

# L'ORDRE NATIONAL

OU

LE COMTE D'ARTOIS,

INSPIRÉ PAR MENTOR,

DÉDIÉ AUX ÉTATS-GÉNÉRAUX.

1789.

*The National Order or the comte d'Artois inspired by Mentor, dedicated to the Estates General.*<sup>1</sup>

PREFACE.

*Stupete Gentes.*<sup>2</sup>

Freedom of the Press has not yet extinguished the mania for writing; today every Citizen picks up a pen. Do all these writings offer the peace and order that can alone save France from the appalling maelstrom that is sweeping it away?

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1 In this text written shortly after the fall of the Bastille in July 1789 de Gouges expresses her own hopes and fears through the voice of a male writer in the Preface before ventriloquizing Mentor (see below) to address the current political situation. De Gouges quite often used voices other than her own in part because it suited her imaginative process but also to lend weight to arguments that would probably have been deemed risible coming from a woman. She always placed humanity above social hierarchy allowing her to address anyone more powerful than herself as her equal, her own voice clear whether masked or not. Here her lifelong belief in unity and clemency is expressed against a backdrop of fear that the disunity shown by those in positions of authority might lead to a form of civil war backed by foreign powers. At this stage of the revolution she welcomed its promise of equality but feared its excessive violence and believed that a reformed monarchy was the best way forward for a safer more harmonious France.

The work is dedicated to the Estates General both because de Gouges was optimistic that their workings would bring about the much needed transformation of her beleaguered country and in the hope that some deputies might take heed of her views. Many rich and influential people (upon whom the earnings of a great number of Parisians depended) were fleeing the country following 14 July. De Gouges could envisage the deleterious effects of such wealth and power leaving the country. If a royal Prince could be persuaded to return others might follow and be persuaded to participate in the creation of a more equitable society.

The comte d'Artois (1757 - 1836), future King Charles X of France, was one of Louis XVI's younger brothers. He went into exile with his sons on 17 July 1789 after the storming of the Bastille three days earlier. During the revolutionary period he backed the counter-revolutionary forces, becoming ever more reactionary. He reigned from 1824 to 1830. Buried in a monastery outside Gorizia (now in Slovenia) he is the only French king not buried in France. His son and daughter-in-law are also buried there, she was Madame Royale daughter of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette and only survivor of that family's incarceration.

In Homer's *Odyssey* Mentor is an older man and wise friend to Odysseus. He is placed in charge of the hero's household during the Trojan War period with a responsibility to look after Odysseus's young son Telemachus. A French work by François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon imagining Mentor and Telemachus's time together was very popular in the early eighteenth century and introduced the idea of mentoring as we understand it today. Fénelon's interpretation of Mentor's teachings, emphasising the triumph of good over evil through wisdom and solidarity, was seen at the time as a criticism of absolute monarchy. Published without the author's approval the work led to his dismissal as tutor to the royal household but nevertheless it became a famously influential pedagogic work. De Gouges's claim in the title that Louis XVI's recently exiled brother is to be inspired by Mentor is thus more than just a nod to classical Greek literature but adds another layer of meaning when addressing an ultra-royalist prince who believed strongly in the divine right of kings.

2 This can be translated as people, or nations, be amazed; *stupete gentes* is in the first line of a famous hymn by Jean de Santeul (1630 - 1697) and became a catch phrase for any astonishing pronouncement.

This freedom of the Press, that has elated the minds of the enemies of public quiet, seems to steal away good Citizens' means of communicating their salutary thoughts on the well-being of the Motherland. Now the honest and truthful Writer can only tremble when offering their opinions; if they strive to calm elated minds, to disarm furious hearts, their Work is proscribed, and their person is endangered.

What wise course can be taken by a heart beyond reproach, who only had the fated merit to warn fellow Citizens well in advance of the damage done by the Estates General's long debates, and predict more to come?

