FURIES OF THE GUILLOTINE:
FEMALE REVOLUTIONARIES IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND IN VICTORIAN
LITERARY IMAGINATION

A Thesis

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The idea of female revolutionaries struck a particular chord of terror both during and after the French Revolution, as represented in both legislation and popular literary imagination. The level and form of female participation in the events of the Revolution varied among social classes. Female participation during the Revolution led to an overwhelming fear of women demanding and practicing democratic rights in both a nonviolent manner (petitioning for education, demanding voting rights, serving on committees), and in a violent manner (engaging in armed protest and violent striking). The terror surrounding female democratic participation was manifested in the fear of the female citizen, or citoyenne. In 1793, these apprehensions led to a severe backlash, in part due to confusion between competing images and contrasting roles of revolutionary women produced by the revolutionary government. The first image was the respectable Republican Mother calling for education and citizenship through publications, speeches, and petitions. This argument was a strong manipulation of revolutionary language; women were conceding to the biological differences between men and women and acknowledging that they were mothers, but arguing that they must be educated and involved in public life in order to educate future Republicans. The second image of women conflicted with the first; this was the more intimidating plebian woman of the streets, armed with pikes, exercising her right to vote. These conflicting and inconsistent accounts confused and alarmed many male revolutionaries to the point of the resilient backlash and crackdown on female freedoms in 1793. The legacy of women actively inserting themselves into the events of the Revolution extended into the nineteenth century across the Anglophone world. Many novels
reveal the popular literary imagination in the post-revolutionary nineteenth century. Most notable was the connection of these dichotomous images of revolutionary women to the Victorian Era “Angel in the House” and the “fallen” woman, manifest notably in Charles Dickens’s *Tale of Two Cities*, reflecting the male anxieties of women exercising democratic liberties.

__________________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Mona Siegel

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Chapter One: Introduction

“Ever busily winding the golden thread that bound them all together, weaving the service of her happy influence through the tissue of all their lives, and making it predominate nowhere, Lucie heard in the echoes of years none but friendly and soothing sounds. Her husband’s step was strong and prosperous among them; her father’s firm and equal.”

Description of Lucie Manette

“She was absolutely without pity. If she had ever had the virtue in her, it had quite gone out of her. It was nothing to her, that an innocent man was to die for the sins of his forefathers; she saw, not him, but them. It was nothing to her, that his wife was to be made a widow and his daughter an orphan; that was insufficient punishment, because they were her natural enemies and her prey, and as such had no right to life. To appeal to her, was made hopeless by her having no sense of pity, even for herself.”

Description of Madame Defarge

Written fifty years after the end of the French Revolution, Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* reveals varying understandings of female democratic participation during the First Republic. Dickens includes two central female characters in his novel: Lucy Manette, the Victorian example of female innocence, timidity, and obedience, and Madame Defarge, the maniacal, murderous, overtly masculine Jacobin woman of the Revolution. Dickens was not the first to present a dichotomous image of female responses to times of war and revolution, however. During the French Revolution women’s activism already generated severe anxieties among male policy-makers forced to debate the question of female political rights. Women’s participation, through the written word, militant action, and political gatherings, during the first four years of the

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Revolution struck a particular chord of terror among male citizens both during and after the events in question. Dickens reveals these fears through his female characters and works to implicitly reinforce the separate spheres ideology. By their words and deeds, women – feminists, militants, and club members – demanded that revolutionary men live up to their proclaimed ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The demand in turn led to a severe backlash from men in positions of power who attempted to limit and silence women as political beings, restricting their public roles and pushing them toward the domestic private sphere.

The French Revolution from 1789-1799 was a time of radical political and cultural changes. These changes included the establishment of a standard metric system, a new calendar system, various political clubs, and most importantly, a new republican government. The revolutionary discussion regarding human rights triggered a corollary discussion regarding women’s rights as fellow human beings. Women took their place alongside men, toppling the absolutist monarchy in favor of a constitutional monarchy and later calling for the establishment of the Republic. While the culture of France evolved with its changing political structure, women actively inserted themselves into the Revolution and integrated their own interests into revolutionary ideology. Though revolutionary men sought to unite the country around female imagery, such as Lady Liberty or Marianne, they were less enthusiastic about real female revolutionaries. 

*Woman* as an abstract allegorical symbol of both the Republic and the Revolution reveals more about the men’s realities than women’s. In actuality, women became rebellious forces in the Revolution, through words and actions. They pushed against a mainstream
society that worked to limit women through a gendered order, revealing themselves as political beings and setting a precedent for women for centuries to come.

**Historical Context:**

French women’s militancy both mirrored and shaped the broader stages of the French Revolution. In the 1780s, the members of the Third Estate were unhappy with the absolutist monarchy of King Louis XVI and looked to the constitutional monarchy of England as an example of how to reform their government. Royal authority had already begun to slip due to the religious wars of the sixteenth century, as well as changing ideas that came later with the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. European intellectuals began to think more philosophically and scientifically, using reason and observation to explain global phenomena, taking a step back from tradition and religion. This new trend in thinking, in turn, challenged the King’s “divine” right to rule.

This trend, combined with the unrest of the French Third Estate, came to a boiling point in the 1780s when the French government went bankrupt and the French people were hungry. In response, the King called a meeting of the Estates General in the spring of 1789, gathering representatives from all three Estates to grant permission to raise taxes. The Estates General had precedent in past crisis, but in 1789, the Third Estate, representing eighty-five percent of the French population, broke with tradition and protested its unequal representation. As a result, representatives stormed out of the meeting hall and took the Tennis Court Oath, swearing to come together, however and whenever necessary, until France had a constitutional government, effectively creating
Thus began the events of the Revolution, leading to the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, the drafting of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” in August 1789, and the creation of the constitutional monarchy of 1791. By 1792, following the king’s attempted escape, radical revolutionaries seized the reigns of power, abolished the monarchy, and created a Republic, which would endure in one form or another until 1799.

Throughout this decade of revolutionary events, women never achieved full active citizenship, but rather they remained passive citizens without the ability to vote or hold public office. Despite the restrictions on female citizenship, or perhaps because of them, French women seized both pens and arms to advance their social conditions and political rights. While there were many limitations placed on women in the French Revolution, the civil rights they obtained – such as the right to equal inheritance – and their role in the revolutionary society shows advancement in their status as French citizens and feminist thinkers.

**Historiography:**

Despite the sweeping historiography of virtually every aspect of the Revolution in France, it was not until the late twentieth century that historians began to write about female revolutionaries, and even longer for historians to suggest how central a role women and gender played in defining the events and ideas of the Revolution: “Women

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are presented apart from the Revolution or beside it…. Although women have become subjects worthy of historical interest, they are denied status as active subjects of Revolutionary history.”⁴ Women’s roles in revolutionary settings, often mythologized or generalized by writers, are represented as either the bloodthirsty woman armed with a pike or the obedient housewife. In recent decades, however, feminist historians have recounted the history of women’s involvement in the Revolution, demonstrating how central their experiences were to their nation and their sex. Historians like Joan Landes, Lynn Hunt, Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Applewhite, and Dominique Godineau have painted a more complete picture of female revolutionary activism: “Investigations of the roots of women’s social protest; the recovery of hundreds of petitions by women of different classes, regions, and occupations; analyses of women’s clubs and their relation to the social welfare of the indigent; interpretations of the significance of the national festivals in which women played a predominant part – all of these have revealed a long-buried world of social and political engagement.”⁵ These scholars have recovered women’s revolutionary experience and debated the legacies of the revolutionary era up to the present day.

Although feminist social historians – such as Jane Abray – had begun to revive interest in French female revolutionaries in the 1970s, the revisionist historians associated with the cultural turn in the late twentieth century helped make gender a central lens for


understanding the Revolution anew. The surge in gender history in the 1980s, primarily cultural history, focused on relations between men and women, concepts of masculinity and femininity, and the apprehensions that followed. This surge was due in part to the rise in gender studies as the theoretical base for rewriting history in the 1980s. Gender historians in the mid-1980s argued that to adequately study and understand power structures, social relationships, and social discourse, one must incorporate masculinity and femininity into the analysis. These feminist revisionist historians include Lynn Hunt, Dominique Godineau, Olwen Hufton, and Joan Scott to name only a few who specialized in women’s conditions, sexual difference, and feminism during the time of the French Revolution. My thesis most closely aligns with the work of Scott, Hunt, and Godineau, drawing inspiration from the analyses of women active in the Revolution, the apprehensions that resulted from their actions and writing, and the reinforcement of stricter gender codes in response to those apprehensions. My study draws from both women’s history and gender history, focusing on the actions of real women, while similarly analyzing relations between men and women and the semiotic expression of gender anxiety resulting from female revolutionary activity.

Historians began by retelling the history of women’s roles in the Revolution through a study of women’s experience and the effect of the events on those experiences. Early historians, such as Jane Abray, celebrated female revolutionaries for their activism and aggressive insertion into the conversations of men. Abray argued that the break away
from domesticity was one of the resounding legacies from the French Revolution. Later women’s historians, such as Dominique Godineau, took Abray’s argument and went a step further, relying on a more extensive array of archival sources to portray women’s activism in the face of strong opposition.

Dominique Godineau’s study *Women in Paris and Their French Revolution* has been particularly influential in both the social and cultural history of the Revolution. Telling the story of the common women who collectively gathered to incite riots in the streets and march in armed campaigns, Godineau gives the revolutionary women agency as active instigators of the Revolution. Much of the history of women written before the surge of revisionist studies in the twentieth century focused on the events women in the Revolution participated in and whether or not they benefitted from it. Godineau expands on this analysis by focusing on the legacies they left behind and the influence they had on feminism in the future. Godineau discusses the significance of gender and social status on women’s political understanding and their overall activism. Different from many earlier histories, Godineau’s research reveals women’s political activism as complex, multi-faceted, and varying along class lines, as well as by political proclivities. Combining her gendered analysis with a detailed understanding of women’s political activism, Godineau presents a holistic argument on the reality of women, of all classes, participating in the French Revolution and how the their role as instigators roused intense concerns within the male population.

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With the start of the Linguistic Turn, a philosophical, theoretical, and cultural shift in historiography, gender history began to influence Revolutionary scholarship. Joan Wallach Scott, Lynn Hunt, and Joan Landes represent this cultural shift by focusing on gendered politics during and after the Revolution. Scott, often referenced as the founding theorist of this new school of gender history, focused her analysis of the French Revolution on real women, such as Olympe de Gouges, and the paradox of revolutionary-era women relying on patriarchy and sexual difference in order to fight for individual rights. Scott argues that the gendering of political discourse in Western democracy excluded women, but early feminists worked to use the gendered discourse in their favor.

Incorporating the French poststructuralist Jacques Derrida and the French philosopher Michel Foucault’s concepts of language and power, Scott attempts to define gender and the social relationship of gender to political structures. In her 1996 study “A Woman Who Has Only Paradoxes to Offer,” Scott works against traditional concepts of feminist schools of thought, arguing that early feminist arguments must be understood in a historical context, as well as with a clear understanding of “Woman’s identity” at the historical moment of study.7 Scott studies how feminists during the French Revolution attacked concepts of inequality and the ways in which they fought for their own rights and equality, through public protest and the written word. The “paradox” she refers to in her title is the understanding that revolutionary-era female activists were forced to rely on patriarchal arguments of sexual difference to defend the call for women’s individual...
rights. Readings of early feminist authors must be understood through Enlightenment thought, says Scott. The conflict between political theory and practice “perpetuated in our histories as so many natural or functional ‘realities,’ thus obscuring not only their relative meanings but all contests about them.” Scott acknowledges that the terminology used may have be different, but that feminism, as a term designated to the advancement of women, was in play in women’s quest for rights. Reading the feminist writings developed during the revolutionary era is “a useful perspective for reading the history of politics and political theory in the French Revolution and for considering questions about contemporary feminist politics.” Explaining the backlash against women’s political identity, Scott points to the Enlightenment ideals of the natural body as so ingrained in French ideology that the male revolutionaries were raised to accept that women’s biology destined them to a domestic role, “but the connection between ‘natural’ bodies and ‘natural’ rights was neither transparent nor straightforward. The meanings of nature, rights, and bodies, as well as the relationships among them, were at issue in the revolutionary debates and these contests about meanings were contests about power.”

Men argued that nature and the body were one in the same; the theory of women’s biology naturally restricting them from political positions was firmly planted in the belief that sexual difference was a natural order. Scott is an important piece of the historiography of women in the Revolution and the conversation of early feminism.

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8 Ibid, 114.
9 Ibid, 115-6.
10 Ibid, 103.
Feminist revisionist histories inspired scholars to study women’s history further by exploring representations of women and the iconography produced. My analysis builds on this scholarship, as I am analyzing how female political expression led to widespread cultural repercussions and a strictly defined gender order. Historians such as Lynn Hunt and Joan Landes pioneered the use of revolutionary iconography commissioned by male citizens both during and after the French Revolution to understand how republican culture itself became gendered.

Historian Lynn Hunt helped lead the drive away from Marxist questions regarding class to cultural questions regarding gender and politics in her 1984 study, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, Hunt determines that republican political culture, shaped during the Revolution largely excluded women from the “universality” of rights. Her book focuses on the relationship between the power structures of politics and society. In her book *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Hunt argues the revolutionaries deliberately broke with the Old Regime to create a new national and republican community and culture.¹¹ Hunt analyzes the significance of symbols and revolutionary language, revealing an emerging political culture that excluded women from political life and public positions. The “new nation” that the Revolution was attempting to put into place is revealed as a contradictory attempt to grant universal rights to only half of the population. Hunt shows that most male revolutionaries wanted women to become the Rousseauian gentile mother in the household, driven by a sense of

patriotism, but without a voice in the public sphere. Hunt argues that the backlash began when men understood women’s intentions to become overtly political beings, and then the terminology of the Revolution changed to legislation and speeches highlighting exclusion and womanly morality.

Joan Landes, like Hunt, explores the gendering of early republican discourse, arguing even more pointedly that republicanism was an explicitly masculinist ideological invention. Landes argues that women’s political downfall began with “the fall of the politically influential women of the absolutist court and salon of Old Regime France.”

With the collapse of French absolutism and an “older patriarchy,” Landes argues, emerged an establishment of “a more pervasive gendering of the public sphere.” Landes claims that feminism and republicanism could not go hand in hand during the Revolution; instead, feminism emerged from women adopting specific language to win over the “highly gendered bourgeois” society by playing on women’s “natural” domesticity. The adoption of this gendered language, by revolutionary-era female writers, proves their intelligence and logic, as they understood the necessary tactics needed to be heard. Landes insists, “the exclusion of women from the bourgeois public was not incidental but central to its incarnation, and that, however marginal, feminist theory and practice supply

12 Ibid, 8.
14 Ibid, 2.
15 Ibid, 2.
important historical and theoretical vantage points from which to re-view the modern public’s emergence.”¹⁶ Landes argues that the Revolution was obstructing for women, in that democratic politics in France became a gendered structure built on women’s exclusion.

