

## SERA-T-IL ROI, NE LE SERA-T-IL PAS ?

Will He, or Will He Not, Be King? <sup>1</sup>

Hippocrates says yes, Galen says no.<sup>2</sup>

*WILL WE ACCEPT a Republican Government, will we replace the King on the Throne, or will we name a Regent? Opinions are divided and these three Parties rush headlong; the fourth, only wanting the good of the Motherland has no voice and finds itself the weakest: it wavers between the three choices but believes the wisest one is that of mediation. The best system has not yet appeared: only the one that I will present to our Legislators can ensure an imperturbable well-being. We find ourselves in painful circumstances; I believe it [my system] is necessary, and indispensable, and I am proud to make it known:*

GENTLEMEN,

It seems to me that no idea has yet been made known to you in keeping with the wisdom you wish to embrace concerning the essential affair that agitates France and interests Europe.

I am not *M. Brissot de Varville*, I am merely a simple woman Citizen of no consequence but of irreproachable patriotism. <sup>3</sup>

If you want the trust that belongs to a great Nation to be given back to the King then it is vital that the Monarch recognises the source of the vice that has spoilt his heart and mind. I cannot dissimulate my opinion and I would still hold to it even if it were to be condemned by the three opposed Parties. I have reason on my side and the interests of my endangered Motherland; boldly, I will defend it, in front of everyone: I am a Royalist, yes Gentlemen, but a Patriotic Royalist, a Constitutional Royalist, and when I sensed the danger to the King, from these three Parties, and [wrote] in my *Séance Royale* that he should resign his Crown I saw the two factions rise up against me, against my works, crying out 'what delirium', 'what madness', 'what audacity'. Such was my spirit and foresight! So, Gentlemen, you neither decreed, nor were capable of foreseeing, who you would choose as Regent to the heir presumptive; if you had, the Nation, in its wisdom, would have made a choice worthy of itself. The King, abandoning the reins of State power and putting himself beyond the reach of enticements, would have confounded the enemies of the Motherland, and elevated himself beyond the Throne; the Nation, touched by this gesture, would have given the Monarch the indispensable power required of a King of France.<sup>4</sup>

Poor King! What has become of you? What have you done?

The lowest citizen was more master of himself than you. Continual vexations may well have led you to lose the equilibrium of your virtue, so long sustained through storms and factions, but your action is one of a hypocrite or liar. If I judge you as a King

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<sup>1</sup> The flight of the royal family on 20 June 1791 gave rise to much soul searching. This pamphlet written at the end of June and distributed in early July draws attention to the malevolence she thought was at the heart of the duc d'Orleans behaviour; she believed he was seeking to place himself at the heart of power by unseating others. Fearing discord and violence she begs for the rule of law to be obeyed and the Constitution to be upheld. This wide-ranging work covers the role of women in society and her project for a female National Guard.

<sup>2</sup> Hippocrates, the famous ancient Greek physician, and Galen, a later Roman physician, seem to represent the old and the new.

<sup>3</sup> Brissot, influential at this moment, was one of the first to call for the downfall of the king on his return from Varennes.

<sup>4</sup> Olympe de Gouges is arguing the case for a French constitutional monarchy with the king as a figurehead of a state where the legislative powers are separated from the monarch.

accountable to the Nation then your departure was a crime; if I judge you as a man who has been seduced, you were unable to withstand the perfidious poison. Who is the man who can say I will never once err in my life? But objections will be raised, a King should never err. Truly, to condemn is easy ... but to be perfect? Never has mankind shown so little perfection than in this time of enlightenment and philosophy. Gentlemen, do not think that my aim is to justify the King: I am not a *Brissot de Varville*, I do not waver in my opinion, something that seems to be becoming generally acceptable at a time when discord creates hotheads and subjugates reason. I nonetheless condemn the actions of the King, it is appalling in all its secrecy, and washing my hands of it I had promised myself to keep quiet about this affair but how can I remain silent when I see my Motherland overturned, allegedly to save her.

Take a close look at the projects put forward by the three Parties, and on the efforts of the emigrants united with the foreign Powers, and pronounce without shuddering, if you can, on the fate of the King. I pity you, true friends of the public good, for our cruellest enemies surround us on all sides. This is how I will utter the truth even though I may become one of its chief victims: my genius is ordinary, my talent is mediocre but I saw, long ago, how things would be; one day perhaps, with my works in their hands, people will cite my prophecies. May my final observations disarm the unkind and convince the fair-minded! My writing related to the King, let me take it up again.

