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TALKING HEADS? GUILLOTINED WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTIONARY AFTERLIFE

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In an account of her entry into the afterlife, published shortly after her death at the guillotine in 1793, it is not her lost head that most concerns the ghostly Olympe de Gouges, but rather the loss of her whole physical self:

> En entrant au milieu de ces ombres dont je fais maintenant partie, je fus long-tems à chercher ma figure. L'habitude d'avoir un corps dont la prestance me faisoit remarquer, me l'avoit rendu infiniment cher, d'autant plus qu'à l'exemple de presque toutes les jolies femmes, j'avois passé ma vie à le soigner & le parfumer; mais bientôt je m'apperçus que tout étant intellectuel dans ce monde aérien, tout ce qui pouvoit affecter les sens y devenoit absolument inutile.[1]

This lament appears in an anonymous collection of *dialogues des morts*, a classical format (inaugurated by Lucian of Samosata in the second century CE) in which the great figures of the distant or more recent past are brought together in conversation in the hereafter, commenting on their own lives and on the changes that have been made since their passing.[2] The deceased individuals revived in this collection include Charlotte Corday, Marie-Jeanne Roland, and Jeanne Du Barry — all guillotined within six months of one another — whilst a second collection in the

[1] Anon., *Colloques des morts des plus fameux, condamnés par la loi portée contre les conspirateurs*, 2 vols (Paris: Chez le marchand des nouveautés, An II [1793–94]), I, 105. All quotations from primary texts are unmodernized. Charlotte Corday is shown talking to Marie-Jeanne Roland, Gouges to a Polish general (the reasons for this pairing are unclear, since this text does not provide concluding morals to link the interlocutors as François Pagès does), and Jeanne Du Barry to Catherine Albout, a prostitute condemned to death by the revolutionary tribunal and executed on 20 March 1793; see *Liste générale et très-exacte des noms, ages, qualities et demeures de tous les conspirateurs qui ont été condamnés à mort par le tribunal révolutionnaire établi à Paris par la loi du 17 août 1792* (Paris: Berthet, 1894), p. 20. There are two further dialogues containing women (one appears only as the wife as the main protagonist, but in the second we find Mary Stuart and Antoinette de Lorraine), making a total of five out of the fifteen that make up volume I of the work. A further six women, including Marie-Antoinette again, appear in the twenty dialogues of the second volume. In this dialogue, Marie-Antoinette is a relatively secondary figure, alongside her husband. They initially try to justify their actions to Charles I and Mary Stuart, then she blames him for having failed to 's'opposer à mes dépenses, ainsi qu'à mes folies' (I, 152), taking a somewhat less powerful and perhaps more stereotypically feminine stance than she does in Pagès's text.

[2] Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*, trans. by M. D. MacLeod, in *Lucian*, 8 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913–67), VII (1961), pp. 1–175. French iterations of the genre across the seventeenth century included collections by Fénelon and Fontenelle, and the latter in particular revives a large number of women, including Dido, Mary Queen of Scots, Sappho, Petrarch's Laura, Bérénice, and Helen of Troy (Bernard de Fontenelle, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts* (1683), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Alain Niderst, 9 vols (Paris: Fayard, 1989–2001), I (1989), pp. 47–211).

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genre, published seven years later by journalist François Pagès, also features Du Barry and Corday, and adds Marie-Antoinette, beheaded that same year.[3]

In the discourse surrounding the deaths of all five of these women, their gender—or rather, their transgression of gender norms — is presented as key to their crimes. An article in the *Ancien moniteur* in November 1793 warns women against overstepping the bounds of womanhood like Marie-Antoinette, 'mauvaise mère, épouse débauchée', or Gouges and Roland, both of whom '[ont] oublié les vertus de [leur] sexe'.[4] Corday too — whose murderous actions were so influential in inspiring other women to political engagement — is consistently described as unwomanly: a 1793 play restaging her trial has her state: 'Je ne serais donc pas de mon sexe?'[5] This implication, that women should know their place, is encapsulated by Louis-Sébastien Mercier in his *Tableau de Paris*, written in the decade prior to these high-profile executions:

> L'homme voudra bien que la femme possède assez d'esprit pour l'entendre, mais point qu'elle s'élève trop, jusqu'à vouloir rivaliser avec lui et montrer l'égalité de talent [. . .] et tout les hommes ont une disposition secrète à rabaisser la femme qui veut s'élever jusqu'à la renommée [. . .]. Un triomphe éclatant serait fort alarmant pour l'orgueil et pour la liberté des hommes.[6]

The vocabulary of 'unwomanly' visibility and overstepping — 'élever', 'montrer', 'éclater' — is striking. In contrast, when insurrection was quashed in 1795, police observers recorded with approval that

> Personne ne contredit, les hommes regardent, *les femmes se taisent*. [. . .] Des mères de famille [. . .] se contentent de verser des larmes *sans murmurer*. [. . . L]es femmes sont rentrées dans le sein de leurs ménages, *elles sont devenues muettes* sur les événements politiques.[7]

Though silence might be interpreted as a form of resistance, Dominique Godineau reads this as a cowed, fearful silence following events of horrific violence. She makes an explicit contrast with the female voices that had been so stridently powerful in the preceding months: whilst both men and women are presented as compliant in these reports, the women are specifically no longer *speaking*. Silence is therefore equated with the role of the good republican woman, wife, and mother: it is one of the 'vertus de [leur] sexe' implied by the

[3] François Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts entre les plus fameux personnages de la révolution française et plusieurs hommes célèbres, anciens et modernes, morts avant la revolution* (Paris: Laurens, 1800). Marie-Antoinette is in conversation with Du Barry, and Corday is presented alongside Arria, the Roman woman who committed suicide to give her husband the courage to do the same. These are the only two dialogues containing women, out of a total of eighteen in the work.

[4] 'Aux républicains', *Réimpression de l'Ancien moniteur*, 32 vols (Paris: Plon, 1847–70), XVIII (1860), p. 450.

