

LE TOMBEAU

DE

MIRABEAU.

Mirabeau's Memorial.¹

My fellow citizens, death has just taken from us the father of liberty; this loss is engraved in our hearts; the enemies of the motherland believe they have triumphed, they are wrong, in Mirabeau they have lost a protecting rampart, just as we have lost one of our strongest supports.

My fellow citizens, this loss is harrowing, but let us not be discouraged, let us render unto this great man all that we owe him; he exhausted himself, he lost his life working night and day for our happiness: if he made mistakes his never to be forgotten works, which may be worth centuries of virtue, have effaced them.

To him I predicted that once he turned his pen to the public good, altars would need to be raised in his honour. He did it; it is up to you, my fellow citizens, to realise my prediction. Could there be a more favourable moment for our gratitude! Could there be a more fitting moment to manifest our affliction than when his still smouldering ashes invite us to enclose them in a tomb worthy of this great man, worthy of the Romans whom we emulate.

It is beneath the altar of the motherland that his ashes should rest; that is where he must remind us of all he has done for us; that is where we must swear on his tomb to continue all that he began. That is what I, the most ardent patriot and the best of citizens, dare propose.

DE GOUGES.

¹ Honoré Gabriel Riquetti comte de Mirabeau (1749 – 1791) was as famous for his scandalous life as he was for his writings. The events of 1789 unleashed his consummate energy and verve into the world of politics. An aristocrat voted in as a deputy of the Third Estate, his oratory and imposing (and to some, repugnant) physical presence made him a natural leader. Representing the people, he supported progressive reforms while realising that too much chaotic change could unbalance the entire country. He believed in constitutional monarchy. Did he sell his soul to the monarchy as some have said, or was he trying to lead it to safer ground for the good of the country? Burnt out at 42 from the excesses of his youth and the exertions of revolutionary life his reputation still divides opinion; he died, after a short illness, on 2 April 1791. De Gouges responded immediately to his demise by writing this pamphlet which she proclaimed publicly in her local café, the Procope, famous haunt of philosophers, intellectuals and theatre people from the nearby Comédie Française. Her call to place him beneath the altar of the motherland came to pass a few days later when he was entered in the Panthéon which, originally designed as a church, became in 1791 a mausoleum for great French men. Mirabeau was the first person entombed there though he was removed a few years later when opinions changed regarding his reputation.