

Women, Art and Revolution: Feminine Symbolism and Democracy in Revolution Era France

Introduction

The French Revolution is regarded as one of the greatest periods of social and political upheaval in French history. With the legacy of the Renaissance still strong in French culture, art played a major role in society, especially the promulgation of the Revolution. However, this time is also considered one of the most uncertain in regards to the eventual outcome of a transition from a monarchy to a democracy, as well as the role of certain social mores. In response to this uncertainty, there was an increase in the levels of didactic art production by both proponents and adversaries of the revolution. From this work emerged an interesting tendency to depict female figures as the ideals of the French Revolution, including democracy, liberty and equality. In an effort to explore the reasoning behind this unprecedented correlation, I seek to look at both how and why revolutionary thinkers utilized the female image in revolutionary art, as well as why this female imagery was able to invoke popular views regarding feminine ideals and influence opinions on the State (whether in a positive or negative manner).

In this paper the argument will be made that feminine imagery was used during the French Revolution to represent revolutionary ideals, including justice, equality and liberty, in order to replace the symbols of the old monarchy that were still prevalent in the public realm. Women were purposely chosen to embody these ideals because they provided the greatest utility as symbols. This was due to their ability to easily personify abstract concepts such as liberty, equality and justice, without conflict from any significant prior connotations in art, as well as the ability to use feminine nudity in order to eroticize the burgeoning democratic state.

In order to best address the intricacies of the relationship between revolutionary art, feminine symbolism and the French democracy this paper will first address the transition between the popularity of Rococo to that of neoclassical artistic techniques. Exploring the motivations behind this transition, as well as the effect it had on feminine symbolism in the era will provide some basis for inference regarding the reasoning behind utilizing women in the neoclassical styling. In an effort to address this contingent, the succeeding paragraphs shall also discuss the role of nudity within the neoclassical movement. This will later be deliberated in relation to the overall use of women in revolutionary art to attempt to eroticize the new French State.

This paper will then continue to explore the reasoning behind the choice to utilize feminine symbolism by exploring any associations previously attached to women in the realm of art. Through this examination the depiction of women in revolutionary art will also be related to the common notions regarding the ideal role of women in the new democratic French state, as related by such outspoken public figures as Louis-Marie Prudhomme and Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Through the in-depth examination of a number of revolutionary works of art, there will be an analysis regarding the use of nudity within French revolutionary art as well as the methods that it was used in conjunction with to eroticize the state. These pieces will be compared with Enlightenment era pornographic illustrations from the narrative *Le Paysan Perversi* in order to display how the differences in motivation affected the use of nudity. Once this is established, there will be a consideration of how such attempts to eroticize the state affected the relationship between femininity and strength or action within pieces of Revolutionary artwork. Finally, there will be a discussion regarding the implications this relationship has in conjunction with the

eventual creation of women as a scapegoat for anti-Revolutionaries (as well as former Revolutionaries dissatisfied with the outcome of the revolution).

1. From Rococo to Neoclassical: Gendered Representation in Art

When studying the artistic trends that developed throughout the French Revolution, the most important (as well as the most predominant in regards to this research) is the transition from the prevalence of the Rococo movement, to the common use of neoclassical techniques and styles. While there is no doubt that the resurgence of the classical humanism movement that developed during the earlier European renaissance period was a large factor in the increased use of the style, there was also a much more pointed and practical purpose for this transition. This function may be best exemplified through a 1713 quote by the Earl of Shaftesbury in which he denounced Rococo as “a revolting form exalting Sensation at the Expense of Reason”.¹

Regardless of whether the views of the Earl of Shaftesbury were predominant in the Enlightenment era society, there was a large population that strongly subscribed to such beliefs. The overall grandeur of clothing and scenery praised within Rococo became associated with women, as the development of the home, as well as an intense devotion to fashion, was considered to be under their domain. For these reasons, Rococo was often connoted with effeminacy, which was deplored: “Whilst we look on Paintings with the same eye, as we view commonly the rich Stuffs and coloured Silks worn by our Ladys, and admir’d [*sic*] in Dress, Equipage, or Furniture, we must of necessity be effeminate in our Taste and utterly set wrong as to all Judgment and Knowledge in the kind.”² As a result of this type of reasoning, the aristocratic women depicted within the majority of Rococo art became largely synonymous with the frivolity and arbitrariness of the wealthy. The women were perfect images of the grace and civility, which served to enable inadequacy by the wealthy in the effort and behaviors involved with love and diplomacy.³

