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Citizens (or citoyennes) of the World: Women's Citizenship and Exile in the French Revolutionary Years 1789-1793

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Lisa Michelle Christian entitled "Citizens (or citoyennes) of the World: Women's Citizenship and Exile in the French Revolutionary Years 1789-1793." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Michael Keene, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Jenn Fishman, Nancy Goslee

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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CITIZENS (OR CITOYENNES) OF THE WORLD:
WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP AND EXILE
IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY YEARS 1789-1793

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lisa Michelle Christian
December 2008

Dedication

To my family and my friends for all their encouragement, and for indulging my love of French history from a very early age.

To all those courageous French and English women during the Revolution, some remembered, and some whose names have been lost to us.

The women have certainly had a considerable share in the French revolution: for, whatever the imperious lords of creation may fancy, the most important events which take place in this world depend a little on our influence; and we often act in human affairs like those secret springs in mechanism, by which, though invisible, great movements are regulated.

~ *Letters from France*, Helen Maria Williams

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Abstract

This study examines the fluid definitions of citizenship during the French Revolution, especially citizenship's relationship to exile. I assert that citizenship was always defined by who could not be citizens. Furthermore, this study focuses upon women's experience of citizenship and exile for their especial vulnerability to exclusion from public and political affairs. In particular, I address the political actions of Parisian common women, and the political actions and writings of the English exiles Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft. Essentially, this study has three distinct parts that demonstrate the development of women's citizenship during the Revolution and the causes of their official exile from active citizenship. First, I examine the historical situation of the October Days, when Parisian market-women drew upon traditional female political action to perform a militant citizenship in the new régime. Next, I move from the physical to the mediated experiences of revolution as I examine the initial responses of Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Helen Maria Williams, and their different definitions of citizenship based upon a bourgeois English identity. Lastly, I examine Williams and Wollstonecraft's experiences as exiles in France leading up to and during the Terror, the ways in which both English women negotiated the ever-restricting and nationalistic definitions of citizenship of the Jacobin régime while maintaining their cosmopolitan ideals. Furthermore, Williams and Wollstonecraft's definition of bourgeois cosmopolitan citizenship was diametrically opposed to the popular sovereignty promoted by the Parisian common women. In the end, I seek to demonstrate that women, whatever their class or nationality, were always acting or attempting to define citizenship from a position of exile.

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I. Introduction

In the early ‘liberal’ years of the French Revolution (1789-1792), women were an integral part of the revolutionary movement. They followed National Assembly debates, participated in protests and *journées* (days of revolutionary activity), and formed clubs. They were responsible for the Royal Family and the government’s relocation to Paris in October 1789, and integral to the fall of the ‘moderate’ Girondins and the rise of the Jacobins in 1793. English writers such as Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Helen Maria Williams looked on female political activity with disgust or hope, but they did not fail to take note. The hopeful Williams and Wollstonecraft traveled to France, wishing to witness a new dawn of liberty for men and women. With the Jacobin ascension to power in 1793 that hope turned to apprehension as they witnessed the systematic clamp-down of women’s revolutionary activity.

Many scholars have examined French women’s experiences during the Revolution, especially during the Terror. Others examined Williams and Wollstonecraft’s experiences in France. Yet, each area of scholarship seems largely separate from the other, as though French women’s activities during the Revolution had no effect upon English women writers in France. It is probable that the active French women felt no influence from Williams and Wollstonecraft, but I cannot imagine that these English writers were not drawn to and influenced by their French counterparts’ experiences, especially in the time leading up to the Terror. There seems to be a dearth of scholarship in examining Williams and Wollstonecraft against the French women’s activities. I feel that it is necessary to remedy that lack if we are to truly understand the conditions that produced Williams’s and Wollstonecraft’s “feminist” works. Moreover, these female revolutionaries figure heavily in their writings. Perhaps most strikingly, these two groups – French women and English women writers (here Williams and Wollstonecraft) – experienced a

literal and metaphorical exile. In light of these connections, I hypothesize that the Revolution itself was (in a very real sense) a continual movement of exile – of persons, groups, and ideas that encompassed gender, nationalities, class and religious affiliations. If one did not fall in line with the prevailing definition of patriot, then one was counter-revolutionary, and hence exiled from the Revolution. In regard to Williams and Wollstonecraft, exile became indicative of all these traits to a certain extent. In my work, I move from the physical (France) experience of revolution, to the mediated (English response) and back to the physical experience as part of that sense of exile. This movement and sense of exile will be explained in greater length in the chapter summaries that follow. But first, I would like to assert that this exile is related to a larger concept of female militant citizenship.

My work on the common women of Paris is indebted to the exemplary and pioneering work of historians Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Applewhite, Joan Landes, and Dominique Godineau, who contend that the women’s revolutionary activities were not so much an aberration in French feminist history as a culmination of events and a tradition of female civic activism in times of economic and civil crises. In particular, I am interested in Levy and Applewhite’s concept of militant citizenship, which they define as “women’s claim to a right to bear arms, either in self-defense, or for the purposes of offensive action against the nation’s enemies – in its most radical formulation, a claim for membership in the sovereign nation” (“Women and Militant Citizenship” 81). While this definition certainly coincides with the physical militancy of the French women during the October Days and later in the revolutionary clubs, it is the “claim for membership in the sovereign nation” which most interests me in light of the consequences of the October 1789, and especially in light of Helen Maria Williams’s and Mary Wollstonecraft’s responses to the female participation in the Revolution. Williams and

Wollstonecraft certainly stake a claim for sovereign membership in their writings, and yet that membership differs remarkably from the French women's more militant and violent membership.

In regard to the revolutionary *journées*, especially the October Days, Levy and Applewhite add a nuanced definition to militant citizenship: "women's threats to use force and their actual application of armed force in collective demonstrations of sovereign will and power" (81). I want to take their concept of female militant citizenship a step further to suggest that the Parisiennes use this militancy as a particular response to the revolutionary establishment's reluctance to acknowledge women's full civil rights as *citoyennes*. As historian David Andress notes, *citoyenne* functioned "ambiguously" in the official language of the state (*The Terror* 221). For male revolutionaries, the designation reinforced the passive female role; they were not *citoyens* (or citizens) in the active sense, yet women must be subject to republican law. Female activists sought to clarify this ambiguity and to achieve for women what the term *citoyen* achieved for men: that is, membership in the state (and popular) sovereignty. In drawing upon their historical participation in royal ceremonies, women attempted to establish a political and rhetorical sphere for themselves within the new republican society. Williams and Wollstonecraft were particularly interested in this concept of *citoyenne*, because they felt that the Revolution held possibilities for women – in respect to education and to women's place in society.

Joan Landes's *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* continues this strain in examining the creation of a masculine public sphere in response to female militant citizenship, and in reaction against women's civic participation in the ancien régime. She demonstrates the transition of French society during the eighteenth century as one initially

heralding a powerful feminine public and intellectual sphere through many segments of the population to a more restricted domestic sphere for women in the later stages of the Revolution. Though she focuses on France, her examination of this transition bears consideration for England as well, especially an England reacting to the French Revolution and the transformation of its own society in light of the “dangers” of revolution.

Though Landes follows Levy and Applewhite’s meticulous research into the tradition of female civic activism, her concept of the pre-Revolution public sphere is far more entwined with the domestic than Levy and Applewhite. She places women’s pre-Revolution activism more within the domestic sphere, suggesting the fluid boundaries of the *ancien régime* spheres. Revolutionaries reacted strongly against this fluidity, seeing female presence in the public sphere as symptomatic of *ancien régime* corruption. As Dominique Godineau remarks, “Throughout the eighteenth century and during the Revolution, the division between public and private spaces was not as sharply demarcated as it would be later, nor had public space been identified as specifically masculine” (7). Landes notes, “public-private oppositions were being reinforced in ways that foreclosed women’s earlier independence in the street, in the marketplace, and, for elite women, in the public spaces of the court and aristocratic households” (22). As my examination of Williams and Wollstonecraft will illustrate, the unique position of French women during this time was enviable to many English women writers, many of whom felt that the Revolution would continue to support female activism. Therefore, I highlight Landes’s examination – and to a lesser extent Godineau’s – of the public and private/domestic spheres, because I want to illustrate the ways in which common French women negotiated these fluid boundaries, how they acted within the pre-1789 conception of the public-domestic sphere to secure support for issues important to them – such as, taxation, suffrage, conscription, and civil

rights. I also use this concept of the public-domestic sphere as something which drew the interest of Williams and Wollstonecraft, especially during their time in Paris – even if they did not always agree with the degree of militancy found in that sphere.

“The October Days: Recalling from Exile and Recovering Female Militancy” examines the Parisian market-women’s militancy during 5-6 October 1789, and the consequences of their march on Versailles. Because Edmund Burke placed the start of the French Revolution with the October Days, I feel that it is necessary to examine this historic event in light of that assertion – especially women’s militancy, which provoked Burke’s consternation. The Parisian Women’s March to Versailles (5-6 October 1789) highlights the first time in the early Revolution in which women took the initiative in carrying out revolutionary goals. Faced with a burgeoning economic crisis, a seemingly ineffective National Assembly, and a king reluctant to adopt any of the new constitutional precepts, the common women of Paris drew upon a long tradition of female civic action in the city to force accountability from their leaders. In effect, they challenged political legitimacy, sovereign power, and prescribed gender roles. They rejected the National Assembly’s conception of the passive *citoyenne*, and redefined their status as militant *citoyennes*. Their determination to act as a cohesive political force alarmed the revolutionary establishment, who saw their actions as transgressions and even as crimes, as predictors of chaos, and as the absolute breakdown of societal structures. In the aftermath of the October Days, the National Assembly sought to reinforce a particular republican patriarchy that exiled women from the republican, political sphere.

In “Prelude to Exile: The English Interpretation of the October Days” I focus on the English response to the October Days as indicative of their larger opinion of the French Revolution. In particular, I address the works of Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and

Helen Maria Williams for their particular stress on the French women's militancy. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke sees the revolutionaries' activities as indicative of the Revolution's anarchic character. The October Days are an especial source of distress because of the palace invasion, in which he reads the Revolution's disregard for order, tradition, and civilization; consequently, he implies that France has exiled itself from European civilization. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft argues with Burke's analysis of the Revolution by discrediting his positions. She uses his contrasting portraits of Marie Antoinette and the Parisian market-women to highlight the injustice of the ancien régime and women's condition in France and England. For Wollstonecraft, the Revolution is a prime moment for social reform that must begin with education, and she contends that women experience exile from public discourse through a lack of proper education. Although Williams does not reply to Burke directly in the first volume of her *Letters from France*, she touches upon the October Days and she celebrates women's participation in the Revolution through her greater emphasis on the Fête de la Fédération. She embraces the Revolution's democratizing effort. Furthermore, this chapter also serves as an introduction to Williams's and Wollstonecraft's experience of exile, and their association with political republican women.

In "The Road to Terror and Exile: Defining Citizenship" I examine the development of different definitions of citizenship against exile in the emerging atmosphere of Jacobin Paris. The English exiles Williams and Wollstonecraft drew their definition of cosmopolitan (and bourgeois) citizenship from the popular demonstrations of female militant citizenship by the Society for Revolutionary Republican Women; or rather, they defined citizenship against these women's actions. In fact, both English women watched the anarchic impulses of the Parisian sections with dismay and repugnance, and concluded that the violence of the streets was proof of

the dangers of popular sovereignty. It reinforced their repugnance for popular sovereignty (or mob rule) and renewed their commitment to constitutionalism. Furthermore, the French government's rapidly changing definition of citizenship was based on exclusion and therefore exile. If one was not included in the prevailing definition of citizenship, then one was "exiled" from revolutionary activity; in the same way, suspect groups were exiled from citizenship and deemed counter-revolutionary. Thus, this chapter, more than the others, examines the interconnected relationship of citizenship, counter-revolution, and exile.

In the conclusion, I examine efforts of Williams and Wollstonecraft to vindicate their support of the Revolution, and to vindicate their fallen Girondin friends. This effort turns into a memorialization of the Gironde, especially in the person of Madame Roland. Indeed, both Williams and Wollstonecraft are involved in the editing and publishing of Roland's memoirs. However, this memorialization becomes in some measure their own memorialization. After all, Wollstonecraft dies in 1797 and Williams is quickly relegated to literary obscurity. In memorializing the Girondin salon culture to illustrate their difference from the terrorist Jacobins, both women memorialize their own positions during the Revolution. That is to say, Williams and Wollstonecraft's politics are vindicated in this memorialization.

II. The October Days: Recalling from Exile and Recovering Female Militancy

Edmund Burke famously dated the start of the French Revolution with the October Days of 1789 and *not* the Tennis Court Oath of June 1789 nor the fall of the Bastille on July 14. He asserted that October 1789 began a “revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions” (*Reflections* 69). It was also on this date that the Royal Family were forced to leave Versailles for Paris, the center of the Revolution. It was this breach of the palace and this turn in the king’s power that cemented the Revolution in Burke’s mind as an end to “chivalry” or “civilization” in France. For Burke, this “atrocious spectacle” of October 1789 showed the true character of the revolutionaries and the direction of the Revolution (68). Whether or not Burke’s respondents agreed with this starting date is irrelevant considering the textual debate (or war) stirred by Burke’s pamphlet. What ensued was one of the greatest debates on English and French political affairs carried on in England. Therefore, for the English (at least in terms of their own investment in the Revolution), the French Revolution *did* begin in October 1789. For this very reason, I feel that it is necessary to examine the historical situation of 5-6 October 1789 in France. Moreover, drawing upon Burke’s scorn for the “furies” invading Versailles, I examine the historical female participants of the March on Versailles. Burke turns these women into symbols (or predictors) of anarchy. I want to recover (or re-discover) the true women of the October Days.

For nearly two centuries historians relegated the common women of Paris to a lesser marginal stage, to certain events, crowds or deeds, linked them inextricably with the Jacobin radical turn in 1792, and as such represented them as figures of chaos and, (for a large minority) as harbingers of terror like Edmund Burke’s furies. The bicentennial year 1989 renewed scholarship and inspired particular French feminist historians to reexamine these overlooked

figures. Many historians, such as Dominique Godineau, Joan Landes, Darline Levy, and Harriet Applewhite produced works of historical recovery. They sought to demonstrate the ways in which ordinary French women overcame gender bias to participate in the Revolution seeking to curtail their activities and to construct a masculine republic; yet, these historians also noted that common women's actions arose from a long tradition of civic participation in the ancien régime.

In my examination, I turn to these common women of Paris who struggled against gender bias, class structure, and the lack of education, individuals for whom the Revolution was very much a bread and butter issue – as it was in the early ‘liberal’ days of 1789, and most particularly the October Days (5-6 October 1789). Because these women did not leave behind memoirs, or even letters, there are few artifacts from which to construct an accurate assessment of their participation. It is difficult to get a true sense of who these women were, how they lived and how they felt about current events. Therefore, after a brief discussion of the March on Versailles, I will turn to the few remaining artifacts, such as their songs (and hence their dialect), their use of the tricolor cockade as a rallying symbol, a litter of ritual ceremonies in which they participated, illustrations, newspaper articles, and finally depositions. All these artifacts carry within them the story of a group of women who, for a short time in early October 1789, held the power of the Revolution in their hands and irrevocably changed the course of that Revolution. I seek to discover how these women saw and/or represented themselves, and in turn how the revolutionary establishment represented them to posterity. My work builds on the recovery work of Levy and Applewhite, Landes, and Godineau, and is, in part, a work of feminist historical recovery in so far as I seek to examine these “recovered” French female figures and to examine their relationship to pivotal moments in the Revolution, and in the English conception of the French Revolution through the works of Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Helen Maria

Williams. Thus, I aim to go beyond mere recovery to suggest how these Parisian common women and their representations in French and English texts (particularly in the October Days) contribute to the common women's historical exile, and by highlighting their historical roles, I aim to connect these common women to the English Revolution Controversy.

Historical Overview

On 2 October 1789, Parisian newspapers reported an incident which ignited the Women's March: an extravagant banquet that the royal bodyguard held for the Flanders Regiment. As Simon Schama points out, these banquets were commonplace celebrations in the ancien régime; however, the luxury of this particular banquet was inappropriate and inconsiderate to the populace struggling through famine (459). To make matters worse, "at a time of conspicuous want, the occasion turned into something of a demonstration of loyalty to the crown" by songs, avowals of loyalty, and denouncing the national cockade (459). Frustrated by the National Assembly's lack of progress, many radical journalists jumped at this "proof" of counter-revolution at Court. The radical Jean-Paul Marat used this incident to enflame tempers within the city. His language was unabashedly inflammatory and alluded to the pornographic broadsheets and cartoons depicting court life. Exhorting the masses to rebel, he wrote:

Il est constant que l'orgie a eu lieu ; il n'est pas moins constant que l'alarme est générale. Les faits nous manquent pour prononcer si cette conjuration est réelle. Mais, fût-elle chimérique, qui doute que, si l'ennemi se presentoit aujourd'hui à nos portes, il ne nous surprit au dépourvu. Cette négligence de pourvoir la Capitale de munitions de guerre de toute espèce est un vrai crime d'Etat. En attendant qu'on fasse rendre compte au Comité militaire de sa conduite, il n'y a pas un instant à perdre ; tous les bons Citoyens doivent s'assembler en armes . . . (Marat 175-176)

It is certain that the orgy took place; it is not less certain that the alarm is general. The facts are missing which would allow us to pronounce if this conspiracy is real. But, even fanciful, who doubts that, if the enemy were present today at our doors, that he would take us unawares? This negligence in providing the Capital with ammunition of any kind is a true crime of State. Until we report someone to the Military Committee for his conduct, there is not a moment to lose; all the good Citizens must assemble in arms . . .¹

Marat's choice of "orgy" to describe the banquet cements its link to Marie Antoinette and the corrupt Court without ever mentioning the queen or her favorites. His language is designed to provoke the almost prudish sentiments of market-women who regularly denounced the queen and Court for their decadence and perceived immorality. He combines moral sentiment with a call to arms, alluding to the Jacobin² stress on republican virtue, which lays the groundwork for the ever-increasing Jacobin agenda: a republic of conscientious active male citizens and chaste passive female citizennes – clearly demarcated public (male) and private (female) spheres. Furthermore, Marat is cautious in pronouncing a conspiracy, yet his wording allows the reader to presume a conspiracy. The facts are missing, yes, but he does not say that the facts do not exist. He then appeals to his reader's sense of security: "if the enemy were present at our doors, he would take us unawares." Marat's enemy is deliberately ambiguous, suggesting foreign enemies, *and* enemies within – counter-revolutionaries. He connects the bodyguards and Flanders Regiment to the enemy within, and therefore, the call to arms becomes armed rebellion, revolt against the monarchy – which is, in fact, the enemy within.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the translations are my own.

² In autumn 1789, the Jacobins (then known as the Breton Club) were not organized into a political party or faction. They were only a political club of ambitious middle-class men situated to the far left. Yet, a peculiar Jacobin

Though his language is far less inflammatory than Marat's language, Antoine-Joséph Gorsas's *Le Courrier de Versailles à Paris et de Paris à Versailles* was among the first to report the dinner. Yet, his Bacchic description has something of Marat's flavor, though tempered.

