

“The Blood of a King Brings Joy:” Blood and the Execution of Louis

XVI

by

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Introduction

Louis XVI rode to the scaffold on the morning of the 21st of January 1793 in a coach – a final favour granted to him to avoid riding in an open cart like all other condemned criminals. Accompanied by his confessor, the King arrived at the *Place de la Révolution* around ten in the morning.¹ According to most accounts, a drum roll cut off Louis’ last words – “I die innocent ... I forgive my death: I wish that my blood can cement the happiness of the French”² – and he either went willingly or was seized by his executioners and tethered to the plank before being rapidly dispatched by the guillotine.³ At the moment of his execution, Louis XVI became the central figure in two competing narratives of national regeneration. For revolutionaries, the spilling of the king’s blood established the new republic and marked the foundational sacrifice upon which the French nation was regenerated. For royalists, Louis became a Christ-like martyr whose sacrifice would eventually save France from the sin of the Revolution and of regicide.

The execution of the Most Christian King of France by the representatives of the nation was almost inconceivable when the Revolution broke out in 1789.⁴ Louis’ initial popularity, however, was severely damaged by his disastrous decision to attempt an escape from France in June of 1791. Louis and his family fled Paris and attempted to reach France’s eastern border

¹ Antoine de Baecque, *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths under the French Revolution*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 95. The square where Louis XVI was executed underwent several name changes due to a succession of political regimes. Originally named the *Place Louis XV*, it was renamed to the *Place de la Révolution* in 1789. In 1795, the Directory renamed the square the *Place de la Concorde* in a reconciliatory gesture. The Restoration reversed this change; in 1814 the square took back its original name. In 1826, Charles X renamed the square the *Place Louis XVI* in a gesture of rejection of the Revolution and honour for his older brother. Finally, the July Revolution of 1830 renamed the square to its current version: the *Place de la Concorde*.

² M. Normand, *Oraison funèbre de sa majesté Louis XVI, roi de France et de Navarre, prononcée dans la cérémonie du service expiatoire, célébré à Tours, dans l’église de St. François de Paule, le 28 juillet 1814* (Tours: Letourmy, 1814), 36. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62575266>, Accessed February 15, 2018: “Je meurs innocent ... je pardonne ma mort: je souhaite que mon sang puisse cimenter le bonheur des Français.”

³ Richard D. E. Burton, *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 45.

⁴ Susan Dunn, *The Deaths of Louis XVI: Regicide and the French Political Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.

before being caught at Varennes and returned by armed guard to Paris.⁵ Louis had left behind a proclamation renouncing the Revolution, making his abandonment of the Revolution obvious. While most depictions of the king prior to 1791 were positive, portraying Louis as the “good father,” the failed flight to Varennes marked a fundamental turning point: thereafter the majority of representations of Louis were derogatory of the king and the royal family.⁶ Almost immediately following the news of the king’s attempted flight, symbols of royalty all over Paris were defaced and calls to depose the king were loudly petitioned.⁷ Matters escalated in June 1792, when a crowd of Revolutionaries stormed the Tuileries and humiliated Louis by forcing him to wear a revolutionary Phrygian cap and to drink to the health of the nation.⁸ Ultimately, a second invasion of the Tuileries on the 10th of August 1792 forced the King to take refuge in the Legislative Assembly – which announced the suspension of the monarchy on the same day.⁹ On the 21st of September 1792, the monarchy was formally abolished – ending over two hundred years of Bourbon rule in France.¹⁰

The abolition of the monarchy by the Convention left open the question of what to do with the deposed Louis XVI. Although the Constitution of 1791 had guaranteed the king’s inviolability, the discovery of Louis’ confidential correspondence with his Austrian in-laws and the fiasco of his flight to Varennes in June 1791 meant the deputies were determined to put the King on trial for treason. Louis was eventually declared legally able to stand trial on 3 December; the trial took place that same month.¹¹ The question of the King’s guilt was virtually

⁵ Burton, *Blood in the City*, 41-42.

⁶ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: CA, University of California Press, 1992), 50-51.

⁷ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 151-53.

⁸ Burton, *Blood in the City*, 42.

⁹ Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 188-89

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹¹ François Furet, *Revolutionary France: 1770-1880*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1988), 117-121.

settled before the outset of the trial – the only real issue during the King’s trial was the debate over what the appropriate punishment would be.¹² Voting on the 15th of January 1793 reached a near unanimous conclusion: 683 deputies out of the 720 present voted for a guilty verdict and none voted for acquittal.¹³ The vote on the King’s punishment, however, was substantially more divisive: 321 deputies voted for imprisonment while 365 – including 35 who advocated for some form of stay of execution – voted for the death penalty.¹⁴ Indicative of division within the assembly, as well, was the vote on whether to appeal to the people over the King’s punishment: 425 deputies voted to reject consultation with the nation while 286 supported the motion.¹⁵ A second vote on the King’s sentence on the 18th January upheld the death penalty, albeit with a narrower majority; 361 deputies voted for death outright, a further 26 voted for death with certain conditions, 46 voted for death with some form of reprieve, while 288 voted for imprisonment.¹⁶ His death sentence having been affirmed twice, Louis XVI was led to the scaffold on the morning of the 21st of January 1793 and guillotined.¹⁷

Previous literature on the execution of Louis XVI has pointed towards the significance of this event for both Revolutionaries and their opponents. Central to this paper is the work of Lynn Hunt and Antoine de Baecque on the sacrificial ritual of the king’s execution in Revolutionary France, Mona Ouzof on the sacralisation of Revolutionary symbols, and that of Sheryl Kroen on the use of expiatory ceremonies during the Restoration period to assert the legitimacy of the returned Bourbon monarchy. Important works by Jeffrey Merrick and Dale Van Kley (among

¹² Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 194-5.

¹³ Jacques-François Froullé and Thomas Levigneux, *Liste comparative des cinq appels nominaux. Faits dans les séances des 15, 16, 17, 18 et 19 janvier 1793, sur le procès et le jugement de Louis XVI, avec les déclarations que les Députés ont faites à chacune des séances, par ordre de numéros* (Paris: Levigneux & Froullé, 1793), 25. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6214277f>, Accessed February 17, 2018.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25. Deputies feared that putting the question of the King’s punishment to the people would risk sparking a civil war.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷ Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 196.

others) – dealing with the nature of *ancien régime* kings – and Mitchell Merback and Paul Friedland – about the religious significance of early modern public executions – figure importantly in providing the backdrop upon which revolutionaries and Restoration missionaries built their narratives. I will be dealing with this literature in greater detail in later sections.

This paper seeks to build on existing literature by discussing the role of blood – in particular that of Louis XVI – in informing narratives surrounding the King’s execution and demonstrating the ways in which Revolutionary and Royalist narratives borrowed from traditions of the *ancien régime* and mirrored each other in important ways. The paper will proceed in an unconventional (non-chronological) structure in the interest of most effectively illustrating the ways in which Revolutionary rhetoric – ostensibly secular and rejecting the idea of the king’s sanctity – mirrored the explicitly religious discourse of the Restoration period expiatory ceremonies. Because the rhetoric of the Restoration period most closely and openly resembled the discourses of the *ancien régime*, it will precede the section dealing with the Revolution. In this way, I hope to expose the parallel yet opposite narratives of the Revolution and Restoration through their connections with each other and with the past. An approach that departs from the chronology of the periods, therefore, is better equipped to expose the lines of continuity between the three periods.

The focus on blood during the Revolution and the Restoration points towards interesting conclusions. The revolutionaries’ focus on “curing” the social body through the spilling of Louis’ blood reveals an organic and corporeal conception of the body politic that resembled that of the pre-revolutionary Bourbon state. These revolutionaries conceived of the Republic and Revolution in terms of a physical body and saw the purging of the monstrous body of the king as necessary to the survival of the nation. The execution of the traditional head of the social body,

however necessary, put the survival of the rest of the body in danger – Louis’ blood, therefore, was used metaphorically as a kind of national medicine for the injured social body. Continued attention to the blood of Louis in the Restoration period indicates the (at least partial) survival of some of the mythologies of kingship that were part of the ideology of the *ancien régime* absolute monarchy despite the disruption of the Revolution and Napoleonic Empire. In this way, a study of the discourses surrounding the king’s blood sheds light on important themes in both periods.

“The King never dies:” Kingship in *Ancien Régime* France

The execution of a king by the representatives of the nation was no small step. Punishment was the traditional prerogative of the crown and the annexation of this power was the ultimate expression of the national body manifesting its supremacy over the king’s body. A discussion of the nature of kingship during the pre-revolutionary period is, therefore, critical to an understanding of the significance of the killing of the king of France by his subjects.

Ancien régime monarchs were conceived of as the physical embodiment of the state. The king alone wielded ultimate authority over the entire realm and represented all his subjects – whose interests were identified as his own.¹⁸ Social hierarchy was represented by an organic analogy: the king’s subjects formed a body of which the king was the head.¹⁹ Authority in the French state was explicitly modeled on the family; the king was the father of all his subjects – who owed him filial obedience.²⁰ Ultimately, absolute monarchy necessitated the investment of sovereignty in the body of the king alone.²¹ It is important to note, however, that, although the monarchy was absolute in name, French kings had limitations to their practical power; the

¹⁸ Jeffrey Merrick, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 12-15.

¹⁹ Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), 133.

²⁰ Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 3.

²¹ Fanny Cosandey and Robert Descimon, *L’absolutisme en France: histoire et historiographie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 40.

parlements acted in defense of the system of privileges of the *ancien régime* through their status as the highest courts of law and, therefore, provided an effective barrier to absolute rule.²²

French kings never die. Put more precisely, “The king *as King* never dies (emphasis in text).”²³ Kings possessed two bodies: their physical body (the king) and their corporate/political body (the King). The corporate body of the king, the “Royal Dignity,” never dies. The idea of the king’s two bodies was cryptically encapsulated in the popular French phrase “*le roi ne meurt jamais*” (the king never dies).²⁴ This popular sentiment was legally codified in 1611 in the *Institutes Coutumières*, a manual of legal maxims that was intended as a textbook for law students.²⁵ The continuity of the state, then, was represented by the succession of uninterrupted Bourbon kings – each taking power at the moment of their predecessor’s death – in this sense, the permanency of the body politic was embodied in the king.²⁶

The religious and political spheres of *ancien régime* France were intimately linked. The kings of France were divinely ordained and God sanctioned their rule.²⁷ The marquis de Saint-Aubin explained divine right in 1735: the king was “appointed by the Lord; royal authority derives from God and not from the people. The king was accountable for his administration only to God, who gave him absolute authority for the good of the people.”²⁸ Kings not only ruled by the grace of God, but were also sacred figures in and of themselves; they reigned as the “visible

²² James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (New York: NY, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 114.

²³ Ralph E. Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1960), 178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

²⁶ Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: a Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997, c. 1957), 316,

<http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/2027/heb.01504.0001.001>.

²⁷ Cosandey and Descimon, *Absolutisme en France*, 83. Arguments for absolute rule followed religious or secular strands of thought. In the interests of saving space, only the religious justification for absolutism is dealt with in any detail in this paper. In broad terms, secular arguments for absolutism put forward the idea that the state should be contained within a single unity that represented all interests in one being (the king), thereby avoiding privileging one estate over the others and providing an unselfish government that acted on behalf of the whole.

²⁸ Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 9.

images of the Divinity.”²⁹ The same sacred character of kingship that allowed French kings to claim accountability only to God also imposed certain obligations on the monarch. French kings were required to rule as representatives of God, and were expected to uphold the Catholic Church, promote the spiritual welfare of the realm, and rule justly and for the benefit of all their subjects.³⁰ This linking of religious orthodoxy with royal absolutism and the protection of public order is aptly expressed in the phrase “one faith, one king, one law.”³¹ Kings were connected to the cult of saints through their iconographic representation as Christ-like figures, through the belief in the curative power of their touch for people infected with scrofula, and through their elaborate funeral rituals.³² The joining of the political and religious spheres, while it invested the crown with political capital due to its divine legitimacy and imposed a duty of obedience on its subjects, also led to the monarchy’s entanglement in increasingly disruptive religious disputes that would prove highly damaging in the long run.³³

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the monarchy underwent a gradual process of desacralization. Broadly speaking, desacralization represents the breakdown of the conjunction of religion and politics that characterized traditional conceptions of kingship and kingdom in France.³⁴ Important disputes during this period between the crown and the *parlements* over religious toleration and other issues undermined not only the authority of both parties, but also the religious character and obligations of the king.³⁵

²⁹ Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theatre: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: University of California, 2000), 30; Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 9.

