contradictory habits of expressing contest through calumny and of treating calumny as a criminal offense'. The institutions that had previously policed this culture were destroyed by the revolution, thus fermenting a vacuum of regulation in regard to speech which led to an abrupt transition of liberty that could only be controlled through terror.[100] The issue of how the deputies dealt with problems of free speech in the Convention is given little attention by Walton, yet this alternative insight into the process of regulation and censorship conforms to the same conclusion – without a respected and powerful means to admonish or punish denunciators, all the Girondins could do was laugh in the hope of convincing others of the ridiculous nature of many denunciations. By doing so, the Gironde revealed their impotency in dealing with rhetorical attacks on their character. Marat's importance to the revolution lay in positioning his conspiracies as acceptable truth. For Marat, it was inconceivable to be accused of libel when he was acting as a safeguard for the people: "[j]usqu'ici est-il possible pour à des êtres pensants d'accuser de calomnie ceux qui ont dénoncé ces faits? (*éclats de rire*)".[101] When delivering his denunciations, Marat

[97] *Chronique de Paris,* no.274 (22 September).
[98] Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language*, 159.
[99] AP 55:428 (25 December).
[100] Walton, *Policing Public Opinion*, 7-8.
[101] AP 52:308 (4 October).

insisted he had been moved by a sense of selflessness and duty to uncover self-interest: "[e]n vous dénonçant ces faits j'ai rempli le devoir que m'imposait ma conscience (*Rires*)."[102] We have seen how the Girondins looked to impart a general truth by presenting realistic yet fictitious letters to their audience. Similarly, Marat's denunciations depended on a certain suspension of disbelief. The moral truth depended on his delivery and his manner of speaking. Accordingly, it was not just the content of Marat's denunciations that were laughed at, but the method in which he communicated them. It is this we turn to now.

The Heroes of the Republic

Sensibilité, as we have seen, was the exhibition of emotional feelings of the heart, demonstrating how the uncorrupted being was 'subject to his own soul'.[103] A man of virtue, as Robespierre put it, had to possess the "sens de sentir" to understand the plight of others.[104] By expressing their own feelings, and understanding the feelings of others, deputies could unlock their 'inner authenticity to achieve self-sovereignty'.[105] If *sensibilité* was truthfulness without the truth, then it was not only a vital component of the denunciation, contributing an added dimension of veracity to the claims made, but also a strategy to repulse the denunciation itself. Too much emotional visibility, however, and the performance could appear ridiculous. Although the sentimental man had the capacity to cry over the plight of others, he had to also demonstrate he was the master of his emotions, 'unlike the 'woman of virtue''.[106] The Girondins propagated the ideal of a universal regenerated man within France; therefore, sentiment was reserved for others whose plight was desperate, such as those subjugated under tyrannical regimes or the relatives of those who had sacrificed their lives for the *patrie*. Marat and Robespierre seldom expressed sentiment for others, however, save for the abstract 'people'. Instead, they exploited the emotional empathy of their audience by portraying themselves as suffering beings, open about

[102] AP 52:564 (18 October).
[103] Andress, 'Living the Revolutionary Melodrama', 105.
[104] AP 52:311 (4 October).
[105] Outram*, The Body and the French Revolution*, 72.
[106] Linton, *Politics of Virtue,* 102.

their misgivings and innermost thoughts. It was this overblown 'sentimental inflation' that the Girondins attempted to delegitimise through laughter.[107]

Gestures were as important as verbal discourse in communicating the capacity for virtue, particularly since there remained an 'inconclusive debate on sovereignty' among the deputies, as Outram points out.[108] Similarly, Rosenfeld advocates that gestures were an important pedagogical tool in the later eighteenth-century, and philosophers looked to the pantomime for inspiration in creating a universalised bodily language which could be considered a natural means to communicate, thereby fostering 'social and intellectual harmony'.[109] For Marat, every gesture, every bodily action, was a careful, choreographed movement designed to convey virtuous comportment, transparency, and revolutionary action. He conducted himself in a manner compatible with the sensible man, as John Moore noted when witnessing his techniques at the Jacobin Club: "When Marat is in the tribune, he holds his head as high as he can and endeavours to assume an air of dignity – He can make nothing of that; but amidst all the signs of hatred and disgust which I have seen manifested against him, the look of self-approbation which he wears is wonderful – so far from having the appearance of fear, or of deference, he seems to me always to contemplate the Assembly from the tribune, either with the eyes of menace, or contempt."[110] Although Moore was an unsympathetic observer, he still conveys Marat's controlled and deliberate movements, which were designed to juxtapose his own person with the uncontrolled heckling and laughter from his opponents. As Antoine de Beacque has described, the free man – the hero who must save France – held his head high, assured and proud; he knew that those who made the greatest expressions were seen to be imbued with the greatest feeling.[111] Such a stance seemed faintly ridiculous but could also be intimidating, as Moore explained: "He speaks in a hollow croaking voice, with affected solemnity, which in such a diminutive figure would often produce laughter, were it not suppressed by horror at the character and sentiments of the man".[112] In the revolution, the body became a discourse conveying an important significance of

[107] D. Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 157.
[108] Outram, *The Body in the French Revolution*, 76.
[109] Rosenfeld, *Revolution in Language*, 109.
[110] Moore, *A Journal During a Residence in France,* vol.2, 86.
[111] De Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 138, 189-191.
[112] Moore, *A Journal During a Residence in France,* vol.2, 87.

meaning: political figures were transformed into 'actors in a theatre, not only playing to an audience, but actually creating that audience through the existence of their drama'.[113] Through his gestures, Marat attempted to portray an autonomous and authoritative self by embodying recognisable tropes familiar to the theatre.

Possibly Marat's most memorable performance occurred on the 25 September, when he responded to an accusation of manipulating the crowd during the Massacres with a view to install himself at the head of a triumvirate – a derogatory connotation that not only evoked the undemocratic Caesar-Pompey-Crassus axis, but also the threat of the Feuillants in 1791 composed of Alexandre de Lameth, Barnave, and Adrien Duport.[114] With the absence of proof, Marat could only respond, as he said, with the purity of his heart and the sincerity of his actions: "Si par la négligence de mon imprimeur, ma justification n'avait pas paru aujourd'hui, vous m'auriez donc voué au glaive des tyrans? Cette fureur est indigne d'hommes libres; mais je ne crains rien sous le soleil." Marat then took out a pistol, put it to his head, and said: "Et je dois déclarer que si le décret d'accusation eût été lancé contre moi, je me brulais la cervelle au pied de cette tribune… Voilà donc le fruit de trois années de cachots et de tourments essuyés pour sauver ma patrie."[115] Marat, in his dramatic moment, simulated the *tableau*, a function of sentiment which freezes the narrative so the theatrical power of the scene is discharged to its full potential, culminating in a throng of emotion by means of a 'moralising reflection'.[116] Such a display of sacrifice – of *sensibilité* – had the potential to create a profound silence in the Convention or rapturous applause blended with tears. Indeed, just earlier in the same session Panis had reported that a young man who wanted to fight for his country had acted in exactly the same way: "Un jeune marseillais brûlant de patriotisme, se mettent le pistolet sur la gorge, s'écria: « *Je me tue, si vous ne me donnez pas les moyens de défendre ma patrie! »"* The onlookers were filled with tears as they witnessed second-hand this public proof of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the nation.[117]

[113] Outram, *Body and the French Revolution*, 79.
[114] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 76.
[115] AP 52:142 (25 September).
[116] Denby, *Sentimental Narrative*, 75-78.
[117] AP 52:137 (25 September).

However, Marat's stage-managed performance was ridiculed precisely because his actions were not one of a patriot fighting on the front, but of a deputy in the Convention, speaking with no obvious immediate threat to his existence. In addition to the laughter in the Convention, witnesses, journalists, and politicians alike were keen to point out the perfidious intentions behind Marat's apparent emotional honesty to the public. One member of the Convention complained that either Marat was the greatest scoundrel among men or the craziest.[118] John Moore wrote: "[w]hat he meant by this I know not, unless it was to vex the assembly on being disappointed of so desirable an event."[119] The Girondin press was much more critical and unified in their condemnation of this act – Brissot amplified the image of a gun-wielding madman and criticised Marat for interrupting a decree for the sake of petty histrionics.[120] The *Chronique* described the surprise on the faces of the *conventionnels* when Marat theatrically threatened to end his career in the manner of a Brutus, Cato or Beauapaire, the latter having killed himself to avoid dishonouring the *patrie* in his defeat at Verdun.[121] The deputy and journalist Prudhomme took the negative theatrical connotations further, describing Marat as a gun-toting *Polichinelle* after the Italian comedic buffoon figure.[122] Marat had many political enemies and they took measures to represent him as a comedic actor who faked his emotion on the public stage. Marat's role as a courageous patriot was particularly incongruous because it was seen to be in contrast to his behaviour outside the Convention. It was well known he had often fled whenever there had been royalist crackdowns, and the Girondist press were quick to point out his pusillanimous nature when he was faced with the prospect of prison.[123] This onslaught proved that deputies had to be careful in when and how they expressed emotional *sensibilité*: too flamboyant, too unbelievable, and they could expect to be ridiculed.[124]

[118] AP 52:142.
[119] Moore, *A Journal During a Residence in France,* vol.2, 25.
[120] *Le Patriote français*, no.1143 (26 September).
[121] *Chronique de Paris,* no.1081 (27 September).
[122] *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 168 (22-29 September), 14.
[123] *Le Patriote français*, no. 1181 (3 November).
[124] See also AP 54:393 (6 December) in which Tallien, attempting to speak amid insults and heckling, threatened to resign unless he was heard, inciting a chorus of boos and laughter, with some daring him to resign on the spot. Eventually, Tallien withdrew from the rostrum humiliated, as his emotional authenticity was unveiled as disingenuous and empty.

Marat, however, was not only aware of the value of presenting himself as emotionally honest, but also cognizant of the theatrical dimension of representational politics. Outram argues that the simulation of suicide was a powerful means to control a political audience.[125] The notion of glorious suicide was inherited from antiquity, from thinkers such as Plato and Seneca – the former evincing that only the good man can commit suicide; the latter arguing that it demonstrated an acceptance of death.[126] In the language of *sensibilité*, expressions and extravagant gestures were considered a gateway into the soul.[127] Sentimental truth occured in the movement 'which sacrifices position and wealth for the overriding moral imperative'.[128] In this regard, the more in tune a deputy was to his inner feelings, combined with his disregard of externality, the more he could convey the truth of his 'heart and soul which constitute the essential humanity of the hero.'[129] The persecuted hero based on the model of classical antiquity was also familiar to the literary style of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose own suffering depicted in the *Confessions* (often as a result of ridicule) was a major literary technique in assuring empathy with the reader and establishing his own uniqueness.[130] Indeed, Marat directly equated his own suffering to that of Rousseau: "les lâches, les aveugles, les fripons et les traitres se sont réunis pour me peindre comme *un fou atrabilaire*, invective dont les charlatans encyclopédistes gratifiaient l'auteur du Contrat social."[131] Heroism, in this manifestation, was not conceived as an aristocratic inclination towards personal glory. It emphasised an ardent love for the nation and self-sacrifice for it – as Jourdan writes: 'le véritable héroïsme est fréquemment sanctionné par le mort'.[132]

This theatricality of the left-wing may seem contradictory: according to Maslan, the Jacobins wanted the eradication of all traces of theatricality. In particular, Robespierre, in 1794 envisaged opening up 'all aspects of France's political life to public scrutiny without creating a theatrical relation – a relation that could mislead, mystify, or

[125] Outram, *Body and the French Revolution*, 102.
[126] Outram, *Body and the French Revolution*, 94-95.
[127] Denby, *Sentimental Narrative,* 183.
[128] Denby, *Sentimental Narrative,* 21.
[129] Denby, *Sentimental Narrative,* 20.
[130] J. Voisine, 'Self-Ridicule in Les Confessions', *Yale French Studies*, 28 (1961), 57.
[131] Marat, *Œuvres Politique,* vol.8, 4751.
[132] A. Jourdan, 'La guerre des dieux ou l'héroïsme révolutionnaire chez Madame Roland et Robespierre', *Romantisme,* 85 (1994), 19.

otherwise introduce opacity.'[133] Robespierre's decision to eradicate the theatrical element from politics during the terror must be seen, Maslan asserts, as a concerted effort to bring about the 'dramatic closure of the Revolution'.[134] In these early stages, however, the revolution had not gone far enough, and Marat and Robespierre carved a niche wherein they presented their political selves as persecuted heroes toiling on behalf of the public against the forces of ignorance. They were aware of their 'self', but crafted this identity both to accentuate their distinctiveness from others and to relate and connect to the audience.[135] Some, like Saint-Just, identified themselves firmly with specific heroes of classical antiquity, such as Brutus. Robespierre and Marat, on the other hand, crafted their own characters, and associated themselves indelibly with the fortunes of the revolution.[136] As Bergson argues, the figure of tragedy uses the power of conviction to assert his truth and individuality. 'No one is like him, because he is like no one.'[137]

For the Girondins, tragic heroism was an unwanted, oppositional language because it was based on a rejection of historical progress in favour of a natural, ahistorical order of things wherein one figure had been gifted with more virtue than anyone else. It also presupposed the existence of evil, which the hero was required to defeat in order to prove his mettle and save the Republic.[138] In contrast, the Girondins' conception of happiness assumed compliance and a collective trust in the law without a need for such titanic struggles – the Republic did not need to be saved. Melancholy was not their style because there was renewed faith in the course of history.[139] The theatrical aspect of heroic *sensibilité*, therefore, differentiated Marat and Robespierre and enhanced their image as defenders of the public good.[140]

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[133] Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts,* 131.
[134] Huet, *Mourning Glory,* 36.
[135] Andress, 'Living the Revolutionary Melodrama', 107.
[136] Linton, 'The Man of Virtue', 405-407. Saint-Just, on occasion, switched between heroes, causing unintentional mirth. His speech on the fate of the king evoked Marcus Brutus, the figure who assassinated Caesar to protect the Republic from the tyrant, but when defending the king's cousin Saint-Just compared himself to Lucius Brutus (409) revealing a contradiction in his logic. See also AP 55:83 (16 December).
[137] Bergson, *Laughter*, 164.
[138] M. Abensour, 'Saint-Just and the problem of Heroism in France', in F. Fehér (ed.),*The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford: University of California, 1990), 147-148.
[139] Jourdan, 'Robespierre and Revolutionary Heroism', 55.
[140] Jourdan, 'La guerre des dieux', 19. Jourdan explains how Madame Roland often complained about the egoism of many of the Girondins, and their unwillingness to display their heroism.

Laughter was an important ingredient in the representation of the tragic hero. This is because, as Denby argues, the hero needed to be a victim to produce the 'sense of protest or outrage' from the audience and convey his own suffering. In this narrative, misfortune provides the 'obstacle to happiness' which the hero must overcome.[141] This unhappiness adds to the authenticity of the performance, because the unhappy know the truth, 'anything short of the most desperate misfortune seems to be dismissed as superficiality, illusion, as a mask to be stripped away to lay bare the reality of human existence'.[142] Marat positioned himself as the unhappy bearer of truth, only to be tragically ignored by his accusers: "Telle a été mon opinion; je ne l'ai point propagée dans les cercles, je l'ai imprimée dans mes écrits; j'y ai mis mon nom, et je n'en rougis point. Si vous n'êtes pas encore à la hauteur de m'entendre, tant pis pour vous (*Rires ironiques sur certains bancs; applaudissements dans quelques tribunes*)."[143] Marat often defied the Girondins by claiming he answered to the unseen power of nature, rather than laws and institutions corrupted by man, "Quant à mes vues politiques, quant à ma manière de voir, je vous l'ai déjà déclaré, je suis au-dessous de vos décrets. (*Il s'élève quelques rumeurs, quelques éclats de rire*.)"[144] It was this show of defiance, his presentation as a foreseer of the future, and his warning that forces were amassing to thwart progress that prompted ridicule from the deputies.

Similarly, Robespierre's skill was founded on his ability to create the impression he was unduly victimised; this was augmented by his vehement emphasis in the demarcation between vice and virtue.[145] Like Marat, he used the indecent laughter aimed at him to his advantage. "Je méprise les sarcasmes imbéciles par lesquels je m'entends interrompre, lorsqu'il s'agit des grands intérêts du salut public; je ne puis les concilier avec l'amour de la patrie. Que ceux qui savent si bien plaisanter sur les malheurs de l'Etat, sauvent donc seuls la République."[146] Robespierre revelled in an isolated role. He challenged his opponents to come out in the open, from the mask of anonymity that a collective laugh provided.[147] For Robespierre, the action of laughter in the Convention was a movement unbecoming of a patriot; it was an artificial

[141] Denby, *Sentimental Narrative*, 13-14.
[142] *ibid*
[143] AP 52:138-139 (25 September).
[144] AP 52:311 (4 October).
[145] Denby, *Sentimental Narrative,* 159.
[146] AP 61:479 (9 April 1793).
[147] AP 56:248 (6 January 1793).

indication of subterfuge, of shadowy forces conspiring against the true patriots. It was not a collective manifestation of the general will. Furthermore, when he was accused of calumny or other offences, such as paying the audience to cheer for him, Robespierre made sure to explain how his persecution was unjust: "Oui, il était absurde de m'accuser, puisque, non content de remplir en vrai patriote que mes commettants m'avaient imposés, je me suis encore dépouillé de tout ce que je pouvais regarder comme la récompense de mon patriotisme." [148] Marat also perpetuated the representation that his enemies were a cabal, orchestrating their puppets behind-the-scenes, and directing them to laugh at those who were burdened with the truth. "Des hommes perfidies que j'ai longtemps dénoncés comme les plus mortels ennemies de la patrie, les membres de la faction Brissot. Les voilà devant moi; ils ricanaient à l'instant au bruit des cris forcenés de leurs acolytes; qu'ils osent me fixer maintenant."[149] In this manner, laughter was represented as something planned and insincere, as opposed to the exhibitions of spontaneous sentiment from Marat.

What demarcated Robespierre, Marat and, to a lesser degree, Danton, from the rest of the Convention were their appeals to the audience – they understood the importance of interacting, not with their fellow deputies, but with the spectators in the galleries. Robespierre drew attention to his own importance to the revolution by often associating his own misfortune to that of the people and public opinion: "En montant à cette tribune pour répondre à l'accusation portée contre moi, ce n'est point ma propre cause que je vais défendre, mais la cause publique, car celui qui est accusé d'avoir aspiré à puissance contraire au maintien de la liberté et de l'égalité est un ennemi de la chose publique."[150] It was Marat, however, who seemed to be most aware of the importance of the gallery. He attacked the vociferous catcalls from the Gironde:

> Si j'ai dans cette Assemblée un grand nombre d'ennemis, je les rappelle à la pudeur et à ne pas opposer de vaines clameurs, des huées, ni des menaces à un homme qui s'est dévoué pour la patrie et pour leur propre salut. Ce n'est pas par de menaces, et des outrages que l'on prouve à un homme inculpé qu'il est coupable; ce n'est pas en criant haro sur un défenseur au peuple qu'on peut lui démontrer qu'il est criminel.

[148] AP 52:133 (23 September 1792).
[149] AP 52:141 (25 September).
[150] AP 52:102 (23 September).

And then, looking to the galleries, he said: "Qu'ils m'écoutent un instant en silence, je n'abuserai pas de leur silence."[151] This was a significant move because it transposed the role of audience from the deputies in the Convention, to those citizens watching on from the spectator seats. As a result, those who laughed at Marat, were not critics of a performance, but active participants within it, taking on the role of villains and persecutors, and creating the misfortune that was required to fulfil the role of the victimised hero.[152] The question to ask from all this, is: which emotional strategy was the most effective in winning the battle of representative authority, the laughter of surveillance or theatrical heroism?

Representing Sentiment

The early period of the Convention, it can be concluded, was marked by a battle over who could express sentiment in the most convincing manner. While the Girondins laughed, they were also aware of how this laughter could be seen negatively by the public. Consequently, the moderate press detailed that deputies laughed from a feeling of pity and sentiment rather than malevolence, because the dissenters who were ridiculed had not been infused with the proper revolutionary spirit that constituted a patriot. According to the *Patriote français*, although the Convention had received Marat with the murmurs of indignation, these outbursts were soon supplanted by the "rires de pitié" when they realised his failure to understand the conditions of the Republic.[153] Additionally, Cambon was made to look out of his depth when one of his proposed decrees, "dont la *simplicité* a fait sourire", was ridiculed in the *Patriote français*.[154] The implication was that the agitators in the Convention were compared to rank-and-file enemies: honest in their intentions, yet not quite knowledgeable enough to understand the benefits of the Republic because they had not been regenerated. The laughter of surveillance, used to control behaviour and humiliate indiscretions, was passed off as compassionate.

Rousseau gave two different explanations of pity, one positive, and the other negative. In his *Essay on the Origins of Languages*, Rousseau outlined pity as a function

[151] AP 52:138 (25 September).
[152] Denby, *Sentimental Narrative,* 73.
[153] *Le Patriote français,* no.1166 (19 October).
[154] *Le Patriote français,* no.1182 (4 November). For more examples of the Girondin press advocating they had laughed with sentiment, see: Buzot, *Mémoires,* 'Première lettre à ses commettants (11 January 1793)', 210; Gorsas (ed.), *Le Courrier,* vol 4., no.1 (1 January 1793).

of the human being in which he could calculate what his fellow man required, such as love. As pity was a solely human quality, those who felt it could recognise their peers and form a society together.[155] In this sense pity was a positive development because it provided the sense of union humans required to become sociable. However, pity in *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and *Émile*, was purely self-centred, forming, with its counterpart, *amour-de-soi*, a solely animalistic notion central to the state of nature [156] The Girondins justified pity through the former explanation: their laughter was an expression of sociability and cooperation, allowing society to flourish. The problem was that the argument was unconvincing. Laughter was too contrary to the sentiment of pity in eighteenth-century political culture. Another problem was that pity itself could be considered a demeaning expression. Ute Frevert argues that Rousseau's natural *pitié* 'imposed a hierarchical relationship, an asymmetry between those who offered it and those who received it.'[157] The Girondins, by claiming to pity certain deputies, also expressed their superiority and unbalanced the equality of the Convention.

The actions of the Gironde were viewed by many to be vindictive, petty and needless. René Levasseur, a perceptive observer of events, stressed that the Montagnards were not the ones who had splintered from the rest of the Convention; it was the Girondins that had isolated themselves.[158] Many of the deputies, he wrote in his memoir, were new to Parisian politics and were ingrained with the idealistic aspiration the Convention would be united in working towards the good of the people. Their idealism had been destroyed from the opening sessions by ridicule which continually pierced the pretence that any utopia existed.[159] Although laughter was used to unify the Convention, it had the opposite effect. Even Paganel, a deputy sympathetic to the Girondins, acknowledged the mistakes the group had made in these months. "La perte des girondins fut résolue; et malheureusement ils l'avaient eux-mêmes rendue possible, en prenant l'offensive contre les personnes au lieu de se renfermer dans la

[155] Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes*, 29-31.
[156] Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes*, 112.
[157] Frevert, *Emotions*, 154.
[158] R. Levasseur, *Mémoires* (Paris: Rapilly, 1829), vol.1, 49.
[159] Levasseur, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 58.

défense des principes."[160] Marat did not miss an opportunity to draw attention to the heckling of the Girondins: "J'ose vous rappeler à votre dignité: il ne suffit pas d'entendre un accusé, il faut l'entendre sans l'interrompre, sans l'outrager…"[161] Other deputies, finding their feet and gravitating around Robespierre, were also attacked. Albitte, interrupted by the Girondins for accusing them of stockpiling grain, addressed their heckling by inferring that his accusations must be well-founded, for if he was mistaken "on m'écouterait en silence. (*Rires ironiques et murmures*.)"[162] Merlin de Thionville also pleaded for silence "Je vous prie, président, au nom de la nation, d'imposer silence à ces Messieurs du côté droit qui veulent usurper le droit que j'apporte ici de dénoncer mon opinion. (*Rires ironiques et murmures sur les mêmes bancs*.)"[163] When Girondins laughed, the left-wing drew attention to its convulsive and unseemly properties.

There is enough evidence to suggest Robespierre abhorred ridicule, at least within the Convention. He had experience of it; after Mirabeau, he was the favourite target of the royalist press during the Constituent Assembly, though he never responded openly to it.[164] Ridicule in the Convention carried a more personal edge, however, because many hostile deputies had been friends of his in 1789. On 27 June 1794, Robespierre reminded the Jacobins that Brissot had calumniated the good patriots through laughter in the early Convention: "il voulait nous rendre ridicules pour nous perdre." Robespierre affirmed his belief that the Convention could only make sublime laws when all deputies had a clear conscious; ridicule poisoned "l'âme pure" and was indicative of an immoral character.[165] This is consistent with his writings at the time. In November 1792, he asked: "Comment la raison publique pourrait-elle faire entendre sa voix dans le tumulte des plus viles passions?"[166] Robespierre even denounced his friends when they made jokes. When Danton, in September 1792, made a lewd joke at the expense of the Rolands (no friends of Robespierre), he complained in his newspaper that Danton had offended the dignity ("la gravité") that the Republican

[160] P. Paganel, *Essai historique et critique sur la Révolution française, ses causes, ses résultats : avec les portraits des hommes les plus célèbre* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1815), vol.2, 11.
[161] AP 52:134 (25 September).
[162] AP 52:439 (10 October).
[163] AP 53:77 (30 October).
[164] M. Bouloiseau, 'Robespierre vu par les journaux satiriques (1789-1791)', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 30 (1958), 33, 48.
[165] Robespierre, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.10, 506-507.
[166] Robespierre, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.5, 127-128.

Assembly demanded.[167] If laws were part of the process of public education, then there had to be measures instilled to clarify the moral worth of legislators to make sure they were qualified to instruct the people.[168]

A further problem caused by laughter, heckling and murmurs, was that, when a concerted group formed to oppose the control of the Girondins, they had license to heckle and laugh because the Girondins had already legitimised it as an acceptable method of parliamentary debate. By December, the murmurers against the Gironde were beginning to carry weight. Opponents on the left-wing of the Convention were growing in number because many wished to see an end to Louis Capet. These deputies argued that their own indecent words, while coarse, carried a brutal truth that was necessary to unveil the machinations of the moderates. Additionally, they argued, was politeness not an aristocratic quality suitable only to the court? Jean-François Rewbel, a moderate, rebuked this view, arguing that harmful insults were not seemly for the Republic:

> Si la politesse n'est pas une vertu républicaine, la décence en est une; car il faut des mœurs dans une république; et si l'on ne respecte pas les représentants du peuple, comment feront-ils de bonnes lois, qui seules peuvent amener les bonnes mœurs? Quand on a perdu le respect pour les organes de la loi, la loi elle-même cesse bientôt d'être respectée.[169]

As upholders of the law – the source of virtue and republican behaviour – the Girondins strove for dignified and passionless debate by December, because the galleries wielded an ever-increasing influence over debates. Delacroix noted that the tribunes terrorised the Assembly, and Brissot sarcastically bemoaned "le souverain des tribunes".[170] To solve this, they attempted to quell the crowd through legislation that was barely ever enforced.[171]

Meanwhile, the representation of a heroic man of virtue was elevated to a higher plane of significance in 1793, becoming a matter of life and death. In the trial of the Girondins, the journalist Hébert, called as a witness, completely reversed the roles in

[167] Robespierre, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.5, 49.
[168] Robespierre, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol.5, 208-209.
[169] AP 54:31 (2 December).
[170] AP 52:138; *Le Patriote français,* no.1155 (9 October).
[171] AP 52:209 (29 September 1792).

the tribunal and reminded the audience of his own experience as a prisoner on trial in order to condemn his rivals. “Citoyens, je remercie mes persécuteurs. Leur conduite à mon égard a éclairé le peuple sur ses véritables ennemis; elle lui a fait connaître l’ont défendue. Après mon arrestation, le peuple prit une attitude fière, les sections cherchèrent le moyen de sauver la chose publique”.[172] Misfortune, so laughed at in 1792, had become the expected norm. Tangible proof was disregarded. Fouquier-Tinville projected this when denouncing the Gironde: “les preuves de leurs crimes est évidents; chacun dans son âme la conviction qu’ils sont coupables”.[173] The Girondins cannot be absolved of this development. As Barnave opined in his own trial, it was Brissot’s group who had legitimised these strategies of groundless denunciation and conspiracy when they defamed Barnave’s reputation: “voici l’art perfide qu’il a employé.”[174]

In conclusion, laughter – a weapon of censorship to silence unwanted discourses – gave those discourses related to the terror an added power of veracity that would last beyond the demise of the Girondins. The government was hampered by the elongation of sessions and paralysed by its own ideology of miraculous regeneration which denied the possibility of disagreement. Marat and Robespierre knowingly used laughter for their own ends, thereby outmanoeuvring the Girondins, even when the Convention was weighed against them. When the Montagnards occupied the positions of government, they would also use laughter to as a weapon of ridicule. However, they would not make the mistake in framing laughter as sentimental, a representation which was highly damaging for the Girondins because ridicule evidently was not a movement of empathy, thus compounding their efforts to appear transparent. Instead, the Mountain would compartmentalise laughter under a very different emotional category in an effort to eradicate oppositional discourses.

[172] ‘Le Procès des Girondins’ (25 October 1793), in G. Walter (ed.), *Actes du tribunal Révolutionnaire recueillis et commentés par Gérard Walter* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1968), 193.
[173] ‘Le Procès des Girondins’ (30 October 1793), in Walter (ed.), *Actes du tribunal*, 237.
[174] ‘Le Procès de Barnave’ (8 Frimaire/28 November 1793), in Walter (ed.), *Actes du tribunal*, 314.

Chapter 3

The Last Remnants of Satire?

It was no coincidence that the role of satire – and indeed laughter – was questioned and fought over during the debates on the king's fate. The Montagnards identified satire as a potential obstacle in securing the death penalty and was part of a wider obsession with curtailing the influence of the Brissotin press in the provinces.[1] More importantly, they recognised the capability of satire, with its multiple forms in the theatre, newspapers and placards posted in the streets, to have the potential to undermine their representational authority which they had worked hard to maintain in the face of ridicule inside the Convention. Issues concerning censorship, popular violence, libel and freedom of speech came to a head at this time. The question of satire exposed the unbridgeable gap between the two factions. The Girondins actively promoted and extolled the writings of journalists who were further to the political right than them, while the Montagnards vented their anger at works which they claimed to be an affront to virtue, but had much to do with personal embitterment over biting remarks. The problem with satire was that its message depended on the interpretation of the audience. As Roselyne Koren indicates, it was much harder to refute an accusation that the reader had inferred than to reject an explicit insult.[2] The Mountain, unable to deflect pointed barbs outside the Convention as they had done so successfully within it, would take steps to silence the satirists. For this reason, this chapter will go beyond the confines of the Convention in order to analyse the satirical content of right-wing newspapers that angered a selection of deputies. Here, I will argue that satire, so commonly held up as the style of the aristocrat, became a prevalent strategy for the Girondins and was largely nullified, not after August 10, but with the execution of the king. Secondly, the ideological arguments concerning satire brought to light disagreements over the role of language in relation to the identity of the revolution. In essence, the defence of satire revealed a wider battle over what constituted the regenerated expression of honest and moral patriotism. However, it is first important to address the relationship between satire and *sensibilité* in the eighteenth-century and explain how satire – defended by the Girondins – could

[1] Whaley, *Radicals*, 110-111.
[2] R. Koren, 'Violence verbale et argumentation dans la presse révolutionnaire et contre-révolutionnaire', in Chisick et al, *The Press in the French Revolution* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1991), 321.

possibly function in the political culture founded on social progress, sentiment, and universal happiness.

Regenerative Language: Satire and Heroic *Sensibilité*

In the late summer of 1793, prominent members of the Gironde wrote their memoirs while imprisoned or as fugitives on the run from the authorities in order to imprint their world view and give their opinion on an increasingly one-sided story.[3] What was striking in the various accounts were their similarities in terms of themes and style – all unfolded in the manner of a sentimental novel, particularly reminiscent of Rousseau's acclaimed auto-biographical work, *Confessions*, and, by extension, the style of heroic *sensibilité* forcefully projected by Marat and Robespierre in the Convention. In other words, the Girondins used a type of emotional language they had previously condemned and ridiculed in the Convention in a final attempt to win over the audience. For his part, Brissot made no secret of Rousseau's influence on his own life story, claiming that he had read the *Confessions* at least six times.[4] Indeed, Rousseau had preached his love for writing and reading – especially Plutarch – and as a child he imagined himself to be a hero in his own drama, self-styled on those of classical antiquity.[5] The Genevan never lost this ideal image of himself, and he was able to present himself as his own protagonist through his novels, particularly in *Confessions*, which was unashamedly candid. Rousseau, in his own novel way, laid bare his soul and invited his audience to judge him, as Peter France has identified, '[t]he sinner confessing his sins ceases to be a contrite creature seeking God's forgiveness and becomes a heroic figure, braving public ignominy to tell the truth.'[6]

The sentimental framework was apt for the Girondins' defence because its two key modes involved 'moulding the emotions and feelings of readers' and interacting with the political controversies of the day, therefore maintaining a balance between virtue and political intrigue.[7] From this we can conclude that heroic *sensibilité* was a script of opposition, best used by those who were outsiders, or those who sought to appear as

[3] For details of these former deputies and an analysis of the value of their memoirs, see B. W. Oliver, *Orphans on the Earth: Girondin Fugitives from the Terror, 1793-1794* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009).
[4] Brissot, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 24.
[5] Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 226-227.
[6] P. France, *Rousseau: "Confessions"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 26.
[7] M. Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996), 2.

such. This style, verging on the melodramatic, was far removed from the genre of satire. But it was not, as William Reddy has argued in his conceptualising of emotion as 'emotives', a clear indication through language of the revolutionaries' true feelings.[8] Rather, taking into account the emphasis on the revolutionaries' awareness of public perception and the imperative task to persuade this body of opinion, the patriots ably alternated their public identity to maximise their powers of influence.[9] Marat, Robespierre and the Girondins may have applied *sensibilité* to highlight their own uniqueness, but it was not an exclusive style of language in the revolution and had little effect in certain quarters. Furthermore, the language of empathy had been used by the factions at different points in time and for different reasons. For the Girondins, defeated and disillusioned, writing a defence in the manner of the epistolary novel was a means to reveal their 'inner nature' in an attempt to establish some kind of authority through exploiting the 'new form of empathy'.[10]

Certainly, memoirs of all kind were consumed by an eager public. Especially popular in the latter half of the eighteenth-century were the candid confessions of nobles, whose revelations were avidly read. The aim of the nobility, in these memoirs, was usually to slander an opponent in order to defame their reputation and good character. Unforeseen was the effect these publications would have in the public sphere. The accounts, often not intentionally, detailed a world in which intrigue, conspiracy and slander were commonplace and accepted in courtly life; such narratives only seemed to confirm or perpetuate the prejudices of readers who held the image of the malicious aristocrat in their minds, even though the majority of memoirists were misinformed of the intricacies of actual statecraft.[11] These scandalous memoirs, according to Peter Campbell, had the effect of turning people, first, towards virtue as a preferable alternative to religion in asserting a sense of morality into politics, and second, patriotism, which served to legitimise 'intervention to save the body politic or body social, by empowering virtuous citizens.'[12]

[8] On Reddy's explanation of emotives, see *The Navigation of Feeling*, 104-107, 128.
[9] The acknowledgement and importance placed on public opinion by historians of the revolution is described in Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 12.
[10] Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights,* 38, 57.
[11] P. R. Campbell, 'Perceptions of Conspiracy on the eve of the French Revolution' in P. R. Campbell et al, *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 25-34.
[12] Campbell, 'Perceptions of Conspiracy ', 33.

In contrast to the aristocratic memoirs, the testimonies from the patriots expressed moral fibre through the accentuation of virtue and patriotism. Buzot acknowledged that while the reader might expect to find some "bonnes perfides" in his memoir, he had sought to defy these presumptions by stressing the audience would only find examples of good morality and virtue.[13] Highly effective in conveying this, and a pervasive feature of the sentimental novel, was the theme of solitude – the state in which man can be free of corrupting influences and, through contemplation, have access to only the truest, most sublime thoughts. Louvet wrote that he had a particular style of working: "c'est-à-dire absolument solitaire, éloigné de tout commerce du monde".[14] Brissot emphasised that he wrote with great loneliness and sadness in his prison cell and Buzot also confirmed he was far removed from the polluting depravity of *le monde*. The Gironde did this to convey their morality, therefore reassuring the reader that what they were to read was true: particularly important, considering that many of the memoirs were written as a testimony of innocence against the innumerable debilitating accusations the Gironde had suffered at the hands of the Mountain and the Paris Commune. The similarities to Rousseau again are potent. In *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau issued a disclaimer on how to read his novel, urging the audience to isolate themselves from the prejudices of society because, "[w]hen one lives alone, one does not hurry through books in order to parade one's reading; one varies them less and mediates on them more. And as their effect is less mitigated by outside influences, they have a greater influence within."[15] The revolutionaries prescribed to this view. In his attempt to elucidate on the advantages of loneliness, Buzot reasoned that the body was equipped with only so much *sensibilité* to express for others before it dimmed and lost its natural vigour; to be *seul* directed *sensibilité* internally, meaning feelings could be understood better, enabling the lonely man to clearly demarcate between virtue and evil.[16]

Efficacious in conveying honesty and transparency was the *tableau* of vindictive aggressors persecuting the hero of the memoir through laughter. The Gironde took

[13] F. Buzot, *Mémoires inédites de Pétion et Mémoires de Buzot et de Barbaroux*, ed. C. Dauban (Paris: Plon., 1866), 4.
[14] J.-B. Louvet, *Mémoires de Louvet de Couvrai sur la révolution française* (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1889), vol.1, 4.
[15] Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, cited in Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 231.
[16] F. Buzot, *Mémoires sur la Révolution* (Paris: Pichon, 1828), 182.

pains to underscore the humiliation and ridicule they endured throughout their revolutionary careers to prove that the true motivation in their political lives was the welfare of the people. For example, Brissot denounced satirists such as Champcenetz and Rivarol who had ridiculed his writings for his humble upbringing.[17] These attacks, he said, elevated him among the company of geniuses such as Virgil, Horace, Diderot and, most importantly, Rousseau, who were all derided by an elite unable to grasp their sublime thoughts.[18] Brissot suggested that satire revealed an aristocratic desire for a society based on a rigid hierarchy rather than virtue.[19] Similarly, Pétion assured his readers that he had refrained from callous jokes because they were an affront to the dignity and modesty of others.[20] The condemnation of laughter raised these patriots to a higher plane of virtue because of their experience of misfortune. "Le grand art d'être heureux, c'est de savoir être malheureux", wrote Brissot.[21] Buzot explained that misfortune was the catalyst which drove a thinking being closer to his feelings; amidst a terrible storm that misfortune brings, the air was purer and more serene than the noxious vapours that enchained his own activity otherwise: "C'est à l'école du malheur qu'on se forme à la jouissance des seuls bien qui conviennent à l'homme sur la terre".[22] Through the regaling of misfortunes, the patriots believed they could develop an emotional connection with the reader by portraying their hardships, travails and pain when toiling to make the revolution succeed.