I will use as my text these Verses from *Tancredi* spoken by Amenaïde:

'In the end injustice leads to independence.'<sup>3</sup>

And independence will in the end produce new abuses more terrible and more damaging to the Motherland than those that have been the bane of France for so many centuries. The Frenchman has fashioned a new character for himself, only retaining from the old one sarcasm and inconsequentiality. In the midst of cruelty he still finds a place for his witticisms. I know that at the moment this genre makes a fortune; notwithstanding my efforts to push it away this French spirit comes, despite myself, and flatters my reason. I beg forgiveness of the beautiful sex, to whom I address a few thoughts at the end of this Preface. No doubt I will not be forgiven for treating it with this old-fashioned frankness, given that nowadays it contributes to keeping minds in a state of ferocity that, until now, was unknown to us.

I must therefore bring mine back to the right path. Unknown Author, weak and feeble animal, your quick-witted genius shines through your virtuous efforts; you only have good ideas, zeal and that is not the talent of the day. Yet I cannot stop myself.

If in general men were good, fair and virtuous, this august revolution would forever be the joy of the French and an example to the Universe.

But can we deny that the conquered Nobility and Clergy's animosity will leave deep scars the effects of which only the conquerors can arrest.

Judging by the arson and number of murders that are being committed in France we would seem to have much to fear, and who can be the authors of such terrible crimes if not brigands?<sup>4</sup> They spread about the countryside, they prowl in Towns. Every moment their numbers increase, some due to temperament, some despair; soon we will be besieged by villains, enemies of the Nobility, the Clergy, the Third Estate and public quiet.

On the other hand could the Princes, furious and in despair at being reduced to fleeing their Motherland, not only seek asylum in order to avoid these excesses but also call upon the sacred bond that unites all Sovereigns and the pact that they have made to mutually help each other in civil wars. Such diverse ills threaten France! And the cause of it all is the same. The brigands ravaging and pillaging the countryside, the villains sowing alarm and horror in the Towns, dividing minds and leading them to revolt they open us up to an expanse of fissures towards which we are running, perhaps without realising it.

Princes, they say, may arrive from all parts at the head of foreign Troops.<sup>5</sup> Let us be wary of fearing such an outcome! French Princes would never deliver up their Motherland, however ungrateful it might be towards them.

I do not know if the fears that I have seen materialise encourage new ones in me today but I only foresee troubles, villainy and the approach of a civil war.

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<sup>3</sup> This line is from Act IV scene 6 of Voltaire's tragedy *Tancredi*, which premiered on 3 September 1760 at the Comédie Française.

<sup>4</sup> What was later termed *La Grande Peur* was underway with country-wide riots and insurrection resulting in arson, looting and murder.

<sup>5</sup> The comte d'Artois was not the only royal to flee, his cousins the princes de Condé and de Conti had left at the same time.

There is only one way to prevent the ills that are so dangerous to the Nation, as simple as it is salutary, as salutary as it is august, and that would be to assiduously occupy oneself in pushing away the brigands, to distance them from the Kingdom and to recall to France the Princes that belong, and are precious, to it.

They are born to defend it, not to attack it and these Princes, recalled by public demand, will joyfully fly back to the place where they were born, that they cherish and love tenderly. Every minute that they pass far from their country, sadly too agitated, feels in their hearts like centuries of torment. Come back, Princes, come back to the places where everything moves you; no longer bring with you the fanaticism of rights, justly destroyed: in this national crisis be the equals of all Citizens, as you are in combat, on the battle field, in the midst of Soldiers. The cannon does not spare you, you do not even avoid it so when reason shows you this same equality for the sake of the State, could you fight it? This fight is merely the effect of a prejudice that is too deeply rooted in the splendour of coats of arms; wisdom's brush has just effaced its prideful character, and today the title of Prince can only be embellished by that of good Citizen and subject obedient to a Monarch who only wishes for the happiness of all his People. Will these People be less well-intentioned and generous than he is? To offer their thanks to him could they resist asking him for Princes, who interest his heart and his nature? What better proof can the French give the Sovereign of their love than to recall within their bosom the brother of their King with his entire Family! This absence agitates his mind and torments his heart. So now it is up to you, generous French, to calm the best of Kings, the most just of men. How long can you leave him to this cruel privation? Would you resist it yourselves? You are, and always will be, French and your Princes will never cease being dear to you. Those are my sentiments, and these principles will not surprise you in any way. I am even bold enough to elaborate them at a time when everything inspires terror towards such a generous project; but by presenting it I am submitting myself to equity's Tribunal. If it is misplaced, it will languish in the shadows; if on the contrary it is useful, it will be esteemed by the public.

