

CORRESPONDANCE DE LA COUR.

COMPTE MORAL RENDU

ET DERNIER MOT A MES CHERS AMIS,

PAR OLYMPE DEGOUGES [sic],

A LA CONVENTION NATIONALE ET AU PEUPLES.

Sur une Dénonciation faite contre
son Civisme, aux Jacobins, par le Sieur BOURDON.¹

Court Correspondence. A Principled Report and My Last Words to My Dear Friends, by
Olympe Degouges, to the National Convention and to the People.

On a denunciation made to the Jacobins, against her patriotism, by Monsieur Bourdon.²

BOURDON, I call on you to reply to the court of public opinion. You will never escape it, and you will account to it for this infamous petition that you attributed to me but of which you are no doubt the Author.³

1 Léonard Bourdon (1754 - 1807) and François-Louis Bourdon (1758 – 1798), aka Bourdon de l’Oise, are very hard to distinguish from each other. They both trained as lawyers, were both deputies, both Jacobin, and history has accused both of lacking in integrity. In his biography, *Léonard Bourdon, the Career of a Revolutionary 1754 – 1807* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999) Michael Sydenham states: ‘...there are considerable gaps in the evidence as well as grave problems in interpreting the conduct and character of a controversial figure who lived through a deeply divisive decade. Identification, too, is often doubtful, the name Bourdon being common. Even in 1791-95, when Léonard was a comparatively well-known deputy in the National Convention, he was often confused with another deputy, his namesake François Bourdon; moreover, as is not unusual, if the name Bourdon is used alone, it can refer to either of these men or to someone else entirely.’ In this instance I believe de Gouges is addressing Léonard Bourdon. In mid-November he spoke at the Jacobin Club about opponents using placards to denigrate the members following the events of 10 August 1792, this is like his accusation against de Gouges on 28 October 1792, clearly the subject of negative petitions and posters was on his mind. In mid-December he allied himself to Robespierre at the Convention which would fit well with de Gouges addressing Bourdon, Marat and Robespierre as a group further on in the text.

2 This text was printed in December 1792 both as a placard and a brochure. De Gouges supplies a résumé of her life in political and literary terms to justify her patriotism in the face of Bourdon’s dangerous attack; he was probably motivated by her closeness to the Girondins party he reviled. What would have appeared harmless in the spring of 1791 (the correspondence between de Gouges and the court regarding a cortège) was, by the end of 1792, capable of being highly suspect. The fact that de Gouges felt the need to respond by publicising letters she had kept private is testimony to the level of threat such an attack could provoke.

De Gouges attached to this text *Mon dernier mot* (available in translation on www.olympedegouges.eu) which was originally printed as a poster in December 1792 then bound with her response to Bourdon, and sent to the Convention in the same month. Discouragement following physical and verbal attacks had finally pushed de Gouges to consider leaving Paris and abandoning her writing of political tracts. This decision was swiftly overturned as, yet again, events became too momentous to be disregarded.

3 On 28 October 1792, at the Jacobin Club, in response to a reading from the newspaper the *Courrier du Midi* (a daily paper based in Avignon that only appeared between May and December 1792) suggesting that Louis XVI was taking his fall in his stride and was happy with the republic because the people were contented [and that by implication he should be allowed to remain as monarch], Bourdon replied: “It’s the height of intrigue to attribute such ideas to Paris after the city almost destroyed itself, on 10 August, in order to kill the tyrant. And who has been placed at the head of this intrigue? It’s that Olympe de Gouges, the one you’ve seen placarding in every street, before the Legislative Assembly ended. A petition was created in Fontainebleau. And it is this hussy who has been charged with disseminating it. There is a simple remedy to all of this. Stay calm. You made your wishes plain enough on August 10th.” From *Journal des Débats et de la correspondance de la société des Jacobins, amis de l’égalité et de la liberté, séante aux Jacobins à Paris* of 28 October 1792.

Mandatories of a people not born to be in chains, lend me an attentive ear.

I was living at the heart of troubles and storms, in my innocence I was living in safety, I feared only for my fellow citizens: it is true that I wished for a philosophical revolution worthy of blessed humanity, once and for all worthy of your republican principles; but the constituent assembly decided otherwise; it vilified tyrants yet maintained them. This most lauded constitution has produced nothing but a monstrous government. I predicted as much and the day of the 10th justified my prediction.⁴ But, let us see what I was, what I am, in the eyes of pernicious citizens.

I will not draw your attention to my principles, you know them already; calumny has finally reduced me speak to you of myself, myself alone, and obliges me to point out to you the dangers that threaten me.