However, there was a degree of hypocrisy in the memoirs. Another, alternative, strategy in these writings was to cover the antagonist to the hero with ridicule. Rousseau, while complaining of the effects ridicule had on his state of mind, nevertheless painted his enemy, Melchior Grimm, in equally absurd and ridiculous terms, describing him as feminine to an excessive degree and vainglorious in habits of

[17] See R. Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 17-20. Darnton recounts the humiliation the writers on 'grub street' felt when they were ridiculed by more esteemed literary talents. The revolution afforded these writers new avenues of opportunity, to the chagrin of their social superiors. See, for example, 38: 'Rivarol interpreted the Revolution as the work of the status-hungry surplus population of men who had failed to make it in the old order'.
[18] Brissot, *Mémoires,* vol.1, 26-27.
[19] *ibid*
[20] J. Pétion, *Mémoires inédites de Pétion*, 132.
[21] Brissot, *Mémoires,* vol.1, 6. Brissot followed a well-exhausted line when arguing that, to know happiness, a person had to have experienced unhappiness. The Bishop Bousset wrote at the turn of the eighteenth-century: 'To be unhappy means to be alone, unhappiness comes from solitude'. Cited in Zeldin, *Intimate History of Humanity,* 67.
[22] Buzot, *Mémoires,* 182.

fashion and cleanliness. Peter France adjudges that Rousseau, in unveiling Grimm's foibles, places him on an imaginary stage and encourages the audience to laugh. The comedy is aggressive, farcical and cruel and, because Rousseau sees in Grimm many traits he finds deplorable, can be deemed as satire, for Grimm is the vessel to which Rousseau vents his anger at wider problems in society.[23] As Simon Dickie has shown, contrary to appearances, eighteenth-century culture was far from polite and sentimental; rather, it was cruel and unforgiving.[24] Madame Roland can also be accused of indulging in absurd ridicule in her memoirs, despite claiming to be above such practices. Her target was Anacharsis Clootz, the Prussian who advocated the universal Republic to much derision from his colleagues. Clootz had often dined in the Roland household, before his sudden criticism of the Ministry marked him as a target.[25] Presenting him as an object of ridicule, Madame Roland described the guffaws of diners when Clootz admitted his hopes for a Convention composed of deputies from all corners of the world. She also divulged his dinner habits to the reader: "Il parla longtemps et très haut, mangea avantage et ennuya plus d'un auditeur."[26] Once again, the contrary and deceptive nature of eighteenth-century culture is on show. Just because the revolutionaries claimed they were in tune with the sentiments of others, does not mean they refrained from insults and ridicule if it meant they could undermine a political opponent. It is also noticeable that in their memoirs the Girondins attempted to gain the empathy of the readership through the conveyance of personal suffering rather than expressing explicit empathy for others; indeed, ridicule and satire operated to eliminate any empathy the reader might have for other characters. Both heroic *sensibilité* and ridicule were vital in persuading public opinion and were interchangeable depending on the situation and context.

We have seen how Marat and Robespierre turned ridicule against their accusers in the Convention by employing the technique of heroic *sensibilité* to perpetuate the representation of a persecuted hero fighting against his antagonists. The Girondins

[23] France, *Rousseau*, 55-57.
[24] S. Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth-Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
[25] In fact, Clootz, after Marat, was probably the most ridiculed member of the Convention due to his unique political program, his rude personal habits, and his status as foreigner. For one notable satirical attack by a fellow deputy, see J.-B. Girot, *Représentant de la Nation Française, A Anacharsis Cloots, Représentant de l'univers* (Paris: Gorsas, 1792). For laughter towards Clootz in the Convention, see AP 58:229-230 (5 February 1793).
[26] Roland (Manon), *Mémoires*, vol.1, 106-107.

assimilated this technique into their memoirs, although the language of *sensibilité* was more appropriate to the plight of these men who were genuinely suffering the greatest misfortune in 1793. Heroic *sensibilité* was a script used by deputies to convey the need for further regeneration, which was why it was eschewed by the Girondins when they dominated the Convention. The difference between the two political sides in 1792 was that members of the Mountain went beyond the page and acted out their travails on the political stage; a strategy deemed to be contrary to the prevailing attitudes within the government of the time (as evidenced by the laughter). This reveals a curious relationship between laughter and power in the revolution. Because of the importance of empathy in establishing authority, along with the performative aspect of the Convention, ridicule only had the power to transfer legitimacy towards those laughed at. It was no wonder the Gironde failed in their strategy to humiliate the Mountain, as Laura Mason writes: '[s]atire, whose humour rests on the audience's ability to disentangle subterfuge and find a truth that is never stated directly, and ridicule, which is undaunted by any sacred principles, could not have been more foreign to [revolutionary] thinking'.[27]

Yet, as is so often the case, matters were not that simple. Marat and Robespierre were able to deflect ridicule in the Convention because their role as actors on the national stage afforded them chance to exhibit their *sensibilité* immediately, and thus prove their virtue to the watching spectators. The art form of satire, providing as it did a more meaningful societal message than personally attacking a representative's demeanour, caused greater anxiety for deputies because it was not ephemeral; poured over by an audience in need of a laugh and not accommodating the opportunity for instant refutation, satire could strike at the representational authority of the deputies. Therefore, outside the Convention, ridicule had an altogether different power of persuasion that could nullify any attempts of sentiment. The very fact Brissot and Rousseau, in their works, had remembered sarcastic writings aimed at them in their darkest moment, and took pains to defend themselves from it, showed how damaging satire was, not only to a representative's reputation, but also to his feelings.

[27] L. Mason*, Singing the French Revolution: popular culture and politics, 1787-1799* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 69.

Satirical laughter, argues Michel Delon, was generally theorised over by eighteenth-century thinkers to either condemn laughter as a whole, or to distinguish bad laughter from the good.[28] When conceptualising the moral value of laughter, the *Encyclopédistes* frequently iterated the formula of Aristotle; laughter, a property unique to humankind, expressed the thoughts of man and revealed the nature of his spirit. Accordingly, the chevalier de Jaucourt outlined moderate, seemly laughter as an expression of joy, which suddenly appeared on the face.[29] However, the satirical laugh, free from any moral cause, appeared through a more tortuous process in the body, compelling some medical practitioners to warn of its debilitating corporeal effect.[30] Caracciolli, the eulogiser of *gaieté*, condemned satirical laughter as anathema to contemplation and decency because it was convulsive, immoderate and aggressive.[31] Rousseau was explicit in his hostility to this mode; satire was used by the miserly to satisfy an empty void within them. "Le méchant se craint et se fuit; il s'égaye en se jetant hors de lui-même; il tourne autour de lui des yeux inquiets, et cherche un objet qui l'amuse; sans la satire amère, sans la raillerie insultante, il serait toujours triste."[32] The *Encyclopédie* article *Ris sardonique*, composed by Ménuret de Chambaud, underscored the animalist nature of the satirical laugh because it constituted the baring of teeth similar to a dog, and its abnormality, because laughter is an unnatural substitute for a negative emotion like sadness or anger in situations when the laugher is the victim.[33] The prominent eighteenth-century physiognomist, Johann Casper Lavater, denoted that, "[h]e is certain of a base and malignant disposition who laughs, or endeavours to conceal a laugh, when mention is made of the sufferings of a poor man, or the failings of a good man."[34] In the memoirs of defeated Girondists, the villains of the piece exhibited this movement. Madame Roland insisted Robespierre had sniggered throughout her dinners before their political split, and had launched "sarcasmes" at her friends' ideas, only to steal and reiterate them in the Assembly next

[28] M. Delon, 'Le Rire Sardonique ou la limite du Rire', *Dix-huitième Siècle*, 32 (2000), 257.
[29] Delon, 'Le Rire Sardonique', 255.
[30] Delon, 'Le Rire Sardonique', 256-257. See also Richardot, *Le Rire des Lumières*, 23-26 on the negative effects laughter purportedly could have on the body.
[31] L.-A. Caraccioli, *De la Gaieté* (Frankfort & Paris: Gille-Cœur), 201.
[32] Rousseau**,** *Emile,* 597, cited in Chamayou, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau,* 92.
[33] 'Ris sardonique' in D. Diderot & J. d'Alembert (eds.), *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers,* v.14 (University of Chicago: ARTF Encyclopédie), 300-301. Available online: http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu [Accessed 09/03/2015].
[34] J. C. Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*. Translated from German by T. Holcroft (London: William Tregg, 1853), 476.

day. Far from exhibiting the smile of trust, Madame Roland warned, Robespierre possessed "le rire amer de l'envie" which functioned to scorn others.[35]

While the *rire sardonique* had largely negative connotations, the genre of satire and its uses was at the centre of protracted debates in the eighteenth-century. The relationship between the Enlightenment and satire is complicated, not least because many who condemned it nevertheless created their own satirical works.[36] Voltaire, in his *Mémoire sur la satire* (1739), aimed to distance himself from a genre he was synonymous with by expressing his disgust that men could print what they liked about others without ramifications. Only works in good taste, he affirmed, were able to reform the behaviour of others.[37] Jaucourt's article described satire as a form of verse which attacked "directement les vices ou les ridicules des hommes".[38] However, satire was also a scathing denigration of known personalities in which the audience took a base pleasure in the humiliation of others; its counterpart, the theatrical comedy, had a more positive effect because the playwright composed his characters from principles rather than personalities and invited his audience to learn moral lessons from what transpired on the stage. The satirist was enveloped by "cruauté" in his quest to expose vice; elsewhere, the serious critic was merely interested in conserving pure and honest ideas, without reproaching the character of any man.[39] Jaucourt, as Yann Robert has highlighted, also wrote an entry in the *Encyclopédie* entitled "libelles" which appeared the same year as "satyre". In this article, Jaucourt stated that a few defamatory libels were permissible if the satirist was able to enlighten the people on the misguided conduct of powerful men, thus exhibiting a reluctance to condemn satire altogether.[40] Similarly, a libel was only a libel, said Voltaire, when it was devoid of instruction and attacked a personality with the intention of destroying him.[41] According to Rousseau, reasoned arguments were much more potent in making a point than satire, because

[35] Roland (Madame), *Mémoires*, vol.1, 202-203.
[36] Richardot, *Le Rire des Lumières*, 216.
[37] Voltaire, *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Hachette, 1892), vol.24, 15-17.
[38] "Satyre" in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers,* vol.14, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert, University of Chicago: ARTF Encyclopédie, <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu> , 700.
[39] *ibid*
[40] Y. Robert, *Living Theatre: Politics, Justice, and the Stage in France (1750-1800)*. PhD thesis (Princeton University, September 2010). Available online: http://gradworks.umi.com/34/14/3414153.html [Accessed 11/02/2015], 144.
[41] V. Kapp, 'Satire et injure au XVIIIe siècle: Le conflit entre la morale et la politique dans le débat sur les libelles', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 36 (1984), 159.

seriousness demonstrated a personal conviction that was of a greater resonance in attacking vice. Satire only succeeded through seducing the reader into laughing at the ridiculous aspects of life without doing anything to precipitate change.[42] In essence, there was discord over the use of satire in elite circles, in addition to its incapability to express sympathy for others.

For Jean-Paul Marat, in his years before the revolution, there were no saving graces found in satire. In *Chains of Slavery*, not published until 1792 in France, he warned against using satire for the purpose of defending the public. "Quand on réclame contre l'oppression, il importe que ce soit toujours d'un ton grave, animé, pathétique, jamais plaisant. Les traits de la satire portent bien sur le tyran, non sur la tyrannie; et, loin de faire revenir l'oppresseur, ils blessent mortellement son amour-propre, ils ne font que l'aigrir et l'acharner toujours plus."[43] In Marat's view, similar to Rousseau and Jaucourt, the failings of satire rested in its ineffectiveness to attack an institution or group; it only succeeded in defaming someone's personal character, and when that person was a monarch he would be embittered by the personal attacks and subsequently oppress the people further. Marat argued that laughter was not a release from servitude but, rather, the opposite:

> Les écrits satiriques ne servent guère d'ailleurs qu'à serrer les nœuds de la servitude. Quand les gens sages ne les croiraient pas toujours exagérés, ces écrits n'iraient pas moins contre leur fin. En amusant la malignité du peuple, ils le font rire de ses souffrances, ils diminuent ressentiment contre les auteurs de ses maux, et ils le partent à souffrir patiemment le joug.[44]

Marat reserved his ire for the *écrits indécents* who advanced the opaque motives of the monarch by making the public laugh, unknowingly, at its own expense. The ideal patriot was to be cool, *sans passion,* and should plead the cause of the people with "un ton grave" and "un ton de maître". Marat contrasted this with the "auteurs ridicules, qui se donnent pour les champions de la liberté, ne font que nuire à ses intérêts: leurs languissons écrits ne réveillent point, ne persuadent point, n'enflamment point le lecteur; leur sotte dialectique le dégoûte, et le dégoût enchaine tout effort

[42] Chamayou, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 93.
[43] J.-P. Marat, *Les chaînes de l'esclavage* (Paris: Harvard, 1833), 146.
[44] *ibid*

généreux."[45] *Gravitas* ensured reasonable, compassionate debate; satire guaranteed inflaming a discussion, while filling the audience with entirely the wrong passions.

It has been suggested that many philosophers were ambivalent towards satire but maintained their critical stance to remain consistent in their denunciation of aristocratic superficiality and cruelty.[46] Those that did advocate satire argued they were defending the proper French language by employing their fine method of taste against mundane philosophy and barbarism.[47] Rivarol was one of these, as were newspapers such as *Actes des Apôtres*, which critiqued the new words of the revolution that were repeated so often, but actually meant very little without referents in their explanations. However, by deriding the serious language of republicanism, satire was perceived to be bound up to the hopes of counterrevolution, because it resisted positive change.[48] The mocking culture of the aristocrat, referred to as *le bel esprit,* functioned as a form of light censorship in order to strengthen cohesion and uniformity among the aristocrats and to avoid contentious political subjects.[49] The *bel esprit* also operated to keep intruders out, by way of a strict mode of communication nearly impossible for those not privy to court politics to understand.[50] Seeing this as distasteful, the patriots positioned revolutionary language as abrupt, short and straightforward; it was to reveal the natural order of things without confusion and ambiguity. According to de Baecque, Brissot was one of the major proponents of this in the early years.[51] The revolutionaries connected linguistic advancement to social and intellectual progress: there was, in effect, 'an acute and singular sense of the power of language to shape human destiny'.[52] The embroidered language of wit and persiflage was the language of old, and considered to be devious and dishonest.

But virtuous threads of satire can be traced among the republicans. Brissot had acknowledged and excused Rousseau's satire precisely because he studied alone, allowing him to become an immensely superior being compared to the witticisms of

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[45] *ibid*
[46] De Baecque, *Éclats du Rire*, 111; Robert, *Living Theatre,* 144.
[47] L. Poinsinet de Sivry, in his own tract on laughter, bemoaned the "dissertations plus assommantes les unes que les autres". See W. Brooks, 'Introduction', in de Sivry, *Traite des Causes Physiques et Morales du Rire, 1768* (University of Exeter: Short Run press, 1986), X.
[48] De Sivry, *Traite des Causes Physiques*, 141.
[49] Richardot, *Le Rire des Lumières*, 83-96.
[50] Robert, *Living Theater,* 130-131.
[51] De Baecque, *Éclats du Rire*, 248.
[52] Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language,* 5-6.

insignificant men who were corrupted in a culture of refined society. Aristocrats wielded satire to impress others; men of reflection used satire to make a moral point and to improve society.[53] In this conception, the individual laugher was framed as a man of reason rather than a conspirator. Louvet, too, saw some importance in satire. He looked back to his time as an author and dramatist as a humorous time. In 1791, he drafted a play entitled *La Grande Revue des armées noir et blanche*, which was performed on twenty-five separate occasions in the théâtre de Molière. Louvet described it as "très gaie, très satirique, très patriotique surtout". Louvet saw satire as a positive literary mode (as long as it was free from corrupting governmental influence) because it could police the state.[54] For the Girondins, satire was reprehensible in a monarchy; in a Republic, it was a natural extension of polite ridicule, enabling the government to police political life. This was the framework that formed the justifications for its use as a strategy against the left-wing. The Montagnards, on the other hand, would relay the pejorative arguments against satire among Enlightenment writers as a means to denigrate the character of the Girondins.

By November 1792, a group of right-wing partisans who had tactfully kept a low-profile in the violent summer months re-emerged on the political scene to mock the culture of virtue. Former aristocrats and monarchists were well suited to the genre of satire. Before the August revolution they had used it to maintain their privileges in the face of growing unrest. Satire, in its nature, was a conservative weapon opposed to change: 'elle est marquée par l'attachement aux traditions, la causticité rustique, la dérision devant toutes les manifestations grandiloquentes, la dénonciation de la dégradation morale du temps présent.'[55] After July 1789 and then August 1792, satire became a means for men who had lost their privileged status to vent their frustrations and pour scorn on an incomprehensible revolutionary culture. Furthermore, satire was also a weapon for those who wanted to resist the extreme course of revolution. While satire is a manifestation of anger on the writer's part, it can also provoke anger in the audience because it arouses indignation and contains an element of truth. Therefore, satire specialised in double entendre, innuendo, exaggerated claims and hyperbolic statements that were so ridiculous they were meant to be interpreted as exact

[53] Brissot, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 21-22.
[54] Louvet, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 14.
[55] Chamayou, *Rousseau,* 94.

opposites of the author's true opinion by the informed reader.[56] It was no wonder considering its often opaque and clouded meaning that revolutionaries saw in satire a threat to their representational authority – an authority which was based on very uncertain foundations to begin with. By 1793, the Girondins – among them, those who had promoted laconic and urgent language – advocated this type of persuasion so often recognised in the eighteenth-century as malevolent, first, because they claimed it had been expunged of all aristocratic and monarchical influence, and, second, because they required their own style to resist the language of classical republicanism.

The Satirical Press and the Resistance to Radicalisation

The golden age of satire in the revolution lasted from 1789 until May 1790, wherein there were 24 separate right-wing newspapers.[57] However, almost all of these papers such as *L'Ami du Roi* and the *Gazette universelle* had been shut down on 12 August by the Paris commune.[58] After August, monarchist papers disappeared or had to moderate their views to avoid censorship, while the archetypal aristocrat became a mere joke in different spheres of French political culture.[59] On 23 August the Committee of General Security demanded no authorisation should be given to the sale of new newspapers in order to prevent the circulation of dangerous royalist ideas, although this law was not instigated until 4 December.[60] Nevertheless, by September, the Convention had reclaimed control from the Commune and gradually right-wing papers filtered back onto the markets. The term right-wing is problematic since it encompasses a diverse political spectrum including royal absolutists, constitutional monarchists, and conservative Republicans. Popkin defines the umbrella of the right-wing as those groups who were resistant to the democratic innovations of 1789. In the conditions of the Republic, I define the right-wing as those who wanted France to return to a previous state before 1792, whether it be a time before the August uprising, the flight to Varennes, or the fall of the Bastille. Although the Girondins originally approved of the demolishment of the right-wing press – Gorsas was at the

[56] Mason, *Singing in the French Revolution*, 66.
[57] W. J. Murray, *The Right-Wing Press in the French Revolution*, *1789-1792* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1986), 25.
[58] A. Söderhjelm, *La Régime de la Presse pendant la Révolution Française* (Helsingfors: Imprimerie Hufvudstadsbladet, 1900), vol.1, 228.
[59] Higonnet, *Class, Ideology, and the Rights of Nobles,* 79.
[60] Murray, *The Right-Wing Press*, 193-194. This law was clarified on the 29 March 1793.

forefront in criticising them[61] – they gradually softened their attitude, instead focusing their attention on silencing the extremists to the left who were considered a greater threat.[62] Some royalist papers such as the *Journal de Perlet* and the *Quotidienne* would endure in their various forms to become a success and outlast the revolutionary period. The latter was a pessimistic newspaper that only promised to lighten its tone when peace and order was restored to France.[63] Ultimately, some of the right-wing newspapers fell out of publication shortly after the fall of the Girondins themselves, while others diluted their scathing attacks in order to survive. Alma Söderhjelm, at the turn of the twentieth century, dismissed the importance of the right-wing press to the revolution after August 1792 because of their longevity. She argued that the royalist press endeavoured to hide their opinions and avoid attention from the republicans.[64] Despite a wealth of research on the press in the French Revolution since, the importance of the right-wing journals to the political debate during this period has been overlooked.[65]

In actuality, a remnant of the right-wing press was central to the political dialogue of the Convention, becoming prominent in December, January and February to the discussions concerning the liberty of the press and the moral worth of satirical language. Here, we will concentrate on two right-wing newspapers, the *Journal français ou Tableau politique et littéraire* and the *Feuille de matin ou le Bulletin de Paris*. Both of the aforementioned papers, in their differing ways, urged a return to the past, as opposed to the Girondins who were striving to maintain the present. They appeared at the height of Girondin power and poured scorn on the Mountain, the Jacobin club and the Paris commune. This garnered them popularity from certain quarters of the Convention but also attracted the unwanted attention of the censors. Though not vulgar, they were two of the most violent papers of the period; the *Journal français*, for instance, encouraged the assassination of prominent Jacobins on the 11

[61] *ibid*
[62] J. Popkin, *The Right-Wing Press in France, 1792-1800* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1980), 7.
[63] Popkin, *The Right-Wing press*, 18.
[64] Söderhjelm, *La Régime de la Presse*, 229.
[65] See Murray, *The Right-Wing Press*. Murray labels his chapter on the right-wing press after 10 August as an 'epilogue'. De Baecque also places the end of his narrative on satire at August 1792; see *Éclats du Rire,* 152. Popkin's *The Right-Wing Press*, does not go into detail on how the right-wing press interacted with politics in the early months of the Republic.

December.[66] We can assume their satires were popular among the readership and reflected its assumptions precisely because of their continual presence – as Popkin has argued, papers pandered to the beliefs and prejudices of their readership: journalists, therefore, 'did no more than follow their audience.'[67] Their relevance to the factional debates of the Convention is also highlighted by the movements of the Jacobins and the Commune to silence the satirists; by 1793 both editors of these papers were illegally incarcerated, precipitating Girondin efforts to secure their release. This raises the question: why were these two satirists specifically targeted by the political left and not other right-wing journalists?

The *Journal français ou Tableau politique et littéraire*, edited by Gabriel-Henri Nicole de Ladevèze, was created on 15 November 1792. Nicole, friends with Madame de Staël, associated with the Feuillants and was right-wing in the sense that he pressed for a return to the state of things before August 1792.[68] His journal's continual existence relied on the protection of the Girondins and it subsequently ceased publication soon after their downfall, on 2 June 1793. From the outset, the newspaper was clear on its aim. The editor promised to eschew the discourse of *sang-froid*. Nicole outlined that he would attack the men with blood on their hands, such as Marat and Chabot, with a specific means: "L'arme du ridicule et le fouet de la critique feront justice de tous ces *Brutus* en miniature."[69] For the right-wing press in all its political forms, satire was the remedy to the culture of empathy in the revolution because – ironically given the patriots' insistence on transparency – it subsisted of a general and brutal truth which could unmask pretentious nonsense. A letter sent to the *Journal français* on the 25 November congratulated the editor for his use of satire, because he had the foresight to not recklessly confront the Jacobins head on with their own language – a naïve strategy of which the moderates had been guilty; rather, the editor was commended for slaughtering the Jacobins with the truth of satire and encouraged him to go further with his attacks:

[66] Popkin, *The Right-Wing Press,* 14.
[67] Popkin*, The Right-Wing Press,* 83.
[68] Nicole's biographical details appear in F.-X. Feller, *Biographie universelle, ou Dictionnaire historique* (Paris, 1834), vol.9, 177.
[69] G.-H. Nicole de Ladevèze (ed.), *Journal français ou Tableau politique et littéraire*, 'Prospectus' (15 November 1792).

> Poursuivez le petit Tallien retranché dans ses amendements: arrachez le masque de popularité qui couvre la figure couperosée de l'infiniment Robespierre: fouettez la blafard Thuriot: immolez au ridicule le Bazire, et vouez au mépris général les Chabot, les Bentabolle, les St. André, les d'Eglantines, les Colot et toute cette séquelle pitoyable à qui l'on attache, on ne sait trop pourquoi, une sorte d'importance.[70]

What is noticeable is the unchanging stance of this newspaper in comparison to the methods and beliefs of the right-wing press before 1792. The complaints were still the same: the satirist mourns over a once great language now abused. Discussing Rivarol's distaste for patriotic language, Antoine de Baecque writes that, "la capacité de rire, malgré tout, encore et toujours, est présentée comme la seule arme possible contre les prétentions révolutionnaires".[71] These papers were motivated by their desire to preserve the sanctity of the French language. The *Feuille de matin* wrote "On se rappelle que le cardinal de *Mazarin* qui appelant l'*arrêt d'union, l'arrêt d'oignon,* était plus haï & plus méprisé à cause de son langage burlesque, qu'à cause du despotisme avec il gouvernait France; les gens que nous attaquons sont certainement cent fois plus coupables que lui, notre devoir est donc de prouver qu'ils sont cent fois plus ridicules".[72] The satirists revelled in their own *abus de mots*, laughing at the republicans' fear of a literary style that suggested uncertainty over the 'true nature of things'.[73]

The *Feuille de matin* appeared on 24 November and was an inflammatory paper that looked to ridicule aspects of revolutionary culture which threatened "la religion, la décence, les mœurs, les loix & les AUTORITÉS CONSTITUÉES, & autant que nous les pourrons, le bon goût & les principes de la langue français".[74] The editor, Jacques-Louis Gautier de Syonnet had previous form in the press. Originally a Grub Street writer striving for success, the revolution afforded him the opportunity to helm the editorship of the *Journal général de la Cour et de la Ville*, commonly known as the *Petit Gautier*, which became a fully-fledged counterrevolutionary paper by May 1790, and was the best-selling and most popular newspaper for the far right until its fall on the 10

[70] *Journal français*, no.11 (25 November).
[71] De Baecque, *Éclats du rire*, 134.
[72] J.-L. Gautier de Syonnet (ed.), *Feuille de matin,* no.28 (23 December).
[73] Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language,* 126.
[74] *Feuille de matin*, no.10 (4 December).

August.[75] Gautier showed strength of will to continue editing royalist satire in the form of the *Feuille de matin*, a newspaper that shared the same tone as *Petit Gautier*, even after the fall of many of his contemporaries' newspapers.[76] In December, Gautier reproached claims his paper was a continuation of *Journal général de la Cour*, asserting his ambition was to attack vice, crime and the ridiculous. Yet, the paper still campaigned for the restoration of a monarchy and the protection of institutions associated with the past.[77] He also claimed his wit would contain general truths no one else dared to speak about. On 23 December, the editor explained that he had received a degree of surprise with the paper's "ton de gaieté", especially given the current tragic circumstances in France. In a similar fashion to the *Journal français*, the newspaper justified its light-hearted tone, detailing that all other weapons were powerless against a common enemy it named as the *jacoquins* (a pun on the word *coquin* meaning rascal), who preached murder, revelled in their brigandage and spoke violent rhetoric. What right did they have to speak for the people above anyone else? The paper stated its purpose: "alors il est du devoir d'un journaliste ami de l'ordre, des loix & de l'humanité, de profiter des moyens que leur offrent leurs mortels ennemis pour les rendre odieux par le ridicule."[78] The aims these two papers used to justify satire – the focus on humiliating individuals, thus exposing their hypocrisy to the public, and safeguarding the natural wit of the French language – belonged to a traditionally aristocratic camp, but lent itself to Girondin policy at that moment, for the moderates were attempting to resist the radicalisation of Republican political culture and had acquired an appreciation for satire to realise this goal. In essence, to protect the present, the Girondins promoted a style of language associated with the past in republican political culture in an effort to resist further rupture and violence.

To be a satirist in Paris was a dangerous occupation and journalists still had to avoid censure from the Paris Commune. The problem for Gautier entailed finding the right balance between avoiding attention while selling enough copies to exist. For this purpose, he used a disparate number of strategies to disguise the jokes for fear of attack from the *sans-culottes.* First, the newspaper appeared without any prior

[75] Murray, *The Right-Wing Press,* 27, 49, 130. Gautier had defended the king's flight to Varennes and praised the violent actions of the National Guard on 17 July 1791.
[76] A. Lods, 'Un journaliste de la Révolution, Le Petit Gautier', *La Révolution française*, 63 (1912), 510.
[77] *Feuille de matin*, no.10 (4 December).
[78] *Feuille de matin*, no.28 (23 December).

announcement, with the first three issues sent to people of confidence who could cover the cost of publication.[79] To subscribe to the newspaper, a citizen had to write to the editor and state his intentions.[80] Second, when the paper detailed an offensive joke, it usually issued a warning beforehand deriding it as an inappropriate comment, in order to distance itself from ownership of the joke and to convey (sarcastic) innocence. For example, the *Feuille* reported a story, with *faux* disapproval, of a citizen who joked that the reason the Montagnards talked of suffering so much in the Convention, was because they did not know the difference between their bottoms and their mouths.[81] In the same way, the *Feuille* excused parodies because, according to the writer, they served as a form of praise to the original work that was parodied. With these justifications the newspaper published a parody on *la Marseillaise*: "L'original est un petit poème sublime; la copie est un débauche d'esprit; l'un est l'élan du génie de la liberté d'un grand peuple; l'autre est l'expression de l'amour de la bonne chère." The editor had assured its readers he had only decided to publish the poem because Paris was in need of a good laugh, plus the crude wording highlighted the sublime nature of the original.[82] At other times, the *Feuille* could barely contain its disgust for "cette précieuse égalité dont nous jouissons enfin".[83] Claiming that the Jacobins had taken to shaving their hair (because it was inconvenient and superfluous), Gautier wrote that he hoped the fashion would catch on, and that a "boutique" be created on which would be inscribed "*ici on rase les jacobins proprement*."[84]

As stated, these journals found much in common with the aims of the Girondins. This is because patriot discourse – especially languages of conspiracy and heroic *sensibilité* – was spiralling out of control with the commencement of the king's trial; the Gironde required a level of law and order to pacify rowdy partisans of the Commune, and the circulation of newspapers, with their power to affect national spirit and influence public opinion, was a strategy which was thought could achieve this.[85] The *Journal français* and the *Feuille de matin* could contribute to unmasking the strategies of high-profile Montagnards in the Convention through their satires. One of their frequent

[79] Popkin, *The Right-Wing Press,* XIV.
[80] *Feuille de matin*, no.1 (24 November).
[81] *Feuille de matin*, no.12 (6 December).
[82] *Feuille de matin,* no.2 (25 November).
[83] *Feuille de matin,* no.1 (24 November).
[84] *Feuille de matin,* no.3 (27 November).
[85] Walton, *Policing Public Opinion*, 204.

techniques was to place a satire in the form of an advertisement for a new book, theatrical play, or a public announcement. For instance, 'Robespierre' had placed a notice alerting citizens to a lost manuscript entitled *la Journée des dupes* which he had misplaced while leaving the Convention.[86] Like a lot of the press before 1792, these right-wing papers created an imaginary space where their formidable enemies were placed in plausible situations with their comical actions and thoughts reducing them to ridiculous figures stripped of all power and dignity.[87] This device allowed the satirists to unveil the underhand techniques in the Convention: "L'art de l'orateur, traduit de Quintillion par Chabot, dans lequel on prouve qu'avec le mots de souveraineté, liberté, insurrection, et despotisme, on peut parler six heures de suite devant les tribunes, avec la certitude d'être applaudi."[88] In a different issue, the *Journal* disclosed the lexicon which would trigger rapturous applause from the tribunes, even though many spectators did not actually understand the words they applauded. These words were: *la souveraineté de la peuple, insurrection, se lever tout entier, majesté nationale,* and *vengeances du souverain*.[89] Other strategies were also laid bare by satire. Tallien came under particular scrutiny. This Jacobin was sarcastically congratulated by the *Journal* on his success in delaying sessions and blocking legislation through his incessant tactic of asking for an amendment and further clauses to a proposed law. The paper invited its readers to purchase the six fat volumes of Tallien's best amendments in a parody of a literature review.[90] Merlin de Thionville was lauded for his 'book' which was a guide on how to organise and prepare the tribunes before a session in the Convention, while the committee of surveillance had apparently drafted twenty volumes of arrest warrants written in blood.[91]

The satirists were scathing against what they saw as vacuous rhetoric composed of meaningless words that were only uttered by the left to gain a positive reaction from the crowd and intimidate the moderates. This stance correlates with one of Mercier's explanations regarding the failure of the revolution. He lamented that every action was taken in the name of a general whole, and this emerged as a form of intimidation

[86] *Journal français*, no.22 (6 December).
[87] O. Elyda, 'La mise au pilori de l'Abbé Maury: Imaginaire comique et mythe de l'antihéros pendant la révolution française', *AHRF*, 341 (2005), 3. See also Speier, 'Wit and Politics', 1372.
[88] *Journal français*, no.1 (15 November).
[89] *Journal français*, no.9 (24 November).
[90] *ibid*
[91] *Journal français*, no.10 (25 November).

because it denied anyone the opportunity to individually denounce crowd unrest. Furthermore, words had lost their meaning and were deprived of sense; phrases operated to seduce the crowd and the most unintelligible of them formed the justifications for oppression.[92] Analogous to this, Lynn Hunt has insisted words had some kind of 'magical quality' in the revolution because of the absence of any other institutional power to justify representational democracy.[93] The declaration and declaring of words had a special authoritative and galvanising outcome in which deputies 'effectively seized sovereignty'.[94] This meant language played a key role in the process of transforming culture and did not just reflect revolutionary change. Consequently, as legislative (as well as representative) power emanated from them, words inhibited a sacred value not to be mocked. Affirming this position, Marie-Hélène Huet has described the revolutionary reliance on the word as law: '[t]he written object must be proclaimed and, conversely the proclaimed object must be put into writing, thus attesting the Assembly's constant concern for the legitimacy of its acts'.[95] The consternation of moderates when witnessing the manipulation of the crowd by the Montagnards suggests that, while words did not carry quite a literal sacred sense beyond any reproach (just because a patriot named himself Brutus, this did not make him anymore pure, wrote the Montagnard Baudot),[96] the process of winning over the crowd had much to do with re-defining words in its favour. The left-wing adapted the meanings of their words when it was advantageous for them to do so. Definitions were not fixed in the revolution; neither were they beyond the control of men. They were malleable, ready to be construed in favour of a people who could do no wrong. The satirists, with their wit, drew attention to the inherent weakness in a republican system eroded by underhand tactics from patriots seeking to manipulate public opinion while at the same time disavowing such corruptive practices. Secondly, they criticised individuals for promulgating a culture that placed emphasis on abusing words to legitimise the criminal activity of the extremists. Gautier, for instance, ridiculed the calls to natural law, and questioned the Jacobins on how many people were required to transform the definition of a criminal assassination into an act of justice from the

[92] L.-S. Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris* (Paris: 1797), vol.1, XXII-XXIII.
[93] Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class,* 20.
[94] Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 132-133.
[95] M.-H. Huet, *Mourning Glory: The Will of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, 1997), 5.
[96] Baudot, *Notes Historiques* (Paris: D. Jouaust, 1893), 150.

people.[97] The Girondins also expressed dissatisfaction with their opponents' method of plucking words from a void to please the crowd or bending meanings to accommodate the actions of the unruly Commune, and were edging towards a finalisation of their constitution that would entail a codification of words preventing this abuse.[98]

Additionally, the right-wing press denounced the practice of public politics, comparing the Jacobin Club unfavourably to a comedy theatre. "On compare assez ingénieusement la société des citoyens *Da… Robes*… *Col*… *d'Herb…* et compagnie, à ces petits spectacles en plein vent, qu'on voit auprès du Pont-Tournant des Tuileries. *Mar…* est l'aboyeur, qui appelle les passants; *Dan…* est la paillasse qui fait ses forcés en dehors et qui casse la tête à son compère; l'incorruptible *Robes*, reçoit l'argent à la porte, et *Coll*… *d'Herb* joue son rôle en dedans avec ses succès ordinaires et connus."[99] This was another unchanging complaint from the aristocracy at the outset of the revolution and one which was shared with the Girondins: political practice had degenerated from a secret affair set apart from the prying eyes of the people to a farcical spectacle performed for the enjoyment of the public, ensuring a decent into anarchy and chaos. Although satirists disparaged this development, they also profited, because political life was henceforth an issue of image and reputation which they could ruthlessly exploit.[100] The Girondins were also uneasy on the nature of transparent politics because it allowed their enemies chance to fill the tribunes with their support.[101] The *Journal français* complained that the deputies no longer made the legislation – it was the Mountain reinforced by the cries of the tribunes that ruled France. The Mountain was compared to animals, while the Jacobin Club was the zoo where its beasts would sometimes escape to make the proceedings in the Convention a disgusting display. "Ce n'était plus le sanctuaire des lois, où la voix de la sagesse était écoutée; c'était une arène où les jongleurs les plus audacieux luttait entre eux de férocité et de barbarie."[102] The right-wing press of 1792 followed a well-trodden line

[97] *Feuille de matin,* no.3 (27 November).
[98] When Condorcet's draft constitution was approved to be printed, the Montagnard, Mailhe, argued that alternative draft Constitutions by other members should also be printed. Garran-Coulon, seconding the motion, was ridiculed for denying that the expense would be too much. AP 58:625 (14 February 1793).
[99] *Feuille de matin*, no.3 (27 November).
[100] De Baecque, *Éclats du Rire,* 135, 151.
[101] See AP 55:634 (26 December) and, in particular, AP 55:45 (14 December) when an unnamed member complained of "ces vociferations de cannibals."
[102] *Journal Français,* no.53 (27 December).

paved by papers such as the *Chronique du manège* that mocked the setting of a riding-school for the National Assembly in 1789.[103] Simon Critchley has explained that a prominent method of satire is to bring forth the animalistic nature of man, reflecting in the joke some uncomfortable realities of human nature. 'The truth of satire is obviously not to be assessed in terms of literal verifiability, but rather to warn us against a danger implicit in our self-conception.'[104] The satirists denounced the disrupting and undignified strategies of the left-wing, noting its dangerous capacity to encourage violence within the assembly.

The papers also confronted the Jacobin suspicions of generals.[105] Nicole wrote that the Jacobins ground their teeth and cried with rage when they heard of Dumouriez' victories; this conversely placed joy in the hearts of true patriots.[106] "Les Jacobins, en attendant mieux, s'amusent à dénoncer nos généraux, le uns après les autres" he wrote.[107] The *Journal* also stated that the Jacobins were devising a penal code that incorporated the punishment for anyone who dared lead the French to victory – "une contradiction si bisarre" it made the positon of the generals a delicate one.[108] The *Feuille* was of the same opinion, questioning why Marat and his cronies were so furious when they heard the cries of victory in the streets of Paris. The newspaper suggested ulterior, personal motives purporting that a girl named 'LA GRANDE VICTOIRE' had denied the advances of Marat in favour of being 'EMPORTÉE' by an officer-general.[109] These right-wing papers invested fully into the belief that *gaieté* had returned to France after the tumult of August and September. Gautier approved of the re-emergence of satirical newspapers marked by *gaieté* and reason, and compared them to sea birds reappearing after the storm.[110] He deplored patriots greeting each other with the term *citoyen* because it was too formal and hampered the tone of *gaieté* "qui commence (*un peu*) à se perdre."[111] Gautier also criticised émigrés who sided with the enemy – their plans to march on France were derided as ridiculous

[103] Murray, *The Right-Wing Press,* 72
[104] Critchley, *On Humour,* 35.
[105] *Journal français*, no.4 (18 November).
[106] *Journal français*, no.22 (6 December).
[107] *Journal français,* no.2 (19 November).
[108] *ibid*
[109] *Feuille de matin*, no.8 (2 December).
[110] *Feuille de matin,* no.9 (3 December). "Leur ton de gaieté, de légèreté, de raison d'humanité, déplaît beaucoup à une certain société."
[111] *Feuille de matin*, no.6 (31 November).

("Pauvres aristocrats! Comme vous nous faites rire!").[112] The satirists were keen to impress on their audience the centrality of *gaieté* to the natural disposition of the French, because it was this temperament that made them superior to other nations.[113] This is in contrast to the type of *gaieté* espoused by the Girondins, which was appropriate to all regenerated beings.

All this amounted to a battle over what constituted the true temperament and language of a patriot; the satirists and Gironde asserted lightness of spirit as a genuine expression of virtue compatible with the Republic because the final regeneration had been achieved and the people could bask in success. Consequently, there was a concerted effort to paint the serious style of the Montagnards, as well as their sensitive demeanour, as counterrevolutionary. This accusation was facilitated by the presence of the king's cousin, Philippe Égalité in the Convention. He was a target for the moderates because he epitomised the hypocrisy of those who condemned monarchy while welcoming a royal to their benches.[114] Gautier accused the Montagnards (the partisans of "l'EGALITÉ") of harbouring Philippe because they had ambitions to supplant his royal cousin with the puppet.[115] At one stage, Philippe stormed out of the Convention in disgust at the insults he suffered, leading Basire to defend him by warning the French should deal in principles and not people: a moralistic ruling which differentiated good and bad eighteenth-century satire for many enlightened thinkers.[116]

Alternatively, the Girondins put forward the case that the left-wing was intentionally creating disturbances in order to save the king. The moderate Lanjuinais was laughed at when he forewarned the Convention that the Mountain were hidden royalists who had purposefully accelerated the judgement of the king in unfair conditions to ensure feelings of sentiment from the public: "[l]es vrais royalistes sont ceux qui font naître la pitié du peuple pour le roi, parce qu'ils veulent l'assassiner lâchement, au lieu de le

[112] *Feuille de matin,* no.7 (1 December).
[113] *ibid*
[114] AP 55:80 (16 December).
[115] *Feuille de matin*, no.14 (8 December). See also *Journal français*, no.36 (18 December). "En effet, périsse Louis et vive l'Egalité: tel est le refrain chéri de cette société."
[116] AP 55:160 (19 December).

juger: voilà les vrais royalists."[117] Others sought to alert the audience to the unpatriotic past lives of the Montagnards. When Étienne Nicolas de Calon denounced rhetoric against the Mountain as calumny, Gensonné retaliated by reminding the Convention that Calon was reputedly a royal officer in the attack of insubordinate troops at Rennes who professed their loyalty to the tricolour flag in 1791.[118] The satirists also waded in on this point, noting the royalist credentials of Merlin de Thionville and Lepelletier in particular.[119] At the same time, it was not clear what the moderates hoped to achieve from such a strategy. Patrice Higonnet, for instance, has been critical of this strategy because in the long-term the Girondins were proving conciliatory to émigrés and were resisting radical measures against them, but in the short-term had attempted to persecute their opponents for being of the nobility and, as a consequence, inadvertently opened the door for the lifting of parliamentary immunity.[120] The moderates were torn in their strategies to save the king, oscillating between presenting the left as an aggravated minority which could be laughed off, or as a counterrevolutionary threat to the progress of the Republic.