[5] Jean-Baptiste Salle, *Charlotte Corday, Tragédie en cinq actes et en vers* (Paris: J. Miard, 1864), II. 3 (p. 53). Gouges was even aware of this trope, describing her actions as sitting awkwardly with her gender: 'Je suis un animal sans pareil; [. . .] ni homme ni femme. J'ai tout le courage de l'un, et quelquefois les faiblesses de l'autre'; Olympe de Gouges, *Réponse à la justification de Maximilien Robespierre, adressée à Jérome Pétion* ([n.p.]: [no pub.], 1792), p. 10. Guillaume Mazeau tracks the 'unfemale' discourse surrounding Corday in *Le Bain de l'histoire: Charlotte Corday et l'attentat contre Marat 1793–2009* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2009), esp. p. 232, but he also notes the 'culte de Marat' she inspired in other women.

[6] Louis-Sébastien Mercier, 'Femmes auteurs', in *Tableau de Paris*, ed. by Jean-Claude Bonnet (Paris: Mercure de France, 1994), pp. 1009–13 (pp. 1010–11).

[7] Cited in Dominique Godineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses: les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française* (Paris: Perrin, 2004), p. 349; my emphasis.

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Ancien moniteur article, which also advises women, 'ne suivez jamais les assemblées populaires avec le désir d'y parler'.[8] Gouges and the over-visible guillotined women are 'rabaiss[ées]' in the most literal way for failing to conform to this model.[9]

The noisy woman, silenced by her contemporaries and consequently silent in the historical record through non-representation, is a vast, transhistorical trope that has been connected with the revolutionary period by a number of modern scholars.[10] It is tempting, therefore, to read the *dialogues des morts* in which Gouges, Corday, Roland, Du Barry, and Marie-Antoinette appear and speak — and in which their gender is often explicitly noted — in this context: an imagined *prise de parole* that gives these overly visible, overly talkative women back the voices that were cut off by their untimely deaths. This argument seems especially attractive considering the commemorative function that such dialogues took on in the late eighteenth century. Lucian's format has traditionally been read as satirical (the wise dead providing lessons to those still on earth),[11] or politically critical (representing the posthumous punishment of one's political enemies).[12] In this period, however, it also became part of the contemporary vogue for telling the history of the past via the lives of its 'grands hommes', a trend exemplified by the 1791 creation of the Panthéon.[13] The individuals reawakened therein often serve to voice views to which the new author wants to give authority (even if these views were never expressed by them in life), or to exemplify particularly moral or glorious actions for readers to emulate.

Reading these women in this context has some value. Their mere presence in collections that include both undisputed cultural luminaries such as Voltaire and Rousseau and major historical actors like Mirabeau, Robespierre and Marat

[8] *Réimpression de l'Ancien moniteur*, XVIII, 450. Indeed, women were specifically excluded from a purportedly more representative politics: in 1793 female political clubs were closed (Suzanne Desan, 'Constitutional Amazons: Jacobin Women's Clubs in the French Revolution', in *Re-creating Authority in Revolutionary France*, ed. by Bryant T. Ragan Jr and Elizabeth A. Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 11–35); female participation in the Assemblée nationale could only take place through a male intermediary (Christine Fauré, 'Doléances, déclarations et pétitions, trois formes de la parole publique des femmes sous la Révolution', in *La Prise de parole publique des femmes sous la Révolution française*, ed. by Christine Fauré (= special issue, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 344 (2006)), pp. 5–25); and from spring 1795 women were excluded from attending the Convention nationale entirely, and forbidden to assemble—and thus discuss—in public in groups of more than five (Suzanne Desan, 'Women's Experience of the French Revolution: An Historical Overview', in *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. by Catherine R. Montfort (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1994), pp. 19–30 (p. 27)). The 1793 closure of clubs provides interesting context for our first collection of dialogues including women, who are allowed to speak with one another in the afterlife as they would not now be allowed to in life.

[9] On women and the French Revolution more generally, see Suzanne Desan, 'Recent Historiography on the French Revolution and Gender', *Journal of Social History*, 52 (2019), 566–74.

[10] Michelle Perrot's study of the subordinate role of women in history from the Revolution onwards is entitled *Les Femmes, ou les silences de l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), and Christine Fauré sets out to examine *La Prise de parole publique des femmes sous la Révolution française* (2006). For discussion of how excessive speech was negatively associated with women in earlier centuries, see Emily Butterworth, *The Unbridled Tongue: Babble and Gossip in Renaissance France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[11] See Stéphane Pujol, *Le Dialogue d'idées au dix-huitième siècle* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005); Claire Cazanave, *Le Dialogue à l'âge classique: étude de la littérature dialogique en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), pp. 124–26; and Lise Andries, 'Querelles et dialogues des morts au XVIII^e siècle', *Littératures classiques*, 81 (2013), 131–46.

[12] See Michel Biard, *La Révolution hantée: enfers fantasmés et Révolution française* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2017).

[13] See Jean-Claude Bonnet, *Naissance du Panthéon: essai sur le culte des grands hommes* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).

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indicates that their status as recognizable, politically significant figures was undeniable, even immediately after the deaths that supposedly sought to erase and silence them.[14] These dialogues thus contribute to a growing body of evidence to suggest not only that the women of the Revolution were far from silent in life, but also that they were appropriated as iconic models with something useful to contribute after their deaths.[15] Even when the protagonists are implicitly critiqued by their authors — for example, when Gouges is mocked as 'une femme jalouse d'acquérir de la célébrité'[16] — it might be tempting to read them in Derridean vein as spectres who remain insistently present, even if the next generation attempts to reject their authority: Gouges's derided ambitions are to some extent borne out by her appearance here.[17]

But the Derridean reading is not one I wish to pursue. For to read these women in these dialogues purely from this perspective of speech-as-representation would be to do the texts a disservice. After all, what we read here are not the words of the women themselves, but rather fictionalized versions of them, rewritten by a (presumably) male author.[18] Moreover, these reimagined words — attributed to women who, though silenced by the guillotine, had a strong public image in life — appear in a minor genre, with likely restricted circulation and readership.[19] Thus, any argument that relies solely on the texts' commemorative (or, indeed, critical) potential, or their ability to make these women more present than they were in life or remake their lasting reputations entirely, is necessarily limited. This article therefore approaches these texts from the perspective of their creation as fiction and imaginative reinvention, examining what their reawakened participants (as women, but also as historical actors) are made to do, say, and represent: how they become, to redeploy the phrase of Joan Wallach Scott, 'sites — historical locations or markers' for considering the

[14] For the dialogues featuring these figures, see Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, pp. 60–75, 131–51.