Gorsas writes,

tout à coup, comme de concert, la table joyeuse & la musique s'est portée à la cour de marbre & devant le balcon de Sa Majesté ; alors on s'est mis à chanter, à danser, à crier de nouveau vive le Roi ! Le balcon s'eil ouvert, un garde du corps, par je ne fais quel moyen, y monte comme à l'assaut ; un dragon, un suisse, un garde bourgeoise le suivent ; en un instant le balcon est rempli . . . le Roi & la Reine arrivent au milieu de ce groupe ; les cris d'allégresse ont redoublés. (27-28)

suddenly, as at a concert, the merry table & the music went into the Marble Court & in front of Her Majesty's balcony; then someone started to sing, dance, shout again long live the King! The balcony opened, a bodyguard, I do not know which one, goes up there as to storm it; a dragoon, Swiss, a bourgeois guard follow it; in one moment the balcony was filled . . . the King & the Queen arrive in the middle of this group; the cries of joy redoubled.

Here the soldiers are only guilty of singing, dancing and swearing loyalty to the crown. Gorsas's language is only subtly disapproving of the soldiers' overexcitement until they insult the tricolor or national cockade when the king and queen appeared. He reports an officer shouting, "A bas les cocardes de couleurs! que chacun prenne la noire, c'est la bonne!" (Gorsas 28).³ His account

viewpoint was already beginning to form. To avoid confusion, and for the purposes of this chapter, I will continue to refer to them as Jacobins.

³ Down with the cockade of colors! Everybody take the black one, that's the good one!

appealed to the market-women for this denunciation of the cockade, to which they took personal offense as indicative of aristocratic contempt for their plight.

Though I will examine the tricolor cockade in greater depth later in this chapter, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of its importance in order to understand the *poissardes*' outrage. The tricolor (or national) cockade was a particularly potent revolutionary symbol in 1789. The three colors red, white, and blue represented the past, present, and future France; moreover, it represented the nation as a whole instead of the nation through the person of the monarch. Therefore, the common women of Paris, particularly the market-women, took the soldiers' denunciation of the tricolor cockade as a mini-counter-revolution. Combined with the unabashed luxury of the soldiers' banquet and ever-increasing prices for bread and grain, the market-women determined to march to Versailles to demand accountability. The National Assembly's official investigation into the October Days, the *Châtelet Commission*, later reported,

Le dimanche 4 octobre, dans les attroupements formés au Palais-Royal, on annonçait la résolution de partir le lendemain pour Versailles ; la rareté du pain, le désir de venger la cocarde, celui d'aller chercher le roi pour le conduire à Paris, étaient les motifs que donnaient les mécontents . . . (“Examen des causes particulières” 576).

Sunday, October 4, in the mob formed in the Palais-Royale, a resolution was announced to leave the following day for Versailles; the scarcity of bread, the desire to avenge the cockade, to conduct the king to Paris, were the reasons given by the malcontents . . .

At this time, legislative and royal power was located in Versailles just outside the capital Paris; the women were determined to remedy this problem too. There was a sense, even in the March's

early stages, that if they could bring the king back to the capital (and hence away from the corrupting Court), then the common people's problems would be adequately addressed. Hence, at this point, the public view of Louis XVI remained essentially favorable, and he was still looked upon in the traditional paternalistic role of the father-king.

Their first stop on the March was l'Hôtel-de-Ville (the Paris city council); they met the young Bastille volunteer Stanislas Maillard. The women trusted him "[a]t first, because of his black coat (members of the Third Estate wore plain black coats), they thought he was a councilor; but then they recognized him as a *vainqueur*, one who had participated in the sacking of the Bastille" (Moore 36). They asked him to lead their march, and he agreed, alarmed by their potential for violence. Many women carried pikes, and some had taken weapons and gunpowder as Marat had suggested, but it is uncertain that these women knew how to discharge a weapon. Certainly, the image of women marching in arms aroused alarm and drew comparisons to amazons. A contemporary illustration links these women to amazons (figure 1):



Figure 1 : Avant-garde des femmes allant à Versailles : Marche des femmes sur Versailles, 1789, 5 et 6 octobre. Vainguard of women going to Versailles. Source : Bibliotheque Nationale RC-A-10109.

The women are organized like a military battalion, armed with swords, pikes and other weapons, completed by a female officer on a horse. They are organized, intent, and capable of violence by their very methodical approach. In the back of the crowd, one woman holds up the scales of justice as a reason for her participation. Most importantly, no men are present in this scene, suggesting that the Women's March comprised entirely women, and that (ultimately) they did not need Maillard's lead.

Maillard's alarm seems partially attributed to this possibility of female militancy. In his later deposition, the anonymous reporter records Maillard's response, "having mingled with the women, he found some forcing the downstairs doors and others snatching papers in the offices, saying that that was all the city council had done since the revolution began and that they would burn them" ("Stanislas Maillard" 37). Initially Maillard seems to link women's potential for violence with their disruption of city government – and their invasion of the masculine and republican public sphere. He views these women through a lens peculiar to his position as a member of that emerging masculine republican sphere – as figures of chaos. He fails to see that women "stormed to demonstrate anger at the failure of the Parisian mayor Jean-Sylvain Bailly and the Commune to provide the people with bread, to secure the equipment and the military leadership, and to express some contempt for the inefficacy of a male government which put words before deeds" (Hufton 15). Maillard's deposition only briefly notes that "these women kept saying that the men were not strong enough to be revenged on their enemies and that they (the women) would do better" (37). Hence, they "expressed a certain impatience with the futility of bureaucracy – men's work" (Hufton 15). Even as the women asked for his (symbolic) role of leader of their March, they negate the power of that role, and emphasize that power rests with themselves. They maintain their assumption of power throughout the March, even at the

National Assembly. Upon arrival, Maillard “urged the women to be silent and to leave to him the task of communicating to the assembly their demands” (“Stanislas Maillard” 40). He tries to impose the state-sanctioned roles of active and passive citizens, and thus to confine the women to a private, domestic sphere even as they assert their right to inclusion in the republican public sphere. They consent only because they realize that their demands will be taken more seriously if they employ a male spokesperson.

Maillard presents himself as a humble speaker, and respectfully in awe of the proceedings in the 8 octobre edition of *Le Moniteur Universel*,⁴ which gives minute detail of the women’s arrival. He declares the women’s intentions, rhetorically including himself in their actions:

Nous sommes venus à Versailles pour demander du pain, et en même temps pour faire punir les gardes-du-corps, qui ont insulté la cocarde patriotique. Les aristocrates veulent nous faire périr de faim. Aujourd’hui même on a envoyé à un meûnier un billet de 200 livres, en l’invitant à ne pas moudre, et en lui promettant de lui envoyer la même somme chaque semaine. (*Réimpression “Assemblée Nationale”* 11)

We came to Versailles to demand bread, and at the same time, to punish the bodyguards, who insulted the patriotic cockade. The aristocrats want us to perish from hunger.

Today, one even sent a check of 200 livres to a miller, encouraging him not to grind, and while promising to send him the same amount each week.

He positions himself as part of the common people, creating a moment of solidarity between himself and the women – as part of the non-gendered plight of the common people. Yet, a

⁴ During the Revolution, this newspaper was also called *Gazette Nationale*. However, when the revolutionary editions were republished during the Second Empire, the paper was renamed *l’Ancien Moniteur* (the edition I use for this work). I will continue to refer to the paper as *Le Moniteur Universel*.

moment later, he assumes rhetorical distance again when acting as a mediator between the women and the Assembly:

Je vous supplie, pour ramener la paix, calmer l'effervescence générale et prévenir des malheurs, d'envoyer une députation à MM. les gardes-du-corps, pour les engager à prendre la cocarde nationale, et à faire réparation de l'injure qu'ils ont faite à cette même cocarde. ("Assemblée Nationale" 11)

I beg you, to return peace, to calm the general spirits and to prevent misfortunes, to send a delegation to Messieurs the bodyguards, to commit them to take the national cockade, and to remedy the injury done to that same cockade.

Maillard acknowledges the women's power, though he sees it as chaotic power capable of injuring the state. He links this proposal to his earlier alarm for the women's potential for violence. He becomes a shield of sorts, serves as protection for the Assembly, even as he *leads* the women. He presents himself as controlling or subduing the women.

Maillard's role in the March diminishes once the women reach the palace. They increasingly rely upon their traditional roles in ceremonial marches, and their "right" of access to the king to seek redress in the paternalistic vision of ancien régime monarchy. Taking Maillard's advice, and acknowledging the women's right to see the king, the Assembly organized a delegation to the palace. The Assembly's president Jean-Joseph Mournier led the delegation, and received "a signed order for any delayed wheat to be delivered to Paris immediately" (Moore 38). The king then agreed to sign the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (39). Articles from *Le Moniteur Universel*, *l'Ami du Peuple*, and *Courrier de Versailles* relate different reasons for the king's acquiescence, though the alarming presence of armed women

must have been a factor. Moore and Godineau place more weight on the burgeoning presence of National Guardsmen at the palace; certainly, this reinforcement added to the tense atmosphere in the evening of 5 October, and contributed to the flared tempers of protesters already cold and wet from the drizzling rain.

Sometime during the night, crowds broke into the palace, calling for the death of *l'Autrichienne*.⁵ Their focused ire upon Marie Antoinette demonstrates the people's suspicions of her influence upon the king, and her status as a foreign princess. Long hated by the market-women for her extravagance and her disregard for the poor, the protestors (particularly the women) saw the queen as emblematic of state corruption and fiscal irresponsibility. In fact, "Marie Antoinette had the reputation of holding the king back from the Revolution and was suspected to be an agent of backlash" (Hufton 15). The women's hatred for Marie Antoinette was such that one eye-witness testified that he heard the women shouting, "Nous voulons couper sa tête, son cœur, et fricasser ses foies ; et cela ne finira pas là" ("Déposition XVIII" 526).⁶ By contrast, the women's reiteration of loyalty preserved his role as father-king; they sang tunes such as *Vive Henri IV*, and cries of *Vive le roi* sprang throughout the crowd after the Royal Family's appearance on the balcony (Schama 462). Their remaining affection for the king strengthened their resolve to bring the king back to Paris where the queen's influence would be tempered. They succeeded after the palace invasion, and the Royal Family removed to the Tuileries palace, which Burke called a Bastille for kings (61).

In retrospect, the women's presence at the palace of Versailles was important for the very fact that they organized themselves into a cohesive and effective political force. As Godineau states, "From this first intervention by a female crowd in the Revolution, we can identify

⁵ *Autrichienne* translates as Austrian woman, but serves as a pun also for Austrian bitch.

characteristics that became increasingly distinct during the following years. Women took the initiative and were soon followed by men organized in armed groups” (99). Women led the way at this juncture; they forced the king’s signature on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, forced the relocation of the National Assembly and the Court to Paris – both goals which men failed to accomplish. They changed the course of the Revolution; from this moment, Louis XVI was a captive king, and the government was increasingly, and inevitably republican.

Who were the *poissardes*?

The greater share of the March’s participants was Parisian market-women, also called *poissardes*. They hailed from the market fauborgs of central Paris: Saint-Antoine, Saint-Marcel, and la Halle (Moore 30; Godineau 62). These sections were “legendary for [their] independence” (Andress *The Terror* 39) and situated relatively close to the Bastille and l’Hôtel-de-Ville. In *Liberty: The Lives and Times of Six Women in Revolutionary France*, Lucy Moore offers a vibrant description:

The typical *poissarde* woman, literally a fish-seller, but including other market-women, seamstresses or laundresses, was described in the revolutionary newspaper *Père Duchesne* as a plain speaker, a frugal housekeeper and a chaste wife. She had an ugly face and despised finery, and was devoted to her family and capable of defending it savagely if need be. Her children were raised according to the political principles she and her husband held, a tradition of fierce egalitarianism and independence, and she claimed the right to sign petitions, fill the audience chambers of the National Assembly and denounce those she considered unpatriotic, deliberately addressing them by the familiar ‘tu’ rather than the more formal ‘vous.’” (30)

⁶ We want to cut off her head, her heart, and fricassee her liver; and we will not stop there.

Moore's insight shows us that from the very beginning of the Revolution market-women held "revolutionary" values of independence, distrusted the artifice of court, and were eager to partake of participatory government. Although they looked positively upon government reform, they also protected the ancient rights of their status, which included special roles in monarchical rituals, and the right of petition to the king in times of famine. Olwen Hufton notes that Louis XV's popular Queen Maria Leczinska "encouraged" this "open line to the monarchy" (15). Hufton also points to a particularly powerful example remarkably similar to the October Days in scope and character: "Women in the hard winter of 1708-9 had marched to Versailles to implore Louis XIV to take action to end a famine and to stop the war" (15). Of course, these special rights were also in line with the *cahiers de doléances* or official grievances gathered from the cities and provinces for the summoning of the États-Général in 1789.

The *poissardes* set up stalls to display their merchandise on the streets of their districts. They struggled daily with the wealthy bourgeois merchant monopolizers sometimes favored by the nobility, which bred resentment among the market-women even as they often relied upon the noble households for their livelihood (Godineau 10). These women straddled a precarious position – they were part of the common people, yet they relied on the nobility and enjoyed a peculiar relationship with the monarchy which set them apart from many other groups in Paris. Because of these factors and their fierce independence, it is difficult to pin their political persuasion. Yet, these factors also led some revolutionaries, particularly in the later radical phase of the Revolution, to state that if counter-revolution came, it would come through the Parisian market-women (Godineau 252). Subsequently, Godineau points out that posterity has handed down an image of the *poissardes* as "undisciplined rebels" (254), and yet this chapter's study of their movements demonstrate that they were methodical in their approach to civic action

and protests. Godineau also states that they were “separate from the revolutionary movement” (254). Yet, these women’s experiences show otherwise. They were acutely aware of political goings-on in the capital and its effect upon their livelihoods and private lives. They were sincerely attached to the Revolution, even if paradoxically, they were as often attached to the King, and “tried to reconcile these two aspects of their existence” (254). Certainly, many counter-revolutionaries targeted this group for that very reason (252). Yet, generally, they remained loyal to the government in power, but retained their right of protest – usually with the backing of those very governments, whether monarchical or republican.

Although it is difficult to pin down their politics, most market-women were somewhat conservative (Godineau 254). This conclusion can be easily seen in their reiterations of loyalty to Louis XVI throughout the March, and in their commitment to a traditionally female domestic role. They opposed many efforts of later “feminist” revolutionaries such as Olympe de Gouges and the Revolutionary Republican Women (254) and their campaigns of radical political equality between the sexes. They abhorred the radical women’s perceived lack of morals (Moore 226). For the *poissardes*, women’s proper place was the pre-1789 domestic sphere from which they would venture out periodically to participate in public-domestic processions and other ceremonies, and to protest on domestic issues such as food and taxation. These traditions and actions informed their sense of militant citizenship that was strikingly different from the female radicals. Indeed, the *poissardes* and the more radical women clashed in the streets dramatically in 1793, which directly led to the banning of women’s political clubs.

The Poissardes and Royal Ceremonies

Women’s actions in October 1789 grew out of a tradition of royal ceremonies. For centuries, the Bourbon monarchy used public ceremonies to reinforce the state apparatus with frequent avowals

and demonstrations of loyalty. Common women celebrated royal births and marriages, and “deputations were sent to the king in times of drought and dearth” (Applewhite and Levy “Responses” 217-218). Yet these ceremonies also provided common people with the illusion of participation, and the foundation upon which they later asserted the right to active civic participation. Ironically, then, these ceremonies taught people to rebel – to organize themselves into cohesive political forces, and to exact change or alleviation when their conditions became too harsh. As historian David Andress notes, “they were free enough to imagine more freedom, but oppressed enough to be willing to risk revolt, when the edifice of the state seemed to totter” (*The French Revolution* xviii). The edifice was more than tottering in the fall of 1789; it was cracking under economic stress, and the king’s refusal to sign reform legislation. When male representatives seemed ineffective at best, women seized the opportunity to exact change for the common people, and to supply necessities for the majority of the Parisian populace. In this context, for women then, these ceremonies were especially important – shut out of the republic-building activities, defined as passive citoyennes and therefore disenfranchised, common women relied upon these traditions to justify or legitimate their actions to the revolutionary government and to themselves as well. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on only two ceremonies: the celebration of the Dauphin’s birth, and the Feast Day of St. Louis (August 25).

The celebration of the Dauphin’s birth was a key ceremony in the ancien régime; it served as public acknowledgment and acceptance of dynastic rule, and the continuance of the dynasty itself. Poissardes were given a special role in this ceremony, that of “verify[ing] the legitimacy of a newborn heir to the throne” (Landes 110). This act “linked them logically to the legitimacy of a constitutional monarch” (110), a suggestion reinforced by an illustration of the birth of constitutional monarchy in 1791 (figure 2):



Figure 2: Les Couches de Monsieur Target, 1791. M. Target gives birth to the constitution. Source : Bibliotheque Nationale RC-A-09689.

In this cartoon, Deputy Target gives birth to the constitutional monarchy in the presence of members from each estate, and a representative of the market-women. Strangely, however, childbirth becomes a male act, although the female retains her traditional role of midwifery. This *male* act of giving birth highlights the republican insistence that politics are men's business even as they acknowledge the traditional female role, and the market-women's special privileges. In essence, the cartoon shows the manner in which the newly born constitutional monarchy *required* the *poissardes'* presence. This suggestion was especially true considering the issues before the National Assembly in September and early October 1789: the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Since Louis XVI refused to sign the document, and building upon their ceremonial role and their new conception of themselves as *citoyennes*, there was a suggestion, at least among the women themselves, that they could force the king to sign; the fact that they accomplished this feat only further legitimized their role, and the power of that role.

The ritual march to Versailles on the Feast Day of St. Louis (August 25) further demonstrates this fluidity of spheres, and female practical education in civic participation. Each

year market-women traveled to Versailles to pay homage to the king and queen, to reiterate their loyalty, and to offer token gifts and flowers. During the summer of 1789 continual bread shortages exacerbated civil unrest inspired by the fall of the Bastille (July 14) and the lack of immediate relief by the new government. In the weeks following 14 July, market-women from the Fauborgs Saint-Antoine, Saint-Marcel and la Halle organized frequent processions to the church of Saint Genevieve (patron saint of Paris), Notre Dame, and Versailles (Applewhite and Levy "Responses" 218-219). Contemporaries did not remark on the unusual frequencies of these processions, "plac[ing] the women's processions in the tradition of religious festivals of thanksgiving and supplication" (218) nor did they mark the fact that the National Guard began to accompany women. A particular procession to Versailles on August 7 served as a rehearsal for the St. Louis Feast Day march, and the October March. On this day, market-women traveled to Versailles to "congratulat[e] the king for acquiescing in a constitution that would limit his powers" (218). Applewhite and Levy point out that the women's language on this day was still tied to tradition which saw the king as a paternal figure, and therefore most able to satisfy their immediate needs; however, the women were careful to emphasize the constitutional aspect of their march – further stressing their role in royal legitimacy, and foreshadowing their demands on 5-6 October. Similarly, on August 25 (the feast day), the National Guard led by Lafayette accompanied the women, linking revolutionary goals with tradition, and providing an image of martial might to an increasingly cornered king.

The Subversive Genre Poissard: Dialect of the Markets

On feast day processions to Versailles, a courtier often prepared speeches in proper Parisian French, although the poissardes were occasionally allowed to add a few lines in their

rough poissard dialect (Schama 456). The additions were typical assertions of loyalty and adoration. However, these applications were unusual for this very supplication.