It was for this reason that the Earl of Shaftesbury, as well as many others considered the neoclassical movement to be a dignified alternative to the effeminate Rococo.⁴ In a strictly aesthetic sense, it maintained a focus on men as the ideal representation of beauty, in addition to having a tendency to produce works of art, which had little background beyond the major figures of the works. This was a practice was usually perpetrated through the use of chiaroscuro, with the purpose of focusing all attention on the foci of the image. It also led artists to believe that Rococo provided a lovely juxtaposition to Rococo.

While the traditional tendency of neoclassical art to focus on men would seem counterproductive, this is in fact not true. The depiction of women in neoclassical style revolutionary art served as a major symbol of the altering political landscape. The ability to make a clear distinction and comparison between the new goddess like women that embodied the Revolutionary ideals and the dated aristocratic women of the monarchy was a significant factor in the transition between styles.

¹ The Earl of Shaftesbury, quoted in Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 3.

² Ibid, 3.

³ Madeline Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 4-5.

⁴ Ibid., 4.

2. Rational Choice and Symbolism: Women as Representation

Though the need for a new set of imagery to replace that of the monarchy can be relatively easily explained, the deeper question, which is why female symbolism was used, requires a more in depth analysis. One explanation reflects upon the language and themes used to represent the revolution on their own merits. Themes such as democracy, liberty and equality (in French, *démocratie*, *liberté*, and *égalité* respectively) were central to the cultural proliferation of the Revolution, as well as the messages fundamental to the didactic art proliferated by the new society elites. When observing the relationship between female symbolism and the Revolution, the most direct link would seem to be that all three of these themes are feminine nouns in French. By this reasoning it would make sense that a word which when spoken and written is considered to be feminine, would be depicted to the average French citizen as a woman. Despite the convincing link between the feminine words and female imagery, it is unlikely that it is the sole reasoning behind the practice.



The Fountain of Regeneration

Another factor that must be recognized, although it does not provide a complete explanation of the link between feminine symbolism and revolutionary ideals, is that women did not have a significant connotation in art to that point. In previous works, women were occasionally portrayed as maternal and nurturing figures in art, if they were portrayed at all. To find images of women was not very common and the ones in existence did not often portray them as the central figures. A woman being portrayed in artwork with political themes was even more uncommon. However in the ones that do, there is a continuation of the same ideas of femininity, consisting mainly of maternal love and a nurturing nature is usually projected on to the female monuments of the State. This trend is demonstrated in *The Fountain of Regeneration*⁵ as well as in *Republican France*



Republican France Offering Her Breast to All Frenchmen

Regeneration,” engraving, (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). In *The Twilight of the Revolution in the Revolutionary Era*, by Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 115. New York, 1992.

Offering Her Breast to All Frenchmen.⁶ However, unlike in artwork concerning the ideal male figure, this feminine connotation was derived from the average citizen's life and accordingly reflected in artwork, as opposed to the works themselves inspiring and popularizing ideas. Overall, when compared to the representation of men in artwork, which was intimately connected with Greco-Roman ideals of beauty, as well as the glorification of heroism and valor, women essentially were blank slates for the average civilian. This made women as figures essential to proponents of the Revolution.⁷ As Madeline Gutwirth states in her work *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, "The ontological void woman represents to the male culture apparently provides a perfect vehicle for the use of the female figure to represent virtually anything."⁸

An additional aspect, which may provide some insight as to why women were chosen by didactic artists to represent the ideals of the Enlightenment, is directly correlated with the levels of participation women were allowed in both the monarchy as well as the flourishing democratic republic. Revolutionaries who subscribed to the traditionalist gender roles of the era were able to publicly utilize the gendered Rococo portrayal of aristocratic women as an excuse for excluding them from public affairs. It was presumed that their innate "weakness" and attachment to material gains made them incapable of properly making decisions. While this practice spanned across class lines, one of the most outspoken figures in favor of maintaining the traditional gender roles, and most skilled persons at this practice, was Louis-Marie Prudhomme, the Jacobin editor of the revolutionary newspaper *Rèvolutions de Paris*.

