

**PRONOSTIC**  
SUR  
MAXIMILIEN ROBESPIERRE,  
PAR UN ANIMAL AMPHIBIE.

PORTRAIT EXACT DE CET ANIMAL.

Prognostic of Maximilien Robespierre, by an Amphibious Animal.<sup>1</sup>  
A Precise Portrait of this Animal.<sup>2</sup>

I am an animal without equal; I am neither man nor woman. I have all the courage of one and sometimes the weaknesses of the other. I am filled with love for my neighbour and bear a grudge only against myself. I am proud, simple, loyal and sensitive.

In my discourse can be found all the virtues of equality; my physiognomy has all the traits of liberty; and my name has something of the celestial about it.

Based on this portrait, which is neither finished nor flattering, I can be taken at my word. Hearken, Robespierre, it is you I will address; listen to this judgement and suffer the truth.

You say you are the only author of the Revolution, you were not, you are not and you will eternally be only its execration and opprobrium.<sup>3</sup> I will not exhaust myself describing you; I am going to characterise you in a few words: your breath is poisoning the pure air that we breathe; your vacillating eyelid expresses, despite yourself, all the ignominy of your soul and each hair on your head carries a crime.

You tell us of your virtues, and still the author of all virtues fails to thunder when your impious mouth dares to utter this sacred word! Whatever awful atheism lurks in your heart you will know him when his invisible hand aims his lightening at your guilty head.

Robespierre, when the French Senate summoned you to answer all the denunciations that were accumulating against you, tell us, why did you waiver? Innocence does not temporise when it can floor calumny: imposture, on the other hand, always seeks subterfuges. You have taken a week to prepare your speech for today's response. I would have preceded you but I wanted to see the proficiency of your latest efforts; they are weak. The French people, having become Republican, will not become assassins. You wanted your answer to be bloody insurrection. Although Paris seems agitated today, what will you be able to say to the Tribune to justify yourself. Believe me Robespierre, you must flee the light of day, it is not meant for you; imitate Marat, your worthy colleague, go and shelter with him in his infamous den. Heaven and mankind are in agreement; you must both be annihilated. What do you want? What do you demand? What are you avenging? Who do you want to fight, and whose blood do you still thirst for? That of the people; it has yet to

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<sup>1</sup> In 18th century French 'amphibie' meant both amphibious and neuter; although I have used 'amphibious' in the title for its euphonic value 'neuter' is a better description of an animal that is neither man nor woman.

<sup>2</sup> First published as a red poster on 5 November 1792 this text was later appended to the text of another poster, *Réponse à la justification de Maximilien Robespierre*, and published in the form of a pamphlet. On 28 October 1792 Louvet, a Girondin, had accused Robespierre of seeking to rule France as a dictatorship. The accusation made a huge impression and Robespierre was obliged to reply, he chose to do so on the 5 November. This momentous event inspired the ever courageous de Gouges to plaster the walls of Paris with her highly visible diatribe a few hours before Robespierre delivered his speech; characteristically her accusations, only too accurate, were a year ahead of their time.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the text de Gouges addresses Robespierre using the familiar 'tu' rather than the formal 'vous'. In the autumn of 1792 'tu' began to represent the egalitarian ideals enshrined in the Rights of Man, its use marking the advent of citizenship in what had been a population of subjects. Generally only used to address children and servants it was a significant change of usage. The plosive effect of 'tu' fits well with the invective anger of de Gouges's tirade.

flow. You know that republican Laws are more severe than the Laws of the tyrants whose authority you want to equal along with their audacious crimes.

Whosoever dares to infringe these laws is punished by death. Knowing the strength of this Government you would encourage the masses to overturn it in its infancy; you want to soil the nation by coalescing as yet undreamt of crimes; you want to assassinate the last Louis to prevent him being judged legally; you want to assassinate Pétion, Vergniaud, Condorcet, Louvet, Brissot, Lasource, Gaudet, Gensonné, Hérault-Séychele, in a word all the lights of the republic and of patriotism!<sup>4</sup> You want to slash your path through heaps of corpses and use murder and assassination as rungs to rise to the highest rank! Gross and vile conspirator! Your sceptre will be the mark of the rack; your throne will be the scaffold; your punishment will be that accorded to the guiltiest men.<sup>5</sup> Mend your ways if it is not too late.

