‘Invisibles et présentes par-tout’:
Re-viewing Women from the Ancient Past
in Late Eighteenth-Century French Art

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Abstract of thesis

This project examines late eighteenth-century French visual representations of selected women from ancient and classical history, with a particular interest in those produced and viewed during the Revolution of 1789-1799. It is clear from the records of Salon exhibitions, and from extant works, that women such as Lucretia, Cornelia, Sappho and the Sabines were a constant presence in art during this period. Depictions of them form a substantial body of work; however, this has not so far been the subject of a sustained study in itself. General surveys mention the most well-known works, and some individual women have been examined in isolation, but overall they remain marginalised, obscured or only partially revealed in art historical discourse.

The principal aim of this thesis is to arrive at a better understanding of what these women represented for artists and spectators (both male and female). How did images of them function in social and political terms, particularly during the Revolution? From an initial survey of over forty women from the ancient past, I have selected four contrasting ‘types’ and focused on key representatives of each: Cornelia the good republican mother (Chapter One); the Sabine women, who take interventionary action through public protest (Chapter Two); Sappho and Aspasia, examples of intellectual and influential women (Chapter Three); and Lucretia, one of several women in whose narrative sex, death, and politics converge (Chapter Four).

My work challenges existing assumptions about what this imagery signified, developing counter-readings and analysing ambiguities and polysemy that have not so far been discussed. It also imagines previously unconsidered interpretive communities of spectators with their own agendas, focusing on the largely lost voices of female viewers. Overall, visual representations of women from the ancient past are shown to be complex, vital components in political, cultural and social debate about the role of women in Revolutionary France.
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Contents List

Abstract of thesis ................................................................. 2
Acknowledgements ............................................................... 3
List of illustrations ............................................................... 6

Introduction ............................................................................ 16

Chapter One .......................................................................... 32
The complexities of Cornelia: re-imagining Revolutionary role models

Chapter Two ........................................................................... 96
Strategies for the Sabines: re-examining the representation of women
who intervene

Chapter Three ....................................................................... 159
Sappho and Aspasia: contrasting approaches to intellectual women from
the ancient past

Chapter Four ......................................................................... 220
The visibility of Lucretia: rape, revenge and representation

Conclusion ............................................................................... 275

Illustrations ............................................................................ 282

Appendix .................................................................................. 394
Bibliography ............................................................................ 424
List of Illustrations

1. Noel Hallé, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1779 Salon, oil on canvas, 76 x 96 cm, Montpellier, Musée Fabre
2. Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1781 (possibly exhibited at the 1785 Salon), oil on canvas, 54.5 x 84.5 cm, London, National Gallery
3. Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1781, oil on canvas, 93 x 132 cm, Toulouse, Musée des Augustins
4. Joseph-Benoît Suvée, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1795 Salon, oil on canvas, 318 x 420 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
5. Joseph-Benoît Suvée, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1790-1795, oil on panel, 36 x 46 cm, Paris, private collection
6. Jacques-Louis David, *Le triomphe du peuple français*, 1794, black pencil, ink and wash with white highlights, 32.5 x 71 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet
8. François-Xavier Fabre, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, undated, graphite on paper, 35 x 24 cm, Montpellier, Musée Fabre
9. Charles Meynier, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, undated, pen and brown ink and brown wash over black chalk on buff paper, 45.5 x 60.5 cm, exhibited in *Master Drawings* at Colnaghi (New York and London), 1998
11. Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, c. 1780-1781, oil on canvas, 24.5 x 32.5 cm, French art market
12. Angelica Kauffman, *Cornelia, the Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures*, 1785, oil on canvas, 100 x 125 cm, Richmond, VA, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts


15. Attributed to Jean-Baptiste Mallet, *Sacrifice à la patrie, ou le départ d’un volontaire*, 1793 Salon, oil on canvas, 71.5 x 59 cm, Grasse, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire

16. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *La patrie en danger*, 1799 Salon, oil on canvas, 59 x 100 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution

17. Avril designed and engraved, *La mère Lacédémonienne remet à son fils un bouclier, lui disant, reviens avec ou dessus*, 1795 Salon, engraving, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes


22. Hubert Robert, *La Grande Galerie du Louvre*, c. 1794-1796, oil on canvas, 37 x 41 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre


24. Hubert Robert, *Projet d’aménagement de la Grande Galerie du Louvre*, 1780s, oil on canvas, 33.5 x 42 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre


27. Nicholas-Guy Brenet, *La piété et générosité des dames romaines*, 1785 Salon, oil on canvas, 330 x 258 cm, Fontainebleau, Musée Nationale du Château

28. Louis Gauffier, *La générosité des dames romaines*, 1791, oil on canvas, 81 x 112 cm, Poitiers, Musée des Beaux-Arts

29. Ruotte after Boizot, *La générosité des dames romaines*, c.1790-1792, stipple engraving, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française

30. Anonymous artist working for Chéreau, *Don patriotique des illustres françaises*, 1789, etching and aquatint, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française


32. Frussotte after Desrais, *Allégorie d’un impôt volontaire ou d’une caisse patriotique*, frontispiece to Olympe de Gouge’s *Lettre au peuple*, 1788, engraving, Bibliothèque Nationale


35. François-André Vincent, *Combat des Romains & des Sabins, interrompus par les femmes Sabines*, 1781 Salon, oil on canvas, 330 x 430 cm, Angers, Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture

36. François-André Vincent, *Combat des Romains & des Sabins, interrompus par les femmes Sabines*, 1781, detail of Hersilia’s head

37. Fulchran-Jean Harriet, *Les Sabines séparant les armées ennemies*, c.1794, pencil and ink, 63 x 78 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet

38. Jacques-Louis David, ‘première pensée’ for *L’intercession des Sabines*, 1794, black pencil, ink, grey wash and white highlights on buff paper, 25.5 x 36 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins

39. Jacques-Louis David, study for Hersilia and three women for *L’intercession des Sabines*, c.1794-1796, graphite on paper in an album of sketches, 17.5 x 13.5 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, RF 9137, fo. 62 verso
40. Jacques-Louis David, drapery study for Hersilia for *L'intervention des Sabines*, c.1796-1798, black pencil and stump with white highlights on buff paper, 47 x 38 cm, Moscow, Pushkin Museum

41. Louis Boilly, *L'héroïne de Saint-Milhier*, 1794, black ink, grey wash with white highlights on paper, 41 x 52 cm, Paris, private collection


43. Le Sueur, *L'héroïne de Saint-Milhier*, undated (1790s), gouache on card silhouette, 35 x 52 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet

44. François-André Vincent, *La citoyenne de Saint-Milhier*, c.1793-1794, pen, ink and grey wash on paper, 28 x 44 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes


47. Anon., *Bataillon de femmes citoyennes 5 Octobre 1789*, 1789, etching, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes

48. Bizard (first name unknown), *Charles-Alexis Alexandre (?) protégeant une cargaison de sucre à Paris en février 1792*, 1792-1793, oil on canvas, 99.5 x 80 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française

49. Thérieux (first name unknown), *Le club des femmes patriotes*, undated, watercolour on paper, 41 x 55 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes

50. Anon., *L'anarchie*, 1793, etching, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes


54. François-André Vincent, study for *Arrie exhorte Poetus à se donner la mort*, 1784-1785, pen and ink with grey wash on paper, 41.5 x 50.5 cm, Paris, private collection

55. François-André Vincent, *Arrie, voyant que Poetus n'avait pas le courage de se tuer, prit un poignard, se l'enfonça dans le sein, & le présenta à son mari en lui disant, tiens Poetus, il ne m'a point fait de mal. Cette action détermina Poetus à se donner la mort*, 1785 Salon, oil on canvas, 324 x 257 cm, Amiens, Musée de Picardie

56. François-André Vincent, study for *Arrie se tue et présente le poignard à Poetus*, 1784, pen and ink, grey wash, white highlights over red chalk on paper, 53 x 42.5 cm, Paris, private collection

57. François-André Vincent, nine studies for *Arrie et Poetus* mounted together, 1784-1785, brown wash on paper, 27.5 x 42 cm total area, Paris, private collection


59. Nicholas-André Monsiau, *Le mariage d'Arrie et Poetus*, 1801, oil on canvas, 64 x 81 cm, Sotheby’s-Monaco sale 20 June 1987

60. Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier, *Le courage des femmes de Sparte*, 1787 Salon, oil on canvas, 318 x 324 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

61. Charles-Nicaise Perrin, *Les femmes Spartiates portant les secours nécessaires à leurs époux, dans le combat que Pyrrhus donna aux pieds des murailles de leur ville*, 1787 Salon, black pencil, brown wash and white highlights on paper, 37 x 52 cm, sold at hôtel Drouot in 1986, current location unknown

62. Jean-Baptiste Pierre Topino-Lebrun, *Le siège de Lacédémone par Pyrrhus*, 1799-1800, oil sketch on paper mounted on canvas, 46 x 53 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française

63. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Sapho inspirée par l'amour*, c.1775, oil on canvas, 63 x 53 cm, Lugano, Thyssen Bornemisza Collection

64. Jean-Jacques Taillasson, *Sapho ne pouvant se faire aimer du jeune Phaon, se précipite du rocher de Leucate dans la mer*, 1791 Salon, oil on canvas, 225 x 190 cm, Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts
65. Jean-Jacques Taillasson, *Sapho ne pouvant se faire aimer du jeune Phaon, se précipite du rocher de Leucate dans la mer*, 1791 Salon, two details

66. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Sapho à Leucade*, 1801 Salon, oil on canvas, 122 x 100 cm, Bayeux, Musée Baron Gérard


68. Mayard after Charles Eisen, illustration of Sappho going over the Leucadian cliff from Moutonnet de Clairfons tr. *Anacréon, Sapho, Bion et Moschus* (Paris, 1773)


70. Antoine-Jean Gros, sketch for *Sapho à Leucade*, 1800-1801, oil on canvas, 33.3 x 25.2 cm, private collection (on loan to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque)


73. Claude Ramey, *Sapho appuyée sur sa lyre, tenant une lettre adressée à Phaon*, 1800-1801, marble (after the plaster model exhibited at the 1796 Salon), Paris, Musée du Louvre

74. Philippe-Auguste Hennequin, *Sapho*, c.1795-1798, ink on paper, size unconfirmed, Silver Spring, Maryland, G. Levitine Collection

75. Jean-Baptiste Topino-Lebrun, *La mort de Caius Gracchus*, 1798 Salon, oil on canvas, 387 x 615 cm, Marseille, Musée des Beaux-Arts

76. Jean-Jacques Taillasson, *Pauline, femme de Sénèque, ne voulant pas survivre à son mari, s’était fait ouvrir les veines; Néron apprenant sa résolution, envoie des ordres pour la sauver; elle avait perdu connaissance, on arrête le sang, on la rend à la vie*, 1793 Salon, oil on canvas, 147 x 190.5 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

77. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Portrait de Christine Boyer*, 1800-1801, oil on canvas, 214 x 134 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
78. Angelica Kauffman, *Sappho inspired by love*, 1775, oil on canvas, 132 x 145 cm, Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art

79. Anonymous frontispiece to Le Conte de Bièvre [sic], *Histoire des Deux Aspasies*, (Amsterdam, 1737), London, British Library

80. Marie-Geneviève Bouliar, *Aspasie*, 1794, oil on canvas, 163 x 127 cm, Arras, Musée d’


82. Nicolas-André Monsiau, *Aspasie s’entretenant avec Alcibiade et Socrate*, 1798 Salon, oil on canvas, size unconfirmed, Pushkin Museum, Moscow

83. Nicolas-André Monsiau, *Aspasie s’entretenant avec les hommes les plus illustres d’Athènes*, 1806 Salon, oil on canvas, 146.5 x 106.5 cm, Chambéry, Musée de

84. Jean-Baptiste Regnault, *Socrate arrachant Alcibiade du sein de la volupté*, 1791 Salon, oil on canvas, 46 x 63 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

85. Joseph-Benoît Suvée, *La mort de Lucrece*, undated, oil on canvas, 26 x 20 cm, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts

86. Cathelin after A. Pellegrini, *La Mort de Lucrece*, 1783 Salon, engraving, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes

87. Philippe-Louis Parizeau, *La mort de Lucrece*, undated (early 1770s?), ink and brown wash, 30.6 x 39.7 cm, Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts

88. Henriquez after Michel-Ange Challe, *Lucrece présentant a Brutus le poignard dont elle vient de se frapper, & lui demandant vengeance de l’affront dont elle s’est punie*, 1763, engraving, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes

89. Gavin Hamilton, *Death of Lucretia*, c.1763-4, oil on canvas, 213.3 x 264 cm, New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

90. Jacques-Antoine Beaufort, *Brutus, Lucretius Père de Lucrece, et Collatinus son mari, jurent sur le poignard dont elle s’est tuée, de venger sa mort et de chasser les Tarquins de Rome*, 1771 Salon, oil on canvas, 129 x 167, Nevers, Musee Municipal Frédéric Blandin
91. Delignon after Sylvestre Mirys, *Lucrece*. *An de Rome* 244, c.1784-1785 (re-issued within a volume entitled *Figures de l'Histoire de la République romaine* in 1800), coloured etching, private collection

92. Gauthier d'Agoty overpainted by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *La mort de Lucrece*, 1787, engraving and gouache, Grasse, Villa Fragonard

93. Attributed to Frédéric Desmarais, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1788, oil on canvas, 195 x 260 cm, Bourges, Musée du Berry

94. Frédéric Desmarais, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1788, oil on canvas, 23 x 31 cm, Montpellier, Musée Fabre

95. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, pencil on paper, 13.7 x 17 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 183

96. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, pencil on paper, 23.5 x 36 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 149

97. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, Beaucamp no. 149, detail

98. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, charcoal and stump, 21.9 x 28.7 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 150

99. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, ink and grey wash, 51.5 x 79 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 148

100. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, Beaucamp no. 148, detail

101. Janinet after Jean-Guillaume Moitte, *La mort de Lucrece*, 1795 (after drawing shown at the 1791 Salon), etching and acquatint, Paris, Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie

102. Jacques Réattu, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1792-1796, oil on canvas, 22 x 31 cm, Arles, Musée Réattu

103. Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1797, oil on canvas, 121 x 138 cm, Grasse, Villa Fragonard

104. Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1797, detail


106. Jacques-Louis David, *La mort de Camille*, 1781, black chalk with pen and wash, 27.5 x 38.7 cm, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina

108. Frédéric Desmarais, *Horace tue sa soeur Camille*, 1785, oil on canvas, 112 x 145 cm, Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts


110. Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson, *Horace tue sa soeur Camille*, 1785, oil on canvas, 111 x 148 cm, Montargis, Musée Girodet

111. Attributed to Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Horace tue sa soeur Camille*, 1785, oil on canvas, 116.8 x 147.3 cm, Providence, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design


113. Nicholas-Guy Brenet, *Virginius prêt à poignarder sa fille*, 1783, oil on canvas, 55 x 45 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française

114. Nicholas-Guy Brenet, *Virginius prêt à poignarder sa fille*, 1783 Salon, oil on canvas, 324 x 259 cm, Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts

115. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille pour lui sauver le déshonneur de servir d’Appius Clodius* [sic], 1795 Salon, brown ink and wash with white highlights on paper, 54 x 98 cm, Pontoise, Musée de

116. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, undated (c. 1794?), black pencil, 14.6 x 22.9 cm, Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts

117. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, undated (1795-1830), oil on paper mounted on canvas, 40 x 61 cm, Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts

118. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, undated (1795-1830), ink and chalk on paper, 38.5 x 58.7 cm, Montauban, Musée Ingres
119. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, c.1800, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 76.2 cm, private collection (on loan to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque)

120. Anon., *Constitution de l’an III*, c.1795, etching, Paris, Musée Carnavalet


The following text is referenced by footnotes which appear at the bottom of each page. Occasionally, a note signalled on one page is in fact printed on the following leaf. This is due to an automatic grouping command within the word-processing programme used to produce this thesis, which cannot be overridden. As it is a relatively rare occurrence, I hope that this will not cause significant inconvenience to the reader.
Introduction

‘Invisibles & présentes par-tout, elles [les femmes] pèsent plus ou moins dans la balance des destinées d’un Empire; & leur influence est d’autant plus puissante que rien, presque rien, ne se fait en leur nom; elles ne sont point responsables de la catastrophe dont elles ont été le premier mobile...

...Les personnages brillants qui sont placés sur l’avant-scène, n’ont souvent fait que les gestes (qu’on me permette cette comparaison); du fond des coulisses, une femme cachée dans l’ombre, leur a dicté tout ce qu’ils avoient à dire, ou à faire. Le spectateur qui n’a pas de bons yeux, s’en tient aux apparences, & se trompe faute de connoître l’intérieur du théâtre, & le jeu des machines; les grands noms auxquels il prodigue ses applaudissements, ne sont que les causes secondes de l’action qui a rempli tout le drame politique. Les causes premières restent pour lui ignorées ou méconnues.’

Ternisien d’Haudricourt, M., Femmes célèbres de toutes les nations, avec leurs portraits (Paris, 1788), pp. 4-5.

Invisible and yet everywhere present; historically and politically powerful; hidden from view behind sparkling characters in the foreground. These words, part of an introduction to a series of moral tableaux of famous women from ancient history onwards, have many resonances for the art historian who starts to investigate visual representations of women from the ancient past in late eighteenth-century France. The Salon livrets from the period and the extant paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints and book illustrations make it clear that women like Lucretia, Cornelia, Sappho and the Sabines were certainly present in visual culture during this period, particularly during the French Revolution of 1789-1799.