As for the National Order, proposed by Mentor, I would wish that Ladies could share in this mark of distinction. Endlessly sharing our pleasures and our pains, why would they not share our rewards? In short, if I did not fear putting forward my opinion, I would prove that they play a great part in the general upheaval. They do so much harm when self-esteem does not excite in them all the virtues! But how much good they would bring about if their self-esteem were piqued, if it were roused, if it were directed towards honour and talent.

Women will then be allowed to claim the national sash when merit and virtue distinguishes them from their sex. If the coquettishness of women has advanced luxury and depravity in the Kingdom, then this vice must be chased out of France like a contagious sickness that can only be uprooted by rewarding virtue. Women's merit will meanwhile be looked at more closely than that of men, especially in Literature. I do not want a boudoir to be the place where an obliging Author offers laurels to a belle when she has done nothing to obtain them. The woman who claims the National Order thanks to her Works will offer authentic proof that she is their only Author.

She who presents a Work worthy of this favour will be examined by four Officers of the Order, chosen for this task.

It must be agreed that Ladies actually have an innate knowledge, or a great influence on divine causes, and that a particular secret between the divinities and the beautiful sex renders women superior to men in aspiration, insight and policy. They have suddenly gathered this advantage without education or depth of knowledge.

An ignorant woman displays traits of enlightenment that are surprising and, bar a few mistakes of spelling and grammar, our wise women masterpieces that have not been perfected by the hands of men.

This rigorous test will only be undertaken as long as the Author is unknown to the public; true merit is not always famous, and in this case the National sash will make known talents often disregarded.

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THE NATIONAL ORDER,  
OR  
THE COMTE D'ARTOIS INSPIRED BY MENTOR,  
DEDICATED TO THE ESTATES GENERAL.

I inspire you, I speak to you, I urge you: recognise my voice, august Prince; glory awaits you amongst the French conspiring against you. Conspiring against you! What wrong has so alienated their love? But do not believe in their oath, rather believe in their generosity. Wandering, and in despair, in the depth of your heart you lament the loss of their friendship; to punish yourself for it you flee the court, you abandon your Motherland and you take from France children who are dear to her and who belong to her.<sup>6</sup>

You cannot control your fate, you cannot distance yourself from France without once again encouraging all minds to be ill-disposed towards you. You must follow me and fly towards your Motherland and soon you will hear an entire People ask for your sons, ask for you too.

But in order to move you with a more impressive picture I want to recall a heart-breaking image of the Court at your departure. See your languishing spouse, overwhelmed by the most terrible of all sorrows. To see you was her sole satisfaction, to embrace her children every minute of the day was her sole joy on earth. Are there any greater ones, any more touching, for a gentle mother? Without anticipating her pain through the loss of such beloved ones you thrust her alive into the most appalling coffin. Death is nothing for those who despair but to live without seeing those we love, that is to die every instant in awful torment. Her situation affects you, alarms you and without consulting me you call her to your side. France, dismayed, sees herself again deprived of a beloved Princess. Your departure astonished everyone, and your destinies are a mystery. I see the Nation pierced by this new loss. I can see it preparing to ask the King for the return of the beloved Princes to the Motherland.

It cannot hide from itself that you were misled: the torch of reason that always guides enlightened men has shown it the truth.

Man's life is a tissue of usurpation, reclamation and restitution. Today this last is only obtained through strength and courage; when the Third Estate becomes all-powerful, and is the victor, can it stop itself offering the vanquished its generosity?

It was always the lot of the victors, and this sentiment was given in preference to the French character. The moment of vengeance does not allow for august reflection but be persuaded, Prince, that the nuances of equity are actually there for all to see.