Hunt, Godineau, and Scott all help reveal how female activism in the revolutionary era challenged cultural norms and gendered apprehensions that French women struggled to calm. My thesis builds on this work, but it also seeks to show the broad geographic scope of resonance of the emerging gendered order. Indeed, one of if not the most enduring cultural representations of revolutionary events came not from the pen of Danton or Robespierre, but from that of English writer Charles Dickens. By incorporating Dickens’s canonical *A Tale of Two Cities* into my analysis, I am seeking to, in a small way, bridge the gap separating historical and literary analyses of the Revolution. My thesis incorporates both historical and literary analysis, to reveal how anxieties generated by female revolutionary action was represented through iconography and literary imagination. Closely influenced by the analyses of Godineau, Hunt, and Scott, my thesis attempts to place women actors within the historical context of the French Revolution, reveal their revolutionary action against male opposition, and to analyze the cultural reverberations of these actions and apprehensions across the Western world. The literary analysis of my argument borrows from the criticism of scholars such as Lisa Robson and Harold Bloom, in tandem with Victorian gender historians, such as Mary Poovey and Sonya Rose. Robson argues that Dickens works to reinforce the

¹⁶ Ibid, 7.
separate spheres ideology by displaying his female characters as “natural” (British mother, pure, domestic) and “unnatural” (political, vengeful, public). Both Robson and Bloom, along with my analysis, reveal how Dickens’s retelling and reconstruction of the French Revolution say more about gender constructs in 1850s Victorian England than they say about France. Gender historians study the Victorian era as a time of rigid gender roles and strict separate spheres ideologies within Western thought. My study combines the gender analyses of Victorian gender relations with the realities of French Revolution female participation to expose the complex connections Dickens made between his world and the revolutionary events that came fifty years before the publication of his novel. The ideologies present in both the historical analysis and the literary criticism reveal the significance of the French Revolution on shaping the politics and society of the Western world and into the Victorian Era.

**Thesis:**

The idea of female revolutionaries struck a particular chord of terror both during and after the French Revolution, leading to a backlash against female citizenship in France and beyond. Women were active participants in the first three years of the Revolution, exercising democratic rights in both a non-violent manner (petitioning the legislature, voting in local elections, and forming committees), and in a violent manner (arming themselves and participating in violent strikes and demonstrations). The terror surrounding female democratic participation manifested most distinctly in the fear of the latter: the armed and confrontational female citizen, or *citoyenne*. At the time of the
Revolution, Jacobin leaders transformed their fear into legislation impeding women’s political rights. Both during and after the Revolution, artists and writers expressed their fears through imagery and novels that demonstrated the boundaries of acceptable female political expression. More specifically, artists and writers wielded their pastels and pens to distinguish between the respectable Republican Mother, who sought primarily to educate herself to raise future (male) citizens, and the dangerous plebian woman of the streets, armed with a pike, exercising her right to vote. Literary imagination kept these ideas alive in the post-revolutionary nineteenth century, most notably in Charles Dickens’s *Tale of TwoCities*, which reflects the male anxieties of women exercising democratic liberties.

While the French Revolution occurred from 1789-1799, the bulk of women’s activism occurred during an early phase of the French Revolution from 1789-1794. This activity largely caused the backlash to occur in the years 1793-1799. Chapter One of this study will explore the history of female participation in active and violent revolutionary campaigns in events during the revolutionary era. The chapter examines what female revolutionaries did and how they represented themselves, focusing first on the non-violent petitioning for individual rights and equal education opportunities by French female revolutionary Olympe de Gouges, English fellow traveller Mary Wollstonecraft, and the feminist legislator the Marquis de Condorcet. The chapter then explores the activism of armed women protesting in the streets during the October Days, the formation of women’s groups to organize female revolutionaries, and the campaigns by a small number of women for armed resistance. This history of activism, viewed in tandem with
feminist writing, helps explain the anxious reappraisal of women’s rights generated by the Revolution.

Chapter Two will analyze the angst of men both during and after the French Revolution, who increasingly classified women within two polar categories: Republican Mothers or armed and dangerous female citizens. The reverberations of female violence during the Revolution, and the imagery that followed, influenced the works of Victorian artists and novelists, Charles Dickens in particular. Dickens manages to transform the dichotomous imagery of politically active women and apply this imagery to Victorian England’s gendered code, specifically opposing the imagery of the Angel in the House to the Fallen Woman. Dickens’s iconic novel recasts revolutionary female activism within a distinctive mold of Victorian gender roles. Though ostensibly sympathetic to revolutionary ideals, Dickens’s novel nonetheless uses the French revolutionary backdrop to champion a stolidly liberal gendered order where women accept their natural role as the “Angel in the House.” Radical female activism becomes, at the same time, associated with the moral disorder of the “fallen” woman. Due to its popularity, Dickens’s novel reveals the wide geographic reach of fears of female citizenship stemming from the revolutionary era. These anxieties over female participation spread into the modern era and across the English-speaking world, clarifying the century-long struggles faced by feminists following the French Revolution.
Chapter Two:  
Female Revolutionary Action:  
Non-Violent Petitioning, the Quest for Individual Rights, & Female Militancy

Women established a public and political presence from the earliest days of the French Revolution. Some women participated in a non-violent manner, whereas others armed themselves in the streets alongside their male counterparts to actively and, at times violently, exercise their arguable natural rights. The French Revolution is, among other things, a history of the women who fought for rations, collectively pushed for women’s rights, and participated when possible in the National Assembly.  

Women among all class levels were effective agents in the Revolution, through actions, words, and public protests. Evident in police arrest records is documentation of working women, “struggling with everyday obstacles but also supporting and practicing in the Revolution – forming a woman’s revolutionary movement.”  

Early writers in the nineteenth century reflected on the events of the Revolution and often distinguished between two kinds of female revolutionaries: the commendable women “who sacrificed themselves for family, religion and heroic virtue” versus the “unnatural” women who fought in armed battalions. These two images of female revolutionaries correlated to the women who argued for natural, or inherent, rights through non-violent means, such as petitioning, and the women who armed themselves and actively inserted themselves into the major events of the Revolution. The reality of women’s situations at the end of the eighteenth century,

18 Ibid, xvii.
regardless of social standing, was one of limited and constrained rights; however, through the written word and various militant actions, women pushed against the patriarchal mainstream to further their quest for civil, political, and social rights. This chapter surveys the broad spectrum of female activism from 1789 to 1799; it analyzes claims for equal rights asserted by revolutionary feminists, and it argues that women’s political activism generated substantial male anxieties that resonated for decades to come throughout the Western World.

The Enlightenment Context:

When the Revolution broke out in France in 1789, men and women were aware of their place in the social order, in part due to ideas widely circulating in the preceding era of the Enlightenment. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment occurred throughout the Western World, but many scholars consider France as the cultural focal point. Political power, centered at the crown, limited opportunities for intellectual Enlightenment thinkers and ideas to shape government, leading “to a lack of consistency in support for reforming ideas, and also prevented the adoption of efforts to create and teach a technical science of government on the model pursued in the German states.”20 In terms of social order, Enlightenment philosophies enforced a clear distinction between public and private realms. This distinction led to a dichotomous understanding of the nature of gender, seen as a vast area of difference, which challenged “strands that emphasized the idea of a

universal human nature, and a universal human history, both validated by the possession of a single universal human form of rationality."²¹ Instead of emphasizing common human characteristics, when it came to women, Enlightenment thinkers explained this difference, using science and appeals to natural law, to rationalize a separate sphere of belonging. These thinkers showed women as mothers, “naturally” different from men, reaffirming social boundaries and gender roles. Women were imagined as belonging to the domestic sphere. Separate spheres were the socially accepted concept of women belonging in the home, maintaining the private domain, while men conducted themselves in the public domain of business and politics. This imagined social order took hold in the eighteenth century and centered on the biological argument that nature had selected women for their role as mothers, manifesting all natural rights through reproduction.

The most recognized theorist of the separate spheres argument was the eighteenth-century writer and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his works *The Social Contract* (1762) and *Emile* (1762). *The Social Contract* details how best to govern a nation, navigating the social issues of the era, including gender roles. The questions regarding women’s role in both the private and public spheres had long been a prominent topic of discussion: “All of the great political theorists from the seventeenth century onward struggled with the question, in particular, of women’s place in the new order, and all of them tried to devise solutions that would ensure the continued subordination of

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²¹ Ibid, 84.
women to their husbands after the breakdown of patriarchy.”22 Rousseau approaches this issue by arguing that there should be separate sexual spheres. Emphasizing his concept of separateness, Rousseau stresses that women were powerful in their own designated spaces: “Although he denied women a formal public position, he anticipated that they would continue to be active and, in their own sphere, powerful.”23 In effect, Rousseau claims that women’s responsibilities entailed overseeing the moral health of the nation, which could be achieved within a private realm. Tying together elements of Old Regime social mores with a more modern representation of women in political life, Rousseau defines women’s role as consisting “of subordinating her independent aims and interests to a higher goal, the ethical life of the community. But unlike her male companion, of whom Rousseau also demands the sublimation of particular interests on behalf of a desire for the public good, woman is barred completely from active participation in the very sphere that gives purpose to all her actions.”24 Rousseau argues that the chaste republican woman must remain in the private realm as part of her political responsibility.

In Emile, Rousseau maintains that women must embrace their maternal duties; otherwise they are “unnatural.”25 These maternal duties keep them in the domestic sphere, otherwise their children will similarly grow up “unnatural.” Focused mainly on education, Emile explains that men and women have different and quite separate

22 Hunt, The Family Romance, 5.

23 Landes, Women and the Public Sphere, 67.

24 Landes, Women and the Public Sphere, 69.

educational needs. Wives and mothers only need education specific to their roles in the home:

If woman is made to please and to be subjugated to man, she ought to make herself pleasing to him rather than to provoke him; her particular strength lies in her charms; by their means she should compel him to discover his own strength and put it to use…. From this originates attack and defense, the boldness of one sex and the timidity of the other and finally the modesty and shame with which nature has armed the weak for the conquest of the strong.26

Understanding these concepts of domesticity, marriage, and motherhood was an essential aspect of a woman’s education. The Rousseauian concept of female passivity undergirded the assertion that women must stay in the home and exercise the qualities of obedience, passivity, and gentleness. Essentially, Rousseau called for women to be the Angel in the House, before Coventry Patmore coined the phrase. His theories helped pave the way for the reigning middle-class separate spheres ideology of the nineteenth century.

Viewed as the “other,” women belonged in the home and were responsible for domestic and maternal duties, such as the education and upbringing of children and the reinforcement of the religious and moral stronghold in the home: “Female nature could be proclaimed as particularly competent at emotional morality. With this, the definition of woman as ‘the sex’ sealed women’s destiny as the moral authority of a society that excluded certain direct human emotions from public interactions. Woman became the moral sex. Humane qualities survived (only) as a female principle.”27 Referring to women as “the moral sex” assured that women’s place was in the home, responsible for


the upbringing and reputation of the family. Such arguments informed all public discourse by the late eighteenth century.

Women in the Revolution learned to play on this separate spheres ideology by embracing the idea of biological differences and manipulating revolutionary language to appeal for their own natural rights. This manipulation was manifest through violent and nonviolent means, with women actively inserting themselves into both the conversation and the revolutionary events of the eighteenth century, marking a significant moment in feminist history.

**Nonviolent Petitioning:**

When the Third Estate broke away from the Estates General in May 1789 and demanded the right to draw up a Constitution, the political context in France shifted. Women began to actively assert their rights as individuals through non-violent petitioning. The events of 1789 empowered women as well as men to try and influence the political future of their nation. Women began writing their grievances down and petitioning the French government for their needs. In this early stage of the Revolution, women engaged in activities for which there was a historical precedent and many (although not all) of their demands could be condoned within a patriarchal society and explained within an Enlightenment worldview that increasingly saw women as naturally separate from men, in roles both moral and domestic, excluding any direct political action.
Female revolutionaries learned how to manipulate and use the political and economic institutions around them to protest and petition for their rights alongside men. For example, with the announcement of the calling of an Estates General, “women authors were among the publicists, making sure that issues such as education, divorce, and public healthy facilities were targets of reform or new legislation. When the Estates General had become the National Assembly, committed to writing a constitution, women were among the crowds from Paris who secured its removal from Versailles and reestablishment.”

Early female petitioners defended women’s limited privileges within the Old Regime’s economic order, despite the fact that the guild structure left women subordinate to men in most professions and generally vulnerable to financial ruin.

In the build-up to the Estates General, by tradition, French men and women had the opportunity to address their grievances to the king. Among the thousands of petitions submitted, some were drafted by individual women or women representing broader constituencies. In the spring of 1789, one such group of women of the Third Estate addressed a petition to the king expressing their concern about women’s precarious economic situation and asking him to protect the traditionally female trades. The tone and language used in the document worked to appease the King and male revolutionaries. The petition began by explaining the vulnerable condition of women in the Third Estate in a desolate light:

If nature has refused them beauty, they get married without dowry to unfortunate artisans, lead aimless, difficult lives stuck away in the provinces, and give birth to

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children they are incapable of raising. If, on the contrary, they are born pretty, without culture, without principles, without any idea of morals, they become the prey of the first seducer, commit a first sin, come to Paris to bury their shame, end by losing it altogether, and die victims of licentious ways.29

The document reminds the King that girls are born without inheritance or the ability to take over family capital. For this reason, the women pleaded to preserve designated female professions, such as seamstresses, marketwomen, and embroiderers: “To prevent many ills, Sire, we ask that men not be allowed, under any pretext to exercise trades that are the prerogative of women…. If we are at left at least with the needle and the spindle, we promise to never handle the compass or the square.”30 Not only did these women embrace the differences between men and women to argue to retain their economic privileges, they also used their position as mothers to ask for further education. This education, they argued, would help them build up men and teach future republicans: “We ask to come out of the state of ignorance, to be able to give our children a sound and reasonable education so as to make of them subjects worthy of serving you. We will teach them to cherish the beautiful name of Frenchmen; we will transmit to them the love we have for Your Majesty, for we are willing to leave valor and genius to men, but we will challenge them over the dangerous and precious gift of sensitivity.”31 The writers were defending female trades and calling for greater access to education, but within the language of a “natural” female position subordinate to men. Understood through the lens


of an eighteenth-century audience, this appeal reinforced gender roles, while subtly working to increase women’s liberties. The women defended a separate closed guild system, rather than asking for economic freedom. The motivation behind this defense could arguably be that the women wanted to earn a living and earn an education. This document is an early example of women using the jargon of the Enlightenment and the Revolution to satisfy their own needs.

In 1789, another petition by female flower sellers in the Parisian markets protested the chaos of the market as an infraction of their corporate privileges. Flower sellers, along with poissardes (fishwives), stood up for their trade and took their concerns straight to the feet of the king: “They express concern for the plight of the uneducated, needy girl who easily becomes the prey of a seducer, only to fall into licentious ways.”32 The working women pointed out how they “paid the king considerable sums for enjoying the advantages of their trade.”33 This early example of female petitioning for corporate rights reveals how the spark of revolutionary protest was circulating and had reached the streets, inspiring working women to put their concerns to paper. For all that petitions of women of the Third Estate pointed to a political assertiveness on women’s part on the eve of Revolution, however, these acts did not break seriously from precedent, as women had previously been instigators of bread riots in marketplaces and had pleaded their rights among competing guilds in early modern France.

32 Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 108.

33 Ibid, 108.
Female petitioners of 1789 also deployed Rousseauian mother-of-the-nation language to argue for new rights, most notably education. Men initially supported the petitioning, encouraging women to take an interest in the events of the Revolution. The nonviolent petitioning appeared innocent enough, airing grievances to the king for more food, better quality of life, and a semblance of financial security in female-only professions. However, early women’s writing to the Estates General and the king airing their grievances, revealed a “divided character.” Some female petitions “seem to straddle a desire to restore the old system of moral justice and an impulse to assert women’s rights within the new system of legal representation.”34 Calling for more education for enlightened mothers of the nation, many women in the first two years of the Revolution evoked both revolutionary and Rousseauian terminology.