Monsieur Bourdon blames the jacobin society for not concentrating all its attention on me; in order to sharpen the daggers that must assassinate me, he attests that I am the daughter of Louis XV; he adds that I carry around a petition that asks for nothing less than the return of Louis XVI to the throne. (*Me, return that traitor to the throne! What a criminal calumny!*) It is this sort of balderdash that is used to excite the people, to lead them astray, and encourage the slitting of citizens' throats!

Are these, mandatories of the people, the men that we chose to govern the State? Oh French senate! Show yourself in your true colours, arise in your entirety and eject from your bosom these tainted members who dishonour you and soil the august forum from which should come the salvation of the republic.

I am not the daughter of a king, but of a head crowned with laurels; I am the daughter of a man famed as much for his virtue as for his literary talents.⁵ He erred only once in his life, against me. At this point I will say no more; a more detailed explanation would make me seem too interesting: I am considering my political justification and I do not want to seduce my judges, I want only to convince them. My evidence will be succinct and include documents that are incontestable.

In 1782 I wrote the play entitled *L'Esclavage des Noirs*, printed in 1784 it was played at the *comédie française* in 1789. This work that gained fame thanks to the societies it engendered, and thanks to the revolution in America, is not, to confound my enemies, a half-hearted refutation on my part; my democracy and my philosophy have for a long while terrified the slaves of the court; my remarks, my apt words on the depravity of this perfidious court are well known; they have been cited in other circumstances.

In 1788, I published my *letter to the people and the voluntary tax*. This first political work attracted the attention of the nation and the government.⁶

The famous philosopher and deputy of the convention, citizen *Mercier*, trembled on my behalf; he can attest to this truth.....⁷ Although a woman, he told me, your writings are

4 This is a reference to the 10 August 1792 when the Tuileries palace was ransacked by an organised mob spurred on by fury at the monarch's refusal to abstain from using his royal veto, his amassing of troops near Paris, and insecurity caused by Prussian advances on France. The King and Queen were forced to seek refuge in the nearby Manège building that housed the Legislative Assembly. The monarchs were never to be free again. From the Manège the royal family were taken to the Temple (an old Knights Templar building whose tower was used to imprison them until their eventual deaths, or freedom (only one family member survived, Marie-Thérèse, the King and Queen's eldest child, who was released in December 1795 aged 17).

5 De Gouges was almost certainly the natural child of Jean-Jacques le Franc de Pompignan (1709 – 1784), a writer who, following a humiliating quarrel with Voltaire, abandoned Paris and its literary life for his provincial estates where he translated the classics, wrote essays and studied biblical works.

6 Translations of *L'Esclavage des Noirs* and *Letter to the People, or Patriotic Purse Project* are available at www.olympedegouges.eu along with brief descriptions of the texts.

7 Louis Sébastien Mercier (1740 – 1814), author, playwright, journalist and politician, was a close friend and supporter of Olympe de Gouges. Some have accused him of being her ghost-writer, others have suggested

too popular and too vigorous, at a time when the revolution that you are preparing is feared. Believe me, hide from the pursuit of tyrants, learn from the persecutions that have assailed me. As proud and brave as this same Mercier, as Jean-Jacques [Rousseau], I became ever more enterprising.

I immediately published my *humane and patriotic reflections*, and *the primitive happiness of man*. The first of these two works vigorously treated of the people's misery (this was at the beginning of the *grand hiver*).⁸ This publication alarmed rich individuals and the court. Benevolence was spread profusely on poor out of work labourers. I proposed public workshops; they were adopted; and I could congratulate myself for having electrified the hearts of this saintly humanity. See the papers of the day, and you will also recognize, senators, that a woman was the first to hold up the charm of independence and the torch of patriotism in the republic.

What were you then, Marat, Robespierre, Bourdon?⁹ Insects squatting in the sewer of corruption, which you have yet to leave. I was already a great man, when you were still only vile slaves. The facts speak better than I do. I pursue my evidence.

The revolution takes place, and I follow it with the tenderness a mother feels for an idolised child. I see all kinds of betrayal; I unmask them: no one wants to believe me. I offer a hundred useful projects; they are received; but I am a woman, so I am not taken into consideration.

he was her lover: the first is certainly not true, the second is possible but unproven; a package of love letters is itemised in the inventory taken of de Gouges's papers following her arrest, crucially there is a comma separating the clause mentioning the package, and Mercier's name making it possible that his name refers to other papers, and not the love letters. It is clear that they corresponded regularly but tantalizingly the actual letters appear to have been destroyed so their content remains a mystery. At the time this pamphlet was produced he was an elected deputy sitting in the Convention.