Gautier and Nicole were represented by the left-wing as enemies of the revolution because they had chosen to moderate their views and support the Gironde in the struggle for the king. Other royalist papers, such as the *Quotidienne* (which was praised by Gautier)[121] had condemned the whole complexion of republican politics, but had no bearing on the factional infighting because of their disassociation from factional strife. Furthermore, the language of the satirists was thought to mislead the people into accepting the current political state. Robespierre defined criminal journalists as those who poisoned public spirit with seductive means rather than the language of reason.[122] The Republic, in effect, still needed to be regenerated, and the people were to be presented with serious language that could precipitate regeneration. Another reason for the crackdown was the emotional and humiliating personal aspect satire could have, although Lanjuinais was laughed at by the Mountain

[117] AP 55:65 (15 December). There were shouts of "Ah! Ah!" and two bursts of laughter from the extreme left.
[118] AP 56:589 (7 January 1793). Madame Roland also tried to present Marat and his followers as aristocrats in her *Mémoires*, vol. 1, 148.
[119] *Journal français,* no.22 (6 December 1792).
[120] Higonnet, *Class, Ideology, and the Rights of Nobles,* 105.
[121] *Feuille de matin*, no.27 (22 December).
[122] J.-C. Laveaux (ed.), *Journal de la Montagne*, no.75 (16 August 1793).

when he suggested Nicole had been arrested because he had offended the susceptibilities of the Commune.[123] On the other hand, Chaumette had complained to the Commune that the *Feuille* persistently derided him as a monk, so the arrest was justified.[124] Consequently, Gautier was labelled by the Jacobin Club as belonging to a royalist coalition; Nicole's paper was described as "le plus détestable de tous".[125] The satirists, argued the left-wing, divided the unity of the political body and promoted factionalism. As the Montagnard François Moreau said, "Quand on combat une opinion, on annonce que l'on diffère de sentiments, et cela peut être; mais quand on s'injurie, on prouve que l'on tient à un parti, et des législateurs n'en doivent point avoir (*Applaudissements.*)"[126] This was an argument that frequently appeared when disparaging the satirists. Thuriot, on 24 December, took the stand to complain that the newspapers were not policing the Convention as they should, but following the spirit of a party: "ils altèrent, défigurent, détroquent nos opinions. Ils s'érigent en censeurs de nos travaux; quelques-uns les rapportent à leur gré et substituent même leurs vues ou celles de leur parti à celles de la Convention".[127] The Jacobins believed the press were an aid to Brissot and Roland in the factional struggle and had to be destroyed. "Les journaux n'ont point changé; ils sont toujours infecté du virus *brissotique*, et je crois que tous ces libellistes mourront dans l'impénitence finale", announced a member in the Jacobin club. 'Il n'en est aucun qui ne se moque de nous, qui ne tourne Marat en ridicule, et les meilleurs appuis de la société." In consequence, the speaker advocated a policy of destroying the printing presses so these newspapers could not distribute their satires, save for Milcent, the editor of *Le Créole Patriote,* one of the few journalists that supported the Jacobins.[128]

Gautier and Nicole were not the first satirists to be imprisoned. Instead, it was the deputy Charles Villette, a man who had devoted himself to satire to impress his mentor Voltaire, who was incarcerated.[129] During the revolution he frequently contributed to Condorcet's *Chronique de Paris* with his satirical musings. On 28th

[123] AP 58:111 (1 February).
[124] *Chronique de Paris*, no.364 (31 December 1792).
[125] Aulard, *Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 590 (16 December 1792), 656 (7 January 1793); for denunciations of Nicole see 528 (30 November 1792).
[126] AP 55:84 (16 December).
[127] AP 55:386 (24 December).
[128] *Journal français*, no.55 (8 January 1793).
[129] A. de Baecque, *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths under the French Revolution.* Translated from French by C. Mandell (London: Routledge, 2001), 37-38.

December, Villette was arrested by the General Council of the Commune for his criticism of the municipal authority, although the instigator of the denunciation, the Jacobin, François Desfieux, had no intention of this. Desfieux explained to the Jacobin club that, from his scheme, he hoped the representatives of the Commune would present themselves at the Convention to rail at Villette, thus publicising to the provinces the malevolent intentions of the Girondin press in calumniating the people.[130] However, he maintained that he never imagined the Commune would arrest Villette, demonstrating the unruliness of the Commune and its volatile relationship with the Jacobin club.[131] Nicole was unimpressed upon hearing the news: "Il était trop juste que Charles Vilette reçut à son tour une ruade de nos bons amis les jacobins. Personne mieux que lui n'a voit manié contre eux le stylet acéré du persiflage et du ridicule."[132] The Convention unanimously agreed it was wrong that a representative of the people could be incarcerated in such a manner. Yet, upon listening to the details of Villette's arrest, it was striking how frequently the deputies laughed, as if the incident was an innocent mistake. For example, on 7 January, Marat, attempting to distance himself from the hasty actions of the Commune, was ridiculed on numerous occasions for resolutely pronouncing that Villette's arrest had been manufactured by Roland to induce sympathy and to create a smokescreen to hide his other machinations. Even more laughable was Marat's accusation that Chaumette, procurer of the Commune, had been working for Roland this whole time.[133] Chaumette, at the rostrum, dishonestly denied he had been involved in such an action and argued that the arrest contravened the principal of liberty of the press, which he held as sacred. The Convention laughed when informed of the bureaucratic errors and miscommunication which led to the arrest. For this reason, Chaumette revoked the arrest to cheers. Laughter was a sign of approval in this instance. Chaumette's comedic display inspired the Convention to forgive the wrongs that Villette had incurred.[134] As we have seen the deputies appropriated genres in the Convention to convey a message. Theatrical

[130] For Villette's offending article see *Chronique de Paris*, no.360 (27 December 1792).
[131] Aulard, *Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 652 (7 January 1793).
[132] *Journal français*, no.45 (28 December 1792).
[133] AP 56:263 In a short speech Marat was laughed at on four separate occasions when he denounced the Gironde: "C'est la coutume des hypocrites de crier sans cesse à la loi, comme c'était la coutume des prêtres de prêcher la continence et de déclamer contre les libertins. (On rit.)'
[134] AP 56:587

comedy depended on reconciliation, to which the audience reciprocated the correct response.

However, the *Journal français* was well aware of the magnitude of the situation. In its opinion Villette had been brought before the tribunal because of his jokes at the expense of the Jacobins. "C'est un grand tort, nous l'avouions. Cependant, nous prendrons la liberté de leur observer qu'ils ne sont pas fondés à ses plaindre, tant qu'à leurs coups de poignard, on n'opposera que de légères épigrammes. Ils bien nous permettre de *tout dire,* à condition qu'en revanche nous leur permettions de *tout faire.* Ce marché-là n'est sans doute pas un marché de dupes, cependant ils semblent encore n'en être pas contents, et voilà qu'ils font traduire devant les tribunes Charles Villette, comme coupable du crime d'avoir fait rire la France entière à leurs dépens."[135] On 31 December, the pleas of the *Journal français* became ever more desperate and soon set aside its jokes in favour of serious comment, "[c]e n'est point une plaisanterie; c'est très sérieusement que l'on poursuit à outrance devant les tribunaux Charles Villette." The newspaper mimicked the attitude of the average Jacobin in relation to laughter: "Ah! Monsieur de Villette! On vous apprendra à rire aux dépens de ceux qui tiennent entre leurs mains les clés de la carrier de Charenton."[136] The *Journal* supported Villette and insisted the Jacobins had turned their past into a sacred history that could not be touched or challenged.

Gautier, editor of the *Feuille de matin*, was arrested by the Commune on 30 December, along with Lafarge, editor of the aristocratic *L'Avertisseur*. While Gautier's arrest had caused uproar, the arrest of Lafarge was widely accepted. Lafarge had few friends in Paris. As Garat observed, his paper had not been funded by its readers, meaning it did not reflect public opinion, and its maxim that kingship was natural elicited laughter from all parts of the Convention.[137] Lafarge hoped for a past that even the Girondins did not want to contemplate. The *Feuille de matin*, meanwhile, ceased publication until the 29 January 1793. "Ce journal etait gai et plaisant" wrote Nicole, concerned for the ramifications for freedom of speech with the arrest of an editor.[138] Deputies inside the Convention ordered the arrest to be revoked. On 6 January, a

[135] *ibid*
[136] *Journal français*, no.47 (31 December).
[137] AP 56:615 (9 January 1793).
[138] *Journal français*, no.51 (4 January 1793).

moderate, Pénières, said Gautier was unduly arrested because he had made jokes about the Committee of General Security. "Gautier croit qu'il est de la plus grande injustice de lui faire un crime d'avoir plaisanté sur quelques personnes, tandis qu'on se tait à l'égard de ceux qui ne *cessent de prêcher le meurtre et le carnage*."[139] Pénières asked a pertinent question: was satire really worse, and any less patriotic, than the violent language of the Commune? The majority of moderates targeted the lexicon of the left as being far more anti-patriotic: "les propos sanguinaires sont toujours les langages des lâches; le vrai courage est calme" said Rabaut.[140] Villette, in a protestation to the Convention read by his friend Salle, inveighed that it was hurtful some deputies thought his satires carried "fermentations populaires". In addition, Villette denounced Chaumette for his words "anticiviques" which he considered more dangerous to the public than the turns of phrase he had used. In response to Villette's claim, Marat announced, "C'est la coutume des hypocrites de crier sans cesse à la loi, comme c'était la coutume des prêtres de prêcher la continence et de déclamer contre les libertins. (*On rit*.)"[141] The left-wing saw satire as inherently aristocratic and suggested it was a rallying point for hidden monarchists ready to defend the king; but the satirists presented violent republican language in similar terms, purporting that it misled the public into committing atrocities for the benefit of a few.[142] Both factions represented the other's language as evidence it wanted a return to the past, and publicly repudiated it. Nonetheless, the arrests of Gautier and Villette caused alarm for the Gironde, and on the same day they moved swiftly to fill the seats of the Committee of General Security.[143]

According to the moderates, the Republic had shifted the connotations of satire. Here on in, satire was an expression of worthy patriotism. Madame Roland permitted satire when praising the style and *gaieté* of Louvet: "c'est la raison en déshabillé, se jouant avec le ridicule, sans perdre de sa force ni de sa dignité."[144] Additionally, she defended the witticisms of Nicholas Chamfort who knew some very funny *boutades*

[139] AP 56:255 (6 January)
[140] AP 58:184 (3 February)
[141] AP 56:262-263 (7 January)
[142] See the transcript of the meetings at the Paris Commune in the *Chronique de Paris*, no.364 (31 December).
[143] AP 56:617 (9 January) When it was announced the Gironde had taken over the committee, Marat cried "C'est une conspiration…" while Duhem shouted "Reconnaissez-vous les intrigues de la faction?..."
[144] Roland (Madame), *Mémoires*, vol.1, 163.

that had the rare effect of making her think and laugh at the same time. When faced with constant denunciations and hyperbolic *sensibilité*, satire was the mode that could reveal the hypocrisy of the left to the public. Addressing accusations that Chamfort possessed the wit of an aristocrat, Roland argued that, just because men had talent, this did not preclude them from being patriots. Revealingly, she wrote, "[n]os exagérés et nos hypocrites n'ont jamais voulu comprendre qu'il fallait employer les hommes en raison combine de leurs talents et de leur civisme, de manière à faire valoir les uns au profit de l'autre."[145] Similarly, in the Convention, Buzot defended Nicole, much to Robespierre's distaste, the latter denouncing Buzot's "bile aristocratique et royale".[146] Journalists, explained Gautier, were worthy of the name patriot because they were able to use their talents to exert a type of censure against serious malcontents who led the public to a temperament that was alien to their spirit.[147] Villette had also denounced the "hommes dénués de talents".[148] On the other hand, the Commune complained that the Gironde were employing aristocrats to ridicule their humble members, such as Legendre the butcher and Lullier the cobbler, who had more virtue because of their poor background – "et vous êtes des hommes de 92!" wrote Milscent to the Gironde in defence of the Commune.[149] The Girondins had extolled the virtue of the people before August; now, they were bemoaning its ignorance. Ironically, these moderates, before 1792, had appreciated the power of exaggerated language in undermining the efforts of the royalists, even if they did not invest fully into the meaning.[150] Back then, they had supported the view satire was misleading and corruptive; now, in power, they had to renege on that position to resist the extremists.

<u>The Judgement of the King signals the end of Satire?</u>

"On a donné hier à ce théâtre la première représentation de l'*Ami des loix*, comédie en cinq actes, par M. Laya". This was the innocuous notice in the *Journal français* on a

[145] Roland (Madame), *Mémoires*, vol.1, 180.
[146] AP 57:732 (28 January 1793). For Robespierre's response, see his *Œuvres,* 319-320.
[147] *Feuille de matin*, no.6 (31 November).
[148] *Chronique de Paris*, no.360 (27 December).
[149] C. Milscent, *Le Créole Patriote ou bulletin de Milscent-Créole, journal du soir*, no.158 (9 December). Milscent, having previously written articles for Brissot, is an example of a patriot shifting his political position because it was expedient to do so. He was, however, committed to the abolition of the slave trade in the colonies. See A. T. Schultz, 'The Créole Patriote: the journalism of Claude Milscent', *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*, 11 (2014), 182-188.
[150] See J. Guilhaumou, 'Modérer la langue politique à l'extrême. Les journalistes remarqueurs au début de la révolution française', *AHRF*, 357, 3 (2009), 21-45.

play that would quickly cause a huge stir in the Convention. First performed on 2 January 1793 in the Théâtre de la Nation, a theatre known for its conservative leanings, *L'Ami des lois* would precipitate a crisis that would run parallel to the king's trial in January, and even delay it, such was the furore the theatrical performance would create. The play has been characterised as the last attempt of a defeated Gironde in defying an oppressive regime. Yet, on the contrary, Jean-Louis Laya's play was an aggressive attack on a faction, certainly on the up, but by no means invincible.[151] *L'Ami des lois* forced the hands of the factions in the Convention to clarify their positions on the value of satire and the role of the people in the revolution. The play also gave an opportunity for the moderates to challenge the Paris Commune and portray its adherents as tyrannical when they attempted to close the performance against the popular wishes of the people. It was another issue in which the right-wing and Girondins would unite in concordance; the Jacobins, afraid of the play's style as well as its content, wholeheartedly supported the arrests by the Commune. Laya's play would momentarily thrust him in the spotlight of revolutionary debate, although he claimed he had no intention of influencing the trial of the king.[152] The Jacobins accused Laya of preaching subservience to monarchy because the play was written before 10 August. According to Girey-Dupré, the chief journalist on Brissot's *Patriote français*, the Jacobins were mistaken; the play promoted order and celebrated a people who had conquered tyranny. By this logic, "ceux qui ne veulent pas d'ordre, pas de soumission aux lois sont de vrais scélérats."[153]

How did this play, then, interact with the political stage? A recent line of thought in historiography has suggested, when accounting for the paradigmatic belief in the theatricalisation of politics, and the politicisation of the theatre in the eighteenth-century, that theatrical and political performances conformed in their methods of representation to pacify the crowd into obedient spectators who had no part to play in political debate.[154] Alternatively, a second strand of argumentation posits that the

[151] M. Darlow & Y. Robert (eds.), 'Introduction' in J.-L. Laya, *L'Ami des lois* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 2011), 8.
[152] J.-L. Laya, *Un mot à M. le directeur de l'imprimerie et de la librairie, ou Abus de la censure theatrale, par J.-L. Laya, auteur de « L'ami des lois »* (Paris: Pélicier, 1819), 11-12
[153] *Patriote français*, no.1247 (10 January 1793).
[154] This conception was most notably defined by Huet, in *Mourning Glory*, 14: 'It was no accident that the Commune decided to close all theatres on the day the King's trial opened… it was because the proceedings at the Tuileries theatre used up all the theatricality of which the Revolution was capable'.

theatrical and political world afforded expressions of protest by crowds invading the stage, transforming the theatrical piece into a political act, regardless of the intentions of the playwright, and exerting a form of direct democracy at the expense of political representation – hence the view politicians were decidedly anti-theatrical.[155]

This thesis does not attempt to explain the political actions of the public; rather it was the interpretation of these actions by the deputies that was important. Because the nature of political power was so turbulent, with two factions offering diametrically opposed interpretations of the revolution's relation to time, both historiographical arguments are valid to a certain extent. The latter view, evincing theatre as the place where the sovereignty of the people could exert itself, is dubious because it is debateable whether the crowd actually attempted to influence political representation; the spectators attended a satirical comedy and did what was expected of them by the playwright: to laugh. The attendance of a satirical play by an audience was not evidence of political rebellion. And, furthermore, the Jacobins did not cancel the play because they feared that the crowd would exert agency for their sovereign right to self-censorship as Maslan argues.[156] For the political left, the issue was with the satirist and not the audience – the former provoking 'un assentiment irreflechi' in the latter.[157] While there is no contestation here that the Jacobins and Commune were concerned over issues of representation on the stage, the problem at the forefront for the left-wing in their opposition to the play had much to do with the style of language inherent in satire which, it was claimed, could seduce the gullible audience into expressing counterrevolutionary views. It was seen as a threat to the regeneration France still demanded.

The Girondins offered the opposite interpretation; the comedy had precipitated a regeneration at a time it was most needed: during the trial of the king. Initially, the reviews of Laya's play were not entirely positive from the Girondin and right-wing press. The *Journal français* reported that it had "quelque negligence de style".[158] The

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Friedland has stressed the conformity between the theatrical and political stages, since they were based on the same conception of representation which pacified the public into silence. See, *Political Actors*, 11.

[155] Both Ravel and Maslan assert the importance of public unrest in establishing the politicisation of the theatre. See Ravel, *The Contested Parterre,* 161; Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts,* 1-21.

[156] Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts,* 66-69.

[157] Darlow & Robert, 'Introduction' in Laya, *L'Ami des lois*, 12.

[158] *Journal français* no.50 (3 January 1793).

reviewers focused on it as a literary piece, unaware of the underlying message of the play until crowd reactions compelled them to look a little deeper. Crowd participation was important in politicising the theatre and the moderates were intransigent in their understanding that the success of Laya's play indicated a satisfaction with the current order of things. Essentially, it was proof no more regeneration was needed. Witnessing the popularity it attracted, the journalists quickly extolled the virtues of the play. Nicole's *Journal* encouraged the friends of liberty to watch the next performance that very night because it exhibited what it called the true language of the revolution: "M. Robespierre et ses amis pourront y prendre des leçons qui ne peuvent que leur être très-utiles."[159] The play itself was a rare satirical work of the period because it targeted Robespierre and Marat. Robespierre was unmistakably the main antagonist, the duplicitous Nomophage, and Marat was the journalist Duricrâne.[160] The *Journal français* noted that the fifth act, in which the friend of the law, Forlis, calms the anger of a misled people, consistently precipitated riotous applause from the *parterre.*[161]

Laya's play ignited an argument over the moral affect satire had over public opinion. Jean-Marie Girey-Dupré was overjoyed by the reaction of the people. The people, he said, had expressed their wish for the revolution to end and delight in the victories of the Republic. "Les *aristocrats-maratistes* reprochent aux patriotes d'aimer cette pièce" he wrote with disapproval.[162] The *Journal français* also connected the laughter from within the Théâtre de la Nation as an expression of the public will. No longer could satire have pejorative connotations, because monarchy no longer existed. Laughter was demonstrative of the public's rejection of the rhetoric of the left-wing. "Aujourd'hui tout est bien changé; ce n'est plus une faction particulière aux prises avec l'opinion générale, c'est la masse presque totale des citoyens qui exprime son vœu et dicte souverainement son arrêt."[163] The right-wing ridiculed the Jacobins' attempt to deconstruct the play's success: *"*[i]l est vraiment plaisant de voir la farce allongée de quelques jacobins clair semés parmi la foule de spectateurs: Chaque trait applaudi par le public, chaque allusion, chaque battements de main, sont autant de soufflets qui

[159] *ibid*
[160] On the character Nomophage, Gorsas wrote that he was "un anarchiste qui cache, sous le masque de la popularité, les desseins les plus perfides." *Courrier des quatre-vingt-trois départements*, vol 4, no.6 (6 January 1793).
[161] *Journal français*, no.50 (3 January)
[162] *Patriote français*, no.1247 (10 January).
[163] *Journal français,* no.57 (9 January).

viennent en ricochets retomber sur leurs joues pales et livides.*"* The *Chronique* also saw in Laya's play a force for good. It was unique and signalled a reemerging genre in French theatre: "[l]a comédie *politique* est un genre qui nous manquait, et cet heureux coup d'essai de Laya pourra produire des imitateurs."[164] To Gorsas, this show of public approval answered criticisms from certain quarters that the Gironde had turned their back on the revolution because they no longer condoned popular protest as they once had. Gorsas promised the reverse was true; their calls to order were a testimony to their love of liberty because it was what the people wanted. The republic could not establish itself if "les grands mouvements" continually left oscillations rippling through the political body. Consequently, Gorsas wrote, "les patriotes actuels veulent l'ordre & les loix".[165] In the Convention, the Girondin deputy Kersaint had successfully put through a law that outlawed the censorship of any theatrical play, though the law was not passed with unanimous agreement: "Et voilà une loi comme les font les *amis des loix*!!!", wrote the *Créole* purporting that Laya's play "irrité les esprits".[166]

On 8 January, the moderate and right-wing press promoted their next hope, *la Chaste Suzanne,* which promised to attain an even greater success and assure regeneration. "Avec quel plaisir nous mettons sous les yeux de nos lecteurs, fatigués de crimes et d'atrocités une perspective aussi rassurante", reported the *Journal français* regarding the success of these performances.[167] Nicole promised that Laya's play, in addition to the jokes and parodies from the right-wing, would save the king because the people of France had seen sense: "[o]serions-voix ajouter encore que la gaieté, la légèreté et l'insouciance naturelle des Parisiens, ne leur permet pas de s'affecter longtemps avec force de même objet; c'est dans le plaisir et la dissipation qu'en dernière analyse ils trouvent le remédie à tous leurs maux."[168] *L'Ami des lois* was seen as a fresh start; a further miraculous regeneration. Through laughing, the French had reawakened and realised how they had been deceived by the rhetoric of the Jacobins. The *Journal* framed laughter as the catalyst for regeneration:

> Nous autres Français, nous sommes de drôles de fous, il faut en convenir. Nous faisons gaiement les divettes entre les poignards des factieux et le fer des tyrans

[164] *Chronique de Paris,* (4 January).
[165] *Courrier*, no.14 (14 January).
[166] *ibid*
[167] *Journal français,* no.57 (9 January 1793).
[168] *Journal français*, no.58 (11 January 1793).

> qui s'apprêtant à fondre sur nous. Tous les soirs, dans les soirs, dans les bras de Thalie, nous nous hâtons d'oublier les idées noires du matin. Nous fredonnons l'ariette des Visitandines, nous parodions l'hymne des Marseillais, nous persifflons les jacobins; nos mains et nos cœurs applaudissements à Laya; et nous courrons nous attendrir à *la chaste Suzanne*, en essayant de saisir quelques allusions fugitives, en dépit de l'austère rigidité de quelques censeurs de mauvais humeur.[169]

The first Montagnard voice of disapproval came from Guffroy on the 7 January. He claimed that, not satisfied with the distribution of the "journaux de commande", the Girondists had taken to compose theatrical plays to corrupt the public spirit further: "j'appris qu'on avait joué sur le théâtre le plus aristocratique de Paris, une pièce mal à propos intitulée *L'Ami des lois*, cette pièce est *tout bêtement* un satyre maladroit, dirigée contre les francs défenseurs de la nation". Guffroy saw the play as more than a theatrical presentation. It was, rather, a machination: "ce n'est pas un drame, ni une comédie, ni une pièce à tiroir; c'est une conversation, une dissertation de coterie, ou une critique de journal exaltée, mise en scène, et par ordre."[170] *L'Ami des lois* was represented by the Jacobins as a clandestine tactic to not only influence public opinion but also to rally aristocrats to the banner of the king; it was, in short, a "plan de corruption". Dubois perpetuated these fears and warned that aristocrats were gathering at the theatres.[171] On 10 January, Manuel, labelling the play as a moral piece worthy of an honourable mention, read a letter from Laya who assured the deputies that his play was in homage to them. The Montagnard, Prieur, conveyed his opposition: "Je n'ai encore entendu parler de l'Ami des lois que par l'opinion et par les papiers publics. J'ai vu dans un extrait ces mots : *Aristocrate, mais honnête homme.* Je demande comment on peut être honnête homme et aristocrate. (*Nouveaux murmures.*)"[172] Prieur demanded the play should be examined since he had not seen or read *L'Ami des lois* – others laughed at this ignorance and lack of authority to speak on the subject.[173] Many of the Montagnards labelled the play as calumny and asked for it to be examined by the Committee of Public Instruction. Others argued the play was

[169] *ibid*
[170] AP 56:448 (7 January). Guffroy also accused the Gironde of staging a play in Bordeaux – the birthplace of Vergniaud – called *le tyran de Syracuse*. In this comedy, the senate sentences the tyrant to death, but he is subsequently saved by a group of women. Women were thought to be more susceptible to emotions and easily deceived by conspirators.
[171] AP 57:331 (16 January).
[172] AP 56:722 (10 January).
[173] AP 56:724. Prieur retorted that those who laughed were jealous of his lungs, which only made his enemies laugh harder.

aristocratic in nature because it attacked specific men, and not principles, but Laya refuted this argument: "[n]on, je n'ai point fait, comme l'ose dire, de mon art, qui doit être l'école du civisme et des mœurs, la satire des individus. Des traits épars dans la Révolution, j'ai composé les formes des personnages. Je n'ai point vu *tel ou tel*, j'ai vu les *hommes.*"[174] Lehardy, in defending Laya, evoked the plays of Molière and Voltaire, and their qualities in exposing the vices of extremists. "Aujourd'hui un auteur, dont j'ignore le nom, a blessé de l'arme du ridicule tous les cafards de civisme, et ces cafards sans doute sont irrités qu'on leur arrache le masque. Ils veulent arrêter la représentation d'une pièce qui sape leur domination. Mais qu'ils craignent les succès de *Tartufe* ou de *Fanatisme.*"[175] The Girondins, advocated that satire was a force for good in order to temper a language gone too far.

Armed with the view satire was corrupting, the Commune managed to cancel any future performances of Laya's play. The satirists were targeted by the left-wing because they used language deputies did not quite understand. The Jacobins and Commune targeted the wordsmiths: Laya, Nicole, Gautier and Villette. The Montagnards were after a serious tragedy, rather than a comedy. The king's execution was so important because it gave credence to the language of gravity and the Jacobin doctrine that the progress of the revolution was not assured until all conspiratorial elements were excised. Thereafter, the temperament of the patriot was to be vigilant and serious, rather than light and laughing. The Girondins failed in their misplaced faith that satire could overwhelm the power of violence and persuade the public of the ridiculous claims of the Jacobins. They also failed to shake away the traditional aristocratic and unvirtuous connotations of satire. The *Feuille du matin* mourned the loss of "le caractère mobile des français, jadis si gais, si folâtres et si aimables".[176] In the end, the lone satirist, embellishing his work with persiflage, irony and wit, was a dying breed in the Republic because the practice was too individualised, and set itself apart from the irreproachable collective. For Madame de Staël, the reason literature took leave of laughter in the revolution was because it was too refined and a privilege of monarchical culture; as the historian Alain Vaillant has pointed out, laughter in the Republic under the Jacobins was conceived as a collective and spontaneous

[174] AP 57:25 (12 January)
[175] AP 57:332 (16-17 January)
[176] *Feuille de matin*, no.49 (12 February).

manifestation, emanating from terminology such as *foule*, *peuple,* and *public*: 'dans ses excès, [Laughter] se charge d'une violence prête à se déchaîner physiquement ou, du moins, à se muer en insultes ou en mépris.'[177] Madame Roland may have extolled men of wit for their ability to crystallise reason, but their 'talent', for the Jacobins and Commune, suggested divergence and worse, smacked of aristocracy. This, along with the satirical attacks on words in favour of popular protest; the association with the Gironde; the humiliating insults and the attacks on Philippe; and, finally, the suspicion that Gautier and Nicole were leading an aristocratic conspiracy to save the king, ensured their imprisonment.

This was not the end of satire in the Republic. Neither would the Jacobins eschew laughter. Instead, they harnessed it for their own ends. A familiar strand equated satire with the golden age of ancient Greece, in a similar way to lost utopian *gaieté*, wherein true satire, uncorrupted, was a 'virulent denunciation of contemporary moral failings.'[178] "Observons que par le mot *satire*" wrote the future deputy, Jean Dusaulx, in an introduction to his translations of Juvenal in 1770, "on n'entendait pas alors, comme aujourd'hui, le honteux effort de la haine ou de l'envie qui ne cherche qu'à déprécier le mérite, à ternir les vertus." Instead, the true satirist was the protector of the good, and "l'ennemi déclaré des méchants".[179] It was Juvenal, the poet who held up vice to the scorn of the audience, who was the poet of choice in the eighteenth-century rather than his counterpart, Horace (who invited others to laugh at the ridiculous).[180] Dusaulx wrote that Juvenal disdained all artifice with "la force, la verve et l'indignation" and his goal was to "consterner les vicieux, et d'abolir, s'il eût possible, le vice presque légitimé. Courageuse entreprise!"[181]

The victory of the Montagnards saw a major development in the meaning and use of laughter. We have seen, in chapters one and two, that the Girondins justified their laughter towards émigrés or the Mountain, because it was an expression of *pitié* – an emotion compatible, they argued, with the framework of *sensibilité*. The king's trial changed all this. We have seen, equally, how Girondins charged the Mountain of

[177] A. Vaillant, 'Le rire bête: pratiques sociales et art littéraire', *Humoresques*, 7 (1996), 105.
[178] Robert, *Living Theater*, 129.
[179] J. Dusaulx, *Satires de Juvénal* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1826), XVII.
[180] See W. B. Carnochan, 'Satire, Sublimity, and Sentiment: Theory and Practice in Post-Augustan Satire', *PMLA*, 85, 2 (1970), 260-267.
[181] Dusaulx, *Satires*, C-CI.

attempting to instil *pitié* for the king. The Mountain accused the Gironde of the same crime. The word "pitoyer", as expressed by Basire as a charge against his enemies, had begun a process in which it would be an unacceptable sentiment to express for enemies in the revolution.[182] Expressing *sensibilité* for designated outsiders suggested conspiracy, as Robespierre revealed: "Je sais qu'il y a un parti qui veut sauver le roi; et je m'étonne toujours que ceux qui se montrent si tendres pour un oppresseur accusé ne témoignent pas autant de sensibilité pour le peuple qu'on opprime. (*Les tribunes applaudissent. – Quelques membres paraissent indignés. – L'Assemblée reste calme.*)"[183] Instead, Cynic philosophy came to the fore. Like Juvenal and Diogenes – the philosopher who showed 'disdain for hypocrites and morally dubious characters' by ridiculing them – the people were encouraged to cast out enemies forever with the laughter of *mépris.*[184] The lightness of wit was too forgiving. The laughter of scorn had taken precedent over sentiment. It is the next chapter which traces this rise of *mépris* at the expense of *pitié*.

[182] AP 55:44 (13 December).
[183] *ibid*
[184] Sonenscher, *Sans-Cullottes,* 22.

Chapter 4

The Strategy of Denunciation

Fear and Cynicism

The patriot, surrounded by enemies, was to be fearless in the face of danger: "Pour sauver la patrie, il faut un grand caractère, de grandes vertus" said Robespierre, "il faut des hommes qui aient le courage de proposer des mesures fortes, qui osent même attaquer l'amour propre des individus".[1] To embody and communicate this masculine and decisive courage, the patriots drew upon on the teachings of classical stoicism: "The Stoics saw virtue and happiness as consisting in the possession of a soul that was equally insensible to joy and pain, that was freed from every passion, [and] that was superior to all fears and weaknesses," wrote Condorcet, although he criticised the philosophy as too hard, and devoid of any compassion.[2] Regardless of Condorcet's concerns, it was, according to Dorinda Outram, the behavioural discourses of forceful self-control, obedience and discipline that triumphed over feminine *sensibilité* in the political culture of the Republic.[3] Indeed, Danton was praised by the Jacobin club for his "énergie mâle et républicaine qui, dans les grandes crises, entraînent aux grandes mesures".[4] Other historians, however, have argued that it would be an exaggeration to present stoicism and *sensibilité* in actual conflict; instead, they were compatible behaviours available to embody on the political scene.[5]

Illustrative of this latter argument was the celebration of Voltaire's tragedy, *Brutus*, in which the titular hero commits filicide for the sake of the Republic. The lessons gleaned from the story were moral rather than political, with the emphasis on patriotism overriding all selfish or personal motivations.[6] The deputy was supposed to be conscious of the inherent honour in his legislative role and compelled to 'master his

[1] AP 75:135 (25 September 1793).
[2] J.-A.-N. de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, 1793.* Translated from French by J. Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955), 63. Regarding stoicism, Condorcet wrote: "The hard, the proud and the unjust sheltered behind the mask of stoicism; sybarites and debauchees often insinuated themselves into the gardens of Epicurus." (64) He possibly had Marat and Robespierre in mind when writing his remarks on the Stoics. This treatise was, after all, written when Condorcet was in hiding from the authorities.
[3] Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution*, 68-89. For Outram's view on the conflict between *sensibilité* and stoicism, see 140.
[4] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 538 (30 November 1792).
[5] Desan, *The Family on Trial,* 364.
[6] For the popularity of this play in the revolution, and its politicisation, see R. L. Herbert, *David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution: an essay in art and politics* (London: Allen Lane, 1972).

emotions before the public' when exacting decisions were to be made. Yet the implacable edge of stoicism was softened because the legislator, like Brutus, also conveyed to the audience his emotional distress when undertaking a decision.[7] This technique, which merged feminine sentiment with masculine justice, was prevalent in the numerous speeches and tracts among the Montagnards regarding the fate of the king. As Robespierre said, when promoting his view on the king's crimes, "[j]e prononce à regret cette fatale vérité… mais Louis doit mourir, parce qu'il faut que la patrie vie."[8] In this instance, Robespierre drew attention to his own personal sacrifice for the greater good, while underlining his courage in his condemnation of the king. This accentuation of the conflicted soul undergoing a tortuous process has been termed as the 'sentimentalization of stoicism' and served to heighten the politicians' masculine virtue in view of the people.[9]

Above all, the revolutionaries were keen to communicate their triumph over fear. "Un représentant de la République ne doit connaitre d'autre danger que celui de ne pas faire son devoir" announced Saint-André in a thinly veiled attack on a few deputies who had raised concerns for their safety amid the threats of the Parisian mob.[10] Fear, wrote Buzot to his constituents in January, was man's most cowardly passion. In the circumstances of the king's trial, he argued, the emotion was pervasive and eventually exploited by the Montagnards and Commune to paralyse the majority into submission.[11] Danton denied that the Mountain was seeking to terrify its opponents; after all, there was no need for a patriot to fear the language of reason and philosophy.[12] The psychological disposition of fear has featured prominently in historical accounts exploring the causation of terror, noticeably by François Furet, who asserted the supposed paranoia of the patriots in relation to imaginary plots, leading the revolution to tear itself apart.[13] This line has been largely readdressed by investigations detailing the very real and unimagined threat of counterrevolutionary insurgence coupled with the unpredictability of popular violence that heightened the

[7] Feilla, *The Sentimental Theater of the French Revolution*, 171.
[8] AP 54:77 (3 December 1792) (Ellipsis in original). See also Feilla, *The Sentimental Theater*, 188.
[9] Feilla, *The Sentimental Theater,* 179. On the masculinity of both the classical and natural variants of virtue, see M. Linton, 'Virtue rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part I', *History of European Ideas,* 26 (2000), 35-36.
[10] AP 53:221 (6 November).
[11] Buzot, *Mémoires,* 214 (11 January 1793).
[12] AP 61:638 (12 April 1793).
[13] Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 53-54.

pressures of everyday life, consequently affecting the decision-making capabilities of the revolutionaries.[14] Timothy Tackett has suggested a more nuanced view: the descent into a 'terrorist mentality' was anchored in the witnessing and uncovering of genuine threats, 'but these threats came increasingly to be interpreted in an exaggerated and quasi-irrational or "imaginary" manner.'[15] Sophie Wahnich has argued that the 'instilled dread' of the *sans-culottes* provided the 'demand for terror'. Wahnich positions the official state terror as, paradoxically, a strategy to 'pacify terror'. Controversially, therefore, she argues that the terror was necessary in preventing anarchy and fear.[16] Fear is the central emotion at work in Marisa Linton's inquiry into the practice of politics among the patriots. She argues that discrepancies in notions of virtue and friendship bred a culture of suspicion among the deputies. The emotion of fear was everywhere. 'There is no understanding the contradictions, the suspicions, the betrayals that made up much of revolutionary politics without it.'[17] This chapter will follow Linton's lead and analyse the escalation of fear among the deputies, which was caused in part by the political strategies in the Convention.

The pervasion of this emotion was partly down to the Montagnards, who, to achieve supremacy in the Convention, resorted to a strategy of intimidation that relied on vociferous insults, denunciations and threats, in addition to harnessing the support of the tribunes and the Paris Commune. This strategy emerged through a gradual process. In the Jacobin Club, for instance, there was initially a general reluctance for any calls to violence against the Convention in its early stages, exemplified when Chabot was admonished on 24 September for his use of the word *forcer* when urging coercion against those who insisted on maintaining the failed administrative functions

[14] See A. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 293: 'Just as there is no revolution without counterrevolution, so there is no counterrevolution without conspiracy'. See also R. Cobb, 'The Revolutionary Mentality in France, 1793-4', *History*, 42, 146 (1957), 195. Similarly, Tackett argues that an obsession with conspiracy only became widespread after 'the very real plots hatched among elements of the royal government in late June and early July' of 1789, and then compounded later with the king's flight. In other words there was rationality to the revolutionaries' fears. See T. Tackett, 'Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789-1792', *The American Historical Review*, 105, 3 (2000), 701.

[15] Tackett comes to this conclusion in an analysis of Mayer's work; see T. Tackett, 'Interpreting the Terror', *French Historical Studies*, 24, 4 (2001), 575.

[16] S. Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*. Translated from French by D. Fernbach (London & New York: Verso, 2012), 28.