³⁰ Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 9-10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

³² Joseph Bergin, *The Politics of Religion in Early Modern France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 6.

³³ Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 2; Bergin, *Politics of Religion*, 6.

³⁴ Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, x.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

A key source of religious tension in eighteenth-century France revolved around the papal bull *Unigenitus*. The bull managed to bind together disparate groups into opposition to the crown through its condemnation of Jansenism.³⁶ Jansenism was a movement within the Catholic Church that believed in pre-destination and the doctrine of efficacious grace – where God granted only some the ability to ensure their salvation.³⁷ Although there was no direct link between Jansenist beliefs and political opposition, there was considerable overlap in the convictions of Jansenists and those critical of the church and the royal government, and Jansenism soon acquired the reputation of a dissident movement.³⁸ By 1713, the year of *Unigenitus*' issue, Jansenism had become wrapped up in two other key elements of French tradition: Gallicanism - the belief that the Catholic church in France should have the ability to judge doctrine independently from the Pope in Rome - and the *parlement*'s constitutionalism - which emphasized the central place of the *parlement* in the unwritten “constitution” of France and its right to reject, modify, and consent to royal edicts sent to it for registration by the crown.³⁹ The Pope's interference, solicited by Louis XIV, into French ecclesiastical affairs (thereby violating the Gallican liberties defended by the *parlements*) through *Unigenitus* galvanized Jansenists, Gallicanists, and *parlementaires* into united opposition to the monarchy. The crown's insistence on enforcing the bull created a determined and coherent opposition that grew steadily in popularity among both the *parlementaires* and elements of the clergy.⁴⁰ Crucially, these types of disputes brought into question the sovereign's accountability to his

³⁶ Dale K. Van Kley, *The Damiens Affair and the Unraveling of the Ancien Regime, 1750-1770* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 57.

³⁷ Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 37.

³⁸ William Beik, *A Social and Cultural History of Early Modern France* (New York: NY, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 307.

³⁹ Van Kley, *Damiens Affair*, 57. Belief in an unwritten constitution had a long history and was well entrenched among many elements of society in France by the eighteenth century, providing an important check to the exercise of absolute rule by the king.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

subjects; the *parlement*'s and others' insistent opposition undermined the king's claim to be accountable only to God, marking a resurgent and increasingly confident movement to hold the king accountable to his earthly subjects as well.⁴¹ The erosion of the amalgamation of religion and politics was well underway, therefore, by the middle of the eighteenth-century.

In strictly quantitative terms, *parlements* engaged with the crown more frequently on fiscal and jurisdictional-constitutional issues – such as the defense of provincial privileges, royal taxation, and jurisdictional rivalry with subaltern tribunals – than they did on religious matters. Religious issues, however, produced more dramatic conflicts: three disruptions of ordinary justice (December 1751, May 1752, and May 1753), two exiling of magistrates (May 1753 and January 1757), and one mass resignation of offices (December 1756). *Parlements*, while willing to back down after a show of protest in other conflicts, pushed resistance in religious matters to escalating levels of hostility.⁴² The *parlement*'s intractability in religious confrontations with the monarchy was bolstered by an active expression of public opinion on religious matters in widespread polemical pamphlets of the 1750s and 1760s.⁴³

Quarrels over *Unigenitus* led to disputes over the traditional constitution of France that culminated in the suppression of the magistrates in 1771.⁴⁴ This “coup” triggered defenses of the “rights” of the nation and attacks on a system of divine absolutism that was increasingly being seen as arbitrary and despotic.⁴⁵ *Philosophes*, such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, compounded

⁴¹ Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 104. This was not the first instance that a French king was held accountable to his subjects, only a stronger and more energetic movement than had existed previously.

⁴² Van Kley, *Damiens Affair*, 99-101.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁴ David Hudson, “In Defense of Reform: French Government Propaganda during the Maupeou Crisis,” *French Historical Studies* 8, no.1 (Spring, 1973): 51-52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/285958>. Louis XV's chief minister, René Nicolas de Maupeou, placed the majority of the magistrates of the *parlements* under internal exile and replaced them with salaried officials, placing the courts more firmly under the grip of the crown. The death of Louis XV in 1774, however, brought an end to this experiment as Louis XVI restored the old *parlements* that same year.

⁴⁵ Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 120-121.

upon the religious disputes of the eighteenth century by attacking the conjunction of religion and politics directly. This discourse undermined the king's religious sanctity, proclaiming him to rule "by the grace of his subjects," not "by the grace of God."⁴⁶ Disputes between the *philosophes* and the defenders of royal tradition opened up the question of religion's role in politics, disrupting the crucial linking of religion to politics, discrediting divine ordination, and secularizing citizenship. Jansenist denunciations of the King as impure and impious further eroded the sanctity of the King's body – leading to an increase in violent threats against the monarch and culminating in the attempted assassination of Louis XV by Robert Damiens in 1757.⁴⁷ The ultimate expression of the process desecralization came in 1787, when Louis XVI renounced his obligation to preserve the hegemony of the Catholic religion in France with the Edict of Toleration – an abandonment of one of the central responsibilities of the Most Christian King. Louis' claim in 1787 – during an attempt to extend the *vingtième* (an income tax) – that he was responsible only to God was met with opposition by the *parlements* who insisted that taxation must be consented to by the nation.⁴⁸

When Louis XVI ascended to the throne in 1774, he inherited a host of unresolved constitutional and religious disputes stemming from the conflicts of the mid eighteenth-century.⁴⁹ The first years of Louis' reign, however, saw a period of relative domestic stability: the *parlements* ceased to publish *remonstrances* altogether in the late 1770s and early 1780s.⁵⁰ Troubles, however, quickly resumed in the worsening financial crisis of the mid 1780s, when

⁴⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁴⁷ Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 114-15. Damiens' dramatic execution is famously described in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.

⁴⁸ Merrick, *Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 165-169.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 105-6.

⁵⁰ *Remonstrances* were explanatory statements issued by the *parlements* after it refused to register a royal law, and often acted as criticisms of royal policy and authority.

calls for reform began to increase rapidly.⁵¹ The French crown on the eve of the Revolution was no longer recognized in some political circles as a divine institution; the actual person of the king however, retained a semi-sacred status. Louis XVI remained hugely popular among large sections of society when the Revolution began in 1789, and the images traditionally associated with the king (as the father, judge, and protector of the nation) remained intact.⁵² While many among the political elites no longer believed the king had a divine right to absolute rule, the myth of kingship retained at least some of its sacral elements among the popular classes.⁵³ The key development, however, was that the king was no longer the only sacred being – the nation, the deputies, and individual rights were also invested with sacrality during the Revolution.⁵⁴ On the eve of the Revolution, the person of the king, although no longer as powerfully divine as in previous eras, cannot be said to have been completely “desacralized.” Ultimately, the king’s blood still held important symbolic power through the weakened, but persistent, belief in the sanctity of the king’s body.

The “Martyr-King:” Louis XVI in Restoration Expiatory Ceremonies

Ancien régime mythologies of kingship were resurrected in 1814-15 in order to reinforce the legitimacy of the Bourbon monarchy upon its return to the throne after nearly twenty-five years of exile following the abolition of the monarchy during the Revolution. The collapse of the Napoleonic regime in 1814 was instigated by military defeat, meaning that the new government took power in a time of crisis and division. Furthermore, Louis XVIII returned to a France fundamentally transformed by nearly twenty-five years of revolutionary and Napoleonic rule.

⁵¹ Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: the Causes Célèbres of Pre-Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1993), 174.

⁵² Chartier, *Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, 111-112.

⁵³ T. Tackett, “Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French elites and the origins of the Terror, 1789-1792,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no.3 (June 2000): 710, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/2651806>, Accessed February 12, 2018.

⁵⁴ Chartier, *Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, 113.

The fragility of the new state – demonstrated by its embarrassing failure to prevent the return of Napoleon in 1815 – necessitated concerted efforts to convince the French people of the legitimacy of the revived Bourbon dynasty. Religious missionaries employed the execution of Louis XVI in their rhetoric as a way to regenerate the French nation and cleanse it of its past sins. Louis XVI was portrayed as a martyr for France whose death would help save France from the divine punishment of a wrathful God. These narratives of national regeneration relied on discourses of the *ancien régime* in order to invest Louis XVI's blood with redemptive power.

The return of the Bourbons in 1814 rested on fragile foundations. Consultation with the French people over the successor regime to the Napoleonic Empire was extremely limited; the Bourbon regime was returned because the Allied powers considered it most likely to provide France with stability and ensure international peace, not because of its popularity with the French.⁵⁵ In short, the Bourbon monarchy owed its restoration to the victorious Allied war effort and returned with a realization that the new regime could not return to the political and social world of the *ancien régime*.⁵⁶ The transformations of the previous twenty-five years had cemented certain political and social realities that could not be undone – the French public was now familiar with other sources of authority and ideologies.⁵⁷ While Waterloo returned Louis XVIII to the throne of his ancestors, it did not solve the problem of the legitimacy of Bourbon rule, which had been severely damaged over the preceding quarter-century.

The Bourbon monarchy returned to a throne that had been fundamentally transformed and de-stabilized by the experience of the Revolution and Napoleonic rule. Louis XVIII

⁵⁵ Robert Alexander, *Re-writing the French Revolutionary Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2. The Allies did consider other alternatives, such as a regency for Napoleon's son under his mother Marie-Louise (daughter of the Austrian Emperor), an Orleanist monarchy, or a monarchy under Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, a former Napoleonic marshal and the Crown Prince of Sweden. None of these options, however, proved feasible for a variety of reasons.

⁵⁶ David Skuy, *Assassination, Politics, and Miracles: France and the Royalist Reaction of 1820* (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 67.

⁵⁷ Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 6.

attempted a compromise with the revolutionary legacy through the granting of a constitution: the Charter of 1814. This constitution – although it retained many of the reforms of the Revolution such as civil equality, freedom of the press (within limits) and freedom of worship – had important symbolic and tangible limitations. Louis XVIII maintained that he had returned to France after a long absence (during which he was still king) by divine providence – not the will of the people – and that he had granted the Charter to his subjects as a gift.⁵⁸ Louis, therefore, denied the principle of national sovereignty; he reigned over France because of the will of God, not the nation, and could grant (and presumably, although not explicitly, retract) the Charter at will.

While the first Restoration government attempted to revive many of the symbols and rituals of the *ancien régime*, they did so with the intent of not confronting the Revolutionary or Napoleonic past: this policy of *oubli* (forgetting) was expressed in Article 11 of the 1814 Charter: “All investigations of opinions and votes expressed before the Restoration are forbidden. The same disregard is demanded of both the courts and the citizenry.”⁵⁹ The Bourbon government encapsulated its symbolic forgetting of the previous twenty-five years when Louis XVIII dated his Charter of 1814 from the nineteenth year of his rule – effectively denying the existence of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic regimes.⁶⁰ The politics of *oubli*, sought, therefore, to erase the public memory of the Revolutionary assault on monarchical sovereignty and cast the Bourbon dynasty as the natural rulers of France.⁶¹

⁵⁸ François Furet, *Revolutionary France: 1770-1880*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1988), 271.

⁵⁹ Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 41.

⁶⁰ Skuy, *Assassination, Politics, and Miracles*, 74-75; Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 271. Louis XVIII dated his rule to 1795, the year of the death of Louis XVI’s son in a revolutionary prison. Louis’ son, of course, never ruled as king but was considered to have succeeded his father in 1793 and was called Louis XVII by supporters of the Bourbon monarchy.

⁶¹ Sheryl Kroen, “Revolutionizing Religious Politics during the Restoration,” *French Historical Studies* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 28, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/286925>.