Providing further evidence of this practice was a series of articles, published presumably in response to complaints he received from Prudhomme's female readers, reflecting on the themes of women. In these public works, he was very candid in attributing blame for the issues of the monarchy solely to women's influence: "The reign of courtesans brought on the ruin of the nation; the power of queens consummated it."⁹ By utilizing the gendered Rococo image of women, as well as speaking against progressives of the Era, namely Condorcet, Prudhomme was able to make an argument against the inclusion of women in the public realm.

Instead, Prudhomme offered a different view of the role of women. Proselytizing directly to his female readers, referring to them as *vous* (you) Prudhomme informed women of exactly what their roles should be. He stated that while in the home, women should be "guardians of morality and education," and prepare their children to contribute to civilized French society.¹⁰ Imitating the themes regarding education in Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* where Rousseau refers to women's equality in occupation and works, including governance as "civil promiscuity"

⁶ Boizot-Clement, Louis-Simon, "Republican France Offering Her Breast to All Frenchmen," painting, (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). In *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*, by Joan B. Landes, Figure 4.7. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

⁷ The use of feminine symbolism by those opposed to the Revolution was largely a response to the didactic art that was supportive of the movement. There is not any particular significance to the choice to use feminine symbolism; the motivation is to sully the images belonging to the "enemies".

⁸ Madeline Gutwirth. *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, 255.

⁹ Louis-Marie Prudhomme, quoted in Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, 287.

¹⁰ Madeline Gutwirth. *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*. 287.

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which engenders “the most intolerable abuses,” the articles specified that women should not be formally educated, nor should they be allowed participation in the realm of governance.¹¹

According to Prudhomme, instead of direct participation, when acting within the public realm women should offer themselves as sexual beings to the heroes of the Revolution and serve as representatives of the Revolution. This belief was likely drawn in part from the artwork of the Revolution. As Lynn Hunt stated: “The proliferation of the female allegory was made possible... by the exclusion of women from public affairs. Women could be representative of abstract qualities and collective dreams because women were not allowed to vote or govern.”¹² Through the actions of those such as Prudhomme who considered it in the best interest of the state to maintain the status quo, women continued to largely be excluded from governance during the early years of the Revolution. With no influence in regards to what the new state would become, it was easy for artists of the era to utilize women’s image; it could be used to represent any ideals with no recourse by those being depicted.

3. Women and the Eroticization of the State

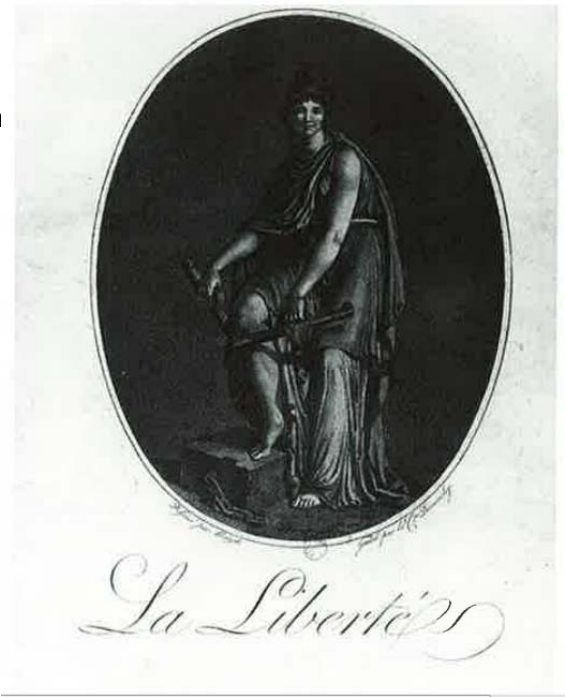
Regarding eroticization in artwork, there are two main factors which must be pondered: the frequency with which nudity is employed, as well as the purpose of the nudity; whether the portrayal of nakedness is meant to incite lustful feelings in the observer. Neoclassical art is known for using nudity with immense frequency; in fact, it is rare to see a figure clothed. While intimately connected with Greco-Roman ideals of beauty, this served a larger purpose for artists, especially those involved with the French Revolution. Bareness inherently draws attention to the body, and yet this does not necessarily provide a causal link to eroticization. An oft-cited utility of nudity in the neoclassical style is that it frees the body and allows greater emphasis to be placed upon the gesticulations of the figures. This is clearly observable in the work of many neoclassical artists.¹³

¹¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, accessed November 29, 2012, <http://books.google.com/books?id=U2dbYNVDpY8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=Emile&hl=en&sa=X&ei=jZi3UPe eFuKY2AWK5oC4CA&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Emile&f=false>

¹² Lynn Hunt, quoted in Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, 287.