The genre poissard developed during the eighteenth century as an effective means of literary protest. Aristocratic writers usurped the market dialect to “protest against general establishment values” (Lodge 155). Like other fads favoring the Rousseauian idealization of the poorer classes, the genre poissard served the same uses in high society. Poissard poets like Vadé used the phonetic spelling and guttural accent as “a rejection of the high-status linguistic norms” (155) and cemented their connection to a less artificial style – something more in tune with the Enlightenment. This choice also gave poets license to deliver sharply satirical and antagonistic works, “railing against the follies of the high-ups of society” (174). They also railed against the strict hierarchy of the ancien régime, which they felt contributed to widespread corruption. Therefore, in these works and in the later poissardes’ songs, “the despised language of *le Peuple* figures not as an object of mockery, but as the expression of popular dissent, potentially subversive of the establishment order” (174).

In the October Days, the poissardes’ use of their dialect in songs emphasized this subversive potential, and linguistically reinforced the rhetoric of their actions. In this way, the poissardes reclaimed their dialect for the markets during the March. They wrote songs for the occasion or en-route, including the “Motion of the Market Women of La Halle:”

If the High-ups still make trouble
Then the Devil confound them,
And since they love gold so much
May it melt in their traps –
That’s the sincere wish

Of the Women Who Sell Fish. (qtd. in Moore 37)

The lyrics betray the frustration of autumn 1789, and allude to conspiracy theories involving aristocrats. Fiery images capture the *poissarde* tendency to damn their enemies to hell. Indeed, their words “just tipped the balance between the coarsely amusing and the threatening” (Moore 37). The women’s despair can be felt as well, considering their economic relationship to the aristocracy, and their general caution in alienating them. By contrast, their song on the March back to Paris exudes triumph and illustrates their changing relationship to the state:

A Versail’ comme des fanfarons

J’avions amené nos canons

Falloit voir, quoi qu’ j’ étions qu’ des femmes

Un courage qui n’ faut pas qu’ on blâme

Nous n’ irons plus si loin, ma foi

Quand nous voudrons voir notre Roi

J’ l’ aimons d’ une amour sans égale

Puisqu’ il d’ meur dans notre’ Capitale

To Versailles like bragging lads

We brought with us all our guns

We had to show that though we were but women

A courage that no one can reproach us for

[Now] we won’t have to go so far

When we want to see our King

We love him with a love without equal

Since he's come to live in our Capital (qtd. in Schama 469-470)⁷

Their insistence upon highlighting their weapons and “[a] courage that no one can reproach us for . . . though we were but women” (470) links these lyrics to the earlier illustration of the amazon-like *poissardes*. It also shows that women were aware of the response that they were likely to receive from men. Although the National Guard enthusiastically embraced the Women’s March, it was not indicative of larger society. As Hufton points out, the March “aroused real fear” (18) in the realization that women could (and did) organize themselves into a cohesive and effective political force capable of exacting real change. *They* were responsible for Louis XVI’s acquiescence in signing the Declaration, ordering grain supplies for the city, and in removing to the capital. Like most *poissarde* songs, these lyrics end in light, mocking supplication, meant to highlight their subversive discourse: “We love him with a love without equal / Since he’s come to live in *our* Capital” (qtd. in Schama 470). The market-women also stress their unique relationship to the king, now forever altered by their ability to command him.

The Poissardes and the Tricolor Cockade

As I have shown earlier, the soldiers’ insult to the tricolor cockade was a catalyst to the Women’s March to Versailles. Their investment in this symbol mirrored the investment of the larger Parisian populace. For many Revolution supporters, the tricolor stood for the power of the Third Estate, and thus the power of the common people against the aristocracy.

An episode involving the tricolor cockade during the March itself illustrates the potency of this symbol in the minds of the common people. Just outside Paris, the marchers met a

number of bourgeois men on horseback wearing the Hapsburg black cockade. These men made no explicit insult to the tricolor, yet the mere wearing of the black cockade provided adequate provocation – it was tantamount to personal and political loyalty to the queen. Maillard’s deposition records, “the women stopped them and made as if to commit violence against them” (“Stanislas Maillard” 39). Allegiance to the queen provoked violence because of her symbolic importance in Louis XVI’s court as an embodiment of everything the market-women despised – decadence, immorality, and the possibility of counter-revolution. This moment allowed women the chance to react against their enemy physically: “they struck [one] and pulled [him] off his horse, tearing off his black cockade” (39). They responded to Marie Antoinette’s hated power over the king with threats of violence and assault to her followers. Only the black cockade signifies her presence; the women’s militancy demonstrates the rhetorical power of these symbols. The scene hence becomes a battle of cockades representing the triumph of new republican female power over ancien régime female power. It prefigures the battle of the cockades between the *poissardes* and the Revolutionary Republican Women in September 1793, a street riot between the two groups struggling for control of that symbol – an incident that contributed to the Jacobin expulsion of women from revolutionary clubs and activities.

In 1789, there was no tension between revolutionary factions for this symbol. Indeed, it was a unifying icon in early revolutionary rhetoric. Because the traditional color white signified the Bourbon dynasty, the cockade had been a French national symbol for generations. This symbol of monarch and kingdom, people and province was an important part of ancien régime ideology which the revolutionaries “reformed” or “remade.” They added red and blue for Paris and the popular duc d’Orléans (Moore 6). Lucy Moore briefly explains its symbolism: “white for

⁷ Translated by Schama.

the revolutionaries' purity, blue for the heavenly ideals they were pursuing, red for the blood which was already seen as the necessary price of France's liberation" (6). The cockade was already infused with a hint of "purifying violence" which would characterize the Terror of 1793-1794. This connection of purity, "heavenly ideals" and bloodshed also emphasized the Revolution as a holy event in the progress of humanity, its martyrs (on both sides) linking it to the early years of Christianity. Therefore, "the tricolour was immediately invested with an almost mystical aura" (6). By the fall of 1789, the canonization of the tricolor cockade was complete. The French dramatist and pamphleteer Louis-Sébastien Mercier heralded the cockade as "the emblem of the new breed of citizen-warriors" (Schama 454-455). During the October Days, the *poissardes* were emblematic of this new breed of warriors – warriors of popular sovereignty which foreshadowed that of the *sans-culottes* in the radical revolution of 1792.

Veiling in Mystery: 'Othering' of the *Poissardes*

In the euphoric wake of the king and National Assembly's relocation to Paris, supporters cast the *poissardes* in the role of heroines. One liberal journalist exclaimed, "We can flatter ourselves that yes! our liberty is strengthened. It needed that much. It could not have endured a minute longer; it was being ruined on all sides. . . . And it's the women who restored it to us!" ("A Liberal Journalist" 51). He seems at the same moment shocked and proud; in his assessment of the March, gender only figures in light of the men's apparent neglect of Liberty (usually conceptualized as a woman). The journalist goes on to proclaim, "In what immortal glory they have just enveloped themselves" (51). In response to this tendency to glorify the women, Landes states, "they were being cast as heroines and inspirational symbols, but they were less apt to be counted as people with strong political interests" (111). This glorifying effort reinforced the Rousseauian belief in women as apolitical figures in direct contrast to the women's actions in

October. The anonymous journalist acknowledges women's actions, but urges them to maintain their apolitical "natures." He advises them to remain home in the future: "They must sustain the glory which they have acquired; they must show themselves worthy of the beautiful role that they have just played out before all of France" ("A Liberal Journalist" 54). To do otherwise would taint their legacy with unfeminine behavior. His attitude was similar to other "liberal" journalists who "welcomed the result but were appalled by the means [who] took comfort by insisting that revolutionary activity had been temporarily justifiable but now had ceased to be so since virtuous government was firmly established in the capital" (Hufton 18).

While for some the ends justified the means, others like the reporters for *Le Moniteur Universel* used descriptions of the March to illustrate their anxiety. They portrayed the women as drunkards and bandits, committing violence only for the sake of anarchy. In the issue following the March, editor Charles-Joseph Panckouke wrote,

Des bandes de femmes, ivres pour la plupart, des bouquets à la main, profitant de l'anarchie, arrêtaient les citoyens dans les divers quartiers de la ville et dans les jardins publics, pénétraient jusque dans l'intérieur des maisons pour demander de l'argent ou des rubans, embrassaient les passants, et les mettaient à contribution sous ces démonstrations de fraternité. (*Réimpression "Assemblée Nationale"* 11)

Gangs of women, drunk for the most part, bouquets in hand, taking advantage of the anarchy, stopped citizens in various parts of the city and in the public gardens, entering into the interiors of houses to ask money or ribbons, embraced passers-by, and used them under these demonstrations of fraternity.

His description seeks to undermine the women's methodical approach to protest. He confuses their deliberate denunciation of men's work at the City Council and at the National Assembly with mere acts of anarchy. His women are thieves, invoking the origin of their name *poissard* (Lodge 163). Panckouke's position as editor of the official "history" of the National Assembly lends weight to his impression, which can be felt in the official investigation:

Ces femmes et des brigands, qui les suivraient armés de haches, de fusils, de sabres et de piques, enfoncèrent les portes de l'hôtel-de-ville, insultèrent les représentants de la commune qui a'y trouvaient, pendirent l'un d'eux, parce qu'il était ecclésiastique, et laissèrent cependant couper la corde avant qu'il fût expiré, enlevèrent les armes, forcèrent les prisons et partirent à une heure pour Versailles, obligeant tous ceux qu'ils rencontraient à marcher avec eux. ("Examen des causes particulières" 576)

These women, and brigands who followed, armed with axes, guns, swords and pikes, forced the doors of City Hall, insulted the representatives which they found there, hung one of them, because he was a clergyman; however they cut the cord before he expired, removed the weapons, forcing the prisoners and left at 1:00 for Versailles, forcing all those they encountered to march with them.

The similarities between Panckouke and the Châtelet Commission's descriptions are obvious – forced break-ins and the compulsion of passers-by. Yet, the Châtelet Commission goes a step further to link these women to a feared segment of society: brigands. Historian David Andress offers a definition of brigands in tune with the Commission's vision of rioting women: "Brigands were the armed and organised manifestation of what could lurk outside the boundaries of the ordered society" (*The French Revolution* 57). Here chaos and organization go hand-in-hand, a

bundle of contradictions inherent in most views of the October Days – like the anonymous liberal journalist, Panckouke, and the Châtelet. For many members of the male revolutionary establishment, women’s assertion of active citizenship foreshadowed societal break-down; indeed, it went one step further than the despised female influence in the ancien régime. These women became the ultimate other – “other” in opposition in the revolution, and “other” in opposition to the ancien régime. At this early stage, the establishment already sought to exile women from the public sphere and from the history of the revolution if only by discrediting them.

Still, in keeping with this connection to brigandage, the men sought (at the same time) to divest women of the credit of their organization. Ultimately, they attributed the Women’s March to an aristocratic conspiracy. Andress explains the connection between brigandage and conspiracy in the popular mind: “Any episode of riot or major disturbance would sooner or later be attributed to shadowy gangs of brigands, an ill-defined and always hidden underworld, which at the same time was supposedly often in the pay of political factions intent on opposing some particular government scheme or order” (*The French Revolution* 57). However, in this context the government and the general public aligned to attribute women’s actions to conspiracy against the revolution. They found perfect targets in the ambitious and progressive duc d’Orléans, and the liberal leader and nobleman the comte de Mirabeau.

Soon after the March, rumors linked the two men to a plot to depose Louis XVI and to place his cousin Philippe, duc d’Orléans on the throne. As a prince of the blood, the duke was in line to the throne, and for many Orléans offered a better alternative; he was known to harbor strong constitutional monarchist sentiments, and he had joined the Third Estate soon after the Tennis Court Oath in June. Still, his royal descent made him generally untrustworthy for many

disillusioned with the Bourbon dynasty. The National Assembly and the Châtelet Commission took up the gambit of conspiracy in their investigations. Many of the depositions published as *Procédure Criminelle* dealt with conspiracy; however, these conspiracy depositions were taken from men. For the sake of space, I will focus on only two depositions taken from men in December 1789.

The first Jean Peltier, aged 30, is identified as a gentleman wholesaler from Paris. He testifies that the comte de Mirabeau approached him:

Eh mais, bonhomme que vous êtes, qui est-ce qui vous a dit qu'il ne faut pas un roi ?
Mais que vous importe que ce soit Louis XVI ou Louis XVII ? Voulez-vous que ce soit toujours le bambin qui nous gouverne ? (*Réimpression "Déposition" I 522*).

But, gentleman that you are, who do you say should not be king? Does it matter to you whether it is Louis XVI or Louis XVII? Do you want us to be governed by a child always?

Here, Mirabeau respectfully acknowledges the man's status as a gentleman. He manipulates the question to appeal to the man's sense of right, and what is right for France. Louis XVI governs like a child to be influenced and manipulated untrustworthy family members. He is weak, effeminate, and Mirabeau's question, moreover, suggests that his reign emasculates France. After all, should a grown man allow himself to be ordered about by a child? Peltier also reports that he saw Orléans in talks with M. Ternay, Moliens, M. de la Clos, and other "liberal" aristocrats suspected (or even openly) favorable to Orléans – and many of whom, such as Clos, who were close confederates of Mirabeau.

Déposition CXXVII from Claude, the vicomte de la Châtre focuses upon the duke's presence during the Versailles palace invasion. He depicts Orléans as delighted by the events:

J'ai vu de cette chambre et j'ai entendu des cris perçants de *vive le roi d'Orléans!* j'ai fixé mes regards du côté de la cour des Ministères, j'ai aperçu ce prince dans ce même moment longeant la ligne des troupes, en dehors d'elles, ayant l'air de venir de la place d'Armes, où les gardes-du-corps, au nombre de deux, avaient été, ledit matin exécutés. Ce prince passant sous la croisée où j'étais, au premier, avait une badine à la main, une grosse cocarde à son chapeau, et ne cessait de rire. ("Déposition CXXVII" 554)

I saw this room and I heard piercing screams of *long live king Orléans!* As I turned my gaze to my side to the Court Ministères, I saw the prince at the same time along the line of troops, yet apart from them, as though coming from the Place d'Armes, where two bodyguards had been executed that morning. The prince, passing underneath the crossroads where I was at first, had a riding whip in hand, a large cockade on his hat, and kept laughing.

Orléans was undoubtedly delighted by his popularity, especially considering his support of the Revolution alienated the Royal Family. While dripping with disapproval, Châtre's deposition does not effectively establish a conspiracy. Other depositions followed a similar vein. However, "No one, however hard they have tried, has yet found evidence that the initial crowd of women was 'set up.' Some royalist and clerical accounts allude to 'women in white dresses' who were thus defined as something other than the women of the people and possible pay-masters in the service of the Duke of Orleans. The evidence for this, however, is flimsy" (Hufton 17). Ultimately, the Châtelet exonerated Orléans and Mirabeau for lack of evidence in October 1790.

It is important to examine the conspiracy theory for its effect upon the legacy of women's participation. As Landes notes, "The Châtelet inquiry, the government's own investigation of the October Days, worked hard to establish a conspiracy theory, even to discount women's prominence in the events" (111). Attributing the Women's March to an aristocratic conspiracy divested it of an important character. If proven true, then the women had not organized themselves into a cohesive and effective political force. They could not boast of having secured grain for Paris, or having conquered a king.

Concluding Thoughts

Whether hordes of chaotic harpies, dupes of an aristocratic conspiracy, or simply ordinary women driven to better their plight in harsh economic conditions, the women of the October Days left an indelible impression upon the pages of history. The revolutionary establishment tried to skew that impression in line with their vision of a virtuous Republican (patriarchal) society. Steeped in Rousseauian philosophy that envisioned an ideal society based on a conscientious male (active) citizenry and a chaste female (passive) citizenry, they felt that the success of their vision depended upon female exile from the public sphere. Landes highlighted these revolutionaries' dilemma: "Either women would have to be subsumed within the universal (and effaced) or treated as different by nature but therefore outside the universal (and *its* privileges)" (105). For the Jacobin leaders in the fall of 1793, the answer was simple: exile women from the public sphere, obliterate female societies that nurtured that inclination for civic activism, and punish female leaders. The result was the realization (if not idyllic) of a patriarchal republican sphere, where women were safely relegated to the domestic – to nurture republican, manly virtues within the home, but only the home.

Still, the images of the poissards and the legacy of their actions continued to resonate throughout the revolution. The consequence of the October Days sent shockwaves across the Channel, and prompted many indignant replies by English political writers like Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine. The seriousness with which these writers responded to the claims of these women, and the claims of the larger revolution can be felt forcefully in Burke's assertion that the Revolution began with the October Days. In the chapter which follows I will demonstrate that Burke, Wollstonecraft, and Williams used the October Days as a particular moment in which they could illustrate their opinion of the French Revolution. Their depictions of the poissardes in particular show that the consequences of active political women were troublesome to these writers. Even the liberal Wollstonecraft and Williams seem troubled by the potential violence and anarchy of uneducated women taking political roles and responsibility. Though they were not Burke's predictors of anarchy, the women assumed the symbolic significance of societal ills for Wollstonecraft and Williams too.

III. Prelude to Exile: The English Interpretation of the October Days

Across the Channel, English writers noted this moment of female empowerment. From Edmund Burke to Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams, each of these writers interpreted the October Days differently. They used the physical barrier of the Channel and the cultural barrier of an English identity to construct a safe haven from which to respond to the revolution, and to present their English viewpoints to an English audience. But even this explanation is too simplistic considering the various motives and reactions of the respondents; these reactions ranged from horror and disgust to passive tourist interest - though a tinge of alarm is apparent throughout each of these writers' works. For Edmund Burke, the violence of the October Days indicates the direction of the Revolution; the *poissardes* are anarchic furies. Mary Wollstonecraft argues with Burke's version of the October Days in 1790, because she feels that he disregards the social ills which produced the condition of the *poissardes* and partially, therefore, excused their violence – namely their poverty and lack of education; yet in 1793, the experience of Paris in revolution teaches her that Burke's "predictions" of anarchic violence may have been borne of political knowledge and experience. Helen Maria Williams celebrates the results of the October Days while she glosses over the violence; indeed, she spends more time depicting the triumph of the *Fête de la Fédération* as a result of July and October 1789. Burke, Wollstonecraft, and Williams disapprove the violence of that October, yet they contest the meaning of that violence – which, in opposing Burke, Wollstonecraft and Williams believe may be necessary in revolution. Yet, it must be noted that Wollstonecraft and Williams experience the later violence firsthand while Burke never visits France during revolution. His experience is always mediated.

Edmund Burke: Uncivilized France as Exiled?

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was published in November 1790 in protest against the Revolution, and in response to the enthusiastic support that the Revolution received among the Dissenting community in England. In particular, the work responded to the assertions made by the Dissenting minister Dr. Richard Price in a speech he gave nearly a year earlier to the Revolution Society. In his speech Dr. Richard Price claimed that England first led the way to liberty with the Glorious Revolution in 1688, and now France led the way for England. It was an especially dangerous assertion given that Dr. Price also stated that from 1688 England had shown that they (as a people) reserved the right to cashier kings. Burke contests Price's view of English history; he asserts that the Glorious Revolution came about through the right of succession and an act of Parliament which prohibited a Catholic from inheriting the throne. Therefore, William and Mary were not "elected" by the English people as Price insists. They were the rightful monarchs by lawful hereditary succession. Through the work, Burke defends hereditary privilege as government by the best, the clergy, and private property – all of which he feels is threatened by the decrees of National Assembly (abolishing feudal rights and the nationalization of church property).