[15] On revolutionary women as far from silent, see Desan, 'Recent Historiography on the French Revolution and Gender', p. 567. Mazeau examines Corday's action as a 'lieu de mémoire', reappropriated across the course of the Revolution and beyond by different factions, to represent different things (*Le Bain de l'histoire*, p. 21).

[16] *Colloques des morts*, p. 101.

[17] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 37. On how the textual commemoration of even bad examples was vital under the Revolution, see Jessica Goodman, '"Le Néant de ce qu'on appelle gloire": Post-Revolutionary Cultural Memory and the *Dialogue des Morts*', *Romance Studies*, 33 (2015), 177–89.

[18] We know Pagès to be a male writer, but for the anonymous text there are no indications of gender, even in the first-person preface. In my broad study of a range of texts in this genre, I have yet to find any that are clearly by women, except Gouges's own *Mirabeau aux Champs-Élysées* (1791), which includes women in the glorious afterlife alongside Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Franklin. My assumption is therefore that this collection too was written by a man; certainly there is far less of a specifically female slant than in Gouges's play. My arguments, however, do not rely on the presumed gender of the author.

[19] There is little or no information about the reception of either of these texts. The *Colloques des morts* are listed in two catalogues from the first part of the nineteenth century, suggesting a level of survival, though probably only on a small scale: *Catalogue des livres destinés à la lecture que se trouvent au cabinet littéraire* (Nîmes: Maux-Buchet, 1802) and *Catalogue des livres imprimés et manuscrits, et des autographes de feu M. Lerouge, membre de la Société des Antiquaires de France, et de plusieurs autres sociétés littéraires: dont la vente se fera le mardi 3 décembre 1833, et jours suivans, rue des Bons-Enfans, maison Silvestre, à six heures de relevée. Les adjudications auront lieu par le ministère de M.e Determes, commissaire-priseur, rue Rameau, n° 8* (Paris: Leblanc, 1833). A second edition of the Pagès collection was published in 1803, implying some interest in the initial run. There are close on forty examples of this text (across both editions) listed in libraries on WorldCat.

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broader political — and in this case literary — context.[20] In the process, it considers whether these dialogues are in fact doing something extraordinarily knowing with the trope of the silent or speaking woman; playing on the concept of posthumous speech to explore the very notion of existence in posterity to which the solely commemorative reading would have them simplistically subscribe.

Both collections present themselves not as imaginative fictions, but as serious moral works. Their shared aim, according to their respective prefaces, is to draw lessons on morality from the figures of the recent and more distant past: the anonymous author of the *Colloques des morts* by presenting remorseful examples of individuals punished for their failure to be good republicans, in order to instruct his contemporaries, and Pagès by looking at positive and negative examples from across time, in a useful contribution to his society.[21] There is little evidence here to indicate the precise political stance of either author.[22] The *Colloques des morts* return again and again to the notion of patriotism, and to a critique of actions that might be viewed as running counter to a love for one's country, whatever their motivation.[23] Pagès, similarly, claims he is recalling to good sense 'les hommes de tous les partis', and enumerates the various and contrasting reasons that have led his contemporaries to '[s']écarter des règles du *vrai beau* et de l'*honnête*', desiring a 'révolution morale' to restore ancient order.[24]

As a result, all those reawakened from the multitudes of both the ancient and revolutionary dead are shown to have faults, whatever their loyalties — from Mirabeau's secret alliance with the royal family,[25] to Antoine Barnave's prideful attempts to make his name — and all these errors are examined before the (reading) audience in a factionally indiscriminate reworking of the theatrical tribunal that played such a key role in revolutionary politics.[26] Here, though, rather than necessarily attempting to uncover or present a 'truth', or even take into account the views of the subject of this literary retrial, the presentation of these faults is shaped first and foremost to serve the aims of these new writers, who draw on different existing versions of the protagonists ('real', self-fashioned, written by others) to create semi-fictionalized versions to suit their own purposes, even as they attempt to persuade

[20] Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 16.

[21] *Colloques des morts*, p. vi; Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. vii.

[22] Pagès was reportedly a Jacobin, but this particular text betrays no evidence of this sympathy.

[23] In one dialogue, for example, the Girondin Jacques-Pierre Brissot and the Jacobin Louis Pierre Manuel both reveal their own faults and critique those of their interlocutor, with no real conclusion (*Colloques des morts*, pp. 94–100).

[24] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. vii; original emphases.

[25] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, pp. 131–41.

[26] *Colloques des morts*, p. 88. On the revolutionary tribunal as theatre, see Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy, and the French Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). On theatrical re-enactment as justice, both before and during the Revolution, see Yann Robert, *Dramatic Justice: Trial by Theater in the Age of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2019).

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readers to forget this fictionalization through the device of the frameless dialogue.[27] The verdict, in other words, if there is one, proves to be less important than the fact that such a retrial can take place; that different versions of an individual can be produced at any one time. It is precisely the slippery, instrumentalizing nature of this approach, which both draws attention to and obfuscates the constructed nature of any public image or reputation, that encourages me to read these texts not for how far they bolster or adapt some fixed, existing reputation, but for how revealing they are about the very nature of such constructions.