¹³ Madeline Gutwirth. *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, 187-191.

Another practical advantage of using nudity within art deals with fashion. Since clothing and other adornments are period specific, they are often great indicators of a certain era, and social and economic class, among other specifications. If the artist wishes for a painting or other work of art to remain ethereal and timeless, then nudity can serve as a great tool to do so. This practice was common among Revolutionaries, who, as discussed earlier, were especially cognizant of the effect that clothing could have in symbolism. It was for this reason that much of the revolutionary artwork depicted women either in the nude, or in Greco-Roman dress as can be seen in the engraving *Liberty* by the Citizeness Demouchy (based off a drawing by Louis-Simon



Liberty



Liberty- She Has Overthrown the Hydra of Tyranny and Broken the Yoke of Despotism

Boizot).¹⁴ This can also be observed in the Jacques-Louis Copia engraving (based off a Pierre-Paul Prud'hon drawing): *Liberty- She Has Overthrown the Hydra of Tyranny and Broken the Yoke of Despotism*.¹⁵

Through this practice, the revolutionary leaders were able to successfully utilize the transition between the Rococo and Neoclassical movements to juxtaposition their “goddesses” (Liberty in the Citizeness Demouchy and Jacques-Louis Copia engravings) with the aristocratic ladies, which they had positioned to represent the epitome of the former monarchy. However, this required avoiding any symbols of wealth, or any other embellishments which could possibly have caused common people to view the women in the paintings (and more so the ideals which the women were meant to be representing) as overly effeminate or grandiose. To do so, would have depicted the Revolution as nothing more than a continuation of the great influence of the aristocracy as had been seen in the monarchy. The use of nudity essentially sought to create an atmosphere where “materiality is deliberately made moot.”¹⁶

Despite representing revolutionary ideals in a legitimate way, nakedness was also used to eroticize the new democracy in France. Realistically, this practice was quite

... engraving, (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). In *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the Revolutionary Era*, by Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 46. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

¹⁵ Jacques-Louis Copia, “Liberty- She Has Overthrown the Hydra of Tyranny and Broken the Yoke of Despotism,” engraving, (Musée Carnavalet, Paris). In *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the Revolutionary Era*, by Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 49. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

¹⁶ Madeline Gutwirth. *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, 22.

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common. A primal example of this technique may be observed in the Citizeness Demouchy engraving *Liberty* (see page nine). The woman featured in this engraving, though supposedly taking such great and violent action as to break a yoke (a symbol of the oppressive Monarchy), is surprisingly calm and serene. Though there are hints of muscle definition as would be seen in an aesthetically pleasing male (namely in her legs), she is still devoid of action overall. The lack of shading (which would possibly create an image of athletic movement) makes it clear that she was not a figure meant to look like she was independently strong or could take any significant action. She was a figure simply meant to be beautiful.

As a representative of classic beauty, lady Liberty easily succeeds. She has the long hair customary to the period (though carefully pinned to her head), as well as the classic angular features that epitomized the classic Greco-Roman ideals of beauty. Lady Liberty engraved by the Citizeness Demouchy is smiling pleasantly and staring straight out towards the viewer as if she were proud of the action she is taking and the honor she has been given in serving as a representative of the Revolution.¹⁷ There is undoubtedly a factor of eroticization within this engraving; she was obviously meant to draw in the viewer and make her ideal of justice appealing.

An even more profound example of this trend can be found in the Basset print *La Liberté* (based off a drawing by Louis-Simon Boizot).¹⁸ Basset's lady Liberty is literally nothing more than a pseudo-goddess meant to represent and eroticize the State. In a highly eroticized image, liberty is epitomized as a striking and graceful woman dressed in a Greco-Roman inspired sheath that only covers her from the waist down. Just as in the Citizeness Demouchy engraving, she is represented as the classic Greco-Roman ideal of beauty, with her facial features rivaling the beauty of any of the ancient civilization's goddesses and her hair long and flowing. Basset's Liberty also lacks any muscle definition. This is because Basset does not attempt to create a façade of action on her part. In fact, the pseudo-goddess appears as if she can barely hold the staff that the phrygian cap is resting upon.¹⁹