8 Late November 1788 saw the start of an unprecedented cold snap (-18° recorded in Paris and 60cm thick ice on the Seine) that lasted until mid-January 1789. The effect of the 'grand hiver' was particularly savage as a week earlier the weather was still unseasonably warm with summer flowers recorded in the hedgerows. Translations of *Remarques patriotiques* and *Le Bonheur primitif de l'homme* are available at www.olympedegouges.eu along with brief descriptions of the texts.

9 Despite her passionate beliefs and swift responses to events de Gouges was generally even-handed and considered in her judgements of others, always willing to retract if necessary. Marat was the exception to this rule: she loathed him and saw in him a viciousness that could only endanger her beloved motherland. Born in the principality of Neuchâtel, Prussia (1743) and assassinated by Charlotte Corday in Paris (1793) Jean-Paul Marat, scientist, physician and philosopher worked in England and France, obsessively pursued scientific experiments yet failed to be elected to the French Academy of Science, wrote radical inflammatory journalism after the fall of the Bastille by creating his own newspaper *L'Ami du peuple* (he refused to collaborate with other editors) and was elected to the Convention in 1792 where he continued to operate as a free agent, belonging to no party. His extreme views, expressed in articles and speeches, incited others to riot and murder (ill health prevented him from participating in such events). His popularity among poorer Parisians eclipsed that of Robespierre and fuelled a long-held ambition to gain power. His death and its immediate portrayal as a republican pieta by the painter David (a great piece of artistic propaganda whose composition, and beauty (Marat was considered deeply unattractive), rendered it ideal for dissemination in print form) did much to consolidate, for a while, Marat's status as a republican martyr. He was entombed, a hero, in the Panthéon but removed (like Mirabeau) not long after when the revolutionary tide had turned.

Maximilien de Robespierre (1758 - 1794) was born in northern France and orphaned early. Educated in Paris he returned home to become a practising lawyer. His enlightened tendencies and his election to the Third Estate in 1789 allow him to mix in liberal Parisian circles; he also frequented the more revolutionary Jacobin club and was, in time, responsible for the schisms between the hard-line revolutionaries whom he supported and their more moderate compatriots. At a time of corruption and confusion his mantle of incorruptibility allowed him to rise to the top of the political order where he was majorly responsible for the creation of the revolutionary government and its subsequent reign of terror. He was adept at ridding himself of any rivals but in the end the terror turned on him too and he was guillotined on July 28, without due process, like so many others he had summarily ordered to be executed. De Gouges always allowed that he was driven by a sense of conviction and not personal gain, a rare enough thing at the time.

Louis XVI leaves for Varennes; I now see him as nothing but a traitor. He is forgiven, and the constitution is signed, I am reduced to forgiving him too. I knew the vices of this constitution, and the depravation of its *leaders*. I had affirmed its impossible progress in all my writings. I was not wrong but I knew how to respect the laws that it gave me. I feared that a second revolution would produce a desperate shock, and precipitate this unfortunate motherland into the abyss in which it was ready to be engulfed. Redressed by the events of the 10th, it is now at the height of the splendour it can attain; but if it makes a retrograde step, it will be torn to shreds, and the tyrants of the earth will share the spoils. *Already three governments in three years! And if the factious carry the day, we will not reach the end of the third legislature.* How will Europe, in its entirety, view this much vaunted revolution, of which we were so proud? We wanted to serve as models to the world, and we will be only its shame and its horror. The awful egotists, who honour themselves with the title of peaceful citizens, manage to slash the throat of the republic; they hate rebels yet they let them act; always in fear for their lives, they hasten their end. Wake up, cowardly insouciance; Fame broadcasts our victories all around: Paris alone can weaken them; the spirit of 89 must be reborn to wipe out the spirit of the 2 September.¹⁰

Senators, this is how I have constantly lifted the public spirit: that is my crime according to the conspirators. At all times I have pursued them; those of the court, those of the town; in a word, I have faced *both their daggers and their poison*. That is not even enough, in this perverse century, to confirm the purity of my soul; it is too elevated in its perfection, I have the audacity to say, for anyone to appreciate it, bar those who, like me, risk their lives for the republic. The Brutuses, the Beaurepaires, are meant for the world's great epochs; I may not share their celebrity, but I have all their virtues.¹¹ It is with these pure arms that I will defy the daggers of cowardly assassins. If I die by their blows my life,

10 Here de Gouges is contrasting the inspiring moments of 1789 (the meeting of the Estates General, the creation of the National Assembly, the fall of the Bastille etc.) with the appalling massacres of prisoners that started in Paris on 2 September 1792, lasted for five days, and were observed but not prevented by those in authority. Her reference to the '10th' contrasts to the earlier one in this work and shows her ambivalence about events on that day. It was a day of horrific bloodshed in the centre of her city, an inevitable outcome of the violent and extravagant rhetoric she so deplored yet it was also recognised by those now in power as a necessary step in France's move to becoming a republic and she needed to acknowledge that. As she repeatedly states, this was not the revolution or republic she hoped for but it was the one she feared.