What, then, are the different ways in which these women are imagined and reimagined? Given the negative, un-republican associations of female outspokenness explored above, it is not perhaps surprising that when the guillotined women appear in the *Colloques des morts*, their charge is various forms of overstepping: Gouges is criticized for her ambition, Du Barry for her royal affectations despite her lowly background, and Corday for taking politics into her own hands by killing Marat. Similarly, Pagès gives the moral of the dialogue between Corday and Arria as the following: 'Le fanatisme de la religion est exécrable; celui de la liberté a quelquefois de dangereux excès; mais celui de la vertu ne trompe et n'égare jamais.'[28] The revolutionary woman in the pairing here is the cautionary tale, whose excessive fanaticism — or more precisely, the actions it inspires — is 'dangéreux'. By implication it is she who 's'égare' from the accepted path of virtuous womanhood; who is the antithesis of traditional evocations of womanly virtue; who is an example to be avoided, and thus by definition exceptional, as opposed to necessarily representative of all revolutionary dead.[29]

Pagès's dialogue between Du Barry and Marie-Antoinette examines female intervention in (male) politics, presenting both women as having exploited their sexuality to manipulate their royal partners and have an impact on national events, in a heinous act of overstepping. The women condemn one another for this same act, but Du Barry also yokes Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette together as equally active agents in the events leading up to the Revolution:

> Si *Louis XVI et vous* aviez maintenu Maupou et ses cours supérieures, *vous auriez* gouverné la nation de la manière la plus absolue. Les parlemens que vous eûtes *l'un et l'autre* l'imprudence de rappeler, n'auraient pas eu celle de demander à grands cris ces Etats-Généraux, qui leur furent depuis, ainsi *qu'à vous et à votre auguste époux*, si funestes.[30]

However, if this view echoes contemporary critiques of the king's weakness and his wife's machinations, the fact that this is part of a dialogue, in which Marie-

[27] Pagès, in his Introduction, reflects on the benefits of this approach: 'Cette méthode est sans contredit une des plus ingénieuses qu'on puisse employer pour présenter toutes sortes de réflexions critiques, morales ou politiques; parce que l'action dramatique, dont elle est susceptible, leur donne plus de vie et de chaleur qu'elles n'en auraient dans les dissertations même les mieux écrites' (Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. vi). On the reshaping of Voltaire and Rousseau as subjects to suit their authors pre- and post-revolution, see Jessica Goodman, 'Between Celebrity and Glory? Textual After-Image in Late Eighteenth-Century France', *Celebrity Studies*, 7 (2016), 545–60.

[28] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 91.

[29] On women as moral exemplars in earlier texts, see Vera G. Lee, 'The Edifying Examples', in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. by Samia I. Spencer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 345–54.

[30] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 32; my emphases.

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Antoinette has the right to reply, turns it from condemnation into something closer to justification.[31] Rather than presenting the 'official', hackneyed (male) perspective of the negative impact of this female intervention, Pagès also provides the (female) perspective of the motivation behind the queen's actions. Instead of simply being criticized for leading her husband astray, Marie-Antoinette is permitted to give a rationale for why they acted as they did, evoking 'les obstacles de toute espèce dont Louis XVI et moi fûmes environnés', and when she suggests that Orléans conspired 'pour me précipiter du trône, ainsi que mon époux', the order in which she mentions herself and her husband is telling.[32] Later she places herself and her political actions even more overtly at the centre of the narrative, suggesting that Orléans's opposition stemmed from the fact that 'je m'étais opposée au mariage de son fils, avec une fille du comte d'Artois'.[33] Moreover, Du Barry's advice here on how she could have avoided her fall (for example, holding on to Turgot and Brienne as ministers)[34] legitimizes Marie-Antoinette's involvement in her husband's political life by never questioning it per se, but instead simply offering a modified strategy.

The dialogue genre here, then, serves to present a view that is missing from the official account; to modify the image of its historical protagonists that may survive in posterity, even as it purports merely to use them as true examples. It serves, too, to humanize them, so that, though not absolved of their crimes, they are viewed as more than these crimes, and thus saved from being wholly condemned. (The well-worn accusation of incest against Marie-Antoinette, for example, is evoked only to be roundly dismissed.) On both of these counts, we are once again in the territory of the theatrical revolutionary trial, at which women were — exceptionally and dangerously — permitted both a voice and a bodily presence to defend themselves. These trials in turn became political theatre, with the presentation of past cases on stage both serving to create a sense of community in those who 'witnessed' them, and — in more subversive vein — providing the opportunity to garner sympathy for condemned individuals through the proximity of their human figures, embodied by actors.[35]

The more negative side of the humanity inherent in the dialogue form is found in the fraught relationships often sketched between the women. Though the genre commonly suggests that all earthly jealousies are washed away in the memory-wiping water of the Lethe, in this dialogue between the two royal consorts there are moments of striking rivalry. At one point, for example, Du Barry comments that 'la même tombe, ou plutôt le même échafaud a tout réuni, et confondu les

[31] On contemporary critiques, see Dena Goodman, *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[32] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 33.

[33] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 33.

[34] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 34.

[35] See Robert, 'The Curtain Falls on Judicial Theater and Theatrical Justice', in *Dramatic Justice*, pp. 226–62, on the concerns around the re-enactment of the king's trial as sort of resurrection that might inspire renewed support. On the use of *dialogues des morts* in a similar vein, see *Commemorating Mirabeau: 'Mirabeau aux Champs-Élysées' and Other Texts*, ed. by Jessica Goodman (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2017), pp. 40–42.

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rivaux vaincus avec les rivaux triomphans: et vous-même avec moi'.[36] The order of the two pairings and the respective epithet implied as belonging to each woman suggests an attempt by Du Barry to place herself in the superior, 'triumphant' position. This rivalry has a basis in reality, for not only, unusually, did the two figures in the dialogue know each other in life, but the tension between the older royal mistress and the new dauphine was widely commented upon in the final years of Louis XV's reign. Marie-Antoinette, as the younger woman and the recognized royal spouse, was in the more powerful position, and reportedly refused to speak to Du Barry if they ever encountered one another. Here, the latter tries to get the last word in, in a rewritten *histoire* that moves beyond the end of *l'Histoire* proper, leaving it open to new conclusions.