If a true Patriotic Party in the National Assembly can get the better of the troublemakers then it must name a Deputation of its Members and make it responsible for proposing what follows to the King:

Sire, it took only a day for your People to bestow their love upon you; that day was the one of your accession to the Throne. This love has been sustained for sixteen years. You received unequivocal proof of this at a time when, surrounded by a dissolute court, there resounded, even through your Palace, the despair and the general discontent of the French; you learnt from this that the power of a King is nothing if it is not the product of a higher power, one sustained by the confidence of the People.

Throughout the storm the French have respected their King, I'll say more, they have adored him anew. It is true that the seditious created some, inevitable, hostility, those unavoidable consequences of great revolutions; the majority of the Kingdom was devoted to you, tied to you with indissoluble bonds, yet instigators of the darkest action encouraged you to break them. One day sufficed for you to lose this love, it was the day you left. But trust, Sire, that this love is not altogether extinguished in all hearts if, by reclaiming your virtue, you can guarantee the purity of your intentions. Now is the time for solemn proof: the circumstances, the events, are guiding men who are changing Governments according to their lights; you must submit to these laws that are stronger than empty prejudice, you must change the spirit of your Court, totally reform your Household, as well as that of the Queen, of Madame Royale, of Madame Elizabeth and regenerate, like the Constitution, this gangrenous Court by putting erstwhile Noble Patriots and men and women Citizens, equally known for their patriotism, in place of the Aristocrats.

This change on your part, Sire, would assure the return of the French who could no longer doubt that you had been misled; this is the wish of the Assembly which has no other concerns than those of the Motherland, the French Monarchy, the achievement of the Constitution and ensuring the happiness of the People. This, Gentlemen, is the only favourable method left that you have not already tried. You must therefore unite the executive and the legislative Powers, the King and the People; there must be no more intermediaries between these two Authorities. This is the principle of the Constitution, it must be your dearest wish: never will any mediation be so memorable and, at last, so worthy of the French Legislators. Those who no longer want a Monarchy and who, obviously, tend towards a Republic see the behaviour of the King as a hostile act that

should not go unpunished; I wonder if the events of October 6<sup>th</sup> were not also hostilities and whether people cried out in equal measure when this affair was forgotten.<sup>5</sup>

I repeat, Gentlemen, that the two opposing parties will resist mediation: one will lose the Benefices and the Bishoprics that it is still chasing – one might as well say to it *and hogs may fly*; the other, which has only just made gains through its patriotism is afraid of losing them today and so detests anything that resembles Monarchy.<sup>6</sup> Thus do passion and personal interests endlessly undermine the public good; this is how one pretends, loyally, to serve one's country and when I consider where true patriotism exists. Alas! I can find it only in the hands of the Poor, the indigent, whom the seditious have been unable to unite or corrupt. I cry out, like Molière, *this, then, is where virtue dwells?*<sup>7</sup> Yes, Gentlemen, real patriotism only exists amongst the *good folk*, they who carry the burden of their poverty, of their hardship, with steadfastness; they have faith in you and say: *we suffer but the Legislators of France promise us happier times, happier times!* Ah, Gentlemen, I am not afraid, yet I worry about hazarding an opinion, even one which confronts the wicked; if only I could inspire them to share my disinterestedness and my love of order! Then, in no time, there would be only one opinion; it would restore, I audaciously hope, all the fugitives to their homes; they would no longer carry all their luxury and wealth to foreign parts but, recalled by a general amnesty, they would give themselves up to reason and philosophy, to Nature in fact. But, Gentlemen, if you are obliged to name a Regent, and that his right ... great God what Regent! ... I can say no more ...

Making the National Assembly suspect in the minds of the People was all that was needed to upset the Kingdom; this absurd list of seduced Deputies that they dare peddle all over Paris shows the names of the most ardent Patriots and is an obvious first step towards dissolution.<sup>8</sup> Lameth, Chapelier, Barnave, Rabaud [sic] de Saint-Etienne, etc., are now the butt of the People's fury. Eh! In what country will enlightened men dare take up the noble defence of the People if they see the French example! And this People, led astray in their judgement, have no idea who set them off. Execrable Palais-Royal, may the disenchanted People one day reduce you to ashes! You will not escape its revenge. You make them ungrateful, unjust towards those who support them, you justify the opinions of the Aristocrats [who think] that the People are born to be in chains, but it will not be: they will be free and just. If they were ever to fall under your rule the heaviest irons would be their share, it is a given. So you want to spark a civil war at home, how can we parry the one abroad? Here is the brigands' plot. Eh! The blood of the People, used to fulfil their guilty designs, would redden the surface of France. French People, recognise the voice of truth, I have used up all my money on your behalf and the difficult position I am in is a sure guarantee that I have remained uncorrupted.