The lack of action on her part, as well as the beauty of Basset's Justice can lead the viewer to infer that she is meant to be nothing more than a figurehead. Though she is meant to be holding both a staff and a stone tablet containing the major Decalogue of the era, it appears that



La Liberté

¹⁷ Citizeness Demouchy. "Liberty," engraving, (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). In *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the Revolutionary Era*, by Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 46. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

¹⁸ Basset, "La Liberté," print, (Musée Carnavalet, Paris). In *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the Revolutionary Era*, by Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 44. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

¹⁹ Also known as a Revolutionary cap.

her hands are barely resting upon these symbols of the Revolution; they control her. In addition to these symbols, the painting also contains the phrygian cap resting upon the staff, and the Gallic Cock.²⁰

The positioning of the Gallic Cock contributes to the air of eroticization. As the archetypal masculine symbol gazes upon her from below, the viewer gets the sense that the Cock is in awe of her and that it is looking to her for guidance; she is a goddess of the French Revolution. However, the most erotic element is the display of her breasts; with the rest of her body adequately covered, it is obvious that her exposed breasts had no other purpose than to eroticize the ideal of liberty. Portraying “liberty as a heart’s desire”, she is stagnant in order to make the other symbols of the revolution more appealing.²¹

4. Rococo, Femininity and Pornography

In order to truly solidify how nudity was used to eroticize the state as opposed to simply sexually arousing the viewers of these works, one of the best ways is to compare the images to pornography of the time and observe the differences in artistic styling and other aesthetic choices. A series of illustrations created to accompany the novel *Le Paysan Perversi* by Rétif de la Bretonne will be analyzed here in an attempt to highlight these differences. Figuring that the artists did not title the illustrations of this series, they will be referred to by illustration numbers. Illustration One²² provides a good example of the more obvious differences between the majority of the revolutionary images and the pornography of the time.

First, the image is drawn in the Rococo style. In light of the association between the aristocracy and Rococo art, this is not surprising as the image depicts three aristocratic women (granted in an incredibly sexual position). As a result of this, the overall imagery of the work is drastically different. The women are not depicted with what were considered classically beautiful Greco-Roman facial features. Yet, while they are not portrayed with the type of femininity as seen in *La Liberté* (see page eleven), neither are they portrayed as masculine figures as in *Liberty- She Has Overthrown the Hydra of Tyranny and Broken the Yoke of Despotism* (see page nine).

Instead, their facial features are shown as beautiful in a more caricatured way without taking focus from the rest of the scene. The background behind the



Illustration One

²⁰ Though it is not labeled, it is most likely that the stone tablet contains major passages from *On the Rights of Man*.

²¹ Madeline Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, 259.

²² Louis Binet, “Illustration from *Le paysan perversi*,” medium unknown, (Harvard College Library, Boston). In “Defining Obscenity, Inventing Pornography: The Limits of Censorship in Rétif de la Bretonne,” by Amy S. Wyngaard, Figure 2. *Modern Language Quarterly* 71:1 (2010): 31.

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figures exists while still being muted enough to draw the focus towards the women, and the ménage à trois, which they are engaging in. One that is reminiscent of the imagery of the goddesses in *Bitter Forms*.

However, the focus of the painting is undoubtedly on the adornments that the women wear. Each woman's hair is long and pinned up in an elaborate style as well as adorned with a hairpiece. Their dresses are long and draped over chairs, giving the impression of disarray. Despite this however, the styling of the dresses gives the viewer the impression that they are made of a rich material. All of these details suggest that these women, though committing a scandalous, libertine act, are of the higher classes. Ironically, this illustration contains less nudity than the majority of the revolutionary images. The eroticizing factor comes from the details of luxury within the illustration, as well as the text of the narrative it was meant to accompany.



Illustration Two

observe the outline of the female figure's rather prominent breasts. As well, the entirety of her legs are visible through the sheer material of her gown, and from this it is observable that she has a body style that is more Rubenesque than neoclassical. Another thing that deserves mention in regards to Illustration Two is that this is the first image in which there is a male figure that is directly interacting with a woman without making them seem cold or unfeeling as seen in *Bitter Forms* and *Liberty- November 10, 1793*.

