

An Interpretive Study of Prints on the French Revolution
Barbara Day-Hickman

My analysis of nine prints from the collection considers the "crowd" as participants in, as well as witnesses to, the major events of the French Revolution. Descriptions of the revolutionary "crowd" in the images from this selection demonstrate the crowd's capacity to endorse or discredit prevailing political forces. That is, artists portray members of the crowd as either the instigators of political action or as objects of opposing ridicule. In many prints, the ideological position of the artist/artisan establishes the interpretive point of view for representations of the revolutionary crowd. Those artists who sympathize with the revolution tend to portray crowd members as heroic agents who embody reason, order, and justice in their efforts to unseat or destroy vestiges from the "old regime." Such pro-revolutionary artists often incorporate neoclassical elements such as linearity and symmetry as well as seriousness and decorum to give the composition aesthetic and political credibility. Revolutionary artists also provide architectural solidity, dimension, and weight as background for the unusual rendition of the crowd's participation in politics. In contrast, those artisans at odds with the revolution often portray crowd members as frenzied, mad, and bestial, or as the ludicrous embodiment of revolutionary folly. The reactionary or counter-revolutionary artist thereby lambastes revolutionary figures by locating his characters in outlandish, uncivil, or chaotic situations beyond the pale of civilized order. More specifically, counter-revolutionary artists often try to discredit traditional or symbolic representatives of the revolution through caricature and ridicule.

From popular to high art, imagery about the revolutionary crowd creates a site for critical discourse on many social and cultural levels. The possession and display of visual art was a distinctive mark of prestige for aristocratic or bourgeois customers who could afford to purchase fine paintings, sculpture, and engravings. But in addition to its aesthetic value for elite patrons, visual symbols and narratives about the revolution were particularly important as modes of communication for illiterate to semi-literate groups, unable to decipher abstract texts. For centuries, church hagiography and visual art about Christian saints or local patrons provided models for devotional inspiration to a widespread populace in both urban and rural areas. Concurrently, popular printing houses marketed secular prints, canards, and broadsides geared to inform, entertain, or in some cases, disconcert viewers with tales of imminent or recent disasters. Similarly, Parisian printers produced illustrations and engravings to celebrate and profit from the dramatic representation of major revolutionary events.¹ Likewise, anti- or counter-revolutionary factions used visual narratives to establish a critical stance toward those currently ensconced in power. Visual texts then became a way for revolutionary and contending groups to presage, represent, and mimetically "replay" the great historical events of the revolution according to their own political agenda. Consequently, revolutionary engravings and prints functioned not only as "souvenirs" of the revolution but also as the expression and extension of prevailing political conflicts.

¹ Warren Roberts, *The Public, the Populace, and Images of the French Revolution: Jacques-Louis David and Jean-Louis Prieur, Revolutionary Artists* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000) 60, 189: During the revolution, printers engaged in the successful enterprise of reproducing major events of the revolution in elegant engravings for well-heeled customers. The *Tableaux historiques de la révolution française* consisted of some 144 full-page folio prints that covered the period from June 1789 to Napoleon's coup on November 9, 1799. Prieur, a proponent of the revolution who was later a juror on a revolutionary tribunal, rendered the first 67 prints in the album.

Such images, even when anonymous, can provide documentation that suggest the underlying attitudes and beliefs of eighteenth-century contemporaries. While some of the engravings rendered in a so-called "realistic" manner, such as those by Jean-Louis Prieur, seem to be politically nondescript and objective, even these more "schooled" texts convey some socio-political bias. This is not to say that any image proffers an obvious or unequivocal argument. Rather, the visual text is necessarily multivalent and can therefore be read according to differing perspectives and methodologies. Vivian Cameron reveals the importance of addressing the contemporaneous response of art critics to understand meanings embedded in recognized engravings. Wayne Hanley, Lynn Hunt, and Jack Censer advocate the use of inter-textual resources such as newspapers, advertisements, notary and police records, literature, theater, medals, and the international print market to address anonymous as well as identifiable compositions. Joan Landes proposes challenging options for a semiotic study of visual texts based on prevailing cultural and psychosocial meanings. And Warren Roberts, in his discussion of Prieur, presents the richness of definite historical information about the artist, location, and social venue for a comprehensive study of the visual text. In addition to the insights of my colleagues, I would simply underline the importance of pursuing a political frame of reference that can be discerned from the style and perspective of each composition.