I withhold my name for such is my design: but I will divulge it when my hand is armed.

I throw down the gauntlet of civic duty; have you the courage to pick it up?

Trace on this Poster the day, the hour and the place of combat; I will be there!

And you, people of Paris for whom I principally picked up my pen, look carefully at this poster, dictated in haste by an irreproachable heart and a republican soul.

The French Republic owes you its existence; defend your creation and be very wary of yielding, for one moment, to the instigations of criminals. These perverse men, whose specious masks I have just broken, will put you back in irons if you weaken.

The worst fate will befall your Freedom, you will fall under the yoke of the Despots and all the Départements of the Republic will break their alliances with you. Paris will become solely an arid region of Cannibals. People will come from all parts to shoot the inhabitants as though they were wild beasts.

The Capital, that queen of Cities, will offer voyagers only ruins and pyramids made of ashes! If your hands bathe in the blood of innocents; if you disregard the instruments of National sovereignty and law; if you are not worthy of republican virtues then Marat and Robespierre will lead you from murder to murder and you will die with these infamous agitators. Our triumphant Armies themselves will come and destroy a mass of assassins; no more peace, no more hope, wretched people, if you once sully the Republic! I will tell you more, to carry you to the heights of a great people, he who reigned from father to son, may merit death: but subsequent to his arrest it may appeal to your dignity to offer him clemency. The English made their king mount the scaffold but they were not Republicans. Appreciate therefore that this title is enough to render you virtuous in a way that slaves never can be. Slavery showed you the path of freedom; freedom will lead you towards all the republican virtues: yet understand that in order to exercise these virtues correctly you have to submit yourselves to terrific laws. If you fear their austerity then open the prison holding your past tyrant or enthrone Robespierre.

Republican People, understand me more profoundly, I condemn all the excesses of misguided patriotism. Each one of us must be responsible for public security; none of us can permit ourselves acts of violence that would represent the fury of vengeance rather than love for the motherland. Without a doubt Robespierre and Marat, for the most part, have covered themselves with opprobrium but their lives are sacred and, if they are truly guilty, it is only the Law that can decide their fate. The national convention must lead by example and stifle its own resentment as a sign of republican impartiality. In a word, it must punish all those who would incite the murder of these senseless agitators who, to sate their own vengeance, wanted perhaps to light the flames of civil war and swell their own ranks by spreading rumours that the patriots themselves were the actual assassins.

<sup>4</sup> De Gouges was prescient for of those named only Louvet survived the Terror.

<sup>5</sup> The original 'ton sceptre sera la fleur-de-lys de la peine de Gêne' literally translates as 'Your sceptre will be the fleur-de-lys of the pain of Genoa'. 'Fleurdeliser' meant 'to brand' as well as decorate with fleurs-de-lys and 'Gêne' was a euphemism for the rack (presumably because that particular city was famed for its torture).

Oh my fellow citizens! Let us beat back this scourge. I have spoken; choose; Pandora's box is open.

*Signed* POLYME.  
On 5 November 1792.<sup>6</sup>

The cowardly assassins suggest that a feigned stupor took hold of my senses and that I could never be found at home. They had planned, therefore, to cut my throat. Indeed! I will rob them of this pleasure for as long as it is within my power not because, like those cowards, I fear death but because, in my turn, I want the pleasure of seeing them come to an end of their crimes. Meanwhile let them understand that I do not take flight; that I do not run away from their daggers. All I wish is to put the finishing touches to my Drama, deposit the manuscript into the bosom of the national Convention, and die blamelessly like Bayard, without fear.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Of the two versions of this text only one has the endnote and date included.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Terrail Seigneur de Bayard (1473 - 1524) was a soldier known as 'le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche' (a blameless knight who knew no fear); he was considered the epitome of chivalric heroism.