They seem, however, curiously invisible - marginalised, obscured, or only partially revealed - in critical discussions of late eighteenth-century French art, whilst their male counterparts remain ‘les personnnages brillants’ at the centre of attention.

This passage also evokes some of the key areas of interest for me in representations of these women: history, emulation and gendered spectatorship. The male author of this text believes that important women from history have been manipulative, the causes of
numerous unhappy endings, and yet have been immune from prosecution whilst in their hiding places. He also believes that the uninitiated spectator is in danger of misunderstanding the part women have played in history, and of acting wrongly as a result: his ‘portraits’ of famous women are intended to instruct their female readers.¹ These slippery, problematic women are seen then as primary causes of action in history, and yet they remain for the spectator ‘ignorées ou méconnues’.

In a sense, this study echoes Ternisien d'Haudricourt’s project, in that we have a shared aim: to bring these women into the spotlight. However, our political positions could not be more different. Whilst Haudricourt enlightens only in order to condemn, this thesis aims instead at a more positive revelation of the role played by women from the ancient past through visual representations at this time. Exploring how they function both centre stage and behind the scenes in ‘le drame politique’, I will seek a fuller understanding of these women and what they may have represented to different spectators in late eighteenth-century, and particularly Revolutionary, France.

This introduction is organised in four sections. I will introduce the material under discussion, before giving an overview of existing research in this area and the primary reasons which justify this study. This is followed by an outline of the methodological approach that I have taken. Finally, I will explain the selection of the four case study groups from the large amount of material which I initially uncovered, and give a brief synopsis of the aims of each chapter.

1. The material under discussion

My research concerns representations of women from ancient and classical history. The subject encompasses images of a wide range of different women: vestals and virtuous mothers; heroic women who take action, alone or collectively; women who are sacrificed or who sacrifice themselves; celebrated intellectuals. In my initial survey, I included both women who were believed actually to have existed in ancient and classical times (for example Lucretia and Virginia) and those whose narratives had developed out of more mythological and literary sources (for example, Phaedra and Andromache). This took into account the blurred boundaries between these women in texts such as the Salon livrets, where they are treated as similar entities. Many of the women from literary sources such as the works of Homer, or the plays of Sophocles and Euripides (re-worked and subsequently so popular in France through the dramatic texts of Racine and Corneille), had narratives with identical properties to those from straightforward history books. They all concerned strong characters, examples of moral and immoral behaviour, and epic action, and had become quasi-historical characters in their own right. We should also remember that the identities of even the most historically verifiable women were essentially constructions, built up from successive histories, fictions, and constant re-translations.

Therefore, I initially considered depictions of all of the women who were associated with ancient and classical history. My focus was then on works produced in or for France (including, for example, works produced at the French Academy in Rome and sent back to Paris). In order to get an overview of the period, I set the outer limits of my project at the years between the accession of Louis XVI in 1774 and the coronation of Napoleon in 1804. However, the majority of the material to be investigated was produced in the late 1780s and 1790s; therefore much of my research is concerned with the period of the Revolution of 1789-1799.²

² I follow Thomas Crow and Philippe Bordes in their belief that pre-Revolutionary images and references to antiquity could and did have political significance (see T. Crow, 'The Oath of the Horatii in 1785:
The Appendix presents my initial findings: it is a chronological survey of the Salon livrets for the exhibitions between 1774 and 1804, listing all of the entries which feature women from ancient and classical history.\(^3\) It is evident from even the brief details in this appendix that these women’s histories present a fascinating set of narratives, with recurrent and intersecting themes of sex, politics, courage, maternity and death. Descriptions from the livrets also indicate how often these women are leading characters in this work, not always or only included as supporting actors for a male star.

It is also clear from the Appendix that a considerable amount of work on these themes was produced and shown at the Salon exhibitions. Many works are still extant, and there are others in existence that were not exhibited or recorded in the livrets (preparatory works and projects which were simply not shown). Overall, the visual representations of these women constitute a major body of work. I emphasise this because statistics about the relative prominence of different genres at Salons in late eighteenth-century France can imply that very limited numbers of history subjects were produced at this time. Michel Vovelle estimates the antique subject levels at Salons at about 9% between 1775 and 1789, then only 4% for 1789-1799.\(^4\) However, a simple percentage comparison alone gives no idea of the amount of work actually produced. The deregulation of the Salon in 1791 meant that the numbers of works exhibited increased rapidly, so a smaller percentage refers to a larger amount of representations. Udolpho Van de Sandt’s analysis of the Salon livrets during the Revolution shows that the number of works in other genres rises to equal, and in the case of portraiture and landscape subjects, eventually to surpass

\(^3\) Since this project is not broadly concerned with a comparison between these women and their male counterparts, I have not also listed the masculine history subjects shown at each Salon. However, a contextual comparison of this nature could be made using the limited but useful list published in La Révolution française à l’école de la vertu antique (exh. cat., Musée Ingres, Montauban, 1989), pp. 112-120. Also of general use is H. Bardon, ‘Les peintures à sujets antiques au XVIIIe siècle d’après les livrets des Salons’, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, vol. XLI (1963), pp. 217-249.

history painting, but that well over a hundred works were still produced in this category at every Salon, and in the mid-1790s, anything up to 347. My own research has found that subjects drawn from the ancient past in general do not dwindle to inconsequential numbers during this period, and that many of the recorded and extant works focus on women.

2. Existing research on this material and primary justifications for this project

This substantial body of work has not so far been the subject of a sustained study in itself. Moreover, research carried out to date on this material as part of other projects suggests that further and differently focused enquiries are warranted. Specific historiographies for the material included in my case studies will be examined at the start of each chapter; my aim here is to give a brief overview of scholarship in this area and to sketch out the contribution that my project will make.

A fundamental problem with existing research on this material is that some of the representations of each woman are very well-known, and are often therefore assumed to be fully understood. However, my investigation has shown that in most cases it is the assumptions made about these works which are familiar, having been constantly re-worked and repeated in successive projects. I would argue that this situation has arisen precisely because this material has not so far been the principal object of study. Scholarship with a broader or different focus has, perhaps unavoidably, marginalised this art. Much of this thesis is thus devoted to challenging and questioning these very assumptions.

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5 See U. Van de Sandt, 'Institutions et concours' in P. Bordes and R. Michel eds., Aux armes & aux arts! Les arts de la Révolution 1789-1799 (Paris, 1988), pp. 137-165 for an overview of changes to the Salon, its contents and its organisation during the revolutionary period, particularly the graphs on p. 141. We must of course acknowledge the problems of different definition which arise in this kind of analysis: Van de Sandt is looking at the genre of history painting in its broadest sense and not just at subjects from ancient and classical history; Vovelle and Bardon each define the group in a slightly different way.
Texts which focus on Neo-Classicism, history painting and on art during the Revolutionary period have tended not to explore representations of women from the ancient past in very much detail. The work of Locquin, Leith, Rosenblum and Bryson has generally been too wide ranging for such research to be possible, as it considers broad historical, political and aesthetic issues.\(^6\) Rosenblum does consider these women to some extent in his work on the *exemplum virtutis* in late eighteenth-century French art; however, he often assumes that the significance of these depictions is limited, and he does not consider them in any detail in the context of contemporaneous social and political debates.

Specific studies on art and the French Revolution have similarly been based upon more general areas of interest, and have been constrained by the amount of material to be covered in what are often survey texts and exhibitioncatalogues.\(^7\) It is worth noting the very limited space overall that the three volume catalogue *La Révolution Française et l’Europe* gives to women. They are neither integrated thoroughly into this work nor given their due space; instead, the editors have included them (in reference to issues of human rights) with blacks and other ‘minority’ groups, each accorded their own information box outside the main text.\(^8\) Brigitte Gallini’s contribution to this catalogue, however, suggests the possibilities that exist for further research on this material. In what she regretfully admits is only ‘une parenthèse au rôle tenu par la femme’, Gallini insists that women in history paintings during this period are never merely accessories to male heroes, and that all representations of such women are a form of social or political


propaganda, however indirectly.\textsuperscript{9} Scholarship focused more specifically on history painting during this period has concentrated on masculine subjects, where the connections to actuality are most obvious. Indeed, where gender has been a central concern in investigations of history paintings from this period, this has often resulted in a focus on men and masculinity.\textsuperscript{10} There is therefore a need for more work on female history subjects and contemporaneous debates on femininity to balance this.

Research focused on representations of women from this period has not usually given a great deal of consideration to subjects from ancient and classical history.\textsuperscript{11} Vivian Cameron does examine history paintings with female themes in one chapter of her doctoral thesis.\textsuperscript{12} However, perhaps because she seeks a direct and unambiguous relationship between this art and actuality during the Revolution, Cameron’s conclusions are that these works rarely reflect women’s changing reality or take part in contemporaneous social debate. This is a key area which I will question in my work, arguing that the connections are more subtle and that we must work in different ways to uncover them.

Certain women from the ancient past have been studied in depth individually. Often, this has taken the form of research whose primary focus is literature: this is, for example, the case with Sappho, Aspasia and Lucretia.\textsuperscript{13} Pictorial representations of individual women

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{9} La Révolution française et l'Europe, 1789-1799 (1989), vol. I, p. 293. This suggestion is also supported by Florence Viguier in her essay ‘De la vertu avant toute chose’, in La Révolution française à l'école de la vertu antique (1989), p. 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} V. Cameron, Woman as Image and Image-Maker in Paris during the French Revolution (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, December 1983), chapter 3, pp. 126-219.
(and also specific paintings) have been examined in numerous articles: David’s *L’intervention des Sabines* and Gros’ *Sapho à Leucade* have elicited particular interest from art historians.\(^\text{14}\) I have found much of this work stimulating; however, these isolated short pieces of research do not together form any kind of homogeneous whole. Again, we find that the frameworks of the authors’ various overall projects inform these specific studies, pulling them in different directions. My thesis will seek to address some of the disjunctions and voids suggested by this research, setting the visual constructions of these women in a series of sustained and interrelated contexts.

The work of a range of feminist scholars has also suggested further inquiries into the relationship between these images and women’s place in society. This is not to say that my project aims simply to point the finger at a series of perceived or proven oppressions. Uncovering strategies which circumscribe various women at different points is one part of my work, but so is investigating more complex, less one-sided instances of gendered power play. Some of the women that I have researched, including both the constructions of ancient women and the actual Frenchwomen of the 1790s, have displayed their own power in different ways: some resisting an easy manipulation, others demonstrating a strength, characteristic or symbolic function which (male) authorities found useful. There is a positive side to the role that some of these representations played which needs to be uncovered along with the mechanisms of oppression: this is also part of the feminist project.

One way of moving beyond the solely ‘accusatory’ feminist project is to consider imagining, if not quite reconstructing, the largely lost voices of female spectators of these images of exceptional Greek and Roman women. Inspirational if not always directly relevant for my work was Carol Ockman’s provocative investigation of female spectatorship of Ingres’ nudes.\(^\text{15}\) This helped me to question, rather than assume, what

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\(^\text{14}\) These articles will be examined later in Chapters Two and Three respectively.

might have been the responses of different actual late eighteenth-century French women
to these constructions of ancient and classical women, given their experiences at the time.
Were female responses what they were intended to be by artists and certain institutions or
authorities? How might women have reacted in the cases which were clearly problematic
(for male power) in terms of offering role models to female spectators? There is little
direct evidence of the views of women on the images that they saw; however, I explore
the use of related testimonies in my research, particularly in the first chapter. This area
seems to me to open up a wide horizon of interesting and plausible interpretative
possibilities for these representations.

Analysis of the relationship between antiquity and the French Revolution contains
remarkably few references to visual representations of women from the ancient past.16
However, this research does suggest the potential for further study in this area. It shows
that antiquity had a significant impact in France, particularly during the Revolution. In its
various forms and constructions, antiquity was an immensely rich and flexible resource,
endlessly open to appropriation and reinterpretation by different people at all levels of
society. Volney summed up the phenomenon when he recalled: ‘... cette manie de
citation et d’imitations grecques et romaines qui, dans ces derniers temps, nous ont
comme frappés de vertige. Noms, surnoms, vêtements, usages, lois, tout a voulu être
spartiate ou romain.’17

In particular, research on antiquity and the French Revolution suggests that further
investigation into the use of figures from ancient and classical history as behavioural role
models is warranted. Claude Mossé’s study concludes that individual figures were
emphasised by educators far more than the organisational systems that antiquity had to
offer, and indeed that key historical characters were seen to be far more relevant for the

16 See for example H. Parker, The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries - a study in the
development of the Revolutionary spirit (Chicago, 1937), and C. Mossé, L’antiquité dans la Révolution
Revolution than models of government. She stresses the importance of 'une Antiquité plus imaginaire que réelle'; narratives about people are a crucial part of this imaginary antiquity, and visual representations are a key way of communicating and debating these stories. Very little research has been done into how female role models in particular were constructed and intended to function, and how they actually did work if at all. This is then another key area which my work will address. I will investigate what it may have meant for different female spectators, with thoughts of emulation in their minds, to contemplate pictures of women from the ancient past.

3. Methodological approach

In order to broaden my understanding of the possible significance of these images in the late eighteenth century, I have sought to re-contextualise them in a series of ways. Firstly, by comparing them with each other: examining closely (usually at first hand) the fullest range of depictions of each woman. I have also considered how images of these women relate to each other as a group, analysing the significance of recurrent modes of representation.

The broader process of contextualisation which I have carried out has been influenced by the work of Stanley Fish: I have found his ideas about reading and interpreting literature suggestive. Fish’s model argues that whilst there is a level at which each individual will produce some personal and idiosyncratic meaning from a particular text, there is also an important (and ultimately overriding) level at which meaning is produced collectively within interpretive communities. Each community shares conventions and assumptions which make the collective decision-making involved in the production of meaning

20 S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1980).
possible. These shared conventions also potentiate disagreement about meaning, and its debate in a principled way.

I have therefore sought to re-imagine possible contexts of conventions, the broader cultural framework within which these images were made and seen by different groups of spectators. I have explored the range of ideas and assumptions in operation about each particular historical woman, by studying for example the sources of her narrative which were current at the time of production and consumption of the image. This encompasses translations of ancient texts, contemporaneous histories and dictionary entries. I have also paid particular attention to the numerous plays written and performed during the focus period which feature these women. Since they develop the narrative and characters, rather than present one scene as visual representations must do, there is more room for contextualisation and explanation for the audience, much of which is highly revealing. The visual representations explored in my research have not so far been discussed in any detail in juxtaposition to these plays; this has proved to be a particularly fruitful line of inquiry for my work.

Other texts that I have investigated as part of this contextualisation include dominant official rhetoric (laws, parliamentary speeches); articles and pamphlets discussing women’s place in society; educational texts; letters and recorded personal experiences, and art criticism. The shared assumptions and conflicting ideas about the significance of these women from the ancient past during the Revolution have then been a key part of my analysis of what these images may have meant both to the artist, and to different groups of spectators. Although Fish’s model privileges the reader, I do not wish to discard altogether the notion of authorial intent on the part of the artist, not least because there is clear evidence of the development of specific representational strategies by some artists, both male and female. However, we should not assume that this intention was necessarily realised when the work was seen by different viewers; hence the need to re-consider spectatorship of this material. In the absence of direct evidence, this process of contextualisation allows us to make some plausible suggestions.
4. The selection of case study groups

"...on ne pourrait citer parmi les femmes d’aujourd’hui une seule Pénélope: elles sont des Phèdres absolument toutes."
Euripides, Les Thesmophories v.549 sq.21

Early in my research, it became apparent that the women under discussion fell quite readily into a series of categories, based on behaviour and fate; moreover, that these ‘types’ corresponded quite closely to certain feminine roles or groups of actual women in France during the Revolution. I was initially concerned that this could be an external division which I was imposing upon the material, and one which might obscure other less obvious relationships between the different women, their narratives and the representational modes used to depict them. However, as I explored different ways of organising the material, it became increasingly clear that the practice of understanding these famous ancient women as ‘types’ had a very long history.22

Scholars researching antique sources have noted that even at the point at which these women enter recorded history (in the works, for example, of Plutarch, Livy and Homer), it is usually as an example of a particular kind of woman and form of feminine behaviour. Claude Mossé stresses this in her study of women in ancient Greece, noting that Helen is the ‘adulterous woman’, Penelope the ‘faithful woman’, Antigone the ‘young rebellious girl’, Sappho the ‘intellectual’, Aspasia the ‘high class courtesan’, Socrates’ wife the ‘shrew’ and so on.23 The women who feature in Roman history similarly address key areas of behaviour: wifely and filial duty, virtue in all its forms, chastity, modesty, sacrifice (of others and of self). This must have been done with the aim of influencing

22 Research on women in antiquity has often been useful for background material, although clearly I am primarily concerned with the myth of each woman as it has been constructed by the time of the late eighteenth century, rather than what we know about what actually happened. However, these works often offer insights into how the myths began in the first place, and also into different ways of dealing with history and myth within the material on offer. Particularly useful are S.B. Pomeroy, Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity (New York, 1975); H.P. Foley ed., Reflections of Women in Antiquity (New York, London, and Paris, 1981); Mossé (1983); and E. Fantham et al, Women in the Classical World (New York and Oxford, 1994).
contemporaneous female behaviour in some ways. We should of course remember that Plutarch was a priest, and that his writing is often considered to be primarily the work of a moralist, rather than that of a historian with a claim to objectivity.24

The discovery that these women seem always to have functioned as archetypal behavioural role models, suggested that selecting case studies by type would be an appropriate organisational principle. This is not intended to be a rigid categorisation: the multiplicity of interconnections between these women mean that one could draw ‘kinship’ lines between them as types in a number of different ways, creating other interesting juxtapositions. My choice of types for case studies here was determined by criteria which included the frequency of the women’s representation, narratives where there were clear connections to actuality, and women whose depiction seemed either particularly straightforward or problematic. I also wanted to choose examples from the three main ancient and classical model societies that the French discussed at the time of the Revolution: Rome, Sparta and (its moral opposite) Athens.