More specifically, artists from my selection structure their "positive" or "negative" interpretation of the revolution based on the carnival theme of the "world turned upside down." This visual theme is taken from Mardi Gras rituals wherein commoners temporarily assume and burlesque the costumes, manners, and authority of

the feudal elite.² For example, in "The Memorable Day at Versailles, 5 October, 1789," [Image 6] artisans depict a national guardsman and several coquettish mistresses who, during their return to Paris, have replaced the king and his scintillating entourage from Versailles. Other compositions from my selection, such as "Madame Sans-Culotte," [Image 18] "Pariser Poisarden," [Image 19] "French Liberty/British Slavery," [Image 23] and "French Democrats Surprising the Royal Runaways" [Image 9] underscore the monstrous or inverted nature of female and plebeian characters who briefly transgress acceptable gender roles and assume political authority. In the latter prints, the counter-revolutionary artist highlights the malevolent or egregious nature of a revolutionary crowd by inscribing distorted facial expressions, bodily shapes, and seductive positions onto revolutionary proponents who have endeavored to turn their social and political world "upside down" by usurping authority from a traditional political elite.³ The popularity of outdoor burlesque and comic mime in "le théâtre forain" or "le théâtre des boulevards" during the eighteenth century could also explain widespread familiarity with the language of mockery apparent in many of the prints.⁴

Pro-revolutionary compositions also portray heroic figures who endeavor to "turn the world upside down." But they do so by adhering to principles of reason, virtue, and honor. Though some of the prints describe the courage of plebeian leaders in the face of

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, translated by Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984) 10: "As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed."

³ Peter Stallybrass and Allen White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986) 16. In their analysis of Bakhtin's discussion of carnival rituals, the authors point out how "Carnivals, fairs, popular games and festivals were very swiftly 'politicized' by the very attempts made on the part of local authorities to eliminate them. The dialectic of antagonism frequently turned rituals into resistance at the moment of intervention by higher powers, even when no oppositional element had been present."

an unruly crowd, the political message is one of underlying praise, not ridicule. Rather, the artist describes how revolutionary justice wins out against crowd disarray and transgression. The prints, "The Trait of Heroic Courage" [Image 22] and the "Arrest of Louis Capet at Varenne," [Image 8] convey the triumph of heroism and self-sacrifice over crowd confusion and physical disruption. Such narratives as these highlight leaders and groups determined to defend themselves and their country against the corruption and disingenuousness of the ancien regime. Furthermore, in the "The Fourth Incident of October 5, 1789," [Image 5] and "Place Vendôme: The Greatest of Despots Overthrown by Freedom," [Image 11] the artists portray the revolutionary crowd as a reasonable and courageous force that successfully replaces the king or traditional patriarchal figures of authority with plebeian heroes or heroines. Such pro-revolutionary prints effectively shift the dramatic focus from traditionally elitist to populist power in a startling, but nonetheless orderly, manner.

One example, "The Trait of Heroic Courage," [Image 22] describes the courageous stance of a republican matron who withstands the invasion of her rural homestead by counter-revolutionary insurgents. The theme of this sophisticated engraving corresponds with a popular gouache done by Etienne Le Sueur entitled "L'Héroïne de Milhier" [Image 30] that depicts a stalwart peasant woman, with muskets in both hands, ready to shoot brigands who threaten her with imminent violence. As compared with the violent confrontation in the Le Sueur print, "The Trait of Heroic Courage" conveys a more restrained interchange between the unwanted marauders and the matron through the incorporation of a more balanced neo-classical perspective and a

⁴ For further information on "le théâtre forain" (1700-1752) and the French boulevard theaters (1752-1800), see David Trott, *Théâtre du XVIII siècle: jeux, écritures, regards: essai sur les spectacles en France des*

finer technical rendering. Though the threat of sexual or physical violence remains prominent in the narrative, because the men appear to be in retreat, the overall effect is less dramatic than the *Le Sueur*. Rather than focusing on the intruders, the viewer's eye is drawn to the courageous woman and her children, who are located to the center right and engulfed by light coming from the open door. The mother sits stoically in a virtually statuesque, classical pose, highlighted on a proscenium that extends from the intruders on the left, to the right corner of the infant's cradle. A small girl clings to her torso, while an adolescent pulls her arm as if vying for her mother's attention. The intertwined bodies of mother and daughters form a shield in front of the half-dressed infant lying in the cradle behind them. The family mascot stretches out and barks with forepaws propped on the barrel as if assuming the protective role of his absent master while the cat arching his back on the rear table conveys its disdain for the intruders by hissing. Initially, the woman appears to be stirring milk or cream with a ladle in one hand. On second glance, it is apparent that she brandishes pistols pointed at a barrel of gunpowder, prepared to blow up her family and home rather than yield to the marauders.