11 Lucius Junius Brutus (? - 509 BCE) brought about the end of the Roman kingdom, expelled the Tarquins, helped create the first consulate thereby establishing a republic. Brutus had to oversee the execution of his two sons who had conspired to bring about the return of the monarchy. He died fighting the Tarquins in battle. He became a hero of all republican sympathisers and was famously pictured by David in 1789 receiving the bodies of his dead sons. Voltaire's play *Brutus*, first performed in the 1730s, had been revived by the Comédie Française in 1790 and played to great acclaim since it appeared to mirror the events unfolding in France at the time. It was reprised at the Théâtre de la Nation (the renamed Comédie Française) in the spring of 1791 and put on by Talma at his Théâtre de la rue Richelieu at the same time. It is highly likely that de Gouges attended one, or several, of these performances. She may be alluding to this Brutus, or equally possibly to Marcus Junius Brutus (85? BCE – 42 BCE). A descendant of the former Brutus, he was one of the Roman politicians who, with Cassius, led the revolt against Julius Caesar that resulted in that leader's assassination. He and Cassius were chased from Rome but two years later the men were engaged in battle by Marc Antony and Octavian. Cassius committed suicide after the first defeat, and Brutus after the second. Later Romans admired him making of him a symbolic opposer of tyranny: Plutarch and Shakespeare, among others, helped propagate that particular view of the man.

Nicolas Joseph Beaurepaire (1740 – 1791) was a soldier who attempted to save Verdun from the Duke of Brunswick's Prussian troops in 1791. The town was besieged and its council wanted to surrender, Beaurepaire had promised his life to defend it and refused to give in. He was found dead from gunshot wounds to his head in his room. It was suggested that he committed suicide to avoid the shame of defeat and this made him a republican hero overnight, someone who would rather die than capitulate to a tyrant. It is now considered equally possible that he was murdered by unknown hands, probably supporting the royalist cause, so that Verdun could join the opposing side. Brunswick took the town but allowed the departing French soldiers to take away their leader with full military honours from both sides.

hereafter, will be all the more glorious and the shadow of the wicked will make the brush-marks of my tableau shine ever brighter.

I take up my text once again: a few days after that famous voyage to Varennes, I published my addresses to the king, the queen, the erstwhile Prince de Condé, etc. Their vigour has not been forgotten; they [the addresses] encompass the precise fate of Louis Capet. What steps did I not take to have these addresses placed under his eyes! M. Gouvion took charge of it, promised to deliver them, and I had to believe him for he assured me that, at the castle, I was the only topic of conversation; that I really worried the slaves of the court, etc.¹² It was not long before I was assailed by a crowd of unknown emissaries coming to my home to ask for these addresses. Among others an elderly commander of Malta, carrying his old decoration in his pocket, who in an astute conversation sought to interest me in what he called Louis XVI's deplorable fate, and that of his respectable family.¹³ My answer was so brief and so democratic that I did not give him the time to finish his rhetorical speech; I ended it brusquely, by getting up, saying: 'Kings are gnawing worms who devour the substance of people, down to the bone.' Right away the erstwhile commander took his cane and his hat, and said as he left: 'I took you for a royalist, Madame?' 'Yes, Sir, I am, but in the spirit of the constitution, and aside from it, I no longer recognise any king.'

A few months later, Monsieur Duport was disgraced.¹⁴ I will be spared from saying all that I think about this man. I have been reproached for being acquainted with him; I must tell the truth as it concerns me: I knew him before he became a minister, and he is the only man whose probity I would have guaranteed. I openly declared war on him as soon as he was in place: friendship and the public good made it inevitable. I showed him the abyss over which he was building his fortune and his position. However much he dissimulated, I noticed that he found my observations unbearable. I brought his resentment to a pitch in a conversation I had with him at my home, in the presence of several people, and in which I accused him of being the vilest of slaves: it was the period when this citizen, corrupted by the subtle poison of the court, decided to receive in *his master's* antechamber, the deputation of the National Assembly. He dared to invoke etiquette, customs. I no longer know myself with these words. 'Etiquette, customs', I told him angrily, 'with regard to the representatives of the people!' It is for this *king* [the people] to go in front of the *sovereign*. He tried to persuade me that I knew nothing about politics. 'Anti-philosopher, bad citizen,' I replied with all the strength of my soul, 'I understand it better than you; we have, I accept, a very different way of observing it.'