Chapter One
The complexities of Cornelia: re-imagining Revolutionary role models

The study begins by focusing on representations of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchae. I start with her because she was frequently advanced as a feminine role model during the Revolution, apparently as a straightforward paragon of female virtue: therefore there are strong connections between image and actuality. To date, the observation that Cornelia represents an ideal of feminine behaviour during the Revolution has been the limit of critical commentary on depictions of her. My analysis of this material reveals several areas of complexity, both at the point of production and particularly in the ways in which different spectators may have understood images of Cornelia in the context of the early 1790s. A new approach to the evidence indicates that a reappraisal of what this woman represented is necessary. Expanding the investigation to study the relationship between Cornelia and other women, in particular the Generous Roman Matrons, I go on to

24 Mosse (1983), p. 82.
examine in detail an instance of practical emulation of antique role models. Representations of this act by authors and artists of both genders, including evidence from women which has not previously been discussed in this context, are used to re-assess some key issues in the spectatorship of exemplary images.

Chapter Two

Strategies for the Sabines: re-examining the representation of women who intervene

Leading on from some of the main implications of the research on Cornelia and the actions of generosity, this section focuses specifically on representations of women who take collective interventionary action. Chiefly under consideration are the Sabine women, who intercede in order to secure peace. This chapter takes as its starting point a fundamental problem in David's painting L'intervention des Sabines which has not so far been investigated. Following the extensive archival material which traces the development of this work, the thesis expands into an investigation of authorial intent, and of the development of artistic strategies in response to new problems. In order to reveal and examine these strategies, I set this work in a series of contexts: textual (analysing David's own written presentation of this theme, which he intended to be read by spectators); related images of women from antiquity; and actual female interventions in France in the 1790s. This evidence then informs a re-consideration of spectatorship of David's Sabines, engaging with existing research on this issue and suggesting new possibilities.

Chapter Three

Sappho and Aspasia: contrasting approaches to intellectual women from the ancient past

Extending the investigation of visual material that plays a role in debates about women's behaviour and agency in Revolutionary France, this chapter considers the legitimacy of female creativity by focusing on images of two renowned women of intellect from ancient Greece. The incidence of depictions of Sappho increases more than that of any other woman from antiquity during my focus period, and some revealing shifts occur in
her representation. My investigation uncovers far more of the strategies used to represent Sappho than previous research has done. It also allows us to understand to a greater extent how these images are part of contemporaneous social and political debates about particular types of women. I examine the different approaches of male and female artists to this subject matter, expanding my discussion to include a re-examination of depictions of Aspasia. The focus here is on Marie-Geneviève Bouliair’s *Aspasie* (1794). Following a line of enquiry which challenges existing feminist interpretations of this work, I develop an analysis of intentionality and spectator response which takes into account the broad context within which this work was made and viewed.

**Chapter Four**

**The visibility of Lucretia: rape, revenge and representation**

In the light of the arguments developed in the previous sections, the final chapter reconsiders images of Lucretia, the virtuous Roman woman who committed suicide after being raped, and whose dying wish for revenge led to the first Roman Revolution. Lucretia has been particularly marginalised and, I would argue, misunderstood in critical discussions of the imagery which depicts her from this period. My research has uncovered previously unpublished visual material, and constructs a wide ranging examination which disputes the assumptions currently made about Lucretia. Considering also pictures of two related women from Roman history, Camilla and Virginia, I develop an analysis of the representational strategies used to depict these women. I also explore the ways in which these pictorial modes relate to the Revolutionary context. By taking a new approach to these images, I uncover evidence of Lucretia’s problematic but important status for different spectators in the Revolutionary decade.

From these four investigations, I conclude that these visual representations of women from the ancient past signified a far more complex range of ideas than has so far been allowed. By focusing on these works as an inter-related corpus, previously unnoticed artistic strategies are revealed, operating within conventions which have never been questioned. By contextualising this imagery within a broader cultural framework, we can
also imagine more accurately the range of meanings which it might have produced for
different groups of spectators, women of different classes as well as men. These
paintings, drawings, prints and other representations are shown to be vital components in
political, cultural and social debate about the role of women in Revolutionary France.
Chapter One

The complexities of Cornelia: re-imagining Revolutionary role models

‘Imitez la mère des Gracches; elle ne se présentait point dans le forum, aux consuls, pour leur donner l’idée de plusieurs loix nouvelles; elle se contenta, dans le silence de son ménage, d’élérer pour la république deux fils qui devinrent un jour les plus ardens défenseurs du peuple, & méritèrent d’en être pleurés, après en avoir été la victime innocente.’

L.-M. Prudhomme, April 1792.1

‘Cornélie, avec satisfaction:
“Ennemis des tyrans, suivez donc Cornélie,
Rome, tu vas renaitre avec de tels vengeurs,
Je lis, dans leurs regards, la fin de tes malheurs,
Demain le sang coupable inondera le Tibre,
J’aurai perdu deux fils, mais Rome sera libre.”’

Mercurin, Les Gracques, tragédie en vers et en trois actes
(Paris, an II, 1791[sic]), Act III, sc. vi.

Cornelia is the woman from the ancient past who is most often cited in scholarship about female French revolutionary role models. Certainly as far as visual representations are concerned, she is held up as the primary antique ‘exemplum virtutis’ for women of the revolutionary decade.2 Moreover, she is understood to be a straightforward, uncomplicated figure: a woman who simply and effectively shows another more frivolous woman what is truly valuable in her own life, namely bringing up her sons in preparation for their public role as champions of the poor.

However, as the two contrasting quotations about Cornelia above indicate, this view that she simply represented quiet, modest motherhood is questionable. In this chapter, I will

1 L.-M. Prudhomme, reported in Révolutions de Paris, no. 143, 31 March - 7 April 1792, p. 24.
2 See, for example, the catalogue entry by Brigitte Gallini for Suvée’s Cornélie mère des Gracques, no. 428 in La Révolution française et l’Europe, 1789-1799 (1989), and Florence Viguier in La Révolution française à l’école de la vertu antique (1989), p. 39.
explore the underlying complexity of Cornelia, and will examine what that may have meant for people making and looking at visual representations of her in late eighteenth-century France. I am interested in both the development of representational strategies by artists who depict Cornelia, and also in spectatorship of these images by both men and women. What is the range of possible meanings which people may have constructed from looking at this imagery?

I will start by sketching out the predominant view of Cornelia that exists in scholarship to date, and by introducing the paintings, drawings and prints that I will be considering. The first area of complexity that I will explore is a fundamental problem of representation which reveals itself in the pre-revolutionary depictions of Cornelia, and which introduces difficulties frequently encountered in the other case studies in this thesis.

I will then proceed to contextualise the revolutionary representations of Cornelia by juxtaposing them with other narratives and texts about her, and events connected to her, re-imagining some of the ideas and assumptions about this woman that artists and spectators may have had in mind. The tensions and relationships which are revealed by setting Cornelia in this cultural and historical framework then lead me to investigate their implications for her status as an ideal role model for women.

The close links between Cornelia’s narrative and that of the ‘dames généreuses’ (both in ancient Rome and revolutionary Paris) form another area which comes under scrutiny. Through analysis of different representations (both textual and pictorial) of these interconnected accounts of physical imitation of antique role models, I develop new ways of thinking about gendered spectatorship of women from the ancient past.
1. Prevailing assumptions: Cornelia as an uncomplicated role model

Perhaps the most famous of antique mothers, Cornelia lived in the second century BC, a patrician woman who was the daughter of Scipio Africanus and wife of Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus. Gracchus died fighting for agrarian reform, leaving Cornelia to bring up the three surviving children from her family of twelve: two boys, Tiberius and Caius, and a girl, Sempronia.

The incident from her life that is almost always chosen by eighteenth-century artists who represent her, concerns the virtuous example that she set to a visiting Campanian woman. Whilst Cornelia does appear in the usual historical source texts (for example Plutarch’s Lives, and Rollin’s Histoire Romaine), the main source for this particular story was Valerius Maximus. The narrative describes how the Campanian woman began to show off her jewels and fine cloths with great ostentation, clearly expecting Cornelia to respond in kind. However, Cornelia chose instead to divert the conversation to a different topic until her sons arrived home from school. At this point, she simply said to her guest ‘Voici mes bijoux’. As Valerius Maximus explains, ‘Cornélie ne vouloit point d’autre parure, et n’en avoit pas besoin’; the Campanian woman was thus shown to be vain and lacking the correct priorities in her life.3

This story is clearly an ‘exemplum virtutis’, and indeed in Valerius Maximus’ work it starts a chapter of instructive examples of richness and poverty, providing the moralising quote which headlines the section: ‘Les plus riches ornemens dont les femmes puissent se parer, ce sont leurs enfans.’4 The other history texts which deal with the incident present it in similar terms. Rollin gives the most detail in the later versions of his Histoire Romaine, adding after the citation of Cornelia’s famous words ‘Voilà mes bijoux et mes

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ornemens’ an encouragement for other women to follow her example: ‘Parole bien mémorable, & qui renferme de grandes instructions pour les Dames & pour les mères.’

This example of good female behaviour, rejecting the luxury and ornamentation increasingly seen by *philosophes* as a dangerous source of weakness in favour of the solid benefits for all of women concentrating on maternity, clearly appealed to French artists in the late eighteenth century. Two small-scale works depicting Cornelia were shown at pre-revolutionary Salons: one by Noel Hallé in 1779 (Montpellier, Musée Fabre, plate 1), and another by Pierre Peyron in 1785 (probably the version now in London at the National Gallery, plate 2). This work is related to a larger canvas made for Cardinal de Bernis, finished in 1781 after a commission in 1778 (Toulouse, Musée des Augustins, plate 3).

However, it is during the Revolution of 1789-1799 that Cornelia was most frequently represented by French artists. Joseph-Benoît Suvée was commissioned in 1790 to paint a version of this theme for the Comte d’Artois, which eventually went on show to the public at the Salon of 1795 (Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 4). An autograph replica made for the Gobelins tapestry works is at the Musée de Besançon, and another is conserved in a Paris private collection (plate 5).

The following year, Bosio showed a *Cornélie, mère des Gracques* at the 1793 Salon (not located). In 1794, David included her in both versions of *Le triomphe du peuple français*, thought to have been an edifying design for a theatre curtain (Paris, Musée du Louvre and

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6 Humphrey Wine has examined carefully the question of whether or not the National Gallery canvas was the one exhibited in 1785, and concludes that it may well have been. See H. Wine, ‘Two paintings by Peyron at the National Gallery,’ *Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXXXIX (1997), pp. 248-255.

7 Another version also exists in Montauban, Musée Ingres; this is generally agreed to be a copy after the finished work. See *La Révolution française à l'école de la vertu antique* (1989) p. 86 and Wine (1997) p. 249.
Musée Carnavalet, plate 6). Then at the 1795 Salon, an engraving by Avril after Lebarbier (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 7) was shown in the same exhibition as the Suwée painting. The title for Avril's print in the Salon livret makes the moral clear: *Cornélie, présentant à la jeune Campanienne, ses Enfans, comme sa parure & ses ornement.* This is reiterated on the print itself, which includes a line of text identifying the subject and repeating Cornelia's famous words: 'Voilà mes bijoux et mes ornementens'.

In addition to these exhibited works, there are also numerous undated sketches and drawings by other artists. These include a drawing by David (Gray, Musée Baron Martin), a series of rough sketches by Fabre (Musée Fabre, Montpellier, see plate 8 for one of these), and further drawings by Gibelin (Aix-en-Provence); Lagrénée le jeune (Rouen), Meynier (exhibited at Colnaghi in *Master Drawings* (New York and London, 1998), plate 9), a painted sketch by Réattu dating from about 1788 (Arles, Musée Réattu), another version by Suwée in Rouen, and one by Blondel, (c.1800-1805, exhibited at Colnaghi in *1789: French Art during the Revolution* (New York, 1989), plate 10).

In addition to these works, I have located an anonymous drawing for an architectural ornament (a tympanum), which shows Cornelia with her children and is dated as 'époque Louis XVI' (more probably a revolutionary work, perhaps a competition piece, although I have found no references to such a design in lists of entrants). There is also a reference to a portrait of *Mlle Le Couvreur en Cornélie*, which is mentioned in the 'Testament de D'Argental légué de sa fille adoptive, Mme de Vimeux', 9 May 1787.

Art historical writing about these images of Cornelia assumes her to be a straightforward example of female virtue, and does not see her as presenting any problems to artists who depict her as such. Robert Rosenblum for example tells her story and notes that according to Plutarch, Cornelia was venerated by her own people who erected a statue in

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9 Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. 0.1033.
her honour. For Rosenblum, she is a decidedly unchallenging figure: unlike other more heroic women like Porcia who stray onto masculine stoic ground, ‘Cornelia’s virtue remained within the Greuzian confines of domestic bounty’.11 Georges Vigne cites Cornelia and Brutus as two key examples of unproblematic antique virtue who were useful for the Revolution: ‘En définitive, les personnages de l’Antiquité ne gênaient personne; mieux, leurs vertus, non seulement avaient préparé la Révolution, mais pouvait encore la fortifier.’12

Rosenblum mentions the link between Cornelia’s rejection of the valorisation of jewels and the example of the generosity of the Roman women, noting Brenet’s painting of this subject from 1785. He also makes the connection to the events of September 1789 when women involved with the art world donated their jewellery to swell the nation’s coffers; and notes Gauffier’s later supposed conflation of the Cornelia and generosity trait narratives, since disproved.13 However, no analysis of these connections is ever offered once they have been pointed out. Similarly, Florence Viguier traces these relationships without further investigation: the act of generosity by the Parisiennes is in her view ‘un épisode bien mineur de la Révolution’, and Cornelia is simply a successful ‘incarnation féminine par excellence de la rigueur morale’ (although this is not intrinsically her achievement in Viguier’s view; rather it is the effect of Cornelia’s close contact with so many virtuous and eminent men).14

Vivian Cameron has more room for analysis about Cornelia in general, and I will consider her arguments in greater detail at different points in this chapter; however, she does not see Cornelia herself as a particularly problematic subject for representation. Whilst she too highlights the obvious intersection between the generosity incidents, both

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12 See *La Révolution française à l’école de la vertu antique* (1989), p. 17. For a detailed analysis of Brutus which considers him as a problematic figure, see Bordes (1996).
13 Rosenblum (1967), p. 86. See p. 77, n. 91 in this thesis on the erroneously attributed subject of this painting by Gauffier.
actual and represented, and depictions of Cornelia, she remains unconvinced about the end result of such a relationship. 'Despite the struggles by French women from 1789 through 1794 which enlarged the sphere of women's activities, these were not generally recognised in paintings ....What the real women, active in public events, did, hardly affected the ideal image of women in paintings.'

This is a statement which I think needs to be challenged. Of course, on the most obvious level, Cameron is right - artists do not suddenly start painting large-scale works depicting, for example, the women returning from Versailles in October 1789, although under duress they do start to represent more iconic contemporary female subjects (for example the Femme de Saint-Milhier, planned on a heroic scale by Vincent amongst other artists for the Concours de l'an II). There are many potential reasons why this does not happen: artists who are fixed into value systems about the relative worthiness of representing different subjects; the disjunction between rapidly developing contemporary history and the lengthy (and expensive) process of painting in oils; and in many cases a lack of will to glorify active women at all (something that I will examine in more detail in Chapter Two).

However, this is not to say that what happened to real women did not 'affect' the ideal image of women in paintings, or vice versa. In my view, the relationship between actuality and art of this type is not best approached by looking for direct influences, major changes or unequivocal statements of intent (always unlikely in an unstable political climate). A more fruitful approach is to examine the subtle tensions and problems which reveal themselves in representations and their reception, and to explore connections between art and actuality in a way that is more imaginative and suggestive.

In Cornelia's case, there are some difficulties which lead us to examine fundamental issues about the representation of exceptional women, and the different consumption of

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those representations by spectators of diverse genders and classes. It is important to question some of the assumptions that have been made about the straightforwardness of Cornelia, as an ‘exemplum virtutis’ who is simple to represent and uncomplicatedly useful as a role model both before and during the Revolution.

2. Fundamental problems: re-examining initial difficulties with the representation of Cornelia

Comparatively little critical attention was directed towards the depictions of Cornelia that Hallé and Peyron produced in 1779 and 1785 respectively. Their small size may partly account for this. In Hallé’s case, some critics felt that the picture may have been unfinished and anyway was not his best work. In coverage of Peyron’s work, the Cornelia painting was usually overshadowed by the artist’s depiction of Alceste, the Trait d’héroïsme conjugal, which elicited much more interest at the 1785 Salon. However, what was written in both cases reveals a distinct dissatisfaction with the different ways in which the artists have represented Cornelia.

The author of the Coup de Patte sur le Sallon de 1779 supports the basic moral of the story, noting that the two women represent ‘un contraste qu’on peut voir chaque jour dans nos sociétés’; however, he gives quite a detailed analysis of the elements that he finds problematic in Hallé’s representation. Some of these reflect on the depiction of the Campanian woman, who the critic feels should look more vain and confused by the response that she has provoked.

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17 One example of a critic who felt that Hallé would have done better to rest on his laurels and do nothing rather than paint this sort of picture is the author of Encore un Rêve, suite de la Prêtresse (Paris, 1779), Collection Deloynes, Collection de Pièces sur les Beaux-arts 1673-1808, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 63 volumes on microfiche (Paris, 1980), vol. XI, no. 207, p. 4. Hereafter, the Collection Deloynes archive will be referred to by the abbreviation C.D.