A more overt jealousy still is evident in Pagès's dialogue between Arria and Corday, which focuses on the excesses to which fanaticism can lead when not governed by virtue. Arria, who committed suicide to give her husband the courage to do the same, cannot believe she has been placed below Marat's assassin in the hierarchy of the afterlife, and manages to convey the idea of possible manipulation on Corday's part even as she denies it:

> Je ne puis vous dissimuler que j'ai vu avec étonnement que moi, qui crois être au-dessus de vous dans le temple de la renommée, sois, par le jugement de Minos, placée au-dessous dans l'élysée. Si Minos n'était reconnu pour un juge inflexible, & qu'aucune considération étrangère à la justice ne peut séduire, et si votre ombre avait pu conserver la beauté dont on m'a dit que vous étiez douée, je le soupçonnerais de faiblesse et de partialité.[37]

The accusation of potentially playing on physical beauty is given weight by Arria's critique of Corday's coquetry during her trial: 'vous étant apperçue qu'un artiste dessinait votre portrait, vous vous tournâtes aussitôt vers lui, et donnâtes même à votre physionomie l'expression d'un doux et touchant sourire'.[38] This argument is ostensibly employed by Arria to suggest that the assassin acted out of a desire for glory, rather than selfless virtue. However, Corday draws attention to her interlocutor's more personal motivations: 'Je vois que les héroïnes rentrent quelque fois dans la classe ordinaire des femmes, puisque Arrie paraît me porter quelque envie.'[39] There is comedy in this all-too-human interaction that adds little to the purported moral aim of the text, but lies instead on the side of involving the reader through the induction of pleasure — a pleasure that, significantly for arguments later in this article, is produced by the women's words, rather than by the bodies that might traditionally be expected to perform this function.[40]

[36] *Colloques des morts*, p. 32.
[37] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 84.
[38] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 90.
[39] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 85.
[40] Thank you to Simon Park for pointing this out. On female authority and comedy, see David Bowe, 'Versions of a Feminine Voice: The Compiuta Donzella di Firenze', *Italian Studies*, 73 (2017), 1–14. The 'Avertissement' in the *Colloques des morts* is clear about aiming to please the reader through such techniques: 'Si l'on remarque dans ces dialogues quelques traits propres à distraire le lecteur des idées lugubres & sinistres qu'offre le spectacle de tant d'acteurs entachés d'incivisme, & coupables envers la patrie, c'est que j'ai cru devoir agir ainsi qu'au théatre, où par le mélange de la tragédie & de la comédie, les ris succèdent aux pleurs, parce que l'homme ne doit pas toujours rire, & ne peut pas toujours larmoyer' (*Colloques des morts*, p. vii).

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The same dialogue portrays another form of female relationship, which transforms jealousy into admiration. Du Barry suggests that Marie-Antoinette should have taken her own mother, empress alone for forty years, as a model, and become a ruler in her own right: 'Fille de Marie-Thérèse, pourquoi n'avez-vous pas alors imité son courage guerrier, et, au défaut de votre époux, ne vous êtes pas mise vous-même à la tête du parti puissant que vous auriez trouvé?'[41] Similarly, although in Pagès's dialogue Corday states, as she did in her own writings, that she took many of her models from the great men of antiquity who overthrew tyranny, she also describes Arria as an exemplar, telling her 'ce fut votre courage qui électrisa le mien'.[42] The women of the past, then, are potential figures for emulation despite their faults: by implication, the figures presented here might take on this same useful role for the readers of these collections in the commemorative model of the 'grands hommes' outlined above; exemplars not by virtue of their simple appearance here, but through their actions as discussed and elaborated on in the dialogues.[43] This matriarchal twist on the most literal version of posterity — patriarchal lineage — is radical: it draws attention to the uneasy necessity for a female presence even in the crucial, male-dominated arena of securing male descent (the role Marie-Antoinette was supposed to play at Versailles), but it also suggests, in the context of a Revolution that is cutting such lineage off for the aristocracy, that women can create a new generation by means other than the biological.[44]

The two dialogues involving Corday engage more directly still with the precise nature of how an individual's actions are remembered. In Pagès's collection, Corday tells Arria that her murder of Marat was worthy of more praise than Arria's suicide, since the latter was not a selfless act but was instead performed to serve her husband and avoid being forced to outlive the man she loved: too female an action to be truly worthy of going down in history.

> Vous trouviez une consolation bien douce et un encouragement bien puissant dans la double certitude de ne pas survivre à un époux chéri, et qu'il ne vous survivrait pas. Pourriez-vous d'ailleurs disconvenir qu'il ne fallût plus de courage pour braver, comme je l'ai fait, les fers, les bourreaux, & tous les apprêts qui précèdent ou accompagnent ceux qu'on mène à l'échafaud.[45]

In the *Colloques des morts*, however, Corday's own action is described in gendered terms. Roland praises the assassin for not having given away the secret of her plot to kill Marat (silence here equated with a discretion that is perceived as beyond the capacities of women): 'Je connois mon sexe, & pour une femme, ce n'est pas une médiocre vertu.'[46] But even when it comes from another woman, Corday is not

[41] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 35.
[42] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 85.
[43] Indeed, Mazeau notes that soon after Marat's death, Cécile Renault set out to kill Robespierre with very similar words to Corday herself, suggesting that she had become a figure for emulation almost immediately (*Le Bain de l'histoire*, p. 231).
[44] Thank you to one of the anonymous reviewers, who made this link.
[45] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 89.
[46] *Colloques des morts*, p. 61.

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happy with this type of recognition, countering that: 'J'aurois cru que mon courage vous auroit plus frappé, que le silence dont vous parlez.'[47] It is her murderous deed, not her uncharacteristic discretion, that she feels is most deserving of being remembered: she was, she says, following the path that glory had set out for her.

The real Corday had made a serious attempt in life to shape how her actions were viewed. In fact, a letter she wrote justifying her actions is the only piece of direct quotation to appear in any of these dialogues, despite many of the women involved having produced some form of written output.[48] Pagès has her cite a moment from that letter, or, rather, a quotation that she included in that letter: Thomas Corneille's 'Le crime fait la honte, et non pas l'échafaud.'[49] This letter was therefore presumably sufficiently well known for Pagès to have had access to it (though, oddly, the editor of her *Œuvres* in 1863 claims it was only published in 1838).[50] That this recontextualized direct quotation (itself a quotation from a literary predecessor) should appear at a moment in the text at which the fictionalized Corday is most directly trying to shape her own reception in posterity works metatextually to demonstrate that any written attempt to control how one's own actions are viewed is necessarily subject to the rewritings of one's successors.