He also seeks to discount the influence of the philosophes in England, which many dissenters and radical in England applauded. In this respect, Burke situates himself as the representative the traditional English character: "We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress with us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers" (*Reflections* 73). He systematically names the important Enlightenment philosophes to discount their influence in England, and to discredit the ideological foundation of the Revolution. Indeed, Burke seems to have a distaste or scorn for

government founded upon abstract principles instead of practical knowledge. He then points out the absurdity and arrogance of the revolutionary belief in progress to perfection by pointing out the rational position of the English:

We know that we have made no discoveries, and we think that no discoveries are to be made in morality, nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born, altogether as well as they will be after the grave has heaped its mould upon our presumption, and the silent tomb shall have imposed its law on our pert loquacity. (73)

Burke links the intransient quality of liberty with eternity and the idea of God, suggesting that God first conceived the idea of liberty, and that thus liberty existed before time and will exist long after time. Because liberty draws from God, then, it is beyond arrogance to assert that humanity can ever discover anything new in that regard. There is an affront to God in the revolutionaries' actions. Thus, Burke praises the steady character of the English which led them to an early conception and allegiance to liberty; in this way, he also links an English liberty with morals as inheritance: "In England we have not yet been completely emboweled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals" (*Reflections* 73). "We preserve," he goes on, "the whole of our feelings still native and entire, unsophisticated by pedantry and infidelity. We have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms" (73-74). Burke then shows that the ancien régime and the Revolution are both compared negatively to the English character. He also contrasts the cold reason of the philosophes to the natural warm feeling of the English faithful to tradition, Parliament, king, and God: "We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to

magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility” (74). And the English come out the better for the comparison. They show their adherence to European civilization that is entwined with these allegiances, suggesting that France is in danger of breaking from that civilization. In effect, Burke’s preoccupation with the upheaval in France and its danger to civilization follows his conception of exile. His exile is explicit in its connection to tradition, inherited privileges and values, and to government owing its roots to a medieval past.

Burke’s depiction of the October Days illustrates both his concern for England, and his assertion that France has exiled itself from European civilization. Moreover, he refers to several sources within his text to demonstrate that his own work shows a more accurate account of the situation in France. Peter Howell offers a succinct list of Burke’s sources:

de Calonne’s accounts of pre-Revolutionary French finances; Necker’s two reports on the French finances; Lally-Tollendal’s *Lettres* on the events of October 1789; some writings by J.-J. Mounier . . . some debates of the National Assembly published in the *Courrier de France* (and probably also from the *Journal des Débats* and the *Procès-verbal*, both being widely-available in England); and an account of events in early 1790 by one M. de la Tour du Pin. To this we can add, . . . the *Courrier de Provence*, the *cahiers* presented to the Estates General in June 1789 . . . and letters from Charles-Jean François Depont, who was the nominal addressee of the *Reflections*, and whose correspondence was the immediate stimulus for his writing. (Howell 377-378)

Beyond this source list, Burke uses a form familiar to readers in England: the court circular – at least he uses a version of this form, which allows him to concentrate on the Royal Family, their distress, and the injustice they suffer because of “popular sovereignty.” The court circular as a tradition of political representation in the eighteenth century filtered news through the court as

the locus of power. It “appeared at the top of the editorial sections of newspapers” (365). As Howell claims, “The politico-epistemology is such that the court, one could say, is like a screen onto which events from the ‘real’ world are projected” (365). The court circular form, then, is also part theatrical, and part Habermasian representative publicness, in which “lordship was something publicly represented” (Habermas 7). The court circular was a textual version of this representation. Consider Howell’s description:

Onto the splendid court-scene in many cases a messenger from a foreign diplomat, or in times of war from military command . . . informs first the King, then the appropriate ministers, at which point the substance of that information, in other words, the ‘news’ story starts. (365)

By situating the invasion of Versailles and the French monarchs’ reaction as the central horror piece in his answer to the Revolution, Burke conforms to this court circular format, especially as it concerns the “display of sovereignty,” as Howell would say (365). Or, as Habermas would put it, Burke’s use of the court circular, especially in his “display of sovereignty” in distress “pretended to make something invisible visible through the public presence of the person of the lord” (Howell 365; Habermas 7). By highlighting the threat to the queen of France, then Burke visibly (or textually) represents the threat to England. The Gordon Riots of 1780 and the enthusiastic support among some segments of the English population must have made the threat of Revolution in England seem very tangible in 1790. Yet, “representative publicness” and the court circular form is also a rhetorical device to elicit sympathy and empathy for the French Royal Family. In this way, both Burke’s theatrical metaphor and the textual pageantry of the Court Circular reinforce power of “political theatre,” which is especially an “outward display of power” (Howell 365).

The invasion of the Versailles palace forms the central “horror” piece of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections*. Burke infuses his depiction with his earlier ideas of the theatre, and of the sublime and beautiful. He employs a theatrical metaphor throughout *Reflections*, going so far as to call it bad theatre. The distance from the scene encouraged this kind of aesthetic judgment as though the Revolution was acted out on a French stage for the benefit of an English audience – if one could trust the English to make the *correct* judgment. As Burke laments, “Everything seems out of nature in the strange chaos of levity and all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies. In viewing this monstrous tragi-comic scene, the most opposite passions necessarily succeed, and sometimes mix with each other in the mind: alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror” (*Reflections* 9). In *Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology*, Tom Furniss examines Burke’s use of the theatrical metaphor in condemning the Revolution. He notes that Burke “condemns the Revolution as an ill-conceived moment of theatre which necessarily has chaotic and unpredictable effects on nations and individuals alike” (130). Indeed, his “strategy is to rewrite it as tragicomic farce in order to deflate any attempt to restage it in England. His whole project depends, therefore, on the possibility of distinguishing between political forms in terms of good and bad drama” (131). Burke’s willingness to see revolution as theatre dates as far back as 9 August 1789 in a letter to Lord Charlemont:

As to us here our thoughts of every thing at home are suspended, by our astonishment at the wonderful Spectacle, which is exhibited in a Neighbouring and rival Country – what Spectators, and what actors! England gazing with astonishment at a French struggle for Liberty and not knowing whether to blame or to applaud! The thing indeed, though I thought I saw something like it in progress for several years, has still something in it paradoxical and Mysterious. The spirit it is impossible not to admire; but the old Parisian

ferocity has broken out in a shocking manner . . . What will be the Event it is hard I think still to say. (“To the Earl of Charlemont” 10)

Of course, Burke’s final judgment on the Revolution is ambiguous here as he waits further developments. However, the October Days and the supporters in England cause Burke to see the dangers in the Revolution as more and more threatening to England. The October Days especially influenced a negative reaction which he expounded in *Reflections*, and the October Days haunted Burke’s opinion of the Revolution throughout its duration. This letter also shows the seeds of Burke’s employment of the sublime and beautiful as rhetorical devices – which in itself is a reply to Price’s employment of those terms (implicitly and explicitly) in his speech to the Revolution Society. As Furniss states, “Burke cannot concede the sublime ground to radicalism” (116). Burke needs to reclaim his aesthetic theory from the pro-revolutionary position if he is to maintain consistency in his denunciation of the Revolution. He cannot deny the sublime effects of some aspects, and therefore, so Furniss says, Burke insists that it is a false sublime, or a “perversion of the sublime” (Furniss 130). Why is it a perversion? Because the source of terror must be near enough to invoke a real feeling of danger so that one can experience the joyous relief of escape. As Furniss states, the sublime “is achieved through a physical or psychological reaction which allows the subject to overcome or transcend its subjection, transforming potential annihilation into a sense of elevation” (27). In the case of the French Revolution, the sublime is false. Firstly the revolution is at a remove, and though the threat of contagion remains to England, it is not near enough at the present time to support a true feeling of terror; secondly, if the Revolution and its terrific scenes have something of the sublime character, it is a sublime out of control (Furniss 119). In France, the “threat of annihilation”

cannot be overcome, because there is something genuinely apocalyptic in reference to civilization.

Burke is acutely aware that the sublime is by definition more powerful than the beautiful; hence, his concern to reclaim the sublime for the anti-revolutionaries. Indeed, he focuses upon the tension between these aesthetic effects in his own writings on the Revolution. Burke's defense of chivalric European civilization is beautiful and invokes the sublime to augment the majesty of kings and God. His invasion scene is supremely sublime, illustrating the dangerous possibilities of the Revolution. However, Burke's strategy is also flawed, for though the invasion is meant to be more rhetorically powerful, it also attracts – at least in the dramatic sense. As Furniss perceptively notes:

Terror would be expected to stimulate readers' anxiety, keeping the Revolution at one remove, and repressing the revolutionary spirit within England itself, while ridicule would help maintain a certain ironic distance. To deny the Revolution's sublimity, to make it sheer terror is because it will not keep its 'distance,' might spur Burke's readers to 'recoil' and work to remove it. Yet if the recoil from terror is equivalent to the self-defensive action of the sublime, there is a danger for Burke that his text might generate sublime reading effects – that he will provoke admiration for the Revolution rather than terror. (135)

Certainly, Burke is aware of this tension between the beautiful and the sublime in his text. He interrupts the palace invasion with a beatific eulogium on the Queen; he mixes the sublime and the beautiful in his lament on the fall of chivalry. Burke praises chivalry as beautifying the “natural” social order, as softening the effects of “servitude” (*Reflections* 66).

Burke's theatrical metaphor and the reclamation of his aesthetic theory is especially apparent in the mixing of genres, which he employs to great rhetorical effect. He uses a rational style suited to political pamphlets in his examination of historical and/or legal issues, a gory pseudo-Gothic style more reminiscent of a novel to describe the invasion of the palace, and finally a sentimentally-charged depiction of the Royal Family in distress. He employs them to highlight the loss in Revolution – that of civilization, whereby the poissardes become predictors of civil unrest. This Gothic genre is suited to capture the imagination or “sensibility” of the reading public; the use of courtly language – especially the use of the word “fidelity,” and his Gothic Romance imagery is calculated to illicit sympathy for the Royal Family. Burke “records” the sacrificial death of a bodyguard: “From this sleep the queen was first startled by the voice of the sentinel at her door, who cried out to her to save herself by flight – that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give – that they were upon him, and he was dead” (*Reflections* 60). This introduction to the king's plight with the sacrificial death is a perfect moment to emphasize Burke's royalist sympathies, in which to die for one's monarch is the greatest honor and romance.

Yes, the guard dies in that historic moment, yet there is a sense of immortal martyrdom in the scenes that follow. The guard's death and subsequent dismemberment suggests the martyrdom of a saint, indeed, recalls the hagiographies of early Christian saints who were dismembered in the streets of pagan Rome, or by spectacle in the state-sanctioned Coliseum. The Royal Family were “forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses” (*Reflections* 60). The assassins' appearance recall those Roman ruffians, and the palace that of the blood-soaked theatre.

Furthermore, the guard's death, and Burke's gory, chivalric tone links this death to the ultimate betrayal to chivalry and monarchy as tragedy and near-sacrilege. Amidst his sentimental reminiscence of Marie Antoinette as a young Dauphine, he laments, clearly betraying his shock, "I thought ten thousands swords must have leapt from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult" (*Reflections* 65). But ten thousands swords did not leap up; the bodyguard is seemingly alone in his willingness for self-sacrifice to defend not only the Queen but the "age of chivalry" and civilized France. Burke's rhetorical strategy is complicated here, but it begs the question: is Burke like that lone chivalric guard, defending the honor of the ancien régime in the person of Marie Antoinette against the Revolution supporters of England? It seems so on some level, especially in linking the guard's death with the failure of those ten thousands swords and with Burke's personal remembrance of the Queen as the young Dauphine.

Burke continually connects the scene with sacrilege. Indeed, horrifically reminiscent of an ecclesiastical procession, the crowd forces the Royal Family to follow the heads of their guards perched on spears like Medieval Hosts. The sacredness of the guards' sacrifice represents something vastly different – a blood sacrifice on the altar of the Revolution for the diabolical and menacing sacredness of mission. A Bacchic revelry surrounds the procession: "horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women" (*Reflections* 60-61). For Burke, the poissardes are always vile furies, and in this apocalyptic scene, the harbingers of doom. The hordes outside Versailles are nihilistic, bent on the destruction of France, of tradition, and civilization itself. For Burke, the terms are interdependent; chivalry is necessary to polish society, and without it, civilization becomes cruder and cruder as evidenced

by the insurrection of the Parisian women. Therefore, he laments, “But the age of chivalry is gone. That sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever” (*Reflections* 65). He sees a dying world, and in its wake anarchy; his prediction for the new order is regicide, patricide, and sacrilege, and gallows everywhere (66). Intellectual historian Gregory Claeys sums Burke’s fears,

The decline of chivalry, then, had been engineered by a mechanical conception of both individual and society in which kings and women were alike reduced to mere generic human beings, their sacrosanctness and dignity dismissed as ridiculous superstition, the more easily to dangle their persons on the gallows . . . (22)

Burke does not yet make his famous “prediction” of the monarchs’ executions. However, he suggests that it was planned at least by some. It was “boldly sketched, but it was only sketched” (*Reflections* 61-61). Indeed, Châtelet Commission recorded death threats against the Queen in depositions and in their official report. Yet, already in 1790, Burke foreshadows that end:

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman . . . Regicide, and parricide, and sacrilege, are but fictions of superstition, corrupting jurisprudence by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father, are only common homicide; and if the people are by any chance, or in any way gainers by it a sort of homicide much the most pardonable. (66)

Burke then sarcastically ends, “into which we ought not to make too severe a scrutiny” (66). His scathing remarks suggest that the revolutionaries will stop at nothing in their destructive, anarchic course.

In light of these fears, Burke warns, “The usurpation which, in order to subvert ancient institutions, has destroyed ancient principles, will hold power by arts similar to those by which it

has acquired it” (67). The seeds of the Terror are in this moment for Burke, although he writes in the relatively bloodless “liberal” Revolution of 1789-1790. The decline of chivalry represents a break from inherited values and institutions, and the early English enthusiasm for the Revolution presents the problem of infection. It is a vicious cycle, and a possible threat of contagion to England. In essence, as Claeys points out, France “exiled itself from Europe” (14).

Mary Wollstonecraft: Chivalry as an Instrument in Exile

Burke published *Reflections* on 1 November 1790 nearly one year after Dr. Richard Price’s *Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, which so provoked Burke’s ire. Mary Wollstonecraft was a member of Price’s Dissenting circle of friends, and she considered him a mentor. As a result, she viewed Burke’s *Reflections* as a personal attack on Price as much as it was an attack on the founding principles of the French Revolution. She quickly wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, which appeared less than a month later. It was the first work to engage Burke in the so-called Revolution Controversy. This first *Vindication* defended Price as much as the Revolution. Indeed, Virginia Sapiro notes, “the *Vindication of the Rights of Men* is an attack on Edmund Burke more than it is a defense of the French Revolution” (25). There is certainly something to that declaration, but it is important to assert that Wollstonecraft defended the Revolution *through* her attack on Burke. His attack on Price may have provided the impetus for her fiery pamphlet, but she did not lose sight of her prime objective to highlight the faulty reasoning behind Burke’s philosophy, and to uphold the Revolution’s progress.

In *Revolutionary Feminism*, Gary Kelly demonstrates that Wollstonecraft uses Burke’s own rhetoric strategy against him. She assumes his language and his theory (especially on the sublime and beautiful) to illustrate the weakness of his argument. She recognizes his strategy to reclaim this theory for his own position, and asserts her own use of the sublime and beautiful as a

part of her strategy to undermine his argument. She notes the sentimental effusions on Marie Antoinette and the Royal Family, as well as his praise for hereditary privilege and primogeniture, as more in line with Burke's (and her own view) of the beautiful. In fact, she goes beyond reclamation to assert that Burke's argument *must* be the weaker of the two for his strong reliance on the beautiful – hence, by his own definition weak and feminine. Her own position, based on reason, even touching the sublime, is then more powerful and masculine by Burke's definition of the terms “sublime” and “masculine.” Furthermore, Wollstonecraft links Burke's effeminate stance with his investment in courtly culture, which is inherently effeminate by its stress on servility and artifice. As Kelly notes, Wollstonecraft found “in Burke's style and arguments the evidence for his corruption by court culture” (87). Wollstonecraft's issues with Burke are inherently tied to her issues with court culture, or more particularly with the “impact of the Court system on its participants” (Sapiro 83). That is to say, court culture promoted the neglect of so-called “manly” virtues: reason, morality, justice. As Sapiro states, “society appeared to Wollstonecraft as constructed top to bottom of interrelated relationships of dominance and subordination or, as she often put it, tyranny, oppression, and servility” (81). She seeks to show that Burke's rhetoric identifies him with this society of dominance. As for Wollstonecraft, she is cautious in adopting a solidly masculine or feminine form of writing. She employs a mixture of both – mixing a “detached and philosophical style” with the “lyrical,” “expressive” familiar letter of sensibility (Kelly 109). Yet as Kelly asserts, Wollstonecraft does not seek an “androgynous form but one that converts the conventional limitations of women's education, ‘mind’ and writing into techniques for advancing and exemplifying women's claim to minds and careers equal to if different than those of men” (109). By checking sensibility with reason,

Wollstonecraft's writing (by her own view) is much more masculine and hence reasonable than Burke's style in *Reflections*.

Wollstonecraft maintains that his persistence in using "sublime" and "beautiful" to support his arguments only proves the artifice of his present position on the French Revolution. Indeed, Wollstonecraft claims, "had you been a Frenchman, you would have been, in spite of your respect for rank and antiquity, a violent revolutionist" (*Rights of Men* 46). This she asserts through Burke's earlier championing of the American cause and other liberal causes, but also because she links Burke's position with his taste of power, which *had* he been a Frenchman would have necessitated his support of the Revolution. Then, the Revolution would have appeared sublime, and the Rights of Man even beautiful.

Wollstonecraft acknowledges that Burke centers his argument on the portrait of the Royal Family in distress, and she acknowledges the effectiveness of this rhetorical strategy: its appeal to sympathy as integral to the theory of the sublime and beautiful. However, she marks the distinction between sympathy for the Royal Family and sympathy for the Parisian common people (of which Burke has none). Burke's own sentimental attachment to Marie Antoinette and his investment in courtly culture reduces his ability to recognize the true objects of misery. Or as Kelly asserts, "Burke has a 'sensibility' made so delicate by luxury, and an 'imagination' and 'taste' so vitiated by art, that he cannot sympathize with a mere '*man*' and with misery as it really is" (92). The influence of this courtly culture is such that Wollstonecraft laments, "it might be difficult to bring back your sophisticated heart to nature and make you feel like a man" (*Rights of Men* 20). Servility has "vitiating" Burke as much as Wollstonecraft later asserts that chivalry vitiates women (25). But in this instance, sophistication (a byword for courtly culture) numbs Burke to the true miseries of the common people, whom he dismisses as the "swinish

multitude” (*Reflections* 68). He does not, so Wollstonecraft states, seek to remedy the ills of their condition. It is only nature, or perhaps divine providence, which placed the “swinish multitude” in their miserable condition. Moreover, Wollstonecraft takes Burke to task for inconsistency even on this point, noting his involvement in the British Royal Family’s misery during the Regency Crisis. She questions, “Where then was the infallibility of that extolled instinct which rises above reason? was it warped by vanity, or *hurled* from its throne by self-interest?” (*Rights of Men* 27). Indeed, Burke was “eager to taste sweets of power” in seeking to promote the interests of his Whig party (27). Wollstonecraft then mocks Burke, emphasizing the inconsistency (and hence weakness) of his argument: “Impressed as *you are* with respect for royalty, I am astonished that you did not tremble at every step lest Heaven should avenge on your guilty head the insult offered to its viceregent” (27-28). Where was then his “servile elogiums” for George III or Queen Charlotte (26)? Where was his sympathy, his sensibility for a “father torn from his children, - a husband from an affectionate wife” (26)?