As far as Cornelia herself is concerned, her lack of evident speech is one fault that this critic points out: he notes that 'La parole manque à l'un des personnages; & c'est, comme vous le savez, dans une parole qu'est le sublime de ce sujet.' He also famously criticises her physiognomy and posture as she gestures to her children, complaining that neither help to communicate the message of the scene.

'Or, ce n'est pas en regardant je ne sais où, qu'elle exprime bien sa tendresse [maternelle]. Elle semble dire: Avancez, mes Enfans; faites la révérence à Madame. Elle n'avait besoin que de les montrer, en portant ses bras & ses regards vers eux; & tandis que sa posture & la disposition de ses traits auroient fait connoître qu'elle répondoit, le caractère de sa physionomie auroit indiqué, jusqu'à un certain point, la nature de cette réponse.'

He also calls for witnesses who reflect the moral action: young people laughing at the confusion of the Campanian woman, and 'de plus graves Personnages auroient témoigné, non par des gestes, mais par une attention recueillie, l’admiration tranquille & profonde qu’inspire une action vertueuse, qui touche & pénètre l’âme, sans l’ébranler avec violence.'

Peyron’s critics focus their disapproval on one particular aspect of his work, his use of dark shadows. This complaint is applied both to Cornelia and its pendant Belisarius by some critics, for example the author of the Mélanges de doutes et d'opinions...1785, who reprimanded: ‘Quand le noir domine, l’ouvrage est triste, sombre, disgracieux, n’a jamais de vérité’. Moreover, the placing of Cornelia herself in the shadows is specifically criticised by the only woman to publish her views of this Salon, the author of the Avis important d’une femme, sur le salon de 1785. She demands to know ‘pourquoi n’est-ce pas cette mere vertueuse & tendre qui soit principalement éclairée? L’objet intéressant doit être le plus saillant: ce principe est commun à tous les arts.'

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19 Coup de Patte (1779), pp. 20-21.
20 Coup de Patte (1779), p. 21.
To date, the art historians who have noted these criticisms have tended to agree with them, particularly in the case of Hallé, rather than to analyse what they say further. Vivian Cameron, for example, feels that the painting produced by the ageing Hallé, submerged as he is in the mannered society rules of ‘le monde’, manages to miss the moral point of the narrative because of Cornelia’s supposed subservience. Cameron outlines the conflicting societal positions of the artist, and of the critic (Louis Carrogis or ‘Carmontelle’, the author of the Coup de Patte), and develops an analysis of this and subsequent representations of Cornelia which operates around polarities of class. For Cameron,

‘What the story of Cornelia represents is the conflict between the old society of the nobility, viewed as operating by and for women, and the new ideology of the bourgeoisie promoting the happy family and content mothers. The difference is that between the public woman and the private woman. In subsequent paintings illustrating the story, the criticism of these critics will be heeded, and the moral represented correctly.’

There is much in Cameron’s analysis which is useful. Her delineation of negative views on ornamentation in the eighteenth century (from the works of Rousseau, Marivaux and Diderot to Marie-Antoinette and the ‘affaire du collier’) is highly pertinent. She also notes the symbolic properties of jewellery at this time, particularly as a sign of independence and control for women, who could legally manage their wealth if it was in the form of jewellery, and sees this as perhaps a further reason for criticism of the Campanian woman. However, there are elements in Cameron’s argument which are undeveloped and problematic.

Whilst she mentions the other connotations of jewels as signifiers of female genitalia and virginity, evoked by works such as Diderot’s Les bijoux indiscrets (1748), Cameron does not analyse the double entendre in Cornelia’s celebrated words. It serves to strengthen the moral of her tale: when the children are referred to as ‘mes bijoux’, they function as a transcendental metonym, representing the vagina as birth canal. The contrast drawn is

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therefore not only that between the children and the Campanian woman's trinkets, but at
another level also between procreational and recreational sex. We might construe from
the slippage around the term 'bijoux' in eighteenth-century French accounts of Cornelia's
narrative that the sexual connotations of this word were indeed well known. Its
replacement or qualification at times with 'parure' or 'ornements' may indicate a self-
consciousness about its full significatory range.  

Moreover, Cameron's dominant interpretation of the Cornelia / Campanian woman
narrative as one of class conflict is both problematic in itself, and avoids some interesting
areas of difficulty rather than scrutinising them. Referring to the lighting problems in
Peyron's *Cornélie* that were perceived in the *Avis important d'une femme*, Cameron
states as obvious that the artist 'expected the viewer to equate the obscurity with modesty
and the spotlight on the Campanian with her pride and avarice.' However, the clear
disjunction between what Peyron may have expected viewers to think and what the critic
in fact perceived is not analysed. Cameron instead interprets the effect of the lighting as
an emphasis on the confrontation between two class-based value systems - 'on the one
hand, the bourgeois institutionalisation of private life, symbolised by the children and, on
the other, the aristocratic world of the public salon, symbolised by the jewels.'  

This, however, does not take into account factors like Cornelia's own aristocratic status,
as the daughter and widow of great patricians. Moreover, the Campanian woman’s social
position is not easily defined as representing aristocracy. She is up from the country: her
place of origin was a large region outside Rome, and whilst this was not synonymous
with the Campagna di Roma, Campania was largely an agricultural area. The name of
the region has obvious homophonic resonances of countryside, reiterated by its alterity to
Rome. The Campanian woman therefore seems to be a nouveau-riche woman from the

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25 For example, Rollin adds to Cornelia's words so that she says 'Voilà mes bijoux & mes ornement'; see Rollin (1752), vol. V, p. 195. Binet's translation of Valerius Maximus prefers the use of 'parure' and 'ornements' throughout; see Valerius Maximus trans. Binet (an IV), book IV, p. 333.
26 Cameron (1983), p. 139.
provinces, anxious to appear sophisticated, rather than a member of an aristocracy
drowning in wasteful luxury.

Cameron’s analysis also fails to consider the blurring of lines which clearly occurs
around the notions of public and private in these works, where the quiet behaviour of a
woman in the private sphere must be witnessed by some form of [male] public in order to
validate it, and where in order for the ‘exemplum virtutis’ to operate at all, it must be
represented for the public to see. Most importantly, she does not examine this disjunction
between what the artist seems to have intended and what one observer, the critic, actually
understood.

Returning to the works and the criticisms against them, different questions might be
asked. Rather than assuming that the artists simply made mistakes, let us consider
whether the elements which displeased commentators may have been included for
legitimate reasons, in line with the narrative being represented.

Carmontel criticises Hallé for representing Cornelia’s good deed without witnesses, for
making her silent, for positioning her body so that her head inclines away from the viewer
(which he interprets as subservience). ‘Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S’, author of the *Avis
important d’une femme*, complains that Peyron does not shine the spotlight on Cornelia
when she is the most important figure. And yet all of these elements could be seen as
representational strategies which are legitimately striving to depict Cornelia as she was
supposed to be, according to a Rousseauvian voice of authority.

Without witnesses, Cornelia is truly private; without a voice (or shown after she has
spoken), she is demonstrably silent and therefore properly demure. By turning her head
away from the viewer, she remains modest, gentle and feminine whilst setting the
example to her guest. This is also the result of Peyron’s decision to leave Cornelia in the
shadows: if she dominated the centre stage and comfortably inhabited the glare of the
spotlight, would she still represent all of the qualities that she is meant to convey in this incident?

There is evidence that Peyron’s use of light and shade in this work was a deliberate strategy. It is with a certain decisiveness that Cornelia has been placed centre stage and yet simultaneously almost effaced by the enveloping shadow in the National Gallery canvas (plate 2). The gloom obliterates most of her body, and in particular obscures the profile of her face so that only the edge of her cheek is visible, even when the painting is scrutinised at close range. Moreover, a preparatory work signalled recently by Humphrey Wine as ‘an exercise in working out light values’ shows a far more even illumination of the canvas (see plate 11). It seems that after this sketch, Peyron decided to cast a veil of darkness over his heroine, in what appears to have been an intentional move. When asking why the artist took this action, surely the most convincing answer lies in the connotations of modesty evoked by this very specific use of shadow.

The critics’ reactions to Hallé and Peyron’s pictures of Cornelia reveal a fundamental difficulty of representation as far as she is concerned. By definition, the modest, private woman should avert her face from public scrutiny, should remain quiet, should shun the spotlight - indeed, should hardly be seen. How then can such a woman be represented in a painting? Does not the very fact of representation, of making her visible and clearly defined, in some way undermine the virtues that she is supposed to embody?

We can consider the paintings of Hallé and Peyron as different attempts to negotiate this basic problem, and the critics’ responses as indications that they were not entirely successful. We can also see how later artists worked to resolve this dilemma, developing the advice of the pre-revolutionary critics into their own pictorial strategies. Cornelia’s difficult status as a private woman made public is acknowledged by Suvée, for example (plate 4). This artist combines a centralised position for Cornelia with an indication that the place she occupies is, however, liminal: she is shown to be far away from the scene of
domesticity in the background at the left edge of the canvas, and yet is also equally
distanced from the sliver of daylight between the columns at the right which indicates the
outside, public world. The way to this sphere is effectively blocked by the massive male
form of the boys’ tutor; likewise, the area above her head is enclosed by a large statue of
her father or husband. Suvée’s Cornelia occupies the remaining central area with a
slightly awkward pose, almost recoiling from the touch of her visitor and from the central
role she is required to play.

Some artists give Cornelia a stern Roman profile (Lebarbier, Meynier and Suvée in his
later replica of the canvas in the Louvre (plate 5)); however, this is usually mitigated by a
pose of some recalcitrance. This strategy is extended on the rare occasions when
Cornelia is depicted out in public. When David included her in a major symbolic
procession, he gave her a decidedly modest bowing pose, bending her face down so that
her whole body, indeed her entire being, appears to be focused upon her children.

The lighting is often kept to an even spread in these later works, but two alternatives are
tried out by different artists. Suvée reverses Peyron’s decision and places the Campanian
woman in profile and with her face hidden in shadow in contrast to Cornelia’s evenly lit
face, with her penetrating gaze clearly visible to the spectator. This clearly addresses the
critics’ objections to Peyron’s canvas; we have already noted Suvée’s other strategies to
avoid presenting Cornelia as too dominant or comfortable in the spotlight. Blondel goes
much further in his small oil sketch (plate 10), flooding the figure of Cornelia with light
and placing her centrally on the canvas. However, he too counters these assertive
elements, giving his Cornelia a sweet face and inclining her body towards her children in
a way that evokes modesty rather than a sense of haughty pride.

Réattu and Lebarbier in particular choose to isolate the Campanian woman in contrast to
Cornelia, who is surrounded by her children. Suvée adds the greatest number of people
to his composition, responding to Carmontelle’s call for stern older witnesses. Some

artists, namely Peyron and Meynier, include female witnesses only; Suvee brings in several older men (probably also tutors) who gravely watch the scene and frown at the Campanian woman, their solid upright standing reiterated by the three heavy pillars behind them. Their legitimating gaze is also echoed by the watchful presence of the two massive statues behind the seated women.

Other artists opt for similar strategies: Meynier (plate 9) sketches in a statue of Minerva behind the women, and Lebarbier (plate 7) lights the lioness’ head on the table so that it appears to be looking up at Cornelia. He also bridges the gap between the two women with a relief high up on the wall showing Romulus and Remus suckling (and includes another possible breast referent, in the tops of the two empty niches which appear over the backcloth). It should be noted however that when this particular design was discussed by the Jury des Arts in terms of its suitability as a tapestry model, the verdict was that it was ‘Rejetté sous le rapport de l’art quoique le sujet soit digne d’être conservé sous le rapport moral.’ It appears that the artistic representation of this worthy subject was not felt to be entirely satisfactory: perhaps another indication of the fundamental problems underlying any representation of Cornelia which makes her visible.

Maternal tenderness is also stressed by Angelica Kauffman, an artist who strictly speaking does not fall into my focus group, but whose 1785 version (Richmond, VA, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, plate 12), provides an interesting contrast to those produced in France. It was also engraved in 1788 in a stipple print by Francesco Bartolozzi (The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery & Museums, Brighton, plate 13) and therefore like many of Kauffman’s other works, would have been known to French artists and collectors through this medium. Bartolozzi’s name alone would have made this a sought-after print. Here, the artist manages to convey Cornelia’s moral superiority not through witnesses, but simply through her position, standing above the seated Campanian

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woman. However, she softens Cornelia’s aspect by giving her a facial expression that blends pity with compassion, and by giving her a very realistic maternal pose (her daughter, Sempronia, is too young to know better than to be attracted by the Campanian’s jewels; Cornelia gently pulls her daughter away as she engages with her crestfallen visitor).

The one feature which is common to all of these different versions is Cornelia’s tranquillity. Suvée’s painting is the only one from the revolutionary decade about which the critics write, and it is interesting that Cornelia’s tranquillity is seen to play an important part in the communication of her message. Polyscope, who wonders if this work is finished since the colours are not particularly lifelike, notes the problems posed by this sort of subject and highlights tranquillity as a defining factor: ‘De tels sujets sont difficiles à rendre. Ce sont des scènes tranquilles qui doivent s’expliquer par le jeu des physionomies, plus que par les gestes des acteurs.’30 The critic of the Mercure de France goes further when he notes that ‘cette composition plaît par sa tranquillité analogue à la modéstie de l’héroïne’.31

Tranquillity might therefore be seen as a key part of the solution to the initial problem of how to represent the modest (and therefore in a sense unrepresentable) woman. However, I think the fact that there was a problem in the first place is notable. It points to a fundamental issue, a major problem which we will encounter repeatedly in our examination of pictures of women from the ancient past: representing exceptional women in a positive way is always problematic, even in the most apparently straightforward cases. Artists were constantly required to develop strategies which could negotiate the essential unconventionality of these women, as their singular conduct intersected in different ways with prevailing cultural and behavioural norms.

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There is also another sense in which we find Cornelia to be more complex than scholars have previously assumed. A further area of tension is created by other narratives about her which were prominent during this period: present earlier in the century in dramatic texts, and then reiterated by new theatrical productions during the early revolutionary years. These texts specifically undercut the quality of tranquillity which appears to have been a key part of the solution to the representational problems that Cornelia posed.

3. Less than tranquil - perceiving another side to Cornelia through image and text

Part of my method in exploring these images of Cornelia has been to re-contextualise them, not only in historical terms, but also in terms of re-imagining the framework of ideas and assumptions about Cornelia that existed at the time, and which was likely to have influenced both artists and spectators. What we find when we consider the broad range of information about Cornelia propagated in the late eighteenth century, particularly during the Revolution, is that the image of the tranquil good mother and modest unadorned woman was not the only version of her available to a cultured audience.

Already in some of the historical texts, we find points of information which give her a greater depth than the image presented by the paintings. Cornelia is portrayed as an intelligent woman by both Plutarch and Rollin, the latter praising her not just for the great care that she took over the education of her sons (and the excellent results that this achieved), but also for her own speech and writing. Rollin notes that ‘Elle parloit elle-même sa langue très-purement: & le langage de ses enfans s’en ressentait, & faisoit honneur à celle dont les soins maternels avoient ce semble moins eu pour objet de former leur corps que leur stile. Ses lettres sont citées avec éloge par Cicéron & par Quintilien.’ Cornelia is also characterised as something of a ‘salonnière’. Rollin describes the later part of her life after the death of her sons thus: ‘Elle y passa le reste de
ses jours dans une maison de campagne sans rien changer à sa manière de vivre. Son rare mérite lui procura toujours une bonne compagnie, soit de gens de Lettres & de Savans, soit des premiers personnages de la République.'33

However, Rollin refers to elements in Cornelia’s make-up which hint at another side to her. Firstly, he mentions Juvenal’s criticism of her pride and haughty air, which according to that author ‘diminuoit beaucoup de son mérite lorsqu’il dit “que dans le choix d’une Epouse on devroit préférer une simple citoyenne de Venouse à Cornélie mère des Gracques, si celle-ci, avec ses rares vertus, apportoit un front sourcilleux, & si elle prétendoit que les Triomphes de son père dussent être comptés dans sa dot.”’34 This then is Cornelia as proud and disdainful, and therefore devalued to some extent as a woman and not appropriate wife material. Such characterisation also serves further to contradict Vivian Cameron’s conception of Cornelia as a personification of good bourgeois values: Juvenal was criticising her distinctly aristocratic pride in her lineage.

It is in connection with the death of Cornelia’s sons that an even more radically different image of her emerges. Neither Plutarch nor Rollin locate Cornelia in Rome at the time of the death of her second son, since they write that she retired to Misenum after the death of her first son, Tiberius. However, she is referred to as speaking of their death in later life, and amazing her visitors by her lack of tender emotion on the subject. Rollin mentions Plutarch’s defence of her strength of character in the face of their sons’ death: ‘Cette fermeté parût si extraordinaire à quelques-uns, qu’ils crurent que la vieillesse & la grandeur de ses disgraces lui avoient affoibli l’esprit & le sentiment. Insensés! dit Plutarque, qui ne savoient pas combien un excellent naturel & une heureuse éducation peuvent élever l’âme au dessus de la fortune & la mettre en état de triompher de la douleur.’35

34 Rollin (1752), vol. V, p. 196.
It is interesting that her reaction is seen as problematic by some (indeed, it appears to undermine her image as the tender caring mother devoted to her children), and it is enough of a difficulty for writers like Plutarch and later Rollin to need to explain it away, albeit not very effectively: how credible is their argument that nature and a good education can stop a mother from grieving?

