

LA FIERTÉ DE L'INNOCENCE,
OU
LE SILENCE DU VÉRITABLE PATRIOTISME.

The Pride of Innocence or the Silence of True Patriotism.¹

PEOPLE OF FRANCE, be worthy of the republican principles; it is your turn to listen to the truth; above all cherish it for it alone can serve you and save you.

I lived only as long as I thought it was in my power to support my country and untangle the causes of treason; suddenly my eyes were struck by light; despite its brightness my ideas remained in such a state of confusion that I found it impossible to deliver an opinion! In the meantime I can at present show myself such as I was born, such as I shall die: free! Free, my fellow Citizens, to save my motherland if I can contribute to her protection.

It is a beautiful thing to serve the cause of the people! It is a beautiful thing to die for it! But how dreadful it is to die without the consolation of knowing that one has saved it from the traps laid by all those ill-intentioned people who have led it astray.

You will be aware, Citizens, that I principally devoted myself to averting the storm that a mistaken populace called down upon the French nation; my writings prophesied accurately all that has come to pass.

So much suffering would have been avoided if they had been prepared to listen to me. So much blood would have been spared if I had been taken seriously. And we would be no less republican for it.

Blood, say the ferocious agitators, makes revolutions. Even the blood of the guilty, spilled profusely and cruelly, eternally soils these revolutions. It revolts hearts, spirits and opinions leading to sudden changes from one form of government to another. The history of the Universe offers several examples. The cruelties of the past, those that still threatened us, changed public opinion; good citizens, as well as bad, fled the Capital; most inhabitants, had they dared admit it, desired the approach of foreigners because the barbarity of the interior [France] made that of the enemy seem bearable! That is how we came close to losing our liberty for ever; the ill-intentioned were recognised despite their cloak of patriotism: true liberty and decent equality have regained their sacred rights and the agitators are reduced to silence. What am I saying? They are confounded. If a love of the motherland can reproduce the good intentions of '89 then a primed destiny will support this victory and we will be forever saved; Citizens, do not doubt it, but distance yourselves from these infamous outlaws who pervert mankind and destroy governments. Understand this truth, fully, and see the hideous vision that the cruel agitators have used to soil the French nation: I want to place it once again before your eyes but in a more favourable light, otherwise how else could you bear the horror?

Paris, this queen of cities, mother of the arts and of talent, had become, to travellers and inhabitants, a den of criminals where it was no longer possible to distinguish true patriots from false. The fury of personal interests had overwhelmed the love of public good. People, despite themselves, were dragged into a life of crime; the throats of

¹ Written in September 1792 this pamphlet was de Gouges's response to the appallingly bloody events of the previous weeks; she was one of the few people to publicly exclaim against the use of violence to uphold governmental change. De Gouges, seeing her dream of a moderate revolution destroyed, was determined to attack not only those actually responsible for the massacres but also those who stood aside and let them happen (she herself was away, in the provinces, visiting theatres that might produce her plays).

thousands of citizens were cut with impunity, many may have been guilty....one has to believe it, but Citizens, is the life of a man so worthless in the eyes of humanity that no one deigns to examine why he is being deprived of it?

Russia, so long considered to be a barbarous nation, offers us a great lesson in humanity by relegating its criminals to its uncultivated lands; the French, so naturally humane, were not capable of imitating the compassion and clemency of the Russians!

Alas! When the Constituent Assembly engaged men of letters to research the penal code in order to repeal the death penalty, even for the condemned, did they imagine that after four years of a revolution enlightened by philosophical ideals, the French would, without cease, for three days and three nights, kill their fellow citizens? But it is not French people who have committed such atrocities, it is tigers, enemies of mankind, let loose on us by foreign powers: they used similar methods to try and subjugate us, betray citizens and throw us back into a state of barbarity and slavery. These appalling henchmen inflicted their cruelty on us, but let them tremble! We are not vanquished. Had the French been capable of these crimes you would already see these butchers, prey to remorse, pursued by wandering souls, by weeping widows, by despairing sons demanding blood for which only the Law can be held responsible. I know that my words will draw the assassins' sword down on to my head but this is not the first time I have braved their fury and I will definitely not be circumspect with them when it comes to safeguarding the common good from the enemies that surround it, both within and without. By loyally serving my country, as is my wont, I may be rushing to my downfall but such is the fate of great souls. I know that to serve tyrants when they have triumphed is to chase after fortune and titles but as you, people of France, are aware, and even convinced, I never sought such remuneration. Like Roland, though long before him, I warned Louis XVI of the fate prepared for him by a perfidious court; today I warn my fellow citizens of the secret webs woven by new conspirators.²

People of France, I defended you during the despotism of the 'ancien régime', I saved the indigents from the misery of the great winter, I forced the rich to be generous through my energetic and affecting writings, none of this suffices for I still owe you some salutary advice. Consider that you are republican; consider that this title is enough to allow you one day to forgive the tyrant who held you captive for so long; consider that you will only achieve greatness when you have achieved this first victory. The Romans chased away the Tarquins: you must chase away Louis XVI, distance him from you government for his presence will thwart its prosperity. Ah! How I cursed his arrest at Varennes. Why concern yourselves with Louis XVI, his wife, his children or all the potentates of Europe? Conqueror, you will break the tyrants' sceptres and see them fall from their pedestals just as they disappeared from the Capital thanks only to the inspiration of a woman. How affecting is my sex when it has handled only the symbols of tyranny! But if it handles a dagger or the horrors of death...I can say no more, it horrifies me.