[17] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 19.

of the Legislative Assembly in the Republic.[18] Intimidation developed as a response to the controlling measures enacted by the Girondins, as well as the exigencies and pressures surrounding the king's trial; a period in which the political dynamics of the Convention altered dramatically. The Mountain stressed to its supporters that the machinations of the Gironde were motivated by an acute fear their crime of royalism might be exposed.[19] After the king's execution, fear became widespread in the Convention because of an amplification of many of the familiar strategies within this short space of time. Denunciations, for example, shifted from an act of a lone speaker inveighing against an unknown other to emphasise his own *sensibilité*, to a collective movement which named rival deputies explicitly as conspirators.[20] Moreover, insults did much more than merely blemish a representative's character; towards the spring of 1793 they frequently carried an implied or sometimes implicit threat of death. "Je declare qu'on me fait deliberer sur le couteau", protested the moderate Salle while attempting to speak under the laughter and interruptions of the left.[21] Even outbreaks of physical violence occurred between deputies towards the climax of factional discontent.[22] Louvet was clear on what precipitated such scenes: "la peur, dissimulée sous le nom de prudence, venait de diviser le faisceau départemental, de rompre les mesures salutaires et de compromettre la liberté dans son dernier rempart."[23]

An evolution of the laughter of surveillance – imbued with threatening innuendo and cynicism – was heard from the benches of the left-wing to complement this strategy of intimidation. Michael Sonenscher has detailed how cynicism became 'the first type of weapon to be used by one type of republican against another'.[24] Yet, the Girondins were never utilizers of pessimistic cynicism. To maintain adherence to the law and the belief in regeneration after September, the moderates employed the language of satire; the laughter of surveillance; and the laughter of progress in the Republic. Cynicism, in its conception during the revolution, relied on attacking the 'unquestioned assumptions' of society in order to regenerate moral currency and was linked to the

[18] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 329 (24 September 1792).
[19] See Marat's speech in AP 59:275 (26 February 1793).
[20] For an analysis of the unknown 'other' see Koren, 'Violence verbale et argumentation dans la presse révolutionnaire et contre-révolutionnaire', 322.
[21] AP 55:641 (26 December 1792).
[22] AP 59:66 (21 February 1793).
[23] Louvet, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 123.
[24] Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes*, 51.

denunciation. There was no need for the Girondins to be cynical of a regime they largely fronted; this was why they adhered to ridicule as a means to reject provocative claims of conspiracy and rupture with the past. For the Montagnards, however, laughter was an expression of doubt. Their cynicism in the Convention was marked as an act of dissension against the positivist laws decreed by the Girondins and enacted by the executive.

The eighteenth-century cynic, inspired by the ancient philosopher Diogenes, only answered to natural law and hence 'had no reason to feel any allegiance to the particular set of social arrangements and conventions that the law upheld'.[25] Diogenes' relevance to the revolution was found in his lantern of 'denunciatory light' which unmasked opponents and appeared as a prevalent patriot symbol in the events leading to the creation of the Republic.[26] A conservative in the Legislative Assembly, for instance, complained he had been threatened in the streets by a gang shouting "*A la lantern*"; in turn, his distress was received with laughter from the patriots.[27] Signs of cowardice in view of the people were not tolerated in the culture of the Republic; Hébert claimed the fear of the lantern motivated the Girondins to flatter the people, whereas he only told the truth.[28] The *lantern* indicated the threat of death, but, through its light, was also the symbol of transparency. This was why Desmoulins had fashioned himself as the 'Procurator of the lamp-post' when advocating popular violence on the streets.[29] For the left-wing, laughter was an emanation of the lantern, and signalled a form of denunciation; namely, the unveiling of a conspiracy which no longer posed a menace to the Republic. "[L]a Société brave leurs clameurs et se rit de leurs intrigues", read a bulletin from the Jacobin club denouncing the conspiracies of the Girondins; these bursts were crucial, for "le crime haït la lumière".[30] Hans Speier, in his treatise on political laughter, wrote that the cynical joke is a 'general expression of moral alienation from the political order.' In the context of the Convention, cynical laughter was, rather, a Montagnard method to alienate the political ministry from the

[25] Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes*, 139.
[26] De Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 238. See also Perovic, *The Calendar in Revolutionary France*, 62. Perovic describes the efforts of Sylvain Maréchal to include Diogenes in his calendar because he admired the latter's use of satire, which was framed as a form of action, and a style of living.
[27] AP 47:598 (9 August 1792).
[28] J. Hébert, *Le Père Duchesne*, no.171.
[29] Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 202.
[30] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 666 (7 January 1793).

people. As Speier later writes, cynicism and jokes function (much like the lantern) to 'unmask pretensions, doing so in an often vulgar way'.[31] The Mountain was not averse to laughter if it could stimulate political dominance. The deputy Baudot wrote approvingly in his memoirs that fellow Montagnards were "frondeurs", ready to "lancer l'épigramme" against their adversaries.[32] The mockery of the Gironde was an important aspect of intimidation, and when the Girondins dared to complain about the acts of verbal abuse or threats of physical violence they had endured, the Montagnards were quick to accost their display of fear as unpatriotic.

In this context, terror is defined as both 'the judicial apparatus assembled to intimidate and punish the perceived enemies of the revolution, but also the near panic state of fear and suspicion experienced during the period by the revolutionaries themselves'.[33] It would be wrong to say that this was the first time terror and intimidation had been experienced by the participants of the revolution – violence was present from the very beginning.[34] Even in 1790 the royalist journalist, Parisau, wrote "[t]out le monde a peur de tout le monde".[35] This was to be expected; the events of 1789 were unprecedented. However, the terror that developed in the Convention – by way of an escalating language and behaviour of intimidation that spiralled into the executions of many deputies – was of a different ilk to the crowd violence of 1789, or the state repression at the Champ de Mars; the terror of 1793 was the first time political violence had been decreed as an official and legal policy from the top; it may have been presented as humanitarian and liberal, but this was because the government needed justification to quell the volatile crowd.[36] Certainly, the pressures of war contributed to the dependence on state terror, though this does not wholly explain how the policy came to being.[37] The war was going well until March 1793 and, by that time, the intensification of fear in the Convention had already been set in motion. It was the interweaving strategies in the Convention, so often underplayed by

[31] Speier, 'Wit and Politics', 1359.
[32] Baudot, *Notes Historiques*, 150.
[33] Tackett, 'Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution', 713.
[34] For the fear and intimidation in previous assemblies of the revolution, see N. Hampson, *Prelude to Terror: The Constituent Assembly and the Failure of Consensus, 1789-1791* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 115-118.
[35] *La Feuille du jour* (December 1790) cited in Koren, 'Violence verbale', 323.
[36] Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution,* 305. The argument that terror was present from the start of the revolution is a central tenet to the narrative of S. Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1989).
[37] See D. Andress, *The Terror: Civil War in the French Revolution* (London: Little, Brown, 2005).

historians, which gave legitimacy and credence to state terror within the smaller scale-platform of Parisian politics. Marisa Linton has highlighted how the politicians' terror involved forcing people to do things against their will. 'It was precisely because the Jacobins could not impose their will in any other way that they resorted to force.'[38] In the Convention, the Montagnards recognised that terror reaped large gains, although they were to find that it was a difficult weapon to completely control.

The Emergence of Intimidation in the Convention

While Furet and the revisionists argue the terror was preordained from the outset of revolution because of a language inspired by Rousseau which determined the course of revolution, it is more accurate to state that the disorganisation of the Convention, an evident feature of all the revolutionary assemblies, precipitated the Mountain's decision to bypass the flimsy legislative rules of decorum through violence and intimidation.[39] On 6 January 1793, the deputy Mellinet raised the issue of disorder in the Convention which was now paralysing debates: if the deputies could not obey their own laws, how could they expect the people to respect them? He pleaded for silence and denounced the indecent clamours, seditious cries, and the "rires insolentes" of both factions.[40] Without a common consensus on the viability of laws, power and authority was torn between clubs, the ministries, the committees and the Paris commune. The Convention, at times, was not the definitive authority, but merely the communicative conduit for these competing institutions that evoked either natural rights or the sovereignty of the general will to justify their actions.

It is true that Robespierre's language, in particular, was imbued with several rhetorical strategies of fear from the offset. 'Terror lay in this magisterium of speech, which Robespierre developed to the full' argues Patrice Gueniffey. Robespierre's claims to the truth, his denunciation of conspirators without explicitly naming them, and his vehement allusions to the catastrophe France faced should the revolution fail, were all designed to create fear.[41] Robespierre claimed to incarnate the revolution

[38] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 10. Linton argues that terror was not inherent in revolutionary ideology; it developed, in part, from the contingencies of the war. But, importantly, she also places emphasis on the 'business of politics' and the factional discontent as factors in the rise of terror.
[39] Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, 30-33.
[40] AP 56:241 (6 January 1793).
[41] P. Guennifey, 'Robespierre', in F. Furet & M. Ozouf (eds.), *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*. Translated from French by A. Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass. & London: 1989), 304.

through his language; by extension, he also insinuated that to ridicule him was to mock the irreproachable sovereignty of the people.[42] Yet, just because Robespierre purported to embody revolutionary ideology does not mean he actually did; equally, his language was never 'fixed', as Gueniffey suggests. The discourse of conspiracy and denunciation may have been present from the start of the revolution, but its purpose and delivery altered in the Republic to adapt to the numerous contentious issues regarding the operations of the Convention – not least the ridicule and heckling which the Montagnards had experienced (and on occasion encouraged). No matter how they deflected laughter, being mocked by their enemies undoubtedly hurt. According to Garat, Robespierre's face soured when the former laughed at his claim that conspirators were present in the Convention.[43] Chabot, to the Jacobin club, tired of the "rire sardonique" of Brissot.[44] Marat also vented to his fellow Jacobins, denouncing the "vils folliculaires, tremblants de frayeur de voir déchirer le voile, s'empressent d'aller au-devant l'opinion publique en semant le ridicule à nos dépens: nous pouvons leur pardonner, car nous les ferons pleurer."[45] The panacea for mockery, explained Marat, was to subject the Girondins to terror. However, terror was not something one man could achieve alone in the political sphere; it was a collective effort of around sixty men, encouraged and supported by those in the galleries, who used such a strategy to overturn the balance of the Convention.[46]

A prevalent practice which frustrated the left-wing into defiance was the *mention honorable*. This was the Convention's special approval of any motion, discourse, or act of patriotism that exemplified the truest republican values. The honourable mention of the session was then subsequently publicised in the *Journal des débats*, edited by the Girondin stalwart Louvet.[47] The caveat was that, while the left-wing did not agree with the Gironde on what constituted republican patriotism, they were nevertheless

[42] Gueniffey states that Robespierre was revolution incarnate. See 'Robespierre' 299. This view was highly influenced by François Furet's argument in *Interpreting the French* Revolution, 55-61. For a rebuttal of this view see Haydon & Doyle (eds.), *Robespierre*, particularly 7-8, 13, 21-22.
[43] Garat, *Mémoires*, 89.
[44] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 474 (12 November 1792).
[45] Aulard*, La Société des Jacobins,* vol.4, 399 (17 October)
[46] See for instance the report in *Journal français*, no.38 (22 December): "Ce n'est plus la Convention qui décrète, c'est la montagne renforcée des hurlements de ces mêmes tribunes."
[47] The manner in which the *Journal des débats* reported the scenes in the Convention caused upset among the left-wing. For an example, see AP 56:592 (8 January 1793).

powerless to affect the opinion of the majority.[48] Around late December and early January, Montagnards parodied this practice, calling with irony for the *mention honorable* whenever notable Girondins made even the most trivial of suggestions in the Convention.[49] Dissatisfaction was also borne from the practice of demanding the floor – the Gironde could claim this purely by making a gesture to the President, to the chagrin of Marat.[50] These voiced grievances only added to the mockery of the left-wing; when the Montagnard, Jean-Louis Second, shouted "[l]a parole ou la mort" after his allies were refused the speaker's rostrum, he was laughed at for his hyperbole.[51] Plots were hatched in the Jacobin club to remedy this – the Jacobins identified the presidency as the crucial position in which to influence sessions in their favour. Not only could the President manipulate the debates, he could also determine crucial bureaucratic positions, such as the commissioners to the frontiers. Another abuse, according to Bentabole, was the power of the ministers, who, even without the king, exercised their own form of despotism.[52] It was this executive influence that proved to be the major irritation, as Levasseur wrote in his memoirs. "Comment pouvait-il exister dans la nation quelque chose d'indépendant de nous qui étions la nation même?"[53] Siân Reynolds has pointed out that there was no clear constitutional ruling on what the executive could and could not do because 'everyone was navigating without a compass'; this led to frequent disagreements over its actual role in governance.[54] Robespierre, in March 1793, advocated the merging of executive and legislative powers, although he was laughed at when he denied having aspirations to be a minister.[55] The type of political terror that was to end many of the deputies' lives was formed as a response to, and as a result of, Girondin dominance and the general weakness of the Convention, rather than an inevitable product of a defective and unchanging language.[56]

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[48] See, for example, AP 56:722 (10 January) and the speech by Roger Ducos: "Quant à la mention honorable, j'observe que lorsque j'étais secrétaire, j'ai vu ordonner cette mention en faveur d'ouvrages détestables; ce n'est point aux principes, c'est à l'hommage qu'on l'accorde."
[49] AP 56:47 (29 December 1792), and 257 (7 January 1793).
[50] AP 56:169 (3 January 1793).
[51] AP 57:410 (16-17 January).
[52] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 363-364 (8 October 1792).
[53] Levasseur, *Mémoires*, vol.2, 3.
[54] S. Reynolds*, Marriage & Revolution: Monsieur & Madame Roland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 295.
[55] R. Scurr, *Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution* (London: Vintage, 2007), 238.
[56] Gueniffey, 'Robespierre', 301.

The recourse to intimidation was also hastened by an off-hand joke that would have far-reaching and unexpected effects on the political trajectory of the revolution. This was the denomination of 'Montagnard', which was often referred to by the Gironde in a derogatory sense, but quickly gained credibility among the supporters of the left because of the word's connotations.[57] After all, the deputies who sat in the seats of the Mountain were no higher than those occupying the elevated seats opposite. In eighteenth-century thought, the mountain was sublime, for it was natural, majestic and pure, while at the same time terrifying and difficult to traverse.[58] Its first usage in a political sense came from Lequinio in 1791 as a means to appeal to the people.[59] Lequinio was largely ridiculed and laughed at, however, because his evocation of the mountain was deemed as overly moral and pretentious, especially when he labelled detractors as too narrow-minded to judge the needs of the people, while those on the Mountain could oversee everything.[60] The joke of the 'montagne' would thus be evoked in an ironic sense in the following months, yet this would ultimately aid in the militarisation and cohesive process of the left-wing in the Convention, much in the same way the word *sans-culotte* was originally a pejorative joke created by the Feuillants, but was seized upon by Brissot and others as a call to arms.[61]

It was Garnier, in the Jacobin club, who encouraged his fellow members on 24 October to form a metaphorical mountain which could challenge the executive and safeguard the interests of the public. He proposed the new group should crash down like a torrent and terrify the conspiratorial ministers and their defendants. In a similar fashion to Moses who had received the code of law on Mount Sinai, Garnier decreed that those on the Mountain solely possessed the capacity to prescribe the law to the French because they had achieved the necessary level of patriotism to understand the

[57] For the multiple meanings and rationale behind the image of the Mountain see M. A. Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution: Violence and Nature in the French Revolutionary Imagination, 1789-1794* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 104-138.
[58] Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution,* 118.
[59] F. Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française des origines à 1900* (Paris: librairie Armand Colin, 1937), vol.9, 631; Miller, *Natural History*, 109.
[60] See the reply from Lecointe-Puyraveau to Lequinio in AP 34:441 (27 October 1791).
[61] Sonenscher, *Sans-Culottes,* 7, 17-18, 21. In his memoirs, Buzot also traced the development of this term: "Ce mot n'eut été prononcé d'abord que par forme de plaisanterie et avec une sorte de pudeur, ensuite il serait devenu insensiblement un signe de ralliement pour tous ceux qui n'ont rien contre ceux qui ont quelque chose." See, *Mémoires*, 81-82.

natural rights of man.[62] From their intimidating height, the Montagnards were closer to the 'God of Nature'.[63] Assertions such as these, in the opinion of Blanchard, exemplified the rejection of objective reason in the revolution, which was substituted by a type of rhetoric that settled 'all questions and problems that may arise'.[64] In contrast to the Montagnards, Keith Baker presents Condorcet, Brissot and those around them as possessing a shared emphasis on 'rational deliberation as an essential ingredient of representative government, and on the search for constitutional devices to ensure that the common will would also be rational will'. [65] Representative government, wherein the sovereignty of the nation found its source in the people but was enacted through the deputies' right to represent it and prescribe the law, was challenged by a language of democratic will which constituted necessary intervention in times of crisis.[66] In addition, Dan Edelstein has recently put forth the view that the Jacobins legally justified terror through their evocation of natural rights. Founded on theories from the Enlightenment, natural law provided the radicals with a legal framework to expunge enemies based on their 'unnaturalness', meaning those subjected to terror were categorised as outside the laws of man.[67] When the Girondins stated that the actions of the left-wing were illegal, Robespierre called on a higher power and retorted that the revolution itself had been an illegal act, but this did not make it any less right.[68] Later, on the 4 November, Billaud-Varenne called on the Mountain to cast off any feelings of fear and push for the judgment of the king by invoking, not only the will of the people, but the right for the Mountain to assume this general will.[69] The Montagnards, he said, had achieved such a degree of moral rectitude that they had no need for the laws of the Convention. Edelstein argues that the Jacobins eventually rejected the notion of general will as the basis of representation, and instead expressed natural right as the foundation of law. It was

[62] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 422 (24 October 1792). Garnier said "Fussent-ils douze seulement, ils [the Montagnards] se grossiront comme un torrent et feront frémir les intrigants."
[63] Gueniffey, 'Robespierre', 309.
[64] J. M. E. Blanchard, 'The French Revolution: A Political Line or a Language Circle', *Yale French Studies*, 39 (1967), 66.
[65] Baker, 'Political Languages', 641.
[66] Baker, 'Political Languages', 646-647.
[67] D. Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, & the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4.
[68] M. Slavin, *The Making of an Insurrection: Parisian Sections and the Gironde,* (Cambridge, Mass., & London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 4.
[69] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 458 (4 November 1792).

the Girondins, he argues, who firmly held to the faith in the sovereignty of the general will.[70] However, natural law was not an ideology the revolutionaries followed definitively. It was a language which fulfilled particular needs: in this case to overcome corruptive elements in the Convention, of overriding the language of law and reason in government which was opposed to the laws inherent in nature. With the creation of the Mountain in December 1793, natural law served as the momentary legal basis for intimidation, functioning as a language of exoneration to bypass the controlling strategies of the Girondins. The problem was, the Montagnards would attempt to solve the problem concerning representation and sovereignty by identifying sovereign will with the sections of Paris. This would ensure the 'fidelity' of the deputies to the popular will, for they were under constant surveillance from the Commune and the *sans-culottes*.[71]

The label of *Montagnard* quickly became a badge of honour – it was also a means to avoid that unwanted insult, *Maratiste*. Châles, for example, was undeterred by the mockery he faced and proudly declared his membership to this exclusive club. "Quant à l'épithète de montagnard qu'on me donne, c'est vrai, je suis de la montagne et je m'en honore. Je ne suis pas sous les drapeaux de Marat; je suis sous les miens. (*Rires ironiques*). On peut être patriote sans être *maratiste*. (*Nouveaux rires au centre*)."[72] When laughing at those who claimed to be of the Mountain, the moderates were not stigmatising individuals, as they had done previously. By imprudently attacking one member, the Girondins inadvertently ridiculed all the deputies of the Mountain who, in turn, used such insolence to highlight the moral void between the factions and to justify their recourse to intimidation. Gaining notoriety largely from an ironic joke, the concept of the Mountain was moulded and refined in the Jacobin Club, allowing for the creation of a particular identity for like-minded individuals to assume in the Convention which could challenge Girondin hegemony.

A declaration on the importance of laughter to the Montagnard program occurred on 22 December, the first occasion in which the Montagnards would claim the rostrum from the President in the Convention. Marc-Antoine Jullien declared that, like the Spartans at Thermopylae, the Mountain would ardently protect liberty from the

[70] Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right,* 196-197, 201-202.
[71] Baker, 'Political Languages', 651-653
[72] AP 56:723 (11 January 1793).

numerous conspirators in the Convention. The Montagnards, he said, had no fear of Girondin ambitions since they were so obvious. He stated how the Mountain would express their disdain for these transparent plots:

> [L]a chose publique elle-même se rira des vains efforts de l'aristocratie. (*Applaudissements à l'extrême gauche et dans les tribunes.*) Et nous, les amis imperturbables du peuple, nous, les défenseurs intrépides de ses droits, nous, nous rirons aussi, et de vos vains efforts, et des tempêtes que vous cherchez à exciter sur toute la surface de la république.[73]

Jullien's justification of laughter was similar to the explanations offered by the Girondins on their use of the practice. However, the Girondins adhered to the belief that those they ridiculed were worthy of pity and sympathy, because they were not knowingly conspiratorial; the radical facet ingrained in the proclamation of the Mountain was in the acknowledgement that deputies from within the Convention were intentionally plotting against the Republic. The Montagnards, like Diogenes, adopted and embodied 'a satirical style of thinking' based on denouncing and unmasking those in power.[74] This had been a growing theme in the Jacobin club; Tallien, among others, explicitly named Brissot and Roland as leaders of a conspiratorial faction.[75]

The *Journal français* criticised Jullien's Thermopylae speech, noting that the *conventionnels* found the evocation of a metaphorical mountain amusing rather than moving: Jullien, reported the paper, had compared the Montagnards "grotesquement aux Thermopyles, et il assure que les 50 factieux qui l'habitent sont autant de Spartiates qui mourront plutôt que de quitter leur poste. Cette parodie histoire a un peu égayé la convention, qui n'a pas vu ce qu'il y avait de commun entre des Spartiates qui ont péri pour la liberté et des brigands qui la détruire."[76] The Girondins and their supporters were still inclined to laugh at any challenge to their authority, especially those who positioned themselves as morally superior to the majority in the Convention.

[73] AP 55:639 (26 December 1792)
[74] Perovic, *Revolutionary Calendar*, 63.
[75] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 575 (12 December 1792).
[76] *ibid*

All the same, the brazen physicality of the Mountain was a worrying development. The Montagnards had been frequently inclined to descend from their benches and forcibly seize the rostrum from the Girondins if a session was turning against them. This aggressive tactic occurred in a debate on 26 December, when around sixty men, with the goal to precipitate an immediate vote on the king's guilt, rose simultaneously towards the middle of the room, where they remained for fifteen minutes, gesturing violently at those who had rejected their wishes.[77] In the session, Jullien justified the Mountain's disregard of the rules: "Nous avons fait le serment de mourir, mais de mourir en hommes libres et en sauvant la chose publique. (*Applaudissements à l'extrême gauche.*) Je suis loin de toute prévention: j'habite les hauteurs (*Continuant de montrer l'amphithéâtre du côté gauche*) que l'on désigne ironiquement sous le nom de Montagne, mais je les habite sans insolence."[78] Their actions were legitimised because they were pure. Despite the laughter from the Convention, the *Journal français* reported with apprehension these developments: "La conjuration des Jacobins contre la convention nationale est si formidable, que nous craignons qu'elle n'y succombe."[79] Five days later, the same newspaper reported that the Mountain was holding the Convention to ransom: "[c]e n'était pas le sanctuaire des lois, où la voix de la sagesse était écoutée; c'était une arène où les jongleurs les plus audacieux luttaient entre eux de férocité et de barbarie."[80] In the early stages of the Convention, Girondin laughter often succeeded in directing the debates. By December, the Montagnards had formed into a powerful unit and were forcibly imposing their influence; in this sense, laughter was proving to be a redundant weapon because it was nullified by the intimidating activity of a concerted block of deputies.

From early December, when an opposition group had fully formed, until 21 January, with the execution of the king, laughter from the left-wing in the Convention occurred on 13 separate occasions out of 69 bursts. Very few of these instances came from jokes. Like the ridicule of the Girondins, the laughter of the Montagnards was mostly a reaction to the words and actions of the opposition that were considered incongruous or out-of-place in the view of those who laughed. The majority of these initial bursts

[77] AP 55:638 (26 December).
[78] AP 55:639 (26 December).
[79] *Journal français*, no.38 (22 December).
[80] *Journal français*, no.43 (27 December).

occurred either when moderate members contradicted themselves or made an honest mistake;[81] when they let their mask of stoic virtue slip by visibly succumbing to feelings of doubt, fear, and anger without mastering them;[82] and in situations when a proposal attempted to temper the rise of radicalism, or was considered so conservative as to be counterrevolutionary.[83] In all this, ridicule was a strategy of denunciation, eschewing any kind of sentiment for a harsher scornful tone. The first instance of this occurred in a flare up regarding education and religion.[84] Durand de Maillane, more conservative than most of the Convention, opposed Condorcet's moderate proposal for an education system based on the universal truths of mathematics and science which, Condorcet argued, circumvented the religious evil of superstition. Condorcet, like many, believed in the progress of man; as long as human kind facilitated new technological discoveries in the sciences, the plight of humanity would ease, ensuring a greater level of happiness. The state's role was not to interfere with these truths but to adapt their laws around them, thereby creating ideal conditions for human progress. Durand, however, called for less emphasis on the sciences and a greater level of religious morality in education. Such a vehement defence of religion was unheard of in the Convention and was equated with a challenge to a revolution based in the morality of virtue. The Montagnard, Duhem, rejected Durand's proposal and satirised his view that science was aristocratic. It is here we see the first specific laughter from the left-wing recorded in the *Archives*.[85] The laughter of the Montagnards was supplemented by a rhetoric which was designed to lift the veil of hypocrisy and corruption and alert the audience to the lack of virtue among certain members and the indisputable proof of conspiracy in the Convention. It was unapologetically cruel, designating that the

[81] See AP 55:49 (14 December 1792) in which an anonymous letter to Minister Roland was read out – the anonymity was proof for the Montagnards that the Girondins had something to hide. See also AP 55:65 (15 December 1792) and AP 55:195 (20 December).

[82] See AP 55:57 (14 December). In this session the Abbé Audrein stormed out of the Convention after being designated a counterrevolutionary for defending the role of religion; while doing this, the left-wing laughed at him. See also AP 56:587 (7 January 1793), wherein Dusaulx, angry that he had been denied the rostrum twenty times after the Montagnards had ignored the standard sessional rules, soon backed down after his complaints were received with laughter.

[83] AP 57:47 (14 January 1793).

[84] Education was debated often in the first three months of the Convention until it was curtailed due to the necessity in judging the king. For this reason there was no significant reform at this time. See L. P. Williams, 'Science, Education, and the French Revolution', *Isis*, 44, 4 (1953), 313.

[85] AP 55:31 (12 December 1792) Duhem : "Oui, c'est une aristocratie de science; il ne faut qu'une seul école, qu'un seul enseignement public; il ne faut pas que l'on ait l'aristocratie d'être savant. (*Rires ironiques et applaudissements à gauche.*)"

laughed at belonged to the past, unlike the Girondins who underlined the conciliatory quality of their laughter.

Historians have noted that the Jacobins and Girondins were not that different in ideology. Linton, for instance, observes that 'very little divided the factions of the Year II: the leading revolutionaries made much in the way of ideology, and many of them had participated closely together during the earlier years of the Revolution in the revolutionary assemblies and clubs.'[86] The deputy Hardy, mindful of the similarities between the factions, made overtures of conciliation to the Montagnards during the king's trial when heated arguments had postponed any immediate hope of rapprochement. Hardy asked for an armistice of sorts because "dans nos manières de penser, nous nous sommes rencontrés à peu de chose près. (*Rires ironiques à l'extreme gauche.*)"[87] The laughter from the left-wing signalled the rejection of conciliation between left and right – there had been much resentment that had been left to boil for too long underneath the surface regarding the conduct of either side. For the left-wing, the course was set: either they would fail and be expunged from the Convention, or the Girondins would, leaving the path clear to radicalise the revolution.

In the written discourses concerning the judgement of the king, many members of the Plain made clear their unrest at how operations in the Convention had become a farce. The Mountain laughed to highlight the despotism of the right-wing in an attempt to precipitate changes in governmental positions; the Gironde laughed to reject attacks on their integrity and resist further calls for upheaval. Philippe Joseph Briez wrote that time spent on long opinion-pieces, cat-calling and petty machinations from both sides could have been used to actually study the law.[88] Another deputy, Charles Lambert, wrote that sarcasms, epigrams and declamations were a cheap tactic and urged for precise and methodical reasoning.[89] Overall, 24 per cent of deputies, in their tracts concerning the king, accused rivals of misleading the people.[90] Despite the laughter in these months, the Montagnards' outbursts were still nowhere near the

[86] M. Linton, 'Fatal Friendships: The Politics of Jacobin Friendship' *French Historical Studies,* 31, 1 (2008), 58; Reynolds, *Marriage and Revolution,* 206.
[87] AP 57:52-53 (14 January 1793).
[88] AP 56:318 (7 January).
[89] AP 57:224 (15 January).
[90] For an overview of these opinions see B. Reilly 'Ideology on Trial: Testing a Theory of Revolutionary Political Culture'*, French History*, 19 (2005), 28-47.

frequency heard from the right-wing. There also appears to be a certain amount of admiration for the Mountain in braving such mockery. A member of the Plain, Sauveur, wrote that the persecution of the Mountain seemed to him undignified and its resistance was understandable.[91] John Moore also disapproved of the ridiculing of the Montagnards, because he feared it garnered them sympathy.[92] The Gironde may have been concerned over the Mountain's disregard for the law, but the left-wing, according to Prudhomme, was also fearful that history, cyclical in nature, was repeating the course of events in Rome, Athens and Sparta, all of which proceeded from democracy to dictatorship.[93] It was the fear of factionalism that took precedence over anything happening outside Paris, as Buzot said – "[n]ous sommes à l'époque où nous n'avons plus rien à craindre que des partis".[94] John Moore wrote, 'It is evident that each party is more afraid of the other, than either is of their external enemies'.[95] Suspicion of corruption in government led the Montagnards to conduct a more concerted campaign of intimidation designed to remove prominent figures from their posts and to replace them with Montagnard sympathisers.

The Mockery of Jean-Marie Roland and the Fear of Womanly Virtue

The laughter of denunciation was reserved most frequently for the executive branch of government, particularly the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Marie Roland, a man unfairly dismissed by historians as incompetent; this is partly because of his wife's celebrity, and partly because of the mockery he suffered, which depicted him as a drab, incompetent cuckold.[96] The Rolands first arrived in Paris on 20 February 1791 to request funds for the authorities in Lyon.[97] Jean-Marie's presence in political circles, his administrative background and, above all, his friendship with Brissot ensured him

[91] AP 57:138 (15 January) "Respectable rocher! ta crime orgueilleuse, constamment habitée par les intrépides défenseurs des droits du peuple, bravera toujours les foudres impuissantes de tous les ennemis de la patrie, quel que soit leur nombre."
[92] Moore, *Journal during a Residence in France,* vol.2, 170.
[93] Prudhomme (ed.), *Révolutions de Paris*, no.168 (22-29 September).
[94] AP 53:13 (27 October 1792); see also Carnot and Lamarque's report on the war (53:11): "Non, citoyens nos collègues, nous n'avons plus d'ennemis à craindre, que ceux qui sont au milieu de nous, que ceux qui veulent rompre l'unité de la République, et faire dominer une section du peuple sur toutes les autres."
[95] Moore, *Journal during a Residence in France,* vol.2, 193.
[96] Reynolds attempts to readdress this view in her biographical work, *Marriage and Revolution.* For the historiographical attitudes towards Minister Roland, see 4.
[97] Reynolds, *Marriage and Revolution*, 116.

the prestigious position of Minister of the Interior in March 1792.[98] The department was huge: it covered 'elections, subsistence, education, agriculture, industry and trade, religious institutions, high-ways and public buildings; security and public order' among others.[99] After a brief interlude in which the king relieved Roland of his duties – earning him a degree of popularity he would never experience again – he retook his position as Minister from August. From that moment, he was denounced regularly in the Jacobin club by those doubtful of his intentions.

The Mountain sought to undermine Roland, not because he was inept, but because he occupied the most authoritative position within the Republic.[100] Particularly rankling was the Minister's control over communications to and from the provinces. Roland was seen to be a spider operating a huge web; as Reynolds has pointed out, the Interior minister was at the centre of an immense messaging network, receiving letters on every subject and political stance: 'Nobody else was in this position, since deputies were responsible to their electors, and other ministers' remit was far less wide'.[101] Rather than addressing these issues, and inviting an open dialogue, the Girondins employed a defensive strategy, indelicately ridiculing the concerns of the Montgnards and fuelling their cynicism. When Merlin raised suspicion that Roland might be interfering in the transmission of correspondence, he was roundly mocked, doubly so when he complained of the laughter overwhelming his voice.[102] Another gripe was that Roland had no qualms in denouncing violence in the capital. He blamed the Paris commune for the capital's constant state of unrest, which was in stark contrast, he wrote, to the peaceable provinces.[103] For its part, the Mountain presented these

[98] Reynolds, *Marriage and Revolution,* 165-166.The appointment surprised everyone, not least Collot d'Herbois who believed himself a shoe-in for the position. Thereafter, he was a vocal opponent of Roland.
[99] Reynolds, *Marriage and Revolution,* 168.
[100] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 364 (8 October). In the revolution there was general suspicion of anyone who displayed ambition or aspired to a leadership role. See B. M. Shapiro, 'Conspiratorial thinking in the Constituent Assembly: Mirabeau and the exclusion of deputies from the ministry' in P. Campbell et al (eds), *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, 42, 48. See also T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, 42.
[101] Reynolds, *Marriage and Revolution*, 207.
[102] AP 53:77 (30 October 1792).
[103] AP 53:149 (4 November). The role of the Parisians in the revolution often occupied the deputies in the Convention. The moderate deputy Rouyer, for example, railed against the petitioners of Paris. Their convulsions, he argued, might have been a virtue under despots, but were only a vice under the reign of liberty. "Qu'avez-vous fait, Parisiens, pour maintenir la tranquillité, pour réprimer les agitateurs ? Rien. Tous les jours, on insulte dans les rues de Paris la majesté nationale." For the other side of the argument see the speeches of Thuriot (AP 53:431) and Basire (AP 53:221).

accusations against Paris as a ploy to disrupt the revolution: "[l]e canon d'alarme… c'est la lettre de Roland" said Louis Turreau de Linières in riposte to Roland's written declamations against the Parisian people.[104]

There were other grievances. The Minister of the Interior allegedly manipulated opinion by subsidising, with state funds, newspapers favourable to the Gironde, as well as dispatching speeches in the Convention that reflected the Gironde in a positive light.[105] In the Jacobin club, a returning deputy, Dufourney, spoke of his astonishment when witnessing how the attitudes of the *départements* had been manipulated by these publications.[106] Another factor which left Roland vulnerable was that he was never present to defend himself in the Convention from accusations and calumnies – his function as a Minister meant he had more important administrative affairs to attend. His dealings behind closed doors naturally led to suspicions from the Mountain: "Le volonté generale ne se forme pas dans les conciliabules secrets, ni autour des tables ministerielles" warned Robespierre.[107] Conversely, one of Roland's most annoying habits was to interrupt sessions with his letters – especially when prominent Montagnards were speaking.[108] After supporters voted for his letters to be dispatched to the army and the provinces, members of the left soon shouted, with irony, that the letters should be sent to all of Europe, and another suggested China.[109] Voices of dissent against the glorification of Roland's policies grew because the Montagnards were constantly denied a voice on legislation and policy.

It was initially in the Jacobin Club that many of the jokes at Roland's expense were heard, mostly because there was a greater degree of freedom there to express an opinion against the Convention without rebuttal. The historian Barbara Rosenwein has put forth the case that, if people changed their behaviour to conform to certain situations, then each space – what she calls 'emotional communities' – had alternative

[104] AP 53:641-642 (28 November).
[105] Reynolds, *Marriage and Revolution,* 234.
[106] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 371 (9 October).
[107] AP 56:22 (28 December).
[108] AP 56:246 (6 January 1793); 54:394 (6 December 1792). When Roland did this just before the king's trial Amer expressed his disgust: "Certes, on emploie mille moyens aussi ridicules que vils, pour entraver vos délibérations, et je pourrais démasquer à vos yeux ces faux amis du peuple, ces intrigants d'un jour dont la tête exaltée fait tout le mérite et l'exagération de tous tels principes."
[109] AP 52:237 (30 September).

expectations and ways of feeling within a culture.[110] The Jacobins, for instance, celebrated heroic *sensibilité*; Marat found that his speeches scorned in the Convention were lauded at the Jacobins.[111] Moreover, as the deputies became accustomed to republican politics and its foibles, jokes and insults provided a welcome outlet for the Jacobins in denouncing the humiliations they had endured in the Convention.[112] The Minister was the main target. Monestier, for example, made several jokes on the conduct of Roland, and suggested his department was hoarding bread.[113] Brival focused on Roland's abuse of communications and proposed that the Jacobins should force him to print Robespierre's speeches, prompting "*Eclats de rire*" from the assembled.[114] Garnier also admitted to mocking the Minister and said that if Roland was virtuous, he would shun such a powerful office; if he was not, he should leave the office anyway.[115] Such jests were extremely rare in the Convention, a place in which the Jacobins assumed the more serious persona of a legislator on the Mountain.

Personality was also a factor in the attacks on Roland. According to the conservative deputy Meillan, Roland's demeanour was extremely irritating; he had a penchant for ridiculing those who did not live up to his exacting standards, such as Danton.[116] His wife was also imprudent. Madame Roland took particular exception to the jovial, unscrupulous Danton, and rebuffed his efforts to forge an alliance with the Girondins in late August; a decision that demonstrated a severe 'lack of political judgement'.[117] Such a rejection gives some context to Danton's famous insult in the Convention. Angered at Roland's campaign for re-election as Minister, Danton warned the *conventionnels*: "[s]i vous faites cette invitation, faites-la donc aussi à Mme Roland, car tout le monde sait que Roland n'était pas seul dans son département."[118] Although no laughter is recorded in the *Archives*, other sources maintain that roars of laughter

[110] Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', 842.
[111] Moore, *A Residence in France,* vol.2, 90.
[112] In a session of the 9 December, for example, Gaudet, Manuel, and Roland were all verbally abused. Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 564.
[113] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 432 (27 October). The exact jokes of Monestier are not detailed in the transcripts.
[114] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 441 (28 October).
[115] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 566 (9 December).
[116] A.-J. Meillan, *Mémoires de Meillan, député par le département des Basses-Pyrénées, à la Convention nationale : avec des notes et des éclaircissements historiques,* 1795 (Paris: Baudouin, 1823), 38.
[117] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 157.
[118] AP 52:229 (29 September 1792).

broke from the benches at these words.[119] The Girondin press was under no illusion over the motivations of this underhand joke. They knew Madame Roland's visibility in the political sphere caused consternation for the radicals, so they strove to defend it. "Danton n'a pas rougi de dire que, si l'on faisait une invitation à Roland, il fallait aussi en faire une à la femme de ce ministre, puisqu'elle aide de ses conseils" the *Patriote français* reported. "Ce reproche était infâme; c'était ressusciter l'exécrable despotisme du régime passé qui dégradait les femmes et leur défendait de penser; c'était jeter du ridicule sur ce qu'il y a de plus sacré de plus doux dans l'état sociale sur communication des idées, des vertus entre les deux sexes."[120] The *Patriote* attempted to purport the view that Danton's attack on the Rolands was also an attack on the inherent virtues located in marriage, a bond between man and woman which helped, in the words of Desan, to 'forge the social unity of the Republic', transforming society into 'a site of political transformation and moral regeneration'.[121] However, Danton's joke was emblematic of the increasingly misogynistic and masculinised path the revolution was taking.