It is when we start to examine the plays that presented versions of Cornelia to audiences and readers in the 1790s that we find that these hints at a harder, perhaps less modest Cornelia barely suggest the full depth of her character. In fact, the predominant idea of Cornelia in the theatre was of a much tougher and more problematic woman. There are two surviving texts that I want to explore. The first is the play by M.-J.-B. Chénier, *Caius Gracchus, Tragédie en trois actes*, which premièred on 9 February 1792 and was republished the following year. This was one of a number of plays decreed to be shown regularly during the Revolution.36 There is also a little known text by Mercurin, *Les Gracques, tragédie en vers et en trois actes* (Paris, bearing the apparently contradictory date of ‘an II, 1791’).37

Both of these plays focus on the later part of Cornelia’s life, rather than on the jewellery incident (although that is alluded to via references to her sons as her ornaments or treasures); both also deal with the death of her younger son, Caius. In each case, and in broad accordance with the historical narratives, Caius is involved in a political struggle which aligns him with the people (as defender of their rights), against a corrupt Senate which has already caused the death of his brother Tiberius. He has to decide whether to

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36 The Convention Nationale recognised the educational value of Chénier’s play amongst others, and on 2 August 1793 adopted a decree favouring the representation of republican tragedies like *Brutus*, *Guillaume Tell* and *Caius Gracchus*. See P. Botteri and M. Raskolnikov, ‘Les Gracques, de Rome à la Révolution française’, *L’Histoire* (1981) no. 31, p. 38. There is also an earlier play on this subject which may have inspired the character of Cornélie which Mercurin and Chénier depict in the 1790s: Marie-Anne Barbier’s *Cornélié, mère des Gracques* (Paris, 1703). In this version, Cornélia is equally tough and uncompromising. I have found references to two other pre-revolutionary plays on the same subject, but have not found surviving examples of the texts. These are the Comte de Guibert’s play *La Mort des Gracques* (c. 1774) and François Tronchin’s *Cornélie ou la mère des Gracques* (Paris, 1784).

37 The date probably is indeed 1791; the an II may well refer to the second year of liberty, which would situate the play’s publication at some point between January and July 14 1791.
proceed with his defiance of them even when it becomes clear that it may well result in
his own death too, either by murder or by noble suicide (a difficult decision in the
versions where he has a wife, Licinia, and a child).\(^3^8\) Cornelia advises and influences him
towards revenge for his brother, freedom for the people of Rome, and a noble death if
necessary for himself. The impression of Cornelia which these plays convey to their
audience and readers is distinctly problematic.

Chénier’s version of Cornelia is an extremely serious woman, with strong opinions which
she expresses forcefully. She constantly sets the example for her son, who is from the
start defined by reference to her: at the beginning of the play, Caius describes himself as
‘Une âme citoyenne, un fils de Cornélie’\(^3^9\). Whilst there are very occasional references to
her ‘douleur maternelle’ (for example in Act II sc.ii), she is almost always a very tough
woman. She is the one to give Caius the dagger to take revenge for his brother, for the
tears that she has shed, but most importantly for the future of his country. She is both
vehement and implacable, unflinching before the violent detail of her plan:

\[\text{‘Fais payer au Sénat les pleurs que j’ai versés;}
\text{Prends, reçois ce poignard des mains de Cornélie;}
\text{Sans remords, sans délai, frappe la tyrannie;}
\text{Cours, vole, en répandant le sang des inhumains,}
\text{Venger ton frère, toi, ta mère & les Romains.’}\]

\(^4^0\)

As we will see in the final chapter of this thesis, this command of revenge is extremely
close to the final orders given by Lucretia to Brutus and her kinsmen just before her
suicide, in plays about Lucretia that were produced in the same early period of the
Revolution. This connection between Cornelia and Lucretia (a similarly virtuous Roman
woman, but one who plays a key historical role and whose narrative is bound up in
controversy), adds further to the edge of danger that there is about Cornelia as she is

\(^3^8\) Licinia is rarely depicted in imagery from this period. A notable exception is Jean-Germain Drouais’
sketch of Caius Gracchus leaving his house to calm the sedition in which he will perish (1788, Lille,
Musée des Beaux-Arts). Here, Licinia appears to have been thrown backwards onto the steps of the house
by the force of her husband’s departure; the child clings to her in fear.

\(^3^9\) M.-J.-B. Chénier, \textit{Caius Gracchus, Tragédie en trois actes} (Paris, 1792), Act I, sc.i.

\(^4^0\) Chénier (1792), Act I, sc.iv. The following unreferenced quotations are all from this scene.
presented in Chénier’s play, whilst simultaneously increasing her stature and the seriousness of her influence.

At this point in the play, Cornelia is chastised by her son for her lawless vengeful desires, an interesting development perhaps when set against the context of increasingly vehement female (and indeed male) popular action in Paris (again, something we will consider further in the next chapter). Caius’ responding speech lays great emphasis on the fact that he will proceed by law alone, begging her to calm her ardour and her hatred, since the extreme violence of what she proposes is not worthy of either of them.

Act II sc.iii sees Cornelia as fearless in the face of danger; for her the role of the mother is to stand by her son until death. When told to flee by Opimius, leader of the opposing senators, she retorts:

‘Moi fuir! connais-tu Cornélie?
Mère, auprès de mon fils, je brave le danger:
Aux côtés de Caius nous venons nous ranger;
A ses côtés; c’est la poste de sa mère.
Si j’avais dans le temple accompagné son frère,
J’aurais péri cent fois par vos coups inhumains
Avant que mon enfant fût tombé sous vos mains.’

Opimius responds in patronising tones: ‘J’excuse vos transports, je plains votre tendresse’. Cornelia however has no wish to have her opinions ‘excused’ on the grounds of maternal tenderness. She counters with an impassioned speech about her responsibility for her sons’ social and moral values, and therefore for any of their actions which are deemed worthy of the death penalty. If anyone should die, she insists that it should be her. Cornelia recounts how she has taught her sons - ‘mes biens, mes trésors, ma parure’ - the laws of nature, respect for the people and a love of their rights.

‘Au sein de leur berceau, je leur ai dit cent fois,
Qu’il faut de l’indigent soulager les misères,
Que des Patriciens les Plebiéens sont frères;
Que l’homme en tout pays nait pour la liberté,
Et qu’il n’est de grandeur que dans l’égalité.
Tous deux ont cru leur mère, & leur mère est contente;
She ends her speech with certainty that she will have universal recognition through her work on her sons: ‘Leur gloire imperissable à la mienne est unie; / L’Univers avec eux citera Cornélie.’ Concern for her own ‘gloire’ is a further way in which this Cornelia displays problematic characteristics, here somewhat masculine and aristocratic traits.

This is continued when Cornelia boldly challenges the senators to start the killing with her:

‘Sur mon corps déchiré frayez-vous un passage;
Payez de vos trésors nos cadavres sanglans,
Et goûtez à longs traits le plaisir des Tyrans.’

The author uses here a type of body imagery for Cornelia which is associated with rape, centring on the torn body through which a passage has been beaten as part of the pleasure-seeking of tyrants. This increases the sense of horrifying danger which faces Cornelia, and adds to the impression of her almost reckless courage. It can also be seen as a reversal of the escape of Tullia, the princess who fled Rome from Brutus and the popular forces involved in the first Roman Revolution (part of the revenge which Lucretia had called for). As she pressed her horses on towards the gates of the city, she drove her carriage over the body of her father Tarquin. Cornelia, on the other hand, will not turn and run, preferring to die and even then block the path of the tyrants with her own body.

The crowd of ‘le peuple’ watching respond by crying: ‘Vive des deux Gracchus la digne & tendre mère!’, at which point we may be struck by the dissonance between this concept of her as a supposedly tender mother and the words of fire and brimstone which she has just uttered. Cornelia is anything but a gentle maternal figure, and this is reinforced by the frequent contrasts made in this play between her and Licinia, Caius’ wife. Just after Cornelia’s passionately defiant and challenging speech, Licinia throws herself at Opimius’ feet to plead for her husband. She does not care at all that the crowd is shocked: ‘Ah! je n’en rougis point, je suis épouse & mère.’
There is no censure however of Cornelia’s behaviour; in fact, quite the opposite. At the end of the play, it is Cornelia who rallies the previously vacillating ‘peuple’ to choose the right side, to avenge her son and kill the tyrant Opimius:

‘Citoyens, levez-vous, expiez votre crime,
Et ne vous trompez plus au choix de la victime:
Ecoutez une mere & le Ciel outragé.
Frappez. Vengez mon fils.’

This is immediately done, and Fulvius (a senator loyal to the Gracchae) then orders that Caius Gracchus should be given a hero’s funeral, and that images of Cornelia should be put up: she is clearly to be venerated as much as her son, even in all of her ferocity.

In Mercurin’s play, *Les Gracques, tragédie en vers et en trois actes*, there are some narrative variations from Chénier’s in that Caius’ wife Licinia is already dead (so he worries that his own death would orphan his son), and the boy is also threatened by the Senate (led by an evil religious figure, a ‘Souverain-Pontife’) in an unusual Andromache / Astyanax parallel, when it is declared that the boy must die for he will surely attempt to avenge his father in the future. Nor is Caius’ death a noble suicide: here, he is assassinated.

Cornelia is again a major player: she heads the character list, and her speeches both open and close the play. Mercurin consistently attempts to mitigate the harsh effect of her implacability by having her waver in private about the choice she has made to encourage her sons to do their patriotic duty, and the grief which it has caused her (which he has her explain she specifically does not show in public). For example in her opening speech, she grieves privately about the sacrifice of her precious sons:

‘Oui je te l’ai promis cet affreux sacrifice,
Rome, mais n’attends pas que mon coeur m’applaudisse,
Et que mere barbare, etouffant ma douleur,
J’immole, sans frémir, mon fils à ton bonheur;
Pleurs indignes de moi, coulez dans le silence;
Scipion, vois ta fille, & soutiens sa constance,

41 Chénier (1792), Act III, sc.viii.
Que son coeur indécis par l’amour combattu
Resiste à la nature, & sauve sa vertu;
(Apres un tems elle se lève.)
Tremblez, tyrans, tremblez, je suis encore mère,
Caius vengera sa patrie & son frère,
Digne du tribunat où mes voeux l’ont porté,
Rome esclave, à mon fils, devra sa liberté,
Et fallût-t-il sa mort pour te rendre propice,
Ciel! que Rome triomphe, & que mon fils périsse!"42

This is interesting as it recognises the problem that Cornelia’s resolution does indeed make her a ‘mère barbare’; this is negotiated via the placing in opposition of nature and duty, with duty eventually winning after a visible struggle. Ultimately, being a mother here is equated with the strength of heart and mind which can make tyrants tremble.

Maternity is praised as a gift worthy of rejoicing, when one’s sons behave heroically: Cornelia, hearing of her Caius’ plans cries: ‘Je rendrais grace au ciel de ma fécondité.’43

However, maternity is also presented as a commodity which Cornelia attempts to use on the guards who come to take Caius’ son hostage. She pleads with them: ‘Accordez cet enfant aux larmes d’une mère’.44 This ploy fails to move them, perhaps because by this point in the play, no one can be fooled into believing that this woman seriously spends time shedding motherly tears. And indeed, when she realises that her ploy has not worked, Cornelia reverts to her usual thundering voice, proudly stating that she should never have begged such a vile person for a favour, and that the leader of the guard is the one who should have been killed as a child.

‘Exécrable assassin, inflexible bourreau,
C’était toi qu’il fallait étouffer au berceau;
Plût au ciel! que des dieux la justice sévère
Eût marqué ton trépas dans le sein de ta mère;
Craigner de resister à cet ordre inhumain,
Je l’instruirais moi-même à vous percer le sein’.45

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43 Mercurin (1791), Act II, sc.ix.
44 Mercurin (1791), Act III, sc.iii.
Cornelia is the most fearsome character in the play, ultimately calling the bluff of the Romans who at the end of the play are considering fleeing their city. She emerges in the last scene, with her grandson in one hand and a dagger in the other, and threatens to kill both him and herself unless the people stand firm (a further connection to Lucretia). This courageous move shocks the people into action, and she effectively becomes their leader. The last words of the play are hers:

Cornélie, avec satisfaction
'Ennemis des tyrans, suivez donc Cornélie,
Rome, tu vas renaître avec de tels vengeurs,
Je lis, dans leurs regards, la fin de tes malheurs,
Demain le sang coupable inondera le Tibre,
J’aurai perdu deux fils, mais Rome sera libre.'

Overall, these plays describe Cornelia as a distinctly public woman. She is stronger than many men, fearless, driven by an implacable need both for blood and revenge that at times has her described as barbarous and inhuman, and yet which also earns her respect and the following of many people. Images of her are to be raised and venerated in the same way that her sons’ tombs will be. All of this is very different from the quiet, modest, private woman presented in the jewellery incident.

No late eighteenth-century artist chooses to represent this later part of her life, perhaps not surprisingly. As we see from the illustrated frontispiece to the 1719 edition of Marie-Anne Barbier’s play on this subject, depicting this formidable side of Cornelia results in an image of considerable ferocity (London, British Library, plate 14). Bleyswyck’s design presents her as a scowling woman in a rage, who has caused her opponent to stagger backwards into the arms of his soldiers. Yet whilst the tradition for book and particularly play illustrations often includes such small scale furies (indeed, the angry woman with arms aloft is a common figure in such illustrations, along with her alter ego, the beseeching woman on her knees), we can imagine how in a large scale oil painting the

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45 Mercurin (1791), Act III, sc.iii.
46 Mercurin (1791), Act III, sc.vi.
effect would be very striking, and not necessarily a positive one.\textsuperscript{47} The painter is of course without the means to prepare the viewer for this moment, as a playwright can do by including scenes which explain and mitigate these moments of rage.

This darker side to Cornelia did have its uses, particularly during the Revolution. There was a need for a maternal role model who did not flinch from the sacrifice of her sons for the good of the Republic, particularly after the call was issued on 11 July 1792 that ‘la patrie est en danger’ and that more conscripts were needed for the revolutionary armies fighting against Austria. The ancient woman evoked most often in this context is of course the Spartan or Lacedemonian mother, who sends her son off to battle with the instruction to either return with his shield (and consequently victorious), or upon it (having died for his country). Isnard urged French women early in 1793: ‘Au lieu de pleurer sur leur départ, entonnez, comme les Spartiates, des chants d’allégresse...’\textsuperscript{48}

Indeed, pictures of this antique role model did appear at the Salons of 1793 and 1795, along with contemporary scenes of mothers saying farewell to their sons. In 1793, Naigeon showed a variation on the Spartan mother narrative: his work (no. 530, not located), was described in the livret as Une Lacédémonienne voyant, au siège d’une ville, son fils aîné, qu’on avoit placé dans un poste, tomber mort à ses pieds, qu’on appelle son frère pour le remplacer, s’écrie-t-elle. Le sujet est l’instant où le frère arrive. Cameron makes the connection here between this Lacedemonian woman and Madame Viala who, after the reportedly heroic death of her young son, wrote to the Convention in 1794 to offer her four other children to the nation. If further sacrifices were needed, she and her husband would gladly give them up: ‘Périssent nos enfants, et vive la république!’\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} A full range of the most commonly used poses for women in play illustrations can be studied in Didot’s 1801 édition de luxe of Racine’s Œuvres complètes, a major project in which a group of leading artists participated during the 1790s.\textsuperscript{48} Journal des Débats et des Décrets, no. 162, 27 February 1793, p. 348.\textsuperscript{49} Journal des Débats et des Décrets, no. 609, 21 May 1794, pp. 17-18, cited in Cameron (1983), pp. 153-154.
The 1793 Salon also exhibited Mallet’s *Sacrifice à la Patrie, ou le départ d’un volontaire* (Grasse, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, plate 15), a contemporary version of the theme of the family’s sacrifice of a young man. We should note that this fundamental change in family role models, from pre-Revolutionary Greuzian moral censure over sons who leave the family to join the army, to a celebration of their bravery and acceptance of this maternal and spousal sacrifice, was not easy to negotiate. Hector and Andromache are the antique couple most often evoked in this transition, as we see via Mallet’s decision to include an older, wiser mother or nurse who is tough enough to support the daughter or wife while she swoons at the thought of the impending departure. The roles here correspond roughly to Cornelia as the wiser older woman and Licinia as the young wife, as they appear in the plays.50

These episodes of stoic sacrifice in 1793 were followed at the next Salon by several depictions of the Spartan mother: a drawing by Lebarbier (now lost), and an original print by Avril (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 17), as well as another print by Alix after Moitte (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 18). This Salon also had a now lost painting by Valin (femme Piètre) [Nanine Vallain], of *La femme Spartiate donnant un bouclier à son fils*. The subject is clearly connected with that of Cornelia - in 1795, both Lebarbier and Avril showed the two scenes together as pendants.

Yet whilst an acceptance of the general theme of stoic maternal sacrifice would support the elements in the character of the theatrical Cornelia which urge her son on to his death, there is little in the simple story of the Spartan mother which can match or encompass the violence and force with which these dramatic incarnations of Cornelia act. The surviving visual representations of the Spartan mother all depict her as seated, firmly anchored to the ground (and home interior) in a solid chair, her only gesture to point to the shield.

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50 It is interesting to note that by the time of the second declaration of ‘La Patrie en danger’, after the Austrian assassination of French negotiators in Rastatt on 28 April 1799, the transition between swooning Greuzian wife / mother and a more hardy revolutionary version of womanhood was complete. We see from G. G. Lethière’s painting *La patrie en danger* (1799, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution, plate 16) how eagerly the women embrace their sacrifice, and hold up their children as both the reason for the departure of the conscripts, and as an example to their growing offspring of the right way to behave.
The Spartan mother does not confront her son’s enemies in public, wishing them dead and offering to die in his place, disdaining their power and herself leading the people in the event of her son’s death.