The ease with which Napoleon toppled the Bourbon state upon his return in 1815, however, meant that the second Restoration was not as forgiving to its opponents. Desire for revenge and to secure the stability of the Bourbon monarchy meant that government policy against political opponents following the Hundred Days was much more forceful. Louis XVIII and his government shifted away from reconciliatory *oubli* to a more forceful policy of “compulsory forgetting,” wherein the instigators of the fall of the First Restoration were prosecuted.⁶² Soon, the purge of those involved in the Hundred Days broadened to include bureaucrats with revolutionary or Napoleonic pasts: one-third to one-half of all officeholders were removed in for this reason.⁶³ This policy was furthered by the government’s attack on the symbols and practices of the Napoleonic and Revolutionary regimes. Not only were expressions of support for Napoleon (such as “Long Live the Emperor”) or the Revolution made illegal, but all objects bearing the likeness of Napoleon were ordered to be destroyed.⁶⁴ Napoleon’s brief return also hardened resistance to the Bourbon regime. Occupation by Allied troops was harsh: sixty-one departments were occupied and requisitions, rape, and plunder were frequent. To make matters worse, the second peace treaty was far less forgiving than the first: strategic territories were lost, heavy reparations (700 million francs in five year instalments) were imposed, and France was made to pay the costs of the Allied occupation.⁶⁵ The events of 1815, therefore, engendered long memories of hatred of the armies that had returned Louis XVIII to his throne.⁶⁶

Factional divisions hardened during the second Restoration; both the desire of ultra-royalists to exact revenge and resentment against the nobility and the monarchy were revived

⁶² Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁶⁵ Alexander, *Re-writing the French Revolutionary Tradition*, 33. The first peace treaty, in contrast, was relatively gentle: it restricted France to her 1792 boundaries and several colonies were lost, but no reparations or occupation were imposed.

⁶⁶ Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 280.

during the aftermath of the Hundred Days.⁶⁷ Royalist anger manifested itself in the White Terror of 1815-16 that targeted Napoleon's supporters through illegal retributive murders and pillaging by ostensibly royalist groups or individuals and by legal terror: the punishment by the courts of leading figures of the Napoleonic regime.⁶⁸ In short, Louis XVIII's second Restoration presided over a more partisan and polarized France – a crucial problem for a regime trying to assert stability and the legitimacy of its rule.⁶⁹

The policy of *oubli* proved to be largely a failure, and the persistent memory of the previous twenty-five years meant that the Bourbon monarchy was no longer the only plausible form of government.⁷⁰ In response to this failure, missionaries conducted expiatory ceremonies that did not deny the alternatives to monarchy, but instead cast these alternatives as the work of the Antichrist in order to assert the divine legitimacy of the Bourbons.⁷¹

Expiatory ceremonies were conducted as part of a program of national revival by members of the clergy hoping to re-christianize France, deliver the nation from the dangers of the Antichrist, and build a true Christian kingdom in France under the rule of the Bourbon monarchy. When the Bourbons were returned to the French throne in 1814, the Catholic Church had been severely weakened by the previous quarter-century of revolutionary governments. The church had suffered greatly from both a material loss and a loss in personnel. To make matters worse, religion among the general population was seen as in decline. These factors meant that many felt the need for the re-christianization through religious missions. To this effect, a national missionary organization was formed and began organizing missions in the areas surrounding

⁶⁷ Ibid., 280-281.

⁶⁸ Alexander, *Re-writing the French Revolutionary Tradition*, 30. Two of Napoleon's marshals fell victim to the White Terror; Marshal Brune was lynched by a royalist mob, while Marshal Ney was executed by firing squad for his part in the Hundred Days.

⁶⁹ Philip Mansel, *Louis XVIII* (London, UK: Blond & Briggs, 1981), 320-321.

⁷⁰ Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 62.

⁷¹ Kroen, "Revolutionizing Religious Politics," 28.

Paris by early 1815. Interrupted by Napoleon's return in the Hundred Days, the missions were taken up again after the second Restoration.⁷²

Missionaries addressed the communal sin of the Revolution in numerous sermons, ceremonies, and outdoor ceremonies where priests led their congregations in a public confession of sin (similar to the *ancien régime* practice of the *amende honorable*).⁷³ These missionaries often found the most success by tacking onto government-sponsored commemorations of the execution of Louis XVI on the 21st of January.⁷⁴ Because the Revolution had persecuted the Church and martyred the King and his family – the Church and the monarchy were seen as united by Providence through their misfortune and as joint partners in the mission to regenerate France.⁷⁵ These missionaries understood France's past in eschatological terms; France had sinned during the Enlightenment, had been punished during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era, and had been saved by the return of the Bourbons in 1814-15. In order to enjoy the benefits of deliverance, therefore, the French people had to expiate themselves and the nation of the sins of the recent past.⁷⁶

The goal of these missionaries, to restore the divinity of the monarch, was in tension with the more moderate ambitions of the Bourbon state; which aimed to rule as a more modern form of monarchy and struggled to impose some limits on the expiatory rhetoric of the missionaries.⁷⁷

Although Louis XVIII's government used the language of expiation in ceremonies

⁷² Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 83-85. Missions were not always popular in the communities in which they took place, in Marseille; for instance, liberal newspapers in 1820 attacked the missions as part of an imagined counter-revolutionary "Jesuit plot." Resistance to the missions, however, was never significant enough to fundamentally compromise their essential success.

⁷³ The *amende honorable* was a form of punishment wherein the criminal would be forced to parade through town in a public admission of guilt and penitence.

⁷⁴ Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 76-77.

⁷⁵ Furet, *Revolutionary France*, 274.

⁷⁶ Bettina Frederking, "Il ne faut pas être le roi de deux peuples: Strategies of National Reconciliation in Restoration France," *French History* 22, no.4 (December 2008): 451.

⁷⁷ Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 66-68; Frederking, "Il ne faut pas être le roi," 461.

commemorating regicide, the thrust of these ceremonies was aimed at forgiveness rather than a need for expiation, and the French people were largely held as innocent in the execution of Louis XVI. Furthermore, government directives for the annual commemoration of the 21st of January attempted to avoid evoking the execution itself, and any condemnation of the French population for the act of regicide, by explicitly forbidding the delivery of a sermon in favour of a reading of Louis XVI's last will and testament.⁷⁸

Missionaries, however, went further, seeking to attack the revolutionary legacy more harshly, assert the collective guilt of the French public, and re-establish the bond between the people at large and the Most Christian King.⁷⁹ For them, expiation required a remembrance of the past, because without remembrance, repentance and salvation for the French people would be impossible.⁸⁰ Expiation of the collective sin of the Revolution was, therefore, necessarily collective as well.⁸¹

Funeral orations for Louis XVI, conducted by priests and missionaries, blamed the sin of the Revolution on the “corruption of public morality” due to the rhetoric of de-christianization of the Enlightenment and the works of the *philosophes*.⁸² For one missionary, over the course of the eighteenth-century, “God, the pontiffs and kings were unappreciated and crucified, and schism and heresy, bribed by bloodthirsty atheism, have covered the earth with their terrible exploits!”⁸³ Louis' execution was the culmination of the century's descent into sin and the beginning of the “divine vengeance that ought to erupt” against the French people and represents the death of the

⁷⁸ Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 63-65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸¹ Frederking, “Il ne faut pas être le roi,” 451.

⁸² Normand, *Oraison Funèbre de sa Majesté Louis XVI*, 19: “corruption de la morale publique.”

⁸³ Le Chevalier de Port-de-Guy, *Éloge de très-haut, très-puissant et très-excellent prince Louis XVI, par la grâce de Dieu, roi de France et de Navarre* (Toulouse: A Manavit, 1815), 11.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6218890m>, Accessed February 16, 2018: “Dieu, les pontifes et les rois ont été méconnus et crucifiés, et le schisme et l'hérésie soudoyés par le sanguinaire athéisme, ont couvert de leurs horribles exploits la face de la terre!”

nation.⁸⁴ For these kinds of ultra-royalist and Catholic theorists, the execution of Louis XVI contained within it the violence and bloodshed of the Terror.⁸⁵ The anarchy, massacres, executions, and war of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period were understood here as a “hydra of troubles” and the “expiatory scourges of the death of Louis XVI.”⁸⁶ The Revolution was God demonstrating his power over the world and punishing France for her sins.⁸⁷ Under this understanding of France’s past, the return of the Bourbons marked France’s revival as “the happiest nation in the universe,” under a “wise, prudent, and paternal government.”⁸⁸

One sin in particular stood as the symbolic centre of the expiatory ceremonies: the executions of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. Expiatory ceremonies were especially prevalent on the dates of the deaths of the monarchs (the 21st of January and the 16th of October) whose executions were meant to be understood as analogous to the sacrifice of Christ; expiatory ceremonies wrote Louis’ execution as a narrative of martyrdom.⁸⁹ The narrative of Louis XVI’s martyrdom is expressed in an anonymous 1792 counter-revolutionary print, *Le Nouveau Calvaire*, in which the king and his brothers are depicted as crucified by revolutionaries.⁹⁰ Louis

⁸⁴Normand, *Oraison Funèbre de sa Majesté Louis XVI*, 2-3: “vengeances divins qui devoient éclater.”; Étienne-Antoine de Boulogne, *Oraison funèbre de Louis XVI, prononcée dans l’église royale de Saint-Denis, le 21 janvier 1814, jour de l’anniversaire de la mort du roi, et du transport solennel de ses cendres ainsi que de celles de la reine* (Paris : A. Le Clère, 1817), 7-8. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6225408g>, Accessed February 15, 2018.

⁸⁵ Emmanuel Fureix, *La France des larmes: deuils politiques à l’âge romantique (1814-1840)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2009), 166.

⁸⁶ Alexandre Soumet, *Éloge de Louis XVI* (Paris: Imprimerie de J. Gratiot, 1814), 31.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62552966>, Accessed 17th February, 2018: “hydre de malheurs”; Pierre-Nicolas Anot, *Oraison funèbre de S. M. Louis XVI, prononcée dans la chapelle de Saint-Nicolas de l’Hôtel-Dieu de Reims, le mardi 26 juillet 1814* (Reims: L.-F.-H. Brigot, 1814), 15. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6293105h>, Accessed February 15, 2018: “fléaux expiatoires de la mort de Louis XVI.”

⁸⁷ Anot, *Oraison funèbre de S. M. Louis XVI*, 11-12.

⁸⁸ *Procès-verbal du service solennel pour leurs majestés les feus rois Louis XVI, Louis XVII, la feue reine Marie-Antoinette-Josephie-Jeanne, archiduchesse d’Autriche, et son altesse royale Madame Elisabeth-Phillippine-Marie de France, soeur de S.M. Louis XVI; célébré à Hazebrouck, le vendredi 10 juin 1814* (Paris: Imprimerie de J.-B. Sajou, 1814), 14. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6313195z>, Accessed 18th February, 2018: “la nation la plus heureuse de l’univers,” “gouvernement sage, prudent et paternel.”

⁸⁹ Kroen, *Politics and Theatre*, 104-106.

⁹⁰ *Le Nouveau Calvaire*, print, 1792, (Chez Webert: Paris), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6941766f>. Accessed February 12, 2018.

is represented as a “martyr-king,” and his scaffold is described as his calvary.⁹¹ His death means that “France no longer has a king, and heaven has one more saint.”⁹² Louis’ connection to the martyrdom of Christ is made repeatedly explicit in a number of sources. Louis’ crown becomes a “crown of thorns.”⁹³ Louis’ experience is compared to Christ’s: “like the saviour of the human race, he [Louis XVI] suffered.”⁹⁴ Louis XVI, the martyr, becomes an analogous figure to Saint Louis and to Christ himself.⁹⁵ Ultimately, his “death will bring happiness to France, like the death of Jesus-Christ provided the salvation to the human race.”⁹⁶ Louis is represented as having sacrificed himself in order to protect France from the wrath of God.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Normand, *Oraison Funèbre de sa Majesté Louis XVI*, 2: “roi-martyr”; Abbé Thévenard, *Oraison Funèbre de Louis XVI* (Dijon, Imprimerie de Frantin, 1814), 7. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6224324x>, Accessed 15th February, 2018.

⁹² Anot, *Oraison funèbre de S. M. Louis XVI*, 14: “la France n’a plus de Roi, et le ciel a un Saint de plus.”