In displaying her determination to protect not only her own virtue but also that also of the republic, the image justifies the matron's armed defense of her domicile. With both pistols ready to fire, the surprised invaders draw back dismayed by her unexpected bravery. In response to her threat, the men lift their arms and turn to leave. A scale on the table to the left of the woman's shoulder suggests that the ensuing conflict with these intruders does not lead to revenge or mayhem, but ultimately to justice. This image is one of the few revolutionary prints where a heroine rather than a hero withstands a band of intruders to defend her home, family, and political allegiance. On a more symbolic

level, the courageous woman could represent a domesticated version of Marianne, who courageously defended the popular revolution against militant opponents.⁵ Further research suggests, however, that the narrative comes from a republican anthology about heroic figures from the revolutionary wars published in 1793 to inspire soldiers, political activists, and young school children with tales of revolutionary heroism.⁶ Whatever the precise reference, it is apparent from the image that a republican matron has "turned the tables" on the unwanted band of counter-revolutionary brigands.

The colored engraving "Madame Sans-Culotte" [Image 18] provides a critical counterpart to the courageous matron in "The Trait of Heroic Courage." [Image 22] In contrast with the proverbial ideal of the "good woman" busy with her needle and distaff, "Madame Sans-Culotte" appears to be preoccupied with internal ruminations as she gazes off into the distance. Seated, her face illuminated by a fire beyond the frame of the print, she lets her needles and knitting drop onto her lap while she raises her left hand upward as if invoking a magical incantation. The cat on the table behind her, associated traditionally with witchcraft and magic, reinforces the threatening nature of her gesture by playing with the ball of yarn that has rolled off the table and onto the floor.⁷ The elder woman does not embody the alleged sans-culotte model of thrift and resourcefulness;

⁵ Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaine de 1789 à 1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979): While the peasant character of the heroic matron is more apparent in the Le Sueur print than the more finished engraving, both images associate the protagonist with Marianne to bolster the righteousness of the protagonist's armed confrontation with counter-revolutionary forces.

⁶ Léon Bourdon, *Convention National Recueil des actions héroïques et civiques des républicains français*, #III (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1793), 6-7: "La Convention nationale décrète que le Recueil seront envoyés en placards et en cahiers aux municipalités aux armées, aux sociétés populaires et à toutes les écoles de la république . . . et que les instituteurs seront tenus de les faire lire à leurs élèves." 19: Note how a republican matron displays the courage of a neo-classical male hero. "Les ennemis s'étant rendus maîtres de Saint-Milhier, une jeune femme entourée de ses enfants, étoit assise tranquillement dans la boutique sur un baril de poudre: elle renvoie deux pistolets à la main, disposée à faire sortir sa maison et toute la famille plutôt que de tomber au pouvoir des brigands. Son courage et cette mâle contenance leur en imposèrent, et son asyle fut respecté."

rather, she remains solitary and preoccupied in front of the makeshift privacy of a draped cloth. With the rope suspended behind her head and the yarn extended from her lap over the table and onto the floor, she could embody a spider waiting for her catch, while her cat suggests a parallel predator dallying with its prey. It is apparent that the artist deprecates the idle woman on multiple counts, in terms of her age, gender, and bizarre mannerisms. The artist likewise associates the woman with the legendary mob of "tricoteuses" who allegedly witnessed and celebrated scenes of revolutionary violence during the Terror.⁸ The title of the print "Madame Sans-Culotte" taken literally could also indicate a woman deprived of aristocratic "pants" or without access to men in power who wore "the pants." The lack of "culottes" taken to mean female undergarments could also identify the woman as harlot or whore. But the most obvious theme in the composition connects the crone with witchcraft and implicit sexuality. Without "pants," the sans-culotte woman assumes illicit power through intrigue and magic.

The regularity and fineness of the metal lines in the engraving, the classical proportions of the woman's body and draped costume, and the subtlety of the print's coloring suggest that the composition was done by a well-trained engraver. But in contrast with the sophisticated rendering of the subject, the artist depicts a stereotypical female "tricoteuse" who witnessed and perhaps celebrated grisly scenes of revolutionary violence at the foot of the guillotine. The print thereby demonstrates the collusion of

⁷ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 92-96.