They talk of a feeble King, of a King lacking in character. At least he only made one false move and his virtues are well known; I do not want to make any comparisons, the proof is apparent to all. If you name a Regent let him be worthy of the public's esteem then you will have been consistent in your principles: let the factious of either party blame or endorse me, such is my opinion. We are dealing with your Constitution not a Republic: no more King, no more Constitution, and then we fall back into chaos, into the dark of new abuses, of anarchy without end, of a Government without principles, without basis and fanatics dictating laws in the streets and public parks. I can see already the frenzied pen-

5 Presumably a reference to 6 October 1789 when crowds invaded Versailles and forced the King and his family to leave for Paris.

6 The original text 'va-t-en voir s'ils viennent Jean, va-t-en voir s'ils viennent' comes from a popular song and means that an event is very unlikely to happen. The English version I have used is thought to date from the mid 17th century.

7 In his *Life of Molière* Voltaire recounts that the playwright gave a beggar a gold coin, the beggar returned it assuming it to have been a mistake, Molière replied: 'Où la vertu va-t-elle se nicher'. De Gouges uses 'loger' in place of 'nicher' which alters the tone more than the sense, 'nicher' being more familiar.

8 Olympe de Gouges believed that the duc d'Orléans was seeking to bring down the Assembly by publicising a list of deputies allegedly corrupted by the court.

pushers distributing amongst themselves the appointments and the debris of the French Monarchy; France will not be like Poland, a cake shared out by Kings, but a cake shared by the vilest Citizens. Yet, if I saw the question discussed with decency and wisdom, if I felt there reigned a feeling of genuine disinterestedness then, more than anyone, I would ask for a Republic for I was born with a genuinely republican character. However, in general, the spirit of the French Government demands a Monarchy, to destroy this spirit would ruin the Kingdom and the Citizens. This is what my limited knowledge has led me to believe, as opposed to my partiality, which I have surrendered for the good of my Motherland; if I could leave I would go to Switzerland; I would go and live in a place where man is equal and perfectly tranquil but the ties of nature bind me to my home where I never find man as he should be or as you have depicted him according to the principles of the new Constitution. This Constitution is now in danger. What! Can such a precious work, a source of enlightenment that became the guiding light of the world, snuff itself out lighting the torches of discord? No, Gentlemen, such a masterpiece must never perish.

Despotism, through these Republican and Regency Parties, still dangles its bait in front of you: be wary of everyone, listen only to the voice of your own consciences, show an attentive and astonished Europe, through your unshakeable strength, that the Representatives of a Nation that will forever be a model to all Peoples have been able to simultaneously disarm the thunder of the destructive Parties, give the Monarch back his Crown and his freedom and force the tyrants and despots to recognise that the true supporters of the Motherland are neither their flatterers nor their assassins.

It is with these beliefs, Gentlemen, that a woman dares rise up to your level; I will say more, I disapprove of your Committees' projects, undoubtedly they would be useful if the Constitution were to be achieved, but can they guarantee that it will exist in six months? You are throwing all of France into a dreadful state of indecision. Will the King approve of the Constitution or will he not? Must he be left in prison for the time being, turning all of Europe against our true principles? A party of whatever hue must be chosen and the fate of the King decided. These are the conclusions I have reached, drawn from public opinion. As for public affairs, they are still in a deplorable state: commerce, recently revived, has experienced yet another setback, payments are no longer forthcoming; dishonest men profit from these circumstances and honest men become scoundrels; the Tribunals are without energy and the Magistrates are even more susceptible to bribery than under the ancien régime. I have heard three anecdotes, worthy of inclusion. An individual places a deposit into the hands of a man respected for his probity; the person wishes to retrieve their deposit, the depository pretends to have invested the money and maintains, to the depositor, that he has no right to retrieve it; a Justice of the Peace is sought who pronounces against the depositor; the depository leaves the next day taking with him the original deposit; however the Society is still there, can it not be forced to pay back this debt of honour? The second and the third are more interesting although on another subject and merit being broadcast publicly. The first gave me an idea for a Play in five acts, entitled *The Divorce*, that I envisaged for the Italian Theatre where I have been registered for a reading for three months but I was waiting for the result of the Decree; despite its delay I will nonetheless perform my play.<sup>9</sup>

A young woman and a young man were brought up together; since childhood they had felt a tenderness towards each other that age had only strengthened making any parental attempts to separate the two hearts that Nature intended for each other quite useless.