⁹³ François Cheyssière, *Discours funèbre prononcé dans le temple des protestans de Bordeaux, le 21 janvier 1815, jour anniversaire de la mort de Louis XVI* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie de J. Pinard, 1815), 6.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6225082n>, Accessed 13th February, 2018: “couronne d’épines.”

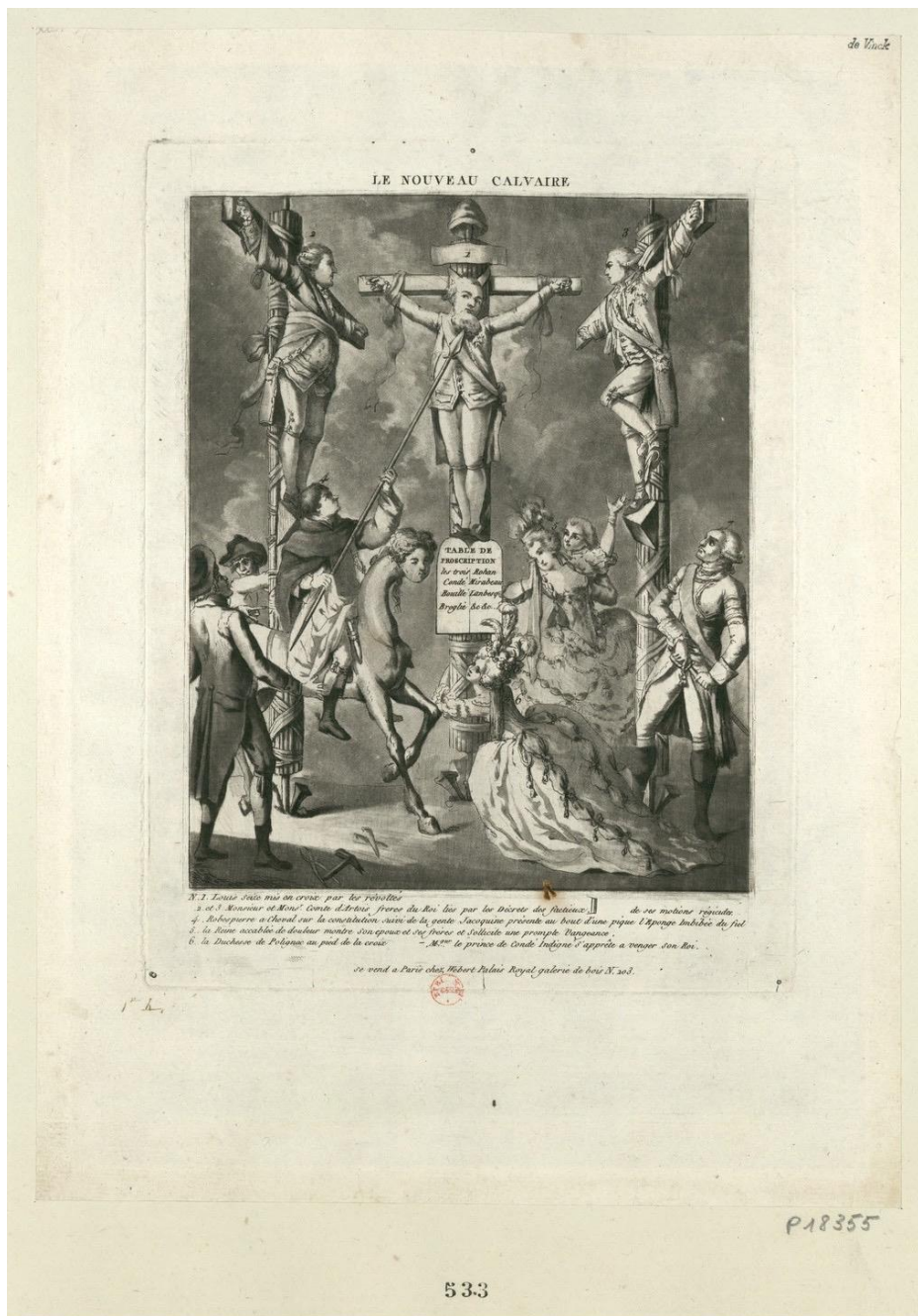
⁹⁴ Pierre de Joux, *La vertu glorifiée, ou le triomphe après la mort; discours prononcé le 21 janvier 1815, au service funèbre et solennel de Louis XVI, roi de France* (Nantes: Imprimerie de Forest, 1815), 19.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6219271h>, Accessed 12th February, 2018: “comme le Sauveur du genre humain, il [Louis XVI] souffrit.”

⁹⁵ François-René de Chateaubriand, “Le 21 janvier approche,” *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* (Paris), January 19, 1815, 1. Accessed February 9, 2018, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4211577>; Fureix, *La France des Larmes*, 173. Saint Louis IX was king of France in the thirteenth century and is the only canonized French king.

⁹⁶ Mgr. de Boulogne, “Précis de l’Oraison funèbre prononcée par Mgr. de Boulogne, évêque de Troyes,” in *La France en Deuil, ou le vingt-et-un janvier* (Paris: Ve Lepetit, 1815), 94. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62143378>, Accessed 11th February, 2018: “mort le fera ce bonheur de la France, comme la mort de Jesus-Christ a procuré le salut du genre humain.”

⁹⁷ M. Zaingelins, “Honneurs rendus dans les pays étrangers à la mémoire des victimes royales,” in *La France en Deuil, ou le vingt-et-un janvier* (Paris: Ve Lepetit, 1815), 114. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62143378>, Accessed 13th February, 2018; Soumet, “Éloge de Louis XVI,” 40.



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Figure 1: *Le Nouveau Calvaire*: 1792 Royalist print.⁹⁸

Religious readings of the death of Louis hinged on the *ancien régime* idea of the divinity of the monarchy. While the sanctity of the king's body was enshrined in the Charter of 1814, the

⁹⁸ *Le Nouveau Calvaire*.

admission that the divinity of the king had to be stated in constitutional law points to the fragile plausibility of this assertion.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the same document stated that the king reigned only in the name of the law and that he himself was not above the law; French kings no longer ruled by divine ordination and were held responsible for their actions.¹⁰⁰ Because Louis XVIII's claim to divine right was weaker than previous French monarchs, ultra-royalist and Catholic missionaries intent on re-building the sacred monarchy of the *ancien régime* turned to religious expiatory ceremonies to reassert the sanctity of the body of the monarch.

Expiatory ceremonies were directly linked to the reassertion of the legitimacy of the Bourbon monarchy in France through their insistence on the continuation of the king's divine body. The execution of Louis XVI marked the physical destruction of the body of the king and ushered in an extended gap of non-Bourbon rule, but royalist theorists argued that this did not affect the continuity of the Bourbon dynasty. Louis XVI's death on the scaffold did not mean the king had died: the mystical body of the king continued in the person of his son and subsequently his younger brother.¹⁰¹ Ceremonies commemorating the martyrdoms of Louis XVIII's royal predecessors emphasised both the divinity of the royal martyrs and their dynastic connection to Louis XVIII – investing the current monarch with divine legitimacy and casting the Revolution and Napoleonic Empire as God's punishment on France of which the restored Bourbon monarchy was France's deliverance.¹⁰² Furthermore, the sacrifice of Louis XVI on the scaffold ensured the intervention of Providence to guarantee eventual succession of Louis XVIII to the French throne.¹⁰³ The legitimacy of Louis XVIII's reign, therefore, was built upon a religious

⁹⁹ Fureix, *La France des larmes*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ Elisabeth A. Fraser, *Delacroix, Art and Patrimony in Post-Revolutionary France* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151.

¹⁰¹ Skuy, *Assassination, Politics, and Miracles*, 74-75.

¹⁰² Fureix, *La France des larmes*, 29-30.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 175.

reading of France's past expressed through expiatory ceremonies that cast him as God's chosen monarch and the solution to the moral disintegration of the French nation.

Expiatory ceremonies invested Louis XVI's blood with redemptive power. The sanctity of Louis' blood in these discourses is clear: "let, at least, your [Louis XVI's] blood, like the blood of a god, render Heaven a friend to your cherished people!"¹⁰⁴ Somewhat paradoxically, the sacrificial shedding of the king's blood has the power to save France from the divine punishment owing for the crime of having killed the king: his "innocent blood has calmed the anger of God."¹⁰⁵ Louis' supposed last words point to this theme; what is relatively constant among the many versions of his final speech is that he wishes "that my blood can cement the happiness of the French."¹⁰⁶ Louis is represented as giving "his life, his blood" to the French.¹⁰⁷ Louis' blood has the power to expiate France of the sin of having executed him: "the blood of a martyr-king has purified the whole nation."¹⁰⁸ For the Bishop of Troyes, Louis' blood is remarkably productive:

The blood of the just one has risen to Heaven, not to cry for vengeance ... but to cry for grace and mercy. It will cover us like a shield, it will protect us, it will interpose itself between Heaven and us. It will reconcile us with God, with our brothers, with ourselves. It will extinguish all hatreds and discord. It will fertilize this earth of so many crimes and distractions, in order to germinate the virtues of our ancestors. It will reanimate the religious spirit that made their glory. It will resuscitate ancient honour. It will renew French blood, by renewing Christian blood. It will finally seal the new alliance that has recently united the king with his subjects.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Louis Brad, *La mort de Louis XVI, élégie* (Grenoble: Imprimerie de J. Allier, 1815), 10.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k58093920>, Accessed February 11, 2018: "Puisse, au moins, ton [Louis XVI's] sang à ton peuple chéri, comme le sang d'un Dieu, rendre le Ciel ami!"

¹⁰⁵ Zaingelins, "Honneurs rendus," 106: "sang innocent a calmé la colère du Très-Haut."

¹⁰⁶ Normand, *Oraison Funèbre de sa Majesté Louis XVI*, 36: "que mon sang puisse cimenter le bonheur des Français."

¹⁰⁷ F. Rouillon-Petit, *Oraison funèbre de Louis XVI, dédiée à son altesse royale Monsieur, Lieutenant-Général du royaume* (Paris: Cérioux Jeune, 1814), 23. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6257523z>, Accessed February 10, 2018: "sa vie, son sang."

¹⁰⁸ Anot, *Oraison funèbre de S. M. Louis XVI*, 15: "le sang d'un Roi martyr, a purifié toute la masse de la nation."

¹⁰⁹ de Boulogne, "Précis de l'Oraison funèbre," 94-95: "Le sang du juste est monté jusqu'au ciel, non pour crier vengeance ... mais pour crier grâce et miséricorde. Il nous couvrira comme d'un bouclier, il nous protégera, il s'interposera entre le ciel et nous. Il nous réconciliera avec Dieu, avec nos frères, avec nous-mêmes. Il éteindra

Expiatory ceremonies infused Louis XVI's blood, therefore, with important symbolic power. The return of Louis XVIII to the throne represents the fulfillment of Louis XVI's promise to the French people on the scaffold: "My [Louis XVI's] prophecy is fulfilled; my blood has cemented your happiness."¹¹⁰ Louis XVI's blood not only, therefore, saves France from the wrath of God, but also ensures the succession of his brother to the throne: "Louis XVI's blood has had the virtue of affirming this illustrious house [the Bourbon Dynasty] on the French throne."¹¹¹ The narrative of Louis' martyrdom and his role in delivering France from divine punishment and ensuring the continuity of Bourbon rule hinges importantly on discourse around the sanctity and redemptive power of his blood.

Missionaries also employed a discourse of blood in order to demonize revolutionaries. Revolutionaries are portrayed as endlessly blood-thirsty: "The thirst of the conspirators has not been extinguished by the blood of the king: they will drink again the blood of the queen, that of Madame Elizabeth [Louis XVI's sister]," "the blood of the monarch has not satisfied the bloodthirstiness that devours you ... innocent blood will flow, in big waves, by your parricidal hands."¹¹² Blood is the defining feature of the Revolution, it is a "Republic of blood,"¹¹³ and

toutes les haines et toutes les discordes. Il fertilisera cette terre de tant de crimes et de tant d'égarements, pour y faire germer les vertus de nos aïeux. Il ranimera cet esprit religieux qui fit toute leur gloire. Il ressuscitera l'honneur antique. Il renouvellera le sang français, en renouvelant le sang chrétien. Il scellera enfin la nouvelle alliance qui vient d'unir le Roi et ses sujets."