⁸ Visual or textual references to the "tricoteuses" traditionally cast aspersions on women who participated in the revolution, particularly those who avidly witnessed grisly executions at the foot of the guillotine. For a more concise analysis, see Dominique Godineau, *Women of Paris and their French Revolution* translated by Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 229-230. A sizeable collection of counter-revolutionary literature connected sans-culotte women with the Guillotine. Godineau explains that men evoked such cruel representations of revolutionary women as a defensive reaction to the feared loss of women's natural softness and reticence.

sorcery and female cruelty with the radical phase of the republican revolution. Through visual innuendo and historical allusion, the artist thus suggests the transgressive and malevolent intent of the sans-culotte woman.

The German print, "Pariser Poisarden," [Image 19] likewise derides French women who not only witnessed but also endeavored to bear arms and participate in revolutionary violence. The term "poisarden" or "fishwives" could refer to the women who led the March to Versailles in October 1789, or to the market women who confronted and opposed the Society of Revolutionary Republican women during the summer of 1793.⁹ Whatever the precise historical reference, the engraver presents three women armed with swords, sabers, bayonets, and pitchforks as they band together in militant solidarity. In addition to the armed triumvirate in the center of the composition, a woman in the left background waves a saber in the air while another carries a bayonet. On the right, two women raise a phrygian hat (suggesting a virtual head) on a pole that they parade above the crowd. Though the gestures and symbols are menacing, the print presages but does not portray the actual outbreak of violence.

The three women "in conversation" form a menacing focal point in the center of the composition. As compared with the innocent and delicate trio who dance in Botticelli's "Primavera," these three display a spirit of conspiratorial militancy. In bearing arms, the women, who represent three different generations (youth, matron, and crone), demonstrate the inversion of their fundamental nature as wives and mothers. In this sense, the print could be read as a parody on the Stages of Life of Woman wherein

⁹ Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 13-17: Hufton determines that for all the controversy about the militant "poissardes," these market women were intent primarily on finding bread for their families. Though the

each age corresponds with normative gender roles related to socialization, reproduction, and Christian redemption.¹⁰ But instead of highlighting the cultural or religious prescriptions for women in courtship, marriage, and childbearing, the print reveals women (from three stages of life) who have disassociated themselves from their prescribed gender roles and instead banded together in a militant enterprise to fight as men. The elder woman and matron appear to be drawing the younger woman into their conspiracy. From my reading, the young woman does not embody "Liberty" as Joan Landes suggests, but rather a young woman vulnerable to the intrigues of two elders. The girl responds ingenuously with a toss of her curls and the salute of her hat. The location of church spires and steeples behind the militant crowd of women who surround the triumvirate suggests their disdain for conventional religious or civil prescriptions.

Through his representation of women's transgression of all societal norms, the German artist suggests the imminence of danger and bloodshed. Moreover, the composition is rendered in heavy chiaroscuro emphasizing the determined crone in a Teutonic helmet rendered in dark tones that belie her prescribed nature as mother and matriarch. Storm clouds gather in the right upper plane as a sign of impending battle. In addition to the proximity of violence, the artist/engraver underlines the villainous character of the militant women who have defied their fundamental nature as wives and mothers by bearing arms and preparing for battle. These obstreperous women, by usurping "public space" as members of a militant crowd, have stepped outside of their legitimate roles as mothers and thereby assumed the behavior of dangerous viragoes.

National Guard joined the march to Versailles with weaponry and cannons, the women demonstrated peaceably and were, for the most part, unarmed.

¹⁰ Barbara Ann Day, "Representing Aging and Death in French Culture," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Spring 1992) 709-712.

Caricature combined with gender parody was another avenue for artists to lampoon the revolution. For example, in the "Memorable Day at Versailles, 5 October, 1789," [Image 6] the artist derides French market women who allegedly capture and escort the king and his family back from Versailles to Paris. The king, however, is not visible in the foreground in the print. Instead, the composition and text portray market women as "glorious modern amazons" who are engaged in entertaining "several gentlemen from the national guard."¹¹ Furthermore, the visual focus on the sexual intrigue between the courtesan and the national guardsman establishes an ironic contrast with the concluding phase in the textual commentary. Instead of celebrating the return of the king, shouts of "Vive la nation. Vive le roi" in the text suggest that the central couple in the image, who are seated on the phallic-shaped gun, have summarily replaced the "absent" sovereign.