²³ Louis Binet, "Illustration from *Le paysan perversi*," medium unknown, (Harvard College Library, Boston). In "Defining Obscenity, Inventing Pornography: The Limits of Censorship in Rétif de la Bretonne," by Amy S. Wyngaard, Figure 7. *Modern Language Quarterly* 71:1 (2010): 44.

The final image in the series that will be discussed, and which will be referred to as Illustration Three²⁴ for the purpose of this paper, is the most obviously pornographic of the three. Though this image is done in the Rococo styling, the background in terms of the building where the characters are located is very sparse. Instead, two incredibly ornamented characters in an argument dominate the background. However the foreground is completely the focus of this illustration, as it depicts a man (who is not in any sense beautiful according to the Greco-Roman standards which were common of the time) wielding a wooden branch (or some similar cane type weapon). This woman, though wearing the customary adornments of the wealthy, is undressed above the waist and chained to the wall, unable to escape the impending blows through any means other than pleading, which is presumably, what the turning of her head away from the viewer is meant to signify. In this image, more literally than in the revolutionary works of art, the female character depicted is beautiful but has no strength. Differing from the revolutionary works though, in Illustration Three, the woman has absolutely no semblance of influence.



Illustration Three

In essence, the use of the female image in the pornography of the Enlightenment era was not significantly different from its employment in revolutionary (or anti-revolutionary) artwork. The Rococo style was used in both realms to impart the same ideas regarding the aristocracy and gluttony of the voraciousness of the upper classes. Its use was also not impeded by the need to make images seem ethereal and timeless, pornographers of the time had no need to prevent associations with a certain time. In some images, nudity as employed less than in the average work of revolutionary art. However, the context of the nudity or hint of sexuality (practices such as prominently outlining the breasts without explicitly exposing them) clearly displayed the difference in the intent of the artists in utilizing nakedness. It is through this comparison that the difference between the use of nudity to eroticize the state and the use of nudity to sexually arouse can be displayed.

4. Goddesses in Action?

While it is possible to interpret the use of female symbolism to represent cherished Revolutionary ideals as allowing women into a position of power, this assumption is incorrect. While there was potential for the enhancement of women's position, there are few paintings where an idealized feminine figure (a beautiful woman) appears to be taking strong action in a work of art. In the majority of Revolutionary art, the relationship between femininity and strong women is clear. Women either tend to be portrayed as beautiful and sexual while weak and

²⁴ Louis Binet, "Illustration from *Le paysan perversi*," medium unknown, (Harvard College Library, Boston). In "Defining Obscenity, Inventing Pornography: The Limits of Censorship in Rétif de la Bretonne," by Amy S. Wynaard, Figure 6. *Modern Language Quarterly* 71:1 (2010): 42.

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incapable of taking any action, or they are depicted as figures of action at the price of attractiveness and sexuality. In order to fully understand this relationship, these trends will now be applied to Revolutionary art in consequential order.

Numerous works of Revolutionary art show beautiful women as passive. This aspect was briefly discussed earlier in the analysis of the Citizen Demouchy engraving *Liberty*, as well as the Basset print *La Liberté*. In both of these paintings, the women are lovely, yet they have little to no muscle definition. An additional example can be found in the painting entitled *Equality*.²⁵ Just as in the paintings personifying Justice, Equality is a woman; nonetheless, a fine-looking woman. While there is less of an eroticizing factor with no nudity present, her Greco-Roman dress is fitting with the neoclassical style and serves to amplify her characteristically handsome features. Again, the viewer is confronted with the classic beauty and long hair that has been observed in the works discussed previously. Also echoed in this work, is the impression that with no tension in her arms and no dynamism, this pseudo-goddess is a frame for the symbols of the Revolution; the laurel wreath (a classical symbol of victory), the carpenter's level, an axe atop what is presumably a scroll of *On the Rights of Man*, as well as the Gallic Cock. Unlike Basset's *La Liberté*, the Gallic Cock in this painting is not an eroticizing factor. The positioning of the animal in this case contributes to her appearance of physical weakness as the Cock stands behind her and squawks in the same general direction that she is gazing, giving the impression that it is protecting his goddess. While this was likely done to get at a larger symbolic meaning, that



Equality

the Revolution is protecting equality in France, it still correlates with the larger effect of creating an atmosphere of weakness around this lady Equality.