¹¹⁰ Louis Dessain, *Réflexions sur la mort de Louis XVI* (Paris: Les marchands de nouveautés, 1815), 24.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62251390>, Accessed February 18, 2018: "Ma [Louis XVI's] prophétie s'achève; mon sang a cimenté votre bonheur."

¹¹¹ Juge de paix de Senonches, *Discours prononcés par le juge de paix de Senonches, devant la maison commune, le 25 août 1814, à l'issue des vêpres, et le 21 janvier 1815, avant le service funèbre fait pour Louis XVI* (Chartres, Imprimerie de Ve Deshayes, 1815), 12. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62245696>, Accessed February 13, 2018: "Le sang de Louis XVI a eu la vertu d'affermir sur le trône français cette illustre Maison [the Bourbon Dynasty]."

¹¹² Anot, *Oraison funèbre de S. M. Louis XVI*, 14: "La soif des Conjurés ne s'éteint point dans le sang du Roi: ils boiront encore celui de la Reine, celui de Madame Elizabeth [Louis XVI's sister]"; Normand, *Oraison funèbre de sa majesté Louis XVI*, 38: "Le sang du monarque n'a pas éteint la soif sanguinaire qui vous dévore ... le sang innocent va couler, à grands flots, par vos mains parricides."

¹¹³ de Port-de-Guy, *Éloge de très-haut*, 52: "République de sang."

Louis is tried by a “tribunal of blood”¹¹⁴ composed of “men of blood.”¹¹⁵ In this way, blood plays a double role in the rhetoric of the expiatory ceremonies: while Louis XVI’s sacred blood has the power to save France, the revolutionaries and the Republic are condemned by their thirst for blood.

Blood played a crucial role in the expiatory rhetoric of the Restoration missionaries seeking to regenerate France under a restored Christian monarchy. Faced with the task of delegitimizing alternative forms of government of the previous twenty-five years, these missionaries sought to portray the Bourbon monarchy as divinely ordained, and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic regimes as the work of the Antichrist. Expiatory ceremonies represented the Revolution as divine punishment for France’s sins – most particularly that of regicide. This understanding of France’s past cast Louis XVI in the role of a Christ-like martyr. This narrative focussed importantly on the spilling of the king’s blood. Like Christ, Louis’ blood is represented as redemptive – his sacrifice of his own blood delivers France from the wrath of God. The explicit connection of Louis’ death to the martyrdom of Christ invested the execution of Louis with a host of religious meanings stemming from familiar Catholic discourses of the *ancien régime*. Narratives of Louis’ sacrifice for France and the power of his blood to save and regenerate France after the sin of revolution and regicide can only function on top of an existing framework of religious narratives of Christ’s sacrifice and the power of his blood. Finally, missionaries resurrected notions of the divinity of the king’s body that had been central to the operation of the *ancien régime* absolute monarchy. The reassertion of the sanctity of the monarchy was crucial both for establishing the divine legitimacy of the Bourbon dynasty to rule France as well as to lend further weight to Louis XVI’s status as a royal martyr.

¹¹⁴ Cheyssière, *Discours funèbre*, 14: “tribunal de sang.”

¹¹⁵ de Port-de-Guy, *Éloge de très-haut*, 54: “hommes de sang.”

“The Blood of a Despot:” Louis XVI in the Revolution

In order to trace the lines of continuity between revolutionary discourse around the blood of Louis XVI and the mythologies of the *ancien régime*, it is necessary to loop back towards the pre-revolutionary era. Tried and sentenced by the convention as “Louis Capet,” the deposed king was killed in the exact same manner as the lowest criminal: decapitation by guillotine.¹¹⁶ Executions of criminals in the *ancien régime* were highly symbolic rituals and were intimately connected with the religious sphere. Louis’ execution drew upon these existing discourses around the punishment of criminals in early modern France – making a brief survey of these types of discourses crucial to an understanding of the use of his blood in the narratives of the Revolution.

The executions of criminals were important rituals in early modern and medieval Europe. Spectacles of punishment were central to the life of eighteenth-century French cities – in Paris, hundreds of these rituals were performed every year.¹¹⁷ The method of execution was chosen to suit the crime and the social station of the criminal, and situated them within a precise hierarchy: noblemen, for instance, were always decapitated with a sword (unless their crime was so heinous that it had derogated their nobility), while commoners were executed by modes that carried disgrace, such as hanging or breaking on the wheel.¹¹⁸ In this way, the method of punishment displayed the nature of the crime on the publically exhibited body of the criminal. The ritual of punishment manifested the guilt of the condemned and exhibited the truth of the crime while erasing it through the death of the criminal.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Revolutionaries invented the family name “Capet” for Louis as the Bourbons were a cadet branch of the Capetian dynasty that had ruled France from 987 to 1328.

¹¹⁷ Richard Mowery Andrews, *Law, Magistracy, and crime in Old Regime Paris, 1735-1789* (New York: NY, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1: 386.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 384-386; Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, 141-2.

¹¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: NY, Vintage Books, 1995), 43-45

Executions during the medieval and early modern period had a distinctly religious character: spectators came to most executions wanting to see a “a drama of Christian repentance, purification, and salvation.”¹²⁰ The execution was taken as an opportunity for presenting an uplifting image of a penitent sinner – who represented every Christian soul – to ascend to Heaven.¹²¹ A popular obsession with the techniques of dying well (*Ars moriendi*) infiltrated the spectacle on the scaffold; the community saw it as their responsibility and in their interest to ensure the condemned died a “good death.” Crime was seen as bringing infamy to a community, and a proper execution - where the offender dies a “good death” - was necessary to purge the community of the sin of the crime and make peace with God. The condemned achieved at least the promise of a kind of post-mortem reintegration with society through a martyr-like death.¹²² The execution ritual, therefore, becomes a kind of “salvific spectacle” where both the body of the condemned and those who watch the execution are redeemed.¹²³

Even after the seventeenth century, when attending executions for amusement became more common, particularly sorrowful displays on the scaffold could still elicit deep spiritual meaning for those who attended.¹²⁴ Into the eighteenth century, the execution ritual retained its redemptive role for the community.¹²⁵ The spectacle of pain of the condemned was the focal point of the religious meaning of executions; the prisoner on the scaffold and Christ on the cross were connected to each other through their suffering.

¹²⁰ Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 1999), 144.

¹²¹ Richard J. Evans, *Rituals of Retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany, 1600-1987* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 154.

¹²² Paul Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done: the Age of Spectacular Capital Punishment in France* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012), 101; Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, 145-6.

¹²³ Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, 150.

¹²⁴ Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 101.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

It is important to note that the late eighteenth century saw important re-conceptualizations of the systems of punishment in France. Calls for reform to the judicial system were common throughout the century, but reached critical levels in the 1780s.¹²⁶ Reformers saw a need to rationalize and simplify the criminal justice system in order to make punishment more humane and effective. Pivotal in these kinds of reforming theories was the work of Cesare Beccaria. Beccaria's treatise on punishment, published in 1764 in Italy, quickly became popular in France.¹²⁷ He argued that the logic of punishment should be preventive – not retributive – and that the criminal justice system should reflect the will and interests of all citizens. Finally, he argued for a rational and predictable relationship between crimes and their punishments.¹²⁸ Beccaria's work inspired countless reformers pushing for change in the French penal system.¹²⁹ By the 1770s and 1780s, these calls for reform reached new levels of enthusiasm, and many considered the old system to be on the brink of massive transformation.¹³⁰ These trends found their ultimate manifestation in the penal reforms of the early Revolution. The adoption of the guillotine for all executions in 1792 abolished the old hierarchical system in favour of a method of punishment that was applied equally to all offenders, regardless of social position. The guillotine, therefore, became a powerful symbol of Revolutionary equality.¹³¹

Executions on the eve of the Revolution, therefore, were not always experienced by spectators as religious events. Many executions were explicitly intended to terrify potential

¹²⁶ Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, 212-214.

¹²⁷ Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, 234.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 209.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹³¹ Regina Janes, "Beheadings," *Representations* 35, no.1 (Summer 1991): 32, Accessed November 2, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928715>. Execution by guillotine was also chosen in part because decapitation was the punishment of choice for noblemen and carried no shame. The adoption of the guillotine was, therefore, intended to erase the shame of public execution inherent in the execution method of commoners during the *ancien régime*.

criminals and to prevent the re-integration of the condemned.¹³² Furthermore, spectators often came to executions as a form of entertainment – not in order to witness a salvific spectacle. Ultimately, however, some executions could be experienced as religious events; at an execution in 1760, the public joined the condemned in singing a religious prayer (the *Salve Regina*).¹³³ While the penal ritual did undergo important changes throughout this period, it remained a vitally important part of the community well into the second half of the eighteenth century.¹³⁴

The central importance of the execution ritual itself in healing a community marked by the crime is seen in the phenomenon of the execution of effigies. Executions of effigies emerged in France by at least the middle of the fourteenth century and were common through the eighteenth century.¹³⁵ Effigies, whether two-dimensional or three, could be used in cases where the criminal was absent (either through escape or premature death). These images were tried, processed, and executed in full view of the community.¹³⁶ Effigies, importantly, were more commonly depictions of the criminal being executed (not simply of the criminal themselves) – they were, therefore, more representations of the execution ritual itself than of the criminal.¹³⁷ These paintings or sketches were commissioned by authorities from local artists and were displayed in central locations – occasionally the images themselves were even “executed.”¹³⁸ In this way, images performed the role of the offender in the judicial and punitive process; they were “efficacious” and were seen as “active interlocutors between a present viewing beholder

¹³² Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 104.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 104-105.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹³⁶ Allie Terry-Fritsch, “Execution by Image: Visual Spectacularism and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” *In Death, Torture and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300-1650*, ed. John R. Decker and Mitzi Kirkland-Ives (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 191.

¹³⁷ Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*, 107.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107-8.

and an absent referent.”¹³⁹ The destruction of the effigy contributed to the purification and renewal of the community in the same way as the punishment of offenders.¹⁴⁰ That executions would take place in the absence of the body of the criminal emphasizes the central importance of the regenerative power of the execution ritual in this period over its punitive aspect.

Revolutionary prints such as Villeneuve’s *Matière à réflexion pour les jongleurs couronnés: qu’un sang impur abreuve nos sillons*, are strikingly similar to these kinds of execution effigies.

The print re-enacts Louis’ execution in much the same way as paintings or sketches of the execution of condemned criminals would have done in the pre-revolutionary period.

Louis XVI – like Christ – was executed as a criminal. The connection, therefore, of Louis XVI’s (a sacred figure in the *ancien régime* royalist theory) blood with the blood of Christ – although revolutionaries would not make this link explicit themselves – is clear. Although Roman crucifixion was an enormously varied procedure, and no technical detail is ever provided in the Bible as to the precise nature of Christ’s crucifixion, by the late Middle Ages, representations of Christ on the cross had become more or less standardized: Christ is always depicted as nailed to the cross (although the exact position of his limbs may vary) and as marked by various injuries – in particular the wound in his side from Longinus’ lance. In stark contrast, the Two Thieves – crucified on either side of Christ – have an enormously varied set of representations; they are depicted in various states of contortion – straining against the ropes that tie them to the cross.¹⁴¹ The necessity of the sacrificial shedding of his blood for the atonement of sin and the ratification of the covenant means that Christ needs to have been nailed to the cross.¹⁴² Blood, therefore, is a key constraint on visual depictions of the Crucifixion because of

¹³⁹ Terry-Fritsch, “Execution by Image,” 192.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 192-3.

¹⁴¹ Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, 69-74.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 77-78.

its overwhelming importance in the narrative of Christ's self-sacrifice. The persistent motif of Christ in the Winepress in French churches into the eighteenth century is testament to the importance of the blood of Christ in religious belief. Christ is depicted in these images as standing in a winepress and becoming part of the grapes, his blood mixing in with the wine. He is represented very literally as giving his blood to humanity for their salvation; Christ's blood flows into vats to be bottled as a redemption-giving beverage.¹⁴³



Figure 2: Christ in a Winepress: early modern engraving.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Rolf Reichardt, "The Heroic Deeds of the New Hercules: The Politicization of Popular Prints in the French Revolution," In *Symbols, Myths, & Images of the French Revolution*, ed. Ian Germani and Robin Swales (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998), 22-24.