In highlighting the strikingly different attitudes towards the two royal houses in distress, Wollstonecraft picks up on a rhetorical strategy that she uses throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* – noting Burke’s inconsistency through contrasting portraits. The heart of her critique of Burke’s depiction of women lies in his own contrasting portraits of Marie Antoinette and the Parisian market-women. He lavishes Marie Antoinette with praise while he dismisses the market-women as the “vilest of women” (61). For Burke, Marie Antoinette represents beauty, civilization, and everything good in the ancien régime; the *poissardes*, as we have seen, are predictors of anarchy and Terror. Wollstonecraft’s own view of the Revolution and her opinion on women’s condition lies in these portraits as well.

First, I turn to Burke's portrait of Marie Antoinette as a particular source of Wollstonecraft's ire. His depiction of Marie Antoinette in *Reflections* was a sentimental ideal of beauty drawn from his own definition of beauty in *A Philosophical Enquiry into Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. She is "glittering like the morning star, full of life, and splendour, and joy" (*Reflections* 65). She is delicate, vain, conscious of her dignity as a Hapsburg princess and a French queen. Moreover, she acts according to the dictates of her station and the prevailing notion of virtuous womanhood. She delights in her own beauty and dress, and in times of distress, she relies on male protection – particularly in regards to the October Days, she flees to the protection of her husband after the death of her bodyguard. Marie Antoinette's weakness in light of her situation, and her "serene patience, in a manner suited to her rank and race" subscribes to Burke's notion of delicacy and elegance as part of the beautiful. Wollstonecraft takes issue with Burke's conception of the beautiful as depending upon weakness, particularly feminine beauty. She decries the popular notion that has elevated weakness to a virtue among women, believing that it inhibited their moral development by encouraging a perpetual childhood. She also bristles at his equation of Marie Antoinette with the beautiful, while the "ugliness" of the market-women served to contrast her greatness. She saw this disparity as part of courtly love inherent in the portrait, and linked it with Burke's stress upon the queen's rank as an especial cause for sympathy – something that Wollstonecraft found unpardonable.

Continuing her strategy of "throwing" Burke's words back at him, Wollstonecraft mocks his language of chivalry in the portrait of Marie Antoinette: "with what indecent warmth did *you* treat a woman, for I shall not lay any stress on her title, whose conduct in life has deserved praise, though not, perhaps, the servile eulogiums which have been lavished on the queen" (*Rights*

of Men 26). They are only worthy of admiration when, high-born, they subscribe to a notion of femininity which is passive, degrading, and formed to deprive women of a rational, useful life. She explains, “such homage vitiates [women], prevents their endeavouring to obtain solid personal merit” (25). Therefore, “The queen of France – the great and small vulgar, claim our pity; they have almost insuperable obstacles to surmount in their progress towards true dignity of character” (30). She celebrates the fall of chivalry, because she sees in it the established mode of oppression, in which women do not always feel their enslavement. She uses Burke’s phrasing: “Whether the glory of Europe is set, I shall not now enquire; but probably the spirit of romance and chivalry is in the wane; and reason will gain by its extinction” (29). She idealizes a society based on reason, and not the empty Gothic forms of romance. She maintains that chivalry only upholds the oppressive distinctions of rank, whereas reason acts as a leveler.

In light of her distaste for chivalry, Wollstonecraft argues with Burke’s depiction of the *poissardes* as predictors of anarchy. She accuses him of exaggerating the violence of the palace invasion, and of romanticizing the Queen at the expense of the *poissardes*: “When you descanted on the horrors . . . and gave a glowing, and . . . a most exaggerated description of that infernal night, without having troubled to clean your palette, you might have returned home and indulged us with a sketch of the misery you personally aggravated” (*Rights of Men* 26). She does not shy away from the violence as Williams does, but she suggests that Burke’s sympathy rests in the wrong quarter, and he seems to have little left for the starving multitudes. For Burke, it is the natural order of things; for Wollstonecraft, it is emblematic of societal ills – that which must be remedied in revolution. Therefore, she must defend the *poissardes* against his attack, “Probably you mean women who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never had had any advantages of education; or their vices might have lost part of their abominable deformity, by

losing part of their grossness” (30). She insists on education reform as a necessary part of democratization if that process is to be successful, and more importantly as a preventative measure against “violence.” Therefore, the *poissardes*’ appearance is more important for their “lack” (of education) than for their actions.

For Wollstonecraft, the improvement of women’s condition must begin with educational reform. She recognized that society overlooked a practical and rational education for women, because it was not deemed necessary. Society wrapped in courtly culture subscribed to a notion of womanhood that was too like childhood, and considered feminine beauty as entwined with weakness. In fact, “Wollstonecraft believed women’s education was designed primarily to nurture weakness” (Sapiro 122). Sapiro notes, “She painted a portrait in which this ‘false education’ leads women to become ridiculous creatures as they become increasingly dependent on men” (123). It also nurtured frivolity, because their education and society taught them that their main goal in life was to be an object of admiration for men. Moreover, because courtly society denied women access to education and access to power, women learned that they must use feminine “wiles.” This condition was dangerous to women because it taught them to be cunning, but not virtuous.

According to Wollstonecraft, private virtue is the key to a successful, rational society – or, in relation to the French Revolution, to a successful republic. She does not necessarily challenge the traditional domestic role for women. In fact, she privileges the republican ideal of “virtuous motherhood,” but Wollstonecraft insists that education must accompany women’s preparation for their maternal and domestic roles *if* democracy is to succeed. She explicitly makes the connection, “if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it

will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice.” (*Rights of Woman* 68). By properly educate women, you prepare them for their appropriate domestic role – to be a companion to man, and a mother nurturing a new generation of virtuous republicans. As Landes says, “[Wollstonecraft’s] own rhetoric implies that the home and women’s role within it can be given a civic purpose; and, consequently, that women may come to be satisfied with a domestic rather than a public existence” (129). Therefore, in keeping with other social reformers of her day, Wollstonecraft politicizes the domestic. If women are properly educated, then they would “act like mothers, and the fine lady, become a rational woman, might think it necessary to superintend her family and suckle her children, in order to fulfil her part of the social compact” (*Rights of Men* 24).

In the end, Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* serves two purposes: to discredit Burke’s attack on Price and the French Revolution, and to serve as a polemic against chivalry as a mode of oppression, especially for women. Therefore, it is evident that the *Rights of Men* also serves as a prelude for Wollstonecraft’s most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which she rails against the oppressive effects of the present educational system for women, and proposes an egalitarian educational system as a remedy in which gender would not be considered. In other respects, Wollstonecraft wrote the first vindication in the midst of her euphoria and hope in the French Revolution, and before the radical turn and before her visit to France in 1792 which led her to reassess the implications of the October Days.

Helen Maria Williams: A Citizen (or citoyenne) of the World?

From the very beginning, Helen Maria Williams enthusiastically embraced the French Revolution. Her 1790 novel *Julia* was written in 1789 just as the Revolution broke out, and though it is set during the American Revolution, the work contains “allusions to political

upheaval,” and even “a visionary poem on the Bastille” (Kennedy 46). In fact, Williams was one of the first writers in Britain to respond to the Revolution, and also among the first to travel to France to witness the events firsthand. Her *Letters from France* chronicle her experience and provide a mediated eye-witness account for her readers in England. As such, Williams’s immediacy answers for her sources, or at least her “eye-witness” account negates the need to account for her sources to a certain extent. This is even true when she recounts past events, for she has special access to participants. In effect, she becomes a foreign correspondent for England in the modern sense of immediacy, of being there on the scene. As a foreign correspondent, moreover, she experiences a double sense of exile – voluntary exile from her native England, and exile in her outsider position in France. This exile is especially apparent in her brief record of the October Days, and her experience of the Fête de la Fédération in July 1790.

Williams’s expatriatism frames her account of the October Days. Her language and tone is that of tourism, providing effective distance from the actual events. Following a tour of important revolutionary places such as the Bastille and the National Assembly, she visits Versailles. There is something artificial in this tourist set-up; she even employs an unnamed guide to lead her through “the passages through which the Queen escaped from her own apartment to the King’s on the memorable night when the *Poissards* visited Versailles” (*Letters from France* I: I.XI.83). This artificiality is never more apparent than in her choice of the verb “visit,” which also suggests that the *poissards* themselves are tourists. It implies a peaceful gathering more reminiscent of the traditional call of the *poissards* to Versailles on the feast day of St. Louis. Yet, this moment is a powerful reminder of the power-shift of October 1789, and Williams’s account (or revision) emphasizes that shift.

In contrast to the *poissardes*'s *visit*, Williams suggests deception in the Queen's movements. She "remained . . . concealed in some secret recess of the palace" (I: LXI.83). Williams treats the structure of the palace and its relationship to the Queen in light of deception or courtly corruption. Secret rooms and recesses, shadowy machinations and intrigue are part of this corruption just as they are a part (even if only hinted) in Williams account of this revolutionary *ournée*. She acknowledges, "I could not help moralizing a little, on being told that the apartment to which this balcony belongs is the very room in which Louis the Fourteenth died; little suspecting what a scene would, in the course of a few years, be acted on that spot" (83). The contrast between the glory of the Sun King and the fall of his successors is poignant, and when she considers the present Royal Family's forced relinquishment of absolute power, just. Yet, there is something pathetic even in that justice, and in the court in decline – even if Williams celebrates that decline. The Queen in distress (perhaps especially because of her distress) cannot move without deception; it is too entwined in the court culture. Moreover, there is the suggestion that she can no longer conceal herself in this aura of intrigue. She has been exposed by the common people, and therefore she appears on the balcony when "it was thought proper to comply with the desire of the crowd" (83-84). Marie-Antoinette's acquiescence acknowledges the dangerous power of popular sovereignty even in the early "liberal" days of the Revolution.

Williams only hints at the danger inherent in popular sovereignty – the threat to order, and the threat to a peaceful bourgeois revolution. She only touches upon the crowd's violent acts. She does not record the preceding violent action nor the actual palace invasion: "All the bread which could be procured in the town of Versailles was distributed among the *Poissards*, who, with savage ferocity held up their morsels of bread on their bloody pikes, towards the

balcony where the Queen stood” (I: I.XI.84). For Williams, the women’s ferocity is righteous, because the ancien régime has failed them. There is no evidence to suggest that Williams knew about the *poissardes*’ special relationship to monarchy nor to their tradition of famine protest. She readily links the October Days to the failure of monarchy.

Yet, there is a hint of disapproval of the women’s actions. As Deborah Kennedy notes, “The image of the unruly *poissardes* jarred with Williams’s own view of a compassionate female identity, as she strove to define an acceptable form of female heroism” (67). Williams’s militant citizenship is not the militant citizenship of the market-women, if Williams’s polite conception of female participation can be called militant at all. Certainly, she shared a worldview more in line with the *salonnières* who influenced *behind* the scenes – who participated in a rational-critical debate with intellectuals in Parisian drawing-rooms. In this respect, Williams was an English *de Staël* with a certain distaste for the lower class manifestation of power. As Kennedy states, “The incident illustrates the class divide as well as the conflict between the domestic and the political roles of women” (67). Still, “she cannot risk being too critical because she supported the goals of the militant action” (67). After all, the Women’s March forced Louis XVI’s signature on the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and forced the relocation to Paris. Yes, she supported the goals, but certainly not the means – a reaction that would come to bear sharply on Williams’s experience during the Terror.

However, in 1790, she can only downplay the violence as though it were an aberration in the Revolution. Indeed, in referring to the deaths at the Bastille’s fall, Williams writes, “If the French revolution should cost no further bloodshed, it must be allowed, notwithstanding a few shocking instances of public vengeance, that the liberty of twenty-four millions of people will have been purchased at a far cheaper rate than could ever have been expected from the former

experience of the world” (*Letters from France* I: I.X.82). Therefore, the French Revolution contrasts favorably with the American Revolution, and even with the English Civil War and its direct descendant the Glorious Revolution. In the very next letter, however, she plunges into her muted account of the invasion of Versailles, thereby linking both the violence of the Bastille with Versailles, if only for that (hoped for) muted violence. I use “muted” here to signify both the downplay of actual violence, and the silence of those violent voices through Williams’s prose. Kennedy says that Williams “dismiss[es] these acts of violence as unfortunate but inevitable in a revolution, and [she] shows that the danger has been removed since she can visit the lamppost herself” (59). I agree with Kennedy to a certain extent. Williams does use the trope of tourism to place violent scenes at a distance, as we have seen, and her “muted violence” serves to emphasize the distance from those scenes. It also highlights a certain naïveté concerning revolution. Yet, Williams’s commitment to pacifism, and her unwillingness to subscribe to the necessity of violence by the disapproval in her tone also suggests that she can see violence as a betrayal of an Enlightenment revolution. Certainly in Letter X when she imputes these violent acts to “public vengeance,” it suggests that Williams sees these acts as separate from a revolution carried out by Enlightenment intellectuals and based upon Enlightenment principles – *not* brutality, which is more in line with her view of the ancien régime exemplified in Letter IV dedicated to the injustices of the Bastille. However, the violent acts committed by the crowds of 1789 are not the Revolution, so Williams seems to suggest when she writes of the “few shocking instances of *public* vengeance” (I.X.82). She defines the public here as the population, specifically the Parisian crowds, and *not* the revolutionary government, *not* the National Assembly.

Indeed, her negative depiction of the crowds and the ancien régime greatly contrasts with

her positive view of the Royal Family as individuals. Setting aside Williams's political association of the Queen with intrigue, she portrays Marie Antoinette as an affectionate wife and mother in keeping both with Williams's sensibility and with the emerging feminine domestic sphere. Returning to Paris, the Queen holds the Dauphin in her lap, and in a last bit of artifice urges her son to "attempt to soften the enraged multitude by repeating, 'Grace pour maman!'" (*Letters from France* I: I.XI.84).⁸ Her amiability is further recorded by Williams's allusion to the Queen's deposition to the Châtelet Commission, in which Marie Antoinette dismisses the violence of that night: "J'ai tout vu, tout entendu, & oublié!" (86).⁹ Furthermore, Williams portrays the Royal Family as accepting the constitution at last, and as at the Fête de la Fédération, committed to raising their children in the precepts of constitutional monarchy. She asserts that the Dauphin "will be taught to consider himself less a king than a citizen" (87). The bold statement precedes a family episode to that effect:

[The Dauphin] has a collection of animals, which he feeds with his own hand. A few days ago, an ungrateful rabbit, who was his first favourite, bit his finger when he was giving him food. The Prince, while smarting with the pain, called out to his petit lapin, "Tu es Aristocrat." One of the attendants inquired, "Eh! Monseigneur, qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un Aristocrate." "Ce sont ceux," answered the Prince, "qui sont de la peine à Papa."¹⁰ (87).

The child is already a product of the Revolution, already distancing himself from the ancien régime and the "despotism" of his ancestors. Interestingly, Marie Antoinette fulfills her role as a *republican* mother by nurturing a son for the republic – or at least for the constitutional

⁸ Spare Mama (Williams's translation).

⁹ I saw everything, heard everything, and have forgot everything (Williams's translation).

¹⁰ Little rabbit, Thou art an Aristocrat – And pray my Lord, what is an Aristocrat? – Those who make my papa

monarchy, a son untainted by absolutism. This incident also shows the vast difference in class perceptions, in which the Royal Family (as emblems of the ancien régime) is seen somewhat more favorably than the crowd of the October Days. Again, Williams's bourgeois alliances are evident by her characterizations.

Conversely, or perhaps contrarily, Williams's conception of the crowd in the October Days is vastly different from the peaceful, sublime crowds of the Fête de la Fédération. She witnessed this celebration of the Bastille's fall on July 14, 1790 just after she arrived from England, which she proclaimed "the most sublime spectacle, which, perhaps, was ever represented on the theatre of this earth" (I: I.I.2). She proceeds to describe the solemnity of the Te Deum performed at Notre Dame the night before, of "electrifying" music and discordant notes that rendered the "horrors" of July 14, 1789 (3). She also includes a recitation from the ceremony:

People, your enemies advance, with hostile sentiments, with menacing looks! They come to bathe their hands in your blood! Already they encompass the walls of your city! Rise, rise from the inaction in which you are plunged, seize your arms, and fly to the combat! God will combat with you! (3)

Williams's inclusion and her description of the ominous music are calculated to elicit a feeling of the Burkean sublime – a motif that she employs throughout her description of the Fête. Church bells also ring incessantly throughout Paris in a cacophony of disorienting noise. This combination is a prime example of Burke's sublime:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a

uneasy (Williams's translation).

manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 36)

Compare Burke's sublime to Williams's and the audience's reaction:

At this moment the audience appeared to breathe with difficulty; every heart seemed frozen with terror; till at length the bell ceased, the music changed its tone, and another recitative announced the entire defeat of the enemy; and the whole terminated, after a flourish of drums and trumpets, with a hymn of thanksgiving to the Supreme Being.

(*Letters from France* I: I.I.4)

We see that Williams follows Burke's conception exactly, which only provides another layer of the sublime, for her description *also* follows Burke's privilege of words over the visual at times. Williams's experience and her description are doubly sublime. Yet, she asserts that "One must have been present, to form any judgment of a scene, the sublimity of which depended less on its external magnificence than on the effect it produced on the minds of the spectators" (5). What follows is almost surreal; the festival becomes something more than a mere description of a celebration. It becomes somehow unreal, spiritual even: "Half a million of people assembled at a spectacle, which furnished every image that can elevate the mind of man, which connected the enthusiasm of moral sentiment with the solemn pomp of religious ceremonies; which addressed itself at once to the imagination, the understanding, and the heart" (5-6). It was a "sacred engagement" (13). Williams hopes to engage her readers in the sacred solemnity of that moment. In keeping with her use of "spectacle" and "theatre," Williams continues to see the Revolution in theatrical terms. And yet, because Williams writes about a commemorative festival, her rhetoric seems doubly theatrical.