A grenadier of the National Guard who wears a fur cap and holds a rifle between his legs appears preoccupied with the brightly dressed courtesan who leans provocatively toward him on their makeshift throne. Wearing red, white, and blue, the couple holds a pole topped with a tricolor hat. Like the prancing horses drawing the cart, the couple on the "cannon" is temporarily "reined in" but prepared to follow the lead of the driver, dressed in a red jacket, blue coat, and white culottes who carries a commanding whip. Representations of two small notables in the left rear of the design (possibly the king and queen) have been reduced in size to mere witnesses of this ribald display. Instead of

¹¹ Gay Gullickson, *The Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 86-87: According to the Greeks, "the Amazons were a society of skilled and fierce warriors who lived without men, rode horses and fought ferociously in battle. . . . Typically Greek statues and reliefs showed Amazon warriors with one breast exposed as they moved into battle." For the most part, the love entanglements of these legendary women warriors ends tragically.

representing the capture of "the king," the artist highlights and parodies the triumphal parade of "public women" who openly celebrate their political "tour de force."

"Memorable Day at Versailles" [Image 6] is a color print, most likely the copy of an earlier version entitled, "The Triumphal Return of the French Heroines from Versailles to Paris, 6 October, 1789" [Image 32] done by, or in the manner of, Debucourt.¹² In the present version, the anonymous artist has added a male Jacobin and a woman dressed in sans-culotte attire to the Debucourt original. The crude primary colors in the current print indicate a rough, inexpensive form of production, perhaps a metal or wood-block etching colored with stenciled applications. The vibrant red of the rider's jacket, the phrygian cap, and the carmagnole vest of the figure in the background, plus the red skirt and frippery of the women's dresses indicate that republican colors and symbols could have been added subsequently (after 1792) to the earlier engraving. Thus, the composition provides a jibe toward both the market women who march on Versailles in 1789, and the sans-culottes women who, in the absence of the king, continue to pursue their own sexual and political exploits. This burlesque shift in power from king to courtesans certainly questions the credibility of the sans-culotte revolution.

Cartoonists, such as James Gillray, also used bitter satire to discredit the French revolution among curious Brits. The explosion of British cartoons after 1792 reveals the extent of the political threat posed across the channel.¹³ In one such print, "French

¹² Jean Adhémar, *Graphic Art in the 18th Century* (New York, Toronto, London: Mcgraw Hill, 1964) 173-174: Highly influenced by the theories of Lavater who maintained a natural correspondence between physiognomy and moral character, Debucourt conveyed his message through facial types, expressions, and suggestive poses that he emphasized in his paintings and prints. The current print imitates the element of sexual intrigue apparent in Debucourt's earlier engraving, but does not duplicate the more ornate and effete rococo style.

¹³ Tamara L. Hunt, *Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England* (Cornwall, England: Ashgate Books, 2003) 149: In order to divert British discontent in the 1790's due to excessive tight purse strings and additional taxes, "supporters of the status quo undertook

Liberty, British Slavery," [Image 23] Gillray points out the frenzied madness of French revolutionaries as compared with the opulence and prosperity of John Bull, who, at the time of the revolution, represents characteristics of the ordinary British citizen.¹⁴ The artist presents "Liberty" personified as an emaciated bohemian seated on a stool, eating turnips and greens (animal fodder) in front of a smoking fireplace. The surrounding room is stark with a cobweb in one corner of the window and a basket of turnips on the table. A sword lies atop a violin, suggesting Liberty's relinquishment of aesthetic skills for martial pursuits. Strangely, Liberty wears the torn stockings and the culottes of a former notable or aristocrat rather than the trousers of an artisan or laborer. But the face of the French radical registers the angularity, length, and obsessed expression of unequivocal hunger. His long hair tied with a bow and bright cockade on his hat identify the starving figure as a desperate proponent of the revolution, but his clawed hands and feet suggest a closer affiliation with the animal world than with the human. Epithets in the balloon above his head laud Liberty in a series of unrelated phrases such as, "Vive l'Assemblée Nationale," "No more Taxes," "No more slavery," "All Free Citizens," and "Ve svim in Milk and Honey." Such empty phrases reveal how Gillray endeavors to discredit utopian platitudes about the French revolution.¹⁵

Gillray's effeminate representation of "Liberty" in his pink jacket contrasts sharply with the bald and obese figure of "John Bull" dressed in royal blue, who is about

propaganda efforts to convince the lower and middle classes that it was in their own best interests to remain loyal to the state, even if their burdens and sacrifices seemed unreasonable. This helped fuel an explosion of prints featuring John Bull" While 30 prints about John Bull were produced from 1784 to 1792, they tripled after the republican revolution in France from 1793 to 1800.