¹⁴⁴ Hieronymus Wierix, *Christ in a Winepress*, engraving, ca. 1553-1619, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/383698>. Accessed February 28, 2018.

Revolutionaries frequently borrowed from the motifs of the *ancien régime* in order to create new symbols and meanings.¹⁴⁵ A key example is the transfer of sacrality from the King to the Republic through the substitution of the image of the King to the Tree of Liberty in representations of the nation. Liberty trees drew on a long history of association with springtime fertility rituals and with practices associated with the dead. Through its commemoration of the new Republic and its previous association with the funerary rituals, the Liberty Tree could take on the role previously held by the royal funeral in the maintenance of social order.¹⁴⁶ Royal funerals of the pre-revolutionary era enabled the continuity of the state through the elaborate rituals of the funeral of the dead king. Although the new king took power at the moment of the old king's death, the "immortal dignity" of the king remained in the person of the dead king (manifested through images and symbols such as the royal funeral effigy) until the end of the funeral ceremony, where it was transferred to his successor.¹⁴⁷ The funeral ceremony, therefore, ensured the continuity of the body of the king – kingship passing to the new king at the exact moment of the burial of the former king – and, since the king was the embodiment of the state, the continuity of the social body.¹⁴⁸ In a similar way, Liberty trees signified the transition from the old world to the new – Liberty trees symbolized the end of the *ancien régime* and the start of the "reign of Liberty" and the seamless social order promised by the Revolution.¹⁴⁹ Liberty trees, starting in the spring of 1792, were frequently crowned by the revolutionary red bonnet. The placing of the red bonnet on Louis XVI's head in June 1792, therefore, represents the victory of

¹⁴⁵ Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 89.

¹⁴⁶ J. David Harden, "A Casebook for Regicide," In *Symbols, Myths, & Images of the French Revolution*, ed. Ian Germani and Robin Swales (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998), 172-173.

¹⁴⁷ Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France*, 124.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁴⁹ Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 255.

the symbol of the Liberty Tree over the King and the transfer of the sacrality of the crown to the red bonnet.¹⁵⁰

Revolutionaries borrowed importantly from the pictorial tradition of the *ancien régime* for the purposes of agitation in their visual political rhetoric.¹⁵¹ Revolutionaries adopted the motif of Christ in the Winepress in order to attack the clergy – pictorial depictions of the clergy represent them being passed through a press to skim off their fat.¹⁵² Revolutionaries, therefore, transformed a pre-revolutionary symbol of redemptive sacrifice through Christ’s death to an instrument of political power.¹⁵³ Revolutionaries also borrowed from the popular culture of *ancien régime* France. The motif of the rat-catcher – common in medieval and early modern France as “pest-controllers” – was re-used by revolutionaries to represent the eradication of the “pests” of the national body during the Revolution.¹⁵⁴ The metaphors of the Revolution, therefore, did not exist in a vacuum and were frequently borrowed and adapted from existing traditions. An examination of the connection of Revolutionary symbols to those of the *ancien régime* can, therefore, be a useful lens through which to interrogate the Revolution in order to shed light on the kinds of meanings that contemporaries would have drawn from the use of these kinds of symbols.

¹⁵⁰ Harden, “A Casebook for Regicide,” 174.

¹⁵¹ Reichardt, “The Heroic Deeds of the New Hercules,” 22.

¹⁵² Ibid., 27-28; Rolf Reichardt and Hubertus Kohle, *Visualizing the Revolution: Politics and the Pictorial Arts in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2008), 48.

¹⁵³ Reichardt and Kohle, *Visualizing the Revolution*, 49.

¹⁵⁴ Reichardt, “The Heroic Deeds of the New Hercules,” 29-33.



Figure 3: *Le Degraisseur Patriote*: 1790 revolutionary print.¹⁵⁵

Louis' execution held important meaning for radical revolutionaries as a symbol of the regeneration of the French nation. Louis' appeals to his subjects in 1788 over the modalities of the convocation of the Estates-General revealed a significant discourse of degeneration and disease surrounding discussions of the French social body.¹⁵⁶ Commentators employed the familiar metaphor of the French state as a physical body in order to make their arguments. France is described as suffering from an open wound, as being in a state of degeneration and

¹⁵⁵ *Le Degraisseur patriote*, Print, 1790, (Paris), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84110598>. Accessed March 10, 2018.

¹⁵⁶ Antoine De Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 79.

sickness due to “fourteen centuries of despotism.” France, therefore, is understood as aging and wasting away from a sickness of the social body due to bad government.¹⁵⁷ Other commentators adopted the opposite perspective on France’s illness; France is understood in this view as being in its infancy – as suffering from a form of government better suited to an earlier society.¹⁵⁸ Constant, however, is the idea that France is a naturally healthy body being weakened by some sort of systemic illness.¹⁵⁹ France, therefore, is represented as in need of regeneration in order to regain its vigour.

Key to these types of discourse is the emergence of the idea of a national body separate to the body of the king. In pre-revolutionary France, the king was represented as the physical embodiment of the body politic.¹⁶⁰ *Ancien régime* political hierarchy was represented through the corporeal metaphor; the king was portrayed as the head of the national body, with the three orders making up the rest of the body.¹⁶¹ This organicist version of the body politic absorbed the entirety of civil society into the person of the king.¹⁶² Thinkers such as the Abbé Sieyès, however, dramatically reversed this vision of the social body. For Sieyès, the Third Estate – held in traditional lines of thought to represent commoners (as opposed to the First and Second Estates which represented the clergy and the nobility) – represented the whole of the nation.¹⁶³ Nowhere was this belief more powerfully put than in Sieyès’ pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?*: “What is the Third Estate? – Everything.”¹⁶⁴ The conception of the Third Estate as the body of the nation, therefore, turned the *ancien régime* corporeal metaphor on its head. Instead of

¹⁵⁷ de Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 80-81.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁶⁰ Merrick, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth-Century*, 12-15.

¹⁶¹ de Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 89.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶³ Michael P. Fitzsimmons, *The Remaking of France* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 34.

¹⁶⁴ Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, *Qu’est-ce que le Tiers état?* (Paris, 1789), 3.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k97743407>. Accessed March 20, 2018: “Qu’est-ce que le Tiers-état? – Tout.”

the head representing the totality of the body, the body takes primacy – the head is subsumed into the body, becoming just another part of the national body.¹⁶⁵ Over time, the word “kingdom,” tainted by its association with privilege, began to be replaced by descriptions of France as a “nation.”¹⁶⁶ Revolutionaries borrowed importantly from Rousseau in the formulation of one of the fundamental premises of the Revolution: the investment of sovereignty in the nation.¹⁶⁷

As the Revolution progressed, radical revolutionaries increasingly blamed the ills of the social body on the institution of monarchy. By 1793, the mere existence of kings is pointed to as the cause of “the most terrible ills that afflict mankind.”¹⁶⁸ The history of the kings of France is described as a series of crimes.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, monarchy is understood as a “regime of blood,”¹⁷⁰ whose despotic kings are drunk with blood and pride.¹⁷¹ The abolition of the monarchy is necessary to eliminate the “poison of royalism,”¹⁷² and the “shameful disease of royalism.”¹⁷³ The use of language such as “disease” or “poison” points to the ways in which revolutionaries

¹⁶⁵ de Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 95.

¹⁶⁶ Fitzsimmons, *The Remaking of France*, 15.

¹⁶⁷ Carol Blum, “Representing the Body Politic: Fictions of the State,” In *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, Art*, ed. James A.W. Heffernan (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 131.

¹⁶⁸ Antoine-Rigobert Mopinot de La Chapotte, *Effrayante Histoire des Crimes Horribles, Qui ne sont Communs qu’entre les Familles des Rois, depuis Le commencement de l’Ère Vulgaire, jusqu’à la fin du dix-huitième Siècle* (Paris: Chez les Directeurs de l’Imprimerie du Cercle Social, 1793), v.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9805233c>, Accessed February 13 2018: “les maux les plus terribles qui affligent les hommes.”

¹⁶⁹ Johann Gotthard Grimmer and Sébastien Bottin, *Discours prononcé à Strasbourg, le 2 pluviôse an VII, jour de la célébration de la fête anniversaire de la juste punition du dernier roi des Français* (Strasbourg: F.-G. Levrault, 1798), 6. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62585023>, Accessed February 16, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ L.-S. Chenard, *Discours prononcé dans le temple décadaire de la commune de Maestricht, le 2 pluviôse an VII, pour le célébration de l’anniversaire du 21 janvier 1793* (1799), 32. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62697951>, Accessed February 12, 2018: “régime de sang.”

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷² M. E***, *Appel à l’honneur Français, sur le jugement de Louis XVI et la fête du 21 janvier* (Paris: 1796), 4. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62631723>, Accessed February 10, 2018, “poison du royalisme.”

¹⁷³ Maximillien Robespierre, “Second Discours sur le Jugement de Louis Capet (28 décembre 1792),” Speech, In *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre*, ed. Charles Vellay (Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908), 231: “maladie honteuse du royalisme.”

thought of the social body as a literal body – one that could suffer from the same kind of ailments as any other body.

The abolition of the monarchy in France found its ultimate expression in the act of regicide. This “rite of blood” marked a crucial public ceremony of sacrifice that served as the foundation of the new Republic.¹⁷⁴ The trial of the king in December of 1792 signalled the final confrontation of the king and the National Assembly – and the victory of the representatives of the French people against the monarch.¹⁷⁵ For radicals such as the Montagnards, Louis as king was incompatible with the existence of the Republic; monarchical sovereignty could not co-exist with popular sovereignty – the king needed, therefore, to be eliminated.¹⁷⁶ Louis had to die on the scaffold because of “the attacks of royalty against national sovereignty.”¹⁷⁷ For Robespierre, the choice was clear: “Louis must die, because the nation must live.”¹⁷⁸ For radicals, the execution of Louis was, therefore, a “foundational sacrifice;” only through the death of the King could the Republic be created and the French nation regenerated.¹⁷⁹

The execution of the King sealed the creation of the new Republic. For Marat, the decapitation of the king meant he could finally believe in the Republic.¹⁸⁰ He, furthermore, claims that the death of Louis “will also give the nation a new energy and force.”¹⁸¹ The execution of Louis marked the regeneration of the French nation: “the head of the tyrant announces by its fall, the fall of slavery and prejudices that, for thirteen hundred years, have

¹⁷⁴ de Baecque, *Glory and terror*, 87.

¹⁷⁵ de Baecque, *The Body Politic*, 89.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁷⁷ “Mort de Louis XVI, dernier roi de France,” *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 185, January 19-26, 1793, 195.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1051352m>, Accessed February 9, 2018: “les attentats de la royauté contre la souveraineté nationale.”

¹⁷⁸ Maximilien Robespierre, “Opinion sur le Jugement de Louis XVI (3 décembre 1792),” Speech, In *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre*, ed. Charles Vellay (Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908), 221: “Louis doit mourir, parce qu’il faut que la patrie vive.”

¹⁷⁹ de Baecque, *Glory and terror*, 91.

¹⁸⁰ Jean-Paul Marat, *Journal de la République Française* (Paris), no. 105, January 23, 1793, 1-2. Accessed January 18, 2018, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1049296n>.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3: “donnera aussi à la nation une énergie & une force nouvelle.”

made under the kings, the misfortune and shame of the French.”¹⁸² The abolition of the monarchy through the destruction of the body of the King ensures the survival of liberty: “The sacred tree of Liberty spreads its deep roots over the remains of the of lilies.”¹⁸³ The symbolic granting of life to the Republic through the death of the monarch is expressed in the moment of his execution; the moment Louis’ head was separated from his body and his head shown to the public, cries of “*vive la nation! Vive la république!*” interrupted the otherwise mostly silent ritual.¹⁸⁴

The sacrifice of the King for the new Republic was encapsulated in the symbolic importance of the method of his execution. Louis was executed by a symbol of Republican equality: the guillotine.¹⁸⁵ This meeting of the body of the king – considered in the *ancien régime* as sacred and above all others – with the ultimate symbol of equality in death, and the triumph of equality over exception is represented in a 1793 revolutionary print representing the transfer of the king’s head from the crown to the guillotine.¹⁸⁶ By exercising a traditional prerogative of the king – the power to enforce punishment – the national body established its supremacy over the body of the king through both the destruction of the king and the assumption of his power over life and death.¹⁸⁷ The *ancien régime* model of the body politic represented the King as the literal

¹⁸² M. E***, *Appel a l’honneur Français*, 3: “La tête du tyran annonça par sa chute, la chute de l’esclavage et des préjugés qui, durant treize cent ans, avoient fait sous les rois, le malheur et la honte des Français.”