We cannot ignore these differences; nor should we avoid the fact that the narratives of Cornelia presented by the plays were in circulation during the Revolution, when the majority of the depictions of Cornelia were seen or planned to be seen. They were part of the potential web of experiences which any spectator might have brought to the process of viewing and the subsequent production of meaning. What effect might the presence of these other narratives have had on different viewers? Before we can begin to answer this question, we need to consider the issue of how we might construct historical spectators for these pictures of Cornelia.

4. Imagining an audience: a flexible and inclusive model

The intended and actual viewers for the majority of the Cornelia pictures under discussion were mostly those who attended the Salon exhibitions at the Louvre. This is clear from the number of these depictions - preparatory works, finished paintings and engravings - which were shown there. Exhibition at the Salon had also become an established convention of the genre of history painting within which these artists were working, and it remained a central part of artistic practice under successive dominant art institutions during this focus period. The larger works would also probably have been on view in the artists’ studios both before and after the Salon, and some individual canvases were evidently conceived for a particular patron (for example, Peyron’s work for Cardinal de Bernis). However, the major opportunity for this work to be seen was the Salon exhibition in Paris.
Thomas Crow and Richard Wrigley have both done admirable work on the Salon in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{51} Crow has investigated the notion of a Salon 'public' and its impact on French painting during this period. In his exploration of the internal dynamics and problems of this construction, he argues that we need to distinguish between the Salon audience, about which some empirical evidence is available, and the far more slippery idea of an art public. Wrigley approaches the problem from the starting point of the explosion of critical texts produced around the Salon exhibitions during this period, but reaches some similar conclusions about the audience (as opposed to the much sought after but elusive 'public'). He also constructs a detailed analysis of the space and conditions within which viewing at the Salon took place, describing the whole event as a Parisian 'spectacle'.\textsuperscript{52}

Both authors indicate a Salon audience which was vast and hugely differentiated. Wrigley analyses evidence which suggests the large numbers of the Parisian population which visited the free exhibition, and indicates that people from a wide range of ages, social classes and both sexes mingled in the crowd.\textsuperscript{53} These scholars also draw attention to the problem of assuming any kind of unified opinion amongst this endlessly diverse audience. This was recognised at the time - for example, one commentator in 1795 grumbled: 'Nous parler d'esprit public, c'est obstiner à donner une dénomination commune aux opinions les plus hétérogènes.'\textsuperscript{54} However, neither Wrigley nor Crow proceeds to address more fully the question of how this realisation of diversity impacts upon our analysis now of the likely meaning(s) that Salon pictures had for members of this audience.

One notable absence from their accounts of the Salon audience is the existence of women, beyond the briefest mention of their presence. Yet we know that they visited the exhibitions in great numbers: apart from the textual accounts of numerous commentators,\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{52} Wrigley (1993), pp. 52-53.

\textsuperscript{53} Wrigley (1993), pp. 78-80 and pp. 86-87.
they are also highly visible in imagery depicting the Salon and related spaces where art was viewed. Martini’s engravings of *Le Salon de 1785* and *Le Salon de 1787* (both in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plates 19 and 20) show considerable numbers of female spectators. There are no similar representations of the Salons of the 1790s, but there are some other images of the venue (the Louvre) in its new role as art museum: for example Hubert Robert’s painting of *La Grande Galerie du Louvre*, c. 1794-1796 (Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 22). A view from the turn of the century is offered by Antoine-Maxime Monsaldy’s etching *Vue des ouvrages de peinture exposés au Muséum central des arts en l’an VIII* [1800], (Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 23). Both works depict many female visitors; indeed, in Robert’s painting, the majority of spectators and students working in the gallery are women.

When considering Salon audiences in the late 1780s and 1790s, it is therefore important to remember their diversity, and to acknowledge that female viewers of different ages and classes were part of the crowd. This then leads to two questions. Firstly, can we formulate a model which might enable us to understand how this disparate audience produced meanings from what it saw? Secondly, what different meanings might have been made by these spectators, both male and female?

It is here that I find Stanley Fish’s ideas about interpretive communities useful. His work has grown out of a response to developments in literary criticism, in particular the post-Barthesian prominence of the reader in analysis of the production of meaning around texts. Fish addresses one of the primary problems of siting meaning in the reader, namely the fear that this model can result in a complete lack of uniformity of meaning, because each individual is so different. He negotiates this difficulty by positing a model where the reader has two levels of understanding: one which is indeed personal, to do with the individual’s experience, but also another (ultimately dominant) level which relates to the interpretive community or communities within which the reader operates.54 These

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communities share interpretive strategies, and, because they are sited in a culture which is to some extent common, they also share assumptions and ideas about a particular subject. In this context, 'share' does not necessarily denote agreement; rather it refers to a common set of cultural ideas and competencies which enable collective discussions and production of meaning(s).

We can understand the notion of 'interpretive community' in several different ways when using it to conceptualise the Salon audience. On one level, we can see the entire collection of visitors to the exhibition over several months as a community who share some aims and expectations (perhaps to be diverted and / or educated), but who obviously have different cultural competencies. The Salon audience also breaks down into groups which clearly share more specialised interests, language and conventions, like artists, critics, and people of different genders, classes and ages, although each of these may still be a fairly loose grouping.

There is also obviously the potential for a single viewer to be part of several communities; indeed this notion of interpretive communities is not intended to be a rigid idea of groups who only talk to their own kind. It also encompasses ways of imagining the 'cross-fertilization' of ideas and meaning within the Salon audience. We can, for example, envisage some arbitrary and temporary interpretive communities in operation: for example, one visitor standing near two others overhears their conversation and then assimilates or responds to their views, perhaps verbally or mentally at the time, or later when thinking about what they have seen or whilst discussing the exhibition with a fourth person. Wrigley notes that the recounting of overheard remarks came to form a whole sub-genre of Salon criticism. These were not always accurate accounts of opinion: he discusses how it was customary for writers to cite 'superficial and erroneous comments overheard amongst visitors in order to discredit [them as a] source of critical authority.' However, in such crowded conditions, shared conversations were inevitable, and

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commentators did on occasion praise the way that regardless of social distinctions, some visitors engaged in the spontaneous exchange of opinions.\textsuperscript{57}

We can therefore imagine that meaning was produced by a range of interpretive communities as they looked at and discussed the pictures on display, as they conducted debates (verbal and written, immediate and developing over time), as they agreed and disagreed. Using this model, we are able to include female spectators as part of this discursive activity, operating in interpretive communities which sometimes included men, but which could also consist of women and their children, or simply of women alone. Again, representations of art audiences from this period show female spectators who were not always looking with male companions to influence their interpretation. A detail from Martini’s \textit{Salon de 1787} (plate 21) shows a prominent group of women in the foreground, who greatly outnumber the few men present (we glimpse the odd masculine form, eclipsed by their skirts). Only one woman is actually listening to the man hidden in their midst. Her female companions talk to each other; another faces outwards, lost in private contemplation. We also see a woman with no male companion, herding her two children before her; in the background, two bonneted women are engaged in a lively discussion.

Such all-female groups are also shown to be looking directly at and discussing the art on view. Robert’s many depictions of the new museum, both projected views and representations of the finished space, often include women studying pictures and sculptures. These are not always female students, as in plate 22. Robert’s \textit{Projet d’aménagement de la Grande Galerie du Louvre}, probably done in the 1780s (Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 24), includes a group of three robust women who lean on the barriers and point out features on a classical statue; two more women with children observe from a distance.

It seems plausible, therefore, to imagine the Salon audience as a range of interpretive communities which included women of different ages and classes, and where the voices

\textsuperscript{57} See Wrigley (1993), p. 86.
of those women were heard. What each voice said was determined by numerous factors, including personal experience, but also shared ideas, conventions and assumptions (shared culture). How, then, does this conceptualisation inform our understanding of the historical interpretation of the images of Cornelia which began this discussion, particularly given our discovery of the contradictory ideas about her in circulation at the time of viewing?

There is clearly a tension between the two constructions of Cornelia that we have identified so far. Representations of her as a domineering, fearsome mother seem to undercut the image of her as a tranquil, modest woman. Viewers who encountered the ferocious Cornelia in plays that they saw (and we should remember the degree to which people were encouraged to see the Chénier play, in particular), would have known when they looked at the Salon pictures by Bosio, Lebarbier and Suvée, that this was not the full extent of Cornelia’s character.

They might then have decided to deal with this dissonance in different ways, for example resolving it temporarily by suppressing one version of Cornelia in favour of the other. We can speculate how spectators from different classes and genders might decide to choose between these contrasting Cornelias. Might some female viewers have privileged the memory of her as an active public figure as they looked at paintings of the jewellery incident, thinking that this was just the beginning of what this woman could do? Would some men have been momentarily reassured by the paintings, focussing in turn (perhaps with relief) at the concretisation of what they felt to be the ‘best’ of Cornelia? How might decisions about what these images of Cornelia meant have varied amongst people of different classes?

Spectators may of course have allowed the two potentially conflicting narratives to co-exist as they looked at and debated the pictures. If we imagine, as above, that some male and female viewers might have chosen to privilege opposing views, then this co-existence within debate was almost inevitable. The family unit was probably the most common
interpretive community which operated within the context of the Salon exhibitions, and this of course would have encompassed spectators of different genders. The question of whether or not male opinion would ultimately be dominant remains open. We should, however, remember that the conception of the 'meaning' of any visual representation must include the totality of debates generated in response to the contemplation of that object; this should include the views of women.

There is, however, a problem of evidence here: female Salon visitors rarely, if ever, wrote down in detail their reactions to the works on show: ‘Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S’ was an exception. In fact, we only have direct records of the views of one loosely grouped interpretive community, the critics; moreover, of the Revolutionary Cornelias, we have already seen that Suvée’s is the only one discussed. In order to broaden my investigation of spectatorship of these works, it is necessary therefore to think laterally, and to consider related evidence which may offer plausible suggestions about how different people saw and understood these pictures. I will now therefore focus on an aspect of the deployment of her image in Revolutionary society which has not so far been analysed: Cornelia as a role model for actual women.

This is an area where the dissonance between the theatrical depictions of her and the quiet painted versions seems most obvious: for example, if a woman has seen the plays by Chénier or Mercurin, how can she take seriously Prudhomme’s advice that she should imitate Cornelia’s behaviour since she ‘never ventured into the forum or approached the consuls to give them suggestions about new laws, contenting herself [instead] in the silence of her household with bringing up two sons for the Republic’?58

It is also a subject where there is related evidence from a particular group of women about their experience of actually emulating an example of virtuous antique behaviour, as well as contrasting records of the thoughts of certain men on the same incident. This provides an indication, in my view, of how different spectators might have approached
and interpreted pictures of Cornelia. What happens when women emulate antique role models, and what can representations of such events tell us about spectatorship of pictures of women from the ancient past?

5. Cornelia as actual role model

There is no shortage of evidence that Cornelia was consistently cited as a role model for women during the Revolution. In addition to Prudhomme’s interpretation of her as a ‘stay-at-home’ mother whom all women should emulate, we find similar sentiments expressed by the Abbé Fauchet in his periodical, *La Bouche de Fer*: ‘Le trône d’une femme est au milieu de sa famille. Sa gloire est dans la gloire des enfants qu’elle a élevés pour l’Etat. Cornélie n’était ni sénateur, ni consul, ni général des armées de Rome. Elle était la mère des Gracques.’59 David planned to advise mothers to teach their daughters that ‘la vraie richesse est de posséder beaucoup d’enfants, qui, fort & courageux, seront un jour les défenseurs de la patrie; qu’à l’exemple de Cornélie, ils soient votre parure & l’ornement de vos maisons.’ He then connected this back to the Spartan mother, adding that ‘la mère dont le fils est mort au champ de bataille, s’enorgeuillisse du sang qu’il a versé pour la patrie...’.60

We also see Cornelia evoked as a role model in a vaudeville comedy from 1794, a play whose colloquial French indicates that its targeted audience included the lower classes. Valcour’s *Le Vous et le Toi, opéra-vaudeville en un acte* (Paris, 1794) is a patriotic reworking of the familiar theme of parents who want a reluctant daughter to marry an unsuitable older man, intertwined with a comedic exploration of the difficulties which some people of different classes experienced over the move towards universal ‘tutoying’

58 For the original quotation in French, see p. 32, n. 1.
of fellow citizens. There is extensive word-play and plot-play around the implied intimacy of this new linguistic custom.

This play makes reference to two women from antiquity as examples for female behaviour. Thibaut the gardener, having remembered Aspasia as an example of bad female behaviour, since she becomes involved in politics and other male business where she is not wanted, then remembers the opposite good example from the ancient past. At first he cannot remember her name:

‘Alle était renfermée dans son ménage; alle élevait ses enfans dans l’amour de la Patrie. Et tians, Père Marcel, si tu te rappelles, alle fit, morgué, d’ses deux enfans, un Pelletier & un Marat; car i’ périrent, tous deux, comme ces braves Représentans, que j’pleurons encore tous les jours, pour avoir pris l’z’intérêts du peuple trop à coeur. Et v’la, morgué! comme les femmes devont être utiles à la révolution.’

Marcel remembers that ‘c’était Cornélie, mère des Gracques, & v’la l’exemple à citer à nos ménagères’, before singing a song which reiterates this behaviour as the way for female Republicans truly to do their duty and serve the fatherland.

François de Nantes clearly had Cornelia in mind when he said to the legislative assembly on 19 June 1792: ‘Voyez les beaux jours de l’Antiquité.... [quand] le coeur restait tout entier à une épouse qui, vivant loin du monde, plaçait tout son bonheur et toute sa gloire dans celle de son époux et de ses enfants.’ The house-bound Cornelia also became a familiar figure of ‘babouvisme’, mentioned along with her egalitarian sons with regularity in the writings of Babeuf and authors connected to him, for example Sylvain Maréchal.

Women too invoked Cornelia, although they did not mention her supposed inhabitance of the domestic sphere in the same way that the men did. Etta Palm d’Aelders cited her on several occasions as a woman worthy of basic rights, and Mme Mouret, author of Annales de l’Education du Sexe (Paris, 1790), reworked the famous line about treasure so that it

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64 See Botteri and Raskolnikov (1981), pp. 41-42.
emphasised the rewards of educating one’s children: Cornelia had found ‘sa richesse & ses trésors dans le fruit de leur instruction.’

We also know that Cornelia’s name was increasingly given to female children during the early years of the Revolution. For example, in Marseille in an II, documentation of the names given to newborn children reveal that out of the general trend for giving children names from antiquity, Cornelia is second only to Brutus in popularity, and for girls was the most likely choice of a Roman name. Such choices project an expectation that the child concerned will grow up to embody the qualities for which the antique name-sake is most famous; they must certainly engage with the role model on a daily (if unconscious) basis.

Scholars have so far not attempted to analyse this relationship between ancient narrative and actuality, nor the effect that it might have had on such issues as the spectatorship of paintings - of Cornelia, or of any other woman from antiquity. Madelyn Gutwirth has considered female spectatorship of allegories during the Revolution, drawing upon issues raised previously by Marina Warner. Gutwirth argues that the experience of seeing these symbolic female forms must have been different for women than for male viewers.

Such images were charged for female spectators with the potential for identification and mimesis. Therefore looking at the vastly increased numbers of such allegories in the early years of the Revolution must initially have been an exciting experience for women, and one which entailed a certain sense of empowerment.

No one has explored similar issues with regard to depictions of women from the ancient past, who share some properties with feminine allegorical personifications.

Art historians have instead assumed that the emulatory function of these women was an unproblematic (and uninteresting) given. Cornelia was a good wife (then widow) and mother, not dazzled by frivolous baubles, and was therefore an example to other women; the exhortations for actual French women to behave like her are seen to be obvious and inevitable, and consequently in need of little analysis. The role of pictures within this process is again assumed to be straightforward: a helpful visualisation of the behaviour which men can praise and women can accept as the way forward for them. Yet the evidence examined earlier of conflicting notions of who Cornelia was and how she behaved suggest that this assumption may be flawed: she was clearly a more problematic role model than has so far been allowed. How might different women have responded to the encouragement to emulate this antique heroine, and upon which aspects of her character and narrative might they have focused?

Some women clearly found ‘Cornelia the modest mother’ to be a difficult role to adopt, however willing they were to emulate her (or at least to appear to have done so). With Vigée-Lebrun’s assistance, Marie-Antoinette seems to have attempted to transform herself into a Comeliaesque mother in the portrait of herself with her children from 1787 (Versailles, Musée Nationale du Château, plate 25). In this work, luxury objects like furniture are also kept to a minimum. A cupboard which might house the Queen’s trinkets is relegated to the background of the canvas, displaced by the empty crib of her youngest (and now dead) child. Marie-Antoinette herself is unadorned apart from simple pearl earrings. Particularly noticeable is her conspicuously bare neck, an allusion perhaps to the notorious ‘affaire du collier’; she is presented here as a woman draped with children rather than with jewels.68 The effect is however less than comfortable: the Queen’s unsmiling face, although perhaps intended to communicate her grief at the loss of her baby, also gives the impression that she is a cold woman who does not appear to treasure her surviving children. This painting is clearly visible as a central part of the

68 This maternal imagery is of course also founded in Rousseau’s ideals, particularly the expanse of potentially nurturing breast on show; however, the exclusion of ostentatious jewellery does also relate this portrait to Cornelia. On Rousseauvian ideals of maternity, see C. Duncan, ‘Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art’, Art Bulletin, LV (1973), pp. 570-583.
hang in Martini’s print of the 1787 Salon (plate 20). Interestingly, not one of the female spectators standing anywhere in the vicinity of this work is looking at it. We should beware of reading too much into this; however, it could be interpreted perhaps as an indication of feminine displeasure at the Queen’s rather blatant attempt to appropriate this particular ideal.