Though Rousseau was hardly a feminist in his ideology, “feminists spoke a language in which Rousseau’s virtuous self is the model for political discourse and domestic reform…. They sought, of course, to turn the claims of nature to their own advantage. The terms ‘nature’ and ‘virtue,’ however, had an ambivalent quality in republican discourse. They functioned to preserve difference and hence guarantee sexual inequality, even as they were yoked to a universalist, egalitarian protest.”35 Laying claim to the mantle of moral protectors of the nation, many early feminist petitioners played on this difference of nature to their own advantage, arguing that education and inclusion in the public sphere were necessary for the advancement of the nation, starting in the

34 Ibid, 107.

35 Ibid, 123.
home. The Revolution, for nonviolent petitioners, “was the vehicle through which enlightened visions of equality and liberty would be realized. Women had been suppressed in the past, but who could imagine that they would not now be free? It would be the honor of France to be the first to correct those ancient and widespread abuses that had kept women subjugated.” Women fought for these liberties through revolutionary and Rousseauian language.

**Female Claims to Individual Rights:**

After the Tennis Court Oath of 1789, French men and women alike shifted from defending privilege to demanding constitutionally endowed rights. This promise, made by the National Assembly to the people of France in the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” (August 1789), opened a new era in revolutionary rhetoric, as varying individuals sought to define the parameters and limits of citizens’ rights. The distinction drawn between passive and active citizenry in the 1791 Constitution touched off some of the most fiery demands for equal rights and full citizenship for French women and men.

The most lasting evidence of women’s involvement in the Revolution resonates in women’s words. Early feminist theorists and writers sought to lay claim to “individual rights” and “human rights,” which were under discussion from 1789-1793. These writers wrote, arguing against theories that “focused on the female body as the locus of women’s intellectual inadequacies and promulgated the idea that women who acted outside of the

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36 Ibid, 105-6.

confines of their physiological nature were desensitized, unfeminine, and ultimately deviant.” 38 These articulate women, and their few male supporters, left behind pamphlets, speeches, and written documents protesting women’s passive citizenship and limited access to the public sphere, and they helped shift women’s revolutionary rhetoric from a defense of female privilege to a demand for individual rights.

Significant context of the French Revolution resides in the concept of passive versus active citizenship according to the Constitution of 1791. Men could be active citizens, with individual rights and liberties, as well as the right to free speech and action; “they were, by definition, political subjects.” 39 Passive citizens, including men of color, men without property, and most importantly all women, “had the ‘right to be given or allowed something by someone else.’ Their status as political subjects was ambiguous, if not wholly in doubt.” 40 Women by nature were assumed to be passive “apolitical animal[s].” 41 The Constitution inspired many women’s rights activists to publish pamphlets fighting for the liberties denied to them. They asserted the law limited women’s individual rights and civil liberties and compromised the very principles on which the Revolution was founded: liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Enlightenment


40 Ibid, 106.

ideals of female passivity and domesticity inspired the publications, petitioning, and actions of women leading up to the Terror in 1793 and the fears that followed.

One such early feminist writer was a male supporter of the female quest for rights, the Marquis de Condorcet. Condorcet was a lone voice pleading for women’s suffrage prior to the Constitution of 1791, and he continued in his defense of women as new political laws were drafted. A French liberal aristocrat, early feminist, and philosopher, Condorcet actively fought for women’s voting rights, women’s eligibility for public office, and women’s educational opportunities. His main argument was that the rationality behind men’s theories that women were not fit for public office or political life all could be traced to their limited education; if women were given equal education opportunities, then they would be able to prove themselves logical and intelligent enough to maintain public and political positions. He argued that there was no way to prove that men had greater intellectual capabilities, as women were denied formal education. While admonishing women for being more governed by emotions, he claimed this deficiency was due to “the education they receive and the life they are forced to live.” Women “are governed by their own reason.”

Condorcet’s most well-known feminist work, published in 1790 in the Journal of the Society of 1789 and entitled “On the Admission of Women to the Rights of

43 Ibid, 112.
45 Condorcet in Landes, Women and the Public Sphere.
Citizenship,” urged the National Assembly to recognize women as equal citizens and advocated for the inclusion of women in public and political life. Condorcet famously declared: “Now the rights of men result simply from the fact that they are sentient beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and of reasoning concerning those ideas. Women, having these same qualities, must necessarily possess equal rights. Either no individual of the human species has any true rights, or all have the same.”

Rather than base citizenship on race or gender, Condorcet argued that citizenship rights should be determined by property alone. He presented an individualist argument, pushing for equal academic, legal, and political access for upper-class women. As a liberal, he believed that nature created individuals, not men and women. Women, he argued, should not be defined by biological factors like reproductive capacity, just as men should not be removed from political positions over biological conditions such as bronchitis (although he does acknowledge that some of the natural responsibilities of a mother could prohibit a woman from exercising or performing her political rights at certain times). Asking the National Assembly not only for women’s citizenship rights, he also called for civil law reform, including the right to divorce. Condorcet spoke on behalf of women who had no representation on the National Assembly charged with drafting the Constitution.

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46 Ibid.

47 Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 114.

48 Ibid, 115.

the final document was made public and women’s passive citizenship ordained, feminist women took up their pens to add to Condorcet’s chorus of protest.

A contemporary to Condorcet, Olympe de Gouges shifted the argument for women’s claims by linking women revolutionaries’ demands to those of individual rights in her retort to the 1791 Constitution with “The Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizen.” Born Marie Gouze, Olympe de Gouges is recognized as one of the most modern feminist writers of the French Revolution. Married and widowed at a young age and without a formal education, Gouze changed her name and moved to Paris to reinvent herself.  

50 Emphasizing the importance of women as the moral preservers in the home, she argued that “Women alone preserve the little humanity that still remains in Paris, and without them, we would see greedy and insatiable men devour each other like wolves.”

51 De Gouges understood and adopted a combination of revolutionary and Enlightenment language, which was ingrained in the political climate of the era. De Gouges understood the fine line that she was walking by representing herself as an individual and as a woman. She behaved as an active citizen through her writing, stressing liberty for all (including people of color in other publications), education for all, equal employment opportunities, inheritance rights, and the recognition of illegitimate children. She also strategically understood and adopted rhetoric of republican motherhood in her demand for women’s rights.


51 Ibid, 99.
Reacting to the revolutionary political document “Declaration of the Rights of Man,” de Gouges went line by line and replaced the word “man” for “woman,” demonstrating that women desired and deserved representation as part of a national assembly, with the same inherent rights as men. In this document, she suggested that women and men be equal in all civil matters. One suggestion she offered was to substitute a marriage contract with a social contract for both men and women to join in a communal union. Replacing a marriage contract with a social contract was an attempt “to equate marriage and society, both voluntary unions, entered either for life or ‘for the duration of our mutual inclinations’ by rights-bearing individuals. These were unions, moreover, in which neither partner had any legal advantage.” Women and men, she argued, should be equals in all things, including punishment (state-legitimized violence) and taxes; rather than suggest women should have special treatment under the law, de Gouges consistently argued for equality on the basis of an individualist conception of natural law.

Deemed more radical than those of earlier female petitioners, de Gouges’s claims were fundamentally different in approach than the flower sellers and activists who came before her. Presenting a similar individualist argument as Condorcet, de Gouges laid claims to rights that nature had endowed to all individuals, rather than privileges based on sex. De Gouges wrote, “Liberty and justice consist in restoring all that belongs to


53 Scott, “A Woman”, 111.
another; hence the exercise of the natural rights of woman has no other limits than those that the perpetual tyranny of man opposes to them.”

Her “Declaration” argued that women should have the same rights to freedom, law, property, and equality as men. To encourage female activism, de Gouges used strongly worded language to plead with women to take a stand defending their own individual rights: “Women, wake up… recognize your rights!”

De Gouges rejected female passivity and obedience and argued that “equality between the sexes was founded in nature, and thus required that women be assured the same inalienable rights bestowed upon men…. The only way to restore peace, maintain good morals, and ensure the happiness of all was to uphold a constitution that included women as citizens.”

In article X of her document, she argues that “woman has the right to mount the scaffold, she ought to equally have the right to mount the rostrum.”

De Gouges argued that women had equal rights of state-mandated criminal punishment, and as such should have the right to free speech, like any other citizen: “Without the right to speak, she insisted, women were powerless to enforce paternal duty, to call men back to their obligations, the obligations on which social cohesion and individual liberty depended.”

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55 Ibid.

56 Beckstrand, Deviant Women of the French Revolution, 90.

57 De Gouges, “Declaration”.

58 Scott, “A Woman”, 110.
women as citizens, de Gouges argues, it was also necessary to keep the family structure together and hold men responsible for their illegitimate children. The concept of illegitimate children struck a particular chord with de Gouges, as she believed herself to be an illegitimate and unclaimed child of a prominent Marquis. She stresses that while men and women were biologically distinct, both sexes should be defined as *human* under the law.

Despite her individualist claims and rhetoric, de Gouges did argue that women needed specific protections as women and as mothers. If men of the state recognized women’s contributions, they would allow them equal individual rights under the law. These protections focused mainly on the institution of marriage, calling for reform of laws regulating unmarried mothers and bastard children. By connecting politics and the nation to the family, she “[blurred] the line between public and private, bringing women into the realm of politics and redefining ‘universal’ and ‘political’ as non-gender-specific.”\(^5^9\) In order to blur this line, De Gouges stressed the importance of the family, the role of the mother, and the union of the legislative and executive in government as a metaphor for the union between man and woman. Using the Constitution of 1791 and the “Declaration of the Rights of Man” as an incentive, de Gouges embraced some female stereotypes, recognizing the differences between men and women and revealing those differences as strengths. She invoked the imagery of the nurturing mother as a strong and active citizen of the Constitutional state. Coming from an uneducated background, “[de Gouges’s] development as a writer, the emergence of her feminist voice, and the

\(^5^9\) Beckstrand, *Deviant Women of the French Revolution*, 94.
experience of its failure tell the story of the woman revolutionary in a particularly revealing and compelling way.”\textsuperscript{60}

Understanding the thin line she walked as a female presenting an individualist argument for women’s rights, de Gouges wove together her individual claims to rights with the existing Republican Mother argument in a skillful and strategic fashion. By replacing the word “man” with “woman,” de Gouges’s “Declaration” drew attention to the fundamental inconsistency in so much revolutionary rhetoric that purported to recognize all citizens as individuals with inalienable rights, but then treated some citizens as more worthy than others. Similarly, “it is a pointed critique of a document which, while claiming to represent universal values and principles, in fact excludes all women, and some men, from the enjoyment of liberty, equality, and fraternity.”\textsuperscript{61} Her ability to make strong statements of natural female rights and universal rights owed to both sexes, while also navigating her way through the dangerous avenue of revolutionary language, memorializes her as a particularly impressive early feminist thinker. Many historians, like Joan Scott, argue that the paradox of De Gouges was that she was a feminist writer, implementing essentialism arguments to make individualist claims, trapped in a male-dominated world. However, the legacy she established with her claims for female rights and her ability to craft an argument using revolutionary rhetoric proves that De Gouges was able to successfully and strategically incorporate references to the needs of women both as mothers and as individuals.

\textsuperscript{60} Diamond, “Olympe de Gouges”, 96-7.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 99.
Her formative response to the Constitution revealed her wisdom, her revolutionary spirit, and her understanding of pivotal revolutionary ideology. It did not, however, spare her her life. Steadily under fire by the revolutionary government for her writings during the Terror of 1793, the catalyst that ultimately led to her arrest was her published poster demanding a direct vote by the people on three potential forms of government: a constitutional monarchy, a republic, or a federalist government. When she was arrested in summer of 1793 on the charge of treason for defending the queen, she used the “language of patriotism” to defend her actions as those of a respectable republican woman. However, the National Convention was more upset with her disdain for and criticism of the Jacobins in her writings than her fight for women’s rights. On November 3, 1793 at approximately 4:00 p.m., de Gouges was executed. As she climbed the scaffold, she declared to the crowd, “Children of the Fatherland, you will avenge my death.” The crowd is said to have shouted in response, “Vive la Republique!”

De Gouges’s feminist legacy did not die at the guillotine, nor were French women alone in rejoicing in the promise of revolutionary freedom or in decrying the limitations of France’s first revolutionary constitution. Revolutionary debates regarding women’s rights spread across Europe and served as the catalyst for many English writers, as well. One English writer, Mary Wollstonecraft, penned what would become one of the most widely read feminist tracts in the Anglophone world, “Vindication of the Rights of


63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.
Woman” (1792). Representing one British perspective on the woman question during the revolutionary era, Wollstonecraft used revolutionary terminology to plead for women’s rights. A British women’s rights activist, philosopher, and writer, she primarily defended women’s natural rights to education. Using revolutionary terminology, Wollstonecraft commended the democratic impulse of the Constitution of 1791, but wrote strongly against the French government for its denial of female liberties. Emphasizing women’s ability to possess reason, she stressed the importance of logic to any political or moral structure: “No duty can be binding which is not founded on reason; that morals must be based on the same immutable principles, for whomever they pertain.”65 Like Condorcet, Wollstonecraft insisted that women suffered solely from a lack of education. Pushing for expanded educational opportunities, she argued that women need education to be better companions to men to help the Republic succeed. Women, she pleaded, must have control over their minds and their behavior, to become rational beings equal to men. If women were educated, she argued, humankind and human virtue would prosper.66 Once given education and civil liberties, women would naturally accept their place of domesticity in the home, while also offering meaningful contributions in public. Rather than calling for women to pick up arms and join the ranks alongside men, Wollstonecraft wished to affect the Revolution in a modest, rational way that would advance women’s position and influence.

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65 Wollstonecraft in Landes, Women and the Public Sphere, 127.
66 Landes, Women and the Public Sphere, 131.
Wollstonecraft’s “Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1792) argued for women to have a more public and prominent position in society, free from the home and free from oppression. She urged women to embrace their innate sense of reason and partake in political discussion. She appropriated revolutionary concepts – reason, sensibility, and truth – for women, arguing only men’s desire to deprive women of their rational impulses had prevented women from fully exercising their clear judgment: “For man and woman, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same; yet for the fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists, demanding the sacrifice of truth and sincerity, virtue becomes a relative idea, having no other foundation but utility, and of that utility, men pretend arbitrarily to judge, shaping it to their own convenience.”