The Nobility's project was violent; it is actually considered to be a most atrocious attack; the plan, it is said, was that all the inhabitants of the capital should perish; this plan is too absurd for any wise person to believe it: it would be to arm oneself against oneself but you were shown the danger facing the Motherland, you were persuaded that she could only be saved by strength and violence, that the support of troops and cannons had to be used to besiege Paris, and that through fear and terror spirits would be calmed without spilling one drop of blood.

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<sup>6</sup> The comte d'Artois left France with his two young sons (his two daughters had died in infancy), his wife followed him a week or so later. The author herself is thought to have lost a daughter in infancy which may explain the depth of her response to the comtesse d'Artois's situation when her family fled without her.

A project as odious as it was ill-conceived! You thought you could use arms to save that which you could win through gentleness and clemency. You promised everything, the moment was urgent, this stormy moment was described to you as dangerous, and you thought to save all the French by presenting them with cannons and arms.

These enterprises often succeeded in the times when Peoples were submissive, not only to their Sovereign but also to the lowliest gentleman. Times have changed, so have manners. A ferocity unknown until now to the French has become, today, their passion; in order to change it, change your own haughty character to sentiments that are more moderate towards your fellow citizens; it is not the enemy that you are fighting, it is your brothers who hold out their arms to you and call you to their bosom.

Your childhood is always present in their minds; from the most tender age you displayed a firm and decided character, martial and generous. Will it be less so when wisdom speaks to you!

Reflect that courage must give way when strength holds sway, that bravery is imprudent when it is not guided by clemency at times like these.

What do the French desire? The prosperity of the State, the authority of the King affirmed for the general good, the welfare of the Motherland and the consolation of the People. You form the same wishes but you express them in too strong a manner; your soul is ardent, proud and bellicose, and the use to which you put your very precious gifts has unfairly drawn upon you the public's hatred.

But if just one day has caused you to lose its love, just one will suffice to recover it; you cannot win it back at the point of a sword, you will only obtain it through generosity and moderation; these virtues are worthy of your courage, if today wisdom does not displease you. What am I saying? Displease you! You expected me, you called me to aid you and divine providence has allowed a new ray of light to penetrate your heart. These painful circumstances, these stormy revolutions, give you the experience of a long life, but meanwhile who can condemn you without respecting you?

The duc d'Orléans has immortalised himself by taking an interest in the strongest party; do you think, Prince, that you will be less admired when dependable history teaches posterity that being unwavering in your defence of the most feeble party, you only yielded in the name of the Motherland and the public good?<sup>7</sup>

And you, the French, who appreciate the value of good actions when reason enlightens you, could you refuse to offer your respect and veneration to a Prince who has shown himself to be the defender of the rights of all gentlemen attacked from all sides? This authentic truth should draw the attention of the Estates General. But what am I saying? The spirit of dissension slips into their assembly every day. If patriotism's last effort does not save them from the precipice opened up by the reunion of a few demons, who far from bringing the three Orders together burden it with horror and fear, all is lost and the National chamber will become the myth of Europe and the opprobrium of its country. I cannot, Frenchmen, hide from you that you may have misused the advantages that you owed to the goodness of your Sovereign; your fury rains down troubles on the head of the Motherland unknown until now, but learn to respect a Prince who alone has shown tenacity and courage. How invaluable will this courage be to you one day, when you are more just towards him? You will say to yourselves: 'Let the enemy advance for we have an intrepid hero in the brother of our King.' And the misled French could have put a price on such a precious head! No, I cannot believe it, they are incapable of such cowardice.

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<sup>7</sup> Louis XVI's cousin the duc d'Orléans, originally chosen to represent the nobility (Second Estate) when the Estates General met was one of the first of their party to join the people's Third Estate, attempting to create a unified group of deputies fit to rule. At the time of de Gouges's writing she still saw this as a positive gesture of solidarity, later his ulterior motives made her question her original views. In this context the 'strongest party' represents the people, the 'weakest' the nobility.