The young woman was orphaned at fifteen so the young man eloped with her and they went to live in a place where hearts were free from persecution. They had several

<sup>9</sup> A secular law in favour of divorce was finally decreed on 20 September 1792 by the National Assembly and modified in 1793 and 1794. It was revoked in 1816 during the Restoration and not brought back until 1844 though divorce by mutual consent was not fully re-established in France until 1975. Olympe de Gouges's play *La Nécessité du divorce ou le Divorce*, written, and due to appear in 1791, was never staged.

children then poverty obliged the young man to return to France where he threw himself at his father's feet along with his companion and their children. This inexorable father, sure of his powers under the ancien régime, dictated his terms, made the unfortunate young woman endorse them so that she was obliged, herself, to beg her lover to marry a rich heiress chosen by his parent. He told her that her children's welfare depended upon this sacrifice. She obeyed and these were the consequences: she retired to a humble hamlet with a small pension from the father; the unhappy young man, doubly forced by nature, united himself to the woman his father had given him. He swore to be a blameless husband and he kept his word; but his wife, born with lascivious passions, took less than six months to show him how foolish he had been to separate himself from a most estimable woman. Despite pointing out to her the virtues of decency and good manners, and the dangers of prejudice, she became even more disorderly; by going as far as to give herself to her valets she led her husband to part with her, but only in private. She became pregnant: the husband, convinced that the child was not his due to the length of their separation, spoke to her philosophically a few days before the birth: 'Madame, everyone knows our intimacy is ending, you yourself know how things stand between us. I am fair, let us at least be reasonable with each other; you were not able to hide your tendencies and you knew of the liaison I had before we met. I had children with the most respectable woman, I was born to be with her: I lament her fate. Soon you will be a mother; let us agree to use our fortune well so that our children are not victimised by our mistakes. I am richer than you; let us divide our wealth equally by signing a contract before a lawyer that will state this august truth'.

This thoughtful intervention should have disarmed the ambitious and culpable woman but the answer she gave her husband was so outrageous that his rationality could not keep him from falling ill; the violence of his emotions gave rise to pneumonia, and three days later, without ever regaining his senses, he was in his tomb. The unreasonable father was also dead. There was no more hope for the unfortunate victim and her two unhappy children, still of this world with two legitimate offspring while the legitimate spouse gave birth to a bastard successor. Such is marriage with its appalling prejudices; would I spare it! Under the new order, the companion consulted a Justice of the Peace who cruelly sent her back to the Law. Who will take up the case of this unfortunate woman? An entire people, I hope.

Here is the third, more recent, anecdote of the same type but much worse for it characterises at one and the same time the bad faith and the dishonesty of a man who has long hidden behind the specious mask of probity: the present circumstances have unmasked him.<sup>10</sup> This man, I will not name him, is in charge of a business, he had the ear of the ministerial Committees under the ancien régime and the so-called patriots of the new: he will read these words and if he does not take the wisest and fairest course to halt this situation then I will not spare him. I hate villains and men of little faith, especially when they abuse the public goodwill. This man is an old bachelor, fifty-five or fifty-six years old. He was forty when he met a young eighteen year old widow who had been sacrificed to a man she loathed. The marriage was not a happy one and the widow was soon comforted with regard to the loss of her husband. Nature had blessed her with many advantages but had deprived her of any means. Whatever treasures were offered to her, only tender sentiments could seduce her heart; she conceived violent feelings for the man I have mentioned, she was equal to him in birth if a respectable family counts for anything, but she fled from hymen and anything that resembled conjugal ties. She therefore lived quietly, full of reserve and decency, with this man as with a husband when in private, or as a gentleman when in public.

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<sup>10</sup> It would seem that Olympe de Gouges is referring to her erstwhile companion Jacques Biétrix de la Rozière and their relationship.