There were different ways of speaking about women and virtue in the eighteenth-century; some of it was inclusive and some marginalising.[122] Women's virtue, for example, was often considered a matter of private suffering away from the public glare.[123] Women were expected to be dutiful and chaste. But, increasingly in eighteenth-century domestic life, women gained a sense of self through reading and writing, creating a space in which modes of womanly virtue could be discussed and developed. Women were said to possess more natural virtue than men – they were more in tune with their emotions and had the capacity to be moral in their own right, in a way that complemented the morality of men.[124] Similarly, Sean Quinlan asserts that the revolution 'produced competing experiences of masculinity, and that these

[119] Dulaure, *Thermomètre du jour,* no.275 (30 September 1792). A. de Lamartine, *History of the Girondists* (London: Bohn, 1847), vol.2, 217.
[120] *Patriote français*, no.1147 (30 September 1792).
[121] Desan, *The Family on Trial*, 48.
[122] Linton, 'Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part 1', 40.
[123] Linton, 'Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part 1', 36.
[124] Linton, 'Virtue Rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part 2', *History of European Ideas*, 26 (2000), 63. See also, Hunt, *Family Romance*, 166-167; D. Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a cultural history of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 6-10.

experiences were the product of struggle and contestation.'[125] In the Republic, Nye argues that signs perpetuating the image of men in fraternal brotherhood loyal to the nation, rather than a monarch, were common. But this discourse of familial relation still competed with the existing notion of personal honour and aristocratic glory as well as encroaching challenges of womanly selfhood.[126] In the political sphere, there were two competing visions regarding virtue and its function among the sexes. The first, as expressed by the *Patriote français*, accommodated female citizenship and presented the virtue of women as a positive notion, indifferent to masculine virtue. This view was expressed by few revolutionaries, though, including women.[127] The most prevalent viewpoint saw women as possessing a different kind of virtue to men, but, in response to critical pressures of war and factional suspicion, exaggerated masculine models of behaviour emerged in an attempt to naturalise political authority and bring about a militarised and egalitarian society of brothers at the expense of active citizenship for women.[128] While the deputies may have expressed their fears, doubts and *sensibilité* – the latter of which was crucial in conveying virtue – these emotions were always conquered by the overwhelming love for the *patrie* and the will to do what was best for the Republic. Although some historical works have sought to readdress the balance and emphasise the positive aspects revolution enabled for women, specifically their 'personal emancipation and political empowerment', within the realm of factional politics, ridicule towards women – especially females aspiring to perceived codes of masculine virtue – was more common than the arguments espousing a political voice for womankind.[129]

A section of patriots proved sensitive to the ridicule of women, and at least acknowledged their potential to exhibit virtue.[130] Condorcet, one of the few who

[125] S. M. Quinlan, 'Men without Women? Ideal Masculinity and Male Sociability in the French revolution, 1789-1799', in C. E. Forth & B. Taithe (eds.), *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 32.
[126] R. A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male codes of Honour in Modern France* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 33.
[127] Linton, 'Virtue Rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part 2', *History of European Ideas*, 26 (2000), 63.
[128] For the view that there was a concerted exclusion of women from the political sphere of the revolution, see Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution,* 125: 'Revolution was committed to an anti-feminine rhetoric, which posed great problems for any woman seeking public virtue.' See also Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue*, 204-215.
[129] Quinlan frames the French Revolution as a positive development in terms of the equality of women, see Quinlan, 'Men without Women?', 31.
[130] Linton, 'Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part 2', 57-58.

fought for the equal rights of women, demanded their full citizenship and political participation. If the rights of man derived from the idea that humans were rational, sentient beings "susceptible of acquiring ideas of morality, and of reasoning concerning these ideas", then women, undoubtedly sharing the same qualities, had claim to the same rights: "Either no rational individual has any true rights, or all have the same."[131] Condorcet had evidently suffered much ridicule for his views, which he alluded to when challenging his detractors, "I now demand that opponents should condescend to refute these propositions by other methods than by pleasantries and declamations; above all, that they should show any natural difference between men and women which may legitimately serve as a foundation for the deprivation of rights."[132] The "never-ending pleasantries", he and others had suffered, Condorcet argued, drew a veil over the fact that there was not one good reason to deny women their role in government.[133]

Such a proclamation was unthinkable for the Jacobins; they held attitudes towards women which were influenced by Rousseau: a woman could be virtuous, just not in the same way as a man. As Dena Goodman has shown, educated women, or even women who aspired to better themselves, regularly endured mockery as a form of punishment for their ambition.[134] Total ignorance in a woman was frowned upon, but the right balance of education was required for a woman to know what society expected of her.[135] A republican woman exhibited virtue at home, by looking after the household and mothering new generations of patriots. "There is no such thing as good morality for women outside of a retired and domestic life", wrote Rousseau.[136] Sexual power over men, it was thought, was a form of tyranny that led to the corruption of

[131] J.-A.-N. de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *The Premier Essay on Women's Political Rights, 1790* (London: Women's Rights Library, 1900), 4.
[132] Condorcet, *The Premier Essay on Women's Political Rights,* 10.
[133] *ibid*
[134] D. Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 64-65.
[135] See for example the advice of Mlle d'Espinassy in *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles (1764)*: "Do not believe that in having your daughter learn all these things, you will turn her into a *fille savant*, something that is much dreaded, and to which a lot of ridicule has been inappropriately attached." Cited in Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, 66.
[136] Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert* cited in C. E. Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (New York & London: Greenwood Press, 1990), 60. For a discussion on Rousseau's influence over ideas on the role of women in public and private life, see Linton, 'Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part 2', 54-56.

society.[137] In consequence, women were to be confined to the private sphere. When Madame Roland spoke in the Convention to defend herself from a denunciation, she was later mocked in the Jacobin club because it was so alien to the acceptable rules of gender.[138] Women who aspired to authorship or a role in politics were derogated because they violated the two treasured womanly virtues of domesticity and modesty.[139] The only positive laughter in the first year of the Convention that celebrated womanly virtue and the capacity of females to regenerate the *patrie*, emerged when a *citoyenne* of the commune declared: "[v]ous voyez ces citoyennes dont les époux sont aux frontières, elles vont vous donner des enfants pour remplacer leurs pères. (*Rires et applaudissements*)."[140] In this way, the strategic laughter of progress incorporated the importance placed on women as good mothers to the new generation of patriots. But laughter also had an important role in maintaining gender roles, as Candice Proctor has observed: '[t]hose who objected to such female ventures had another formidable weapon: the depressing application of scorn and ridicule.'[141]

In her memoirs, Madame Roland could not contain her antipathy towards Danton and blamed him for orchestrating the campaign of mockery she and her husband suffered. Marat, she wrote, also bore a grudge against the couple, purportedly because the Minister had denied him 15000 livres for his publications. Consequently, Marat posted placards around Paris, which, Madame Roland wrote, were "destiné à jeter du ridicule sur le ministre en le supposant conduit par moi."[142] Marat supposed that Madame Roland was the true power in the executive. When Manuel read a letter from the department of Finistère critiscising the methods of the Mountain, Marat dismissed it: "Je demande que cette adresse soit renvoyée à sa source, au boudoir de la femme Roland."[143] Roland's defence of his wife also provoked a quip from Basire in the Jacobin club. "Pour former l'esprit public, Roland a trouvé un autre expédient: il doit s'établir prochainement aux Tuileries un club de femmes dont les premières séances seront présidées par Mme Roland."[144] Whereas Madame Roland was

[137] Quinlan, 'Men without Women ?', 48.
[138] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.4, 553 (7 December).
[139] Proctor, *Women,* 73.
[140] AP 68:382 (7 July 1793).
[141] Proctor, *Women,* 75
[142] Roland (Madame), *Mémoires*, 221.
[143] AP 56:240 (6 January 1793).
[144] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.5, 576 (12 December 1793) "Cette nouvelle fait rire la société."

abnormal because she transgressed the limits of her sex, her husband was ridiculous because he was seen to act with secrecy and deception; traits associated with femininity.

In her memoirs, Madame Roland assured her readers that ridicule of this kind could not damage a true man of virtue:

> [Les Montagnards] imaginent, par leurs satires, exciter des petites passions, m'attirer sur la scène, et mettre alors en jeu du ridicule; ils peuvent me déchirer à l'aise, je ne dirai mot. Mais s'ils attaquent l'homme public, celui-là remplira son rôle en laissant voir son dédain ou démentant fièrement les calomnies.[145]

A woman, Madame Roland acknowledged, was not supposed to interfere in public life; therefore, she had not said a word regarding the satires she endured, even though the paradox of womanly virtue was that women were excluded from public life, yet were publicly judged by men.[146] Somewhat ironically, considering the Girondins' ridicule of Marat and Robespierre, Madame Roland also insisted that to attack a virtuous public figure like her husband was self-defeating because it gave him a platform to prove his patriotism, not seeing that this strategy had been used by the left-wing constantly. Certainly, for Minister Roland, it was a glorious moment to be given the chance to defend his "union avec la *vertu* et le courage".[147] Even so, he rarely ventured into the Convention in person, and when he did, he was more likely to employ measured language rather than the *sensibilité* he utilised when writing to his wife.[148] However, there does seem to be a concerted effort on the part of the Girondins to repulse accusations of femininity. In the *procés-verbal* on 29 September, the details of this session reveal that the Convention unanimously applauded the "vertu mâle et sévère" of Roland's discourse.[149] Because this description occurs in the same session as Danton's accusation of femininity, it is probable his joke had considerable influence over the choice of words highlighting the masculinity of Roland in the final publication of the transcript.

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[145] Roland (Madame), *Mémoires,* vol.1, 163.
[146] Linton, 'Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part 1.', 46.
[147] *Le Thermomètre du jour*, no.275 (30 September). The Archives only describes applause at this moment. AP 52:237 (30 September), AP 53:511 (21 November).
[148] See Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 166-170.
[149] AP 52:215 (29 September).

The rights of women were not taken very seriously in the Convention either. Laughter was a strategy in repudiating the role of women in politics, and a means to designate their function in the Republic. Charles-Nicholas Osselin, a friend of Danton's, ventured to the rostrum on 17 November to put forth a motion that would exempt female *émigrés* from the laws on emigration. It was clear from the start, however, that this proposal was not going to be given a great deal of consideration by the *conventionnels*, highlighted when Osselin made a couple of jests which defined women purely by their body: "il peut etre juste de faire une exception pour les personnes du sexe. (*Rires*)… Mais, citoyens, nous en avons tous en… (*Nouveaux rires*)…"[150] The main tenet to Osselin's argument laid in the belief that women were naturally susceptible to fear and could be excused from fleeing the country; if a man was to do the same, he was a coward.[151] This was why the Montagnards laughed at impetuous displays from their adversaries; they had not been masculine enough in their virtue because they had given in to the feminine emotion of fear, failing in the embodiment of sentimental stoicism. In the end, Osselin's proposal was rejected outright. Another example of scorn towards women occurred when the actress and political activist, Olympe de Gouges, offered to defend the king during his trial. Prudhomme was unforgiving in his newspaper, writing that there was nothing more ridiculous and unnatural than a woman concerning herself with the affairs of men. "Tout cela a donc bien amusé la convention, même les femmes qui s'y trouvaient." Prudhomme suggested Olympe de Gouges might be better disposed to sewing pantaloons for the *sans-culottes*.[152] Although the Girondins vehemently defended the role of Madame Roland in government, they too were not averse to using the presence of women to ridicule others, which in many ways undermined their arguments. Primarily, they drew attention to the support of Robespierre in the tribunes, which was largely composed of women apparently easily swayed by his words.[153] In the factional struggle, principals were sacrificed for the sake of political point-scoring.

It was not just the Jacobins that ridiculed the Rolands. Jacques Hébert, journalist and editor of *Le Père Duchesne*, the foremost journal aimed at the *sans-culottes*, was brutal

[150] AP 53:456 (17 November).
[151] *ibid*
[152] *Les Révolutions de Paris*, no.180 (15-22 December).
[153] *Le Patriote français,* no.1190 (11 November); no.1192 (14 November). See also Moore*, Journal during a Residence in France*, vol.2, 168.

in his attacks, often referring to Madame Roland as 'Madame Coco' and accusing Brissot of having "jeté le chat aux jambes des meilleurs patriotes".[154] For the overly-masculine character of the *Père,* being around a woman made his constitution weaker by the day.[155] These pamphlets were ephemeral, yet also damaging, contributing 'to the talk on the street, to the rumors of the crowds, to the movement of altercations, and to a certain kind of obscene, collective laughter as well.'[156] In the Convention, Manuel publicly denounced the circulating literature.[157] Paganel, a moderate, believed that Hébert's ability to make the *sans-culottes'* laugh made him their master; subsequently, he handed this social force into the arms of Marat and Robespierre.[158] In reality, the mocking cynicism of the left-wing was 'a means of public access to what was supposed to be secret'; the imaginary conduct of the Girondins was humorous, but also bred suspicions and fears because the jokes unveiled the conspiratorial ambitions of the ministers.[159]

Did these popular jokes and rumours have any effect in destabilising the Girondins? Such a question involves a judgement on the power of public ridicule. A prevalent historiographical argument concerning this issue asserts the role of ridicule in spurring the downfall of the king, who was 'desacralised' through the emergence of the public sphere and the circulation of pamphlets that destroyed the image of the monarchy and the links the king held with his subjects. The physical constitution of the king, seen to be imbecilic, infertile and sickly, was emblematic of a 'seminal transfer' of power 'from one body to another'; Louis XVI was 'symbolically put to death by laughter' as France lurched from monarchical to popular sovereignty.[160] However, it would be an exaggeration to claim the circulation of satirical pamphlets could erode the foundations of a symbolic and ideological framework. The 'emasculation' of Minister

[154] Walter (ed.), *Actes du Tribunal Révolutionnaire*, 156.
[155] *Le Père Duchesne*, no.199.
[156] C. Thomas, 'The Heroine of the Crime: Marie-Antoinette in Pamphlets', in D. Goodman (ed.), *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 102.
[157] AP 56:728 (11 January).
[158] Paganel, *Essai historique*, 256-261.
[159] Farge, *Subversive Words*, 62. Farge refers to the mocking derision of placards in the streets during the eighteenth-century. She asserts that, '[p]opular judgments were conveyed through laughter, mischief and mockery.'
[160] See de Baecque, *The Body Politic,* 68; See also Farge, *Subversive Words,* 34-35. In a rebuttal of this theory, William Doyle has rightly noted that the majority of ordinary people did not understand the sacred ideology of the king anyway, and plenty more still believed Louis XVI a sacred vessel even after his death. W. Doyle, *France and the Age of Revolution: Regimes Old and New from Louis XIV to Napoleon Bonaparte* (London: I.B Taurus, 2013), 103-112.

Roland – reminiscent of the abuse Louis XVI had suffered concerning his relationship with Marie Antoinette – did not destroy the ideological safeguard of representational sovereignty or immunity surrounding the Girondins, nor motivate the *sans-culottes* to overthrow them. Indeed, mockery and ridicule was a natural by-product of democracy, especially since public image was the concern for hundreds of representatives, as opposed to one sacred individual. By playing on the 'ahistorical' fears of female influence in politics, however, the left-wing managed to seriously undermine the individual representative authority of Roland through encouraging the people to laugh at his feminine virtue. But it was Roland's own decision to resign in 1793; intimidation and fear were the factors determining this resignation. In the political sphere, laughter was a psychological weapon, part of a strategy of terror that was meant to create enough doubt and fear that eventually the Girondin leaders would admit defeat without the need for insurrectionary violence. It was an incessant tool meant to slander and demoralise. The last section of this chapter will look at how the strategy of intimidation and mockery affected the Gironde.

Denunciation and Mockery

There may have been a growing penchant for denunciative laughter in the Convention, but the spoken denunciation was still the foremost strategy for the Montagnards to legitimise their claims to virtue and discredit others. By December, the Montagnards had formed into a fully-fledged resistance movement in the Convention. Because of this, they attempted an alternative type of denunciation, which was more organised and relied on material proof, as opposed to the style of the lone virtuous man defying his persecutors, although this type was still ubiquitous as well. The crucial point to the lone denunciator was that the focus was put on the denunciator himself, because only he knew the details of the mysterious plots he spoke of, and his courage and virtue was communicated when defying his anonymous enemies. However, the Girondins were growing accustomed to Robespierre's provocative speeches, and were refusing to give him the dissenting reaction he craved, exemplified when Isnard made it known to his colleagues that Robespierre paused and looked around in his speeches when he actively sought interruptions to demonstrate his suffering and virtue.[161] The type of denunciation that was accompanied with proof, on the other hand, explicitly

[161] AP 62:159 (15 April 1793).

named individuals and shone the spotlight on their wrongdoings, rather than on the virtue of those who exposed it. Those who were denunciated felt the weight of suspicion and intimidation.

The Achille Viard conspiracy was the first of the elaborate denunciations, and emerged when a moderate deputy, Grangeneuve, found misplaced documents on his desk inviting certain Montagnards to a meeting at Chabot's house to hear an important denunciation. Chabot, Basire, Tallien, Merlin, Ruamps and Ingrand were all involved; this was contentious, since they were all members of the Committee of General Security and had not alerted the other members to the evidence they had discovered. The denunciator was a man called Achille Viard, who claimed that Roland and Fauchet were involved in a shady plot with Narbonne and Talleyrand in London to restore the king to power. Viard was apparently the intermediary, transporting packages between the parties. Yet, from the start, the Girondins laughed at the preposterous claims and encouraged an inquiry to reveal the Mountain's attempts to frame prominent deputies.

In total there were thirteen separate instances of laughter in relation to this incident; all of these bursts came from the Girondins, in an attempt to repudiate the manoeuvrings of their enemies.[162] Chabot, humiliated, was forced to reveal details of the plot and warned the deputies that when he had finished speaking, Roland's crimes would be revealed and he would be vindicated. "*Murmures et rires ironiques à droite et au centre*" accompanied these words.[163] When a secretary read the incriminating evidence, to the consternation of Marat and others, laughter was heard throughout the piece, particularly when it was suggested that Viard met with Madame Roland for instructions.[164] Marat was laughed at when he made one of his trademark pleas to the tribunes after deputies had called for the documents to be handed to a different commission to that of General Security: "Ah! ces petits Messieurs veulent exclure des affaires les membres patriotes! (*On rit.*)"[165] A few deputies on the left, including Jean Debry, tried to rescue the situation by accusing the Gironde of purposefully forging the

[162] These instances in the Convention occurred between the sessions of 5-7 December.
[163] AP 54:413 (7 December 1792).
[164] *ibid*
[165] AP 54:414.

fake letters of Viard to make the Montagnards appear as the conspirators.[166] Barbaroux humiliated those involved further by inviting a witness to give his opinion on Achille Viard. According to the testimony, Viard was a faithful follower of Marat – Marat himself laughed at these revelations in an attempt to represent the proceedings as a Girondin conspiracy.[167] No other incident was laughed at more than this in the Convention.

It is not absolutely clear whether Chabot and Marat had manufactured the conspiracy themselves, or were willing to believe the claims of Viard, who may well have been merely an opportunist. The relatively impartial *Gazette* seemed to take the latter view after criticising Chabot for signing Viard's testimony without reading it.[168] However, the organs of the Gironde were of no doubt to the nature of circumstances. The *Journal français* reported: "Tel est le ramas dégoûtant d'absurdités que Chabot et compagnie avait adapté de confiance pour perdre Roland, et l'exposer aux poignards des assassins; cette horrible espérance l'avait tellement aveuglé, qu'il n'avait pas eu le temps de réfléchir sur la profonde ineptie de ce projet."[169] Whether or not the Mountain knowingly created this conspiracy or was gullible to the claims of Viard, the aim was the same: the Viard affair was seen as an opportunity to put the Girondins on trial and force Roland and Brissot out of office. This whole conspiracy egressed from the frustration of powerlessness in the Convention, and it caused a great deal of resentment and animosity.[170]

Despite this political defeat, the Montagnards carried on presenting poorly conceived conspiracies to the audience, while the Girondins carried on laughing. The second was instigated by Thomas-Augustin Gasparin – labelled by the *Journal français* as "ce nouveau Viard" fronting "la nouvelle machine dénonciative" – who unveiled an improbable conspiracy concerning a secret agreement between the Girondins and the king's valet, in a similar vein to Mirabeau's secret arrangement with the monarchy a few years previous.[171] In retaliation, the Girondin, Gaudet, sarcastically applauded

[166] AP 54:415.
[167] AP 54:416.
[168] N. Chamfort (ed.), *Gazette Nationale de France*, no. 256 (8 December).
[169] *Journal français,* no.24 (8 December).
[170] Lamartine, *History of the Girondists*, 298. Lamartine sees in the Viard affair the moment of change in which both parties succumbed to a language that was violent, ignoble and unseemly.
[171] *Journal français*, no.51 (4 January 1793).

Gasparin's sudden patriotic spirit since it had taken months for him to remember this fact.[172] Furthermore, the Girondins laughed when counter-evidence was produced proving those deputies inculpated by Gasparin to be innocent.[173] Brissot, meanwhile, was victim of a forged letter purportedly sent by him to one of the king's former ministers, Laporte, expressing support to the royalists. Despite the signature having been falsified and the handwriting baring no resemblance to Brissot's own, several deputies insisted on an investigation into the matter.[174] Elsewhere, the Girondins produced their own proof revealing that the Montagnards had dispatched agents into the departments posing as government officials to spread rumours at the expense of the Girondins. One of these agents, to the laughter of the Convention, had communicated that Roland, Vergniaud, Brissot and Gaudet were all detestable men, while Marat and Robespierre were worthy patriots.[175] "Est-ce amusant!" vented Marat, to cries of "Oui! Oui!" from the benches, while Brissot, derided as an aristocrat by Duhem, merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled.[176]

In a study on the theory and practice of denunciation, Colin Lucas examines the vague descriptions inherent in many denunciations of the terror and concludes that their ambiguity encouraged the imaginations of the revolutionary audience, consequently legitimising their plausibility; as I have argued, jokes operated in very much the same way.[177] Yet, the series of elaborate denunciations between December and May did not arouse suspicion through vague rhetoric; the purpose was to directly incriminate the Girondins in a series of accusations enforced by 'evidence' so the political audience did not have to imagine anything. It is probable that many believed the Girondins were truly guilty and purposefully contrived evidence to present this belief to the public.[178] These plots were not created by a group purely paranoid about what went on within closed doors, however, although suspicion did play a part to a certain extent. The denunciations emerged from personal antipathies; the experience of the day-to-day proceedings of the Convention; and the frustration that Girondin

[172] AP 56:170 (3 January).
[173] AP 56:181, 183, 198 (4 January).
[174] AP 58:582 (15 February).
[175] AP 58:497 (13 February)
[176] AP 58:501.
[177] Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation', 783.
[178] Linton, 'The Tartuffes of Patriotism', 237.

policies, such as the refusal to execute the king, were not going far enough. These elaborate denunciations were formed primarily to force the Girondins out of politics.

On first glance, it does not appear that the Montagnards had much to gain from this strategy. Most of the conspiracies they claimed to have unearthed seemed to be fraudulent, and the Girondins were unremitting in their laughter to highlight this. However, as Lucas notes, denunciations were concerned with publicity and the evocation of public opinion as 'arbiter' of the veracity of claims made, rather than the approval of other deputies.[179] Minister Roland himself admitted this, complaining to the Convention in a message on 9 January that the ridiculous denunciations were repeated so often that the weak-minded believed them. Roland inveighed that he did not have the time to even see his family, let alone conspire against the Republic.[180] Buzot was of the same opinion: "[p]lus la chose est absurde, plus elle lui plait; plus elle est fausse, plus il la croit."[181] The aim of all denunciations was to turn public opinion against the denunciated, and create favourable political conditions for that faction. It did not matter if an accusation was not true, as long as it was plausible for the audience.

The Girondins countered both vague and specific denunciations through laughter, but this was less a strategy of control, as it once was, and more an indication of political impotence. Indeed, Girondin laughter was still a constant feature of the Convention, even until the end of May. From the end of January, on the 28, until 2 June, laughter occurred 103 times. Thirty-nine of these instances are explicitly, or almost certainly, from the right and centre against the Mountain. On 26 occasions, laughter is universal – as a strategy to repudiate the past and as a strategy indicating acts of patriotism – or, emerges from situations wherein the laughter is too vague to deduce which side it is emanating from. On 9 occasions there was laughter in response to the speeches of Anacharsis Clootz; the *Archives* does not specify the designation of the laughter in any of these bursts, so it can be assumed that Clootz was a universal figure of fun. Finally, 29 instances emanated from the Mountain – a figure that competes, but does not reach, the amount of laughter from the right-wing.

[179] Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation', 775-776.
[180] AP 56:606
[181] Buzot, *Mémoires*, 44. See also Speier, 'Wit and Politics', 1372. He argues that rumours 'morally engage people' and 'afford secret delight'.

The laughter of the Gironde was mainly a defensive strategy to deflect the increasing amount of denunciations. They struggled to nullify the weapons of fear, suspicion and rumour. Vergniaud, in a speech defending the system of representation as an expression of the general will, mocked the denunciations of the left-wing.[182] Birotteau ridiculed Thuriot when he was about to embark on a denunciation, "Ah! voici les prédictions qui commencent! (*Nouveaux rires sur les mêmes bancs.*)"[183] Gensonné also ridiculed the left-wing, particularly the "insupportable clameurs" and their arrogant claims they had solely made the revolution; if the Montagnards had helped to save the Republic, he said, it was through unconscious instinct, like the squawking geese that had alerted Marcus Manlius to the Gallic attack on Rome.[184] Buzot was one of the most critical of left-wing conspiracy theories, and defended ridicule in his memoirs, which to some smacked of ambivalence: "[l]oin de moi toute plaisanterie déplacée dans un sujet aussi grave! Mais est-ce ma faute si le sarcasme est dans les mots dont je me sers, lorsque tout est atrocement ridicule dans les faits que je décris."[185] The point was that many denunciations were outlandish, and so the Girondins attempted to convince the political audience of this by laughing at them.

Yet, the Girondins were losing support, not purely because of policy, or the arguments of the left-wing, but also because of wide-spread intimidation emanating from numerous quarters. During the trial of the king, Buzot wrote that spectators carried placards indicating they would beat up anyone who supported the king.[186] Charles Villette complained that the rabble outside the doors of the Convention had promised to tear him apart if he did not vote for death.[187] Lehardy also spoke of his unease regarding the death threats to those deputies who voted for the call to the people. Such immediate concerns were dismissed by Louis Legendre as "les peurs fantastiques", and Marat called the emotional turmoil of the Gironde as a "farce".[188] The Mountain also went further to convey this fear as a sign of guilt: "C'est toujours

[182] AP 56:93-95 (31 December 1792). See also AP 56:250 (6 January 1793) for a joke made by Vergniaud on the Mountain's distrust of the Ministers.
[183] AP 57:601 (23 January).
[184] AP 56:153 (2 January 1793). *Rires* followed this joke. In his *mémoires*, the Montagnard Baudot remembered this comment and used it as an example of Girondin malignance: "[Gensonné] paya de sa tête ce prétendu bon mot" (119).
[185] Buzot, *Mémoires*, 9.
[186] Buzot, *Mémoires*, 27.
[187] AP 57:335 (16-17 January).
[188] AP 57:336.

avec indignation que j'entends des membres annoncer qu'ils craignent les poignards dans les murs de Paris" said Thuriot. "L'homme qui remplit son devoir ne craint point la mort".[189] Historians have traditionally been drawn to the discourses of the patriots to analyse how they persuaded the audience, but the physical encounters and verbal threats in the Convention had just as much an effect in determining support for a faction.[190] While it may have been the reliance on natural rights – on the virtuous and morally superior mountain – that legitimised the right to use intimidating tactics, it was the experience of intimidation that caused many Girondin deputies to resign or stay away from the Convention. Leigh Whaley argues that the Mountain, despite its aggressive rhetoric, resisted attempts from the Commune to expel the Girondins in a coup. Yet, the pressures the Montagnards placed on the Ministers and their supporters suggests otherwise.[191]

The strategy of intimidation garnered tangible results. Kersaint was the first to leave, resigning on the 18 January. He had cited ill health and later his intolerance of violent actions, but also assured his compatriots that he resigned "sans crainte".[192] When, on 22 January 1793, Roland offered his resignation (citing the insults, mockery and denunciations made against him, which, he said, had not caused fear but indignation) the Montagnards expressed their satisfaction, and Thuriot assured Roland his conspiracies would still be revealed, although this drew "*Rires ironiques à droite.*"[193] Hébert's alter-ego, the *Père Duchesne* claimed to have infiltrated the ministry and regaled his readers with what he saw: "[l]e ministre coco ne rêve plus qu'insurrections et lanternes. Toutes les nuits il est suffoqué plus encore par le peur que par la pituite. Il y a quelques jours il s'est cru à sa dernière heure." The *Père* said that he then quickly left the scene to prevent himself from dying with laughter at seeing the fear of a known enemy of the revolution.[194] The left-wing made known to the public that the

[189] AP 57:443 (19 January).
[190] Edelstein, for example, acknowledges the role of intimidation in the Convention, but ultimately decides that the 'great power struggle between the Mountain and the Gironde was in the end a literally "rhetorical" one, hinging as it did on who could persuade the mass of wavering deputies known dismissively as "La Plaine". See Eldenstein, *The Terror of Natural Right*, 167.
[191] Whaley, *Radicals,* 146.
[192] AP 57:428 (18 January).
[193] *ibid*. In response, Thuriot made clear that this laughter gave him license to list in detail Roland's failings.
[194] *Le Père Duchesne*, no.205.

Girondins were intimidated by the "craintes chimeriques", even though true patriots had nothing to fear.[195]

Shaken from the calls against him, Manuel resigned on 19 January. Thuriot immediately went on the offensive and accused Manuel of cowardice and assured the people he would never quit his post at the first sign of danger.[196] Garrau was even less forgiving, stating he laughed at Manuel's protestations.[197] Kersaint, meanwhile, was placed before the tribune to explain his denouncement of the Mountain in his resignation letter and found himself suffering the insults from these deputies during his interrogation: "je me trouve dans une situation à ne pas pouvoir demeurer plus longtemps à la barre (*Rires ironiques à l'extrême gauche.*)."[198] The mayor of Paris, Chambon, was physically harassed and bullied by the left-wing, causing him to resign from office on 11 February. All these resignations occurred around the king's trial – it is almost certain that such intimidation would have also played on the minds of the deputies when they came to vote on the king's punishment. Desmoulins also involved himself with jokes that carried a threatening undercurrent; when he said he wanted to "mettre le feu à la Sainte-Barbe" he insisted he was speaking figuratively, and not referring to Barbaroux specifically.[199] In the sections, outspoken moderates, loyal to the Girondins, were forced to change their allegiance; some were arrested in the middle of the night.[200]

The Montagnards contrived to corner the rest of the Convention into an emotional state wherein only acquiescence and obedience was permissible. If deputies laughed, the Montagnards accused their antagonists of despotism, such as when Dubois-Crancé charged his persecutors of jealousy in response to laughter and heckling: "j'ai constamment été assailli des injures les plus grossières. Pourquoi? Parce que dans cette enceinte, j'habite la Montagne. Ah! Cette Montagne est aussi pure que moi: elle a fait la Révolution; elle sauvera le République."[201] It was also still a prominent strategy for Robespierre to denounce his opponents when faced with laughter: "je méprise les

[195] AP 60:167 (13 March).
[196] AP 57:442 (19 January).
[197] AP 57:519 (21 January).
[198] AP 57:540 (22 January).
[199] AP 62:30 (13 April).
[200] AP 65:14 (17 May).
[201] AP 62:48 (13 April). See also the words of Phillippeaux, AP 62:196 (16 April 1793).

sarcasmes imbéciles par lesquels je m'entends interrompre", he said, "lorsqu'il s'agit des grands intérêts du salut public". The power of laughter as a strategy of surveillance for the Girondins was massively diminished on 20 January with the death of the Montagnard, Louis-Michel Lepeletier, assassinated for voting for the king's death.[202] The assassination of Lepeletier vindicated and legitimised the claims of persecution and sacrifice among the Montagnards; it was they, it seemed, who had more reason to fear for their lives, despite Petion's desperate pleas for calm and to not see in everything "des machinations, des trames, des complots".[203] Marat used the death to his advantage; he laughed at claims of innocence from across the hall, observing that not one of the moderates had been so much as scratched.[204] Hébert claimed the Girondins rejoiced in Lepeletier's death.[205] Laughter was also an unbefitting tactic after the betrayal of Dumouriez, especially since, in the weeks leading to the defection, the Girondins had mocked the attempts of the Montagnards to pass legislation enabling soldiers to elect their officers to prevent conspirators leading the armies.[206] When Dumouriez' defection became apparent on 1 April, the Girondins tried to shift blame onto Danton and Delacroix even though the Girondins had been equally as close to the general. Danton asked what the Girondins had done to prevent the treachery of the general, to the laughter and applause of the Mountain.[207] Conclusively, laughter as a means to exert control on debates was no longer a viable strategy, because in the public eye it was interpreted as joy and apathy in response to the mounting crises. The Montagnards clamoured for a further rupture – a complete break from the past. "Il est temps que cette comédie finisse" said Robespierre, "c'est par des mesures véritablement révolutionnaires qu'il faut sauver la patrie; c'est sur la force de la nation qu'il faut s'appuyer."[208]

If the moderates responded to intimidation with the emotions of fear, anger, or heroic *sensibilité* then they were received with denunciative laughter, such as when

[202] See AP 57:516 (21 January) for the reactions to Lepelletier's death.
[203] AP 57:523 (21 January).
[204] AP 57:337 (16-17 January).
[205] *Le Père Duchesne*, no.213.
[206] AP 59:67 (21 February); 151 (24 February).
[207] AP 61:55 (1 April).
[208] AP 61:271 (3 April).

Cambacérès lost his cool with constant interruptions.[209] When Cambon denounced the interruptions he suffered, a Montagnard replied, "[n]ous ne murmurons pas, nous rions de ton impudence."[210] In order to precipitate a new beginning, the Montagnards scorned the moderates by mocking their public image of patriotism and virtue.[211] Even Robespierre mocked the Girondins.[212] Furthermore, with the war taking a downturn, the Girondins now explained these disasters increasingly through the language of misfortune, which, they said, was a necessary component of virtue. This reverse from the language they used in September precipitated laughter.[213] Hannah Arendt says that misfortune, by definition, requires a degree of compassion. The Mountain denied their enemies this.[214] For too long, compassion and pity had held the revolution back. In the terror, laughter was encouraged, but as one method to reject those in the present; those obstacles to the future.

Like the laughter of surveillance seen in the early months of the Convention, the laughter of denunciation was a form of ridicule against fellow deputies. Rather than being precipitated by a sentiment of pity, however, this laughter was justified through the necessity in unveiling counterrevolutionary activity and holding it up to the mockery of the audience. Denunciatory laughter was underpinned by cynic philosophy and belonged to a strategy of intimidation, which relied on heckling, physical occupation of the rostrum and the support of the tribunes to silence the Girondins and dominate the debates. All this paralysed the functions of the Convention, allowing the Montagnards to call for a rupture, because the present legislative assembly was not satisfactory in achieving progress. Intimidation was also a measure to remove increasingly disillusioned Girondins from office. With their fall, finally enabled by a further upheaval, the Republic was regenerated anew; consequently, so too were the emotional rules of laughter.

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[209] AP 58:535 (14 February). Cambacérès: "Ne heurtez pas tous les principes (*Rires ironiques à l'extrême gauche*)".
[210] AP 58:403 (9 February).
[211] For example, see AP 59:59 (21 February); 59:619 (5 March); 60:15 (9 March); 60:655 (29 March); 62:165 (15 April).
[212] AP 61:541 (10 April). Robespierre: "Je n'ose pas dire que vous devez frapper du même décret, des patriotes aussi distingues que MM. Vergniaud, Brissot et autres (*Rires ironiques sur la Montagne*)."
[213] AP 60:695 (29 March).
[214] H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 70.

Chapter 5

Strategies of Laughter during the Terror

Progress or Crisis? The Dichotomy of Laughter

In *Chains of Slavery*, first published in England in 1774, Marat asserted that under despotic regimes the people were bound to a kind of emotional servitude. Tyrants, he wrote, subjugated the people into feigning its feelings according to their will: "ils vous ordonnent de pleurer quand ils pleurent et de rire quand ils rient."[1] Liberty of expression, for Marat, could never be realised if civic virtue lay dormant, constantly suppressed by arbitrary powers.[2] It is ironic that Marat's words were perhaps more relevant to the year of the terror, in which a smirk, chuckle, or even tears could attract unwanted attention. "If you laughed, you were accused of joy at some bad news the republic had had; if you cried, they said that you regretted their success", wrote the Scottish aristocrat Grace Elliott when describing the house searches by soldiers.[3] In the midst of the terror, republicans had to be careful when publicly communicating their feelings through corporeal expression because the body was considered the 'natural extension of the mind'.[4] A laugh at the wrong moment could incur punishment.[5] However, laughter was not an altogether negative expression in the terror. Physiognomy – the science behind the reading of the body – had the capacity to incorporate positive, regenerative models for laughter, regardless of Lavater's distaste for it.[6] Abbé Grégoire, an exponent of physiognomy, advanced that the Jews had the potential to evade persecution and appropriate themselves into French society by laughing at their own peculiarities and beliefs.[7] Conversely, tears, considered the

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[1] J.-P. Marat, *Les chaînes de l'esclavage* (Paris: Havard, 1833), 272.
[2] Baker, 'Transformations of Classical Republicanism', 43-44.
[3] G. D. Elliot, *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street), 124.
[4] Feilla*, The Sentimental Theater*, 197.
[5] During a session, the Convention listened in silence as they were told of the sacrifice of young patriots fighting against the rebels in Nantes. However, Génisseau alerted the Convention to a spectator in the gallery: "Il riait en entendant les fâcheuses nouvelles dont on vient de donner lecture." The spectator was subsequently taken to the Committee of General Security. See AP 60:511 (24 March 1793).
[6] The importance of dress in appearing as a patriot has been covered by Wrigley in The *Politics of Appearance*, 199-202. For the influence of physiognomy in the terror see Linton, 'Tartuffes of Patriotism', in B. Coward & J. Swann (eds.), *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 245-246.
[7] A. G. Sepinwall, *Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005),71-72. Grégoire noted that the 'pallid face' of the Jew affected his moral character.

ultimate expression of sentiment, were not a guarantee of patriotism during the terror. As Anne Vincent-Buffault has shown, it was not shrewd to cry over the misfortunes of acknowledged conspirators.[8] All this amounted to a more stringent surveillance of the expressions on the face to judge if anyone harboured counterrevolutionary tendencies. The general suspicion of another's motives, and the obsession with identifying hidden plots through the reading of signs apparent to only those with the upmost virtue and integrity, indicated, according to Marisa Linton, 'an underlying anxiety in the revolutionary mentality, a profound, though unvoiced, uncertainty that anyone could ever entirely prove their revolutionary virtue.'[9]

There was a marked dichotomy in the appropriation of laughter during the terror which reflected the schism between two distinct sets of discourses. Firstly, there were moments when external enemies were ridiculed in the same vein as they had been in the first year of the Convention, and not at all treated seriously. There were also junctures in which notions of heroic sacrifice were eschewed for expressions of triumph and celebration. Progress was still communicated with laughter by the *conventionnels*, although this patriotic *gaieté* was realised after the execution of traitors and the development of public education rather than the miraculous military victories or astounding feats which had exemplified progress for the Girondins.[10] "C'est glorieux de foutre le tour aux autrichiens, mais il serait plus heureux d'exterminer tous les traitres qui sont dans l'intérieur", wrote Hébert.[11] Furthermore, Spartan education and rigour, reasoned prominent Jacobins, would solve the problem in breaking from the past as children would be removed from corrupting influences and placed together in communal schools.[12] As one dispatch to the Convention read, when praising the emphasis on public spirit and morality in schools, France was henceforth in a situation where "la nature va rire du retour de ses enfants vers elle". [13] The creation of a new people – which involved a total rupture between past and present – was not instantaneous in this form but in fact occurred diachronically through the careful inculcation of moral values.

[8] A. Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears: Sensibility and Sentimentality in France* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), 92-93.
[9] Linton, *Choosing Terror,* 224.
[10] Ozouf, 'Regeneration', in F. Furet & M. Ozouf (eds.), *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution,* 783.
[11] Hébert, *Le Père Duchesne*, no.189.
[12] H. T. Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity,* 125.
[13] AP 82:389 (27 December 1793).

Yet, there was also a second and altogether more negative attitude towards laughter among the deputies, evident at moments when tragedy had befallen the Republic: for example, when news of a military loss reached the Convention; in instances of division and conflict among the patriots; when legislation was passed; or in moments when enemies – suspected or otherwise – expressed happiness. In the latter case, the patriot had to exhibit the opposite emotions to his adversary. When General Custine laughed off accusations against him, the journalist Jean-Charles Laveaux responded, "Oh! Quand viendra-t-il donc le temps où tous les représentants du peuple français prendront un caractère digne de leur mission sublime! Où ce titre n'inspirera plus à aucun l'étourderie, le ton tranchant, la vanité, le ridicule, l'orgueil dégoutant; mais la sagesse, la dignité, l'amour du peuple, la vertu majestueuse."[14] The deputies may have laughed at the prospect of forming a Republic in which the 'fiction' of utopia was transformed into 'reality', but, in the meantime, they were required to uphold their role as sentinels and defendants of the people in order to uncover the hidden plots that made the 'succession of disasters' which had befallen the revolution easier to understand.[15] Under this particular circumstance, laughter was frowned upon because it was considered a sign of indifference and apathy to the important duty of discovering the enemy within.