Mme Roland is another prominent woman who appears to have engaged with a form of Corneliaesque role model. Before the Revolution, she tried to convince herself that she should emulate this kind of behaviour, but ultimately found such a role to be an unsatisfactory match for her ambitions. Harold Parker’s survey of Mme Roland’s writing highlights her early praise of Cornelia and the Spartan mothers. In November 1773, the as yet unmarried Manon Phlipon wrote to her confidante Sophie of these admirable women, ‘who found their glory in the happiness of their husbands, the care of their house and of their children....Retiring and sedentary, they brought the reign of peace and order to the interior of their homes; they were really respected, why? Because, as a Spartan woman answered, they knew how to form men [in virtue].’69 Three months later, she dreamed of becoming such a useful wife and mother in another letter to Sophie.

Later that year, though, we see signs that this role may not have offered as much potential for achievement as Manon desired. In a letter written to Sophie on July 24 1774, she revealed her regret that she was not born a man, since a man’s opportunity to do good on a large scale was so extensive. Since she could not change her sex, Manon tried to accept the possibilities open to her, namely to marry and have male children, whom she could form into men of outstanding virtue and merit who would be useful to society.70 Parker charts the presence of this idea over the next few years of Manon’s life, including the period where her mother dies and the man in whom she is interested is practically forbidden to enter the house by her father - her marriage hopes have as yet come to nothing, and still she is prevented by the society in which she lives from having any

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69 Cited and translated by Parker (1937), p. 53.
70 Parker (1937), pp. 53-54.
influence through a public literary career. In 1776, she admits crossly to Sophie "In truth, I am vexed at being a woman: I should have had a different soul, a different sex, or another century. I was meant to be born a Spartan or a Roman woman, or at least a French man. As such I should have chosen as my country the republic of letters, or one of those republics where one can be a man and obey only the laws." 

Parker accepts this apparent equation of two different kinds of desirable alternative life at face value, and feels that when Manon did eventually marry the government official Roland in 1780, she was content or at least resigned to her role, looking after her husband and having a vicarious literary career by revising his proofs, articles and addresses. "Such a life usually had its "severe happiness", as well as its moments of satisfaction. Such a life fulfilled both her wish to try to make another happy and her wish for a career of virtue. Whether contented or resigned, she would cease to voice the regret that she had not been born a Spartan or a Roman." 

However, Mme Roland's clear frustrations at times with her role as wife and mother, and her subsequent eager embrace during the early years of the Revolution of the chance to influence others through her salons and own writing, suggest that in fact she was never really content with the role of the woman who stays out of the limelight and focuses on forming men of virtue within her family. She is an example of a highly educated woman who scoured the pages of her beloved Plutarch in search of heroic models to imitate. Although she tried to persuade herself that a Corneliaesque role could be as fulfilling and glorious as that of a man of letters, her experience of living this role out, suggested by the evidence of her own actions and writing, proved that for her, this was simply not true. Moreover, the way she interpreted the notion of women privately forming men far exceeded the limits imagined by others, notably the men who would ultimately judge her high.

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72 Parker (1937), p. 58.
73 See Parker (1937), p. 38 on Mme Roland's passionate absorption in, and identification with, the heroes of Plutarch's *Lives* when she was a child.
behaviour. External observers of Manon Roland’s apparent acquiescence to a Rousseauist ideal of womanhood in public (for example, sitting apart from the men at the Roland’s salon in 1791, knitting and listening), were well aware of her influence over her husband in private. This power was deemed to be excessive, and was used by enemies like Danton to attack both husband and wife. Madelyn Gutwirth has noted that Manon’s ‘strategy of glazing herself lightly in domesticity simply backfired: her blithe pose of being the subordinate domestic woman could not stand.’ She concludes that ‘both Mme Roland’s political engagement and her love affair with Buzot scarred her as inadequate, not only in her Girondist politics but qua woman, as far as the Jacobin orthodoxy that would send her to the guillotine was concerned.’ We see from this instance both how elastic the role model was, in that Mme Roland and her accusers can interpret it in such different ways; and also how this role model could not possibly contain all women, as some vociferous men in positions of power such as Prudhomme and Amar might have hoped.

Another example of how such antique role models were unstable, shifting entities is found in the case of several groups of women who re-enacted an ancient instance of behaviour very much connected with Cornelia, in 1789. This was the generosity of artists’ wives and women artists, in emulation of the Roman matrons before them. It was an altogether more public action, and one which did not involve the daily restrictions of the reality of simply being the mother who stays at home and experiences only the reflected glory of her sons.

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75 Gutwirth (1992), p. 245 and p. 246 respectively.
76 Amar’s contribution to debates about female behaviour, which resulted in restrictive laws, will be discussed further in Chapter Two.
6. Making generous donations: practical emulation and its consequences

In this section, I will briefly examine the narrative and images of the ancient example, and outline those of the modern emulation, sketching in the connections to Cornelia. I will then analyse the textual and visual representations of the modern action. I will investigate these in some detail, because they are revealing about both the experience of acting out a feminine exemplary role, and about different perceptions of what this behaviour signified. In my view, this evidence can inform our understanding of the spectatorship of visual representations of not just Cornelia, but the whole range of exemplary women from antiquity.

The story of the generosity of the Roman women is found in the usual source texts - for example, Livy’s history of Rome (Book V), Plutarch (in the life of Camillus, X) and Rollin’s Histoire Romaine. A group of Roman women decided to help their country by donating their jewellery for the good of the nation, giving it to the Tribunes so that it could be melted down and made into an important sacrificial cup which was offered to Apollo. All the historical source texts stress the collectivity of the women’s action, and the fundamental generosity and sense of sacrifice involved, noting as Rollin does that ‘le courage étoit grand, vu l’attache ordinaire des Dames pour leurs bijoux.’

This event was then emulated on 18 September 1789 by a group of Parisian women (usually referred to as wives and daughters of artists, although some were also artists in their own right). Led by Mme Moitte, they too offered their jewellery for the nation’s

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78 Rollin (1738-1741), vol. II, p. 396. In view of the earlier discussion about the connotations of ‘bijoux’, there is a possibility that Rollin’s comment is edged with sarcasm.

79 One of the leaflets which recorded and described this event referred to the women as ‘une association de Dames artistes’: see Anon., Motion à faire et arrêté à prendre dans les différentes Classes et Corporations de Citoyennes Françaises (no place, September 1789), p. 4; certainly later groups who emulated this action were female artists and artisans: see Rigal, Discours prononcé par Mme Rigal, dans une Assemblée de femmes artistes et orfèvres, tenue le 20 Septembre pour délibérer sur une Contribution volontaire (no place or date).
benefit, this time without the intermediary step of a religious sacrifice. They were admitted to the Assemblée Nationale in order to hand over their donation in person; a speech by Mme Moitte was read out and thanks expressed by the President.

The connection between these events has been noted before by art historians to some extent, although not analysed in any detail, as I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Philippe Bordes feels the contemporary women do not emulate the actual event of the Roman women's generosity but rather act in its spirit; however, this is clearly not the case. In the women's own documentation of their action, they cite directly the ancient event itself. For example, Mme Moitte, in the first of two leaflets which she writes and publishes on the event, cites the 'Dames Romaines' story when she notes that 'l'histoire romaine nous fournit un trait qu'il serait honorable d'imiter.' In another text about the contemporary women's action, anonymous but clearly written by a woman, there are again references to the Roman example. The author wonders at first why French women have not done as the Romans did: 'Françaises, cet exemple vous dit ce que vous pouvez faire; pourquoi ne l'imiteriez-vous pas? Etes-vous moins Citoyennes, moins attachées à vos époux, à vos enfans, à votre patrie que ne l'étoient les Dames romaines?' She then corrects herself, reminding herself (and the reader) that Mme Moitte and her companions have already followed the historical example. Prints made to represent the event also refer to the ancient action: for example, an anonymous etching entitled Origine des dons patriotiques faits à la nation from the Récoulements de Paris (c.1789, Paris, Musée Carnavalet, plate 26), is specific that these women 'retracent ainsi parmi nous les vertus de l'ancienne Grèce et de l'ancienne Rome.'

Moreover, the connections between these acts of generosity and Cornelia are clear from several types of documentation from the Revolutionary period. For example, in the Recueil des Actions Héroïques et Civiques des Républicains Français, a collection of incidences of exemplary behaviour produced in large numbers to be read out in local

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81 Mme Moitte, L'Ame des Romaines dans les Femmes Françaises (Paris, 1789).
assemblies and public schools, we find a description of the contemporary donation which refers to the women as ‘ces modernes Cornélies’, declaring that their names will be recorded for posterity.  

In the speeches and pamphlets about the 1789 event, which I will consider in more detail shortly, there are frequent references to Cornelia, through moralising phrases about ornamentation, virtue and happiness. For example, in his leaflet, M. Raup-Baptestin connects back implicitly to Cornelia when he writes (about his own plain style of writing) ‘La vérité n’a pas besoin d’ornemens pour plaire, quand elle retrace les heureux effets d’un sentiment héroïque & sublime.’  

Similarly, in the words from Mme Moitte’s speech which he records, we find links with Cornelia when her speech exclaims: ‘Eh! quelle est la femme qui ne préférera l’inexprimable satisfaction d’en faire un si noble usage, au stérile plaisir de contenter sa vanité?’ [my italics]. This phrase equates vanity with sterility, referring back to Cornelia’s conscious replacement of vanity with fecundity, and with bringing up the children that are the result. The President’s reply to Mme Moitte includes the agreement that ‘Vous serez plus ornées de vos vertus & de vos privations, que des parures que vous venez de sacrifier à la Patrie’, another reference to Cornelia.  

The sacrificial element in both Cornelia’s narrative and that of the modern generosity action is another bond between them. Cornelia produces sons to lead and die; the female donors of 1789, some of whom are later identified specifically as ‘orfèvres’, are also sacrificing their lineage. An artist or artisan’s posterity resides in the survival of the made object; its donation in order to be disposed of or melted down for the good of the

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82 Motion à faire…. (1789), p. 4.
83 L. Bourdon, Recueil des Actions Heroïques et Civiques des Républicains Français présenté à la Convention Nationale au nom de son Comité d’Instruction Publique (Paris, an II), vol. 3, no. XXI, p. 15. The preface makes the educational aims of the work clear, and includes notice of a decree from the Comité de Salut Public that 150,000 copies should be printed.
85 Les Génereuses Françaises..., p. 6.
86 Les Génereuses Françaises..., p. 8.
nation is precisely parallel to Cornelia’s willing relinquishment of her sons. Discussions of this material have not usually picked up on this aspect of the symbolism of the material sacrifice which is made in September 1789.

There is also pictorial evidence which links the two generosity incidents with each other and with Cornelia. There is, for example, a clear visual relationship as well as a narrative one between the images of ancient and modern donations. The theme of the *Piété et Générosité des Dames Romaines* was treated by Brenet in 1785 (Fontainebleau, Musée Nationale du Château, plate 27), a commission for the King which was shown at the Salon to modest success although several critics felt that he should have included more women taking part; there is also a sketch for this dated 1784 in Quimper, Musée des Beaux-Arts.87 A version of this subject by Brenet was then re-exhibited at the Salon of 1791 (notably, after the contemporaneous female action), along with a painting of the *Générosité des Dames Romaines* by Louis Gauffier (Poitiers, musée des Beaux-Arts, plate 28). There is also an engraving by Ruotte after Boizot of this theme at the Musée de la Révolution Française in Vizille (plate 29); Jacques Gamelin also painted several small pictures on this theme, two of which dating from l’an II are in the Musée de Narbonne.

If we compare these images to just three of the numerous prints which represent the Parisian women’s donation of jewels, such as the *Origine des dons patriotiques faits à la nation* already mentioned (plate 26), an anonymous print from Chéreau’s shop of the *Don patriotique des illustres françaises* (1789, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française, plate 30), or Berthault’s print after Prieur of the *Députation des Femmes Artistes à l’Assemblée* (1789, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 31), we see that there are clearly some similarities because of their virtually identical narratives. In all cases, women gather to approach seated males who accept their gifts and record their names for posterity.
Moreover, some critics clearly realised the connections between the ancient and modern incidents when they came to discuss the Gauffier painting in 1791. One critic wrote that Gauffier had referred to the modern event by giving his Roman women the facial features of some of the Parisian donors. He asserts that ‘quoique les dames ayent le costume romain, il n’en est pas moins vrai qu’elles ont toutes des visages français: quelques personnes, et moi-même, avons cru en reconnaître, et nous en avons été charmés. En tous lieux, en tout pays, la vertu doit être chantée.’

We should note that although Gauffier was resident in Rome when he sent his painting to Paris for exhibition, he had returned to the French capital from May to December 1789, and was familiar with the September donation. Moreover, his choice of subject for the Concours de l’an III [sic] was recorded as Le Dépouvement des citoyennes de Paris, a depiction of the contemporary donation (now lost) which won the artist a Prix d’Encouragement of 9,000 francs.

Recognising the close connections between the donation narratives (both ancient and modern) and Cornelia is for me the first step in re-examining what happens when actual women start using ancient women as examples of behaviour to follow. The modern generosity event is extremely interesting, because it is such a clear example of emulation, and also because women themselves wrote about their experiences of taking part in this action. I have examined texts and images made by both men and women about this incident. These reveal significant differences in the perception of what this event signified, tensions which are in my view informative about the process of recommending, representing and following role models.

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87 On criticism of the meagre numbers of women taking part in the donation in Brenet’s painting, see for example the Observations critiques sur les tableaux du Salon, de l’année 1785 (Paris, 1785), C.D., vol. XIV, no. 326, p. 5; also the Avis important d’une femme..., p. 14.
91 At this point, we should note that a painting formerly thought to depict a direct conflation of Cornelia and the donation theme, a work by Gauffier from 1792 at the Château de Fontainebleau, has since categorically been identified as Roman matrons appealing to the family of Coriolanus. See J. P. Samoyault, ‘Note sur un tableau de Louis Gauffier’, Revue du Louvre (1975), no. 5-6, pp. 334-337.
7. Women's representations of their own generosity

Pamphlets by three different women have survived to give us an indication of their views on female donation events, and their significance for the rest of the nation. Mme Moitte, leader of the initial group of donors, wrote L'Ame des Romaines dans les Femmes Françaises (Paris, 1789) with a follow up second part (the Suite) issued shortly afterwards. An anonymous female author wrote a text entitled Motion à faire et arrêté à prendre dans les différentes Classes et Corporations de Citoyennes Françaises (no place, September 1789), and a third voice was added when Mme Rigal published her speech, the Discours prononcé par Mme Rigal, dans une assemblee de femmes artistes et orfévres, tenue le 20 Septembre pour délibérer sur une Contribution volontaire. All three authors are primarily addressing women, but also include men as part of the wider audience for their texts. There are many similarities in their perceptions of the donation events.

Firstly, this action is definitely connected to the Roman precedent for these women, and indeed, their way of following suit is not just emulation but almost an embodiment of the Roman women and everything that they stood for. Mme Moitte heads her text with an unspecified quotation from Corneille which refers to this actual living out of Roman-ness: 'Rome n'est plus dans Rome; elle est toute ou je suis.' She then proceeds to exhort women to walk in Roman women's footsteps: 'Hâtons-nous de marcher sur les traces de celles qui ont eu l'avantage de naitre avant nous, pour nous frayer la route qui conduit au temple du patriotisme.'

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92 For example, Mme Rigal's text is clearly labelled as one spoken to an assembly of women. Mme Moitte refers frequently to a concept of 'nous' which is obviously feminine, and which has for example husbands; the Motion à faire... similarly clearly addresses readers as 'citoyennes'. At certain points, however, appeals are made to all people, such as Moitte's request: 'que chacun de nous à l'envi, sans distinction de sexe ni de rang, marche avec rapidité vers l'Autel de la Patrie'. See Moitte, Suite de l'Ame des Romaines dans les Femmes Françaises (Paris, 1789), p. 4.
94 Moitte (1789), p. 5. Rigal is the only author to say that French women do not need to have roman examples cited to them in order to behave generously; see Rigal (1789), p. 4. It is interesting that none of the 1789 authors choose alignment with a more recent precedent, Olympe de Gouges' 1788 project for a patriotic tax, a voluntary contribution to a patriotic fund which aimed to alleviate France's deficit. Publicised in a 'lettre au peuple' leaflet published by the Journal Général de France on 6 November 1788 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection Hennin), this project did not come to fruition, although it was noticed.
There is a shared perception that the action arising from this emulation is a particularly appropriate female contribution, and indeed that women can do a great deal to help their country. At the beginning of her text, Mme Moitte confronts the issue of her subordinate position in society because she is a woman. However, she insists that her sex does not stop her from feeling courageous and patriotic: ‘la subordination qui est inséparable de mon sexe, n’a point étouffé chez moi le sentiment de la liberté, de courage et de patriotisme.’ Mme Rigal is even more specific about how much women can do. She notes that ‘Notre Sexe est exclus [sic] des emplois difficiles; mais il est admis à deux emplois bien intéressants; à l’exercice des vertus délicates, & à celui des sacrifices héroïques. Le moment en est venu pour la France.’

Moreover, the willingness of women to give up what is theirs is not the only potent gesture here: ‘les vertus délicates’ are also felt to be useful resources. The female authors place a great deal of emphasis on the specifically feminine power of persuasion. They feel able to use the full arsenal of female skills, from sweetness to openly shaming others, men in particular, into following the example of their behaviour. Mme Moitte is sure of the ‘pouvoir victorieux de si douces armes’; she is convinced that ‘elles convertiront le plus déterminé des méchants, ou tout au moins le livreront à l’impuissance.’