Danger did not frighten him, the loss of the Kingdom was his only concern; like his ancestor, that Henri so dear to France, who distanced himself from the walls of Paris rather than expose it to the horrors of a city stormed, who knew how to be in command of all sentiments, even religious ones.<sup>8</sup>

Today I influence all minds; Parisians, without anger, without cruelty, are assembling and forming themselves into numerous battalions; the confounded brigands lower their heads and dare not show themselves; love of the Motherland, honour alone, now guides all the French; the sight of a cannon can not horrify them; every citizen is safe in his house; the police have become Soldiers, without Commissioners and the French have shielded themselves from the enemies to the Motherland; woe betide anyone who behaves despicably.<sup>9</sup>

Titles are no longer bought, they must be the reward of virtue and talent. Everything appears to be favourable but Prince, think how the French are incapable of living with this independence, that soon individual claims will disunite them, that several parties will arise, that the French are born to be dependent on the laws of a good King, that honour speaks to them at this moment, but that disorder, villainy and ferocity can follow on from these honourable principles: you alone can now prevent their effects.

The signal has been given, all good French people will appear with a ribbon. This ribbon will soon be the link that will unite the French to the comte d'Artois. And you, Prince, adorn your hat with this ribbon, ask the King to create a national order, and furthermore ask to be named its Grand Master. This memorable action will not only bring all hearts back to you, but you will be creating a new form of emulation, you will encourage every virtue of the lower classes.

The Nation will place into your hands these randomly picked ribbons which will be converted into its own Order that in future will only be distributed by you.

It will said one day that the comte d'Artois alone courageously supported the Nobility, but the Nobility gave itself up and this Prince himself became part of the Third Estate, so much did love of the Motherland swiftly inflame all hearts.

There, Prince, is the means that Mentor offers you today with which you can alone regain the respect, the friendship and the esteem of all the French. Your return to France will offer you all these advantages: give your character renewed vigour and remember that the Grand Condé only dimmed his glory by one false step.<sup>10</sup> This precious name is no less cherished by the French; courage and bravery are hereditary in your house. Be convinced that the French have not lost from sight so much greatness and heroism, that they are convinced that these same Princes would endanger their own lives on the battle field to defend the Motherland, that the fallen Soldier can only revive himself by the example of these Warriors. The French are sure of it but they have a right to claim that honour and merit will make them worthy in future to approach these Heroes. And you, Prince, who

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8 De Gouges is referring to Henri IV (King of France from 1589 to 1610) whose cult of 'good king' was particularly celebrated in the eighteenth century. King of France but lacking a capital, Paris being in the hands of his enemies, a Catholic League, Henri attempted to take the city by force in November 1589. This attempt failed so he withdrew to gather his forces and tried again between May and August 1590, again resulting in failure. The Protestant Henri converted to Catholicism in December 1594 and was accepted as the rightful consecrated King gaining Paris by consent.

9 A National Guard was formed in Paris on 15 July 1789 led by La Fayette. In October 1791 participation in this militia became mandatory across the country for voters and their adult sons.

10 Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, duc d'Enghien (1621 - 1686) was known as le Grand Condé thanks to his fearless glittering military career. A well-read unorthodox man who claimed to be an atheist while remaining true to his Jesuit upbringing knew both highs and lows as his arrogance allied to his brilliance often led him to challenge the King's and the state's authority. He briefly rebelled against Louis XIV, leading the *Fronde des nobles*, was arrested, imprisoned, released, fought again, was defeated and fled to Spain in 1652. He was eventually pardoned by the King and returned to France in 1659 and never took up arms again instead supporting many of the free-thinkers and writers of his time. There is surely a trace of irony in de Gouges offering the Grand Condé as a role model to the famously conservative ultra-royalist Artois.

amazes all minds by a constancy so rare, do not fear yielding when all Gentlemen are themselves yielding; this courage would seem to be hard and unjust if you were to keep it to yourself at this time. Could you yourself refuse to join with your brothers, friends and fellow citizens? Remember that your return will be valuable to the Motherland, and that you will be cherished as a Hero, always ready to defend it. This moment is urgent, the time is favourable; announce your arrival and all the people will flock to see you on your route: add to this the National Order and this creation will immortalize you. With this conduct, leaving nothing to desire on your part, I will follow your steps on the battle field as in the council chamber. Mentor will accompany you everywhere, and with me you will be seen by the Universe to be a second Telemachus.