Wollstonecraft, like Condorcet and de Gouges, presented a largely individualist argument for women’s rights, stating that while men and women possessed some different traits, they were due the same inherent rights and freedoms in constitutional form. Wollstonecraft addressed these inconsistencies in her *Vindication*. Unlike Rousseau, Wollstonecraft rejected the idea of innate female inferiority, arguing instead that gender differences were largely a product of cultural conditioning, not nature. The feminist seeds that Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, and de Gouges planted during the French

67 Sledziewski, “The French Revolution as the Turning Point.”

Revolution may have not blossomed into concrete legislation or women’s active citizenship in the 1790s, but they did influence feminism and women’s roles for years to come.69

The bold claims of prominent feminist writers also helped inspire less prominent women to lay claims to the rights of citizenship through the publication of essays and pamphlets. These publications helped to expand the reach of female activists and widen their intended audience. Many of these pamphlets appeared in the early 1790s, decrying the inequalities of the constitutional monarchy and the Jacobin Republic. Widely circulated and read, journals and petitions reached a varied audience of women of all social classes. All of these factors gave women of Paris access to revolutionary language and ideas. These women claimed a public status and role in the Revolution through political tracts expressing revolutionary ideology. Anne Felicite Colomb, for example, was arrested in 1791 for printing radical journals and was taken to trial where a mixed-sex political club, the Cordelier’s Club, represented her. During her trial, she argued that she was protected as a citizen with equal rights and protections under the law.70 Colomb’s trial shows the relationship of women to revolutionary ideology of natural rights. During and after the Revolution, women “demanded recognition as citizens; in the historical conjuncture, these demands necessarily re-identified them as subjects of universal rights. The conquest of a permanent place on those fields of power and principle may turn out to

69 Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication.”

be, for them, the most critically important legacy of the French Revolution.” 71 The printing of pamphlets connected women to the public sphere and the revolutionary movement, as female citizens overtly asserted their own voices and demands in published documents.

Another such revolutionary, Etta Palm d’Aelders, was a Dutch political activist and writer living in France who focused heavily on promoting education and establishing workshops for underprivileged girls. She was also the founder of the first all-female political club, the Society of Friends of the Truth. Although she never opened any schools, she drew attention to the lack of girls’ education. She also fought for women’s fair representation under the law. Attacking the National Assembly’s 1791 ruling that if a woman was convicted of adultery she must forfeit her dowry, d’Aelders argued that the ruling revealed the stark and vicious inequality of the new nation on the question of women’s equal rights within a marriage: “By the degradation of our existence, in flattering your own vanity, it will rock you to sleep in the arms of a slave and thus deaden your energy, to better rivet your chains…. The powers of the husband and wife must be equal.” 72 D’Aelders compares the wife to a slave, and the male legislators/husbands to slave-owners. Working tirelessly from 1790-1791 on behalf of women’s rights in the forms of education, protection from domestic abuse, employment opportunities, and political equality, she radically infused Enlightenment language with modern political rhetoric to push for legislative change.

71 Ibid, 288.

D’Aelders challenged female passive citizenship and was eventually arrested and tried by the National Convention. D’Aelders also petitioned the Legislative Assembly to recognize women’s contribution to the events of the Revolution as equal to men’s and to have their natural rights reflected in citizenship rights. She argued, “Women have shared the dangers of the Revolution; why shouldn’t they participate in its advantages? Men are free at last, and women are the slaves of a thousand prejudices.” Stating her demands as an individual rather than as a woman in her April 1, 1792 plea, d’Aelders implored “that the Assembly take into consideration the state of degradation to which women find themselves reduced as far as political rights are concerned, and reclaims on their behalf the full enjoyment of the natural rights of which they have been deprived by a protracted oppression.”

Anne Pauline Leon, another female activist and founder of the important political club the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women (to be discussed later), was similarly arrested in 1794 and wrote a justification of her political behavior and defended her political stance as one of a radical revolutionary republican. Not shying away from explicit detail, she explained various strikes and riots she participated in, as well as petitions she drafted and many interactions she had with fellow sans-culottes over the course of her revolutionary activity. Defending her principles and actions, she also argued

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74 Ibid, 123.
that she had nothing to hide, insisting her own revolutionary actions had been in keeping
with newly proclaimed republican rights and responsibilities:

All patriots are aware of my conduct… and of my actions both in forming the
Societe revolutionnaire, which I believed was appropriate for hastening this
glorious era, and in directing its {the Society’s} endeavors toward that end.
Finally, everyone knows what my political views are. In the popular societies,
under the gaze of an immense crowd, I manifested my love for the Fatherland,
propagated the principles of a sweet equality, and supported the unity and
indivisibility of the Republic…. Finally, in the heart of the National Convention, I
expressed, on behalf of the *citoyennes* of my Section, their joy and satisfaction
over the completion of the Constitution.75

Leon detailed her participation in the events of the Revolution up until her arrest, and
how this action had been motivated by patriotism and a quest for rights. Both d’Aelders
and Leon appealed for citizenship rights for women through the written word, in speeches
in front of the legislature, in political organizations of their own.

Well aware of the importance of language and ideology, women linked their quest
for rights to the umbrella term “universal rights,” as was found in the “Declaration of the
Rights of Man.” They, in effect, granted themselves a sense of agency and empowerment,
creating a rhetorical strategy to argue for equal rights as men. Women were denied full
legal citizenship during the Revolution, yet, “thousands of women in all socio-
professional categories pushed past the legal boundaries to claim citizenship in words and
acts, to erode acceptance of the constitutional monarchy even as it was being established,
and to take their place alongside men in the ranks of the sovereign people, inextricably

75 “Anne Pauline Leon, Femme Leclerc, Reconciles her Political Behavior with Radical
Revolutionary Principles and Policies,” in *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795*, edited by
Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson (Chicago: University
combining democratic practices with political empowerment and rights claims.”

Attaching women’s rights to universal rights, feminists would further build on feminists’ demands of the 1790s, repeatedly asserting that no real democracy could continue to repress the natural rights of half its citizens. Feminist historian Joan Scott argues “when revolutionary feminists connected their interests to universal rights, they opened a complex and continuing dialogue about the necessary and sufficient conditions of liberty, equality, and autonomy for women as political selves, citizens in the modern world.”

Women’s revolutionary action was more threatening to male revolutionaries than that of the female petitioners in 1789 because the form of their action was deliberately public and political, addressing a wide audience, and supporting new revolutionary institutions. Early petitioners used language specifically rooted in an acceptance of sexual difference and a defense of privilege. Over time, proto-feminists revolutionary women increasingly tied their claims to universal rights; they claimed that their position in society was not due to “nature,” but to an abnegation of freedom and individual rights. A small number of men, like the Marquis de Condorcet, accepted these claims and supported feminists’ agenda; however, most men did not accept this logic and claimed the citoyennes were dangerous and threatening, a perception that would be magnified by the radical acts of other women over the course of the Revolution.

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Militant Action and Armed Protest:

Even more threatening than women’s words were their actions and deeds, which were often combined with actual violence. Granted, early on in the Revolution, women seized weapons in defense of the revolutionary government. The storming of the Bastille and the October Days, however, could be celebrated, in part, as a continuation of the types of behaviors women engaged in during bread riots of earlier eras. Soon, however, such behavior became more threatening as it took on an overtly political nature, as when women occupied the National Assembly. This behavior grew even more problematic and threatening later on in the Revolution when women began organizing politically and demanding their rights to defend the nation. When such groups of women began to demand that women conduct themselves as active citizens (by wearing cockades and carrying weapons on the streets) their militancy provoked a response. No longer did men view them as “symbols” of freedom, they were now demanding that women’s freedoms, like men’s, be defined by the needs of the Republic.

Women began to assertively arm themselves with pikes, stakes, and other makeshift weapons as early as the storming of the Bastille prison. During the assault on the Bastille in July 1789, women joined men in freeing seven prisoners, symbolically ridding Paris of an oppressive institution, and seizing the storehouse of weapons kept there. Most women participants were listed as widows or bystanders; however, one such woman, Marguerite Pinaigre, wrote to the National Assembly asking for the same recognition for her involvement as her husband received. She painted the picture of the event as one where men and women were on equal grounds:
Not only has this dear citizen fought in the conquest of the Bastille with the greatest courage, but furthermore, his citoyenne wife, who is present here, worked equally hard with all her might, both of them having resolved to triumph or to die. It is she who ran to several wineshops to fill her apron with bottles, both broken and unbroken, which she gave to the authorities to be used as shot in the cannon used to break the chain on the drawbridge of the Bastille. Therefore, by virtue of these legitimate claims the petitioner believes herself justified in coming before the National Assembly today to advise it concerning the non-execution of laws relative to conquerors who were severely maimed, as was the petitioner’s husband.78

The storming of the Bastille, one of the most iconic and recognized events of the Revolution, represents the assertive way in which women removed their aprons, grabbed arms, and not only symbolically, but physically inserted themselves into the French Revolution.

During the October Days of 1789, market women of Paris instigated a march to Versailles, drawing a large crowd of armed men and women. The spark igniting this demonstration was the issue of subsistence. Bread shortages and increased food prices drove Parisian market women to public action, eventually leading them to try to put their demands before the National Assembly.79 In Paris, women helped lay siege to the Hotel-de-Ville on October 5, 1789. Six to seven thousand women, with men at their backs, demanded bread and guns to storm the Versailles castle. A group of women, armed with knives, stormed the hall, where they “interrupted debate, pressured and intimidated the...

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79 Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, Women in Revolutionary Paris, 5.
deputies, and demanded that they discuss subsistence problems in Paris.”  

Practicing active political citizenship, these women symbolically voted in the Assembly on this day, inciting a role reversal symbolic of women’s “seizure of power from deputies whom they perceived to be either incapable of representing them, or unwilling to do so.” Not only did they march to Versailles and demand to be heard, they marched to the palace the following day to demand an audience with the king. Growing restless and impatient, the marchers pushed forward to forcefully enter the grounds. They attacked and physically abused the king’s guards and forced the king and queen into hiding. The mob was only settled after the king, encouraged by his advisors, addressed the crowd and promised to assist in their demands for bread.

During the October Days, women engaged in an overtly political and threatening manner. The women illegally armed themselves, instigated public riots, stepped into the public streets, and took the initiative to make demands of their government, marking a precedent for women in the months to come. While their male counterparts viewed the women of the October Days in an uncertain light, “neither side disputed the fact that women predominated in the October march and displayed extraordinary tenacity in demanding bread and patriotic loyalty from the King. Of all the popular insurrections during the Revolution, the October Days stand out as the women’s insurrection…. What was dramatically new was their target – the King and the deputies instead of the

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80 Ibid, 84.

81 Ibid, 85.
government of the city of Paris.”82 These marches to Versailles “were organized manifestations. Women were grouped by trade, district, and parish; they marched to drumbeat; they were recruited in advance. These marchers assert their right as women to participate in public affairs.”83

Whereas protestors during the October Days focused their demands on the King, later militant women sought the right to bear arms for self-defense and revolutionary action. In 1792, women delivered a petition containing over 300 signatures to the Legislative Assembly defending women’s rights to arm themselves. During the Assembly’s deliberation over women’s right to bear arms, the Paris Commune and mayor Jerome Petion defended this right, claiming that women were essential in militant demonstrations thus far in the Revolution.84 The Assembly ultimately denied the petition on the grounds that arms-bearing was too dangerous for women; however, the campaign continued and in 1793, “women’s escalating claims and practices literally invited either a total reconceptualization of citizenship, or a radical repression of militant citoyennes.”85

Militant women persistently argued for the rights owed to them as citizens, including the right to bear arms, such as rifles, pikes, and swords. They participated in public demonstrations, as they did in the October Days, and, when needed, armed and defended

82 Ibid, 16-17.

83 Landes, Women in the Public Sphere, 109.


themselves. This campaign for legal recognition of women’s right to bear arms was linked to their quest for power and active citizenship. Women fought for the right to become Prudhomme’s definition of the revolutionary citizen, “independent, free, equal, vigilant, and armed.” Never obtaining the right to bear arms through legal means, revolutionary women throughout France took it upon themselves to illegally arm themselves when necessary and to engage in militant demonstrations, marking themselves not only as political beings, but assertive and radical ones as well.

Theroigne de Mericourt stands as the most famous of imaged of armed female revolutionaries during the years of revolt, inspiring some and evoking fear in others. She was a participant in the October Days of 1789 and was active in various women’s clubs in France. Born a peasant and destined to a life of work, at a young age she took a rich lover and began to educate herself. Redefining herself as an aristocrat and intellectual, she worked to raise women from a life of oppression to one of autonomy. Mericourt aggressively argued for “an armed female battalion,” claiming that women should be armed and allowed to fight in the army alongside men. Many images show her riding a horse, brandishing a pike and shield, depicted as an “amazon of the Revolution, both sexually and politically liberated.” Mericourt fought most passionately for women’s right to defend the nation by force:


88 Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, Women in Revolutionary Paris, 63.

89 Beckstrand, Deviant Women of the French Revolution, 18.
We shall take up arms, because it is reasonable to take steps to defend our rights and our hearths, and because we would be failing both ourselves and the Fatherland if the pusillanimity which we have suffered in our condition of slavery had still sufficient sway over us to prevent us from redoubling our efforts…. Let us break our chains; at last the time is ripe for Women to emerge from their shameful nullity, where the ignorance, ride and injustice of men had kept them enslaved for so long a time.\textsuperscript{90}

Skillfully combining the masculine duty of bearing arms with a female defense of the hearth, Mericourt wove together radical individualism with traditional domestic imagery to provoke support of armed women and women’s claims to political citizenship.

Another example of a woman illegally arming herself and exercising active militancy was Charlotte Corday’s murder of Jean-Paul Marat on July 13, 1793. Marat was a Jacobin deputy to the National Convention and a close confidante of Maximilien Robespierre. Corday was a twenty-four year old Girondist sympathizer. Entering Marat’s living quarters while he was bathing, Corday stabbed Marat and left him dying in a pool of his own blood. It is believed that in a response to this act of Girondist extremism, a large group of “militant women seized a special role in the funeral cortege carrying the bath in which Marat’s bloody body continued to exude blood and subsequently they paraded with the blood-stained shirt and empty bath through the streets.”\textsuperscript{91} Both Corday’s act of assassination and the imagery of women carrying a bloody and slain member of the Jacobin government through the streets of Paris heightened male fears of female violence and furthered strengthened the events of the Terror to come.

\textsuperscript{90} Mericourt in Beckstrand, 19.

\textsuperscript{91} Hufton, \textit{Women and the Limits of Citizenship}, 31.
Another form of combative action was through the gathering of militant women in political clubs. The most prominent women’s-only group during the French Revolution was the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women (SRRW), formed during the Radical Republic and intended to educate, organize, and politicize female citizens. Founded in 1793 by Pauline Leon and Claire Lacombe, the SRRW worked to educate members on voting rights and natural individual rights. For this time in French history, the organization and political education of people was a modern democratic practice. Many sources document a membership of approximately 170 members of mostly middle- and upper-class, educated women, but historians only have specific records of about 60 female members during the club’s six active months in operation. Upon foundation, “their principal intention was to form an armed body of women to combat ‘internal enemies,’” in hopes of gaining support from their revolutionary male counterparts.92 Scholars argue that the SRRW encouraged their members to act as active citizens of the republic, wearing the patriotic tricolor cockade and arming themselves:

Women's right to bear arms and their civic responsibility “to live for the Republic or to die for it” were inextricably linked in this understanding of militant citizenship and placed at the center of women's political self-definition. This recasting of political identities carried the Revolutionary Republican Women far beyond certain earlier revolutionary behaviors (for example, marching and petitioning— acts that, although transformed by revolutionary circumstances and ideology, nonetheless may have been more readily tolerated by revolutionary leaders because they replayed roles deeply rooted in the popular culture of the ancien regime). By the summer of 1793, the Revolutionary Republican Women were laying full claim to wartime rights and responsibilities of citizenship; in fact,

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they proclaimed that the performance of a patriotic duty was a precondition for fulfilling one's domestic duty as wife and mother.93

The SRRW established rules and regulations from the beginning, presenting the club as a serious political organization. To be a member one needed to understand the protocol, procedures, and offices, which were selected, in a democratic fashion. All members had to be competent of revolutionary ideology and ready to defend the Fatherland. The by-laws included guidelines on office-holding positions and a breakdown of committees within the organization. Written in their regulations was also their purpose:

“Revolutionary Republican *citoyennes* have formed a Society to instruct themselves, to learn well the Constitution and laws of the Republic, to attend to public affairs, to succor suffering humanity, and to defend all human beings who become victims of any arbitrary acts whatever.”94 The SRRW radicalized over time, calling for “systematic terror” against Royalists and aristocrats, even verbally attacking the Jacobin Club, Cordeliers Club, and the National Convention, establishing many political enemies.95 These women did not have the support of the Jacobin government, as the Jacobins considered the SRRW too extreme to align with the values of the new Republic. Most notably, the Jacobins viewed the militant behavior of the group as fundamentally hostile to the family structure and to gender boundaries, and actively worked to shut down the SRRW.