¹⁸³ Ibid., 3: “L’arbre sacré de la liberté étendit ses profondes racines sur le débris des lys.” The lily was one of the symbols of the Bourbon monarchy.

¹⁸⁴ Marat, *Journal de la République Française* (Paris), January 23, 1793, 2.

¹⁸⁵ de Baecque, *Glory and terror*, 91.

¹⁸⁶ *Dialogue: je perds une tête, j’en trouve une*, Print, 1793 (Paris), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6949657m>, Accessed February 12, 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Janes, “Beheadings,” 24.

head of the state, the decapitation of Louis, therefore, holds symbolic value in that the head of the head of state is removed: Louis and the state become equally decapitated.¹⁸⁸

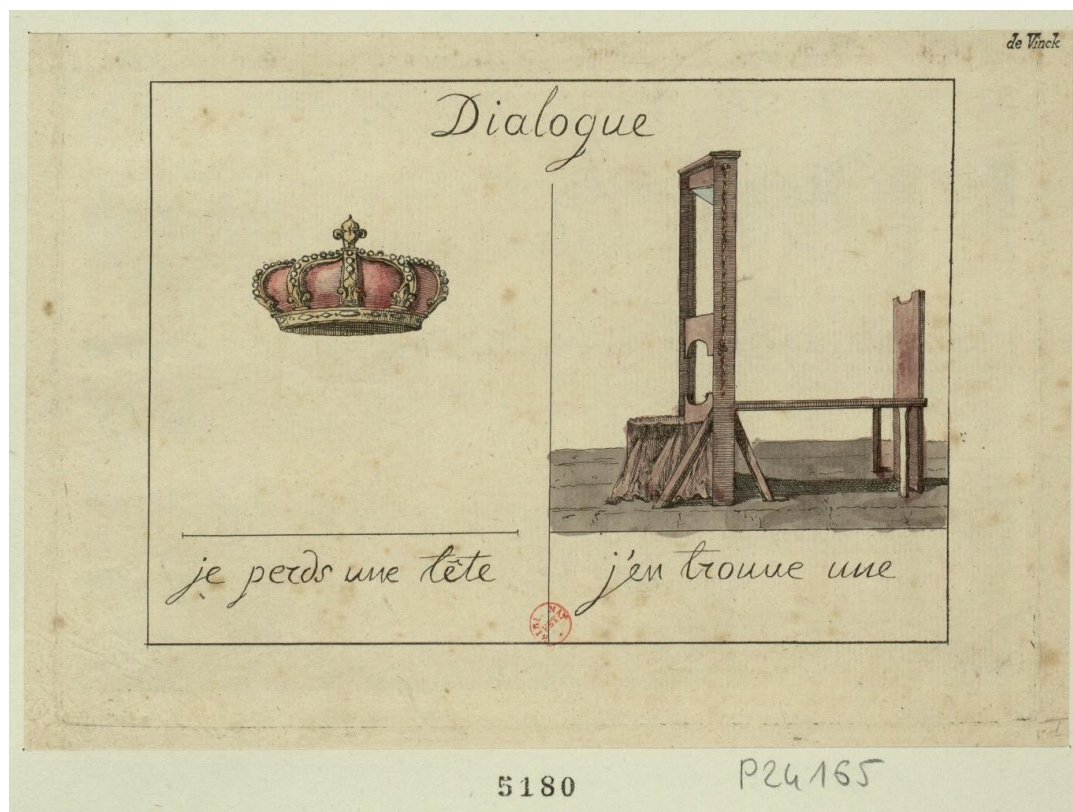


Figure 4: *Dialogue: je perds une tête, j'en trouve une*: 1793 revolutionary print.¹⁸⁹

For Marat, spectators treated the execution of Louis XVI as a “religious festival.”¹⁹⁰ The Revolution was marked by a focus on public ceremonies, and an understanding of these types of public rituals can further understandings of the ceremony of regicide. Thousands of festivals were celebrated throughout France during the course of the Revolution.¹⁹¹ Mona Ouzof has

¹⁸⁸ Ronald Paulson, “The Severed Head: The Impact of French Revolutionary Caricatures on England,” In *French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799*, ed. Lynne Hockman (Los Angeles, CA: Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, University of California, Los Angeles 1988), 58.

¹⁸⁹ *Dialogue: je perds une tête, j'en trouve une*.

¹⁹⁰ Marat, *Journal de la République Française* (Paris), January 23, 1793, 2: “fête religieuse.”

¹⁹¹ Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 13.

argued that the central principle of Revolutionary thought and action was that of purge – an “enterprise of subtraction and purification.”¹⁹² She argues, however, that the purging nature of Revolutionary festivals served to reconstruct unity through a “search for a sacralizing foundation.”¹⁹³ Ultimately, Revolutionary festivals transferred sacrality onto political and social values such as reason, rights, liberty, and the fatherland.¹⁹⁴ These trends are played out in the attempts – most significantly by Robespierre and his associates – to replace Christianity with revolutionary cults. Revolutionary cults celebrating reason and nature gradually faded in popularity over the course of the early Revolution in favour of the deistic cult of the Supreme Being (championed by Robespierre). By the end of the Terror, hundreds of these cults and rituals – which often borrowed heavily from Catholic traditions – were being celebrated across France.¹⁹⁵ This understanding of Revolutionary festivals can point towards the significance of the ritual of Louis XVI’s execution; the purging of the monarch by the nation marked the transfer of the King’s sacrality to the Republic.

Lynn Hunt has argued that the killing of Louis XVI represented “an act that comes as close as anything does in modern history to a ritual sacrifice.”¹⁹⁶ Hunt points towards two interpretations of the ritual killing of the monarch: the killing of the father and the re-establishment and redemption of the community. Hunt wants to combine both of these interpretations in order to cast the Revolution as a conflict between the father and his sons as well as a debate about the threat of violence to the social body.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 269.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁹⁵ Timothy Tackett, “The French Revolution and Religion to 1794,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. 7, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 553-54.

¹⁹⁶ Lynn Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 9.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

Kings of France were traditionally conceived of as the father of the nation. Authority in the French state was explicitly modeled on the family; the king's subjects owed him filial obedience.¹⁹⁸ Hunt understands the execution of Louis XVI in part through a Freudian frame of analysis wherein the fraternity of sons kill the father in order to wrest power from him.¹⁹⁹ Louis XVI, upon taking the throne, was understood as a good father. Subsequent events, especially after 1789, transformed his image into that of a tyrannical father who needed to be eliminated.²⁰⁰ Revolutionaries wanted to replace the patriarchal system of authority of despotic paternal control with a system of contractual association of free individuals.²⁰¹ Louis' transition into the role of tyrannical father made his continued existence incompatible with these emerging principles. Revolutionaries replaced the image of the Father-King, therefore, with a Fraternity of equal brothers.²⁰²

Hunt uses a reading of René Girard's psychoanalytic theory to build an understanding of Louis execution as a way in which revolutionaries – fearful of their own violence – perform a ritual to reassert the boundaries of the community. As Hunt puts it, “the king has to die to erase the guilt that the French feel before the act has been committed.”²⁰³ Revolutionaries transferred the guilt of the violence of the breakdown of the *ancien régime* onto a scapegoat, a “monstrous double:” the king. Louis is, therefore, transformed into a sacred monster whose death and expulsion will regenerate the community tarnished by violence.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 3.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-10.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 44-52.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁰² Lynn Hunt, “The Political Psychology of Revolutionary Caricatures,” in *French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799*, ed. Lynne Hockman (Los Angeles, CA: Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, University of California, Los Angeles 1988), 39.

²⁰³ Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 11.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Louis is frequently represented in terms of monstrosity. This discourse is marked by a focus on blood. Louis is described as a vampire who feeds off the “blood of the People,”²⁰⁵ he is “thirsty for the blood of the French.”²⁰⁶ More than just a tyrant, Louis is “a traitor, coward, ingrate, perjurer and bloodthirsty,” in short: “[t]he most false, vile, and guilty man in the world.”²⁰⁷ The 21st of January, therefore, represents the liberation of France from the “the most horrible scourge.”²⁰⁸ The anniversary of his death, therefore, is something to be celebrated; it will give a “great pleasure to everyone.”²⁰⁹

Louis is not alone to receive this kind of treatment; all enemies of the Revolution are described as “drinkers of blood.”²¹⁰ The French people are represented as having been “devoured under the kings by thousands of blood-suckers” during the *ancien régime*.²¹¹ The privileged classes are seen as “starving for the blood of the people,” and as destined to shed their own blood on the guillotine.²¹² Singled out for special vilification, however, is Louis XVI’ wife: Marie-

²⁰⁵ Aristide Valcour, *Discours prononcé à l’Assemblée générale des citoyens de la commune de Nogent-Sur-Marne, le 12 prairial de la seconde année de la République, une et indivisible, jour de l’anniversaire du 31 mai 1793, (style esclave)* (Paris: Imprimerie de Renaudière jeune, 1793), 5. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6234489w>, Accessed February 18, 2018: “sang du Peuple.”

²⁰⁶ M. E***, *Appel à l’honneur Français*, 68: “soif du sang des Français.”

²⁰⁷ Georges Couthon, *Opinion de Georges Couthon, Député du Département du Puy-de-Dôme, sur le jugement de Louis Capet* (Paris: Imprimerie de L. Potier de Lille, 1793), 2,14. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62624700>, Accessed February 13, 2018: “traître, lâche, ingrat, parjure & sanguinaire,” “l’homme du monde le plus faux, le plus vil & le plus coupable.”

²⁰⁸ Valcour, *Discours prononcé à l’Assemblée générale*, 7: “plus horrible fléau.”

²⁰⁹ “L’anniversaire de l’expulsion des Tarquins se célébroit à Rome,” *L’Ami du Peuple*, no. 122, January 19, 1796, 3. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56253529>, Accessed February 12, 2018: “grand plaisir à tout le monde.”

²¹⁰ Bernard Vercoustre, *Discours à l’occasion de l’anniversaire de la juste punition du dernier roi des Français* (Dunkirk: Imprimerie de Drouillard, 1795), 10. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6225386b>, Accessed February 14, 2018: “buveurs de sang.”

²¹¹ Pierre-Jean Audouin, *Discours prononcé par Audouin à la société des Jacobins de Paris, le 7 vendémiaire, l’an 3me. de la république, une et indivisible* (Paris: Imprimerie de G.-F. Gallettie, 1794), 22. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6261855c>, Accessed February 20, 2018: “dévoreré sous les rois par des milliers de sang-sues.”

²¹² François-Barnabé Tisset, *Compte-rendu aux sans-culottes de la République Française, par très-haute, très-puissante et très-expéditive dame Guillotine* (Paris: Denné Petit, 1793), 196. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57510486>, Accessed February 10, 2018: “affamés du sang du peuple.”