Gouges is presented in the *Colloques des morts* as being absolutely aware of her own posterity, and of trying to master it, just as she did in life. She is introduced by her interlocutor, the Polish General Józef Miaczinski, as 'une femme jalouse d'acquérir de la célébrité, qui sans savoir écrire faisoit chaque mois des écrits'.[51] It is ironic that Miaczinski begins his damning phrase with 'je vous reconnois', implying that Gouges's attempts to make a name have been at least partially successful, albeit not perhaps in the way that she had hoped. In reality, like Corday, Gouges was not at all successful in fixing her image as a literary great: her plays and pamphlets (her specifically female *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* aside) remained largely unprinted or unstudied for centuries, and have only relatively recently been reincorporated into literary studies of the period outside of a purely 'female' context.[52]

In her discussion with Corday, the prolific writer Roland has surprisingly little to say about either posterity, or her own legacy. Yet perhaps the topic of their debate—which, despite touching on their ongoing, posthumous interest in politics,

[47] *Colloques des morts*, p. 61.

[48] Marie-Antoinette and Du Barry were only ever represented, in more or less truthful text and image, including the latter's invented *Mémoires* (J.-S.-A. Damas-Hinard and E.-L. Lamothe Langon, *Mémoires de Mme Du Barri, sur la ville, la cour et les salons de Paris sous Louis XV* (Paris: Chroniques populaires, 1857)). For Corday, we have not only records of her trial, but a series of letters and an 'Adresse aux français' (Corday, *Œuvres politiques de Charlotte de Corday, décapitée à Paris le 17 juillet 1793, réunies par un bibliophile normand* (Caen: E. Le Gost, 1863)). In prison, Roland drafted her *Appel à l'impartiale postérité* (Paris: Louvet, [n.d.]). Finally, Gouges wrote plays, pamphlets, and *mémoires*, and was constantly conscious of trying to shape her reputation; see Gregory S. Brown, 'The Self-Fashionings of Olympe de Gouges, 1784–1789', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34 (2001), 383–401.

[49] *Colloques des morts*, p. 87. For the original phrase, see Thomas Corneille, *Le Comte d'Essex* (1678), ed. by Wendy Gibson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), IV. iii.

[50] Corday, *Œuvres politiques*, p. 33.

[51] *Colloques des morts*, p. 101.

[52] For discussions of the need to rehabilitate her, see Sophie Mousset, *Olympe de Gouges et les droits de la femme* (Paris: Félin, 2003), p. 16.

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revolves around love, and the influence that men have had on both their lives and actions—is not all that surprising for a woman whose whole writing life existed in relation to men. For much of her life she was an unacknowledged ghostwriter for her husband, and her posthumously published *mémoires*, finally in her own voice, and even entitled *Appel a l'impartiale postérité*, were not only edited and published, but also titled as such by a male friend, Louis-Augustin-Guillaume Bosc, who specifically expressed his concern about sullying her feminine virtue through exposure to the public sphere.[53] Bosc perhaps took at face value her claim in this document that if she ever wrote a book, 'ce sera[it] donc sous le nom d'autrui [. . .] car je me mangerois les doigts avant de me faire auteur'.[54] Though the anonymous author of the *Colloques des morts* does not engage directly with Roland's attitude to self-fashioning or posterity, her portrayal here as a woman conscious that she was 'séduite par un mari qui m'entraîna dans le précipice' seems to echo Bosc's desire to protect her virtuous image in spite of public exposure—though whether or not this was Roland's own desire, denied as she was the chance to speak her own defence speech at her trial, remains unclear.[55]

It is not surprising that these dialogues for the most part return time and again to the question of posterity, for they are in part acts of remembrance and (re)writing. As a result, any discussion within them of what the afterlives of their protagonists on earth might look like is by nature self-reflexive. In purporting to allow their subjects a glimpse into their own posterity, not only do they frequently touch on the theme of glory, but in their very substance they are part of the complex game of imagination set out by Marmontel in the *Encyclopédie*, where he describes how to acquire 'gloire' by projecting yourself into the future, imagining that you are glorious, and working out what you would have to have done to get there.[56] As readers explore the afterlife of another, they are therefore encouraged to consider—as the writer also inevitably does — their own probable afterlife; if not in literal terms, certainly in terms of the discussions they might witness about themselves among their descendants — and how they might like to respond, if they had the opportunity.[57]

The line between what survives and what is lost in posterity might, at least in part, be seen as a gendered one, thanks to the places and genres in which women's words are traditionally stored. When, in his own 1683 *Dialogues des morts*, Fontenelle stages Dido (who did not write her own narrative) complaining about how Virgil has misrepresented her, the text in which this complaint takes place is itself a response to and re-rewriting of this same represented figure:

[53] See Lesley H. Walker, 'Sweet and Consoling Virtue: The Memoirs of Madame Roland', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34 (2001), 403–19.

[54] Roland, *Appel à l'impartiale postérité*, p. 26.

[55] *Colloques des morts*, p. 68.

[56] Marmontel, 'Gloire', in *Encyclopédie, ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert, 28 vols (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1751–72), VII, 716–21.

[57] The idea of using an imagined future outcome to encourage action in the present has been repackaged in modern times as a management technique called the 'pre-mortem'; see Gary Klein, 'Performing a Project Premortem', *Harvard Business Review*, 85 (2007), 18–19.

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> Il a plu à un Poète, nommé Virgile, de changer une Prude aussi sévère que moi, en une jeune Coquette, qui se laisse charmer de la bonne mine d'un Etranger dès le premier jour qu'elle le voit. Toute mon histoire est renversée.[58]

And this new, 'corrected' presentation of her is just such another version of her 'histoire'. But in fact, the appearance of our guillotined women, many of whom did try to exercise control over their posterity, alongside their similarly altered male contemporaries, reminds us that women and men are equally apt to induce this speculative reimagining. That the quotation from 'Corday' is already itself a repurposed quotation from Thomas Corneille is proof enough of this fact: posterity, like the 'tombe ou [. . .] échafaud' evoked by Du Barry, above, can be an indiscriminate leveller in this regard. Thus it is not (or at least not solely) as silent or speaking women, but as public figures *tout court* that they function in this manner.[59]

Indeed, many of the functions of these women examined so far can be considered in the same light. Men just as much as women may represent missing historical viewpoints, present themselves for 'retrial', examine the exercise of power, reveal the humanity of public figures, and — as a result, and most crucially of all—induce speculation on how people might be reimagined in posterity; and for the most part the apparently gendered features that contribute to these functions can equally be explained as pertaining to individual circumstances. Despite their individual celebrity histories, those portrayed here *are* representative of the multitudes of revolutionary dead evoked by Gouges in the very fact of their deaths, and in their resulting susceptibility, like all dead, to be judged and rejudged (or even, as Gouges again suggests, forgotten entirely).[60] Their status as public figures merely throws this capacity to be rewritten by one's successors into even sharper distinction. There is, however, one final theme, prevalent in all five dialogues, which appears distinctly differently when discussed by women. This is the theme most apparent in the extract presenting the 'intellectuel[le]' Gouges with which we began: that of the female body.