Contrasting the above examples are works that show women as revolutionary ideals, and portray them as strong and taking action, but at the expense of their femininity. The painting *Liberty Triumphant Destroying Abusive Powers* featured in the Prudhomme led *Rèvolutions de Paris* provides a good example of this



Liberty Triumphant Destroying Abusive Powers

usée Carnavalet, Paris). In *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 51. New Brunswick: Rutgers University*

trend.²⁶ In this painting, the theme returns to Liberty. However, unlike the previous examples discussed, lady Liberty in this work occupies a different place. The female figure is in motion; she has a firm grasp on the staff holding the phrygian cap and she is capturing lightning bolts in her other palm. Yet, even being a figure in motion, she does not serve as a very strong female figure. While her position on a cloud contributes to her femininity, as does the angelic type glow around her (making it seem as if she is a goddess), the position also removes her directly from the action. While the ground below her is devastated and obviously has seen a great battle of the Revolution, she floats above the chaos. Being removed limits her to being more of an ideal and a representation than a figure in motion.

Regardless of the fact that her action is limited, as a female figure, this minimal action has caused the aura of femininity to suffer severely. Though the facial features are not unattractive, there is little definition of her neck and face. There is little of the angularity that is typical of neoclassical art (and can be observed in the previous works mentioned in this research). In fact, her neck connects directly to her chin, perhaps showing a lack of artistic skill. Her body is lacking in definition. She does not have the heavy shading and muscular definition that would be seen in a male figure; however, she also lacks the thin and delicate grace that is prevalent in other paintings such as *La Liberté*. This woman hovers somewhere between *La Liberté* and the masculinity of the woman in *Liberty- She Has Overthrown the Hydra of Tyranny and Broken the Yoke of Despotism* which will be discussed in the next paragraph. She really is an androgynous and almost sexless figure; the only symbols of femininity present are her exposed breasts and long flowing hair.

Another work that can provide insight into this relationship is the previously mentioned *Liberty- She Has Overthrown the Hydra of Tyranny and Broken the Yoke of Despotism* (see page nine). When compared to *Liberty Triumphant Destroying Abusive Powers* this female figure is much more dynamic. The epitome of a strong female revolutionary figure, Copia's depiction of lady Liberty is highly dynamic. A striking figure, Liberty is the complete focus of the viewer. Holding an axe in one hand and the commonly seen broken yoke (of despotism) lady Liberty has the air of a Roman soldier victorious after a significant battle. Her Greco-Roman style cloak, though completely ripped and tattered as if it survived a war, flows in the wind to signify dynamism and movement on her behalf. Positioned in a stance that men are usually situated in after a significant triumph over an enemy, she stands upon the Hydra of Tyranny or as it was commonly referred to by the French citizenry "monster Privilege," a common symbol of the aristocracy.²⁷ Even more anti-monarchical is the presence of several crowned heads underfoot.

In regards to her body, though she still lacks the same degree of muscle definition that one would see on a male figure, out of the female figures, Copia gifts upon his lady Liberty the best sense of vitality: "The sheer force and relaxation of this gently muscled strong woman's body conveys a sense of easy athletic grace."²⁸ While this lends a sense of credibility and independence to the woman and to the ideal, she loses her femininity. With only the peak of a breast above her gown giving any indication she is a woman, Copia's engraving of lady Liberty

²⁶ Artist Unknown, "Liberty Triumphant Destroying Abusive Powers," painting, (University of North Carolina). In *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the Revolutionary Era*, by Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 45. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

²⁷ Antione de Baecque. *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 170.

²⁸ Madeline Gutwirth. *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, 264.

has more in common with a portrait of Julius Caesar than with one of an aristocratic woman of the period.

The relationship that can be observed between femininity, physical strength and dynamism has implications for many areas. While providing evidence to the Revolutionaries' obsession with neoclassical art, the artwork also displayed the ability for these figures to be portrayed as any ideal (though it is obvious that the depiction of some ideals were more popular than others). However, the greatest lesson that should be taken from this relationship is that it did not make a statement in favor of beautiful and strong female characters. The lack of a physically strong and graceful woman, who is also beautiful, makes a statement about the role of women in positions of civil power, as well as their overall place in French society. This statement does not veer far off of Prudhomme's definition and that of many of the less progressive philosopher; that a woman's place was in the home being the educators of the next generation of noble men, not in the realm of governance.