¹⁴ Adhémar, *Graphic Art in the 18th Century*, 94: James Gillray distinguished himself as a skilled draftsman and observer of human foibles. He developed satirical cartoons about the royal family in England, Napoleon Bonaparte, and satirical studies of the French revolution. For further information on representations of John Bull during the revolutionary period see Hunt, *Defining John Bull*, 149ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

to ingest his proverbial pot roast and ale on the table in front of him. The body and facial coloring of the flushed "Brit" reflect the slab of beef he is about to devour. To give full attention to his meal, the rotund gourmand has drawn the tablecloth around his neck as an erstwhile bib and discarded his wig on the side of the armchair. The legend in the balloon above his head reveals his frustration with the taxation policies of the Pitt ministry. "This cursed Ministry. They'll ruin us all with their damned taxes." The contrast between the starving French fiend and the prosperous British glutton underlines the dearth and scarcity of material means in revolutionary France. A statue of Britannia holding a sack of sterling on the mantle piece behind John Bull further contrasts British wealth as compared with destitution in revolutionary France. Seen from a cannibalistic perspective, the British icon has devoured or is about to devour the emaciated figure of French Liberty that scarcely poses any sort of real threat to British sanguinity.

Gillray produces another vivid caricature of revolutionary France in his depiction of "French Democrats Surprising the Royal Runaways." [Image 9] As in "French Liberty British Slavery," Gillray emphasizes a physio-psychological contrast between the sinuous (starving) and emaciated bodies of the French revolutionaries who invade the French royal quarters on June 20, 1791 and the pompous, ample, and lethargic physique of the king and queen. But Gillray also indicts the corpulent king (decked out in a red vest, blue jacket, and yellow pants) and queen (wearing an elegant British hat with pink ribbons) who raise their hands in dismay at the unexpected invasion by a revolutionary hoard wearing tricolor cockades. The invaders' elongated faces and enraged expressions bear close resemblance to the distracted figure of "French Liberty" [Image 23] in the previous Gillray print. Carrying brooms, mallets, muskets, pistols, bayonets, knives, and swords,

the unruly band threatens the king and queen, and points a bayonet toward the bottom of the indisposed dauphin, who is having a tantrum on the floor. While the leader of the troop, sporting aristocratic culottes, directs his sword and musket toward the head of the king, a frantic gunner behind him sticks out his tongue and points his "provocative" weapon directly at the queen. Another figure in the center background appears about to decapitate himself with two knives during the frenzied capture of the royal truants. Though the invading troops address their unrestrained rage toward the king and queen, the royal couple appears to respond with perplexity to the unexpected furor of their captors. The British satirist thereby pokes bitter fun at the irrationality and violence of the revolutionary hooligans while at the same time underscoring the indolence, ineptitude, and cowardice of the beleaguered royal family. Through both political and gender satire, Gillray poses British prosperity as a preferred alternative to a cowardly French monarchy beset by a deranged band of starving revolutionaries.

In some cases, French artists presented the revolutionary crowd and its leaders as viable heroes in the new revolutionary regime. "The Arrest of Louis Capet and his family at Varennes" [Image 8] by Berthaut after Prieur provides an interesting contrast to Gillray's bitter rendition of the French king's failed attempt to flee with his family to Austrian territory. Instead of depicting the revolutionary crowd as a group of crazy specters, the French engraver presents a resolute and determined militia who surround and capture the royal family. The current narrative portrays Drouet, the son of the local postal director, in the village of Sainte-Ménéhould as a heroic figure who forces down the door and enters with his ragtag crew of soldiers bearing rifles and bayonets.¹⁶ The leader

¹⁶ Michel Vovelle, *L'image de la Révolution Française: rapports présentés lors du Congrès mondial pour le bicentenaire de la Révolution* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1989) Vol. II. 281.

wears the three-cornered hat of a lower-rank officer with a frock coat and boots. His local band displays determination and manly prowess as they break into the king's hideout and point accusingly at the royal entourage seated passively about the table dining on the right side of the print. The queen and dauphin are in the shadows while the king, sporting a broad paunch and broad-brimmed hat, grabs a bottle as his only defense against the unexpected invaders. Disarmed by the threatening gestures of the militia, several elegantly attired members of the king's party, sporting courtly wigs, draw back with gestures of resignation. The leaders of the militia carry torches that illuminate the stark room of the inn and reveal the traitorous plans of the royal family. Torchlight marks the moment of "truth" when the revolutionary militia discovers the king's attempted escape in the sulphurous darkness of the royal refuge. But the sturdy figures in the left foreground have brought the king's deception to light with their torches. Through the contrast between light and shadows, transparency and duplicity, the artist underscores how the revolutionary soldiers who capture the royal party secure a major victory, not merely through their bravery but also by inadvertently divesting the king and his company of their "hidden identities."