The political language of terror was wholly paradoxical because, on the one hand, violence was justified on the premise that good republicans had to actively excise diseased elements of the political body to regenerate the moral character of society and secure a utopian future. On the other hand, this future could never be attained because conspiracy and denunciation encompassed the major legitimising tools of political discourse, and were necessary in lending reason to the troubles of the revolution, in addition to safeguarding political representation. Relinquishing the strategy of denunciation was not feasible because it was so entrenched in conceptions of power. It was this contradiction that offers an explanation to the conflicting attitudes towards laughter at this time, because politicians alternated between laughing at conspirators in order to convey the success of governmental policy in one moment, and, in the next, they warned of the impending disaster the people faced should the program of terror be relaxed. This chapter will thus recover the traces of

[14] Laveaux, *Journal de la Montagne*, no.43 (14 July 1793).
[15] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 10.

laughter in the terror, primarily examining how it operated within the political sphere, when it was acceptable to laugh in the Convention and when it was dangerous to do so. We will also look at laughter that did not follow the rules enacted by the Republican government, but instead served as a means of protest and dissent against the violence of the period. Ultimately, it shall be argued that, first, laughter maintained an important function within Republican society despite its seeming decrease, and second, that laughter could not be fully controlled by the organs of the government. In fact, laughter was a powerful weapon in exposing the discrepancies of terror.

The strategies of laughter altered in the terror because of the intensification of suspicion and fear among the patriots. This happened for two reasons. Firstly, by the summer of 1793, the optimism of a short, victorious war had been displaced by a pessimistic outlook. The revolutionary war had opened on further fronts, and, worse still, the French armies were surrendering ground, notably at the battle of Neerwinden on 18 March 1793. Laughter precipitated by military victory was rare in the Convention, especially compared to the first few months. On 19 March, the deputies created the revolutionary tribunal, which had the power to execute without appeal those considered to be in armed rebellion against the Republic. One of the main advocates of the tribunal, Danton, approved this ruling because he claimed it would frighten conspirators into inaction.[16] The fears of a federalist or royalist revolt appeared to be substantiated with the emerging counterrevolutionary forces in the Vendée along with major disturbances in important cities such as Nantes, Lyon and Toulon. Revolutionaries were vetted and examined to see if they were advocates of the foreign enemy. "La crainte, la division, le découragement, la ruine du trésor public, l'épuisement des provinces, la misère du peuple; voilà les suites de l'entêtement de la cour d'Autriche" wrote the journalist Jean-Charles Laveaux in *Journal de la Montagne.*[17] The deteriorating position within France's borders and externally on the European front undoubtedly caused the patriots to look amongst themselves for answers regarding the misfortunes of the Republic. For the deputies, it was human agency which was the soul factor to consider when determining failure, rather than societal or economic issues.[18] In Paris, the left-wing fragmented, splitting into several

[16] AP 61:334 (5 April 1793).
[17] *Journal de la Montagne*, no. 31 (2 July 1793).
[18] Linton, 'The Tartuffes of Patriotism', 236.

factions that refused to share the same stage until Jacobin rule intensified, promptly eliminating freedom of thought, expression and, by extension, any voices of dissent.[19]

The defeat of the Girondins on 2 June 1793 also contributed to the fearful situation. This is because the Girondins, adjudged guilty of subversion, shared virtually the same political culture as the Mountain. Both factions believed in the necessity in conveying virtue and patriotism, of doing selfless deeds, and denunciating corruption. Both groups also adhered to the maxim that truthfulness could be conveyed without much attachment to the truth.[20] Because of these similarities, the conspirator was deemed even harder to root out than before; he was almost indistinguishable from the true patriot. As James Johnson writes, 'the battle was no longer between revolutionary and aristocrat, us versus them. It was revolutionary against dangerous lookalike, us versus us.'[21] Additionally, if conspirators could infiltrate the Convention, then they could penetrate other hotbeds of patriotism, including the Jacobin and Cordeliers clubs. The revolutionaries urged their audience to be vigilant of enemies who had learned to play the part of the patriot: "Les agents de Pitt sont partout," said the Jacobin, Audouin, "ils seront aussi à cette discussion; ils nous écoutent, ils observant jusqu'à nos gestes, ils pressurent toutes nos expressions, pour en extraire le venin que nous n'y mettons pas."[22] This fear of the enemy within, mimicking with exactitude the behaviour of patriots, explains why the Montagnards alerted their audience to the brief, momentary expressions of the Girondins in order to denote their undisputable guilt and to make a clear distinction between patriot and enemy. The Girondin conspirator, argued the Mountain, possessed either the face of a fearful coward who was not willing to renounce his life for the Republic, or the face of malignancy which laughed at a Republic edging towards the precipice.[23] After the fall of the Gironde, this strategy had the effect of forcing the deputies into a tighter, more cohesive culture, which was weighed down by the expectation they were all to speak the same language without dissonance. Meanwhile, the denunciation was not only used as a strategy to challenge

[19] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas,* 503, 510. Israel sees the terror as the 'general suppression of all the Revolution's essential principles and philosophy'.
[20] Feilla, *The Sentimental Theater,* 204-205.
[21] J. H. Johnson, 'Versailles, Meet Les Halles: Masks, carnival and the French Revolution', *Representations*, 73, 1 (2001), 110.
[22] *Journal de la Montagne*, no.78 (11 Pluviôse/ 30 January 1794).
[23] In the Convention, Couthon gave a speech denoting the physiognomy of the conspirator. AP 86:502 (15 March 1794). The speech is discussed in Linton, 'Tartuffes of Patriotism', 245-256.

the authority of others in the terror, it also became a necessary and expected duty for republicans to prove their loyalty and patriotism. Inaction in Year II was considered a crime because the revolution could not stagnate, only galvanise forward. Consequently, those caught up in the terror denunciated out of desperation and self-preservation.[24]

Thus, the political dynamic was in constant flux during the terror, encompassing two diametrically opposed scripts. The revolutionaries were at times in celebratory mood because the utopia seemed to be at hand: "La régénération de l'esprit public n'est plus un problème dans notre ville" wrote a provincial Jacobin club to the Convention, whose members claimed to possess "la gaieté dans nos esprits".[25] At other times, the deputies fell back onto the language of crisis which justified the severe measures they decreed.[26] Crisis, according to Keith Baker, was an 'essentially defensive and oppositional' discourse, inherent within classical republicanism, which preached that if the Republic was not growing stronger then it was failing, undermined by subterfuge. There was no in-between.[27] The call on the discourse of crisis was often invoked at moments when the Committee of Public Safety urged for an intensification of terror; the deputies were to be "sévères dans les moments de crises" like the legislators of ancient republics.[28] The oscillation between the severe present and the bright future can be gleaned from the speeches of Robespierre. Immediately after the purge of the Girondins, for example, Robespierre assured the people that there was no need to worry about conspiratorial plots because the new regime could maintain tranquillity.[29] Yet, just ten days later, he warned that the people's character of "civisme" had to match the rage of the nation's enemies otherwise the revolution would fail.[30] Therefore it was imperative for a deputy to identify the prevailing mood, conditions

[24] Take for example D.J. Garat, who, under severe questioning, attempted to divert suspicion over his patriotism by claiming he knew of a conspiracy. He subsequently admitted that the plot he had denounced was still to take place: "Je crois citoyens, qu'il existe ici vingt ou trente hommes que je ne connais point, qui ne sont peut-être coupables d'aucuns crimes, mais que je crois dangereux et capables de tout entreprendre pour satisfaire leurs passions." D.-J. Garat, *Mémoires de Garat* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis, 1862), XXX. See also Linton, 'Tartuffes of Patriotism', 241, on the attempts of Fabre to save himself by denouncing others.
[25] AP 81:686 (29 Frimaire/19 December 1793).
[26] AP 79:652 (2 Frimaire/22 November).
[27] Baker, 'Transformations of Classical Republicanism' 36.
[28] AP 82:35 (30 Frimaire/20 December).
[29] AP 66:173 (8 June).
[30] AP 66:673 (18 June).

and situation at any one time in order to laugh with progress and mourn setbacks. Adapting to the discourses of terror would prove to be a struggle for many deputies.

Unmasking Conspirators: The Laughter of Denunciation and Progress in the terror

In the summer of 1793 the Minister of the Interior, Dominique Joseph Garat, was probed in the Convention for a controversial circular he had dispatched to the *départements* in which he dared to brand federalism a phantom. Although the pamphlet was largely impartial, its detached tone attracted unwanted attention from the Mountain; only heartfelt devotion to their cause was acceptable in political discourse, not uncommitted moderation. Garat was subsequently arrested on the authority of Collot d'Herbois, who accused him of conducting himself in a manner redolent of Roland, although Garat suggested Collot's anger stemmed from his jealousy of the Minister's privileges, particularly his right to a carriage whenever he desired it.[31] As deputies had grown to know each other well in the preceding years, republican politics was deeply personal, based on feuds and rivalries. Many denunciations were generated from petty motivations, rather than an ideological duty to root out the enemy within.

Garat, on the 2 August, was summoned to the Convention to face his accuser. At the rostrum, Collot d'Herbois utilised a strategy referred to by one historian as "tragi-comique".[32] He first took on a serious persona and accused Garat of the gravest conspiracies. Among a long list of crimes, the Minister was alleged to have rejected the *maximum* – the economic policy of fixing the price of grain – and of hoarding vital information regarding the activities of counterrevolutionaries within the Ministry. In 'unveiling' these crimes, Collot d'Herbois claimed he was courageous, for the patriotic action of the denunciation invited the potential reprisal of duplicitous enemies sitting silently in the Convention, poised to attack him. Collot subsequently altered his delivery and proceeded to turn the Minister of the Interior into a laughing-stock. Garat described the following exchanges in his memoirs: "[p]our varier les tons et les impressions qu'il faisait, pour passer du sévère au plaisant, [Collot] lut ensuite l'une des questions sur les singularités de l'organisation physique, celle-ci: *Les yeux communément sont-ils bleus ou noirs*? Le rire part de tous les côtés, il éclate et circule

[31] Garat, *Mémoires*, 280. For Collot d'Herbois' denunciation see AP 70:128 (2 August 1793).
[32] These are the words of E. Maron, the editor of Garat's memoirs in 1862. See 'Préface' in Garat, *Mémoires de Garat,* XXXVI.

dans toutes les tribunes".[33] The 'organisation physique' referred to by Collot d'Herbois described the Minister's involvement with the philosopher Pierre Cabanis and his work on physiology, which had been castigated by the authorities because it was seen to omit the importance of morality and virtue in public instruction. It did not go unnoticed that Cabanis and Garat ascribed to Condorcet's teachings on materialism, either; indeed, Cabanis played a hand in hiding Condorcet from the authorities when a decree of arrest was made against him on 8 July.[34] Essentially, Collot d'Herbois attempted to discredit Garat by alerting the Convention to his questionable friendship network.

Collot d'Herbois' denunciation reveals the differing approaches to annunciating accusations and their expected effects. While the intentions and plots of a conspirator were often listened to with the greatest solemnity, as these were ploys constructed to destroy the Republic, the personal qualities of a suspected counterrevolutionary (encompassing his characteristics, interests, appearance and relationships) were always ridiculous. Targeting a deputy's difference – his own particularity – added to the claims of the denunciation, because anything outside the political culture of virtue was a potential sign of division. Consequently, Garat's supposed plan to mislead the people into believing federalism was a myth was treated with the upmost consideration, while his fascination with physiological theories associated with discredited minds exemplified his untrustworthiness and, conclusively, his ridiculousness. As Garat noted: "Rien n'est si *niais* qu'une pareille question, et parce que cela est *niais,* je suis coupable."[35] The strategy of denunciation in the terror attacked the patriotic credentials of a conspirator and humiliated him. Deputies were told to "accueillez la vérité d'un rire dédaigneux". Yet, this laugh did not signal apathy: "les circonstances sont sérieuses" read a letter to the Convention, when justifying its use.[36] In this way laughter was not just a weapon of admonishment and control as the

[33] Garat, *Mémoires*, 284. Garat's memoirs on the revolution were originally published in 1795, and served to distance himself from the Jacobin regime. His comments on this confrontation comply with the text from the *Archives*. The latter source tells us that Collot was applauded many times in his denunciation of Garat. See AP 70:131-133 (2 August 1793).
[34] M. S. Staum, *Cabanis: Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 147-149.
[35] Garat, *Mémoires*, 284.
[36] AP 65:261 (24 May 1793).

Gironde had hoped it would be, but an emanation of truth and justice and a complete rejection of a representative's authority because of his perceived abnormality.

Between the arrest and execution of the Girondins (2 July – 31 October 1793), the Montagnards did not wield absolute hegemony over the Convention and some disillusioned deputies were motivated to speak out in defence of their calumniated friends, even under severe questioning, causing murmurs, disapprobation and laughter. Although fraternity was a key concept in the revolution, and virtue was explicitly linked to friendship based in classical antiquity, personal loyalties proved problematic in relation to the wider interests of the public.[37] Marisa Linton has described how friendships, at times, 'ran counter to the idea that revolutionary politics should be open and transparent and should promote the good of all citizens'.[38] In this context, private friendships were publicly scrutinised for fear of an undiscovered cabal, or a network of extensive patronage or corruption hidden beneath the surface of republican politics. Laughter in the Convention was a strategy that enforced adherence to the collective will as opposed to the self-interest of personal ties. Even Desmoulins was laughed at for maintaining his friendship with the general Arthur Dillon and affirming his friend had no ambition but to be a soldier.[39] When determining the innocence or guilt of an accused, the negative public perception associated with certain authoritative roles or institutions took precedence over the personal testimony of a friend because these categories were anomalous to the Republic. Suspects were represented as stereotypical comedic archetypes: the hypocritical clergyman; the greedy, feminine aristocrat; the power-hungry and traitorous general.[40] Once these feared enemies had been uncovered, they were transformed into comedic figures, and their defenders were equally as ridiculous because they were considered apologists for corruption.[41]

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[37] Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 42.
[38] Linton, 'Fatal Friendships', 76.
[39] AP 68:576; See also Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 203-204.
[40] For laughter aimed at suspects because of their links to the church, see AP 65:67 (17 May 1793). More specifically, see AP 63:21 (20 April 1793) and 69:19 (15 July) for laughter involving the case of Fauchet, a clergyman who made no differentiation between his patriotism and faith. Levasseur said that Fauchet had smiled at the civil war taking place in France, citing his links to the church as proof – see *Journal de la Montagne*, no.45 (16 July). For the arguments and laughter against military personnel, see AP 61:45, 55, & 602.
[41] Saint-Just made this very argument in his accusatory speech against the *Indulgents* on 11 Germinal /31 March 1794 in AP 87:634. In *Le Vieux Cordelier* Desmoulins railed against this hypocritical stance:

News of disastrous events, that had the potential to unhinge the progress of revolution, also precipitated the dichotomous attitudes inherent in the different types of denunciation. Toulon defecting to the side of the English was one such example, extracting calls of anguish at one point, and laughter in the next. Claude Alexandre Ysabeau expressed a typical view among the deputies, writing that the defection of Toulon, as well as other insurrections in Marseille and Lille, was a disaster which resulted from apathy and a relaxation of surveillance. He urged his compatriots to be more severe.[42] It is noticeable that the deputies blamed each other for these losses, rather than the foreign forces. In contrast, the rebels of Toulon were ridiculed. The *Feuille du Salut Public*, for example, reprinted the declaration of the Toulonnais rebels whilst simultanously drawing the reader's attention to the unintentionally humorous remarks within it: "Le comité [of Toulon] parle des *secours* qu'ils ont reçus des anglais, et assure que les Toulonnais *seront toujours libres*, en datant sa lettre de l'*an premier du règne de Louis XVI.*" It is important to note that the loss of Toulon itself was not a laughing matter. However, the royalist sympathies of those who passed the port into English hands were held up to ridicule because they were so misguided in their praise of an archaic political system which could only bring misery and despair. In these instances, the strategies of repudiation and denunciation often overlapped. The italicised phrases in the report served to highlight these ridiculous assertions. Admiral Hood, for example, "promet au nom de l'Angleterre que toutes les villes de la France lui *seront rendues à la paix.*" The deputies reacted to this news with the scorn it deserved. "Un rire d'indignation et de mépris a circulé dans toute la convention nationale à ces protestations, dont l'hypocrisie est une farce inouïe au milieu d'une scélératesse sans exemple."[43] The revolutionaries operated in a culture in which compassion was expressed sparingly because true republicans were to strike "sans pitié les traitres et les conspirateurs."[44]

Unlike ridicule in 1792, which aimed to quieten opposition, the laughter of denunciation was an expression of revolutionary justice and required a response from

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"Depuis quand est-ce un crime d'avoir défendu quelqu'un!" C. Desmoulins, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, no.5 (16 nivôse/15 January), 71.

[42] AP 73:235 (30 August 1793).

[43] *Feuille du Salut Public*, no.67 (6 September 1793). For the laughter in the Convention regarding the rebels, see AP 75:509 (2 October). For laughter relating to the British navy and Admiral Hood, see AP 73:342 (2 September), and 389 (4 September).

[44] AP 74:184 (15 September).

the defendant; he was placed under scrutiny, humiliated for his difference and was held accountable for his actions. Laughter was also the verdict of the courtroom, heard in the many hearings of the revolutionary tribunal.[45] It was no longer a denunciation that revealed a suspicion; it was judgement, and also progress, because conspirators had been punished. When a denounced member of the Jacobin club in Lille, for example, was put on trial, the representative of the Convention asked those in the tribunes if he had told the truth of his innocence. "Le peuple ayant ri et crié *non*, le représentant a dit: « *le masque tombe* »."[46] Laughter operated within an optimistic script of terror, and was a spontaneous, collective manifestation of the people that was often interpreted by representatives as the expression of excision and could have a very real influence on their decision as judges. As Wahnich argues, the terror encouraged the people's enthusiasm as a form of law 'so that it should not turn destructive'. Emotions had to be 'deposited by the people into the hands of the legislators' and retranslated into expressions of law.[47] In contrast to the guilty, those who were found innocent were received with the inclusive tears of joy, such as 51 year-old Marie-Ann Vallée, a teacher of Montataire, who was accused of scheming for the reestablishment of the monarchy. When found innocent, because her students possessed the purest patriotic principals, there were cries of *Vive la République,* and the judges embraced the *citoyenne* while tears flowed.[48]

The incarcerated were treated with contempt, largely because they were seen to be unnatural and no longer citizens. Several moderates, from their cells in the *Abbaye*, complained of the crude jokes that were shouted from the streets. Brissot wrote, "[j]'entendis même un jour une chanson de cannibales où l'on plaisantait sur mon guillotinement prochain, et les voisins se pâmaient… et la populace éclatait de rire...'

[45] The deputies of the Committee of General Security, such as Vadier, Jagot and Amar, were remembered particularly unfavourably in terms of mocking those they adjudged to be guilty. See G. J. Sénart, *Mémoires (inédit) de Sénart*, (Paris: Dumesnil, 1824), 98. See also J.-A. Dulaure, *Esquisses historiques des principaux événemens de la Révolution française, depuis la convocation des États-Généraux jusqu'au rétablissement de la maison de Bourbon* (Paris, Baudouin frères, 1823-1825), vol.3, 12.

[46] AP 81:640 (28 frimaire/18 December 1793). There are many other examples. Notably, Hébert was laughed at in his trial. He suffered, according to a spy, "la honte de devenir l'objet de ses propres sarcasmes contre l'aristocratie." In the eponymous newspaper, the character of *le Père Duchesne* often boasted of his fine beard as a sign of virile masculinity. The people in the tribunes joked that the guillotine would finally give *le père* a warranted shave. See Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 381.

[47] Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror,* 30-31.

[48] G.-F. Galletti (ed.), *Journal de la Commune de Paris,* no.29 (5 pluviôse/24 January 1794).

He envisaged his executioners dancing around his body with a joy *effroyable*.[49] Honoré Riouffé also complained of the guards treatment of him, "j'étais en butte à leurs ris insolents".[50] Madame Roland, in a letter to the minister Garat, pleaded with him to stop the harassment. "Ce sont ceux d'un colporteur qui annonce *la grande colère du père Duchesne contre cette b… de Roland…*; déluge de sales épithètes…provocation à me maltraiter." Hébert, meanwhile, was triumphant when it was confirmed the Girondins would face the revolutionary tribunal. He affirmed to his readers that the jokes within his journal served a practical purpose beyond making its audience laugh; they were, he confirmed, a form of denunciation because, although his accusations may have been ridiculous, that made them even more viable – conspirators by definition *were* ridiculous.[51]

A further aspect of the laughter of denunciation which differentiated laughter from Girondin ridicule was its detachment from pity. We have seen in the early months of the Convention that the Girondins presented their laughter in a compassionate light – they attempted to reject the discourse of conspiracy and promote conciliatory language reminiscent of the optimism of 1789. The laughter of pity was largely reserved not for the proponents of liberty but for those who opposed the revolution; they were represented as unfortunate because their ignorance, determined by unavoidable circumstances and background, had made them unaware of their own slavery. Those in the Convention who the Girondins purported to have pity for – mainly Marat and Robespierre – were also laughed at because they too, so it was claimed, had not experienced the same regeneration as everyone else (although, in reality, it was their performance and language that was ridiculed). Thus, the Girondins affirmed that the ignorant still had the potential to experience the sense of rejuvenation true patriots already had. However, the discourse of *mépris* established in the terror denied any possibility that the unreformed could change.

Until 1793, the majority of patriots held views similar to that written by Voltaire; laughter fuelled by *mépris* was reprehensible because it was anathema to sentiment,

[49] Brissot, *Mémoires*, 7.
[50] H. Riouffé, *Mémoires d'un détenu, pour servir à l'histoire de la tyrannie de Robespierre* (Paris: d'Anjubault, 1795), 36, 44.
[51] *Le Père Duchesne*, no.199.

attacking the character of a man and not his principles.[52] Buzot wrote approvingly that the Girondins were incapable of expressing *mépris*, unlike the Mountain.[53] As the terror developed, however, scorn was presented as necessary to the success of the revolution. Enemies were treated with disdain, even ordinary rank-and-file troops by late 1793, as the deputies realised there was no hope they would rebel against their masters.[54] This challenges the view presented by Hannah Arendt, who describes how 'compassion became the driving force of the revolutionaries only after the Girondins had failed to produce a constitution and to establish a republican government.'[55] Pity – which was, according to Arendt, the 'perversion of compassion' as it is more distant, boundless and focused on larger groups, whereas compassion is focused on individuals – relied on misfortune, and so required an unhappy state for it to thrive, thereby establishing 'a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself' because pity for themselves rather than the suffering motivated those in power, disinterested, to solve problems through violence.[56] Yet, the adoption of *mépris* as the justification for terror suggests otherwise, because violence was permissible in concordance with an unforgiving righteousness to eradicate immorality. Laughter of the terror, therefore, took on a more scornful and personal edge. Deputies were encouraged not to feel pity for others or themselves.

The judgement of guilt in the king's trial was pivotal in eroding the ideology of pity, beginning with Saint-Just's speech on 13 November 1792 which accused the Girondins of attempting to save the king by playing on the natural sentiments of the people. "On cherche à remuer la pitié; on achètera bientôt des larmes; on fera pour nous intéresser, pour nous corrompre même."[57] In late 1793, despite the efforts of Robespierre, Saint-Just and Billaud-Varenne, there was still an allowance for pity in republican discourse, although this was indicative of the general confusion and difficulty the deputies had in adapting to the ideology of the terror rather than an

[52] Voltaire, 'Mémoire sur la satire', *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Paris: Hachette, 1876-1900), vol.24, 15.
[53] Buzot, *Mémoires*, 10.
[54] One provincial society wrote to the Convention: "votre existence ne dépendra plus de la compassion de vos semblables". See AP 82:55 (1 nivôse/21 December 1793).
[55] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 70.
[56] Arendt, *On Revolution* , 84-85.
[57] AP 53:392 (13 November 1792). See also, Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 192. Hébert also attacked the Girondins specifically, detailing that they were attempting to exploit the people by making them feel pity for a man who warranted nothing but *mépris*.

example of a conscious resistance to these new ideas.[58] In the days after 2 June, Saint-André, for example, outlined to fellow deputies that "vous devez rester inexorables" towards the mass of hypocritical conspirators who corresponded with the foreign powers. On the other hand, the "instruments aveugles de ces conspirateurs" were worthy of pity.[59] This initial view that the pawns of despots were innocent of their actions was prevalent until the winter of 1793, although it was diluted with the introduction of indignation to republican discourse. On the 4 October 1793, for example, the *Feuille du Salut Public* moved to quash fears that Danton was negotiating with foreign powers, claiming that these rumours were merely misguided attempts to scrutinise the conduct of revolutionaries and should be treated with a mix of the laughter of *pitié* and indignation.[60] Echoing this development, Phillippeaux reported that rebels in the town of Saumur should also be treated with a combination of pity and indignation.[61] More frequently, others completely denied their opponents any compassion. Bernard de Saintes discouraged any inclination towards pity because it could lead to the veneration of those who were pitied.[62] The belief that events and actions could happen by accident or by innocent misunderstanding was gradually phased out of republican discourse, in favour of a more black-and-white outlook on the motivations of others.[63] By February 1794, Robespierre ushered in the firmer attitude of *mépris*: "Punir les oppresseurs de l'humanité, c'est clémence; leur pardonner, c'est barbarie."[64]

Reconfiguring the Present: The Laughter of Repudiation

The laughter of denunciation was a weapon of the present, casting doubt on the innocence of political opponents, emerging as a facet of the revolutionary tribunal to indicate the guilt of the defendant. Progress was expressed in the courtroom and around the scaffold. The strategy of laughter as a form of repudiation, served to deny

[58] H. T. Parker has documented how Robespierre's and Saint-Just's attitudes transformed in this period; they were at the forefront in emphasising 'pitiless severity'. See, *The Cult of Antiquity*, 158
[59] AP 67:79-80 (22 June)
[60] *Feuille du Salut Public*, no.96, (4 October 1793). "Le rire de la pitié et de l'indignation fut ma seule réponse."
[61] F. Aulard (ed.), *Recueil des actes du Comité de salut public* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889-1923), vol.6, 194 (30 August 1793).
[62] AP 74:36 (13 September 1793).
[63] AP 82:100 (21 December). One deputy warned his compatriots of possessing "un pitié sacrilège et une compassion barbare".
[64] Robespierre, *Œuvres complètes*, vol.10, 359.

others agency in the making of the revolution, specifically the Girondins. For example, ironic laughter denied the claims of Boyer-Fonfrède when he endeavoured to vouch for the moral character of his friends.[65] Those who hoped for conciliation between the factions in the summer of 1793 were also laughed at. The deputy Saladin wrote that, concerning the events of 2 June, "les plaintes portées à la Convention elle-même, de cette horrible violation de tous les droits, fût accueillie par les rires des tribunes".[66] The deputies of the Mountain deconstructed the character of the Girondins and concluded they did not have the moral fortitude comparable to a Lycurgus to sustain the revolution.[67] They were also proven to be self-interested cowards who had made their guilt transparent by attempting to flee Paris. Former practices in the Convention were ridiculed as despotic, such as the honourable mention which was perceived to be boastful and self-congratulatory.[68] Deputies seen as insufficiently patriotic by the *sans-culottes* could be dealt with a far worse hand, though, as they were susceptible to physical violence; Grégoire complained that a colleague – a Girondin sympathiser – had been punched in the stomach and his cravat ripped up by a *sans-culotte* in the corridors of the Convention.[69] Those who improperly invoked the past were physically harassed rather than politely rebuked. While the prospect of violence deterred any potential support for the Girondins, laughter functioned to reject the role the Girondins had played in the creation of the Republic. In this respect, the Convention laughed to strategically demarcate that the Girondins belonged to the past. Indeed, they were cast in the same category as aristocrats and treated in the same manner. The defence of Louis XVI irrevocably damaged the credibility of the Gironde; from that moment they were bombarded with accusations they had conspired to restore the monarchy. The *ci-devant* king's death, according to Robespierre, ushered in a "grand caractère à la Convention nationale, et la rend digne de la confiance des français."[70] In light of this regenerative transition, Keith Baker has argued that the aristocrat 'was now defined in terms not of his social status but of the energy and orientation of his

[65] AP 66:280 (11 June 1793); see also 66:281 in which the Mountain also laughed when they heard someone say that the Girondins were the compass of the revolution.
[66] AP 66:717 (19 June 1793)
[67] Ozouf, 'Regeneration', 782. On Lycurgus and his prominence in the revolutionary discourse on terror, see Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity*, 152-170.
[68] AP 61:70 (31 July).
[69] AP 66:23 (11 July).
[70] Robespierre, *Œuvres complètes*, vol.5, 226.

will'.[71] The Girondins were presented as not having attained the necessary revolutionary character as everyone else in the aftermath of the king's execution. Regeneration was concerned with maintaining the innocence of the people; the Girondins were framed as a threat to this ideal.[72]

But the Jacobins also actively encouraged ridicule which targeted those more traditional enemies of the revolution. The patriots frequently mocked the rulers of other nations, for example. In one edition of the *Feuille de Salut Public*, the journalist Rousselin played the doctor and diagnosed their illnesses: Catherine of Russia, he wrote, had been afflicted with an unfortunate bout of nymphomania; the Emperor Francis had a brain comparable to a ten year old; and the medical practitioners of Berlin could not decide if their king was an imbecile or a madman.[73] Saint-Aubin also 'disclosed' a conversation in which a devastated Pitt informed King George III that the French had not succumbed to the allied powers. Subsequently, George questioned the Prime Minister on why his money, ships and generals had no effect on the Republic. "Je le dis tout bas à votre très-excellente majesté" replied Pitt "mais les Français se moquent de tout cela."[74] Humour such as this was a denigration of the immorality of the old world. The revolutionaries created an imaginary space in which they were superior in every way to their enemies. Indeed, George III was often depicted in caricature as the comical, Molièrean figure of Georges Dandin.[75] This conception of laughter is in contrast to the prevailing ideology of enlightened sentiment. The Encyclopédistes, as Anne Richardot has shown, notably omitted Democritus, who laughed at follies and revelled in his own superiority, from their editions and instead included a lengthy entry on the tearful and more sympathetic Heraclitus.[76] In contrast, the terror is the period in which the laugh of superiority is in vogue. After Toulon had been retaken, for example, the *conventionnels* laughed to hear that some citizens celebrated by pinning an effigy of Pitt to the tail of an ass.[77] Even Robespierre ridiculed the rulers of state; the Convention laughed in response to a speech filled with irony wherein he urged the audience to imitate the morality of kings, including the candour

[71] Baker, 'Political Languages of the French Revolution', 651.
[72] Ozouf, 'Regeneration' , 781.
[73] *Feuille de Salut Public*, no.83 (20 September 1793).
[74] *Feuille de Salut Public*, no.89 (27 September 1793).
[75] Leon, *Molière*, 93-94.
[76] Richardot, *Le Rire des Lumières*, 56-58.
[77] AP 82:608 (14 nivôse/ 3 January 1794).

of Louis XVI, the wisdom of George III, and – to great amusement, given the attitude to women in the political sphere – the chastity of Messalina and the modesty of Marie Antoinette.[78] In this respect, not much had changed from the Girondins' dominance of the Convention in regard to the attitudes towards the foreigner. They had always been figures of fun.[79] However, superiority was defined by nationality in 1793. The revolution had taken a xenophobic course with the gradual denial of citizenship and universal rights to any foreigners, even at the most local level of French domestic politics.[80] Eventually, the revolutionary war was framed as not one of the people against tyranny, but one of nation against nation.[81] This attitude was fuelled by the belief that only total rupture could make progress ensue. To aid in the war effort, Mechele Leon has highlighted how the Committee of Public Safety devoted 50 million livres to projects aimed at influencing public opinion, including works which made clear the ridiculousness and atrociousness of the enemies of liberty.[82] Ridicule of these enemies, she argues, was designed to allay fears, transforming the monstrous – those 'categories of outcasts' – into something insignificant. Laughter was no longer a corrective tool in this case but a 'politically punitive one'.[83] However, laughter at these enemies was more a method to direct vigilance internally, within the borders of France, were the real threat existed. This propaganda did not allay fears, but directed the emotion elsewhere to the real threat. Hence, the revolutionaries had no problem with laughter in the terror – as long as it was directed at the correct targets, and not the institutions of the Republic, or the unknown other.

The violence and brutality of terror was not a regretful policy, instead causing plenty of amusement. For instance, the deputies laughed when a representative reported that the combined weapons of *terreur* and *effroi* were forcing enemies to retreat.[84] Laughter also emerged in the Convention from a report which described the beatings inflicted on intriguers by the patriots of Toulouse: "[l]e moyen était violent. Mais quand il y a urgence, il faut bien s'en servir. (*Rires*)."[85] Representatives looked to the

[78] AP 80:693 (15 frimaire/ 5 December 1793).
[79] As one deputy said in the Convention: "Un peuple libre se rira toujours des folles conceptions des tyrans". See AP 83:69 (18 nivôse/ 7 January 1794).
[80] Rapport, *Nationality and citizenship in revolutionary France*, 206.
[81] Rapport, *Nationality and citizenship in revolutionary France*, 240.
[82] Leon, *Molière*, 93.
[83] Leon, *Molière*, 99.
[84] AP 74:365 (18 September 1793).
[85] AP 69:641 (29 July)

emotions of their citizens when gauging the success of their actions. The deputy Bernard, stationed in Montbéliard, stripped those suspected of aristocratic sympathies of their powers and reported that, "Les *Messieurs* ont l'air un peu consternés, le people rit: bonne marque."[86] Similarly, Ozouf argues that the appearance of parodic scenes among the general populace were the 'result of the fact that the Revolution was seen as not having finished its task'. These unauthorised festivals of mockery and laughter appeared at moments when the revolution had seemed to stall and were 'accompanied by an invitation to go further'.[87]

Terror was made readily acceptable because it was represented as a natural event, often through the imagery of the volcano which could indiscriminately obliterate anything in its proximity. The volcano was also a metaphor for the emotions, which were seen to be spontaneous, unpredictable and, on occasion, violent.[88] Sylvain Maréchal's *Le Jugement dernier des rois*, a play in which all the kings are banished to a desert island (revealed to be a volcano towards the end), has been described by critics as an ultimate expression of 'coarseness in comedy'.[89] Maréchal explicitly stated that he wanted to display the state of reversal in the Republic; that the kings who so often laughed at the misery of others were now the laughing-stock.[90] Ridicule was justified because it was a form of vengeance, which itself was condoned by the years of slavery the people had suffered.[91] Mary Ashburn Miller has posited that this ridicule went much further in the terror and kindled a 'passionate hatred' of the enemy.[92] Yet, the volcano, and by extension, the terror, could also preserve and create life through its fires, enabling a rupture in the historical continuum which could 'regenerate time', thereby providing an altogether different future from the past which was to be a happy and cathartic reconfiguration.[93] Terror was also a 'subjective experience'. While it was frightening for those associated with despots, to patriots, the terror was sublime because their collective moral conscious was clear and they perceived violence from a

[86] Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, vol.7, 391 (9 October 1793).
[87] Ozouf, *Festivals,* 105.
[88] Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution*, 160. The volcano was a source 'of passionate and ruinous violence'.
[89] For a selection of contemporary reviews on this play, see G. E. Rodmell, *French Drama of the Revolutionary Years* (London: Routledge, 1991), 157-160.
[90] Rodmell, *French Drama*, 168.
[91] Vengeance was a common feature of republican discourse in the terror. For example, between 20 December and 2 January 1794, the word was uttered 62 times in the Convention. See AP 82.
[92] Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution*, 156.
[93] Perovic, *Revolutionary calendar*, 81-86.

place of safety; in this regard, according to Kant, terror should afford delight and even 'thrill', causing the emotion of 'astonishment'.[94] Therefore, first-hand documentation describing the violence of terror afforded the deputies to laugh from their place of safety, hearing as they did the eradication of enemies, importantly not by them, but by the people, which validated terror and demonstrated its effectiveness. This was why Maréchal's play was so funny: the *sans-culottes* who had deposited their monarchs on the island, and removed themselves to safety, are 'exemplars of the revolutionary 'peuple' in action, just as the active volcano represents the irresistible force of the Revolution itself.'[95] The cooperation of the people dispensing with the old, the inevitability of terror ready to explode, and the subsequent regeneration; here is the terrible process of advancement which made the deputies laugh.

In the Convention, the deputies laughed regardless of whether they found something funny to maintain the appearance of legitimacy. The deputy Paganel, for example, observed that politicians kept Hébert's *le Père Duchesne* close at hand, even though its humour was alien to them, in order to avoid suspicion in view of the *sans-culottes.*[96] This practice applied to all the major political bodies in Paris. The Commune and the Convention laughed when hearing, on separate occasions, a joke involving the rank-and-file of the Vendée, who had been assured by their leaders that if they were to die they would be resurrected in three days, such was the righteousness of their cause.[97] In addition, women were laughed at more than ever in the political sphere as the Jacobins attempted to enforce a rigid role for the sexes in concordance with nature. When Gilbert Romme proposed that the first day of the French calendar would be dedicated to the husband, Louis Albitte replied that every day was the day of the husband to the applause and *rires* of the Convention.[98] If the fragmented notes of the Paris commune are anything to go by, humour was crueller still among the *sans-culottes*, especially when they were faced with challenges to their authority. A group of female postal workers disputed the injustice of a law drafted by the municipal body

[94] See D. McCallum, 'The Volcano: From Enlightenment to Revolution', *Nottingham French Studies*, 45, 1 (2006), 53-54.
[95] McCallum, 'The Volcano', 66.
[96] Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 390. Paganel described it as "une joie simulée".
[97] Galletti, G.-F. (ed.), *Journal de la Commune de Paris*, no.6 (7 nivôse/ 27 December 1793). AP 79:510 (29 brumaire/ 10 November 1793).
[98] AP 76:122 (5 October). See also AP 75:378 (20 September), in which there are three separate examples of laughter ridiculing women, and also AP 75:402 (1 October), for another two occurrences of laughter of the same type.

which proposed to remove them from their jobs. They added that, in a republic, "les femmes doivent être comme les hommes, employés à ce qu'elles peuvent faire; que d'ailleurs elles sont très pauvre." The members of the commune laughed at this, and one participant, Laurent, called for the women to pay damages to the Commune as recompense for the time they had wasted, to further bursts of laughter.[99] Importantly, women were also figures of fun because they were naturally susceptible to undesirable pity; tears expressed the weakness of femininity. In Calvados, a representative reported to the Committee that he had successfully introduced the cult of reason as a substitute for superstitions, and all the emblems of fanaticism had been destroyed. "Quelques femmes ont pleuré, mais les homes raisonnables, de bon sans-culottes ont ri de ces pleurs versés par l'ignorance, et le tout s'est passé autant bien que pouvait espérer."[100] Ridicule, in these cases, was used to maintain roles based on nature and virtue, but it was also a strategy to persuade and be heard, as deputies knew they could extrude patriotism or, more importantly, assuage suspicion, by telling jokes at the expense of maligned groups.

Both types of strategies concerned with laughter – repudiation of the past and denunciation – were framed as cruel and unforgiving in the terror. They were substitutes for indignation and expressions of scorn. Pity was eventually sounded out at this time, with some suggesting it should even be classed as a crime. There were constant reminders from the deputies, warning their audience not to be taken in by the enemy: "La malade va crier, sans doute, mais un médecin courageux coupe sans pitié le bras gangrené pours sauver la reste du corps."[101] Laughter also repudiated the old world and was a tool to refashion society, just as the revolutionary calendar refashioned time and the *départements* reshaped space, because these bursts occurred when the deputies were confronted with the undesirable past. Ridicule, marked by a conception of superiority as framed by Hobbes, was aimed at traditional enemies for the sake of the war effort. Denunciative laughter probed and refashioned those who were close at hand, and scorned them for not having adapted to the latest regeneration. The terror caused fear and pain for enemies of the Republic, and this

[99] *Journal de la Commune de Paris,* no.28 (4 pluviôse/ 23 January 1794).
[100] Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, vol.12, 243 (28 March 1794).
[101] AP 74:365 (17 September 1793) See also AP 75:234 (27 September 1793) on this metaphor of the body in relation to the revolution.

was something to be celebrated; far from a tearful process, excising corruption was a happy occupation.