12 Gouvion, Jean Baptiste (1747 – 1792) was both an army officer and, briefly, a deputy in the Assembly. He went to America in 1777 as a volunteer military engineer to serve in the War of Independence; he helped reinforce West Point, build Verplanck's Point, and took part in the Yorktown Campaign. He returned to France a colonel and rejoined the French army. Gouvion was La Fayette's second in command and stationed at the Tuileries in early August 1791 when he promised to distribute de Gouges's *Addresses* within the palace. He helped de Gouges's son, Pierre Aubry, in his military advancement. In June 1792 he was killed in action at the battle of La Glisuelle.

13 Commander was an honorary title given to a high-ranking member of the Order of Malta, until 1798 Knights of the Order had to have taken holy vows. The Order (also known as St John of Jerusalem) dates from the eleventh century when it was the military and religious Knights Hospitaller order based in Jerusalem. It grew in power and wealth, spread across the Christian world, and is still active to this day, primarily as a Roman Catholic charitable institution.

14 Duport-Dutertre, Marguerite-Louis-François (1754 – 1793), was a lawyer elected to the municipality of Paris in 1789. On La Fayette's recommendation he became Minister of Justice in 1790. As Minister, on 24 January 1792, he had had to observe the first use of the guillotine; in a prophetic letter he stated that it had made him feel as though he were being executed. In March 1792 he lost his position to Jean-Marie Roland. After 10 August 1792 he was accused of conspiring against the constitution and the security of the state. It is likely that de Gouges was a close friend of the Duport-Dutretres; he was rumoured to have been involved in some financial and political corruption involving the royal family when they were in the Tuileries which may explain de Gouges's acid comments and desire to distance herself from him. He was guillotined on 28 November 1793, the same day as Barnave and about three weeks after de Gouges, having spent more than a year imprisoned without trial. His wife, overwhelmed by his death, committed suicide.

On another occasion, in his study, I asked him about my son whom he had been leading by the nose, from promise to promise for eighteen months: 'My son deserves to be employed on his own merits; do you think that his mother has not earned it by her sacrifice of thirty thousand *livres* at least, in favour of her motherland?' 'Oh!' he cried, with that delicate ministerial tone: 'It is a great mistake to ruin oneself for ingrates! Ah! If you had wanted, if you had known.....if you still want.....if one could count on you.'

I cut him short: 'Sell myself like you to the crimes of the court,' I said with pride! --- 'That is not what I meant,' he said, suddenly trying to correct himself --- 'Good for you, I do not want to hear any more; I am hastening to your worthy colleague Narbonne.'

Barely had I arrived at Monsieur Narbonne's than Duport presented himself there with Monsieur de Cahier de Greville; I was admitted in front of the triumvirate.¹⁵ The courtier was most polite but, observing that I had not come to him to hear compliments, I reminded him of his duty. I really jeered at the gentlemen's assumed quarrel that had elevated itself to a king's council. 'I am not its dupe', I said. 'you are like those valets in comedies who agree to fight among themselves so that one has more faith in them.' At this remark Narbonne said to me: 'Your son will have a place tomorrow.' 'You are right,' Duport took up, 'for she could denounce us.' 'Thus you are guilty?' I asked them both. Duport replied seriously: 'Need one be, these days, in order to be denounced?' That is enough with regard to this ex-minister to wash my hands of him.

At last it is time for the Mayor of Estampes's festival.¹⁶ Did any good citizen fail to weep on the tomb of this martyr of the law? I want women to be admitted to this *national* ceremony; and in order to effect this, I get out of bed, where I had been held by a supposed chest infection. I start a subscription in favour of indigent girls; I present myself to the *commune*; from there to the national assembly; I am welcomed everywhere and my prayers are answered. The girls of the people had to be given veils and sashes; a considerable collection was needed to make this possible; Monsieur Brousse de Faucherets and the organisers of this festival assure me that it is up to me to take charge of augmenting the income, if I want to enable indigent girls of the people to adorn the cortège. I beg favours all around; but Pétion, the mayor of Paris, having made known to me, no doubt inadvertently, that wicked people might mistrust my discretion, I had no wish to receive a penny from anyone, so I engaged all the donors to send their offerings to the sections or to the municipality.¹⁷