Both dialogues concerning Du Barry have a clear focus on vanity, and the futile nature of earthly pleasures. The moral for her dialogue with Marie-Antoinette reads: 'Faut-il que ce ne soit qu'à la mort que nous reconnaissions tout le néant,

[58] Fontenelle, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 59. On Dido's afterlives, see also Helen J. Swift, *Gender, Writing, and Performance: Men Defending Women in Late Medieval France (1440–1538)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 26–33.

[59] See also discussion in the field of celebrity studies on this matter. John G. Cawelti distinguishes between literary fame, concerned with the words produced, and celebrity, focused on the producer and his life ('The Writer as a Celebrity: Some Aspects of American Literature as Popular Culture', *Studies in American Fiction*, 5 (1977), 161–74); Ellis Cashmore describes a historical shift from achievement-based fame to media-driven renown ('History', in *Celebrity Culture* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 21–49); and Rebecca Braun sketches a 'disembodied' authorial name, cut off from both physical and textual body ('Cultural Impact and the Power of Myth in Popular Public Constructions of Authorship', in *Cultural Impact in the German Context: Studies in Transmission, Reception, and Influence*, ed. by Rebecca Braun and Lyn Marven (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 78–96). For more on celebrity in this period, including Marie-Antoinette herself, see Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques: l'invention de la célébrité, 1750–1850* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

[60] *Colloques des morts*, p. 107.

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toute la vanité des grandeurs et des plaisirs?'[61] Du Barry describes herself as 'une courtisanne [. . .] amollie par les délices et les voluptés, et depuis par mon élévation', and Marie-Antoinette admits she was 'enivrée par ce même triple délire'.[62] The weakness they describe is related to their lives of physical luxury: though notions of softness and delirium may have a stereotypically female tone, luxury is often connoted as feminizing all its subjects, so we cannot necessarily view this as a presentation of women per se.[63] But it is significant that in the concluding moral, when Marie-Antoinette has learned the vanity of all she cared about in life, she places physical beauty first of all in the list of things that death destroys: 'La beauté se flétrit, la puissance nous échappe, l'esprit et la santé s'affaiblissent, la tombe s'ouvre et nous dévore.'[64]

There is something of a paradox in this discussion of beauty, for of course, unlike at the revolutionary tribunals at which they were tried in life, the physical body is entirely missing in the afterlife: we might imagine these executed women as either disembodied heads, or mere formless spirits or ideas. But given the extent to which the state of being female is associated with the body — not just in terms of beauty and ageing, but in terms of assumed frailty, and the reproductive functions that are so key to the revolutionary conception of womanhood — it is perhaps unsurprising that this lack of a body is also explicitly referenced in all three of the *Colloques*, not just in Gouges's search and her conclusion that the afterlife is a merely cerebral place. Du Barry spends much of her dialogue with Catherine Albout talking about the physical comforts of her provision at court, yet by the end of the conversation her focus has changed, and 'la du Barry, qui n'existoit que par les sens, sait enfin maintenant réfléchir'.[65] Meanwhile Roland, in the third *Colloque*, claims that 'j'oublie tout l'attirail de la galanterie, le souvenir des romans, les plaisirs sensuels, pour vivre d'une manière intellectuelle dans un pays où il n'y a que des esprits'.[66] Just a few pages later, she notes that 'chacun fait de la mort un simulacre qu'il arrange d'après sa manière de vivre & de penser' (p. 67): the fact that the women begin with the expectation of deathly physicality whilst the male author instead imagines an afterlife of the mind is, in this context, revealing about the relative 'manière de vivre et de penser' of the two genders — at least as imagined by the anonymous author themself.

The repeated return to this theme forms a striking contrast to the dialogues involving men in the same collection. Men, in this imagined afterlife, have a very different relationship to the loss of their body: on the rare occasions on which they mention it at all, they are either relieved to have no longer to concern themselves with the tiresome procedures of dressing and resting it ('rien de plus agréable de n'avoir plus à se lever, à s'habiller', says Miaczinski), or dismayed that

[61] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 38.
[62] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 38.
[63] See *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 165–206.
[64] Pagès, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 38.
[65] *Colloques des morts*, p. 141.
[66] *Colloques des morts*, p. 64.

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they will now miss out on the pleasures of satisfying it with food and drink (the merchant Kolly laments: 'un financier sans manger, [. . .] il n'y a pas de plus grand malheur').[67] Never, though, do we have a sense of their very existence, their very *self* being tied to the presence of their body. For the women, in contrast, even in dialogues that seem to focus on political power and influence (such as that between Marie-Antoinette and Du Barry), this power is born from their sexuality: thus, the notion of their body is ever-present.[68]

The dialogue between Du Barry and Albout refers to the royal mistress's life as a series of 'rôles' in 'le théâtre le plus brillant'.[69] Rousseau's description of acting as near to prostitution in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* is here reversed, with Du Barry's relationship to the king, yoked earlier in the text to the trade of the 'femme publique' Albout with the phrase 'notre profession', further debased by its comparison to the false and immodest bodily display that is appearance on stage.[70] But this metaphor is telling, too, for its reminder that all these women are 'publiques': appearing before an audience thanks to their status or their political choices, their private, domestic, reproductive, womanly bodies thus 'doubled' by a public-facing, collectively created version, which is especially troubling to the male vision of womanhood in its visibility (in particular, when coupled with words, at the tribunal), and also complicates any attempt (by the women, or their successors) to understand or shape their own reputation.[71]

Indeed, in the Gouges dialogue with which we began, the theme of the body is explicitly linked to the notions of posterity and celebrity. When the Polish general says to Gouges 'je vous reconnois', we might wonder what exact form this recognition takes: he mentions her physical features as well as her writing (she is 'aussi maligne que belle'),[72] but just pages later she states that the former are lost. This discussion is then already engaging with the question of what survives into the afterlife, from a life in which both woman and work were publicly recognized. Later, Gouges's interlocutor recalls that she wished to become the model for a sculpture representing *la Liberté*, 'pour la raison que cela dureroit plus que vos ouvrages'.[73]

[67] *Colloques des morts*, pp. 105, 84. See also the journalist Pierre Lebrun, who is relieved to be free of the concerns of a poor harvest, and of potential illness (p. 59), and Nicolas Luckner, who, on being told that he is 'bien mort', retorts 'ne pouvant plus boire, je le crois' (p. 73).