But what if the enemy laughed? What behaviour should the patriot present to others in this case? Some deputies in the Convention urged compatriots to cry when the enemy laughed.[102] Others identified the suitable emotions to convey by observing the movements of the Parisian *sans-culottes.*[103] The revolutionaries believed that a utopia encompassed everyone sharing in the same emotions; the whole nation had to be as one, and not just Paris. The emotion of the nation, therefore, was dependent on the feelings of the enemy, and when conspirators were happy – or at least imagined to be happy – this was usually a signal that there were still conspiracies to be unearthed, and still a purge to take place. In the pessimistic outlook of the dichotomy of terror patriots had to take on a more severe exterior.

Controlling the Laughter of the Revolution

When Collot d'Herbois denounced Garat on 2 August, the latter attempted to refute the accusations put against him by laughing. The exchanges that led to this moment are documented in Garat's memoir and in the *Archives*, yet only the memoir records the laughter. As Garat was never a fully-fledged supporter of the Mountain and his account is consistent with the transcriptions in the *Archives*, we can presume laughter did occur in the Convention at Collot d'Herbois' expense.[104] Historians compiling the debates in the *Archives* relied more on the accounts of journalists than the reports of the official *Procès-verbal* and the *Bulletin de la Convention* in the terror, which offered less information and often listed the debates out of order.[105] This leads to the question: why was the documentation of sessions in the terror of a less detailed nature than before? A speculative reason is that journalists and secretaries did not want to provoke powerful politicians. The *Archives Parlementaires* are composed of extracts from various newspapers that had to tow the party line of the Mountain. Many journalists found themselves under intense surveillance. Gone were the days in which

[102] AP 67:375 (24 June).
[103] Thibaudeau, who had been based as a representative in the Vendée, wrote "Paris rit ou pleure; que les départements le veuillent ou ne la veuillent pas; il faut qu'ils en fassent autant." Thibaudeau, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 41.
[104] E. Maron, 'Préface' in Garat, *Mémoires de Garat,* XXXVI. In the *Archives*, some deputies, in defence of Garat, mention Collot d'Herbois' desire to be Minister, which would be the most obvious point in which to laugh, especially considering Collot d'Herbois' subsequent retreat from his denunciation.
[105] See the "Avant propos" in AP 83:VIII.

a lack of libel laws meant revolutionaries had no choice but to 'shrug off' the large amount of insults and calumny.[106] Anything remotely sympathetic to discredited revolutionaries drew the murmurings of unrest. Bourdon de l'Oise, for example, accused the largely impartial *Moniteur* of counterrevolutionary sympathies because a former editor was known to have been friends with some Girondins. He subsequently asked that it be closed down.[107] Any journalist was a suspect in the terror, even those who professed their explicit support of Robespierre or the Commune. Hébert explained that all newspapers, apart from his own, existed out of self-interest because they seeked to make money or promote a faction.[108] There was often disgruntlement among the patriots over how their speeches or debates had been reported. Chaumette criticised the editor of the *Commune de Paris* for documenting the discussions in detail and not just the plain facts.[109] Journals that reported speeches word-for-word were also vulnerable if they misrepresented the intended message of a speaker. Robespierre cautioned the *Journal de la Montagne* and the *Moniteur* for not alerting their readers to the irony and sarcasm of a speech he had delivered.[110] On a few instances the secretaries, who transcribed the meetings for the *procès-verbal*, were absent during sessions.[111] In other moments, jokes that would have been laughed at previously are only recorded as having generated applause.[112] Subsequently, we can conclude that a lot more laughter occurred within the Convention than the records suggest, but those responsible for documenting the sessions neglected to note it because laughter was ambiguous, open to interpretation and not worth the trouble. Dissenting laughter – the laughter that ridiculed or challenged the government – was probably not reported because the Convention was supposed to be unified; journalists did not want to publicise any sort of resistance to the government, no matter how trivial.

The diminished freedom for transcribers and journalists is not enough to explain the decrease in general applause, laughter or murmurs, however. From the 2 June 1793, to the execution of Danton on 5 April 1794, there are only 68 instances of laughter in the Convention according to the *Archives*; this is three less than in the first month of the

[106] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 132.
[107] AP 82:298 (5 nivose/ 25 December 1793).
[108] Levasseur, *Mémoires,* vol.3, 39.
[109] *Journal de la Commune de Paris*, no.20 (24 nivôse/ 13 January 1794).
[110] Robespierre, *Œuvres complètes*, vol.10, 50.
[111] AP 78:450 (16 brumaire/ 6 November 1793).
[112] See AP 82:560 (12 nivôse/ 1 January 1794) for an example.

Convention alone. Laughter diminished due to the pacification of the Convention and the increasing role of the committees – particularly the Committee of Public Safety. The vibrant and often angry sessions which marked the factional nature of debates had become a thing of the past. The Convention was "un instrument passif de la terreur" and a ghost of its former self.[113] Thibaudeau highlighted the pressure deputies faced on a daily basis, writing that they were careful to manage their own appearance and words diligently in order to avoid being accused of a crime. "En effet rien n'était indiffèrent, la place où l'on s'asseyait, un geste, un regard, un murmure, un sourire. Le sommet de la montagne, passant pour le plus haut degré du républicanisme, tout y refluait".[114] The right-hand side of the Convention was deserted, and those who had previously occupied it sat in the *marais* hoping to disappear into the background. Others under great suspicion constantly moved seats in order to escape detection, and some stood by the doors ready to slip away in case they were required to vote on any legislation. "Les séances autrefois si longues et si orageuses, étaient la plupart calmes, froides et ne duraient qu'une ou deux heures."[115] By March 1794, 135 deputies had been removed one way or another for their opposition to the Committee of Public Safety.[116] The Mountain, purveying the sessions, emphasised unity, obedience and militancy. In fact, as Robespierre asserted, the Mountain *was* the Convention: "Oui ceux qui vont prêchent contre la montagne, contre la convention, sont, à coup sûr, des ennemis du people."[117] These deputies aimed to come down hard on the slightest hint of division which they believed could manifest itself through "les éclats de rire insolents" – a sure sign of divergence from the general will.[118] Laughter specifically labelled in the *Archives* as emanating from the right-wing of the Convention occurs for the last time on the 11 June, less than ten days after the defeat of the Girondins.[119] In November, the Convention laughed at the absence of any opposition from the right; deference and tranquillity – the ideal conditions in which to legislate – had ostensibly

[113] Thibaudeau, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 47.
[114] *ibid*
[115] Thibaudeau, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 48.
[116] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 513.
[117] *Journal de la Montagne*, no. 30 (1 July 1793).
[118] AP 73:234 (30 August 1793)
[119] AP 66 :475 (13 June)

been achieved.[120] Correspondents from the departments praised this development, "nous croyons la Convention libre" they wrote, "puisqu'elle delibere en paix".[121]

While not actually laughing in the physical sense, suspects claimed to laugh at their supposed crimes when they had been denounced as a rhetorical tool to prove their innocence.[122] On the surface this seemed a viable strategy, since many denunciations were absurd in their extravagance or banality, and others who had tried to prove their patriotism by drawing on their past record were laughed at regardless of their defence.[123] However, this rhetorical technique rarely succeeded; accusers combated it by switching to the more serious discourse of crisis. Within this behavioural code, the patriots considered laughter as a sign they had not struck enemies hard enough. Furthermore, only an aristocrat had the capability to make light of such serious accusations, as deputies outlined in their speeches.[124] This was in evidence when Robespierre, denouncing Custine in the Jacobin Club, encountered hecklers. He responded: "[v]ous voyez citoyens, que tous les bruits ridicules répandus et accrédités par nos ennemis n'avaient d'autre but que d'égarer le peuple".[125] Laughter was conceptualised as a form which encouraged apathy, convincing the people to forget its rights. The *Journal de la Montagne* supported Robespierre, arguing that with every military loss Custine was mocking the Convention; his agents in Paris had been paid to applaud his fabulous stories to justify his retreat. "Vils flagorneurs de Custine, ne vous amusez point à détourner la question par des imputations ridicules et des dégoûtantes calomnies, contre que ceux qui se sont imposé la tache de le démasquer."[126] The image of a military commander mocking the Convention was a sore point for the *conventionnels* because of the pervasive rumour that Dumouriez had joked at the Convention's expense prior to his betrayal.[127] The individual laugh had such pejorative connotations because revolutionaries ascribed to the maxim that society could be

[120] AP 79:549 (30 brumaire/ 20 November)
[121] *Journal de la Montagne*, no.30 (1 July 1793).
[122] See AP 68:124 (3 July 1793) and the efforts of Custine to reproach his denunciators. See also Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, vol.8, 449 (15 November 1793). J. Féraud: "Comment a-t-on pu me reprocher de n'avoir rien fait?... Oh! Pour le coup, cette plaisanterie est un peu trop forte." ; vol.6, 34 (19 August) Garrau: "Mes calomniateurs sont confondus, et, fort de ma conscience, je me ris de la haine impuissante de tous les partis."
[123] See, for instance, the efforts of Thibault who replied to the accusation of Couthon by saying, "j'étais republicain peut-être avant toi… (*Rires ironiques sur certain bancs*)." AP 70:296 (5 August 1793).
[124] AP 73:431 (5 September), 519 (8 September).
[125] *Journal de la Montagne,* no.40, (11 July 1793).
[126] *ibid*
[127] Thibaudeau, *Mémoires,* vol.1, 17.

corrupted by individualism, which had the capacity to encroach on the common good civic virtue fostered.[128] For this reason, epigrams were to be avoided, for they were not spontaneous and too opaque for the transparent republican.[129] Sarcasm, according to one member of the Mountain, indicated disinterest.[130] The patriots were suspicious of those who laughed on their own because it indicated they had something to hide. The accused was often found in a paradoxical dilemma, because whichever script that person embodied, the patriots would take on the opposite demeanour within the dichotomy of terror to compound the appearance of guilt.

In prison, Brissot complained of the ridiculous accusations against his conduct: "Mon innocence était évidente, il m'était si facile de la démontrer! Il était si absurde de m'accuser de royalisme, moi républicain depuis vingt ans!"[131] Yet, Hébert, Robespierre and others assured the audience of the veracity in their accusations, not necessarily because the facts were correct, but because of their superior revolutionary virtue and patriotism, and their vehement belief that they spoke for the public while others spoke for their own interests. This is emblematic of what Israel calls the 'subordination of reason to popular will'.[132] When Pierre Duhem laughed at an accusation by Jean-Charles Laveaux (he wrote that Laveaux "dénoncé avec absurdité"), Laveaux responded by accusing Duhem of placing his own, individual opinion above that of the public: "[t]u dis un mot… et voilà la France désabusée!"[133] Denunciations were more dependent on the virtue of the denunciator rather than the credibility of the actual conspiracy. When asked to provide proof of Phillipe-Égalité's guilt, for example, Robespierre was quoted by Thibaudeau as saying "des preuves! des preuves! veut-on que j'en fournisse de légales? J'ai là-dessus une conviction morale. Au surplus, les événements prouveront si j'ai raison."[134] Denunciation effectively imagined in the

[128] Baker, 'Transformations of Classical Republicanism', 36.
[129] *Feuille du Salut Public*, no.59 (28 August 1793). The *Feuille* praised the play *la Journée de Marathon* for conveying the hopes and fears of Athens during desperate times, but also criticised the playwright for making light of the situation, "car le français, satyrique par gaieté, ne connait rien à l'abri de l'épigramme, et le ridicule qu'il attache à la manière dont le sujet est traité, fait souvent tort à la beauté du sujet même". On the harmfulness of epigrams, see also the annex on Constitutional Principles by Barthelmy Albours in AP 67:183 (24 June 1793).
[130] AP 67:579 (27 June 1793)
[131] Brissot, *Mémoires,* 8.
[132] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas,* 90.
[133] *Journal de la Montagne,* no.42 (13 July). "Je t'avoue, d'ailleurs que la manière de Custines, ses plans, sa franchise me plaisant."
[134] Thibaudeau, *Mémoires sur la Convention*, vol.1, 21.

terror 'what it could not prove'.[135] The predominance of will and instinct as the proof of denunciation superseded arguments based in the philosophy of science, understanding, and knowledge. In this more severe script, laughter was denigrated due to its monarchical character; it was self-serving, attacked the public good, and maintained a fixed hierarchy. Mercier had once denounced laughter in a theatrical context because, far from denigrating vices, it transformed the spectator into an apologist for immoral behaviour.[136] It was exactly this interpretation of laughter that was used against the lone suspect, because it proved his acquiescence to conspiracy, deliberately leading the people astray.

It is worth repeating that a conspirator's actions and their potential effects in destabilising the republic were not to be ridiculed. We have also seen that the revolutionaries imagined a space wherein their enemies complained of being mocked by the liberated French. It is notable that this worked in reverse: the revolutionaries were obsessed in imagining their enemies laughing at them, particularly at times when there was political discord within debates, or when the Committee of Public Safety attempted to justify new legislation.[137] The strategic discourse can be traced, once again, to the Girondins, and in particular, Brissot's argumentation for war against England on 1 January 1793, ostensibly delivered in a plea for the king's life. In his speech, Brissot appealed to the dignity of freemen, advancing that the English laughed at the proceedings of the Convention because they expected the patriots to execute the king; this, the English believed, would rally the monarchists, resurrect royalty, and subject the patriots to a massacre worse than the one seen in September. Brissot also presented this English strategy as a "tableau de comédie" because on the surface the cabinet seemed to pity the plight of the king, but behind closed doors, "ils parlent avec le mépris le plus insolent!"[138] To play a comedy in the terror was a euphemism for duplicity and manipulation. In 1794, the *Journal de la Montagne* also imagined the English Parliament ridiculing the patriots on an almost daily basis. Sheridan, for

[135] Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation', 783.
[136] Leon, *Molière*, 89
[137] *Journal de la Montagne,* no.32 (3 July). For instance, see a letter from the republican Society of Lamballe to the Jacobin Club : "Voyez-vous l'astucieux anglais sourire à nos divisions?" See also the speech from Carra, in which he proposed a new Committee of Justice. It was required, he said, because despots were plotting disasters "en riant sous cape". AP 59:196 (25 February 1793). This strategy was common in republican discourse. For other examples see, AP 72:577, AP 73:431, AP 74:420 and AP 79:31.
[138] AP 56:124-126 (1 January 1793).

instance, "prononce un long discours plein d'ironie et de sarcasmes" against the Republic, while in the following session there were "beaucoup de plaisanteries sur ce qui a été dit des principales républicains."[139] The journal described more humiliating scenes on the English stage: "[d]ans les pièces du théâtre anglais, on affecte d'y insulter les françaises et de leur faire jouer un rôle bas et ridicule." [140] The description of enemies laughing at the revolutionaries was a method to awaken the anger within the people against those who insulted their dignity. "L'aristocratie du dedans et les ennemis du dehors ont le temps de rire: ils sont à la comédie" read a bulletin from the Committee of Public Safety.[141] The comedy was equated with stagnation at a time when patriots urged intervention to secure a rupture with the past. Just like the aristocrats, the Mountian claimed the Gironde, while in power, had "applaudissaient à leurs succès barbares et se riaient de notre misère" until the fearless deputies on the left had shook with rage and destroyed them.[142] Those that laughed maliciously were attempting to "amuser et asservir les hommes".[143] The comedy was considered lackadaisical; those who played a part in it were happy to let the performance of revolution run stale; the tragedy, on the other hand, was severe, decisive and dignified. The ploy of conjuring the image of the laughing conspirator within discourse, therefore, was one method in which deputies could call for greater vigilance and swifter vengeance.[144]

As we have seen, laughter was visibly encouraged by the Republican government – as long as it was the right sort of laughter. When the revolutionary calendar was ratified on the 24 October 1793, one of the *sanscullottides* proposed by Fabre d'Eglanrtine was to be named the Fête de l'Opinion, in which, for one day a year only, the representatives who had displeased the people were to be subjected to "les chansons, les allusions, les pasquinades, le sel d'ironie, les sarcasmes profonde". This day encouraged festive gaiety and was to be "plaisant" for the true patriots and "terrible"

[139] *Journal de la Montagne*, no.87 (20 pluviôse/ 8 February 1794).
[140] *Journal de la Montagne* no.96 (29 pluviôse/ 17 February).
[141] Aulard, *Recueil des actes*, vol.10, 279 (16 January 1794).
[142] AP 73:284 (1 September). See also Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 233, in which Francois Deffieux accused the Girondins of ridiculing him when he suggested establishing a club of sans-culottes in Bordeaux.
[143] AP 79:7 (21 Brumaire/ 11 November 1793).
[144] It must be emphasised, however, that the English really were laughing at the Revolution. As Pascal Dupuy points out, two thirds of publications in England were concerned with the revolution in 1793, and the majority of these mocked the revolution to discredit the image of the Republic. See P. Dupuy, 'La Caricature Anglaise Face À La France en Révolution', *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 32 (2000), 311.

for the functionaries who had displeased the public that year: "[c]'est ainsi que par son caractère même, par sa gaieté naturelle, le peuple français conservera ses droits et sa souveraineté".[145] Sanja Perovic suggests that this uncontrolled festivity was an allowance to the people to conversely ensure that the rest of the year was not a grotesque experience but an 'ideal mode of consensus'.[146] This was a normal attitude towards festivals in the eighteenth-century, preventing 'intemperance from spreading to everyday life and throughout the social body as a whole'.[147] In theory, the allowance of a festival of ridicule enabled the deputies to appear to be servants of the people; in reality, movements of mockery against the institutions of the Republic were still heavily regulated. Only legislators had the capability to define what constituted expressions of public opinion. Mockery and ridicule generated by large crowds were problematic to denounce, however, because they did not conform to the image of the lone conspirator – regardless, popular protest was still marked as counterrevolutionary. The commander of the National Guard, Hanriot, certainly used the shifting and malleable meanings of laughter for his own devices. Required to dispel rumours on 5 September 1793 that a protest had taken place at the doors of the Paris commune by a crowd who had demanded bread, he wrote: *"[h]ier j'ai vu avec douleur des citoyens demander en riant du pain à la commune: rit-on quand on a faim? rit-on quand on manque des premiers aliments de la vie?* Ceux-là seuls me semblent recevoir l'or et l'argent des puissances étrangères."[148] By revolutionary logic, laughter was unnatural to a disgruntled people; there was therefore an element of subterfuge to the protest in question.

As terror intensified, the 'science' of physiognomy was used more often to send suspects to the guillotine. Emotions were often retrospectively interpreted to adhere to a narrative of guilt. Marie-Antoinette, for example, had blushed at her trial, which was a sign "du désagrément d'être découverte."[149] Colin Lucas has argued that this style of denunciation became 'an art of reading signs, an exercise in semiotics'.[150] The

[145] AP 77:504 (24 October).
[146] Perovic, *Revolutionary Calendar*, 123-124.
[147] Ozouf, *Festivals,* 4.
[148] 'Ordre du jour d'Hanriot (5 September 1793)' in C. Dauban (ed.), *La démagogie en 1793 à Paris, ou Histoire, jour par jour, de l'année 1793: accompagnée de documents contemporains, rares ou inédits* (Paris: Plon, 1868), 374.
[149] *L'Anti-Federaliste* (15 October 1793) cited in Walter, *Actes*, 134.
[150] Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation', 783.

denunciation in the terror gave the bare minimum of facts, and focused on the face, imposing on that expression a set of accusatory implications – what Lucas calls 'extraneous considerations' or 'imputing a meaning on the basis of supposed general truths'.[151] In short, the emotions on the face – including laughter – were used to implicate those who expressed dissent.

Laughter, it was said, had the power to mislead the people, to subvert morality, and create a false virtue. Moreover, the French were naturally susceptible to be misled. This belief was expressed by the *Journal de la Montagne*. "Le Français est né avec une humeur imitatrice et moutonnière."[152] Humour could easily seduce the people into doing harm. These were the intentions imposed on youths who laughed at the Convention when they reportedly realised they were exempt from some laws due to their age, although this legislation was swiftly readdressed in the Convention.[153] These accusations were also the crimes levelled at Charles-Phillipe Ronsin, a *sans-calotte* who had ascended to the rank of general, and had become a key figure in the war department, as well as an ally of Hébert. In his trial of 23-24 Ventôse, a witness, the deputy Louis Legendre, testified that Ronsin along with his friend Vincent, had received him with "un rire sardonique" when he refused the invitation to turn against the Jacobins.[154] The laugh was significant in Legendre's testimony because it amounted to crucial evidence which proved the perfidious intentions of the two *Hébertistes*. Ronsin was also arraigned for purportedly labelling the deputies as "robed mannequins" in his private dealings.[155] Soon, the accusation developed into an even more serious and elaborate accusation; Ronsin and Vincent were alleged to have actively dressed mannequins in the garb of the deputies while encouraging the people to mock them. "Lorsque vous transformiez ces mêmes représentants en mannequins, et que vous vous proposiez de les montrer au people avec dérision, en disant: voilà vos représentants, vous prétendrez-vous encore bien intentionné?" asked the prosecutor, Fouquier-Tinville.[156] Ronsin denied that he had dressed mannequins in the revolutionary garb, he had merely said, as a light jest, that "ce costume de différents couleurs pouvait étonner des yeux qui n'y étaient point accoutumés" and that it was

[151] Lucas, 'The Theory and Practice of Denunciation', 782.
[152] *Journal de la Montagne*, no.55 (26 July 1793).
[153] AP 74:210 (15 September 1793). Charlier labelled these youths as *muscadins.*
[154] R.-J. Clément, *Bulletin du Tribunal criminel révolutionnaire*, vol.4, no.2, 7.
[155] *ibid*
[156] *Bulletin du Tribunal criminel révolutionnaire*, vol.4, no.2, 8.

"un propos inconséquent et irréfléchi." He categorically denied that he had ridiculed the representatives of the people – in fact he had publicly burned an effigy of King George as proof of his patriotism. However, Ronsin had made it easy for his accusers: commodious in his mockery, this was evidence enough to secure his downfall.[157]

Ronsin's laughter was condemned because it was interpreted as a malevolent attack on the French system of representative democracy and the deputies themselves. More seriously, Ronsin was charged of intentionally misleading the people, who had "suivaient toutes les impulsions qu'on voulait leur donner". The public had been presented as an easily swayed mass, not sure of its rights. When passing his judgment, Fouquier reminded the two *Hébertistes* of the conduct required of patriots; the ideal revolutionary was to be serious in his duty and convey an air of *gravitas* to remind the people of the pressure of the situation. The prosecutor praised those "qui ne cessent de se livrer aux discussions le plus sérieuses et le plus pénibles, et de lutter journellement contre la malveillance des contre-révolutionnaires de toute espèce."[158] Nevertheless, it is evident that political opponents were not placed before the tribunal because they had ridiculed France or laughed at the failures of the revolution. They were ruthlessly amputated from the political body because they challenged either the power of the Montagnards or the subsequent Committee of Public Safety. It was fear that drove these trials forward, not laughter or ridicule.[159]

Danton and Desmoulins were executed together on 16 Germinal (5 April 1794). It was their political row with the Hébertists and the Committee of Public Safety regarding the extremities of the terror which consigned them to the guillotine. Although Robespierre agreed that the terror was going too far, he was not prepared to agree to the leniency Danton and Desmoulins pleaded for, partly because of the whispers of corruption surrounding them and their friends.[160] The case of Danton and Desmoulins concerns us for two reasons. First, they used laughter in a slightly different way. While others had laughed at their accusers to fend off accusations and failed, Danton and Desmoulins used humour to induce the public to laugh at the government.

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[157] *ibid*; Vincent was also accused of defacing the revolutionary dress. This was a crime "qui tient évidemment au système d'avilissement de la représentation nationale, formée par Vincent et ses complices, suivant les vues des despotes coalisés." See also Walter, *Actes*, 334.
[158] Walter, *Actes*, 334.
[159] As Linton argues: 'we need to acknowledge that they [the revolutionaries] were driven more by fear and anxiety than by reasoned judgment.' See Linton, *Choosing Terror*, 177.
[160] H. Gough, 'Robespierre and the Press', *Robespierre,* 122.

Indeed, Danton, in the view of Madame Roland, possessed a course and rude wit, as well as "le rire de la debauché".[161] He adeptly spoke what Antoine de Baecque identifies as the discourse of farce, meaning the baseness and depravity which allowed the user to embody a certain type of "authenticité populaire".[162] Danton was an anomaly in the National Convention, because he did not feel constrained by the languages of crisis, denunciation, and *sensibilité.* He could be ferocious at the tribune, but on occasion he used humour to temper the emotions and calls for severity in the Convention.[163] Certainly, Danton stands out among his peers because he was jovial while all others were careful in what they said in the Convention.[164] He also mocked the language of terror openly; Robespierre wrote disapprovingly in his diary that Danton often laughed at the word virtue, claiming it was what he did with his wife at night.[165] *Le Père Duchesne* may have represented the *sans-culottes*, but in reality it was Danton, less angry and more joyful, who shared much more in the popular culture of Paris than the softly-spoken and feminine Hébert. According to Baudot, "Danton était susceptible de pitié, de cette vertu des cœurs généraux, sans laquelle l'homme n'est rien pour l'homme."[166] It was Danton's rejection of the perfectibility of man, and his embrace of men as they are, that was a primary reason for his incarceration and later execution.

Desmoulins is perhaps most remembered for a short-lived journal, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, published between 5 December 1793 and 3 February 1794; its seven editions dared to expose the hypocrisy and contradictions of the revolutionary government through pointed satire.[167] This journal was a product of growing animosities combined with Desmoulins' desire to defend his friends and political position against attacks from the government and the Commune. In the first two issues, at least, Desmoulins targeted the foreign enemies and the growing movement of *déchristianisation* which Robespierre loathed. Yet, the first edition carried a potent message, declaring that the

[161] Roland (Madame), *Mémoires*, vol.1, 212.
[162] De Baecque, *Éclats du Rire*, 13.
[163] Thibaudeau, *Mémoires*, vol.1, 59. Danton "avait dans la vie privée un caractère facile, une morale très-relâchée et le propos cynique. Il aimait le plaisir et méprisait la vie."
[164] For some of Danton's jokes in the Convention see AP 58:102-103 (31 January 1793); 72:126 (13 August); 73:342 (2 September); 82:404 (7 nivôse/ 27 December).
[165] W. Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 274-275.
[166] Baudot, *Notes Historiques*, 10.
[167] Desmoulins' admitted in an emotional letter to his wife that he was to be executed for his friendship with Danton and for his jokes aimed at the government. Linton 'Fatal friendships', 51-52.

journal would be unrestricted in its views. “Nous n’avons plus de journal qui dise la verité, du moins toute la verité. Je rentre dans l’arène avec toute la franchise et le courage qu’on ne connait.” Desmoulins declared that humour, free from the influence of the government, would clear away the self-defeating and opaque rhetoric of the terror. He questioned his readers: was it not ironic that the Republicans mocked the English for their lack of liberty, yet their newspapers possessed the freedom to attack Pitt and his policies daily? A degree of opinion, he wrote was healthy for the body politic and should not be taken for a sign of sickness.[168] Desmoulins, according to one scholar, harkened back to values demonstrated in the old Cordeliers’ club of 1790 which relied on ideas based in English republicanism, particularly the emphasis on the liberty of the individual against the will of the collective.[169] Desmoulins’ satire compared the moral fortitude of those arrested – such as his father-in-law – to the less than savoury character of those who carried out the arrests.[170] But it was clemency and compassion that was especially provocative about Desmoulins’ program, because this threatened the basis of the pitiless ideology of terror which the followers of Robespierre had urged throughout the year in an effort to transform the revolutionary doctrine.[171] A representative, he wrote, had the ability to be mistaken.[172] In this respect, he was not a traitor but a human being. Additionally, while the political program of Desmoulins was treasonous, Caroline Weber argues that the jokes themselves, often overlooked as an afterthought, were in their very nature a strategy to legitimise divergent opinions and political opposition.[173]

In the Convention, Saint-Just was the denouncer-in-chief of Danton and his allies and was central in guaranteeing their arrest.[174] His tactic was to heap suspicion on Danton’s questionable friendships in the revolution as proof of his guilt, while also portraying himself ‘as a hero in the antique mould’, unveiling crimes and making no distinction between the public and personal vice of Danton and his followers.[175] Had

[168] Desmoulins, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, no.1 (5 December 1793), 5.
[169] R. Hammersley, ‘Camille Desmoulins’s *Le Vieux Cordelier*: A link between English and French Republicanism’ *History of European Ideas*, 27, 2 (2001), 132.
[170] Desmoulins, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, no.5, (15 January 1794), 64. See also his joke in the Convention, AP 83:602 (5 pluviôse/ 24 January 1794) that focused on the same theme.
[171] For Desmoulins’ plea for clemency, see *Le Vieux Cordelier*, vol.4 (20 December 1793), 56.
[172] *Le Vieux Cordelier*, vol.6 (25 January 1794), 103.
[173] Weber, *Terror and its Discontents,* 118.
[174] AP 87:629-635 (11 germinal/ 31 March 1794).
[175] Linton, ‘Fatal Friendships’, 411.

Danton, he said, not been friends with the most violent conspirators against liberty – Mirabeau, d'Orléans and Dumouriez, and, with the latter, planned a military coup against Paris? And had he not manufactured the Champ de Mars massacre along with the Lameths and Brissot? Added to this were accusations of avarice and corruption, especially in his dealings with his friend Fabre. Saint-Just also addressed Danton's role in the uprising against the Gironde, accusing him of recoiling with horror at the actions of Hanriot to usurp the tyrants, all the while laughing jovially to his face. This was the laughter of hypocrisy, Saint-Just asserted. Furthermore, Danton, according to Saint-Just, boasted that virtue was ridiculous and "que la gloire et la postérité étaient une sottise".[176] Desmoulins was accused of attacking the national representation with his journal. "On sent parfaitement que votre intention était de ridiculiser le décret qui prononce l'anéantissement de tous les signes de féodalité et de royauté."[177] The laughter of dissenssion was the laughter that expressed a hope for a return to the past. Lavasseur, in his memoirs believed Desmoulins's crimes to be not political. Rather, he was too puerile, too childish, and too willing to joke about the Republic – this had prevented him from becoming a sincere republican, "prêt à sacrifier tout ce qui lui était cher pour la cause de la liberté."[178] Conversely, Baudot, like Lavasseur writing a long time after the event, reflected on the shocking nature of Saint-Just's speech, and expressed his revulsion that emotion could be enough to merit death ("O barbarie absurde!").[179] A reason Saint-Just's speech was so successful is that he spoke in a place where no one dared to interrupt him. He played the part of the severe legislator, irreproachable in the Convention. During the trial, when Danton was allowed a response, the proof of guilt would be undermined.

Danton was tried on 13 Germinal along with Francois Chabot, Bazire, Fabre d'Eglantine, Jean-Francois Lacroix, Herault de Sechelles, and Desmoulins. It was clear that Danton intended to take on the role of accuser and not the defendant. He asked the jurors if his real prosecutors dared to face him, and employed his familiar violent and loud style of oratory to overawe his opponents. The President replied that "l'audace est le propre du crime, et le calme est celui de l'innocence".[180] The

[176] AP 87:631.
[177] *Bulletin du Tribunal criminel révolutionnaire*, vol.4, no.24, 93.
[178] Levasseur, *Mémoires*, vol.3, 73-74.
[179] Baudot, *Notes Historiques*, 130.
[180] *Bulletin du Tribunal criminel révolutionnaire*, vol.4, no.21, 83.

prosecutor relied on physiognomy to belittle Danton, evoking the image of a convulsing body not conducive to reason and *sensibilité*. But Danton continued in his diatribe, and mocked the accusations that Saint-Just had presented in the Convention. The President refuted these sarcasms as futile. "L'ironie à laquelle vous avez recours, ne détruit pas le reproche à vous". The prosecution again attempted to present Danton's jokes as evidence of guilt: "[r]ien de plus ordinaire que la plaisanterie, les jeux de mots aux accusés qui se sentent pressés, et accablés de leurs propres faits, sans pouvoir les détruire."[181] In reality, as much as the judges attempted to paint the emotions of Danton as evidence of guilt, Danton was embarrassing the process of revolutionary justice with his performance by appealing to the public as his judge; the audience applauded his defence, thereby legitimating his innocence. "Chaque chef qui lui était impute n'étant appuyé ni de preuves, ni de pièces, étant même dénué de vraisemblance, il ne lui était pas difficile de se justifier", wrote a *greffier*.[182] Revolutionary politics involved the persuasion of the public. Danton used humour to achieve this. The Jacobin authorities, however, were fearful of stagnation and the ridicule of the Republic. Consequently, the trial was ordered to be quickly resolved without any hearing from the defendants. The will of public opinion was ignored; something that Robespierre would be often reminded of in the forthcoming months.

The Girondins also used laughter to expose the illegitimate nature of the revolutionary tribunal, although, unlike Danton, the tribunes were against them. In the midst of the trial, Madame Roland laughed at the bluster of the prosecutor and the flimsy denunciations made against her.[183] When the judgement of the Gironde was announced, the accused led an ironic cheer of *Vive le République* and threw *assignats* into the crowd. The Girondins ridiculed the Mountain to the very end.[184] Those in the most danger noted the madness of their own laughter. Meillan, on the run with a small group of Girondins, noted that Barbaroux laughed and joked at everything, even with an injured foot.[185] The poet Jean-Antoine Roucher, in his letters from prison, often wrote of a *rire fou* among the inmates. It was, he said, a coping mechanism and a release from sorrow: "Puorquoi vous affliger, quand vous apprenez de moi que j'en ai

[181] *Bulletin du Tribunal criminel révolutionnaire*, vol.4, no.22, 86.
[182] Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 435.
[183] Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 273.
[184] Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 249.
[185] Meillan, *Mémoires*, 131.

ri d'un rire fou?" he wrote to his daughter. "Vous eussiez mieux fait de rire comme moi, vous auriez eu quelques instants d'oubli, et c'est une bonne chose que l'oubli d'un chagrin."[186] This mad laughter was also infectious: "après quelques instants d'inquiétude, entré et non rentré en cellule, ai-je ri de bon cœur, au point d'avoir passer ma joie autour de moi. Possible! Oh oui, très possible!"[187] Roucher also detailed the jokes, japes and amusements among inmates in prison, as did Riouffé who could not hide his admiration of the laughing, smiling Ducos in particular.[188] This was not defiance, but a melancholic gallows' humour, and a very human way to accept death.[189]

Indeed, it seems a type of gallows humour became a coping mechanism for many deemed guilty. The Gironde passed the final night apparently in good spirits, drinking and singing together and some faced the guillotine with a smile. Jean-Francois Ducos, who possessed "le caractère très gai", even made a joke at the scaffold as one witness observed: "Il est temps, dit-il à ceux qui l'entouraient, que la Convention décrète l'inviolabilité des têtes".[190] Jean Duprat, meanwhile, faced death with "un rire tres deplacé." This was no strategy of laughter, but a human effort to comfort others at a point where there was no hope. It would be futile to analyse the deeper psychological issues behind this laughter, especially at a time of such stress. What is clear is that observers placed their own preconceptions and meanings onto the emotion they witnessed. Hostile observers, such as Prévost on behalf of the government, were less ambiguous and continued to paint their enemies as unhinged in their laughter.[191] When the *Hérbetiste*, Momoro, travelled to the scaffold he laughed "un mauvais rire".[192] All this was done to convince the people of their guilt, which suggests the government were uneasy over how convincing their arguments to execute their rivals really were. Laughter and celebration were encouraged at public executions as an affirmation of progress and a validation of guilt. As Andress notes, 'executioners were entertainers.'[193] Alternatively, the sympathetic Riouffé praised Madame Roland, who

[186] J.-A., Roucher, *Consolations de ma captivité, ou Correspondance de Roucher, mort victime de la tyrannie décemvirale, le 7 thermidor, an 2 de la République française* (Paris: H. Agasse, 1797), 259.
[187] Roucher, *Consolations de ma captivité*, 249.
[188] Roucher, *Consolations de ma captivité*, 134-135. See also Riouffé, *Mémoires d'un détenu*, 60.
[189] Speier, 'Wit and Politics', 1396-1397.
[190] Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 253.
[191] Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 255.
[192] Walter (ed.), *Actes*, 383.
[193] Andress, *The Terror*, 322.

walked to the scaffold “avec une gaîté si douce et si vraie, qu’elle fit naître le rire sur les lèvres à plusieurs reprises.”[194] Emotion could also be spun in a positive way.

In conclusion, the deputies did not eschew laughter; they laughed to signify the successful and necessary violence of the terror. The enemies of the revolution were allowed no respite and no pity. The people’s laughter was seen to be spontaneous and virtuous, and was tantamount to a guilty verdict for those put on trial. Conversely, laughter was a strategy – although unsuccessful – to fend off denunciations and attack the institutions of the Republic. This type of laughter was represented by the government as an individualistic and aristocratic laugh that functioned to mislead the people. Enemies of the Republic were also denounced for having laughed secretly at the misfortunes of the Republic. But the people’s will, in the form of laughter, could be directed against the government as Danton’s performance proved. In this sense, expressions could not be controlled by the government, despite their best efforts. It was, however, the divide between progress and crisis that defined how deputies laughed in view of public opinion. After Danton’s death, deputies hoped the terror would be relaxed, and voiced this opinion through the form of laughter.

[194] Riouffé, *Mémoires d'un détenu*, 70.

Epilogue

Laughter and Robespierre

Justifying Terror after Danton

After the execution of the factions, the deputies of the Convention hoped that measures would be instilled to signal an end to the wave of executions. Indeed, Couthon had hinted at this development in the Jacobin club after the fall of Danton.[1] This admission, however, was not forthcoming from the central mouthpiece within the Committee of Public Safety. "En déjouant les conspirateurs, nous n'avons pas encore atteint le but auquel nous tendons", said Robespierre, demanding further sacrifice to the Republic in order to assure happiness. It was not advisable, he said, to "abandoner les grandes mesures que nous devons prendre."[2] Instead, the *grandes mesures* were accelerated, culminating with the law of 22 Prairial (10 June 1794). It has been estimated that 2,217 people were executed in Paris during the last five months of Robespierre's life; only 399 were executed in the previous eleven months.[3] The ideology of terror was promoted more than ever: "[u]n homme libre peut pardonner à son ennemi, s'il ne lui présente que le mort; il ne lui pardonnera jamais s'il ne lui présente que des fers." Therefore, the good patriot should drive out with "mépris et de ridicule ces astucieuses, perfidies et cruelles contextures."[4] Robespierre had quashed hopes of conciliation and still affirmed the use of ridicule to trivialise and dehumanise the acknowledged enemies of the Republic.