Williams's inclusion of the Fête de la Fédération at the beginning of *Letters from France* illustrates the new era in France, as well as the her beginnings of exile. It is also politically motivated to highlight the best parts of the Revolution. As Mona Ozouf noted in her celebrated work on festivals in revolutionary France, "The festival, intended to mark an entry into a world of light, at the same time dismissed the old world" (33). I would not go so far as to suggest that the festival "aimed to dismiss the Revolution itself" as Ozouf suggests (33). I think that it would be more apt to say that the festival seeks to demonstrate that the ancien régime is effectively at an end. Ozouf writes, "Although it was the first great Revolutionary festival, and in this it inaugurated a long series, the Festival of the Federation was presented as an end" (33). There is certainly some truth in this as many believed that by accepting the constitution Louis XVI had accepted a limited constitutional monarchy like England – or at least many hoped that this was the case. So, in that respect, the Federation represented an end to the uncertainty of violent change, but it did not seek to "dismiss the Revolution" (33). To "dismiss the Revolution itself" undermines its importance, and suggests a transient nature.

The festival's crowds are very different in character to the crowds marching to Versailles in October 1789. Of the festival's crowds, Williams writes, "how am I to give you an adequate idea of the behaviour of the spectators? How am I to paint the impetuous feelings of that immense, that exulting multitude?" (*Letters from France* I: I.I.5) They are not riotous, but "elevated" (5). In contrast to the active women of the October Days, here women's roles consist of preparations, of appearing as court attendants, or as spectators (5). The order of procession at the Fête de la Fédération is very much related to the October Days as well, and to Williams's perception of those days, for in it lie the seeds of female activism, or rather the dormant strains of it. Her inclusion of the procession list shows that no women appear in the procession (I.II.10-

11). Ozouf tells us that the National Assembly rejected a women's procession for July 14, and only reluctantly agreed to support a later contingent of women participating in a thanksgiving ceremony (44).

As for the Fête, authorities regulated women to secondary preparatory or passive roles. Historian Simon Schama records that one woman represented the constitution and another Liberty, while Marie Antoinette held up the Dauphin for the crowd to see, pledging to raise him in constitutional values (508, 511) – examples that demonstrate the ways in which the male revolutionary establishment sought to confine women in passive roles. Women are active spectators. For instance, “crouds of women surrounded the soldiers, and holding up their infants in their arms, and melting into tears, promised to make them imbibe, from their earliest age, an inviolable attachment to principles of the new constitution” (*Letters from France* I: I.II.9-10). As Angela Keane observed in *English Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s*, “So intent is Williams on celebrating the charms of Parisian society in the midst of political transformation, that she seems oblivious to the downgrading of female influence in the formation of French public opinion” (61). Keane's observation pertains to 1792, yet in looking back to the Fête de la Fédération, it becomes clear that the revolutionary authorities were already curtailing women's revolutionary activities. After 1789, women were generally regulated to increasingly passive roles. At this point in 1790, French women were still actively participating in the Revolution by forming clubs, participating in marches, even writing pamphlets like Olympe de Gouges who expounded the Rights of Women along with the Rights of Man. Yet, even in this charged atmosphere of change, the roots of female exile in the public sphere began. Just after Williams arrived in Paris, the Châtelet Commission published their report on the October Days. Even while the Commission exonerated the comte de Mirabeau and the duc d'Orléans, the

causes and the actions of the October Days were left deliberately vague. Still, this ambiguity in the official report perpetuated the popular theory and discredited the *poissardes* as an active political force. By the time that Williams visited their scene of triumph, the government was already consigning them to historical obscurity, or rather exile. In this context, it is not surprising that Williams' early account focuses on the fruits of female action rather than on the action itself.

Concluding Thoughts

Burke, Wollstonecraft, and Williams's depictions of the October Days varied considerably with their investment in the Revolution itself. For Burke, primarily concerned with Great Britain, it was a threat to domestic stability. While Burke's furies pointed to the decline of civilization, those same women exemplified the ills of the *ancien régime* for Wollstonecraft. Indeed, for Wollstonecraft, those frenzied women symbolized the remaining work of the Revolution, and thus became a kind of "marching order" to true democracy – something that must begin with educational reform. In contrast to Burke and Wollstonecraft, Williams' supreme idealism illustrates her commitment to the progressive ideals of 1789, even when it became evident that the Revolution would not live up to those ideals. It is little wonder, then, that the English response to the French Revolution begins with the contentious images of crowds bursting into Versailles and forcing the government (National Assembly and Royal Family) to relocate to the locus of revolutionary activity – Paris. It is little wonder also, that these images continue to haunt English responses even after the initial euphoric support waned and the radical turn of 1792 seemed to lend weight to Burke's prophecies of anarchy.

IV. The Road to Terror and Exile: Defining Citizenship

The previous chapter dealt with a conception of citizenship rooted in a particular historical moment, the October Days, and examined the consequences of that event upon citizenship: to declare the French people citizens not subjects, and to ensure basic civil rights such as elected representation and suffrage. As we have seen, Parisian market-women claimed a militant citizenship based on their unique relationship to the monarchy, but as we shall see, they did not seek an equal civil status with men. Unlike their more radical counterparts the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, the *poissardes* did not claim, nor did they want, the full civic responsibilities associated with male active citizenship, such as defense of the *patrie*. Instead, they advocated the maintenance of their former position; that is, the market-women demanded official recognition of their positions as wives and mothers. By contrast, the English respondents to the Revolution defined citizenship by what it should not be; namely, it should not be mob rule. They condemned the popular sovereignty advocated by the *sans-culottes* in 1793: the will of the people as superior to the power of elected officials. While Burke, Wollstonecraft, and Williams disagreed on the nature of the Revolution itself, they remained united in their distrust and disgust for popular sovereignty, to which they attributed the worst excesses of the Revolution. In 1790, this view centered upon the October Days as a prime example; by 1792, the September Massacres eclipsed the October Days in demonstrating the danger of mob rule, and the untrustworthy character of the mob. Indeed, the escalating fervor of the summer of 1792, culminating in the overthrow of the monarchy on August 10 and the September Massacres, seemed to justify the English opinion of the masses, embodied in the *sans-culotte* mentality. The Massacres did not change Williams's and Wollstonecraft's support for the Revolution, but it did refine their opinion of its course and nature, which grew decidedly pessimistic. Though the

Reign of Terror did not officially begin until the following September 1793, the seeds of that proclamation lay in September 1792. This moment proved the devastating power of popular sovereignty in its most radical sense: the literal power of the state in the hands of the masses (i.e. the September Massacres); it also demonstrated the powerful threat of counter-revolution in the common people's minds, which could lead them to commit horrific deeds in the name of the *patrie*.

In this chapter, I consider the close relationship of citizenship and exile. I argue that citizenship is always in some measure defined by exclusions – exclusions of gender, politics, and nationality – and therefore, it is dependent on exile as well. Moreover, citizenship is also related to counter-revolution, which was the antithesis to citizenship. In order to examine the complications of exile and counter-revolution to citizenship, I turn first to the attempts of the French revolutionaries and the expatriates to define citizenship. The exiles claimed a unique cosmopolitan citizenship based on their belief in the universal rights of man. Calling themselves citizens of the world, they maintained that citizenship was not based on nationality. By contrast, the French government promoted a nationalistic and often chauvinistic citizenship based on popular sovereignty and the exclusion of certain groups. Next, I examine the French women's efforts to redefine *citoyenne* in terms of active, militant citizenship. In doing so, I argue that these women take Rousseau's conception of popular sovereignty a step further to argue against the philosopher's insistence upon the tacit and passive consent of women in the general will of the people. I also show that French women were by no means united in their vision of female citizenship and that consequently, their struggle for control of the term *citoyenne* contributes to their ultimate expulsion from revolutionary activity. Thirdly, and most importantly in examining the connection of citizenship and exile, I turn to Helen Maria Williams and Mary

Wollstonecraft's experiences in Paris in 1793. Their reaction to French women's activity in their writings reverberate with hostility towards the French women's promotion of popular sovereignty. I want to demonstrate that Williams' and Wollstonecraft's experience of popular sovereignty during the Terror showed them precisely what citizenship should not be and realized their fears of mob rule. Indeed, the Terror taught them that the fluid definitions of citizenship and counter-revolution were inextricably entwined and it contributed to a sense of exile unique to 1793 – that is, gender, political, and national exile.

Defining Types of Citizenship

The expatriates in Paris were inspired to participate in the Revolution by their investment in a cosmopolitan citizenship. In other words, they believed in the universal and natural rights of humankind, and discounted nationality as a factor in citizenship. Reason, education, and natural rights were the basis for their *enlightened* version of citizenship, which they called “cosmopolitanism” (Rapport 3). Consequently, they called themselves citizens of the world, a phrase that Helen Maria Williams repeatedly turns to in her works. Michael Rapport notes that the French revolutionaries themselves took up the term “cosmopolitanism” in reference to these expatriates (3). At least in the early Revolution, “the notion of unity of mankind [was] bound together by the sharing of the same fundamental rights” (9). Expatriates could participate fully in the Revolution *as* exiles without feeling as outsiders. Initially, the French revolutionaries welcomed cosmopolitanism, feeling that the influx of foreign radicals and intellectuals would be beneficial to their cause (Rapport 113). Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and John Hurdford Stone traveled to France under these auspices, hoping to gain inspiration and practical knowledge for reform at home. In the early years, indeed, the movement seemed a beacon to reformists for their own agenda at home. The National

Assembly's debates and motions, the king's acquiescence to the new constitution, and the willingness to realign the staid European society along new republican lines inspired liberals and radicals, because, here, they could find hope (perhaps more so than the American example). The French revolutionaries welcomed this enthusiasm for idealistic and practical reasons. They were quite willing to use exiles for diplomacy, to contribute to reform and intellectual growth led many French radicals "to confirm that the Revolution was the property of humanity in general, open to all who cared to participate" (Rapport 113).

However, as the Revolution grew steadily more radical and as France was fraught with internal strife and war with other European powers, citizenship became more and more exclusive as "revolutionary ideology lost its cosmopolitanism and focused on the defence of the nation itself" (Rapport 6). Expatriates watched the increasing xenophobia with anxiety, feeling that it was partially a betrayal of the universal ideals of the Revolution. Moreover, the turn from cosmopolitanism to patriotism (with its focus on the *patrie* or fatherland) coincided with the Jacobins' rise. The Jacobins' agenda was itself increasingly xenophobic because they reasoned that French citizenship must be the reserve of the French; they saw the expatriate community in terms of foreign conspiracy and counter-revolution. The English expatriates contributed to the Jacobins' suspicions by their open support of the Jacobins' rivals, the Girondins. Indeed, most English radicals supported the Girondins, because of their stress upon constitutionalism and legality, and because "they appeared to be less willing than the left, or the Mountain, to appeal to the mob" (Rapport 181). Indeed, the Girondins shared the English exiles' distaste for popular sovereignty and for the people. Andress summarizes the different positions:

Radicals prided themselves on never concealing their moves from the virtuous 'people', even if that 'people' was actually the self-selecting group that chose to watch the sessions

of the Jacobin Club, or to haunt the Convention's meeting-place. Of course, for the Girondins, that 'people' was actually a corrupt clique, the same private army they held responsible for the September Massacres. (*The Terror* 130)

The exiles' open alliance with the Girondins only cemented the Jacobins' contempt for the expatriate community and cemented their suspicions of conspiracy against France. Thus, after the Jacobins' expelled the Girondins from the National Convention in May 1793, they turned to the exiles as agents of counter-revolution. They promoted a nationalistic and chauvinistic citizenship diametrically opposed to cosmopolitanism.

While cosmopolitanism may have been an ideal for revolutionaries that encompassed exiles in its early years, the government's definition of citizenship remained exclusive from the beginning. Exile worked in various ways: to allow foreigners to participate in the Revolution through cosmopolitanism and to serve as a basis for citizenship among the French. For instance, the active and passive definitions of citizenship espoused by the Constitution of 1791 were predicated upon class and gender exclusion: "Active citizens had the right to vote for representative assemblies and to sit in them themselves; they had the freedom to make moral choices and to act independently. Passive citizens had to allow other people to think, speak and act for them" (Moore 53). As Moore points out, the passive category included the poorer classes such as peasants and domestic workers, and "even if they paid taxes, women, blacks, non-Catholics . . . and actors were all forbidden the vote and considered incapable of participating in public life" (53). Women were in this passive category without debate, because as Godineau states, "it was apparently . . . evident that women could not enjoy political rights" (100). Passive female citizens were not, in actuality, citizens at all. Yet, women still attempted to define citizenne in particular civic terms: "The very words *female citizen* linked women to the polis, to

the nation, and thus they tried to give meaning to these words when working for the general good” (Godineau 101). Definitions of citizenship were essential to the female experience of revolution and, ultimately, exile. Indeed, it may be said that women were always acting from a position of exile, and therefore, their definition of citizenship was always integral to exile.

The Revolution’s preoccupation with defining citizenship was tied to Rousseau’s social contract, a foundational text for the doctrine of popular sovereignty. The entire revolutionary movement rested upon the premise that government must have the consent of the governed; moreover, that power was invested in the people, not the state. Furthermore, in popular sovereignty, so Rousseau contended, could be found a general will, if people sublimated their individual wills (or desires) for the good of the community. Therefore, the foundation of a successful republic rested upon the people’s civic duty or citizenship. Rousseau also invested civic duty with private virtue; that is to say, a step toward proper civic duty began with good moral principles within the domestic sphere. Thus, private virtue was also political virtue, a concept inherent in revolutionary ideology, especially the later Jacobin ideology.

The revolutionary government promoted a version of popular sovereignty quite different from Rousseau’s original definition, because it added the dimension of elected representation as the proper interpreters of the general will (Andress *The Terror* 225). Rousseau himself contended, “the sovereign, which is simply a collective being, cannot be represented by anyone but itself” (26). Elected officials may represent the people, but they cannot represent the General Will, because “power may be delegated, but the will cannot be” (26). The revolutionaries, however, argued that while representatives could not represent the will, they could “interpret” the will. Subsequently, this interpretation of popular sovereignty was a perfect set-up for the Revolution’s later paranoia. Andress explains that this “twist . . . still asserted that individual

representatives who dissented over the correct course of action to follow could be excluded thereby from the political community” (*The Terror* 225). It illustrates the way in which popular sovereignty weeded out counter-revolution in the establishment, and added to the common people’s sense of betrayal by the authorities. If the establishment continually found traitors in their midst, how could the people trust the government to correctly interpret their will? Moreover, this paranoia contributed to the sans-culottes’ application of popular sovereignty in which they forced the authorities to bend to the masses. In the years 1792 through 1794, the gulf between the official and the common definitions of popular sovereignty widened as the common people took increased advantage of their newfound power. Andress explains:

For [the politicians], popular sovereignty meant that the people's representatives, at the national level, had absolute power. For Parisians, less concerned with constitutional niceties, it often meant that a crowd or an audience could demand action, or take action themselves, on the grounds that they were 'the people', acting locally in a way that they claimed, implicitly, would be approved by the rest of the people. (*The Terror* 107-108)

Recognizing the political advantage (and expediency) of the masses’ support, the Jacobins seized upon this radical conception of popular sovereignty dependent on militant citizenship.

Manipulating and acting upon the supposed people’s will, the Jacobins seized power in their name, and consequently declared other factions and acts as contrary to the General Will, and hence counter-revolutionary. In other words, if a person did not act within the prescribed notion of citizenship or patriotism, then one was counter-revolutionary. The very term counter-revolutionary, or *contre-revolutionnaire*, implies something more than just counter to the prevailing Revolution; in French it suggests “actively against” or “in opposition to” the Revolution, and as such functions in various ways to label groups and people as dangerously

unpatriotic. In this way, then, popular sovereignty and counter-revolution are tied to a conception of citizenship dependent on exile – literal and metaphorical exile. In other words, citizenship was always defined by who could not be citizens. The years 1792 through 1794 show that the list for those eligible for citizenship grew narrower and narrower as the Revolution grew more radical.

Women played an important role in Rousseau's vision, although he relegated them to a passive role and denied them basic civil rights. Landes asserts that his entire social contract depended "on the silent but tacit consent of women" (66). He was among the first to acknowledge women's virtuous political influence rooted in the domestic sphere. He "interpellated women as a new kind of political and moral subject" (Landes 67). Moreover, he "anticipated that they would continue to be active and, in their own sphere powerful" (67). This power centered upon their function within the domestic sphere as a source of moral strength. Unlike the sexual power of the ancien régime salonnières, whom Rousseau distrusted, women of the new republic would be pure, chaste, innocent, a moral standard guiding men and children. He elevated motherhood to a cult, and romanticized devotion to husband and children as the ultimate ideal for moral society. Women exert their proper influence from this domestic function; they may manipulate or seduce men for virtuous ends, yet they must also halt men's "unlimited desire" by that virtuous influence (Landes 79). To this end, her chaste reputation was a critical source of strength for her family since "confinement to the private realm functions as a public sign of her political virtue" (Landes 67). This publicness of political virtue is related also to an inversion of Habermas's notion of representative publicness. Habermas contended that in representative publicness sovereigns were the physical embodiment of their office; it lent an "aura" that "endowed his authority" (7). Therefore, lordship or sovereignty was publicly

represented “not for but ‘before’ the people” (8) in order to “make something invisible visible through the public presence of the person of the lord” (7). Rousseau’s version of representative publicness also seeks to make the invisible visible, yet the source of sovereignty is radically different. For Rousseau, power rested in the people, and though women form part of the people, they are silent and passive. He still places the importance of their political and private virtue at the heart of his social compact, and therefore, though women are not the source or even the embodiment of popular sovereignty, they must publicly represent its foundation – their private but political virtue. Women were paradoxically the private and the public sign of political virtue. This paradox rests at the heart of women’s experience of the Revolution: even when they participated in the Revolution, the very nature of revolutionary ideology denied them access to the public sphere – exiled them, in effect.

Despite the revolutionary ideology that demanded women’s relegation to the private/domestic sphere, women continued to take part in demonstrations and festivals. They attempted to define female citizenship for themselves, though they did not always agree upon the definition. As in 1789, women in 1793 drew upon the traditions of female political participation in times of civil crises as the foundation for their present struggle for citizenship. Historians Applewhite and Levy take particular notice of this continuance as the impetus that drew women to assert their part in the creation and maintenance of popular sovereignty. They “used the corporate and institutional supports of a paternalistic Old Régime to build a new revolutionary doctrine of popular sovereignty and to create a participatory democracy in which they, along with men of humble rank, acquired de facto citizenship” (“Responses” 215). This “de facto citizenship” is most important in examining these active revolutionary women and in understanding their movements (both political and popular) as part of their later exile, for it

requires one to acknowledge the women's understanding of citizenship as *already* existing, and therefore incapable of being granted by any governmental body. Throughout the Revolution, authorities denied that women's active citizenship existed at all, because of their belief in the Rousseauian ideal. Yet, such denial cannot actually deny what, in fact, already exists. Therefore, "de facto citizenship" was all that these women could claim in the interim between 1789 and 1793.

Women actively insisted upon their de-facto citizenship in the spring and summer of 1793. They continually asserted their rights to petition the state when the state appeared to fail in providing for necessities and protection against counter-revolution. After a harsh winter saw soaring bread and grain prices once again, Parisian women resorted to their popular and traditional right of famine protest. However, the context of the resurgence of female militant citizenship added a new dimension of a more radical political awareness in the wake of the monarchy's fall and the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793. Just as in 1789, people associated hoarding and counter-revolution, insisting that counter-revolutionary agents were intent upon starving the Parisian populace into submission, partly in revenge for the king's execution. Moreover, the further radicalization of the Revolution turned against the heretofore laissez-faire approach to the economy, as the poorer classes insisted upon price controls for necessities. They even resorted to *taxation populaire*, or "insurrectionary demands invoking the people's right to subsistence commodities at a just price" (Levy and Applewhite, "Women of the Popular Classes"²¹). And as in October 1789, women were at the heart of these insurrections. In this way, they acted out a de-facto citizenship denied to them by the authorities, and the hope rising from the monarchy's fall enabled some women to hope for their further liberation. They organized themselves into political clubs mirrored on the structure of the male revolutionary

clubs such as the Jacobins and the Cordeliers in order to provide a basis for their political activity.