¹⁵ Narbonne-Lara, Louis Marie Jacques, comte de (1755 – 1813) commanded the National Guard in Besançon and was Minister of War from 6 December 1791 to 10 March 1792. His resemblance to Louis XV led many to believe that he was the king's illegitimate son. In February 1791 he accompanied Louis XVI's aunts Mesdames Adélaïde and Victoire (his half-sisters?) to Rome where they stayed before moving to Naples, Corfu, then Trieste, running ahead of various armies (Victoire died in Trieste in 1799, Adélaïde died in Rome 9 months later). Appalled (or endangered) by the events of 10 August 1792 he fled to England where he joined his friend (and lover?) Madame de Staël. Narbonne tried to return to Paris to support Louis XVI during his trial but was refused a safe passage. He came back to France after the coup d'état of 1799 and, favoured by Napoleon, regained his military grade, was made a plenipotentiary minister in Bavaria, took part in and survived the Russian campaign, and was then sent to govern Torgau, a fortress town on the Elbe in Saxony, where he died in 1813.

Cahier de Greville, Bon-Claude (1751 – 1796) a politician who trained as a lawyer, replaced Lessart as Minister of the Interior in November 1791 but resigned in March 1792.

¹⁶ Simonneau, Mayor of Estampes, was killed on 3 March 1792 in confusing circumstances after an uprising in the town caused by grievances against the rising cost of staple goods. His murder was a cause célèbre that divided opinion. He was posthumously honoured as an upholder of civil law by the Legislative Assembly, a festival in his honour, the Fête de la Loi, was held on 3 June 1792: de Gouges organised a female procession within the cortège to highlight the importance of women in public life, some commentators were in favour, others (generally the most revolutionary) were violently against women participating in such activities.

¹⁷ Brousse des Faucherets, Jean-Louis (1742 – 1808) was a playwright and librettist, who during the revolution became an administrator in Paris, and was the mayor's deputy responsible for public

I wished to interest the erstwhile queen in this subscription; I wrote her the vigorous letter that I eventually had printed; but the problem was how to reach her; therein lay all the difficulty.

I made the torturous effort of conveying myself to Monsieur Brissac's house, who, after a fairly strange conversation, sent me to the head of the queen's household, the infamous princess Lamballe.¹⁸ The one [conversation] I had with this woman, *infatuated* by the empty prerogatives she called her rank, is no less interesting: I have given it, word for word, in a scene of a five act drama that I will produce entitled *France Saved, or the Tyrant Dethroned* and in which, I hope, I will finally be understood.¹⁹ The prediction that I made to the lady Lamballe, both in my conversation and in my letter, was verified in a manner so dreadful for her, that the unfortunate woman, when dying, perhaps believed me to be her executioners' accomplice.

Having failed with these two personages, as a last resort, I addressed myself to Monsieur Laporte, intendant of the civil list, who, more adroit than Monsieur Brissac and the lady Lamballe, fulfilled my mission by being politic rather than patriotic. No doubt it will be considered surprising that, with regard to this, I have kept silent until now; on reflection, it will be seen that I had no need to persecute the court for my own glory, then perhaps some credit will be afforded to my wise modesty which, fulfilling the aim of my true patriotism, could, according to my beliefs, only have been weakened by publicity. Senators, people, here are the letters with their replies: read them; and if you can, stifle this fervour of admiration, one that you find so difficult to accord to my sex.

establishments. He was removed from his position and arrested during the Terror for being too moderate, but survived imprisonment and took up public life again in 1800 and became, for the four last years of his life, responsible for theatrical censorship. De Gouges had appeared before him in February 1790 when he had decided the fate of her wrangle with the Comédie Française, not in her favour.

Jérôme Pétion (1756 – 1794), a constitutional monarchist (he was part of the delegation sent by the National Assembly to bring back Louis XVI and his family from Varennes in June 1791) and Robespierre's friend, was the Mayor of Paris from November 1791 to October 1792. President of the Jacobins in September 1792 he veered towards the Girondins and lost the support of Robespierre; as the latter's star rose Pétion's fell. He was proscribed in June 1793, lived in hiding for a year, and committed suicide in June 1794, days before Robespierre's fall from power. His body was found in a field partially eaten by wild animals.

18 Brissac, Louis-Hercule-Timoléon de Cossé (1734 – 1792) was a politician, a courtier and commander in chief of the King's Constitutional Guard. He was massacred, with other prisoners, near Versailles on 9 September 1792 while being transported from Orléans prison to Paris.