The arrest of Danton and execution of Hébert did precipitate one minor adjustment in the discourse of terror, laid bare in the Jacobin club on the 21 March 1794. Tallien, in a speech evoking the imagined expressions of enemies, reminded his audience that aristocrats and moderates were laughing at the patriots for their refusal to intensify the revolution's anti-aristocratic measures. This was not true, said Robespierre in response. On the contrary, never had the conspirators been so angry to see their agents fall: "[l]a joie des modérés était dans la faiblesse du gouvernement, et l'énergie que la Convention a développé les a plongés dans un désespoir mortel." Perhaps the

[1] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.6, 33 (31 March 1794). "Enfin l'horizon politique s'éclairait; le ciel devient serein, et les amis de la République respirent."
[2] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins* vol.6, 44 (5 April 1794).
[3] These are the findings by William Croker cited in Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 2.
[4] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.6, 183-185 (21 June).

aristocrats displayed a happy exterior, but this was only "un joie hypocrite" in order to "calomnier le patriotisme." The scaffold had successfully extinguished the joy inside the enemies of the Republic and instilled them with terror. Tallien apologised and seconded Robespierre's declaration.[5] Robespierre changed the image of the laughing conspirator from the Jacobin imagination to prove that the terror was achieving progress. In this way, the perception of progress in the revolution was driven by changes in rhetoric, rather than events. When Danton was finally executed, Robespierre declared that the aristocrats would not dare pursue their dark designs anymore – all that remained was to bring them to the justice of the guillotine and virtue would reign.[6]

The Ridiculous Supreme Being

Robespierre's cult of the Supreme Being, decreed on 18 Floréal (7 May 1794) and inaugurated with the festival on 20 Prairial (8 June 1794), had Jacobin clubs from the departments inundating the Republican government with letters praising "la plus riante" festival of nature that was to take place.[7] Finally, France would reach "bonheur par la route de la vertu".[8] Robespierre had always been consistent with his religious beliefs throughout his life.[9] God had created man, and designed him purposefully as a social animal to revere the dual truths of justice and morality. Only adherence to these virtues would make society happy. He also believed in divine providence (exemplified when he announced the divinity had struck down the Emperor Leopold just as France lurched to war) and the immortality of the spirit after death.[10] Equally, however, Robespierre could not tolerate the religion of the *ancien régime*. He despised the abuses of the church along with the hypocrisy of the upper clergy who, he affirmed, bound the people into the servitude of superstition and harvested their wealth while preaching the benefits of a modest lifestyle. On the other hand, his arguments towards spirituality and the lower clergy were devoid of 'cheap' and 'vituperative' remarks

[5] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, vol.6, 5-6.
[6] Robespierre, *Œuvres,* vol.10, 426.
[7] AP 91:312 (16 prairial/ 4 June).
[8] AP 91:441 (21 prairial/ 9 June).
[9] F. Tallet, 'Robespierre and Religion' in Haydon & Doyle (eds.), *Robespierre,* 93.
[10] Tallet, 'Robespierre and Religion', 95-97. Robespierre was also accused of propagating superstition when he announced these beliefs. See Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.8, 235.

designed to cause laughter, unlike others who laughed at the destruction of the church.[11]

Robespierre's toleration was not unusual in the early years of revolution. Indeed, the concept of virtue – central to the practice of politics and the articulation of the meaning of revolution – was partly informed by Christianity, in the sense that all souls were thought to be equal in the afterlife and had the same virtue.[12] By Year II, Robespierre's relative moderatism brought him into direct conflict with other movements of terror. The Convention had always laughed at superstition and religion since its inception; as we have seen, it was ingrained in the political culture of the deputies, intensifying into a laugh of disdain. In this period, any effort to conciliate Christianity with republicanism was dismissed through laughter. Chabot's diminishing influence, for example, was evident when he was ridiculed by the Mountain in 1793 for stating that Jesus was the first *sans-culotte*.[13] The constitutional clergy who were committed to uniting the ideals of revolution to Catholicism, such as Grégoire, Fauchet and Lamourette, were largely marginal figures by this point; the latter two were guillotined.[14]

As the terror took hold, so too did the movement of *déchristianisation* which worked to destroy the cult of religion. Laughter was a tool of derision to attack religious signs. The Jacobins in Belgium, for example, had mocked the Catholics by wearing the clothes of their priests, dancing on their altars, and urinating in their chalices, all the while laughing with derision.[15] Processions frequently entered the Convention carrying religious items to be mocked, until Danton denounced the "mascarades antireligieuses."[16] Robespierre saw atheism as a conspiratorial project that looked to inculcate the people with immorality in order to usurp the natural truths of virtue. A godless society was one of chaos, Robespierre warned; those who strove for it held the people with *mépris* and looked to deprave the Republic.[17] The radicals' iconoclasm was

[11] Tallet, 'Robespierre and Religion', 98.
[12] Linton, *The Politics of Virtue*, 25. As Linton points out, in temporal affairs the Church saw eighteenth-century virtue to be 'weak and ineffectual'.
[13] AP 68:624 (12 July 1793). Chabot was a Capuchin friar.
[14] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas,* 485.
[15] L.-M. Prudhomme, *Histoire générale et impartiale des erreurs, des fautes et des crimes commis pendant la Révolution française* (Paris: 1797), vol.6, 128-129.
[16] AP 80:165 (6 frimaire/ 26 November 1793)
[17] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.10, 453.

a challenge to the universal semiotic meanings the republican government intended to represent to the people.[18] It was no coincidence that, two days after the Festival of the Supreme Being, the law of Prairial was enacted, precipitating the most violent period of revolution. Robespierre seeked to use both the Supreme Being and the guillotine to purify France of these oppositional meanings: "[t]out a changé dans l'ordre physique; tout doit changer dans l'ordre moral et politique. La moitié de la révolution du monde est déjà faite; l'autre moitié doit s'accomplir."[19] For Robespierre, the physical and moral orders were two requirements for the same goal: the physical order in France had been successfully equalised with terror; the moral order was still to take shape in the form of didactic teachings.[20]

The Festival of the Supreme Being has often been interpreted by historians as either a conciliatory political necessity in maintaining power during so much turbulence, or a heartfelt attempt to reintroduce spirituality. As Ozouf maintains, the two are not mutually exclusive.[21] What is plain is that first, in Robespierre's outlook, utopia was to be expressed by its participants through decency and respect. There was to be no mockery or laughter.[22] Happiness was internal, and was, moreover, a state of seriousness. This belief was echoed by figures such as Restif de la Bretonne and Mme de Stael.[23] Second, this incentive, realised through the Festival, was not attractive enough to induce the obedience of Robespierre's compatriots and they laughed at him behind his back. Paganel retrospectively contemplated this political failure, judging that the incorruptible "ne connut point l'art le plus nécessaire aux usurpateurs, l'art de séduire l'imagination par de riantes promesses, et de calmer d'amers souvenirs par le baume de l'espérance."[24] Similarly, Mercier criticised Robespierre for having no imagination and none of the talents which could flatter or seduce patriots into following him.[25] Essentially, if the Festival of the Supreme Being was what the utopia would look like, then it was deeply unimpressive to those who mattered.

[18] Clay, *Iconoclasm in Revolutionary Paris*, 272.
[19] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.10, 444.
[20] Ozouf, *Festivals*, 106.
[21] Ozouf, *Festivals,* 107-108.
[22] Ozouf, *Festivals,* 114.
[23] Richardot, *Le Rire*, 193.
[24] Paganel, *Essai historique et critique*, vol.2, 19.
[25] Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, vol.4, 147.

While Robespierre may have been sincere in wanting to improve the moral fibre of citizens, the Festival of the Supreme Being was seen as a highly arrogant exercise in which he had nominated himself as both teacher and priest of the nation. "It's not enough for him to be in charge", remarked Thuriot, "he has to be God".[26] It was said Robespierre was overcome with happiness seeing the throngs of people who had attended the Festival. Yet, he also ignored the barely disguised ridicule of his colleagues, who laughed at the representation of atheism, which was an ugly cardboard figure with the ears of an ass.[27] Mercier commented on "cette scène burlesque" and derided the ridiculous priesthood Robespierre hoped would ingrain itself within the Revolution.[28] The celebration invited mutterings of discontent and a deluge of jokes which Robespierre would subsequently complain bitterly about.[29] A further political mistake by Robespierre was to place himself centre-stage. He led the deputies by fifteen feet in ceremonial dress to undertake the worship of the Supreme Being. This is particularly pertinent since Robespierre had derided Lafayette for his self-important posturing during the first anniversary of the Bastille's fall.[30] Eighteen months earlier, the Girondins, in the press, had also ridiculed Robespierre for his priestly conduct and his cult-like following.[31] According to Paganel, if the Festival of the Supreme Being was Robespierre's idea of moderation – towards "un autre ordre de choses" – then he had severely misjudged the hopes of a nation. "Robespierre venait à peine de proscrire les cultes, de briser les autels, et d'exposer aux risées du peuple les prêtres, les pontifes et les mystères, lorsqu'il institua une fête religieuse avec la plus imposante solennité".[32] The jokes against Robespierre stressed an apparent truth: while in speeches it had been easy to delineate between the worship of nature and the worship of superstitious artificiality, in reality there seemed to be no difference at all, thus Robespierre's insistence on the deference to nature was a hypocritical one, no different from the preaching of priests.

[26] Cited in Tallet, 'Robespierre and Religion', 105.
[27] Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 296.
[28] Mercier, *Le Nouveau Paris*, 129.
[29] Levasseur, *Mémoires*, vol.3, 94-97. Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 296.
[30] Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 130-131.
[31] J. Vilate*, Les mystères de la mère de Dieu dévoilés: troisième volume des Causes secrètes de la Révolution du 9 au 10 thermidor* (Paris: 1794), 60. "Aux jacobins, comme à la Convention nationale, Robespierre, continuellement environné de ses femmes, ressemblait à un pontife, dictant ses oracles."
[32] Paganel, *Essai historique et critique*, vol.2, 341.

It has been suggested that laughter during the Festival of the Supreme Being was a manifestation of powerlessness among the deputies and a way in which they could mask their fear.[33] But ridicule also posed a challenge to the illusion of uniformity Robespierre's utopia demanded. The Supreme Being, the most choreographed and controlled of all the revolutionary festivals, possessed 'a false view of itself' because it professed unanimity and celebration of peace, while concealing the shocking violence that terror had engendered while also excluding individuals who encouraged divergence.[34] Moreover, ridicule was damaging for Robespierre because he had always envisaged it as a tool to discover and isolate unwanted enemies to pave the way for progress. In the parade of the Supreme Being, in which participants played out his ideal utopia and in which the perfect future was momentarily present, there was to be no vituperative laughter because the Festival was supposed to take place in an imagined space wherein all enemies had been destroyed. Yet, when laughter was heard, the performance was exposed as a farce, since the ideal man of virtue did not have the capacity to ridicule other pure beings. As Andress notes, Robespierre 'explicitly blamed many of the ills of the Republic on the attitudes revealed by the mockery he had suffered at the Festival of the Supreme Being.'[35]

Ridicule in the Convention

It is important to note that Robespierre was not a dictator. The Republic was, rather, a dictatorship of prominent individuals with competing visions who shared power in the two committees. Indeed, Robespierre had tried to prevent the worst atrocities of the terror, such as corruption and iconoclasm in the provinces. Nevertheless, through his growing power base and political networks, he was the foremost revolutionary in terms of control on the political dynamic. His political prominence was an opportunity to those who could blame their crimes on him and make him appear as a tyrant.[36] In the final months of terror, the political war was drawn between the ideologues, Robespierre, Couthon and Saint-Just of the Committee of Public Safety, and those in the Committee of General Security, Vadier, Tallien, and Amar, later joined by Billaud

[33] Rapport, 'Laughter as a Political Weapon', 250.
[34] See Ozouf, *Festivals*, 11-12. Ozouf describes this as a central feature of all the revolutionary festivals.
[35] Andress, *The Terror*, 333.
[36] Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 294.

Varennes and Collot d'Herbois among others.[37] The Committee of General Security believed that the law of 22 Prairial was a design by Robespierre to send them to the guillotine. Additionally, Robespierre's policies on religion were worrying for many of the atheists because they saw in these developments an attempt to appease the right-wing of the Convention. Unlike Danton and Desmoulins, they sought to pre-empt Robespierre by carrying the offensive to him, not in the sheets of a newspaper with which deputies could laugh discreetly, but in the open, from the confines of the Convention.

It was Marc-Guillaume-Alexis Vadier, the President of the Committee of General Security and a man who saw Jacobinism as an opportunity rather than an ideology, who launched the offensive of ridicule against Robespierre. Vadier was a wily political operator who rarely gave speeches and likely disposed of a great deal of incriminating evidence. He was also a generation older than most of his fellow patriots. This partly explains his apathy and, at times, contempt for the language of Rousseau.[38] In the Convention he is notable as one of the few who consistently utilised humour in his rhetoric, along with Barère and Danton.[39] Vadier seized upon the ravings of Catherine Théot, an old, mentally ill woman who professed to be the second mother of God and had been reportedly encouraged in her proclamations by a former monk, Dom Gerle, an acquaintance of Robespierre who had sat in the Constituent Assembly.[40] Allegedly, it was Barère and Vadier who had concocted this conspiracy together – and they reputedly planned their line of attack while laughing and trading jokes, although this is probably spurious.[41] Levasseur was of no doubt the significance of these machinations. It was, he wrote, "la ridicule superstition de Catherine Théos qu'éclata la guerre sourd

[37] Eude writes that these antagonisms have been greatly exagerated; see M. Eude, 'Le Comité de Sûreté Générale en 1793-1794 Annales historiques de la Révolution française', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 261 (1985), 300-305.
[38] M. Lyons, 'M.-G.-A.- Vadier (1736-1828): The Formation of the Jacobin Mentality', *French Historical Studies*, 10, 1, (1977), 76, 96.
[39] Joachim Vilate, *Causes secrètes de la révolution du 9 au 10 thermidor* p.18 ; See also AP 93:19 (21 Messidor/ 9July) On this day Vadier defended some innocent sans-culottes in the district of Andelys who, in their hunger, stole some grain sufficient only for a small bird from a farmer. The story made the Convention laugh.
[40] Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 305.
[41] Mathiez, *The Fall of Robespierre and Other Essays* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1927), 119-125. Vilate, *Les mystères de la mère de Dieu dévoilés*, 15.

des membres des deux comités."[42] It was this backdrop in which Vadier launched his volley of ridicule against Robespierre.

Delivered on the 27 Prairial, Vadier's speech to the Convention is a remarkable anomaly. Before it, no laughter had been heard for a month. During its delivery, there were sixteen separate bursts of laughter. Even in the days of Girondin dominance, no amount of laughter had ever been heard in response to a single speech. Despite the laughter, Vadier orated in a cold tone because he could not be seen ridiculing Robespierre overtly, plus a lack of gravitas would have discredited the supposed seriousness of the 'plot'. At the same time, inducing laughter was, according to the juror Joachim Vilate, a tactic employed to make the denunciation more memorable compared to other denunciations, which usually followed an overused script.[43] It was an incredible risk. Had his been misunderstood or fallen flat, Vadier would have left himself vulnerable to the retribution of Robespierre. However, the speech ultimately challenged the ideology of severity and aided the movement of growing opposition against Robespierre, laying the foundations for a further attack on 8 Thermidor.

Although Vadier commenced by praising the Supreme Being, he soon made negative allusions to it by warning that the head of fanaticism had reared its ugly head. He reminded the deputies of the dark days of religion. He vilified priests who, attracted to their vocation through greed, egoism, and cowardliness, sought to entangle weak minds by their lies.[44] Some in the audience must surely have recognised Robespierre and the Supreme Being in these words. After these serious misgivings, Vadier moved on to the discovery of the "école primaire de fanatisme", led by Catherine Théot, the self-proclaimed Mother of God. He added his own flourishes when needed to make the audience laugh. He changed the accused's name from Théot to *Théos* (the Greek word for divinity). Not only did the conspirators believe in the immortality of the spirit, said Vadier, they also believed in the immortality of the body, through genuflecting before the virgin (the old, haggard Théot) and kissing her seven times.[45] Moreover, to add a degree of veracity to his claims, Vadier used a trope more familiar to the

[42] Levasseur, *Mémoires*, vol.3, 112.
[43] Vilate, *Les mystères de la mère de Dieu dévoilés,* 5. It must be noted that Vadier strongly contested the veracity of Vilate's tracts, published in 1797.
[44] AP 91:640 (27 Prairial/15 June) The first laughter induced from Vadier, came from the priest selling prayers to save souls from purgatory: "il n'y avait de salut ni dans ce monde, ni dans l'autre. (On rit et on applaudit.)"
[45] *ibid*. Vadier described how the seventh kiss was a little more fervent than the others.

Convention of 1792: this was the theatrical plot device of discovering the conspiratorial letter; in this case a letter from Catherine Théot supposedly found on the person of the monk Dom Gerle, friend of Robespierre. The revelations in the letters added to the hilarity. Dom Gerle had apparently prophesised the destruction of the revolutionary regime, writing that France would be ruled by a worthy prophet – unmistakeably Robespierre. Dom Gerle, claimed Vadier, was a hypocrite and a creature of Pitt who had abused his position of trust to encourage Théot and her troop to cause anarchy in the Republic. [46]

Critically, Vadier recognised his audience's use of laughter and encouraged it: "L'arme du ridicule, le sentiment de la pitié, sont les seuls remèdes sans doute dont le raison peut faire usage contre ces jongleries fanatiques". However, while the *conventionnels* were allowed to laugh with pity, Vadier stressed it was the job of the Committees to excise this sect with terror in case they were linked to a larger conspiracy.[47] In this way, he set apart the importance of the Committees from the Convention; the latter could laugh with *sensibilité*, the former had to remain vigilant and take the threat seriously. Vadier emphasised that only when the fall of tyrants had been attained – what he called "cette heureuse époque" – only then, could the Committees pour on priests the "ridicule qu'ils méritent." For Vadier, in a slight variation of Robespierre's narrative, enemies such as priests could only be laughed at after utopia had been achieved, because by then their degrading influence would have no effect on the people. For the time being, however, any conspiracy could sink the vessel of the revolution, especially when it was "tourmenté par la tempète" of fanaticism. "Ce rapport, moitié bouffon moitié sérieux, était destiné à tourner en ridicule les idées religieuses de Robespierre et la fête à l'Etre-Suprême" wrote Lavasseur, acknowledging the aim of Vadier's ridicule: "c'était un puissant levier de discrédit".[48] Vadier encouraged the Convention to laugh, therefore undermining Robespierre without explicitly naming him. But by urging the Committees to deal with the conspiracy seriously, he pre-empted Robespierre should he have attempted to discredit the conspiracy as ridiculous. 'To such absurd machinations was politics in the Republic now reduced', wrote the historian, R.R Palmer, but '[o]n such trifles did grave

[46] AP 91:641-642. Four bursts of laughter came from this plot.
[47] *ibid*
[48] Levasseur, *Mémoires*, vol.3, 120

matters depend'.[49] In 1910, Mathiez complained that historians had previously seen the Supreme Being as an 'attempt at political enslavement' and Robespierre's attempt to satisfy his 'unbridled ambitions and mystical passions.'[50] This is testament to the effectiveness of Vadier's speech and the capacity for the ridiculous to make a memorable argument.

On the 9 Messidor (27 June 1794) Robespierre was forced to make a speech to the Jacobin club addressing the Théot affair and the unrest regarding his belief in the Supreme Being. His tactic was to treat the denunciation seriously, all the while denouncing the laughter that went with it. While acknowledging Vadier as a worthy citizen and recognising that it was his duty to lift the veil on conspiracy, Robespierre also denounced the numerous brochures that had appeared in the style of Hébert, forming an "indécente parodie" of the conspiracy. These brochures had also linked Robespierre to the conspiracy.[51] In the Jacobin club, Robespierre inveighed that the *Brissotins* had used the same strategy in their attempts to destroy the Mountain.[52] Furthermore, these *Hérbertists*, the name he had took to describe those who laughed at him, had misled the people by suggesting there was no Supreme Being "dans ces termes dégoutants, qui revoltent l'honnêteté publique".[53] Here, Robespierre used his frequent strategy of masking his own feelings for that of the 'people' or the 'general will'. In reality, it was he who had been stung by the ridicule from these pamphlets. He ended his speech by unveiling the 'true' motives of the *Hérbertists*:

> Ils veulent faire rire aux dépens d'une femme [Catherine Théot] pour se soustraire au soupçon du crime, caché sous cette écorce. Ils veulent ridiculiser l'Être suprême, persuadés qu'un des sûrs moyens de perdre la morale publique, c'est d'effacer l'impression sublime et touchante de la fête de l'Éternel, ces transports fraternels et civiques, par des sarcasmes grossiers et des plaisanteries hébertistes. Ils voudraient que la justice nationale s'arrêtât aux vils instruments, et les épargnât eux-mêmes.

Laughter may or may not have been a sign of fear. But to transform Robespierre into a laughing-stock was an adept political strategy because it made him appear as a

[49] R. R. Palmer, *The Year of the Terror: Twelve who Ruled France, 1793-1794* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 368.
[50] Mathiez, *The Fall of Robespierre*, 85.
[51] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.10, 509.
[52] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.10, 507.
[53] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.10, 510.

conspirator. Before he was in power, Robespierre had gladly played the victim to accentuate his authenticity, but now, as spokesman of the Republican government, laughter was subversive, divergent and conspiratorial. His inability to quieten the ridicule served to emphasise his weakness, because in Jacobin ideology, to be ridiculous was to be guilty. Finally, his denunciation in the Jacobin club of those who laughed at the Théot affair was a challenge to the Convention, because the majority of deputies had laughed along to Vadier's speech.

The Return of the Regenerated Patriot

Throughout the terror, Robespierre had curbed the laughter of the deputies when they heard news of military success. As we have seen, regeneration was a process rather than an event that could only be achieved when all enemies had been discovered and eradicated. Indeed, the news of defections and betrayals were more likely to be received by laughter than military success. On April 1793, Robespierre announced what type of progress constituted regeneration: "[c]'est par le progrès de la philosophie et par le spectacle du bonheur de la France, que vous étendrez l'empire de notre révolution, et non par la force des armes et par les calamités de la guerre."[54] The deputies were supposed to take on the greatest severity when they reacted to the manoeuvrings of the military – even victories were not to be celebrated too enthusiastically. He warned that it was not time for the national energy to be paralysed by leniency: "gardez-vous de faiblir", he said, "car il retomberait en vous sur éclats, et vous precipiterait en fond de l'impur marais." Military success engendered frivolity and apathy which could corrupt morality. When Barère, speaking for the Committee of Public Safety, delivered a grave summary on the dangers to the Republic, it was done, he said, not to frighten the deputies, but to imbue them with "severité, avec l'austerité necessaires pour vous engager à prendre de grandes mesures contre les villes lâches ou rebelles." Unlike the Girondins, who had preached that military success was inevitable, the Committee was obliged to instil defiance and surveillance into the patriots, and even instructed them to distrust success, as Barère once again announced: "[v]oilà pourquoi [the Committee] vous parle quelquefois avec sévérité, car il ne sait point flatter. Il ne connaît que le vérité; il ne vous donne jamais des

[54] AP 62:532-541 (10 April 1793).

fausses joies, de fausses espérances."[55] The Committee of Public Safety, and in particular, Robespierre, had learnt to question the dispatches from generals from the experience of the early period of the Convention and the betrayals that followed, especially involving Dumouriez, whose defection had not a small influence on why the deputy should not celebrate.

Laughter from military victory was rare in the year of terror. That is, until 12-25 July 1794, when there were ten separate bursts of laughter precipitated from news of the war effort. Certainly, this was nowhere near September 1792 levels, but in comparison to previous months (with the exception of Vadier's speech) this was a substantial number. The bursts of laughter from the deputies in this period all emerged from dispatches read aloud by Barère, Vadier's friend from the Pyrenees. It is highly questionable why Barère would do such a thing, since he had previously acknowledged Robespierre's assertion that seriousness was required when talking about military affairs. However, he was also notorious for his duplicity and had maintained a friendship with Vadier so, although speculative, there is a chance there may be more to these readings than first thought.[56] After the victory at Fleurus on 28 June, Barère announced on 12 July that Brussels had been retaken, expediting bursts of revolutionary enthusiasm. Subsequent sessions involved news on the 20 and 23 July of further ground gained around the Rhine, the Moselle, and Nieuwpoort. Laughter was a response to the familiar signs of triumph written within dispatches, such as insults aimed at foreign commanders,[57] intercepted messages containing complaints that the French did not use conventional tactics,[58] and Italian Catholics fighting in the name of the Virgin Mary.[59] It is possible that the deputies were more anxious to be seen laughing at these discourses of triumph to allay suspicion, rather than at news they genuinely found funny, but, regardless, the dominant mood in the Convention was one of optimism reminiscent of the fervour experienced in the Convention during

[55] AP 77:467 (23 October).
[56] Louvet, *Mémoires,* vol.1, 20. Louvet wrote that Barère had seemed to support the Girondins all the way until the very last moment.
[57] AP 93:250 (29 Messidor/17 July 1794). The Duke of York was described as "ce fameux jockey de la cour de Georges", precipitating laughter. See also 93:251 for two more instances of laughter in this vein.
[58] AP 93:288 (30 Messidor/18 July 1794).
[59] AP 93:449 (5 Thermidor/23 July 1794). There were two bursts here. For the remaining four instances see: 105 (24 Messidor/12 July 1794), and 289 (30 Messidor/18 July).

Dumouriez' Belgium campaign in 1792. It was in this atmosphere Robespierre chose to make his disastrous speech.

Robespierre, on 8 Thermidor, rebuked the Convention for its laughter. He delivered a speech which was meandering, hard to make sense of, lasted more than two hours and was a political error, primarily because he was vague in his denunciations which made deputies wonder if they were to be next.[60] Robespierre remonstrated to his colleagues on the ubiquity of "ces discours que l'on vous a faits sur les succès des armées". To laugh at this news was not the conduct of a virtuous deputy. He reminded the Convention that this was the familiar "système de Dumouriez", in which the general had lulled the deputies into the ignorance of laughter, enabling him to conduct his conspiracy undetected. While the Convention indulged in joviality, in Belgium the liberty trees had grown sterile and the army had formed a camp "qui peut devenir dangereux."[61] Robespierre voiced his strong opposition to laughter of this kind because it suggested a celebration of the generals who were always to be mistrusted, as well as signalling apathy in fulfilling the duties expected of a deputy. Moreover, he said these victories strengthened the call of the moderates to disband the war committees.[62] Robespierre had detested the laughter of the 1792 campaign; he feared "l'ivresse de la victoire" which could blind "les intérêts de la patrie."[63] The stability of the interior was much more important to him than the situation on the front.[64] Saint-Just had replicated this belief: "[l]e vétéran rit sous les armes de la sottise de celui qui le commande, et voilà comment nous éprouverons des revers".[65]

Robespierre's disgruntlement over the deputies' laughter also highlights his refusal to relinquish hold of the policy of terror. He was never ready to put a stop to it; not until he had regenerated the people morally and spiritually, at least. After this admonishment, Robespierre again untactfully listed the unjust laughter in the Convention, and naively mentioned the attempts by Vadier to make him appear ridiculous – a point that had rankled and distressed him.

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[60] Lavasseur, *Mémoires*, 130.
[61] AP 93:531 (8 Thermidor/ 26 July 1794)
[62] Scurr, *Fatal Purity*, 308.
[63] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.10, 507.
[64] Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol.10, 512. "On juge de la prospérité d'un état, moins par les succès de l'extérieur, que par l'heureuse situation de l'intérieur."
[65] L.-A. Saint-Just, *Œuvres complètes de Saint-Just* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908), vol.2, 85.

> [J]e me suis étonné de la légèreté académique avec laquelle on vous parlait quelquefois de nos victoires, comme si elles n'avaient rien coûté à nos défenseurs; du ridicule qu'on s'était seulement attaché à répandre sur la mère de Dieu, lorsque la conspiration dont elle est l'âme est liée à toutes les autres, et je vous avertis qu'on s'amuse à planter dans la Belgique des arbres stériles de la liberté, au lieu d'y cueillir les fruits de la victoire.[66]

Vadier taking his cue, seized on Robespierre's complaints. He had heard with "douleur" that his report on Théot had been dismissed by Robepsierre as a "farce ridicule de mysticité" and that "c'était une femme à mépriser."[67] As he had forewarned in his previous speech, Vadier had neutralised this argument from Robespierre through his insistence that all conspirators should be treated with the upmost seriousness until they had been caught and brought to justice. Only then could they be scorned through laughter. Robespierre was almost certainly angry and frustrated at this moment, as Vadier made a point to contrast his own demeanour with his adversary. "Je parlerai avec le calme qui convient à la vertu."[68] Robespierre himself had used the stressed and frightened behaviour of his enemies against them, such as when Dufourney frantically tried to prove his innocence.[69] Crucially, Robespierre tried to interrupt Vadier, but he was denied by the President, Collot d'Herbois, something that had never happened to him since the days of the Gironde. Vadier continued with his *faux* distress that Robespierre seemed to think the conspiracy was an affront to virtue: "Robespierre a dit que ce rapport, ayant donné lieu à un travestissement ridicule, a pu nuire à la chose publique." If the report was ridiculous, said Vadier, then sometimes "le ton de ridicule" was necessary to "dérouter le fanatisme."[70]

In Vadier's final speech on 9 Thermidor, he again used laughter to his advantage, this time implicating Robespierre directly with the Théot plot. Playing on Robespierre's image of the 'Incorruptible', Vadier warned the Convention that another mystic had proposed to Robespierre a "constitution surnaturelle. (On rit)." Then, Vadier attacked the image Robespierre projected of himself to the people. "A entendre Robespierre, il

[66] AP 93:531 (8 Thermidor/ 26 July 1794)
[67] AP 93:522.
[68] *ibid*
[69] Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins,* vol.6, 50 (5 April 1794). "Le calme, continue Robespierre, n'est pas dans ton âme."
[70] AP 93:532-533 (9 Thermidor/ 27 July).

est le défenseur unique de la liberté; il en désespère, il va tout quitter; il est d'une modestie rare (on rit)". Whoever conspires against me, the friend *par excellence* of the Republic, said Vadier, mimicking Robespierre, that man also conspires against the Republic. He also assailed Robespierre's criticism of the deputies when they laughed to the news of military victory. On the contrary, these bursts of laughter should be praised because "les victoires que la république remporte sont aussi le fruit de la compression des ennemis de l'intérieur." [71]

There were two strategies of laughter on view against Robespierre. The first was the strategy of denunciation; the type of laughter used by deputies to denounce their rivals as conspirators. This type highlighted the ridiculous aspects of Robespierre's character, revealing his friendships and religious views to be subversive. It was also a spontaneous and collective movement. The second type of laughter which undermined Robespierre was the return of the expression of regeneration concerned with miraculous events, which he had attempted to eradicate. It was a practice that rejected Robespierre's insistence that regeneration would happen progressively with the regeneration of morals. In this way, laughter overthrew Robespierre's own claims to authority, and rendered him as both a conspirator and a remnant of the past.

[71] AP 93:553.

Conclusion

The Importance of the Strategies of Laughter

In the Convention, the deputies were aware of the important role the expression of emotions could play in republican politics, because this form of communication was a persuasive means to convey authority and appeal to the public. For this reason, laughter was a ubiquitous and important facet of political life in the assembly, and a strategy for deputies to establish their representative authority at the expense of their rivals. In particular, laughter was a useful tool because it was ambiguous; deputies could define and manipulate the meaning of the practice for their own needs. Initially, patriots of the Convention imagined they would be courteous, grave and devoid of the frivolities appropriate to the aristocracy; but laughter emerged as a necessary response to the reality of debates and the business of politics. It was a strategy to achieve short-term political goals that developed in response to the experience of the day-to-day sessions, as well as a tool that helped reshape cultural boundaries and meanings, contributing to longer-term plans relating to the ideology of progress and the nature of the revolution itself. As they were answerable to the people and cultivated their own image in view of public opinion, the deputies of the Convention were politicians in the modern sense.

Laughing at the Past: The Strategy of Repudiation

The strategies of laughter had to operate within the political culture of virtue; a culture which was a response to the supposed secretive machinations of the court and established sentiment, selflessness, morality and transparency as the accepted representations of the people's sovereignty. Consequently, in their efforts to re-appropriate laughter so as to befit the new, regenerated society, deputies disagreed on how it should be conceptualised, particularly concerning the meaning and moral worth of laughter, in addition to when it could be used. All deputies were universal, however, in their condemnation of enemies on the exterior from the outset of the Republic. To appear patriotic, deputies laughed at the futile misdeeds of foreign armies, clergymen and émigrés who had apparently refused to accept the conditions of Republic, because their decision to effectively reject the prospect of utopia was seen as ridiculous. The system of monarchy and their symbols were repudiated

through laughter, as were church practices, in an effort to demarcate the culture of the Republic to the audience. Letters read in the Convention were a strategy to convey the outmoded behaviour of these figures in a believable manner.

One aim of this thesis has been to understand and re-evaluate the public image of the sentimental man by analysing the serious business of laughter in the Convention. The demeanour of *sensibilité* – a discourse that related to empathy and shared experience in an effort to appear honest – did not go unquestioned by deputies. Expressing tears for those citizens who had suffered in the war was initially the accepted form of patriotic *sensibilité* at the outset of the Republic. But *sensibilité* – according to the Girondins – could also be expressed in the form of laughter at enemies who were suffering misfortune as a result of their opposition to the revolution. In this way, laughter was a strategy to signify the superiority of the revolutionaries and the lack of exterior threat to the Republic. Laughter was also imbued with the sentiment of pity because it was thought the people of Europe were still enchained unlike the liberated French. Repudiating the past in such a manner was a means to assert the legitimacy of the Republic and the Girondin ministry.

As laughter was sentimental, the Girondins expressed their hope enemies could be persuaded to renounce their former rights and privileges and join a society based on the love for the *patrie*. But Marat and Robespierre, the two most vocal opponents of the ministry at a time when most deputies were still acclimatising to political life, denounced the laughter of sentiment. The past had to be eradicated completely. During the king's trial, there was a shift in the accepted ways in which deputies conducted themselves; patriots did not want to be seen expressing sentiment for those who had been proven guilty. Laughter was transformed into an expression of *mépris* for those who opposed the common good and belonged to the past. Enemies were culpable of their actions, including those inside the Convention. Their misfortunes were to be enjoyed and not pitied. The definition of enemies significantly broadened to include those who did not actively show their patriotism. This ideology was part of the effort to legitimise and give meaning to the radical measures of state terror.

Laughing to Police the Present: The Strategies of Surveillance and Denunciation

The deputies frequently ridiculed each other as a strategy to assert their own legitimacy and to control the language of the revolution at the expense of their compatriots. Ridicule acted as a form of admonishment against those who voiced intolerable views in relation to the past. These occurrences were rare. The strategy of surveillance was also employed to stifle unnecessary debate and pass laws conducive to progress. Deputies who attempted to abuse their time at the rostrum – especially those who spoke out against the ministry – were the most common victims. Laughter was a strategy to make the Convention more efficient and bypass the time-wasting tactics of others. Moreover, the embodiment of heroic *sensibilité* – that is, the type of emotional exuberance that was often melodramatic in tone and centred on the self in relation to the fortunes of the revolution – was frequently ridiculed by the Girondins.

This heroic *sensibilité* was seen by the Girondins to be not only ridiculous, but dangerous too, because it conveyed the sense a further regeneration was needed. Their efforts to sound this language out with laughter only aided in augmenting its power, however, lending a certain prestige and authority to Robespierre and Marat, the most forceful proponents of this behavioural discourse. They became victimised heroes acting out their misfortune and honesty. A key facet to the embodiment of the hero was the unknown other that had to be defeated. Therefore, the strategy of denunciation was an important component for the Montagnards in creating a force they could fight against and contrast their virtue. This discourse was further legitimised when setbacks to the revolution occurred, making the denunciations of the left-wing believable since the message of progress the Girondins propagated did not conform to the reality of the situation. Laughter was represented by the Mountain as a sign of apathy and despotism; it was artificial because it was orchestrated from the shadows.

The Mountain emerged as an intimidating force, although the deputies who sat there denied it. The Montagnards purposefully tried to undermine the image of their opponents by alerting the public to their fear. This was proof certain deputies in the Convention were not patriots. The violent calls and active seizure of the rostrum were done in the name of the people, as well as the law of nature, bypassing the law of the Girondins. As part of this strategy of intimidation, laughter no longer merely policed the Convention; it was a type of denunciation, adapted from cynic philosophy, which

uncovered the pretensions of deputies and cowed supporters of the ministry into silence. If suspected conspirators attempted to use heroic *sensibilité* to assure the people of their innocence, then they were laughed at. Alternatively, if suspects ridiculed the denunciations against them, then they were accused of trivialising the mechanisms of government. Using negative interpretations of emotions as proof of guilt was a useful pretext to destroy a political rival. But the interpretative quality that was so important to accusations was founded on the authenticity of the accuser; when this authority was eroded, that deputy could be left open to the same accusations.

Sensibilité was not the only behaviour which could exude patriotism. There were other types of communication that could be either independent or combined with an emotional display of empathy to strengthen representative authority. Deputies could be stoic; at times they used the language of romance which was urgent and laconic. Prominent and wide-ranging discourses of the Enlightenment were selected to supplement arguments. The deputies evoked figures from antiquity to make a point; equally, the language of classical republicanism was vital in determining how revolutionaries – specifically the Jacobins – perceived the revolution. In the terror, deputies were expected to show their disdain for those who did not agree with the government. On the other hand, expressions which could be interpreted as feminine – in particular, fear – were universally derided through ridicule. Although constrained within an ideology of virtue, there was a still great degree of choice available to deputies in how they carried themselves and crafted their own image. Those who were the most successful secured a degree of legitimacy which allowed them to shape how people thought and spoke about the revolution. It is in this way that the revolutionaries could 'act' and influence the course of the revolution.

<u>Laughing to Project the Future: The Strategy of Regeneration</u>

This thesis has also shown how laughter was a major strategy in communicating the perceptions of temporality in relation to the revolution. A purpose of this study has sought to show that the differing views in the Convention concerning the progression of the revolution were a defining factor in the factional disputes and determining who to support. The laughter of regeneration can be seen as an attempt by the Girondins to maintain the current state of things, and to resist further upheavals. Since the Girondins held the executive positions and knew the repercussions would be severe if

there were further uprisings, laughter was a strategy to convey the sense that the final regeneration of society had occurred with the declaration of the Republic. Citizens had regained their *gaieté*, the hallmark of a liberated being in harmony with himself and those around him. It was a strategy to consolidate the revolution. The Girondins extolled the infallibility of the law and obedience to it. They laughed when hearing about the miraculous acts of patriotism in France and on the war front – proof that regeneration had been attained.

For the Girondins, the revolution was at an end. For this reason, satire was permissible because it was free from all aristocratic connotations in the Republic, acting as a polite reminder of Republican principles, although it was also a tool to unveil the strategies of the Montagnards in the Convention. In contrast, the Montagnards urged for a total rupture with the past: this involved the elimination of committees founded during the Legislative assembly; the removal of those who defended the king; the establishment of a calendar signalling the inception of a new era; and the expounding of moral instruction. For the Montagnards, satire was proof of the Girondins' counterrevolutionary aspirations.

Both factions used laughter to indicate the progress towards a future utopia. Military victory was the means to bring this closer to realisation for the Girondins. Through laughter, they communicated their belief that the defeat of the tyrants would lead to the people of Europe uniting in their support for the revolution. According to the Mountain, progress could only be achieved with the physical excision of enemies. This ideology was greatly influenced by a tenet of classical republicanism which held that if the revolution suffered setbacks then it was in crisis due to widespread conspiratorial elements. The Montagnards equated progress to the state of the interior. They opposed laughter towards military victories because of their suspicion of generals, as well as their belief that the war distracted from the genuine threats. Robespierre himself ridiculed tyrants and aristocrats, as well as the Girondins, and was focused on the moral teaching of virtue to citizens to advance the progression of the republic. But, when the war turned in France's favour, he discouraged the laughter associated with victory because legislators were to be severe. The policy of the terror could never be ended by the government even though certain quarters urged them to do so because the Jacobins required the strategy of denunciation to justify their authority.

Consequently, there was a cycle in which deputies were expected to either laugh or cry depending on the circumstances, until it was broken on 9 Thermidor.

In a special 'Fall 2009' issue of *French Historical Studies*, entitled "Then and Now", esteemed historians of the French Revolution were invited to discuss the future of revolutionary studies; of the patterns and influences that were predicted to shape the way scholars conduct source analysis and form frameworks and methodologies in relation to the revolution.[1] Unfortunately, in a forum of disparate opinions, the unified consensus was that revolutionary studies are in a 'historical backwater' in terms of a lack of paradigm to pull works together into a central question or theme, and has suffered a 'demotion' in terms of a decline in the interest in the revolution from the mid-1990s onwards because of a fashionable trend in denying it importance in the grand narrative of modernisation and globalization.[2] A study on how expressions were used as a strategy to achieve political aims can contribute to questions surrounding the issue of modernity in the revolution, as well as the vibrant research into emotions in history.

Laughter refuted the past, it policed those in the present, and it indicated the future in its various conceptualisations, depending on the faction which laughed. Studies on emotions in the revolution have analysed the conceptions of self, the collective conscious and subconscious of the revolutionaries, as well as their emotional state based on modern scientific analysis. In this thesis, I have offered a different perspective. The analysis of the expression of laughter has helped gain access to how revolutionaries attempted to legitimise themselves, how they viewed the revolution, and how political culture developed and changed over time. By tracing the strategies the deputies employed, we can see how personal rivalries grew and animosities developed, in addition to how deputies affected the political dynamic of the Convention. Without denying the importance of determinist factors for change, this method of analysis focuses the spotlight on the actual decisions of the revolutionaries, and their direct influence on the course of the revolution.

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[1] *French Historical Studies,* 32, 4 (2009).

[2] On the decline of importance placed on studies of the revolution see the aforementioned issue, and, in particular, Hesse, 'The New Jacobins', 663. Hesse calls the revolution a 'sacrificial victim' to 'cold war politics' and an 'ideological wasteland'. See also, Jones, 'Twenty Years After', 681. Jones notes how doctoral dissertations on the French Revolution have markedly decreased. On 'historical backwaters' see Rosenfeld, 'Thinking about Feeling', 697-706.

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