Antoinette. Described as a “ferocious Austrian,”²¹³ Marie-Antoinette is represented as a “blood-sucker of the French,”²¹⁴ who enjoys bathing in the blood of French patriots.²¹⁵ The queen is depicted as an impossibly evil figure, desiring the blood of French patriots, and whose cruelty is only ended by the guillotine.²¹⁶ The enemies of the Revolution are vilified through their obsessions with consuming blood and even human flesh.²¹⁷

The execution of the King destroyed one of the central metaphors of *ancien régime* France – the incorporation of the social body in the body of the monarch. The killing of the king, consequently, “risked the continued life of the body politic.”²¹⁸ Revolutionaries, therefore, had to look for ways to regenerate a body politic put in danger by the execution of its traditional head. I argue that the blood of Louis XVI played an important role in this regenerative discourse. For Revolutionaries, “the blood of the despot”²¹⁹ cements the foundations of the Republic: “the base of the throne of Liberty, cemented by the blood of kings, will affirm itself forever.”²²⁰ The spilling of Louis’ blood marks the deliverance of the French people and the purification of the Republic: “the blood of Louis Capet, shed by the blade of the law on the 21st of January 1793, cleanses us of a withering of thirteen hundred years. It is not since Monday the 21st that we are

²¹³ Valcour, *Discours prononcé à l’Assemblée générale*, 7: “féroce Autrichienne.” The original French contains an insulting pun lost in the English translation; “*chiienne*” is an impolite word for a female dog.

²¹⁴ Pithoud, *La Vie et la mort de Louis Capet, dit de Bourbon, seizième du nom et dernier roi de France, et celle d’Antoinette d’Autriche, sa femme* (Paris: Pithoud, 1793), 83. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k96938258>, Accessed February 12, 2018: “sang-sue des Français.”

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84; Valcour, *Discours prononcé à l’Assemblée générale*, 7.

²¹⁶ *Le ménage royal en déroute, ou Guerre ouverte entre Louis XVI et sa femme* (Paris: Imprimerie patriotique, 1792), 2. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9693826p>, Accessed February 16, 2018; *Directoire exécutif. Procès-verbal de l’anniversaire de la juste punition du dernier roi des Français, célébré à Paris, dans le temple de la Victoire, le 2 pluviôse an VII* (Paris: Imprimerie de Gratiot, 1799), 11.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62732148>, Accessed February 10, 2018.

²¹⁷ “François-Élie Guiraut, *Oraison Funèbre de Marat* (Paris: Imprimerie des 86 départements, 1793), 2.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k56253529>, Accessed February 13, 2018.

²¹⁸ Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 58.

²¹⁹ “Mort de Louis XVI, dernier roi de France,” *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 185, January 19-26, 1793, 204: “le sang d’un despote.”

²²⁰ *Discours prononcé à l’occasion de l’inauguration des bustes de Lepelletier et Marat*, (Paris: Imprimerie de Millet, 1793), 15. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54676760>, Accessed February 10, 2018: “la base du trône de la Liberté, cimentée du sang de rois, s’affermira pour toujours.”

republicans.”²²¹ For Republicans, “the blood of a king brings happiness.”²²² The significance of Louis’ blood is expressed in Villeneuve’s famous 1793 print *Matière à réflexion pour les jongleurs couronnées*, where Louis XVI’s decapitated head is shown held aloft by the executioner, dripping blood, with the caption “let an impure blood water our furrows.”²²³ Revolutionaries were acutely aware of the ambiguity of images and sought to control the ways in which they could be interpreted by anchoring images to words.²²⁴ Captions and other text placed on images, therefore, are important in the ways in which they were intended to shape the reading of the image by the audience. Text taken from *Lettres de Maximilien Robespierre à ses commettants* controls the interpretation of Villeneuve’s image: “the Tyrant has fallen under the blade of the law. This great act of justice has distressed the aristocracy, destroyed royal superstition, and created the republic.”²²⁵ Louis’ blood, then, waters the fields of France and enables the growth of the nation and the creation of the Republic.

The key role of blood in informing metaphors of national regeneration finds its ultimate expression in a uniquely bizarre suggestion for a monument commemorating the execution of Louis XVI proposed in 1796. The author suggests the construction of a vast semi-circle monument representing a “sea of boiling blood.”²²⁶ The sea of blood will be filled with “bloody heads representing those of the principal immolated aristocrats.”²²⁷ The centerpiece of the

²²¹ “Mort de Louis XVI, dernier roi de France,” *Révolutions de Paris*, no. 185, 19-26 January 1793, 194: “le sang de Louis Capet, versé par le glaive de la loi le 21 janvier 1793, nous lave d’une flétrissure de treize cents années. Ce n’est que depuis lundi 21 que nous sommes républicains.”

²²² “Ibid., 205: “le sang d’un roi porte bonheur.”

²²³ *Matière à réflexion pour les jongleurs couronnées: qu’un sang impur abreuve nos sillons*, print, 1793, (Paris: Chez Villeneuve), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6949685x>, Accessed February 10, 2018: “qu’un sang impur abreuve nos sillons.”

²²⁴ Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 35, 55.

²²⁵ *Matière à réflexion*: “Le Tiran est tombé sous le glaive des loix. Ce grand acte de justice a consterné l’Aristocratie, anéanti la superstition Royale, et crée la république.”

²²⁶ M. E***, *Appel à l’honneur Français*, 63: “mer de sang bouillonnante.”

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 64: “des têtes sanglantes qui représentent celles des principaux aristocrates immolés.”

monument is a larger than life representation of Louis XVI's head.²²⁸ Decorating the sides of the monument are a series of smaller heads "which designate the massacres made en masse throughout the republic for the propagation of happiness and liberty."²²⁹ To complete the display, a statue of Hercules (representing the republic) is depicted about to extinguish the two-headed statue of Nero and Titus (representing the monarchy) with his club.²³⁰



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Figure 5: *Matière à réflexion pour les jongleurs couronnés*: 1793 revolutionary print.²³¹

²²⁸ M. E***, *Appel à l'honneur Français*, 64.

²²⁹ Ibid.: "qui désignent les massacres faits en masse dans tout la république pour la propagation du bonheur et la liberté."

²³⁰ Ibid., 64-65. This suggested monument was, perhaps unsurprisingly, never carried out by revolutionary authorities.

²³¹ *Matière à réflexion*.

The discourse of blood infuses revolutionary rhetoric about the martyrs of the Republic. The blood of revolutionary martyrs – in particular figures such as Jean-Paul Marat and Louis-Michel Lepelletier – plays a remarkably similar role to that of Louis XVI. The Republic and the constitution are described as being cemented by the blood of French patriots.²³² A speech celebrating the anniversary of Louis XVI's death describes the revolutionary martyrs of the Champ de Mars massacred as having said “We die content because our bloodshed cements the happiness of our nation.”²³³ Lepelletier, assassinated by Royalists on the eve of the King's execution, echoes this sentiment in his last words: “I am pleased to shed my blood for the nation, I hope that it will serve to consolidate the Republic.”²³⁴ The last words of these Revolutionary martyrs express a remarkably similar message to Louis XVI's last speech on the scaffold: “I die innocent ... I forgive my death: I wish that my blood can cement the happiness of the French.”²³⁵ In the same way that Louis's “impure blood” waters the soil of the Republic, the blood of revolutionary martyrs “will flood the soil of the nascent republic.”²³⁶ The blood of Marat serves a similar purpose: “this cherished blood [Marat's], which waters the soil of Liberty, cries justice to the sky.”²³⁷ The crucial difference is that the blood of revolutionary martyrs is taken to be sacred while Louis' blood is impure. Louis' monstrous blood founds the Republic by being forcefully spilled by the people, while the blood of martyrs such as Marat and Lepelletier is sacrificed in service of the nation.

²³² Chenard, *Discours prononcé dans le temple décadaire de la commune de Maestricht*, 30-31.

²³³ Vercoustre, *Discours à l'Occasion de l'Anniversaire de la Juste Puniton*, 15: “Nous mourons contents, puisque notre sang versé, cimente le bonheur de notre patrie.”

²³⁴ *Discours prononcé à l'inauguration des bustes de Lepelletier et Marat*, 9: “Je suis satisfait de versé mon sang pour la Patrie, j'espère qu'il servira à consolider la République.”

²³⁵ M. Normand, *Oraison funèbre de sa majesté Louis XVI*, 36: “Je meurs innocent ... je pardonne ma mort: je souhaite que mon sang puisse cimenter le bonheur des Français.”

²³⁶ “Séances du Corps Législatif,” *L'Accusateur Public*, no. 33,34, August 7, 1797, 25. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54580477>, Accessed February 10, 2018: “inonda le sol de la république naissante.”

²³⁷ *Discours prononcé à l'inauguration des bustes de Lepelletier et Marat*, 14: “ce sang chéri [Marat's] qui abreuve le sol de la Liberté, crie justice vers le ciel.”

For Foucault, *ancien régime* rituals of public punishment allowed for the reconstitution of the injury done to the sovereign through the crime against the kingdom (as personified in the body of the monarch.) Public executions “restored sovereignty” by manifesting it in a spectacular – and violent – way. Executions, therefore, belonged to a host of other rituals through which power in the *ancien régime* was expressed.²³⁸ The way in which revolutionaries understood the execution of Louis as regenerative draws upon this theme. Louis’ execution can be seen as a regeneration of the sovereignty of the fraternal republic through the spilling of the blood of the tyrannical monarch. The purging of the monarch both cures France of its disease and endangers the nation through the decapitation of the social body – necessitating the intervention of Louis’ impure blood and the sacred blood of revolutionary martyrs to heal the wounded national body. Ultimately, Louis’ and the revolutionary martyrs’ blood can only be invested with curative and regenerative power through their association with mythologies of the *ancien régime*.

Conclusions

Revolutionaries and Royalists alike saw a need to regenerate France and looked to the blood of Louis XVI in order to provide a central metaphor for this regeneration. These narratives of the execution of Louis XVI provide symmetrically opposite interpretations of the events of 1793. Blood figured importantly in the rhetoric of both groups in almost exactly the same kind of ways. For Revolutionaries, the King’s “impure” blood regenerated the nation by being purged – its sanctity being transferred to the Republic. The decapitation of the vampiric Louis XVI cured France of the disease of royalism and ensured the survival of liberty. For Royalists, Louis’ blood was also regenerative, but in this case because of its sanctity it delivered France from divine punishment due to the sin of revolution and ensured the return of the Bourbon dynasty to the

²³⁸ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 48. I’m borrowing Foucault’s words here out of the context within which he used them, and he would not necessarily agree with their use in my argument, nor do I wish to invoke the broader context of his argument.

French throne. Revolutionary rhetoric about republican martyrs – such as Lepelletier and Marat – provided remarkably similar discourses around sacred blood as Restoration-era Royalist narratives about Louis XVI and the royal family. Blood was also used to demonize enemies, both Revolutionaries and ultra-Royalists painted each other as “blood-suckers” or “men of blood.”

Neither Revolutionary nor Royalist narratives of national regeneration existed by themselves. Revolutionaries borrowed and adapted traditions and beliefs of the *ancien régime* surrounding the execution of criminals and the blood of Christ and French kings in order to create powerful new symbols and metaphors. Although Revolutionaries denied the sanctity of the body of the king, the blood of Louis XVI was invested with regenerative power through its association with the salvific nature of the execution of criminals and with the metaphors of sacred kingship that linked the King’s blood to the blood of Christ. Royalists drew links between Louis XVI and Christ much more explicitly than Revolutionaries. The sanctity of the body of the king was re-asserted, and Louis XVI’s blood was directly linked to the redemptive blood of Christ. Ultimately, the power of these metaphors was due at least in part to their connections with the past.

The explicit connection to the pre-revolutionary era of the expiatory ceremonies is indicative of the survival of the mythologies of kingship through the tumultuous quarter-century of the Revolution and Napoleonic regime. Although these kinds of conceptions of kingship were undermined over the eighteenth-century and were explicitly denied during the Revolution, their employment by missionaries during the first years of the Restoration points towards the persistent, if weakened, cultural power of *ancien régime* ideologies into the nineteenth-century.

Louis’ blood played a key role in the rhetoric of the revolutionaries. Revolutionaries, like Royalists, worked under a corporeal conception of the national body – a body that they

considered to be in decay by the outbreak of the Revolution. Once the king had been identified as a key source of this degeneration, his purging from the nation became critically necessary. The consequence, however, of a conception of the social body based on that of the *ancien régime* (where the king was represented as the literal head of the social body) was that the decapitation of the head of the king also represented the decapitation of the social body itself. Louis' blood allowed for the reconstitution of the injured national body. Through its investment with powerful metaphors of the previous period surrounding the execution of criminals and the blood of Christ, Louis' blood regenerated France.

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