Lamballe, Marie-Thérèse-Louise de Savoie-Carignan (1749 - 1792), a princess, widowed at 19, was a close friend of Marie-Antoinette, and for a while superintendent of her household. Her piety and sobriety made her a dependable but perhaps dull companion who was eclipsed later by more genial but troublesome confidantes. She was a free mason and was elected grand mistress of all the lodges of adoption in France in 1781. Lamballe was imprisoned in August 1792 and summarily tried in early September. Refusing to swear an oath of hatred to the royal family she was thrown out of the court to a waiting mob who killed her and mutilated her body. Her head was paraded on a pikestaff under the windows of the Temple prison where the royal family were held. Her death was iconic, her corpse the focus of the disdain and hatred felt for the court entourage and its lifestyle. The horror that de Gouges felt for the manner of these deaths, and the rising tide of violence that was sweeping through France inspired her to write *La Fierté de l'Innocence* (available in translation on www.olympedegouges.eu).

19 Begun in August or September 1792 the play was never finished and was found in manuscript form when de Gouges's lodgings were searched by the authorities following her arrest in June 1793. Her satirical view of this encounter was used against her at her trial in 1793. The playwright's accusers claimed that only a royalist would consider placing a queen on the stage; when de Gouges defended her script as being dramatically accurate, representing the monarch's ideas, rather than her own, she was derided. It was not in the interests of her detractors to acknowledge the author's anti-royalist satirical intent. There is something tragic in the words 'finally understood' when in fact the play helped the authorities to finally execute her.

LETTERS AND ORIGINALS

That the Author proposes to deposit in the bosom of the National Convention.

Letter from Olympe de Gouges to M. de Brissac.

Sir, I presented myself at your abode with all the confidence of a soul beyond reproach, and a heart that goes to the nub of all that is good. It is not my fault if this is not observed, or if there are reasons for not wishing to see it; but you will allow me to express to you my surprise at the manner in which you received me. Sir, you say you are the king's friend, I too am his friend but in a manner quite different to yours! As long as you distance the truth from the king's ear you will never serve his true interests, which are founded only on those of the entire motherland. Meanwhile, Sir, I neither want to draw attention to my undertaking nor to your conduct until I have received certain proof from you that you are seeking to distance from the throne anything that could contribute to the public good. You know my principles at present. I attach to this letter two brochures for the king and queen that you cannot refuse to pass on to the king since you are the one who is the closest to his person. I await, Sir, your reply. You must consider that, in this circumstance, it would be only too vital to reconcile the queen to the maxims that can restore the love of a nation, one to whom she should be a friend. I am, Sir, with all the sentiments of equality, your fellow citizen, OLYMPE DE GOUGES.

Reply from M. Brissac.

I am sorry, madame, that you do not appreciate the reasons that made me tell you that I was not the one that should be addressed to present your letters to the king and queen, in particular. I had the honour of telling you that I did not allow myself to deliver to the king any writings whatsoever. I have never offered the king any advice; he has never asked me for any; I have done my best to serve him by only concerning myself with fulfilling the offices that I have held. If you wish, madame, to deliver your letters to the king yourself nothing is easier than to present them to him as he passes by, on his way to mass; I will give it my blessing willingly, and that is my concern, or, if you prefer, nothing is easier than to send it to his valet in chief; the same method to be used for the queen. I trust, madame, that you will appreciate my discretion and that you will accept my sentiments. I do not doubt yours, and I beg you, madame, to graciously receive my respectful homage,

The commandant-general of the
king's guard. LT. THIMOLÉON
DE COSSÉ BRISSAC.

P. S. I attach herewith, madame, your printed letters.

Letter from Olympes [sic] de Gouges to Madame de Lamballe.

MADAME,

You must know that philosophers do not believe they are made to kneel in front of prejudice. Proud in their desire to do good, the noble ambition of succeeding in this always holds their souls above the empty prerogatives of fate. Their talents and their virtues are often placed above those of kings. I differ greatly from these immortal men, madame, but I possess the elevation of their sentiments.

You refused, madame, to deliver a text to the queen that exudes only the sweetest philosophy and affairs of her glory and person. You cannot, and should not, madame, oppose yourself to her receiving my patriotic expressions. Perhaps I made my thoughts known to you too abruptly but, madame, I repeat, *tyrants sooner or later drag their accomplices into the abyss*. Therefore I take the liberty of insisting on my proposition, convinced that, once you have read this publication, you will not resist the duty that the queen's interests and your own impose upon you, especially in a situation where all commands you to yield to the slightest occasion that might restore her to that popularity that should always have guided her. If truth frightens you, madame, no doubt you will not fulfil my wish, and I may be allowed to apply to you Phèdre's two celebrated lines.

Détestables flatteurs, présent le plus funeste,
Que puisse faire aux rois, la colère celeste!²⁰

I trust, madame, that you will deign to prove that the opposite is true; then no one will be more zealous than I in offering you the homage that will be your due.

OLYMPE DE GOUGES.