5. Female Symbolism and the Anti-Revolutionary Movement

Another factor to consider is that for both anti-Revolutionaries and disillusioned Revolutionaries, the featured women, both the pseudo-goddesses and active women, developed into scapegoats. It is debatable whether this was a purposeful decision or simply one of opportunity. Regardless of the motive behind creating scapegoats out of the feminine figures, the use of women to represent revolutionary ideals put women in the position to be ridiculed and despised. This can be clearly observed in multiple anti-Revolutionary paintings, *such as Liberty-November 10, 1793.*²⁹

In this anti-revolutionary painting is the typical pseudo-goddess of Liberty. Wearing a Greco-Roman sheath and holding symbols of the Revolution, including the shaft and phrygian cap, there is no doubt as to what she represents. However, this painting differs from all of the others analyzed in the fact that this work of art never meant to cast lady Liberty in a positive light. This goddess is cold, unfeeling stone. She ignores the disheartened and impoverished Revolutionaries that lay below her, begging for justice to be served and for the status quo to change. This clearly reflects the disappointment of the common citizen with the lack of change in their everyday life; their anger that they were not properly reimbursed for their violence and injuries. This is most clearly the sentiment of the man with the peg leg, and those literally throwing themselves on the ground in front of her emblem.



...ainting, (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). In *The Twilight of the
...ionary Era*, by Madeline Gutwirth, Figure 71. New

The same sentiments can be observed in the C. Normand engraving (based off an idea of L.-E. Poirier) entitled *Bitter Forms*.³⁰

One of the most iconic anti-revolutionary images features a monster, a symbol of the Revolution stands below two guillotines with beheaded bodies resting upon them. More bodies lay piled beneath the monster's feet, as another symbol of the aristocracy, a large cat looms in the corner with a pile of bones.³¹ On the other side of the image, normal citizens plead to the ideals of the Revolution for help. Yet these ideals, represented by women and complete with the standard symbols of the Revolution, are unresponsive to the pleas of the common people as they float on a cloud above the chaos, fully enjoying their status. These women are the



Bitter Forms

representatives of the revolutionary ideals and this image gives not only the impression that Revolution is removed from what it claims to be fighting for, but that some of the blame belongs with the ideals themselves.

Ironically, despite the fact that women are made to be the scapegoats in this image, they are still represented in a sexualized manner. The two seated goddesses are dressed in full Greco-Roman attire, including long hair pinned to the head. Interestingly, one of these goddesses, though engaged in conversation with the second, is helping to pull the gown off the third, as she stands fully naked. Another interesting caveat to this image is that the naked goddess has a very Rubenesque body type. Though this is inconsistent with much of the artwork of the time, this can be attributed to the close relationship that Rococo art shared with the social structure under the monarchy; a pro monarchy (or at the very least anti-Revolutionary) artist would use the classic style of the monarchy while using the neoclassical style goddesses as a scapegoat.

Conclusion

Overall, the French Revolution served as a catalyst of change in more areas than one might expect. While the obvious transitions such as the ousting of the monarchy and the creation of a new democratic state are relatively well known, arguably some of the most important have largely been ignored. For the first time in the Enlightenment period, artists purposefully chose women to represent ideals that were integral to the creation of their ideal future. While this signals an increase in the standing of women in society, especially when previously it was considered that any participation by women in governance would lead to unimaginable horrors

³⁰ C. Normand, "Bitter Forms," engraving, (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). In *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, by Antione de Baecque, Figure 17. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

³¹ Antione de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, 170.

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(as Rousseau suggested), the significance of this occurrence is dulled through the manner in which it was perpetrated. Hardly ever was there a depiction of a beautiful and strong woman, instead, one or the other tainted the image.

As a result of the fact that women were largely chosen because of the appeal of their sexuality, there is not a large removal from the popular idea that women should, as Prudhomme states, give themselves sexually to the heroes of the Revolution. While the images analyzed above clearly do not literally show this practice, on a symbolic level, that is the embodiment of the practice. Granted this is done in a way that differs from the use of erotic female imagery in pornography of the era. Essentially, Revolutionary artists and anti-revolutionaries alike utilized what little power they considered women to possess in order to advance their own cause. That is the major lesson that can be learned from this practice. As a result of various factors including the minimal connotation women possessed in art until that point and their exclusion from public affairs, male artists were able to use female imagery, and femininity overall as a tool for their own gain.