Revolutionary Republican Women: Citizenship in Action

In studying women's efforts to gain basic civil rights, and to gain the full status of citizens, none is more important than the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women organized by female sans-culottes such as Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe. Their principle concern was full citizenship for women, which included the right to petition and to demonstrate, the right to bear arms, and even the right to vote. These rights and citizenship itself were tied to defense of the patrie for these women. They asserted this aim as part of their duties as women and mothers, thereby justifying (ironically like the *poissardes*) their active citizenship with virtuous republican motherhood. Godineau explains, "Repeating the division between woman-interior and men-exterior, they transposed it onto the defense of the Revolution and defined two areas of intervention, one for each sex" (122). If men fought at the front, then the women *must* defend the Revolution and the nation in their absence. It was only another facet of the masculine-public and feminine-private dichotomy. Ironically, then, the Revolutionary Republican Women's beliefs required them to step into the public sphere in order to protect their domestic spheres.

They espoused the sans-culottes' version of popular sovereignty, which insisted that direct and physical power lay in the hands of the people. The Revolutionary Republican Women courted a relationship with the Jacobins, whom they associated with true patriotism, and whom they believed would lead France to true republicanism. Their vision of the ideal republic centered on power remaining in the hands of the common people, and therefore they sought to expel any remaining elements of aristocracy – from the aristocracy of nobility to the aristocracy

of commerce. The Revolutionary Republican Women identified with the violent anti-aristocratic and paranoiac rhetoric of the Jacobins, whom they believed would cleanse France of the perfidious influences of aristocracy and commercialism. Like the Jacobins, the women linked aristocracy and commercialism, and therefore, the Jacobins' political arch-nemeses became their own: the Girondins. They immediately distrusted the Girondins' evident distaste for the sans-culottes, popular sovereignty, and free-market economics. As the rivalry between the two factions intensified in the spring of 1793, the Revolutionary Republican Women turned viciously against the Girondins and aided the Girondin expulsion from the National Convention at the end of May 1793. They took to the streets, encouraged Jacobin support in their sections, and harassed the Girondin deputies from the Conventions' galleries. Manon Roland, wife of the Girondin deputy Roland, and Helen Maria Williams particularly cited the Society's actions in May as leading to their party's downfall.

The Revolutionary Republican Women's increased political activity and their increased demands for full citizenship in the summer of 1793 ironically led to the Jacobins' efforts to disband the society. The Jacobins acquiesced to the society's demands in regards to the law requiring women to wear the tricolor cockade, the premiere signifier of citizenship in 1793. However, as we shall see in Wollstonecraft's "account" of the cockade war, the issue of the cockade ignited a struggle between different female factions and their conceptions of citizenship: the Society's "de-facto citizenship" vs. the more traditional militant citizenship of the *poissardes*. The *poissardes*' version of citizenship was rooted in their *ancien régime* privileges and domestic civic action. Only when circumstances, such as famine, affected the stability of that domestic sphere did the *poissardes* believe that women should venture into the public political sphere. They looked upon the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women with scorn, linking them

with the corruptive influence of ancien régime women. To the *poissardes*, the Revolutionary Republican Women seemed far more threatening to their status, because they advocated a citizenship much more in line with the revolutionary male concept of citizenship, which included representation and defense of the *patrie*. Therefore, they fought the Society over the requirement to wear the cockade and many civil disturbances erupted across the city. Since their assumption of power, the Jacobins already distanced themselves from the Society, for their own ideology absolutely forbade women a political role in the new republic. They believed, like Rousseau, that women's proper roles were as the chaste wives and mothers of virtuous republican men. Therefore, the civil disturbances provided them with an opportunity to put these alarming amazons in their place. Nearly a month after the bill's passage, "market women, aided and abetted by hostile authorities, stormed a meeting of the Revolutionary Republicans and abused and beat society members with impunity" ("Women of the Popular Classes" 24). On October 30, the National Convention decreed all women's clubs and popular societies illegal, citing the "unnatural" character of these societies which drew women from the hearth and incited civil unrest. André Amar, a deputy and member of the Committee of General Security, made the following statement to the Convention upon the decree:

In general, women are ill suited for elevated thoughts and serious meditations, and if, among ancient peoples, their natural timidity and modesty did not allow them to appear outside their families, then in the French Republic do you want them to be seen coming into the gallery to political assemblies as men do? Abandoning both reserve – source of all the virtues of their sex – and the care of their family? ("The National Convention" 216).

Indeed, for republicans, "[p]olitically involved women, who were seen as preventing politics

from being disinterested by promoting their favorites, were believed to contaminate both society and the state” (Moore 56). The salonnières, Marie Antoinette, and Madame du Pompadour epitomized this corruption and justified the expulsion of women from public life. As Moore emphatically states, “cleansing France of corruption could only be accomplished by preventing women from playing any kind of public role. . . . In the ideal republic, according to their ‘natural’ roles, men would lead and women would serve” (56). As Amar’s remarks show, the male revolutionary establishment was intent upon constructing a masculine public sphere based on Rousseau’s vision for society.

Ultimately, the War of the Cockades was a small but significant battle in the larger war of different conceptions of citizenship during the Revolution: the different militant female citizenships of the *poissardes* and the Revolutionary Republican Women, and the passive female citizenship of the Jacobins. The cockade itself, as the premier visual signifier of citizenship provoked the women, because each group struggled to promote and protect their own versions of citizenship in a time when the very definitions of citizenship were especially fluid. The *poissardes* won because the Jacobins ironically supported their conception of citizenship over the Jacobin Revolutionary Republican Women. They decreed that women did not *have* to wear the cockade, because its symbolic significance did not apply to them. Women were not endowed with full civic responsibilities, and therefore, it was pointless to force women to wear the badge of full civic duty.

Helen Maria Williams: Cosmopolitanism vs. Popular Sovereignty

Throughout 1792 and 1793, Helen Maria Williams remains preoccupied with women’s citizenship as well, though her conception was drastically different from the “de facto citizenship” of the Revolutionary Republican Women or the militant citizenship of the

poissardes. She remains committed to a cosmopolitan citizenship ideal that cannot be confined by nationality, even when the radical turn of 1792 seems to betray the universal ideals of 1789. She nostalgically recalls the Fête de la Fédération as the highpoint of the liberal bourgeois Revolution. Williams laments, “What is become of the transport which beat high in every bosom, when an assembled million of the human race vowed on the altar of their country, in the name of the represented nation, inviolable fraternity and union – an eternal federation! This was indeed the golden age of the Revolution” (*Letters from France* I: III.I.6). In her reminiscence, Williams clearly illustrates the inclusive nature of 1789-1790 when the *universal* Rights of Man prevailed. In 1790, Rapport explains, foreigners could celebrate and participate in the Revolution without the conflicting interests of nationality, because “France had not asserted historical, prescriptive claims” to rights as *Frenchmen* (83). The revolutionaries’ whole claim to reform was based on “rights purely and simply as human beings” (84). As such, the movement claimed a sort of universal or cosmopolitan approach to citizenship, as we have seen. Williams clung to this cosmopolitan approach as the true character of the Revolution even after the radical and xenophobic turn in 1792. Indeed, for Williams, this turn seems a betrayal or perversion of revolutionary ideals. She makes the September Massacres into a dividing point in the Revolution, perhaps more so than the fall of the monarchy in August 1792. It has, in fact, become two revolutions: the initial “liberal” revolution and the anarchic revolution.

Although Williams briefly returned to England in the summer of 1792, she had returned to France by the time the monarchy fell on August 10, and therefore, she was in Paris when the September Massacres occurred on 2-6 September 1792. As we have seen, by this time she was firmly aligned with the Girondins, and like them, Williams blamed the Massacres on a Jacobin conspiracy. She writes to her friend Hester Thrale Piozzi on 4 September 1792, “you will hear

accounts of it as if it were the mob – but it is a well-known fact that the plan was laid & the list of the proscribed marked by those to whom the people have been the instrument” (qtd. in Kennedy 91). Williams concludes that the Jacobins are all too willing to take advantage of the people’s ignorance in order to gain power. The people have been “shamefully betrayed” into betraying their own revolution (91). She contrasts the crowds of 1789 with those “patriots” of 1792, as she seeks to illustrate the betrayal of the Revolution:

Ah! ye slaughtered heroes of the immortal 14th of July, was it for this ye overthrew the towers of the Bastille, and burst open its gloomy dungeons? – was it for this, ye generous patriots, that with heroic contempt of life ye shed your blood to give liberty and happiness to you enslaved country? – Ah! had ye foreseen as the fanatics of superstition, would have their day of St. Bartholomew, would not your victorious arms have been unnerved? (*Letters from France* I: III.I.5-6).

In 1789, French people only sought to secure their rights as citizens and to overthrow the last vestiges of absolutism, symbolized by the Bastille. In 1792, acting on paranoiac rumors of counter-revolutionary plots in the city’s prisons, sans-culottes broke into prisons, held “mock” trials and executed hundreds. Williams recounts the savagery of the Massacres’s mock trials:

[Surrounding nations] have beheld, in the room of the pure and sublime worship of liberty, the grim idol of anarchy set up, and have seen her alter smeared with sanguinary rites. They have beheld the inhuman judges of that night wearing the municipal scarf which their polluting touch profaned, surrounded by men armed with pikes and sabers dropping with blood – while a number of blazing torches threw their glaring light on the ferocious visages of those execrable judges, who, mixing their voices with the shrieks of the dying, passed sentence with a savage mockery of justice, on victims devoted to their rage (4-5).

This is popular sovereignty at its worst; it is more than just militant action of ignorant crowds – it is the willful manipulation of that ignorance by the Jacobins. Williams accuses, “the violence of the people, [was] hurried on by the maneuvers of a set of sanguinary and unprincipled men, who at this period had obtained chief power in the state” (*Letters from France* I: IV.V.237).

Williams’s description of the sans-culottes, and her willingness to view them as instruments of a larger conspiracy has a peculiar Burkean note, and alludes to Burke’s own imitations of conspiracy on the night of 6 October 1789. Indeed, Kennedy notes, “Using a touch of Burkean rhetoric to attack the followers of the Jacobins, Williams articulates her fear of the anarchy which she sees resulting from empowering (or at least arming) people whom she views as morally degenerate” (101). Williams observes the female Jacobins and followers of Robespierre with a tinge of Burkean rhetoric. They are present at the Girondin fall; indeed, to Williams, they seemed crucial to that fall, almost like the Jacobins’ personal army of women: “A certain class of women of Paris, who gave themselves the title of revolutionary women, had been serviceable auxiliaries to the conspirators, and had taken place of the poissardes, who not having all the energy which the present exigencies required, had yielded the palm to their revolutionary successors” (*Letters from France* II: I.V.139). Passing the torch from the poissardes to the Revolutionary Republican Women is extremely important for Williams even in regards to those political groups and classes she disdains. It illustrates the transitory nature of the Revolution; it is made up of people, not just ideas, and because people are not immutable, therein lies the danger. Moving from the poissardes to the Revolutionary Republican Women, moreover, links the different groups of militant women and their struggles for citizenship even when they differ on the definitions of citizenship. There is a triangular relationship between these groups of women and Williams even though Williams does not spend a great deal of time on the poissardes

or the Society. Their presence lingers in the background, because they are the ultimate expressions of anarchic female power and provide important contrasts to the controlled educated Madame Roland and Williams herself. It is interesting that Williams never names any of the *poissardes* or the Revolutionary Republican Women even though many such as Theroigne de Méricourt, Pauline Léon, and Claire Lacombe achieved a certain amount of political celebrity. By not citing individual women, Williams textually preserves the crowd mentality of these scenes. They are like the anarchic furies of Burke's invasion scene, responsible for the destruction of civilization and for France's exile. In 1792-1793, the descendant crowd is responsible for the descent into anarchy. Writing after the Gironde fall in May 1793, Williams can easily trace the seeds of the Jacobin takeover. Consequently, her view of the September Massacres is colored by that fall, as she places all blame on the *sans-culottes* and the Jacobins. Her sense of exile deepens with the double sense of exile as a Girondin supporter and as an English expatriate.

In order to distance herself from the Jacobins and the less savory events of the Revolution, such as the Massacres and the king's execution, Williams conveniently creates a good/evil dichotomy along the Girondin/Jacobin divide, clearly labeling the Girondins as the good, true patriots, while the Jacobins are alternately tyrannical and anarchic. Williams's dichotomy of Girondin/Jacobin reinforces her take on the transition of citizenship leading up to the Terror. In vindicating the Girondins and herself, Williams aligns their moderate (for 1793) stance with the best characteristics of the old and new régimes. Keane states that "she goes to some lengths to characterize the Gironde as an amalgam of the best of the old régime (chivalry, taste, civility) with the new (democracy, equality), and to distance their ambitions from those of the Jacobins" (63). Like Burke who declared that France had exiled itself after the anarchic

break-in of Versailles in 1789, so Williams maintains that the Jacobins have exiled France by their reliance on mob rule, their distrust of commercialism, and their rejection of cosmopolitan ideals. Williams states that the Jacobins' ambitions include a tyranny far worse than the ancien régime, for it is founded upon the backs of the uneducated masses and the betrayal of the people and the ideals. The Jacobins use the anarchic crowd for their own ends and incite violence as a justification for their assumption of power. For Williams, the Jacobins represent the chief devastating force to the Revolution; they are responsible for the worst excesses, for the Massacres and the King's execution, for the Girondins' fall and the Terror – all for the sake of power, a new tyranny. Their betrayal is the most “shameful,” because every act is committed in the name of the people, and while they proclaim to act for the good of the Republic, they dismiss the ideals of the Revolution and trample upon the people's rights.

Williams continues her good-Girondin / bad-Jacobin dichotomy in prison scenes. Indeed, she uses her own experience of prison and the imprisonment of her friends to construct a textual as well as physical barrier between the good and bad sides of the Revolution. She creates another community of exiles within the prison walls, a community based on experiences of persecution and her own vision of cosmopolitan citizenship. Even though, as Keane states, Williams “recedes to a purely English identity when she is imprisoned” (69), she never loses that commitment to cosmopolitanism. She praises the prisoners' attitude: “United by the strong tie of common calamity, the prisoners considered themselves as bound to soften the general evil by mutual kind offices; and strangers meeting in such circumstances soon became friends” (*Letters from France* II: I.I.26). Ironically, the prison, a ultimate place of citizenship exile, becomes the ideal political community of cosmopolitan values. The outside anarchic and Jacobin republic stands for everything anti-Girondin. The Jacobins' victims then become the iconographic

martyrs in the struggle. However different their actual political persuasions, in Williams's narrative the prisoners present a collective anti-Jacobin image. She writes that the Girondin victims "met their fate with all the calm of innocence, and breathed their last vows for the safety and liberty of the republic" (*Letters from France* II: I.VI.163). They draw their inspiration from Roman models of martyrdom, and Williams willingly contributes to this characterization, likening their stoicism to moral and political virtue. More than one "mourned over the fate of his country and not his own" (163). In fact, all the best people, so Williams seems to say, are in prison. The female prisoners "are particularly important for Williams as an antidote to the popular, pejorative image of all women associated with the Revolution" (Keane 73). She agrees with many of the pejorative images, especially the images of the *poissardes* and the Revolutionary Republican Women, and with the earlier images of corruptive *ancien régime* women like Marie-Antoinette. Indeed, the *poissardes* and Marie-Antoinette have often represented both extremes of female power for Williams, and these images are always partly based on the lack of or bad education. In highlighting the virtuous behavior of Girondin heroines like Charlotte Corday and Madame Roland, Williams seeks to reclaim positive imagery for female citizens. They provide women with virtuous models, even in imprisonment and death. Corday defended her assassination of Marat, "asserting that it was a duty she owed her country and mankind to rid the world of a monster whose sanguinary doctrines were framed to involve the country in anarchy and civil war" (*Letters from France* II: I.V.131). She met her death "with undaunted firmness" (135). Madame Roland appears in similar though stronger terms. Unlike Corday, Roland was Williams's good friend. Williams visits her in prison and admires her stoicism: "She told me she expected to die; and look of placid resignation with which she spoke of it, convinced me that she was prepared to meet death with a firmness worthy of her exalted

character” (II: I.VI.196-197). She goes on, “This celebrated woman, who at the bar of the national convention had by the commanding graces of her eloquence forced even from her enemies the tribute of applause and admiration, was now in the hands of vulgar wretches, by whom her fine talents, far from being appreciated were not even understood” (197-198). Among all the character in Williams’s *Letters* Roland stands out as the ideal revolutionary heroine, a French counterpart to Williams. She identifies with these French women in political exile and they often represent her own cosmopolitan ideal of citizenship.

Williams is aware of the tendency among the English across the Channel to view all revolutionary factions in France as the same faction. She uses her Girondin/Jacobin dichotomy to vindicate her position as an English supporter and to distance herself from the anarchic crowds and the Jacobins. In doing so, she also distances herself from popular sovereignty as the basis for citizenship, reasserting the bourgeois standard of education and reason as the foundation for responsible citizenship, moreover, demonstrating her inclusive cosmopolitanism against the chauvinistic, nationalism of the Jacobins and their supporters. In fact, by 1793, Williams’s political alliances in France place her on the *right*, while her English audiences, her former friends and acquaintances, connect her more and more with the violent, radical turn. They do not distinguish between the Girondins and Jacobins, between constitutionalism and the sans-culottes. Kennedy observes that Williams’s decision to remain in France even after the September Massacres “alienated her from several friends and affected her public opinion” (96). Williams herself writes about this alienation, her own imprisonment, and her brief exile in Switzerland, creating a poignant and layered sense of political and national exile: “I was an exile from my family – from the only friends I had left – my friends in England” (*Letters from France* II: I.VII.176). It was also during this time that Williams began to be publicly hounded in the British

press for her continued support for the Revolution. Horace Walpole and others like Anna Letitia Hawkins even called Williams a *poissarde* (Kennedy 81), a particularly insulting term for Williams who so detested the Parisian market-women. As we have seen in her account of the October Days, Williams saw the *poissardes* as the epitome of the anarchic crowd. Indeed, in 1793, these women seemed to be the harbingers of the most destructive crowds of the massacres and the furies of the guillotine. They were the personified dangers of popular sovereignty. By identifying Williams with the *poissardes*, the British press attempted to damage her reputation irretrievably. After all, Burke's infamous betrayal of the palace invasion had called them "the vilest of women" bent on destruction and the murder of the Royal Family (*Reflections* 61). By 1793, these crowds prevailed and the press's identification of Williams with the *poissardes* placed her in these crowds. Just as the Châtelet Commission represented the *poissardes* as a destructive and easily swayed mob in order to discount their power, so the British press did the same for Williams. From 1792 on, Williams was textually and emotionally, as well as, physically exiled from her native England.