People of France, understand that the most ardent destroyers of royalty were neither patriots nor republicans; they served their own purposes and not your interests. May they tremble! Once your eyes are opened you will demand that the French Senate punish them. What am I saying? Is it for me to speak of vengeance or hatred? If my feeble voice was heard, in the hearts of all citizens, it was to spread calm, clemency and the love of my country. Sensitive author of *Virginie*, brilliant evoker of nature, you persuaded me by your simple and touching conversation that I was an angel of peace: I accept with delight this glorious title; it imposes on me a new duty better suited to my soul and my principles.³

² When Minister of the Interior, in the spring of 1792, Roland (or allegedly Madame Roland) addressed a letter to the King criticising the latter's vetoing of decrees against emigrants and clergy. Its tone was inconsistent with Roland's position so he resigned thus freeing him to read the letter to the Assembly and subsequently printing it for public distribution. It was widely circulated and is thought to have influenced public opinion enough to lead to the King's removal.

³ Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737 - 1814) author of *Paul et Virginie* (1787).

And you, respectable members of the National Convention, Pétion, Condorcet, Vergniaud, Brissot and all those others like yourselves who have only ever embraced the true interests of the motherland, give me my due.

Finally I begin to understand the principles of these celebrated men that I had, for a moment, mistrusted. The patriotism of each has the same aim; it is nuanced, as are all things. During revolutionary eras mistrust and suspicion are natural. True patriots do not accuse each other gratuitously: the wicked condemn everything even virtue. Lacking any proof, imposture becomes a substitute for evidence.

An individual, who I suspect may be an aristocrat, advised me that malicious people had found a way to place my name on the Civil List: truly, I challenge their assertion.⁴ No one, I am sure, will publish my letters, which must have been found at M. de Brissac's, at the princess Lamballe's and at la Porte's, the Administrator of the Civil List.⁵ I have, in my hands, copies and replies therefore I, myself, must make known to the public the kind of rapport I had with a perfidious court. The informants keep silent with regard to me so I will deposit, with my usual haste, all this correspondence in manuscript and get the originals passed to the French Senate.

Fellow citizens, please, please, excuse my style! I employ no literary hack or scribe: I rewrite my works less than any other author. I might be prepared to admit that I am perfect at correcting others yet suffer from a bitter carelessness when it comes to letting all my mistakes get into print. I always dictate with my heart and never with my mind. When I read the proofs of these two addresses I felt that they should be amended to please the critical purists but, as I only serve the motherland, sacred philosophy and the people, what do I care for the rest?⁶

Signed, MARIE-OLYMPE DEGOUGES

The merit of these addresses depended on the spur of the moment: they were delayed at the printers.

⁴ The 'liste civile' covered the expenses of the King and his entourage; being named on it would label de Gouges either as a courtier and aristocrat or as one of the supposed recipients induced by money to influence public opinion in favour of the monarchy (Mirabeau, Barnave and Danton were not averse to such payments). She famously refused an approach by Marie-Antoinette who offered her a modest pension in the summer of 1792. Her view of this encounter, portrayed in her unfinished satirical play of the same year *La France sauvée ou le Tyran détroné* (see www.olympedegouges.eu), was used against her at her trial in 1793; her accusers claimed that only a royalist would consider placing a queen on the stage; de Gouges defended her script as being dramatically accurate: it was not in the interests of her detractors to acknowledge the author's anti-royalist satirical intent.

⁵ Louis Hercule Timoléon de Cossé-Brissac was a politician, a courtier and commander in chief of the King's Constitutional Guard. He was killed with other prisoners in Versailles on 9 September 1792. The princesse de Lamballe, a close friend of Marie-Antoinette, was imprisoned in August and summarily tried in early September. Refusing to swear an oath of hatred to the royal family she was thrown out of the court to a waiting mob who killed her and mutilated her body. Her head was paraded on a pikestaff under the windows of the Temple prison where the royal family were held. Arnaud II de La Porte was Minister of the Marine and Minister of the Royal Household; he fled France in 1789 but returned to serve the King before being arrested and executed for treason against the Revolution in August 1792. All three were involved in responding to a letter sent by de Gouges to Marie-Antoinette in which she asked the Queen to contribute towards the funding of a female cortege at the festival in honour of Simonneau held on 3 June 1792. Within months times had changed and de Gouges clearly feared the publication of letters addressed by her to these proscribed individuals, however innocent their content. In December 1792 de Gouges wrote *Compte moral rendu* (see www.olympedegouges.eu) in which she described her experiences with the Queen's household and published the letters.

⁶ This text was produced as a poster as well as a pamphlet, hence two addresses.