Without seeing the original design by Prieur, it is impossible to identify the engraver's subsequent modifications. Pierre-Gabriel Berthaut senior, who worked as chief engraver for Napoleon in 1809, could have executed a later rendition of this scene to reflect the heroic costume of Napoleon as the democratic "little corporal" wearing his greatcoat, three-cornered hat, breeches, and boots. It is more likely, however, that Berthaut rendered the print closer to the actual event, circ. 1793.¹⁷ By accentuating the

¹⁷ Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs, et graveurs* (Paris: Librairie Grund, 1976) Tome premier, 690.

concerted assault of the revolutionary militia, the artist underscores their heroic mission to capture and unveil the deceitful intrigues of the royal family. In the latter case, the print would have furnished a rationale for the beheading of the king and thus endorsed the establishment of a radical, democratic republic.

The "Fourth Incident of October 5, 1789" [Image 5] likewise underscores the daring efforts of a female crowd intent on displacing male political prerogative in order to participate in the legislative assembly. The entry of women into the Chambers is, for the most part, orderly. While several "mixed" groups discuss assembly proceedings in the foreground of the design, the silhouettes of well-dressed women form a bastion in the upper tribunes located in the background. The only sign of disorder or lack of protocol are the women on the central proscenium who try to be recognized by the gentlemen presiding at the speaker's table. The dismayed expressions of deputies on either side of the speaker indicate their discomfiture but not undue reaction to the dispute over assembly leadership. Only the male figure teetering backward on a chair at the central table suggests that the women's efforts to gain recognition have not produced an entirely tranquil effect. Nonetheless, the presence of women in the foreground, middle ground, and the background of the print demonstrates their determination to remain present and active in assembly proceedings. And because the women are dressed appropriately with caps, shawls, and long dresses, the artist does not imply any sexual indiscretion. He instead portrays the women as respectable and equal in size, though located on levels slightly inferior to the president of the assembly. Moreover, light falls equally on the women who stand at the central table and the leaders who officiate at the speaker's table.

The rhetorical action of the narrative appears evenly distributed between groupings of women and the men on the proscenium.

This unusually positive rendition of a heterosexual "crowd" done in pen and ink, nonetheless, accentuates the transitory nature of the figures in the legislative assembly. Though the women's intrusion registers a temporary disturbance in the chambers, the solidity of the neo-classical background overrides any sense of permanent disorder. Instead, the sturdiness of four ionic columns bearing the solid renaissance ceiling conveys the strength of tradition, order, and stability to the revolutionary setting. The women's unexpected entry into public space thus marks a brief moment or unexpected hiatus in which women endeavored to participate as equals in the revolutionary forum. In this instance women appear to have legitimately assumed power in a venue normally open only to men.

The final print "Place Vendôme: The Greatest of Despots Overthrown by Freedom" [Image 11] reveals how crowd members take possession of political space (and power) in the Place Vendôme and replace the absent statue of the king. This somewhat popular allegorical print reveals a disparate group of sans-culottes figures who successfully capture and kill the "monster of despotism." Concurrently, a triangular grouping of sans-culottes leaders mount a pedestal formerly dedicated to the memory of Louis XIV. The defiant crew of sans-culottes thus takes on the proverbial role of St. George who, according to Christian traditions, impaled and destroyed the villainous dragon of Indo-European folklore. The band of plebeian figures on the pedestal raises the phrygian bonnet (symbol of political freedom) above the fray to celebrate the defeat of

the dragon and their liberation from French tyranny. Smoke and fire emitted by the dying dragon encompass the monument, creating an apocalyptic conflagration.¹⁸

But in addition to the triumphal figures at the apex of the composition, the artist locates varied "crowd" members who have approached and assailed the dying demon from both sides of the print. The grouping of sans-culottes men, who tie down the beast with ropes from their improvised barricade to the left of the design, perform an essential role in the capture. Likewise, an infantryman in the foreground left, the sans-culotte artisan on the right, and the tiny figure of liberty who kneels atop the dying monster establish multiple sites for crowd participation in the battle. A varied set of actors (in different places) can thus claim recognition for destroying the statue of the king and slaying the fiery dragon. It is apparent that the crowd refuses to remain a passive witness to the major events of revolutionary history.¹⁹ In this final political representation of the "world turned upside down," a disparate band of plebeian fighters has slain the monster of tyranny and subsequently mounted the king's pedestal to embody the new republican revolution.