She became a mother; this man was wealthy, he felt authorised to guarantee his child an income, payable to the mother. This liaison was ruptured and renewed several times. It lasted about seventeen years. A second infant led the man to create new measures for the mother and child ensuring their long-term security. He agreed to buy assets or to advantageously invest forty thousand francs and to deliver the invested funds at a fixed time. This time arrived during the Revolution. The woman had committed herself, entirely confident that she could count on the validity of these titles, on her rights and on the conscience and feelings of the one in whom she had put her trust. She now sees herself in danger of being totally bankrupted and, at present, the unkind man is putting forward objections that he would not have dared cite during the ancien régime although this kind of agreement was condemned by its iniquitous laws.<sup>11</sup> The way in which he created his bond would thus have been held against him; would the facts, in truth, not condemn him today to an eternal opprobrium? At a time when Nature has reclaimed all her rights, at a time when philosophy guides mankind, what is this infamous man doing? Abusing the decency and sensitivity of this woman who, with a sense of foreboding, fears making herself known, he takes hold of the receipts and falsifies them in such a gross manner that even the least clairvoyant sees the swindle. They go in front of a Justice of the Peace and at the present time the affair is in his hands. This Justice of the Peace is a perfectly honest man, or is he? I cannot yet rightly say. He is a friend of the dishonest man and the, supposed, advice that he has given him is not that of a Justice of the Peace. If this affair is heard in public I will think better of the Magistrate, however for now it would be imprudent to vouch an opinion. But I have bad presentiments regarding all these Justices of the Peace, I can see a partiality that may create many more unhappy people than that which made Themis blush.<sup>12</sup>

Gentlemen, here is a digression longer than I had promised myself on the important question that concerns you at the moment. I will write a new but more amusing version for one must always end in the style of the French spirit. Women want to amount to something and whatever the effeminate men may say, when courage and energy are required, these men will not be in the lead: the revolution guarantees it and these anecdotes that I have placed in front of your eyes, which will affect your hearts even more, only show you how much more there is to do to help this wretched sex. Would you put this work off until there is a new Legislature when women contributed as much as you to the revolution: they were not disdained then, they were admitted to the Citizenry when the walls of the Bastille crumbled. It is on these ruins that I want to go and form a legion of women and show them the path to glory, telling them that men have only left us shameful ways to pursue a living, risking our honour and our vulnerability, while they can pursue great careers. Should these only be open to them? What an absurd prejudice; from it comes all the vice and corruption of Society and Government! I consider a well-born woman to be one who is blessed with a virtuous soul and heart and a well brought-up woman to be one who has received a good education: a well-born woman without a fortune, is deceived by a villain and dishonoured; if she has children by him she finds herself fighting for them, pathetic victims of fate and prejudice. Those creatures that prostitute themselves at a discount of a third or a quarter are more respected than you are [she is?! In the minds of thoughtless men you are [she is?] often considered to be the same as these terrible examples. But, Gentlemen, I have said enough for what is only an inconsequential paper; I will soon present you with my piece on the matter entitled *The Women's Friend*. Meanwhile, here is my project for a

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11 In a bid to deter men from keeping courtesans it was illegal to openly support a woman other than family members especially outside the family home. This led to complex financial arrangements that were prone to fail leaving unmarried women, and their children, at risk of penury. Olympe de Gouges fought to create equality for married and unmarried partners and particularly for the safeguard of all children irrespective of their status, legitimate or otherwise.

12 Themis was a Greek Titan goddess who represented divine justice, order and good custom; she also had prophetic powers.

National Guard: a project that I have already shown, in manuscript, to several Members of the Assembly, to the Jacobin Club and to the Fraternal Society on the very day the news came that the King had been arrested. At the same time I present you with a copy of *Mirabeau aux Champs Elysées*, as I have of all my other works.<sup>13</sup> If unkind people say I have ruined myself for a puff of smoke, for a National Assembly that will never give me any credit, then the recompense is already in my heart; I have worked for the Motherland and maybe posterity will be grateful to me.

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*PROJECT addressed to the national assembly the day the King was Arrested*

GENTLEMEN,

Europe is watching you, may it also observe your women. The departure of the King which should have lit the torch of discord everywhere has, by a miraculous effect, changed the fury and frivolity of the French people into wisdom; a moderation that no People has ever seen before, one that will immortalize in the most distant centuries.

Let the return of this fugitive King unify beliefs and encourage harmony; through one of your wise Decrees let the People know that they may once again respect this Prince who is either perfidious or deceived. Hasten to pronounce, as French Legislators, on the judgement that must render to the State its splendour and its tranquillity, and which will impress, by its wisdom, our enemies and those abroad.

It is nonetheless vital to change the Queen's Household, to totally renew it like the rest of the Kingdom.