Mary Wollstonecraft: Revising the October Days

Mary Wollstonecraft was still in England preparing for her journey to France when news of the September Massacres reached London in 1792. It served as a sign of caution for her revolutionary support, and for those eager to denounce the Revolution in England, and with it any fruits of that Revolution. Yet, this event did not have the same impact for Wollstonecraft as it did for Williams, and thus did not serve as a focal point in examining her views of that Revolution nor where it went awry. Both Williams and Wollstonecraft were willing to acknowledge that violence was inevitable, and while not excusable, at least explainable. The difference between their two positions in 1792 lay in their locations – namely, Williams's place

in physical exile, while Wollstonecraft remained in her 1790 position: as a viewer/supporter in England. Therefore, her response to the Massacres was very different from Williams's response, and influenced by her safe distance across the Channel; in effect, from her position of exile in England – that is, as a supporter of France in England. Because, like the fall of the Bastille and the October Days, the event took place at a great distance, Wollstonecraft was able to maintain her idealism and support. She acknowledged the carnage as distressing and regrettable, but inevitable; this distance also allowed her to dismiss (and partially deny) the range of brutality in the event. In a letter to her friend William Roscoe dated 12 November 1792, Wollstonecraft attempts to explain the violence and defend the Revolution against any exaggerated reports: “Let me beg you not to mix with the shallow herd who throw an odium on immutable principles, because some of the mere instrument of the revolution were too sharp” (*The Collected Letters* 207). She was resigned to some measure of violence in the defeat of despotism, and she seemed to believe that since violence was an instrument of oppression under the ancien régime, then violence would ensue when that régime fell until people grew enlightened enough to govern responsibly and moderately. She accepted violence because it was inevitable. This acceptance supported her “developmental view of history” (Sapiro 250) in which humankind gradually raised themselves from superstition and oppression to enlightened democracy. In enlightened democracy, which is based partly on her theory of educational reform, “the voice of the people is always rational” (233). Therefore, representative democracy is an ideal form of government. However, the French Republic has not yet reached the appropriate stage of development to be a successful republic. Until people and their governments became properly enlightened, they are likely to act destructively and even violently. Therefore, Wollstonecraft is able to defend the revolutionary government in the wake of the massacres without the risk of betraying her own

enlightened principles. She writes to Roscoe: “Children of any growth will do mischief when they meddle with edged tools. It is to be lamented that *as yet* the billows of public opinion are only to be moved forward by the strong wind, the squally gusts of passions” (*The Collected Letters* 207). Until enlightenment, popular sovereignty is itself a tool of oppression and destruction; it should be suppressed and the people governed by stronger and more enlightened heads than their own. As she explains in her *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, “this sovereignty of the people, the perfection of the science of government, only to be attained when a nation is truly enlightened, consisted in making them tyrants; nay the worst of tyrants, because the instruments of mischief of men, who pretended to be subordinate to their will, though acting the very part of the ministers whom they execrated” (419). Her negative view of popular sovereignty is in line with Wollstonecraft’s earlier and more idealistic view espoused in 1790’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*; her view is only more refined by the failure of the constitutional monarchy, by the Champs de Mars Massacre in 1791, and finally the September Massacres of 1792. Because she always distrusted the will of the people, Wollstonecraft is more able to maintain her support of the Revolution when many of her British friends turned from disgust with the radical turn of that year.

Wollstonecraft arrived in Paris in December 1792 at a “comparative lull” between the upheavals of September and the king’s execution in January 1793 (Kelly 145). Yet, the king’s trial began earlier the same month, and with it brought new political tensions, which intensified the rivalry between the Jacobins and the Girondins. War with Britain was also imminent and a new revolt in the southern royalist region, the Vendée. She almost immediately “realized that the political situation was deteriorating” and felt the precariousness of her position as an Englishwoman (145). Kelly states that she nearly accepted a gentleman’s offer of “a seat in his

carriage back to England” (145). Witnessing the events firsthand, Wollstonecraft also realized the degree in which she had underestimated the situation to Roscoe in November. The violence is no “mere instrument,” but symptomatic of the rising Jacobin state. Louis XVI’s trial cements this new opinion. Though predisposed to admit the necessity of his execution, Wollstonecraft is also repelled, and feels sympathy for the pathetic figure of the fallen king. She writes to her mentor Joseph Johnson on 26 December 1792:

I can scarcely tell you why, but an association of ideas made the tears flow insensibly from my eyes, when I saw Louis sitting, with more dignity than I expected from his character, in a hackney coach, going to meet death, where so many of his race have triumphed. My fancy instantly brought Louis XIV before me, entering the capital with all his pomp, after one of the victories most flattering to his pride, only to see the sunshine of prosperity overshadowed by the sublime gloom of misery. (*The Collected Letters* 216)

The Revolutionary Tribunal would not sentence Louis to death until 20 January, but the Jacobin propaganda, and the bullying tactics of the sans-culotte section proved the death sentence to be a foregone conclusion. Wollstonecraft, herself, was prepared to admit the necessity of his execution “as an unavoidable, if regrettable, demonstration that no public official is above the law” (St. Clair 158). At the height of the Terror, she wrote to her friend Ruth Barlow in July 1794, “my God, how many victims fall beneath the sword and the Guillotine! – My blood runs cold, and I sicken at thoughts of a Revolution which costs so much blood and bitter tears” (*The Collected Letters* 255). Godineau states that the guillotine was the ultimate democratizing force (230). Indeed, it was the ultimate enforcer of correct citizenship, that is, people of all classes fell beneath the blade if they were accused counter-revolutionary (the primary designation of the

anti-citizen). It was also an instrument of exile, permanently and fatally exiling “traitors” from the Revolution.

Wollstonecraft’s experience during the Terror forces her to re-evaluate her opinion of the Revolution’s early idealistic days as well. She returns to the October Days, an earlier example of the power of popular sovereignty, to find the origins of the present Terror. She suggests that the crowds which marched on Versailles bore resemblance to the anarchic crowds which invaded the Tuileries in 1792, the mob who massacred prisoners that September, and the crowds that hounded the Girondin deputies in the galleries. *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect It Has Produced in Europe* chronicles the events leading up to the Revolution and culminates in the aftermath of the October Days. However, Blakemore asserts, “the Terror is the book’s secret subject” (90). Wollstonecraft infuses her revision of the October Days with her own sense of exile and citizenship and her firsthand experience of the Terror in 1793. She stresses the violence and the chaos of the French crowds during the early days, illustrating that those crowds are the direct antecedents to the violent crowds of 1793. In particular, Wollstonecraft’s depiction of the *poissardes* resemble the militant activities of the Revolutionary Republican Women as they helped expel the Girondins from the National Convention in May 1793 and later when they battled the *poissardes* in the streets over the tricolor cockade. As a Girondin supporter, she was especially angered over the women’s involvement in the Girondins’ expulsion. She was in Paris at the time of the War of the Cockades and must have known about the disturbances between the two groups of women.

Wollstonecraft pays more attention to the cockade in her October Days revision. As an Englishwoman, and moreover registered as the American Gilbert Imlay’s wife, she would have been exempted from the law requiring women to wear the cockade. However, she was definitely

aware of the significance behind the law and the power invested in that symbol. Moreover, she would have been aware that in the summer of 1793 the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women demanded certain civil responsibilities and recognition that the tricolor cockade symbolized. As we have seen, the Society demanded the right to participate in the political public sphere through petitions, demonstrations, and suffrage. Indeed, they even claimed the right to bear arms in the defense of the patrie. In addition, they sought the *appearance* of citizenship. Drawing upon the political fad of the time, in which to *appear* as radical as possible meant to disregard traditional formal dress and class dress distinctions, the Revolutionary Republican Women created a militant citizenship dress, which included the red liberty bonnet, the tricolor cockade, and a military-style jacket called the amazone. Their militaristic appearance complimented their aggressive tactics in finding counter-revolutionaries. Wearing the cockade was a badge of membership or citizenship in the nation, and therefore, those unwilling to wear the cockade were by default counter-revolutionary. Levy and Applewhite note, “The Society’s members were aggressive and relentless in pressing revolutionary authorities to enforce this legislation energetically” (“Women of the Popular Classes” 23). Their bullying tactics recall the poissardes’ attack upon the black cockade-wearing bourgeois gentlemen on the way to Versailles. As you will recall, the market-women forced the gentlemen to wear the tricolor cockade.

Thus, in her revision, Wollstonecraft stresses the significance of the insult given to the tricolor at the soldiers’ banquet. Its trampling “was regarded as the commence of fresh hostilities, on the part of the court” (*An Historical and Moral View* 423). She seems aware that even in 1789 the tricolor cockade symbolized citizenship and allegiance to the Revolution. She rightly identifies this incident with a mini-counter-revolution in the public mind: “it seemed

confirmed by the appearance of white and black cockades, which inconsiderate individuals displayed at the risk of their lives. Moreover, 'These, said the parisiens, are the first indications of a projected civil war - the court wish only to have the king safe to head them before they speak out'" (423). Even here the prospect of counter-revolution tinges public opinion and foreshadows something of the paranoia of 1792 and 1793, and therefore something of the Terror. Wollstonecraft craftily picks up on this tendency of suspicion, using future events and her own experience of the Terror to flavor past episodes and vindicating her own worsening opinion of some aspects of the Revolution - namely, the too-radical politics of the Jacobins, and the "popular sovereignty" of the Paris sections. She explicitly links this popular sovereignty with the crowd's desire to return the king to Paris, again picking up on a 1789 desire and adapting the narrative to her 1793 experiences.

Wollstonecraft's allusion to civil war also plays on the fears and experiences of 1793, especially in regards to counter-revolution. It also points out the failures of popular sovereignty in unifying the populace and teaching distrust of the authorities, which characterized the Terror. In the October Days, she returns to the supposed conspiracy between the duc d'Orléans and the comte de Mirabeau. In doing so, she shows not only that the conspiracy was still believed in 1793, but that counter-revolutionary conspiracy existed even in the supposed idealistic days of Revolution. Consider the following passage:

The agents of despotism, and of vengeful ambition, employed the same means to agitate the minds of the parisiens; and covered as they now are with foul stains, it is an acknowledgement due to their original good disposition, to note, that at this period they were so orderly it required considerable management to lead them into any gross irregularity of conduct. It was, therefore, necessary for the duke's instruments to put in

motion a body of the most desperate women; some of whom were half famished for want of bread, which had purposely been rendered scarce to facilitate the atrocious design of the murdering both the king and queen in a broil, that would appear to be produced solely by the rage of the famine. (*An Historical and Moral View* 431-432)

The same description could have applied to any of the famine riots in the spring of 1793. She also foreshadows the monarch's execution in the October Days by returning to death threats against the queen in the palace invasion. This moment, therefore, contains all the seeds of the Terror, that of popular sovereignty out of control, paranoia, and violence.

Wollstonecraft takes particular care to stress the dangers of popular sovereignty in her revision of the October Days. She suggests that the idealistic atmosphere of 1789 blinded the authorities to these dangers and allowed the radicalization of the masses to proceed unchecked. In doing so, they damned the nation's progress, because they encouraged the radical application of popular sovereignty. She reasons, "These sentiments were dangerous to the authority of the new government; but they were sentiments which never would have been promulgated, even had they existed, had the assembly acted with integrity and magnanimity" (*An Historical and Moral View* 463). The government was too weak in 1789, too ready to afford people power if that power benefited themselves. It is a shocking break of good government. Subsequently, there can be no turning back. The people will not respect the Assembly's sovereignty, because the Assemble does not respect it themselves.

Concluding Thoughts

Madame Roland wrote memoirs in prison in the hope of vindicating herself, her husband, and her Girondin friends. She had to take control of her story. She knew the way revolutionary propaganda worked to discredit its former favorites, and she believed in a certain Roman code of

honor that demanded her attempt at vindication. Therefore, when Williams visited her prison cell, Roland entrusted her with many of her manuscripts. This moment, therefore, becomes another passing of the torch, in this case from the French ideal of women's citizenship to the English ideal in Williams. There is a sense of connecting the generations, and the French and English women with their textual representations, and with their own stories. They take the power of representation away from the male revolutionary authorities, and preserve themselves for posterity. Even if the Jacobins prevail, even if women are unequivocally relegated to the passive, domestic sphere, even if they are exiled literarily and historically, their words will survive as a testament to their experiences. This moment also shows Williams's shift from the correspondent to the survivor. She is left with the duty of vindicating her friends and herself, and of memorializing their deeds, a task which Wollstonecraft takes up as well.

V. Conclusion

After the arrest and execution of her Girondin friends, Williams seems to feel that her role as a writer has changed. Instead of a chronicler of events, she has become the voice of the lost Girondin voices. She records her visit to Madame Roland in prison, and describes her behavior in glowing terms as we have seen. She immediately realizes the significance of the documents that Roland entrusts to her, both as potentially dangerous to Williams's own safety and as artifacts of innocence. She writes,

With keen regret I must add, that some papers in her justification, which she sent me from her prison, perhaps with a view that at some happier period, when the voice of the innocence might be heard, I should make them public, I was compelled to destroy, the night on which I was myself arrested; since, had they been found in my possession, they would inevitably have involved me in her fate. (*Letters from France* II: I.VII.198)

Yet, she attempts to save the papers, but claims, "I could find no person who would venture to keep them amidst the terrors of domiciliary visits" (198). Her failure in this regard strengthens her desire to commemorate Roland and the other victims. If she cannot save these memoirs, then she will make certain *they* survive through her works. Keane notes that Vol. V of *Letters from France* "reads as a catalogue of executions, and a tribute to the 'fortitude' with which the victims, particularly the women, met their fate" (73). As we have seen, Williams links their behavior in the face of death with their moral rectitude and courage with their innocence. Indeed, she "finds herself lucky to be able to memorialise [the cosmopolitan community] and keep alive its ideals through her own publications" (Keane 73). Yet, she manages to save at least part of Roland's memoirs and published a portion in her *Letters*. Claire Tomalin and Lucy Moore speculate that Williams may have been successful in smuggling part of Roland's writings

to Wollstonecraft (Moore 155). In a letter to her sister Everina in March 1794, Wollstonecraft discusses the Roland manuscript:

The French are, at present, so full of suspicion that had a letter of James's, improvidently sent to me, been opened, I would not have answered for the consequence. I have just sent off great part of my M.S. which Miss Williams would fain have had [m]e burn, following her example. – And to tell you the true, - my life, would not have been worth much, had it been found. (*The Collected Letters* 248)

She does not dare write whether the manuscript is her own or Roland's, but it is certainly probable that she writes about Roland's memoirs, especially considering that Williams had burned her own portions of Roland's work. Moreover, Wollstonecraft edited the first English edition (Moore 255). Both women played important roles in keeping Madame Roland's memory alive for future generations. Kennedy tells us, "Roland's posthumous popularity burgeoned after the publication in 1795 of her memoirs in French and then English" (115). Roland became an ideal heroine, lauded by Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Sir Samuel Romilly, even if others like Lewis Goldsmith were repulsed by her political actions (115). Still, Roland was an iconic figure, symbolizing the lost hopes of the Revolution. Williams and Wollstonecraft were part of that struggle, English counterparts to Roland's zeal though they were not quite so lauded nor so romanticized. The publication of her memoirs turned Roland into a novel heroine in some respects. As for Williams and Wollstonecraft, they continued to struggle in vindicating themselves and their Girondin friends.

Both Williams and Wollstonecraft combine memorialization with vindication. Kennedy describes Williams's later volumes: "Part history, part journalism, part melodrama, part documentary, these *Letters* avenge the death of her Girondin friends by combining political

analysis and tableaux of sensibility in order to revive in her readers their earlier revolutionary hopes for a better world” (Kennedy 109). She seeks to create an intimate relationship between the readers and the Terror’s Girondin victims so that they can identify with the victims. In this way, Williams can highlight the differences between the Girondins and the Jacobins once again. She can show that the Girondins represent the true Revolution. As Keane states, “The character sketches and execution reportage that Williams styles after the iconography of martyrdom, and supplements by the self-vindications of the martyrs’ letters, memoirs and transcriptions of trial defences, urge her readers to distinguish between the perpetrators and victims of Revolutionary terror; and between the true revolution and its anarchic simulacrum” (74). Throughout the later volumes of the *Letters*, and especially in her efforts to commemorate both the dead and the ideals of 1789, she also promotes cosmopolitan citizenship. Indeed, Williams suggests that popular sovereignty is responsible for the descent into chaos and terror. Furthermore, through their vindications, Williams and Wollstonecraft hoped to demonstrate that tyranny and despotism could exist just as easily under the auspices of republicanism, and that the tyranny of the multitude could be just as, if not more, devastating than the tyranny of the monarch.

Wollstonecraft was not quite so literal in her commemoration. In 1794, she traveled to Norway, Sweden, and Denmark on behalf of Imlay. Viewing the rural kingdoms, and observing the less sophisticated manners and countries of the northern people gave Wollstonecraft the chance to reflect on the Terror in France from a safe time and distance. She recorded her experiences in the popular *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. With some surprise she acknowledges the interest which the Revolution inspires even at such a distance:

Here I met with an intelligent literary man, who was anxious to gather information from me, relative to the past and present situation of France. . . . Still the Norwegians, though more connected with the English, speaking their language, and copying their manners, wish well to the republican cause; and follow, with the most lively interest, the successes of the French arms. So determined were they, in fact, to excuse every thing, disgracing the struggle of freedom, by admitting the tyrant's plea necessary, that I could hardly persuade them that Robespierre was a monster. (116)

She suggests that ignorance is the cause of this mentality, the same ignorance which drew many French common people into the Jacobin and the sans-culottes' version of popular sovereignty – which was only a different kind of tyranny. She concludes, “I am . . . inclined to believe that the gross vices which I have always seen allied with simplicity of manners, are the concomitants of ignorance” (161). The northern Europeans' lack of sophistication strike her as part an essential part of the problem of their near barbaric condition: “I did not immediately recollect that men who remain so near the brute creation, as only to exert themselves to find the food necessary to sustain life, have little or no imagination to call forth the curiosity necessary to fructify the faint glimmerings of mind which entitles them to rank as lords of creation” (10). This lack of reason was also a distinguishing characteristic of the Parisian mobs. Like Williams, she blamed the Terror on the rise of the uneducated classes. Her travels only confirmed her commitment to a bourgeois revolution and to educational reform.

Therefore, in her own *Letters*, Wollstonecraft's commemoration works subtly to show the benefits of a bourgeois cultural and political revolution and to promote the *universal* rights of man. She does not explicitly discuss the Girondins though her work is infused with their political ideals of representation, protection of property, and educational reform. Instead, we are

left with a lasting image of the wandering Wollstonecraft amidst desolate landscapes, dwelling upon the excesses of the Terror yet maintaining the ideals of Revolution. Her commemoration works differently than Williams's more obvious tributes. It is her observations of the conditions of people in *other* lands that prove the power of the 1789 ideals of universalism.

Wollstonecraft's position as the ultimate lone exile is her source of strength. And yet, Williams claims something of that position as well. They are both like lone survivors in desolate lands, seeking to memorialize what they have lost. Indeed, it is entirely fitting and poignant that Williams and Wollstonecraft's lasting images are as wanderers, exiles; they claim relationships with two countries and yet belong wholly to neither. They are the ultimate citizens (or citizenesses?) of the world.

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