[68] Indeed, Dorinda Outram argues that the Revolution defined the monarchy as 'a regime characterized by the corruption of power through the [sexual] agency of women', and thus itself as a 'purging of the female from the body politic'; Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class, and Political Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 125–26. On the different meanings ascribed to Marie-Antoinette's body at various moments of her life, see Lynn Hunt, 'The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution' (pp. 117–38) and Pierre Saint-Amand, 'Terrorizing Marie-Antoinette' (pp. 253–72), both in *Marie-Antoinette*, ed. by Dena Goodman.

[69] *Colloques des morts*, p. 134.

[70] *Colloques des morts*, p. 128; see also Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert sur son article 'Genève'* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 163.

[71] See also Hunt, 'The Many Bodies', p. 131, on how this multiplied body functioned for Marie-Antoinette in particular. In the Pagès dialogue, Marie-Antoinette emphasizes that 'j'étais mère de deux enfants' (*Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 36), and Outram notes that Roland's writings contained much material relating to her physical experiences (including childbirth), which was cut from early editions, suggesting a contemporary discomfort with female physicality in the public sphere (*The Body and the French Revolution*, pp. 130, 133–50).

[72] *Colloques des morts*, p. 101.

[73] *Colloques des morts*, p. 107.

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On the surface, this is part of Miaczinski's mockery of Gouges's desire to be remembered at all costs. However, his comment also extends the examination of whether ideas or image survive more successfully, shifting the locus from the afterlife (what goes with you) to the world that is left behind (what remains). As the dialogue nears its conclusion, Gouges herself gives a yet more pessimistic view of her likely fate in posterity: 'laissez les babillards s'exercer sur la terre à mes dépens, quoique les morts se succèdent aujourd'hui de si près que l'un fait oublier l'autre'.[74] Perhaps no record of either body or words will survive — suggests the woman who speaks of her beautiful body, in a dialogue written after her death.

This, then, is the feature for which these specifically female dialogues are of most interest. The general musings on the workings of posterity and the notion of human glory outlined above can be traced in a range of texts in the genre, but the focus on what it means for one's identity to lose a body is far more novel. By presenting women who are speaking and only speaking, Pagès and the anonymous *Colloques* author play on both the trope of female speech and silence and the (now commonplace) notion of the female body as a site of contested meaning to consider the implications of the genre in which these women appear. For of course, these dialogues — in the fiction of the afterlife, and in their textual form — are made only of words. Their protagonists are not even talking heads; rather, as in the example of the comic interaction described above, they are purely verbal constructions. And in drawing attention to this fact, through the presentation of ghostly dead women whose identity, even as constructed in words and by others, has been so bound to the physical, the texts invite us to move beyond the female, and to reconsider what happens to any individual's identity once it is released both from the body, and from the control that body can attempt to impose over its dissemination through speech and writing.

After Corday's execution, her severed head was allegedly lifted before the crowd and slapped. Corday mythology reports variously that she blushed, or responded with an expression of indignation.[75] She thus became a case study for whether the individual retains any sensation or consciousness after death. As the supposed perpetrator of the slap, François Legros, was being tried and imprisoned for this offence against a woman, the revolutionary authorities were having Corday's body tested to see if she was in fact a virgin (and not, as they believed, being controlled by a male lover). It was found that she was.[76] This conglomeration of events around the physical body of an executed women plays into exactly the same questions raised by our dialogues: What happens to the self after death? What becomes of the physical? How far does the lifeless body continue to reveal

[74] *Colloques des morts*, p. 107. See also the dialogue between Roland and Corday, in which the latter notes, regarding their interpretation of ancient texts, that 'la femme déguise son visage, et l'homme son esprit' (*Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p. 70).

[75] Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution*, pp. 118–21.

[76] Nina Corazzo and Catherine R. Montfort, 'Charlotte Corday: *femme-homme*', in *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. by Montfort, pp. 33–54 (p. 45).

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something about the dead individual? Who controls this narrative? The gendered aspects of Corday's after-death experience are also striking: blushing is a peculiarly feminine sign of shame or modesty; Legros is considered to have contravened the social code because he slaps a *woman* (albeit a dead one); yet the physical violation constituted by checking her sexual status (itself an act predicated on her gender) is presented as a pressing political need, and therefore legitimate.[77]

If Corday's guillotined, female body was already a site for examining the nature and constitution of the self — in life and death — then the dialogues, staging Corday alongside her guillotined female peers, merely extend this examination. As the nineteenth century progressed, romanticism would build upon the burgeoning notion of the individual, as examined by Rousseau — for whom the physical, experiencing self, the self as constituted in text, and the (posthumous) self as imagined by others were all key concerns. But these themes are already under the surface, too, in these minor revolutionary texts. And by focusing on the fictional worlds (or afterlives) these texts create, rather than their potentially commemorative function for the real women they present, we can bypass the relevance of their limited reception at the time or since, and consider instead how they redeploy hackneyed understandings of female speech and physicality to play into this evolving discussion that is so crucial in the development of modernity. Paradoxically, in the end, in these dialogues it is not these women's reimagined words — their talking heads—but their missing bodies that signify most of all.

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[77] Outram argues that this interest in the body of a young women (even if the slap itself never happened) testifies to a concern to draw together moral and physical 'sensibilité' in a single individual; in other words a concern about the unified, dignified body-image of the (ruling) middle classes, as compared to the 'wild "passions" and "energies" of the lower-class political movements' (*The Body and the French Revolution*, p. 121). For her, then, it is also an examination of the 'self', but to different ends.