This observation is all the more important when it is no longer possible to leave her with the same entourage as before; those pre-revolutionary Duchesses, Princesses, Marchionesses, etc., this class of women enslaved by their outdated prejudices must be replaced by active female Citizens, zealous in their defence of the Motherland, whose rank will only depend on merit and patriotism. I alone can exempt myself for I do not have a personality suited to the Court. Doubtless it is still necessary for the well being of this ill-advised Queen that she should have around her only women who are able to help her recognise harm and who can advise her on the means of recovering the love of the People. Like '*Belle et Bonne*', adopted by the original genius who established philosophy in France, I am instructed to attach to this project the plan for a National Guard of women created to keep watch over the Queen, over Madame Royale, Madame and Madame Elizabeth; clearly it is not intended that they should mount guard outdoors, but inside, in the apartments as well as accompanying them at all times.<sup>14</sup> Fear not, Gentlemen: if you settle such marks of esteem and trust, as befit the enlightened Legislators who make up the august French Senate, upon these women, they will not abuse them. On our heads be it if the Queen were to disappear again, or to form any plot whatsoever without it being discovered. All my sex will be our guarantors. But even more importantly the Queen will be respected and treated as a Sovereign. Our only vengeance will be to seek every method to distract her and oblige her to respect, love and admire all that is French.

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<sup>13</sup> De Gouges's four act prose play was heavily cut by the actors of the Italian theatre and performed as a one-act piece in Paris on 14 April 1791, Mirabeau having died on 2 April 1791. Like many of her works it was written at speed. A critically mixed reception in Paris was followed by greater success in the provinces where it was better appreciated.

<sup>14</sup> '*Belle et Bonne*' was the name Voltaire gave to his adopted daughter Reine Philiberte Routh de Varicourt in honour of her goodness, beauty and sagacity. She married the Marquis Charles de la Villette at Ferney on 19th of November 1777. In 1789 the couple espoused the revolutionary cause, abandoned their titles, and, like Olympe de Gouges, expressed their support for divorce, child protection and the marriage of priests.

The circumstances allow all Citizens of any rank, of any age, of either sex, to fly to the defence of the Motherland.

Women may well have contributed the most to the Revolution that guarantees us a Constitution that will regenerate the Kingdom and ensure the happiness of all: would it then be so misplaced if they were to contribute more to safeguard the future of France? All is possible in this century of enlightenment and philosophy.

Gentlemen, time will not allow me to develop the mass of ideas that I could submit to your wisdom on the capacity, the strength and the courage of the sex I represent.

In the name of this sensitive sex, once frivolous now crucial, I ask you, Gentlemen, that their names be inscribed in the Revolution; that one day your wives, sisters and daughters can be proud to bear the glorious title of French women and that these modern Amazons can, today, recreate the fabulous history of their earlier sisters in more noble circumstances.

We will not allow ourselves to compete with you in politics or business affairs; our only goal is to be useful. Women today are mingling in the public Assemblies and in the Clubs; they are deserting their homes, they must be encouraged back to them by a noble challenge: women are always more susceptible to points of honour when inspired by glory.

Gentlemen, the illegal incendiary clamour and the bloodthirsty menaces that you hear fill you with indignation: the safety of the Queen is essential to hold back our enemies and the foreign Powers; to stain us with a heinous crime would be to lose the fruits of all your noble work and would cover the French People with an eternal opprobrium. There will be an outcry against this plan and what good will it do the Motherland? I will reply, if *Royal-Phlegm* and *Royal-Bonbon* are useless, *Royal-Prattle* will be even more so, especially when he will have sworn not to speak when under arms.<sup>15</sup> This joke may upset my project but I prefer to make it myself than leave it to my critics; anyway, I want to cheer up bilious spirits: I want to show that the divisive plans of ruthless men, based on ideas of civil war, are no better than a moment of fun, and that if the French lose sight of their amiable urbanity they will lose, philosophically speaking, their happiness and their hope.

BY MADAME DE GOUGES

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<sup>15</sup> This is a reference to the satirical names given to three volunteer regiments; *Royal-Pituite*, *Royal-Bonbon* and *Royal-Caca* supposedly made up of the elderly (phlegm), children (sweets) and street urchins (filth). Olympe de Gouges uses 'Cacquet' instead of 'Caca' (literally pooh) as 'cacqueter' means to gossip or prattle, a pastime often associated with women; she may have been pre-empting any jibes aimed at a female National Guard.