93 Ibid, 93.


Another group of women, the knitters or *tricoteuses* (female *sans-culottes*), knitted names of counterrevolutionaries and important dates of the Assembly. The *tricoteuses* obtained a near mythical status throughout the Revolution, encompassing as they did both the characteristics both of the Republican Mother and the armed woman spectator at the guillotine executions. The knitter was often understood as a two extremes: a militant woman who was usually in her twenties or she was in her fifties and active in political women’s clubs.\(^\text{96}\) Depicted as angry and aggressive, the knitters “gave reality to the female citizen, who was still the clandestine passenger of Enlightenment dictionaries.”\(^\text{97}\) Coined “the furies of the guillotine,” these women “[evoked] feelings of violence, hate, death, and blood.”\(^\text{98}\) Compared with conventional imagery that associated a female knitting with feelings of maternal comfort, gentleness, and loving care, the *tricoteuses* played on the idea of women as conniving weapons in disguise, who dangerously concealed themselves as domestic innocents, when in reality they were the working for the cause of the Revolution. Depicting the knitting needle as a weapon of sorts, the imagery of these women became increasingly more violent: “In the imagination needles are always symbolic of this sort of disloyalty; they can become dangerous; weapons without names; tools for labor tinged with bloody tips.”\(^\text{99}\) The amount of mystery surrounding this group of women reveals the vast amount of secrecy necessary

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97 Ibid, 368.

98 Ibid, xviii.

99 Ibid.
for survival during the Reign of Terror in 1793-1794 when the Jacobin rulers heightened the number of executions and increased the limits placed on the democratic freedoms of French citizens. Shrouded in mystery and secrecy, these women were in fact real figures who participated actively in the Revolution and at executions. The literary imagination of these women in the decades following exaggerates their level of agency, however, but does reveal the anxieties of men over the gathering and participation of women during the Terror in the revolution.

The various revolutionary women’s groups – the SRRW and the tricoteuses as two examples – effectively organized women into collective and public activists. Women actively inserted themselves into the events of the Revolution through illegally arming themselves and participation in the most significant physical events of the Revolution.

**Conclusion:**

During the critical first years of the Revolution, women claimed the public stage both as gendered beings – both women and mothers – and as individuals with natural rights. In both cases, they spoke and acted with increasing militancy. Forcefully inserting themselves into the events of the Revolution by word – with manifestos, petitions, articles, and speeches infused with the language of natural rights – and also through the active arming of themselves to march alongside men on the streets of Paris, women sought legislative change.

Mounting female militancy early in the French Revolution led to a backlash in 1793 and after. The SRRW was eventually disbanded in late 1793 over disagreements
between Society members and market women about appropriate dress and behavior of women in the Revolution. The SRRW wanted a law making it mandatory for all women of the Revolution to wear a tricolor cockade (or, type of hat), an issue that, among others, that resulted in the market women’s complaint to the National Convention. The market women responded to the SRRW by shouting in the streets, “Down with red bonnets! Down with Jacobin women! Down with Jacobin women and the cockades!”100 In October 1793, “the market women petitioned the Convention for the abolition of the Society, contending that the members threatened their commerce and harassed them.”101 The Convention seized this opportunity to shut down the SRRW and subsequently outlaw all female clubs. Jacobin legislator Jean-Baptiste Amar defended such a proscription, arguing that, “Women lacked the requisite moral qualities and physical strength to participate in politics…. Nor could there be any question of women’s meeting in political associations, like clubs, the purpose of which was to unveil enemy maneuvers, to exercise surveillance over authorities, to provide examples of republican virtue, and to enlighten through ‘in-depth discussion.’”102 The Convention shut down the women’s clubs, claiming women unfit for political participation and disparagingly referring to them as


102 Ibid, 95-96.
“so-called Jacobins.”103 Amar argued that the female club members in revolutionary colors offended market women and that “women are hardly capable of lofty conceptions and serious cogitations.”104 As such, Amar turned women’s biology into an excuse for differentiating between male and female citizens and silencing female activists. The elimination of women’s meetings was one of the early steps to limiting and halting the political participation of women in the Revolution. With this decree, the SRRW was dissolved.

From this point forward, women in revolutionary France were prohibited from forming political clubs and societies. The legislation passed and limitations enforced on women in 1793 marked a dramatic shift in women’s ability to insert themselves in the political sphere; however, even these laws did not end women’s quest for rights or advancement of a feminist agenda: “Women from popular milieus, as ‘thinking’ and social beings, continued their interest and participation in revolutionary political life. Although they could no longer express their thoughts and demands in a club for women, only a minority had belonged to this club, and its prohibition did not end the presence of women of the people in the revolutionary movement.”105

Women were active agents in the French Revolution, fighting both for the Republic and their nation, as well as for women’s political rights. The Revolution opened


104 Ibid.

the discussion over whether women were individual human beings, capable of political identities.\textsuperscript{106} By the year 1795, many of the most outspoken female revolutionaries were dead or dispersed. Olympe de Gouges was executed, Lacombe was imprisoned, d’Aelders fled to Holland, and Mericourt fled and was rumored to have gone insane.\textsuperscript{107} This collective fate would lead many to believe that female citizens failed to achieve their goals during the French Revolution, “but the involvement of the women of Paris in the Revolution did have a lasting impact on French politics and society in spite of the numerous setbacks to women in the aftermath of Year II. Furthermore, women of the middle and lower classes acquired new outlooks about themselves and their role in society which could not be erased by patriarchal attitudes and laws.”\textsuperscript{108} The writings of feminists like Condorcet, de Gouges, and d’Aelders, along with the militancy of groups like the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, offered a sharp contrast to the legislation of the male revolutionaries. Fighting against their own oppressors and making a place for themselves in revolutionary politics despite political obstacles, French female revolutionaries laid the groundwork for feminist movements that would come decades later: “The human being is free only when not subjugated to the power of any other human being…. The qualification of a ‘free woman’ enabled one to play on this fundamental paradox: women were members of a ‘free’ people but subject to masculine

\textsuperscript{106} Sledziewski, “The French Revolution as the Turning Point.”

\textsuperscript{107} Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, \textit{Women in Revolutionary Paris}, 271.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 310.
‘despotism.’”109 These female activists initiated a feminist conversation on the role of women in democratized governments in Europe. The Revolution raised hopes for real change in women’s social, civil, and political status; however, the immediate result was a return to patriarchal politics and a reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Though women never shed their status as inferior, essentially passive, citizens of the French government, they made significant cultural advancements in feminist thought, and the seeds of feminism were planted in the Western world.

The male anxieties that followed female political participation had equally long-term cultural reverberations. Despite the positive feminist legacy, women’s political participation in the Revolution led to an immediate backlash on a cultural and political level in France and beyond. The following chapter will examine male anxieties surrounding the female citizen and male representations of the female as an apolitical entity both during and after the Revolution, as best exemplified through the cultural resonations and literary imagination of the Victorian world decades later.

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Chapter Three:
Culture Reverberations in the Western World:
Male Anxieties, Charles Dickens, and Victorian Gender Constructs

The French Revolution rocked the Western European world, setting the precedent for smaller revolutions in the nineteenth-century and for the spread of modern democratic political ideologies. The cultural and political changes in France reshaped the political concepts and ideological conversations across Europe, including those regarding female citizenship and political identities. During the Revolution, male policymakers shut down women’s freedoms and also commissioned many works of art that depicted the armed woman as a demon, contrasting her with the Republican Mother was the image of patriotic obedience. During the post-revolutionary era and into the Victorian Era, with the increase of industrial and factory growth, women left the home and entered the waged work force, creating concurrent concerns about the definition of womanhood and motherhood. The social changes that came with the Industrial Revolution generated conflicting understandings of female in the public sphere. While feminists in England would seek inspiration from republican ideals from revolutionary-era writers (such as Wollstonecraft), others continued to see the French Revolution as a warning of what can happen when politicians attempt to undo “natural” sexual difference. In the Victorian Era, many authors across borders and put pen to paper to grapple with the dichotomous image of women’s political activism and male anxieties arising from rapid social changes occurring during industrialism. This chapter will exclusively focus on English literary imagination and appropriations of gendered discourse spurred by the French Revolution.
These anxieties manifested in Victorian concepts of gender are best revealed in Charles Dickens’s 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens focused on social criticism throughout his literary career, but this novel worked to further legitimize the disenfranchisement of women, the disparaging of politically active women, and the reinforcement of separate spheres. This novel, and the cultural effects that followed its publication, reveal the dichotomous understanding of “good” and “bad” female behavior. Dickens’s novel indirectly criticized France’s revolutionary tradition, which he implies fell to the fury of militant and unnatural female activism, as opposed to English middle-class gentility. Influenced both by gender constructs in the 1850s, as well as the legacy of revolutionary-era gendered iconography, Dickens crafted a literary portrait of gender roles and a social critique of women’s place in the public sphere, commenting on his 1850s Victorian experience through the lens of revolutionary France.

**England and the French Revolution:**

Charles Dickens was English, writing about tumultuous events that happened in another country over fifty years prior. Why would this canonical author of Victorian England dedicate an entire novel to events distant in time and separated in space? Dickens had visited Paris and studied the French Revolution and French culture, an interest that was far from unusual for the time. Many people in Victorian England were fascinated with the French Revolution, and the history of the relationship between England and France during the revolutionary era was complex.
The start of the Revolution in 1789 did not appear cause for much alarm to the British public, with many newspapers debating whether the French Revolution was France’s attempt to reinvent Britain’s “Glorious Revolution” of the 1680s. This comparison brought about mixed reviews. Some British citizens viewed the Revolution as “the hand of JUSTICE” over the French people, while others, like William Wordsworth, felt the French were an inspiration to those unhappy with the British reforms of 1688, writing of the French Revolution “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.”\textsuperscript{110}

Responding to Britain’s own level of unrest in the 1790s, British intellectuals similarly debated how and if to institute the democratic rights of man. British opinion held the French state as unstable and chaotic. British radicals pushed for a revolutionary new form of government (democracy), while loyalists cast aside any social reform in favor of reinforcing the British constitution established after the Glorious Revolution in 1688: “Loyalists saw citizenship in terms of ‘traditional’ British values – property, social order, the Church and the monarchy…. The radicals, by contrast, thought that citizenship came from universal ‘natural rights’. This meant that all men (though not necessarily all women) had a right to take part in politics, whatever their social class, political background or religious beliefs.”\textsuperscript{111}


The debate was enhanced in England with the publication of Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* (1791-2), a defense of the French Revolution, a push for democracy, and an argument in defense of citizenship rights and reform. This book was in stark contrast, and somewhat in response, to loyalist Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, written a year earlier. Burke’s *Reflections* defended Britain’s existing constitution and argued that attempts at reform, such as the revolts in France, were dangerous and treasonous. Founded in 1792 by Thomas Hardy, the London Corresponding Society took up Paine’s ideas, intending to inform British citizens of the rights owed to them and infringed upon by the British government. However, in 1793, when things became more violent in France, the British government began treating groups of this nature as radical and dangerous: “The authorities sought to restrict the activities of reform societies under the guise of national security. British reformers, they argued, were far too similar to French Jacobins, the most powerful and extreme revolutionary faction. Government-sponsored journalists propagated this message in the press, while spies on the ground penetrated radical meetings and provided exaggerated reports of treasonous plots.” These debates led to a widespread fear and paranoia through the British society, and offered a spirit of unrest fifty years later at the time.

The Glorious Revolution, or the Revolution of 1688, in England led to the overthrow of King James II by Parliament and William of Orange. The result of this revolution was the passing of a Bill of Rights, the end of the Catholic monarchy, and the establishment of an early constitutional monarchy in England.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Mather, “The Impact of the French Revolution in Britain.”
Charles Dickens was writing. Harkening back to the writings of Wollstonecraft during the revolutionary-era, aspects of Victorian sexual norms derived from desires not to unleash the armed and political female citizen. A large part of the English inheritance and understanding of the French Revolution was concern over gender roles and the question of women’s rights. Backlash over these debates led to increased social anxiety and criticism from authors who penned social commentary on the debates of the time, which worked to further reinforce a strict gendered code in Victorian England. Known for his social commentary within his novels, Dickens incorporated criticism and analysis of female activism in the French Revolution from a British Victorian perspective.

Comparing the two countries, England and France, as part of his theme of dramatic extremes, Dickens described each country in contrast to each other. England had “a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face,” whereas France had “a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face.”\textsuperscript{115} Throughout the novel, the differences between the cities, and the importance of one’s nation, remains consistent. England was concerned with the unrest in the American colonies, along with religious strife. France was concerned with the lavish spending, intense violence, and a revolution looming on the horizon. By beginning the novel with the distinctions between the two cities, Dickens set the tone for the rest of the novel’s focus on doubles and extremes.

In many Victorian novels, French characters are written as violent and unconventional. The work of Charles Dickens is no exception. In \textit{A Tale}, England stands as orderly, quiet, and systematic, whereas France exists as chaotic and marked by public

\textsuperscript{115} Dickens, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, 3.
disarray. Similarly, the English characters are upper-middle-class, proper, and Victorian models of masculinity and femininity; French characters are lower-class, violent, and unconventional. Lucie Manette and Madame Defarge represent England and France, “middle-class lady and peasant, the perfect angel and her complete opposite.”\textsuperscript{116} The comparison of England and France became a popular motif in Victorian art forms, specifically the novel. Characters were given traits specifically linked to gender and class. The legacy of the French Revolution for the decades to come was one of heightened political awareness, economic and social debate, an increased sense of nationalism, and restructuring of gender and class boundaries, across the Western world. Charles Dickens helped to reinforce a patriarchal Victorian gendered order through the characterization of his female heroines and through gender motifs from the French Revolution. Dickens similarly included gendered national characters, celebrating English middle-class gentility, and therefore demonstrating limits to his own social critique of limitations on women.

\textbf{1850s European Gender Constructs:}

Writing fifty years after the end of the French Revolution, Dickens lived at the height of the Victorian Era. Spanning from 1837-1901 and named for Queen Victoria, the Victorian Era came to encompass distinct social and gender roles in Britain and to some degree the Western World. Queen Victoria “came to be seen as the very model of marital

stability and domestic virtue. Her marriage to Albert represented the ideal of marital harmony. She was described as the ‘mother of the nation’, and she came to embody the idea of home as a cosy [sic], domestic space.”117 After the Enlightenment and the close of the eighteenth-century, “male and female roles were drawn more sharply and what had been division of labour, separate areas of activity and control of separate spaces became articulated as a doctrine of separate spheres, which had at its core divergent notions of male and female.”118 The “elaboration of domesticity” in the nineteenth-century contributed to regimented gender roles and a renewed celebration of the Rousseauian wife and mother.119 Women could not vote or hold public positions, nor could they own property. Women’s education was only permitted to the extent that it encompassed relevant information pertinent to domesticity.120

Victorian concepts of sexuality combined concepts of Rousseauian female domesticity with modern concepts of male apprehensions over female sexuality. Victorians understood proper ladies as “desexualized Madonnas” and saviors destined to control male sexuality.121 Men and women were understood as binary opposites in terms

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118 Deborah Simonton, Women in European Culture and Society: Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700 (New York: Routledge, 2011), 134.