N.B. I received no reply to this letter but I learnt that it had been the subject of a dreadful conversation about me. I will add that I had wished, in the first instance of my resentment, to publish it in the paper of the Eighty-three départements and the Thermomètre du jour. I do not know what prevented these two patriotic journalists, now members of the convention, from inserting it at the time. Was it forgetfulness on their part? Was it indifference to my civic-minded nature?

To Monsieur de la Porte.

MONSIEUR,

You occupy a position that looks suspicious to the eyes of the common people; yet I am pleased to believe that you are an honest man. It is with that trustworthiness in mind that I address myself to you in order to place under the eyes of the king and queen, the brochures that I am attaching to this letter.

You are doubtless aware, Sir, that in order to serve the motherland, I firstly attacked despotism, and it is in this spirit that I address myself to you.

I have resolved that the truth will finally be placed in front of their majesties' eyes. To this effect I first had recourse to M. de Brissac and to Mde de Lamballe. Oh truly, I had chosen aright in order to fail! But these blinkered courtiers must be pleased with me. Despite everything, I pray for their sakes that my prediction will never come to pass. So, monsieur, I address myself to you as a last resort. You are the intendant of the civil list. Might you, in memory of the virtuous Simonneau, persuade their majesties to contribute to

²⁰ 'Hateful flatterers, most deadly of gifts/ that royalty may receive from celestial fury.' These famous lines from Jean Racine's *Phèdre*, Act 4, scene 6, end a long *tirade* spoken by the eponymous character to her nurse Oenone at the height of her impotent fury, when she blames her longtime servant for her ills, and curses her for leading her astray by being like a coward unable to speak truth to a weak unhappy prince. Oenone kills herself, driven to despair by the curse of her beloved surrogate child.

the subscription that has been opened for this festival. The queen, sir, in a circumstance such as this, should show herself as the benefactress of indigent people, by having some veils and sashes distributed to poor people of her sex, known for their good behaviour! This benefit cannot disrupt their majesties' finances, and if, in all circumstances, the civil list had been used for such a noble purpose, allow me to tell you, Sir, there would be fewer complaints about the depravation of the court. I pray, excuse my frankness. I do not flatter kings; I know how to speak to men. If you possess, Sir, this virtue, you will, straightaway, place under the eyes of the queen, this printed letter that I am addressing to her as I await, Sir, your reply, and a with all the sentiments of equality, your fellow citizen, OLYMPE DE GOUGES.

Reply from M. de la Porte.

I come, madame, from placing under the eyes of the queen, the letter that you did me the honour of addressing to me, and the printed text attached to it. As the directory of the department is charged with regulating all that pertains to the festival that is due to take place the day after tomorrow, her majesty gave me the order to chart, on her behalf, according to your proposition, what they will judge reasonable; and to leave, to this effect, at their disposition, a sum of 1200 *livres*. I wrote to them about it, and I addressed my letter to M. Desfaucherets with whom I have already corresponded regarding certain things that were asked of the king for this festival, and whom, being personally charged with it, can hasten the execution of your wishes.

The intendant of the civil list,
LA PORTE.

The day after this reply, an emissary from Monsieur Laporte presented himself at my home several times without finding me in; he asked the door-keeper a hundred questions: for example, did I have several children, was I wealthy, who came to visit me; at the time I had lodgings in citizen Lunel's house, first cousin to citizen Pétion: all these facts are well known. Finally this strange emissary found me; it only concerned a pension and a place with the erstwhile queen. Neither one nor the other are made for me, I told him: Sir, if my writings are moderate and decent, it is because I have always believed that in order to redeem tyrants, or destroy them, facts are necessary and not insults. This emissary, by teaching me the while the virtues of the erstwhile king, had the good humour to agree with me that I had not been injured by the assumption that I could be corrupted, thanks to the critique of a man known to me, whose name I will leave to conjecture, he who had been too hot-headed with me and too dangerous to keep a secret.

Senators, now analyse all the facts; all the witnesses exist, truth is always interesting for its own sake. But I defy any man in the entire universe to present it as I do in all its purity and in its full light.

I have sacrificed everything for the sake of the motherland alone; fortune, pride, labours, health, amorous sentiments, which is not a minor thing for a soul as ardent as mine; I have totally deprived myself of all society's advantages, all that is left to me is the nobility of my sentiments and a very mediocre fortune: like you I have served the State and the people, *I am not asking you for anything*; but offer me the respect that our common enemies, the motherland's agitators, wish to take from me, by forcing the impostor Bourdon to publicly retract his atrocious calumny. OLYMPE DE GOUGES.

[There follows in this published version de Gouges's text *Mon dernier mot* (available in translation on www.olympedegouges.eu); it was created as a separate poster which thus far has never been located.]