In retrospect, the prints selected for this study represent the crowd as political agents as well as witnesses to the events portrayed. Whether praising or ridiculing,

¹⁸ The engraving combines apocalyptic themes and naive style of popular prints sold by traveling peddlers in cities and villages during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While the dramatic narrative reveals a historical event, i. e. the dismantling and removal of Louis XIV's statue, the composition also incorporates religious, mythical, and pagan themes to indicate how commoners envisaged their release from the experience of tyranny, evil, and oppression. For further information on popular art, religion, and politics, see: Barbara Ann Day-Hickman, *Napoleonic Art and the Spirit of Rebellion in France 1815-1848* (Wilmington, Delaware and London: Associated University Presses, 1999).

¹⁹ Records in Qb1, 1792, in the Division des Estampes at Bibliothèque Nationale Française, Richelieu, indicate the date of the event portrayed as August 11, 1792, one day after the people's storming of the Tuileries palace and subsequent imprisonment of the king. The print itself, however, might have been produced in the spring of 1793 to underscore the legitimacy of sans-culotte takeover of the National Convention.

engravers portray crowd leaders and their following as protagonists in the revolutionary events. For example, "The Trait of Heroic Courage" [Image 22] and the "Arrest of Louis Capet at Varenne," [Image 8] demonstrate the courageous efforts of plebeian leaders to express their heroic allegiance to the revolution when confronted with crowd resistance, aggression, and counter-revolutionary reaction. The protagonists in each of these prints--the courageous matron and the heroic leader of the revolutionary militia--demonstrate their resolute determination to contest duplicitous forces that obstruct the new political order. Such prints represent revolutionary leaders and their following as harbingers of revolutionary "virtue" who confront, disarm, or endeavor to overwhelm the alleged enemy. Both compositions demonstrate the triumph of political virtue and heroism in the face of crowd dispersion and disarray. The heroic protagonists in these more dramatic compositions function as agents of "virtue" and "honor" who surpass the foolhardy resistance of counter-revolutionary forces.

In contrast, five satirical prints, "Madame Sans-Culotte," [Image 18] "Pariser Poisarden," [Image 19] "French Liberty, British Slavery," [Image 23] "French Democrats Surprising the Royal Runaways," [Image 9] and "The Fourth Event of October, 1789," [Image 5] and "The Return of the French Heroines" [Image 32] present a Rabelaisian world turned upside down to poke fun at revolutionary partisans. Artists who critique the French revolution describe individuals or "the crowd" in terms of an inverted social order where plebeian leaders usurp power from traditional, aristocratic, royal, or male prerogatives. Conservative artists who question radical violence represent revolutionary adherents as irrational or bloodthirsty. Furthermore, artists who wish to put revolutionary leaders or events into question depict the crowd as disorderly and

destructive. Through the display of crowd distraction, irrationality, or animalistic furor, satirical artists create a "grotesque" contrast to the presumed dignity and sanity of "traditional" societies.

Gender transgression also explains much of the violence depicted either implicitly or explicitly in the prints. Whether the artist's predisposition is pro-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, many of the images reveal rampant disregard of acceptable gender boundaries--between masculine and feminine, active and passive or public and private domains. Such transgressions may be designed to provoke audience indignation at the inappropriateness of the character's behavior. For example, in some of the anonymous prints such as "Pariser Poisarden," [Image 19] the engraver derides women in public space to underline scandalous disregard for their preordained roles as wives and mothers. In contrast, women observing their maternal duties in the home, such as the matron in "The Trait of Heroic Courage," [Image 22] are presumed virtuous and honorable. Men who transgress gender norms are likewise liable to political censure. For example, representations of men in private space, such as the figure of "French Liberty" or the "King" respectively in the Gillray [Image 23] and Prieur [Image 8] prints, suggests passivity, cowardice, and emasculation. According to each of the artists, such inordinate transgressions of traditional gender roles merit social censure or violent reprisal.

Artists either endorsed or critiqued revolutionary personae and events by describing the virtual or actual shift in authority from traditional to popular groups. In some cases the transition in power was apparently peaceable and orderly. In other instances, the disqualification or removal of the King from power was rendered through ridicule or violence. And whether the transfer of power from the traditional elite to

revolutionary leaders was produced in costly metal engravings or cruder popular etchings, the theme remained constant. Visual art articulated and replayed the fundamental carnival ritual. And though visual narratives seem to be based on the uncomplicated theme of "the world turned upside down," historians cannot neglect the importance of such visual and perhaps mimetic evidence. This investigation therefore continues to question the ways that artists/artisans/ printers (and their virtual public) endeavored to identify, discredit, and replace those at odds with their own political vision.