119 Ibid, 134.

of sexuality, with women as maternal and pure, without innate sexuality: “Women were redemptively maternal; the female body a ‘socially undifferentiated’ womb.”\textsuperscript{122} Men, on the other hand, had a natural sexuality that was outside of their control. For men “to maintain their positions of power within the society as a whole and the ‘little kingdoms’ of their own households,” they relied on their wives “as agents of salvation.”\textsuperscript{123}

The Victorian Era was also a time of rapid industrial growth. With the end of feudalism in England, the economy changed from agricultural-based to industrial-based.\textsuperscript{124} The Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century changed where people lived (rapid movement into large cities from the country), as well as the type of labor in demand. Most importantly, the Industrial Revolution ushered in changes to women’s work. Women’s work continued in the home with piecework, laundry services, and tailoring. However, there was also an increase in the numbers of women working outside of the home. Examples of women’s work included factory work (for the lower class) and female-appropriate work for the upper and middle classes, mostly charity work, nursing, and assisting with the family business.

The increased numbers of women working outside of the home had ramifications for their roles as wives and mothers. The (public) workingwoman, Victorians argued,

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{123}] Davidoff, “Class and Gender,” 90-91.
  \item[\textsuperscript{124}] Makati, “A Critical Study,” 17.
\end{itemize}
made a terrible wife and mother. Rigid Victorian gender roles could not easily accommodate working women outside of the home: “All social relationships including gender divisions were affected by these changes…. The status characteristics associated with gentility, for example, differed for men and women; and the concepts manhood and womanhood which are peculiar to the nineteenth century have very different resonances.”

By mid-century, English commentators drew a strict line between the lauded “Angel in the House” and the scorned “fallen” woman. The rigid ideology that developed divided all women in the Victorian Era into two irreconcilable groups – “wives or whores” – an ideal that shaped many cultural values and literary imaginations.

The socially valued Victorian wife represented the “Angel in the House,” a phrase coined from Coventry Patmore’s 1854 poem. Written in adoration of his wife, the poem described the perfect Victorian woman. The “Angel” must please her husband, and be pleased to do so. She must also “[love] with love that cannot tire; / And when, ah woe, she loves alone, / Through passionate duty loves springs higher, / As grass grows taller round a stone.” This Victorian phrase also described a woman willing to take on her

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125 Ibid, 54.

126 Davidoff, “Class and Gender,” 86-88.


husband’s sins as her own and to be confined to the hearth.\textsuperscript{129} This woman encompassed the moral responsibility for the family and inherited the Rousseauian ideals of womanhood. The role of wife and mother fulfilled the Angel’s life, harkening back to the model of the Rousseauian domestic woman: “She was expected in the lower classes to contribute to the family income. In the middle classes she provided indirect economic support through the care of her children, the purchasing and preparation of food and the making of clothes. This model gave way to an ideal which had little connection with any functional and responsible role in society…. In her most perfect form, the lady combined total sexual innocence, conspicuous consumption and the worship of the family hearth.”\textsuperscript{130} Victorian novels portrayed this Angel motif with female characters restricted in the domestic domain, caring for children, minding the servants, and running the household. These concepts were important to Dickens’s understanding of gender roles and the cultural connotations of women stepping outside these roles. Well aware of the “Angel” metaphor, Dickens created character foils in his novels; he created women who represented the “Angel in the House” deliberately opposing them to the women the “Angel” opposes: the “fallen” women.\textsuperscript{131}

The “fallen woman” could refer to virtually all women who lived a life that varied from the socially accepted female conventions, whether due to economic necessity or

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Martha Vicinus, \textit{Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age} (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1973), ix.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Makati, “A Critical Study.”
\end{itemize}
lack of maternal affection. In the Victorian Era, all working women risked being labeled as prostitutes: “The theme of prostitution and the ‘fallen woman’ became a staple feature of Victorian literature and politics…. The emphasis on the purity of women led to the portrayal of the prostitute as soiled, corrupt and in need of cleansing.”\footnote{Ibid, 26.} During this period of rampant industrialization, family units changed and many needed multiple incomes to survive. Sexually segregated women’s work paid less but was necessary to family survival. Working-class women took on unskilled domestic work, piecework, or sexually divided factory work (most often in textile factories) in addition to pre-existing domestic duties. As a result, “[women] left the social and economic protection of their families to encounter sexual exploitation and low wages, [and] they became part of the potential supply of new prostitutes.”\footnote{Ruth Rosen, \textit{The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 3.} More women needed to work, but the work that was available to them was undesirable and often dangerous. Women in the workforce during the industrial era were underpaid, undervalued, exploited, and vulnerable to sexual predation.

Much of women’s public work was understood through the lens of gender politics, specifically concerning prostitution and sexuality. The emerging Victorian sexual ideology tended to see prostitution as a necessary evil, yet still condemned the moral risk that prostitutes posed to upstanding and virtuous wives and mothers through their errant husbands. Considered a necessary evil, prostitution, it was argued, helped to conceal the pure Victorian wife and mother from the sexual promiscuity of men. Middle-

\footnote{Ibid, 26.}
class ideals in the nineteenth century “advocated male self-control and female passionlessness.” At the same time, a growing number of social reformers began to separate sexuality from reproduction. This change has been attributed to rapid industrialization and urbanization, as well as the increased knowledge of birth control methods to limit the size of one’s family. There began a cultural shift away from sex being viewed as a reproductive act, to more acceptance and acknowledgement that sex was an erotic act as well, increasing the demand for prostitution: “Despite wide variations in the content of published advice literature, a central tension runs throughout nineteenth-century sexual ideology – that is, whether sex ‘ought to be’ a procreative or an erotic act. The evidence of behavioral change strongly suggests that the procreative function of sex declined over the century.”

Overall, however, throughout the nineteenth-century, most people believed that procreation remained the most “valued goal of sex,” with social and reform agendas overwhelmingly focused on anxieties over disease, social chaos, and female desire. To protect the gentility of their respectable wives, men went to prostitutes, who “[functioned] as the ‘protector of the home,’ … servicing men’s sexual needs as other women could not, because a great gulf separated her nature from that of other women.

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135 Ibid, 201.

136 Ibid, 204.
Other women were pure; she was depraved.”¹³⁷ Sex, in the Victorian Era, was not confined within the home, under the guise of “protecting” wives’s purity. With the growing number of brothels and public places designated to the selling of sex, moral anxieties arose as sex increasingly became seen as a commodity. Victorian men fancied keeping “their happy and contended wives in their setting of affluent materialism” separate from the working women and invisible sectors of society; similarly, “they preferred to see the sweet and innocent wife who evoked their strongest moral sentiments rather than the wicked women of the Battersea pleasure gardens who led even proper Victorians into sinful transgressions.”¹³⁸ The complex world of nineteenth-century prostitution reveals a strong connection between prostitution, capitalism, and industrialism, marking the commodification of sex as a profitable and lucrative industry, both for urban development and working women. It also helps to reveal the prevalence of the trope of the “fallen” woman in Victorian literature.

**Dickens, Victorian Gender Norms, and the French Revolution:**

In his novels, Dickens both drew upon and reinforced dichotomous understandings of women’s roles, even as he offered stinging critiques of other Victorian conventions. Dickens typified the age in which he was living, writing “social critiques which attack the institutions that do not perform the roles for which they were created


and thus fail to reform society.”139 For example, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) criticizes class struggles during early industrialism, *Oliver Twist* (1837) often is read as a critique of child labor and poor houses during the Victorian Era, and *Bleak House* (1853), perhaps the most well-known of Dickens’s social commentaries, criticizes the unfairness of the law, the plight of the poor, and the lack of social justice for the underrepresented.140

When it comes to gender roles and sexual vulnerability, however, Dickens offered no such critique. The separation of women as the “Angel” or the “fallen” woman has “been so ubiquitous throughout literature by men and much preference is always given to the ‘ideal’ woman who is usually an embodiment of true femininity as shaped by patriarchy. The ‘monstrous’ female characters are women who are searching for liberty, but Dickens kills the rebellious nature in them and creates vulnerable women.”141 Dickens understood the gender constructs of the time in which he was writing, establishing strong character foils that would be recognizable to a Victorian audience.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, moreover, Dickens constructed his female protagonists out of both Victorian stereotypes and out of the rich archive of gendered iconography produced at the time of the novel’s central event: the French Revolution. Already, fifty years earlier, male revolutionaries had begun to establish a dichotomous understanding of female revolutionaries, depicted in iconography and imagery, based on female actions the first few years of the French Revolution. The revolutionaries, like all political actors, had

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140 Ibid, 13.

141 Ibid, 55.
“collective imaginations,” seeing themselves, their purpose, and the imagery they incorporated as it appealed to them. Male revolutionaries employed female imagery not to evoke realistic living women, but rather to project their fantasies and imaginations of how Republican women should be: “Most representations of the republic were feminine…. Young women appear almost promiscuously in official representations, for they could be and were used to represent every imaginable political attribute such as Liberty, Reason, Wisdom, Victory, and even Force. Whenever a political message required an allegorical presentation, the allegory almost always centered on female figures.” The iconography grounded republican ideals in symbolic form. Women could represent these abstract qualities, as they were so far from political office-holding positions that they could not be confused with any real male leader. Female figures would never be directly associated with a king or dictator, therefore making them safe representations: “Female allegories could not be associated with particular political leaders, if only because all officials were male by definition.” Despite these patriarchal and misogynist reasons behind the political representations of the female figure, “the female allegory had powerful resonances that went beyond the merely symbolic.” Men worked to legally and socially limit female power, but the imagery commission, initiated a type of influence and presence of women in the Revolutionary discussion: “The

143 Ibid, 82.
144 Ibid, 83.
145 Ibid, 84.
Revolution put females on a pedestal, embodying the images of ‘angels, saints, goddesses, and queens’…. The view that a woman’s power lay in her virtue perpetuated a concept of female influence and even dominance…. Despite their subordinate position and lack of education or political and economic opportunity, women were still believed to have a considerable amount of influence and power.”¹⁴⁶ This power manifested itself in the home and as symbols of the Republic.

Both idealized revolutionary allegorical female symbols of the Republic and imagery of dangerous armed *citoyennes* thus provide the second important context to understand the central female characters in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Revolutionary-era women were placed into dichotomous roles that, as seen through Victorian literature, at times mirrored roles in the Victorian era. The “Angels” maintained similar characteristics as the revered Republican Mothers, whereas the *tricoteuses* represented similar danger and fear as the Victorian “fallen” women. The dichotomous imagery that stemmed from the French Revolution, with similar dual understandings of women in the Victorian era, worked together to influence Dickens’s gendering understandings in his novel.

**History of the Author and Novel:**

Charles Dickens was born February 7, 1812, to John and Elizabeth Dickens. From a young age, Dickens was interested in books and education; however, growing up in poverty, he had very little formal education. By the year 1833, Dickens was steadily

submitting stories to the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Morning Chronicle*, and the *London Evening Chronicle*. The publisher hired Dickens to write his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), which was soon followed by numerous other novels, including *Oliver Twist, Barnaby Rudge*, and *A Christmas Carol.*\(^{147}\) During his early adulthood, Dickens began working in amateur theatre as a writer, director, and actor; many of his plays were adapted for the stage under his close eye.

In February 1859, Dickens was suffering from writer’s block while working on a novel he was unable to begin: “I cannot please myself with the opening… and cannot in the least settle at it or take to it.”\(^{148}\) However, once those few famous lines of the first chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities* were written, he was on his way to writing the masterpiece. The novel was to be published in parts within his weekly serial, *All the Year Round*. Dickens planned on taking the sensitivity and enthrallment of the English population with the French Revolution and creating a novel encompassing, “historical drama, social awareness, and nonsectarian Christian archetypes of compassion, forgiveness, and sacrifice.”\(^{149}\)

One of the best selling novels in British history, *A Tale of Two Cities* became one of Dickens’s most popular works, and, scholars argue, far more compassionate and


\(^{148}\) Ibid, 414.

\(^{149}\) Ibid, 415.
serious than his previous works. Many believe that Dickens’s passion and strong expression of the human condition in this novel stem from its autobiographical inspiration. The highly similar characters of Charley Darnay (possessing the author’s same initials) and Sydney Carton are said to be forms of Dickens himself: “They become one figure, two parts of Dickens’s personality that are united in art… between the two characters, he creates an antiphonal self-portrait that, while it emphasizes the heavy hand of the past and the potential for self-destruction, unites opposites into an idealized version of love.” This strong connection that Dickens felt for his two leading heroes shines through his words, making *A Tale of Two Cities* one of his most memorable novels.

To Dickens, London was culturally the center of the world, and while he loved to visit Paris and had stayed in the city for months at a time, his lack of experience of places outside of London make it even more remarkable that he was able to write “a book about two cities, one of which he understood; the other he did not understand. And his description of the city he did not know is almost better than his description of the city he did know.”

For the bulk of the historical research for the novel Dickens relied on Thomas Carlyle’s dramatic and idealistic chronicle, *The French Revolution: A History* (1837). Carlyle told the history of the French Revolution as a chaotic act of vengeance by the

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150 Ibid, 416.

151 Ibid, 417.

people and for the people.153 Carlyle prophesized and implied that England was on the same path to revolution if the “economic tyranny” of the early nineteenth century continued.154 Carlyle’s dramatic depiction greatly influenced Dickens, who depicted “the lurid picture of a cruel and oppressive old order, a world of ‘rapacious licence and oppression.’”155 Dickens incorporated historical facts (such as the seven prisoners released from the Bastille) in his story, differentiating him from many novelists and this time, who exaggerated facts and numbers.156

Dickens was drawn to the French Revolution both out of interest in the historical event and out of a perceived parallel between the Revolution in France fifty years earlier and the economic unrest in London in the 1840s and 1850s. On this strand, “unconsciously, but not accidentally, Dickens was here working out the whole true comparison between swift revolutionism in Paris and slow evolutionism in London.”157 Many literary critics agree that rather than making an argument about the French Revolution itself, Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* primarily as social commentary on Victorian England: the theme of so many of his works.

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157 Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms*, xxv.
A Tale of Two Cities follows members of a middle-class British family navigating their way through the streets of Paris at the time of the Terror in the French Revolution. Lucie Manette, her father, and her husband find themselves caught in the chaos of the Revolution when Manette’s husband, immigrant Charles Darnay, admits to being a member of the French aristocratic class. Returning to France from England, Darnay is captured and arrested by revolutionaries and sentenced to die by way of guillotine. Sydney Carton, a family friend, acts as the sacrificial figure, trading places with Darnay and dying by the guillotine following a dramatic monologue on the terrors of revolution and the hope that a better future lay ahead.

Divided into three books, each section centers on the rising storm of Revolution and the climactic final event. Book one, “Recalled to Life,” centers on the revival of the British Dr. Manette, a prisoner in pre-revolutionary France, and his reunion with his daughter Lucie back in England. The second book, “The Golden Thread,” focuses on the reconnection of the core family with new members and friends: Charles Darnay, Mr. Lorry, and Sydney Carton. Lucie and Charles are married and it is revealed that Charles is a member of the French elite, hiding in England. Lucie is the piece that binds them all together and the light that holds her father together. This book also details the life and interactions of Monsieur Defarge and Madame Defarge, French shopkeepers who are very active in the revolutionary events on the streets of Paris. The final book, “The Track of a Storm,” is when the pivotal revolutionary action takes place. The mob’s building aggression is like the growing chaos and hostility of a storm.
The novel was a success upon its release, and “the public was dazzled by the sureness of style, the firmness of tone, the combination of literary qualities and noble feelings whose ultimate referent as the model of Christ.”\textsuperscript{158} Carton sacrifices himself on the guillotine for the good of Lucie and her family, taking Darnay’s place in persecution, allowing the pivotal characters to flee back to England to safety. Dickens, through his descriptions of mankind’s haunting darkness and portrayal of the human condition apparent through universal concepts of moral chaos, displayed the possibility of resurrection and human restoration even at desperate times of revolution and terror.

\textit{A Tale of Two Cities} is also a novel about women’s roles and women’s attempts, at the time of the Revolution and after, to lay claim to some form of political citizenship and individual rights. The two main female characters of the novel represent different aspects of women’s struggle both at the time of the French Revolution, as well as in Victorian England. As literary critic Lisa Robson persuasively argues, the novel “contains female subversion and denies women access to effective political agency by characterizing their social activities as aberrant rather than ‘natural’ behavior…. Through [the] acceptance of Lucie and rejection of Madame Defarge, Dickens affirms the exclusion of women from political life and reveals a patriarchal fear of women becoming equal partners in the Revolution.”\textsuperscript{159} Through his unconventional female characterization, Dickens highlights the social questions of both his era and the Revolution. Women possessed power in his novel, suggesting that Dickens may have sympathized with the

\textsuperscript{158} Kaplan, \textit{Dickens}, 415.

\textsuperscript{159} Robson, “The Angels in Dickens’s House”, 327.
plight of women, granting them agency and identity at a time of male-dominated politics: “Dickens raises La Guillotine to near mythic status by suggesting her timelessness and universal familiarity, and clearly identifies as female this symbol of the bloodthirstiness of revolutionary vengeance. Just as his extreme portrayal and rejection of Madame Defarge and his exaggerated depiction of Lucie as a desired feminine form demonstrates patriarchal anxiety about powerful women, so Dickens’s use of feminine and female symbols to represent the French Revolution, its causes and effects, underscores a need for containment of such convulsion and a fear of revolution itself.” Ultimately, however, the socially conservative assessment of the female question presented in the novel represents the author’s attempt at commenting on the plight of women during a time fifty years before his own. Dickens’s limited understanding of revolutionary politics and women’s quest for rights, as well as his clear representation of his two female characters as opposites, further comments on the confusion and angst over public women in the England in the 1850s and reveal Dickens to be an author aligning with the Victorian understandings of female sexuality.

**Lucie Manette: The Republican Mother and the Angel in the House**

Charles Dickens transposed the imagery of the ideal Republican and Rousseau-ian woman onto his heroine Lucie Manette, ultimately transforming her into the Victorian “Angel in the House.” While Lucie represents aspects of the Republican Mother, her identity is much more complex. Like the Republican Mother, Lucie possesses an elevated

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status as a nurturer of the nation; however, unlike the Republican Mother, she does not make claims for education and rights as a mother. In this way, she remains very much in her roles as a Victorian mother and “Angel.” Lucie encompasses the ideals of both eras, revealing herself as the savior and symbol of purity at a time of revolutionary chaos.

In building the character of Lucie, Dickens borrowed from and built on the obsequious revolutionary iconography of the Republican Mother, often imagined through the various depictions of breastfeeding mothers, as well as the imagery of Lady Liberty and Marianne. Breastfeeding was significant to male revolutionaries as symbolic of a woman’s biological maternal duty. Revolutionary artists offered many images of the idealized woman of the imagination. This woman, characteristically gentile, timid, and charming, had her origins in Rousseau-ian writings in the eighteenth century. The ideal woman was also weak, both physically and mentally compared to the man and she was unable to engage in industrial labor. She would not have the physical or mental stamina to keep up with her husband’s acuity. Using biology and “nature” as a defense to keep women out of the political world, many revolutionary men argued that the woman had “breasts for nursing” and that the “heated discussions” of political debates were “incompatible with gentleness and moderation” of women. Predominantly, male policymakers argued that her role was of obedient wife and mother, primarily concerned with feeding and nurturing her children. Maternal imagery became such a popular ideal that Liberty often had one breast exposed to promote the idea of the Republic as a


nurturing mother to the French subjects.\textsuperscript{163} The venerated image of the mother endured, as “women were not merely mothers but mothers of future republicans and revolutionary combatants. The future of the Republic, which needed soldiers, depended on them.”\textsuperscript{164}

The Revolution claimed to need women, but that need only extended to the “domestic life that nurtured [their] patriotic husband[s] and raised [their] children to support the ideals for which [they] lived.”\textsuperscript{165} As we saw in chapter one, women’s groups, such as the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, sometimes played on this maternal imagery, evoking women’s place as mothers of the nation to fight for women’s rights and citizenship. The government-commissioned imagery of motherhood appeared to commend women’s domestic skills, establishing them as vital to the democratic goals of the Republic: “The virtuous republican woman became enshrined in the \textit{mere de famille} – the mother of a family. She was retiring, simple and pure, but above all she was fertile…. Motherhood was a woman’s duty, her triumph, her glory.”\textsuperscript{166}

Male revolutionaries depicted the Republican Mother as a young woman, establishing her as “precisely the kind of transparent, natural representation that a reading of Rousseau inclined the revolutionaries to adopt…. As opposed to the sexually threatening images of the female aristocratic body, this feminine representation of the reinvented body politic seems almost to call out for the protection of virile republican


\textsuperscript{164} Godineau, \textit{The Women of Paris}, 29.

\textsuperscript{165} Milroy, “Insult and Injury,” 50.

men." The key word in this description is transparent. Since there was not the fear of
the female vote or female office-holders, the abstract female figure seemed
nonthreatening. She represented all the Republic stood for, while also paving a way for
male leaders to transform her image into messages that best suited the Republic. Lady
Liberty managed to “achieve an abstract, impersonal representation that carried none of
the connotations of monarchical rule…. The female representation of the nation works
best because it effaces the identifiable features of any known female person. Because of
her generality, Liberty stands as a metaphor – not a metonym – for the whole social
community, free from any and all divisions.” Through her motherly features, the
imagery of Liberty further reinforced gender division of spheres, domains, and lifestyles.

Lady Liberty and Marianne, a symbol of the democratic Republic, both
represented aspects of the male understanding of women and their roles. Marianne,
represented reason, rights, and an armed defense of the nation. As opposed to the
domestic, maternal Liberty, Marianne was a young woman in a Phrygian warrior’s
helmet. She was identifiable to the working classes and stood for the motherland, both
during wartime and peacetime. As a primary symbol of the Revolution, Marianne
gained popularity in 1792. More so than Liberty, Marianne embraced the old and the new
France, with her attire most often in the style of Antiquity and her armor that of a helmet,

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167 Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere.*

168 Ibid, 29.

169 “Marianne and the Motto of the Republic,” *Gouvernement.fr.* Accessed February 20,
a French flag, and a copy of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.\textsuperscript{170} Most often depicted as an abstract woman, she revealed a masculine perspective of the ideal image for their newborn Republic. While different in their representations and significance, both female symbols exemplified male understandings of women’s place in the public eye.

The character of Lucie Manette in \textit{A Tale of Two Cities} borrows from these revolutionary images, but Dickens transformed them into a distinctly Victorian ideal of womanhood. His manipulation of the revolutionary rhetoric from a Victorian perspective becomes a depiction of the “Angel in the House.” Lucie’s characterization is that of an ideal Victorian woman, set in the backdrop of the chaotic and confusing French Revolution. Victorian by nature – domestic, innocent, perfectly dressed, obediently behaved, angelic, and self-sacrificial – Lucie sees herself only as a daughter, wife, and mother. When topics of Revolution arise, she excuses herself from the room. At the first trial of Darnay, the crowd is hungrily watching the proceedings, hoping that they will be able to witness an execution. Lucie, on the other hand, shows so much frailty and pity, that the crowd is struck by her concern: “Her forehead had been strikingly expressive of an engrossing terror and compassion… starers who had had no pity for him were touched by her.”\textsuperscript{171} After the crowd witnesses her pity, they take it upon themselves to feel it as well; however, this sympathy lasts only moments, until they become bloodthirsty once more.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{171} Dickens, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, 67.
Another display of Lucie’s purity and kindness is shown in her affections for her father. After saving him from imprisonment in France, Lucie rekindles a deep love and connection with her father, so intense that the very thought of being separated from him by marriage is enough to emotionally devastate her. Lucie is the representation of all things good and radiant in the novel and is often referred to as the light or “golden thread.” Representative of the “Angel in the House”, she holds the moral responsibility for the family: “Only his daughter had the power of charming this black brooding from his mind. She was the golden thread that united him to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery: and the sound of her voice, the light of her face, the touch of her hand, had a strong beneficial influence with him almost always.”

Dickens presents her as the Angel, working tirelessly to please her father and any other male characters that enter her home.

Using the “Angel in the House” as a model for female characters was common for novelists in the Victorian era. Dickens, however, went a step further, depicting Lucie with “supposedly innate redemptive and regenerative abilities, [and a] capacity to function as a type of savior figure, and the consequent elevation she receives as a spiritual creature to be worshipped.” Lucie personifies the evolution of the Angel imagery to a savior-like figure, as the “golden thread” that rescues them all from the darkness of the

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172 Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 76.


streets and the Revolution. She, like the idealized Victorian woman, encompassed the moral responsibility and the pure redemptive power within the home. Lucie is able to resurrect her father after his imprisonment, using her feminine qualities of kindness, selflessness, gentleness, and concern to entice him back into his old middle-class life.\textsuperscript{175} Consistent reference to her as the “golden thread” harkens back, “toward a mythic connection with the Greek Fates as the weavers of destiny. This mention of the traditionally female activities of spinning and sewing suggests the novel’s metaphor of redemption, or the feminine saint image, by highlighting the domesticity of feminine figures in their roles as preservers and reconcilers of the family.”\textsuperscript{176} Lucie inhabits a specific role necessary to the survival of her family and fulfills the domestic needs of each male character in the book: “As an idealized feminine figure, Lucie is everything to everyone; she is innocent child to her father, loving (yet pure and non-sexual) wife to her husband, and compassionate friend and moral inspiration to those who love her. Through this firm affirmation of Lucie and her redemptive capacity, Dickens offers such feminine virtue, charitable love and self-sacrifice as alternatives to the violence and inhumanity which dominate his representation of the French Revolution.”\textsuperscript{177}

The common theme of female saviors in Victorian literature reinforced patriarchal cultural ideals, as did the Republican Mother argument. Lucie had the ability through “all [her] faithful service” to remind the men in her family of the home they left in England

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 313.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, 314.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, 314.
through the desolation of Paris.\textsuperscript{178} Her capacity to be a savior resulted in her own detriment: “A woman whose very name suggests ‘light,’ Lucie’s ability to redeem others depends upon her capacity to love them and sacrifice herself for them.”\textsuperscript{179} The character of Lucie Manette came to represent ideal womanhood at a time when women were assigned domestic identities. Lucie finds strength and voice within the home, recalling her father and husband to life and acting as the golden thread they all cling to; however, her voice is limited once she leaves the household: “To sympathize with Lucie is to join her in self-abandonment to the interests of middle-class men. If middle-class female sympathy does not prove fatal in being a crime against the French Republic, then it works its own suicidal course.”\textsuperscript{180} Women of the novel were designated an elevated status as agents with moral and saint-like abilities, yet they were still only given passive citizenship (and passive agency in a novel-setting). This irony led to an “impasse” of sorts, which “explains the dull and lifeless representation of Lucie in the text, because in order to survive under such circumstances Lucie must remain an ‘unconscious and happy’ heroine with little personality.”\textsuperscript{181} Writing in the Victorian Era, Dickens understood these gender dichotomies and the struggle for women’s rights, creating unconventional female roles in novel. Lucie’s unconventionality resides in the agency

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\textsuperscript{178} Dickens, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, 54.
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\textsuperscript{179} Robson, “The Angels in Dickens’s House”, 313.
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\textsuperscript{181} Robson, “The Angels in Dickens’s House”, 316.
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and power she is given within her home and over her family. The characterization of both Lucie and Madame Defarge “[exposes] social problems and [explores] new spaces for women to inhabit. Yet, although Dickens appears to allow these women to adopt non-traditional female roles, he consistently reverted to granting them representation only as passive, silent, marginal figures… [Allowing] women to break free from traditional sexual boundaries only to recontain them more forcefully in their traditional positions.”

Certainly influenced by idealized images of female republican virtue, Dickens created a female protagonist who personifies the ideals of her nation, while representing the values of Victorian female purity. While Dickens was inspired by revolutionary imagery, Lucie remains a product of the Victorian world, rather than expressing characteristics of the revolutionary-era women represented in iconography. Depicted as a Liberty-like character, Lucie never lays claims to a political identity or rights for her sex, rather Dickens depicted her as the “Angel in the House,” embracing Victorian domesticity and avoiding claims to a political identity or voice.

**Madame Defarge: The Armed Female Citizen and the Fallen Woman**

In revolutionary France, the icon of the armed and angry female citizen acted as a character foil, or contrasting figure, to the Republican Mother. Dangerous and unpredictable, real and imaginary, the armed woman aroused the anxieties of revolutionary men and haunted Dickens’s fictional portrayal. Dickens’s understanding of female militancy can be seen in his character Madame Defarge and her dark, conniving

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182 Ibid, 312.
plot for revenge. In the person of Madame Defarge, the armed revolutionary woman became the “fallen” woman of the Victorian Era.

Intimidating and threatening, the armed woman was both a social reality and a symbolic threat from 1789-1799. Moreover, the ultimate symbol of revolutionary terror, the guillotine, was feminized, referred to both as Saint Guillotine and Madame Guillotine.183 Such imagery conjured up visions of unruly female mobs calling out for blood to flow and heads to fall. To claim their place in public and in the Revolution, many revolutionary women did claim the guillotine as their own and supported the Terror, pinpointing enemies as the aristocracy and the Royalists. The guillotine became “the protective ‘saint’ of the Revolution.”184 The cult surrounding the killing machine was in fact primarily female. Women attended the spectacle of the executions in a mass number, “[valuing] the executions, not always as the death of men, but for what the executions represented: the annihilation of the enemy.”185 These attendance numbers, as well as the feminizing of Saint Guillotine, led to the labeling of women as “furies of the guillotine.”186 Forbidden from bearing arms or participating in the legislative process of the Revolution, women attended the executions in part as a political act, to witness the wheels of justice. They also were less shocked by the spectacle than we might expect. Women of the Revolution had hardened sensibilities due to the frequently rough


185 Ibid, 230.

186 Ibid.
conditions of daily life. To a modern reader, this seems callous, shocking, and grotesque; yet it is important to remember that working women living in eighteenth-century Europe at times of political, financial, and social revolution had a desensitization to daily violence, unfamiliar to many women today.

Actual political and militant women did not fare well in revolutionary iconography, as can be seen in descriptions of revolutionary “men-women” and the tricoteuses. The Man-Woman imagery worked as a type of warning to women participating in public demonstrations that they were unnatural, and therefore anti-revolutionary. The French Republic promoted familial values and the significance of remaining within one’s gender boundaries as necessary for the Republic to thrive. The concept of the “family romance” helped to structure the Revolution, and similarly explained the transition from absolutism (restrictive parents) to fraternity (solidarity from one’s parents).¹⁸⁷ When the revolutionary Charlotte Corday murdered Jean-Paul Marat, the editor of the newspaper “Friend of the People” in July 1793, she defended her actions as those defending a liberating people from an oppressor.¹⁸⁸ The French state, concerned over her acclaim, published a newspaper article defaming her: “This woman, said to be very pretty, was not at all pretty; she was a virago, brawny… as are almost all female philosophers and eggheads…. Charlotte Corday was 25 years old; in our customs that is practically an old maid, especially with a masculinized bearing and boyish look…. Thus,

¹⁸⁷ Hunt, The Family Romance, xv.

it follows that this woman had thrown herself absolutely outside of her sex.”

Challenges to these defined gender roles were depicted as harmful to the home, as well as to the nation. Members of the political body, such as Maximilien Robespierre, attempted to remove women’s political identity throughout the course of the Revolution, arguing that political women threatened republican ideology, actively “[silencing] the voices of fully half the country’s population.” The 1789 pamphlet “Women of the Third Estate” detailed these mixed-gendered women, calling them negligent mothers, monsters, and beings that presented a threat to all of the values the Republic held close. Olympe de Gouges, the pamphlet propagandized, was one such “man-woman” who had “forgotten the virtues that belong to her sex.” The “woman-man,” it was argued, was unnatural and did not belong in the political world or public sphere.

In the character of Madame Defarge, Dickens melded together imagery of the militant female citizen of the French Revolution and, in the abstract, the Victorian “fallen” woman. While Defarge is neither a prostitute nor a depraved character, she represents a politically active, and therefore inhumane woman. Women like Mme. Defarge who were politically effective in Victorian novels tended to lose not only their sense of femininity, but also their sense of humanity. Madame Defarge embodies the “darkness” of human nature and of revolution. Her character is very cold, cruel, and

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189 Cited in Hunt, *The Family Romance*, 82.


callous. One of the scariest aspects of her character is that she appears to be the silence, or calm, before the storm. This is a deceptive image, however, because she is ever plotting and scheming, even in her silence: “It was nothing to her, that his wife was to be made a widow and his daughter an orphan; that was insufficient punishment, because they were her natural enemies and her prey, and as such had no right to live… Such a heart Madame Defarge carried under her rough robe.”

The casting of Mme. Defarge as an inhumane animal brings to mind the common depictions in both British and French revolutionary-era press of vicious revolutionary public women, such as the prolific imagery of Theroigne de Mericourt as a bloodthirsty cannibal.

The lives of others are insignificant to Mme. Defarge, as long as her revolutionary goals succeed. Early on in the novel, readers discover that in Mme. Defarge’s quiet knitting, she is “registering” names into her work; this registration is a document of those targets whom the revolutionaries are planning on executing. She quietly keeps to her knitting but always has an evil eye on her surroundings. There is a power in secrecy, especially through Madame Defarge. She has an unknown secret that she uses as her motivation and justification for her vengeance. These secrets make Madame Defarge more terrifying and powerful. In Dickens’s novel, good and evil are represented as his characters are- constant and rigid. Madame Defarge is as evil as Lucie is good.

Madame Defarge, as a fury of the guillotine, represents social anger and the lengths women went to have a public presence. Shouting, “tell the Wind and Fire where to stop; not me,” the fury knits away the lives of the victims of the Revolution, living in

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anger and resentment.\textsuperscript{194} As the “would-be Fate of the novel,” the character “is the image of death itself: remorseless, frightening, and yet masochistically attractive, and finally conquered only by heroic love.”\textsuperscript{195}

Mme. Defarge is not shown any sympathy until Dickens reveals the source of her anger: the rape of her sister by the aristocrat Marquis, closely associating Mme. Defarge with a “fallen woman.” The cruelty and oppression by the aristocracy is personified by the Marquis, who essentially serves as the villain of the novel. With no remorse for the poor, he is the rapist (both literally, in the case of Mme. Defarge’s sister, and figuratively) of the less fortunate.\textsuperscript{196} Madame Defarge’s desire for revenge justifies the revolution, the violence, and her association with both. Her identity as a fury strengthens the more she participates in and rationalizes the spectacle of the Revolution. The spectacle has fundamentally become her identity. Throughout the novel, she remains always present, always watching, always knitting. With her “watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything,” she managed to weave the fate of those who wronged the people of the streets.\textsuperscript{197} Comparable to “a modern-day spy,” she is watchful and adept at nonverbal communication: “Defarge’s knitting is both camouflage and badge. Dickens represented her as a tricoteuse (in English, a knitter), one of those terrible women who

\textsuperscript{194} Dickens, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, 327.
\textsuperscript{195} Bloom, \textit{Charles Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities}, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{197} Dickens, \textit{A Tale of Two Cities}, 24.
would take their knitting and watch the public beheadings in Paris during the revolution. They are tough, unforgiving and ruthless. Their knitting may seem harmless, but their needles have sharp points.”198 Her sole focus, as she weaves in the names of those to be executed by the revolution, is to seek revenge for her sister’s rape, a mission that has consumed her feminine identity. The rape of Madame Defarge’s sister by the Marquis “highlights a sense of callous, aristocratic indifference which helps to create the class hatred.”199 The victim of the rape is not given any agency, in fact readers do not learn her identity until much later in the novel, but instead she serves as the catalyst for much action in the novel. She is the reason behind Doctor Manette’s imprisonment and Charles’s connection to the Manettes, and she also acts as the motivation behind Madame Defarge’s rage and thirst for revenge. Her sister represents female innocence lost in a world of revolution, exploitation, and chaos.200

Rather than granting Defarge political awareness and knowledge, Dickens presented her as an asexual creature driven by bloodlust. Madame Defarge stands as the most overt example of a revolutionary woman, closely associated with the disdain of “fallen” women. She is not a mother, “she is neither submissive victim nor saintly
savior.”201 Madame Defarge comes to represent the “unnatural horror of revolutionary violence.”202 She is ruthless and “wholly unfeminine,” with her run-down and sharp appearance setting her as “angelic Lucie’s dark-haired antithesis.”203 Eventually killed in an epic and climactic final battle, Madame Defarge becomes “immortalized,” knitting the names of those to be executed by La Guillotine, terrorizing those around her. The imagery of a blood-lusting armed woman on the streets, personified through Madame Defarge, became a “dominant nineteenth-century stereotype still [persisting] in popular representations of the revolutionary woman.”204 Neither a conventional “fallen” woman, nor a prostitute, Defarge represents a combination of the stereotypes of women that brought alarm and apprehension to male citizens. Active and angry, she takes initiative to aggressively insert herself into the Revolution and into conversations between men, while depicted as an inhumane and “bad” woman.

**Conclusion:**

Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* represents one microcosmic example of the many cultural reverberations stemming from the French Revolution. Female laborers in Dickens’s Victorian England generated similar anxieties, as had political women in Revolutionary France. Dichotomous imagery of revolutionary Republican Mothers and

201 Ibid, 322.

202 Ibid, 323.

203 Ibid, 323.

armed furies, paired with his contemporary understandings of the Angel in the House and the fallen woman, served as the foundation for Dickens’s characterization of unconventional female characters, both French and English. The dramatic distinction between Lucie’s golden threads and Mme. Defarge’s knitting needles served as effective social commentary on unconventional gender roles spanning the 1780s to 1850s. Representing Lucie in such stark opposition of Madame Defarge reveals Dickens’s own retelling of the events and aftermath of the French Revolution. His literary imagination built on both real women’s actions, as well as widely circulating revolutionary iconography that depicted women’s demands and activism.

Dickens’s understanding of gender issues in the Revolution was influenced by revolutionary iconography, but more so by the changing social world of his own Victorian England, brought about by rapid industrialization and urban growth. Through Lucie and Mme. Defarge, Dickens legitimates the patriarchal doctrine of separate spheres by idolizing the “Angel in the House,” and condemning her character foil to fictional death. This fictional tale also reaffirmed the stereotyping of dangerous female activism through the depiction of violent and threatening armed women. The theme of duality present in the novel appears in the title as well as the character foiling. The title of the novel implies the symbolism of two vastly different cities. Dickens’s female protagonists more broadly represent these two cities. In praising Lucie (the Londoner), Dickens is thus also subtly championing England’s civilized historical evolution over France’s revolutionary and violent one.
Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* expanded on revolutionary era anxieties and apprehensions of militant womanhood into the nineteenth century and across the Anglo-phone world, helping to re-establish philosophies of female domesticity and potentially further impeding female political development for many decades to come.
Chapter Four:  
Conclusion

Commenting on events of the French Revolution from a Victorian perspective, Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* is one notable example of the spread of male anxieties concerning the politically active female citizen. Inspired by the commissioned iconography of the revolutionary era, as well as the fears of women in the workforce during the Industrial Revolution, Dickens relies on unconventional characterization of his female characters to reveal the social apprehensions of the Victorian world. The dichotomous imagery of active women from the French Revolution, paired with his own understanding of the Victorian “Angel in the House” and the “fallen” woman, were the foundation for Dickens’s characterization of female characters. The understanding of women established both during and after the revolutionary era resonated with many Europeans in the Victorian Era and contributed to Victorian literary imagination and understanding of gender roles.

The armed and angry female citizen was a very real and present fear in male French revolutionary thought. These “evildoers” were considered a threat to society because they “[inspired] in women the desire to share the political rights of men.”205 Women who wore the cockade and joined public revolutionary protests incited a concern among many men that women would want equal rights as men, the ability to vote in assemblies, and the opportunity to hold political office. Revolutionary imagery did not

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depict such women in a positive light. Rather, male revolutionaries preferred to idealize women as breastfeeding mothers or condemn them as “furies.” In very Rousseau-ian terminology, these men depicted any woman who was not a dedicated and submissive wife and mother as a siren of the guillotine, an armed threat to the Republic. While it was the male revolutionaries who commissioned this iconography, the understanding of women ultimately helped women to strategically “find their place among the colorful images of revolutionary France, sometimes as real historical figures, more often as legends – Amazons, furies, heroines – or as invented characters – the Madame Defarges and the neoclassical goddesses of liberty. Such historical memories have distorted or suppressed the very real contributions that women.”

While the imagery created during the French Revolution and the stereotypes of women in the Victorian Era inhibited women on the surface, many early feminists manipulated this imagery to plant early seeds of feminist thought. The Republican Mother concept embraced male revolutionaries’ understanding that women belonged in a separate sphere; this thinking was not new or revolutionary. What made this argument different from gender debates decades before was the reliance on science and reason to show difference and to defend gender assigned roles. The Republican Mother argument represented one early feminist example of female activists manipulating a revolutionary stance in order to embrace their place as mothers of the Republic who deserved natural rights. Women in the eighteenth century were acknowledged for their

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207 Outram, *The Enlightenement*, 91.
contribution to society, but this contribution was viewed as solely biological. Women were credited as mothers, wet nurses, and homemakers.\textsuperscript{208} Strategically, the Republican Mother argument encouraged the evolution of the role of the mother in the home- she should be educated politically, socially, and economically so she can better raise future republicans and be a better wife to her husband. Adopting the Rousseau-ian ideology of the perfect woman as patient, compliant, and meek, early feminists highlighted those differences as reasons why they needed changes in their social condition within the domestic sphere to better the Republic. The concept of the Republican Mother acknowledged the natural differences between women and men. Using this argument to call for political rights, women played on the concept to inspire in their children a sense of politics and patriotism. Despite the attempts to manipulate revolutionary rhetoric in their favor, many men used this manipulation to further condemn women to a private life in the domestic sphere: “Thus a demand for citizenship based primarily on woman’s performance of her maternal duty was easily refuted. If woman’s service to the community was viewed as a function of her mothering role, the most likely consequence was to offer women political representation in a \textit{mediated} fashion. This is ultimately how women’s demands for greater participation in the new French republic was greeted.”\textsuperscript{209}

Although Marianne was a masculine construction, female revolutionaries also adopted her to represent their proto-feminist, republican efforts. The collective voice of women revolutionaries protesting and making demands was often referred to as the voice of

\textsuperscript{208} Steinbrugge, \textit{The Moral Sex}, 26.

\textsuperscript{209} Landes, \textit{Women in the Public Sphere}, 138.
Marianne. In this sense, a figure of patriarchal origin was redefined as a collective feminist symbol.

Extending into the nineteenth century, Victorian feminism had its earliest seeds in domesticity and the role of the mother, with influence from the French feminists. During the Victorian Era, the concept of charities and charity work became a large role for groups of women to fulfill, and “Victorian feminism emerged as a potent political force.” Victorian feminism was a push against patriarchal society and oppressed social structures, at a time when women fought for equality in public, social, and economic life, through legislation and overt public work: “Victorian feminism was a struggle against women’s confinement to the private life and their yearning for belonging to the public world of politics and business.” Prominent in Victorian literature and key legislative acts, firstwave feminism can be traced to the writings and actions of women in the French Revolution and in the post-revolutionary era.

Writing during a time of rapid social and economic change, Dickens acknowledged the struggles of women (even fifty years earlier), and how women’s push for public identities resulted in male anxieties: “The perception of women by men is characterized by criticism and cynicism, which is reiterated by Charles Dickens in the presentations of [some of his female] characters.” Despite this acknowledgement, the author worked to reinforce patriarchal views on gender. He greatly idolizes the Angel in

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210 Abrams, “Ideals of Womanhood”.


212 Ibid, 64.
the House figures, while representing public women as “grotesque” or unnatural. Dickens offered a social criticism of women’s struggles during the Revolution, as well as during the rapid industrialism of the Victorian era. Ultimately, his female characterization reveals him as a Victorian man with a Victorian patriarchal understanding of female sexuality and women’s activism. Looking ahead, the struggles of French feminists paired with the anxieties of men, greatly contributed to the establishment of Victorian feminism and the decades-long battle for women’s individual rights of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries.

Female revolutionary action and participation in the French Revolution, both real and imagined, terrified male citizens and led to a strong backlash against women’s rights both at the time of the Revolution and long after. Seeking to understand and contain politicized womanhood, male citizens began to portray women as either honorable Republican Mothers or armed and dangerous female citizens. They commissioned iconography in praise of the first and in degradation of the latter. To limit this participation, during the Terror, women’s political and social rights were further limited and their calls for individual rights were ignored. During the French Revolution and in the decades to come, this dual understanding of female activism became further entrenched through literary understanding of female political expression. In Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, the male apprehensions concerning female activism and democratic liberties merge into a distinctly Victorian understanding of women’s roles. The novel further works to reinforce the praise of the “Angel in the House” and separate spheres

\[213 \text{ Ibid, 64.}\]
ideology. An analysis of the legacies of female activists in the French Revolution in tandem with Victorian literary gender constructs, helps to expose a clear representation of the history leading to the century-long struggle feminists would face while striving for individual and human rights in the Western world
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