In her eulogy of the donation events, the author of the *Motion à faire*... cites both women’s particular talent for sacrifice and their already proven ability to enflame men, to

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and discussed (for example, the royalist *Petit Almanach de nos grandes Femmes* noted the ‘fameuse’ *Lettre au Peuple*, and de Gouges herself mentioned different responses to her plan in her *Remarques Patriotiques par la Citoyenne, Auteur de la lettre au Peuple* (Paris, 1788). The frontispiece for the *Lettre au peuple* by Frusotte after Desrais, *Allégorie d’un impôt volontaire ou d’une caisse patriotique* (plate 32), shows a woman as central to the process of giving for the nation. When she writes about the potential of such donations, de Gouges uses ideas and language that is very similar to that later used by Mme Moitte and her colleagues; however, the women of September 1789 never acknowledge the connection. On Olympe de Gouges’ projects and propositions, see B. Groult, *Olympe de Gouges: Oeuvres* (Paris, 1986), and J. Wallach Scott, ‘French Feminists and the Rights of Man: Olympe de Gouges’s Declarations’, *History Workshop*, vol. XXVIII (1989), pp. 1-21.

96 Rigal (1789), p. 2.
97 Moitte, *Suite* (1789), p. 2. We might note too the implied disempowerment of those who resist persuasion, here stated as an aim by Mme Moitte.
encourage their heroes into action.\textsuperscript{98} She also venerates mothers for their love, going so far as to attribute the saving of the nation to the actions of French mothers: ‘nos pères n’ont pas seuls travaillé à nous procurer ce bonheur; nos mères aussi nous ont aimés; elles se sont immortalisées comme leurs époux; ils avaient servi ou défendu la Patrie par leur sagesse et leur bravoure; mais ce sont elles qui l’ont sauvée par leur générosité.’ [my italics]\textsuperscript{99} For this author, a mother’s love and generosity has even greater value than men’s defence of the fatherland. The reader is given a powerful sense that womanly skills and actions have long-term importance and value.

This is a key point in these texts. The generosity action is understood by the women not only as a particularly good use of their specific female skills and characteristics; it is also perceived as a major event of national importance, one which could result in the rescue of the nation from its disastrous financial situation. Mme Rigal speaks of the potentially enormous scope of the idea, which could be cascaded on throughout the nation. ‘Quelques femmes Artistes de Versailles ont donné l’exemple au nôtre. Leur noble mouvement s’est communiqué à nous, & par nous il se communiquera à toutes les Femmes de France. Ah! si ce mouvement général contribuait à restaurer un empire \textit{[sic]} défaillant! Si au seul récit de nos foibles efforts, tous les bons Citoyens, tous les riches propriétaires, tous les capitalistes opulens s’unissoient comme nous pour le salut de la Patrie!’\textsuperscript{100} Rigal writes about the financial state of France over the following pages in some detail, and comes back to the same conclusions - the women can save the Empire, not through the value of their own jewellery donations, but by shaming men (possessors of the real wealth) into donating serious amounts of money into the national coffers.

Rigal’s belief that the women’s actions are of national consequence is shared by her counterparts. Moitte speaks of how happy she will be when, because others have emulated the women’s donations, ‘nous aurons sauvé la Nation de sa détresse.’\textsuperscript{101} The

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Motion à faire...} (1789), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Motion à faire...} (1789), p. 6.
\textsuperscript{100} Rigal (1789), pp. 4-5. The discrepancy in the capitalisation of ‘Empire’ is perhaps a typographical error.
\textsuperscript{101} Moitte (1789), p. 7.
author of the *Motion à faire...* declares that this is a 'grand ouvrage', 'un projet vraiment patriotique et qui dût sauver tout l'Etat!'\textsuperscript{102} France faces major problems, but if anyone can start the road to recovery, it is these women: Moitte says with some pride that 'Les dettes de l'Etat sont innombrables, mais nos ressources le sont aussi.'\textsuperscript{103}

This is clearly an expression of a realisation of empowerment, and it is by no means the only one in these texts. Writing about the future of her country, Moitte urges: 'tâchons...de trouver le pouvoir de la sauver. *C'est en nos mains, si nous le voulons.* Si nous le voulons: (ce mot est grand, impérieux, libre et réjouissant:) oui, nous le voulons, dirons-nous avec véhémence, travailleurs de concert à ce grand projet; sauvons notre mère et sauvons-nous.'\textsuperscript{104} [my italics]. Her words project a sense of the invincible strength of will that she feels women can and do have, and which can overcome the most apparently insurmountable of problems.

They also signal that greater achievements are only achieved through co-operative work, and indeed, female collectivity is an issue which is very much foregrounded in these texts. For example, in the *Motion à faire...*, the title page carries a note which explains that in the future, women will group together on a regular basis. Because most of the *citoyennes* are not part of any corporation except via their links to whatever organisations their husbands are part of, these women 'se réuniront et formeront des associations suivant ces états, chacune dans leur classe; ainsi les femmes des marchands s’associeront avec celles des marchands du même Corps'. The author goes on to cite types of wives (military, artists, financiers etc) who would each associate according to their class (or that of their husband).\textsuperscript{105} The generosity incident gives these women the confidence to plan their future collectivity, to organise themselves presumably so that they can participate in public life more effectively.

\textsuperscript{102} *Motion à faire...* (1789), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{103} Moitte, *Suite* (1789), p. 2.
\textsuperscript{104} Moitte, *Suite* (1789), pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{105} *Motion à faire...* (1789), p. 1.
For all of the women who write about the event, it is clearly a starting point from which more ideas and action will follow. Mme Moitte’s eagerness to contribute further suggestions is clear: she says that she has devised ‘mille projets tendans au bien de l’Etat’.\textsuperscript{106} The author of the \textit{Motion à faire} is convinced that this is only the beginning of what women can do. She feels that women are: ‘prêtes à donner nos fortunes, notre vie même s’il le falloit pour notre Patrie’.\textsuperscript{107}

These female authors try on occasion to be circumspect about their sense of achievement, perhaps aware that they are not preaching to the wholly converted (particularly the male readers of their pamphlets). We can note for example the dissonance between the grandeur of the scope of Rigal’s imagined project to save the nation’s finances, and her almost coy use of phrases like ‘nos foibles efforts’ to describe it. Similarly in her closing words, Rigal seems consciously to use belittling terminology, perhaps to present the action as respectable; yet also betrays a tremendous sense of ambition and potential in terms of where this endeavour might lead. She begins in suitably self-deprecating tones, by saying that ‘Tandis que l’Assemblee Nationale s’occupe à les [state finances] régénérer en grand, nous osons prétendre à les secourir en petit.’ A few lines later, the grand hopes which lie behind such a statement are revealed: ‘Compagnes des Arts, Sujettes de l’Etat, annoblissons nos parures frivoles, sanctifions les pompes mondaines, en les sacrifiant au besoin public... Que le luxe devienne une vertu, & que les Arts qui font briller un Empire, contribuent à le faire renaître & subsister.’\textsuperscript{108} Both as artists and as women, Rigal’s audience can contribute to the renaissance of the Empire.

Her appeal shows how for these women, a form of behaviour which is clearly linked to Cornelia (through the references to luxury, to ‘parures frivoles’, and to rebirth) has come to embody far more than devoted domesticity and small personal sacrifices. Rigal triumphantly perceives the action which has developed out of the emulation of antique role models as the start of a great feminine role in the Revolution.

\textsuperscript{106} Moitte (1789), p. 1.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Motion à faire.} (1789), p. 5.
Indeed, the women’s act of generosity leads directly to what are, in effect, the beginnings of a demand in these texts for political power for these women. Although in the *Suite de l’Ame des Romaines*... Mme Moitte stresses that the women seek only praise from their own consciences, other authors mention the possibility of having some input into the decision about the uses to which the money they have raised is put. A footnote in the *Motion à faire*... leaflet touches on the issue of political power when it suggests that some of the women donating want to have an influence over how their money is used, and that they feel that it should only be released after the constitution has been finished and approved.

The overwhelming characteristic of these female texts is a sense of excitement about the event, and what it means for women. This is particularly noticeable in the two pamphlets by Mme Moitte. She uses language which is almost sexually charged, asserting that the greatest happiness and the most pleasurable feelings for women can result from these donations. She invites women to join in this thrilling action: ‘que chacune s’électrise de l’amour du bien public’; her excited phrases are layered one after another in a climactic structure. There are also constant references to the potential for satisfaction that this behaviour offers women. Moitte exclaims that if her letter persuades others to donate, ‘je serai au comble de la satisfaction’, and describes the warm glow felt by the women at their action as the most perfect happiness they have ever experienced. She declares that her companions ‘peuvent certifier que jamais en leur vie elles n’éprouvèrent un bonheur plus parfait, et, plus on donne, plus la satisfaction doit être grande.’ The underlying implication of Moitte’s superlatives seems to be that these feelings surpass even those resulting from intercourse and childbirth. This instance of emulation, then, is felt by the women to be exciting, pleasurable, and satisfying, both mentally and physically.

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110 See *Motion à faire*... (1789), p. 7.
The representations that women make of their action show that for them, this instance of emulation of an antique role model is a vital experience, an event of personal significance and national importance. We will return to consider what implications this evidence has for spectatorship of depictions of women from antiquity; at this point, I want to contrast these findings with the ways in which non-female observers represented the same events. Whilst male views appear to vary considerably, it is clear that the men who represented this act of female generosity did not perceive it to be anything like as momentous or consequential as the women did.

8. Male representations of female donations

The most detailed male response comes from an anonymous leaflet (but noted in handwriting on the copy in the Maxwell archives as being by a M. Raup-Baptestin) entitled *Les Généreuses Françaises, Anecdote Historique. Promts effets du bon exemple. Nécessité de l'établissement d'une Caisse Patriotique* (no time / place). The author describes himself as a ‘confident de leurs projets, sincere admirateur de leur zèle, témoin de leur réception à Versailles & de leur entrée à Paris’, and seems genuinely to admire the women’s action.\(^{113}\)

Overall, he is quite positive about ‘nos modernes Romaines’, and echoes some key points which the women make in their own leaflets.\(^{114}\) He certainly sees their action as an inspiration not just to other women but to men too, referring to the event as ‘un si noble exemple aux Citoyens des deux sexes.’\(^{115}\) Raup-Baptestin then confirms how quickly other people begin to donate once Mme Moitte has conceived of the idea: ‘tel est le pouvoir des bons exemples’, although this is mainly restricted in his report to further female activity. Recalling that Madame Necker has said that she knows many women who plan to donate jewels also, he later includes a number of other instances of

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\(^{113}\) *Les Généreuses Françaises...*, p. 1.

\(^{114}\) He refers to them as modern Romans on p. 3 and p. 19.
generosity and moves to set up *caisses* and offices to receive donations inspired by the Parisian women’s action.\footnote{Les Généreuses Françaises..., p. 1.}

Raup-Baptestin also notes the increased female collectivity which resulted from the initial event, and tentatively supports the idea that the Assembly should not ignore the views of the people who have donated (he does not specify them as women) over how the money should be spent.\footnote{Les Généreuses Françaises..., pp. 2-3 and p. 17.} Like the female authors then, there is a hint here of how collecting and donating money may inevitably lead to demands for a form of political power, namely calls for accountability and some influence over how those finances are used.

However, although this text is highly supportive of the women’s action, it is still very different from the female authors’ versions in many respects. For example, Raup-Baptestin’s account does not convey anything approaching the sense of excitement and overwhelming importance that was communicated by the women. It also contains many elements which refer to the participants as modest, rather sweet-natured women, and their action as a small affair (it starts in the title, where this action is labelled an ‘anecdote’). All of this presents a very different image from the women’s own self-representation as potentially great achievers and future saviours of France.

Firstly, great emphasis is placed upon the exceptionality of the event, of the fact that it took place within the hallowed male governmental apparatus. For example, the arrival of the women in the Assemblée Nationale is presented as a highly unusual occurrence. Raup-Baptestin records that the Deputies who were not in the chamber at that moment all came running back in; ‘ceux qui étaient à leur place, étonnés de ce mouvement extraordinaire, s’empressaient d’en demander la raison.’\footnote{Les Généreuses Françaises..., p. 4.} Special chairs were fetched for the ladies, and extensive note is taken of the fact that the women were allowed to stay to the end of the session as a mark of honour. Meanwhile ‘L’on continua les discussions

\footnote{Les Généreuses Françaises..., p. 1.}
\footnote{Les Généreuses Françaises..., pp. 2-3 and p. 17.}
\footnote{Les Généreuses Françaises..., pp. 18-19 and p. 21.}
\footnote{Les Généreuses Françaises..., p. 4.}
sur les grands objets qui occupaient alors l’Assemblée; for this author, the real business of the day was not the women and their act of generosity.119

There is a certain tension here between different tasks performed by this text. On one hand, Raup-Baptestin is specific about the essentially transgressive nature of the women’s act; at the same time, however, he believes that it was for a genuinely good cause and so is anxious to portray the donors in a positive light. One of the ways in which he does this is to attempt to mitigate their transgression by stressing their decorum at all times. For example, he notes how ‘Ces Dames, toutes vêtues de blanc, toutes déce­mment & simplement coiffées, toutes ornées d’une cocarde patriotique, entrèrent précédées de deux Huissiers, se rangèrent sur une ligne, & firent, avec beaucoup de dignité, les révérences d’usage à M. le Président, & à MM. les Députés, qui les leur rendirent.’120 He emphasises the women’s orderliness, their simple and morally correct dress, and the good manners of the whole occasion.

Similarly, Mme Moitte is presented here as a shy, decent woman who had prepared an address, but had to ask a man to deliver it for her, an aptly named M. Bouche.121 Raup-Baptestin adds details like Mme Moitte’s delicacy in mixing up the donations so no one could tell who had brought more or less. ‘C’est un raffinement de délicatesse imaginé par cette excellente Citoyenne; & ce serait commettre une grande injustice envers elle, que de le laisser ignorer.’122

Yet even though motivated by apparently positive designs, Raup-Baptestin’s insistence on such points seems also to constrain the women, particularly when we compare his leaflet with their own. His language and ideas recall previously sanctioned behaviour and seem to be an attempt to fix the women back into those ideals; whilst their own texts re-

120 *Les Généreuses Françaises...,* p. 5.
121 *Les Généreuses Françaises...,* p. 5.
122 *Les Généreuses Françaises...,* p. 2.
examine their past behaviour and find hidden germs of heroism that will transform the future for them.

Also, he does not see this example-setting as something for which women in particular have a talent, in the way that the female authors presented it to be a specifically feminine strength. Instead, Raup-Baptestin extends the good qualities displayed by the women to the French in general: ‘Tels sont les Français, quand ils pensent, quand ils agissent d’après eux, & qu’ils suivent l’impulsion naturelle de leur coeur.’

This is radically different from the women who claim this kind of action as their own, as their chance to show, encourage and if necessary to shame the rest of their countrymen and women into the correct way to behave.

So whilst this author does give the women their due for coming up with an idea which everyone is starting to imitate, and defends them against possible critics of both sexes (an eventuality which none of the women even imagine, so convinced are they of the overwhelming benefits of their action), Raup-Baptestin’s leaflet ultimately results in dreams for the nation which make no reference to the women whose action led him to pick up his pen in the first place.

Other records of the event produced by men are often far less supportive, and whilst overtly praising the women, find ways to downplay their donation and its significance. For example, we find that the description in Bourdon’s *Receuil des Actions Héroïques et Civiques* includes details like the fact that the woman who actually offered the box of jewels to the Président did so ‘avec une grace & une timidité qui ajoutent à ses charmes.’ These are the instantly recognisable terms of ideal womanhood according to the Rousseauvian model, and we can understand them to some extent as words of power used by men to circumscribe women. Exactly the same phrase is used with reference to the incident in a discussion of heroes and heroines of the Revolution in 1794, reported in

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124 Bourdon (1794), vol. 3, no. XXI, p. 15.
the *Journal des Débats et des Décrets*.

We may also remember the words of the critic who noticed the French faces in the Gauffier painting of the Roman act of generosity, and his statement of how ‘charmed’ he and his friends had been by their inclusion. This is all redolent of a rather patronising pat on the head for the women, and is very far removed from their own perception of their action and its importance.

Another critic is openly hostile to these women and their project in his review of the 1791 Salon. Having described the Roman generosity incident as a prelude to his assessment of the Gauffier painting, this critic remarks that this is an act ‘qu'on a vu se renouveler de nos jours, mais avec un sentiment plutôt d'orgueil que de patriotisme.’

We are reminded again of Raup-Baptestin’s defence of the women against such charges - clearly other people (here almost certainly a man) felt that by taking the spotlight, the women were behaving in a provocative way which invited attack. This particular critic also condemned women artists in general, implying that many other people’s hands did their work and denouncing parents who allowed their daughters even to train as artists.

The prints which depict this event also represent it in ways that differ significantly from the women’s pamphlets. The *Origine des dons patriotiques* (plate 26) seems, like Raup-Baptestin’s text, to derive from a supportive viewpoint, naming the women below the image and indicating in the title that this was an event which was much copied.

However, other prints were less positive in their presentation of this scene. Often, the women are shown as if they are invading a male dominated space, and are made to appear very small within this area (notably, in the Chéreau and Prieur versions, the tall upright, phallic pillars of the interior of the chamber where the National Assembly was held provide a particularly pointed contrast). There is also a very marked difference in scale between the representations of women taking part in the Roman event and those of the 1789 example. Obviously, this is partly to do with the conventions of the revolutionary

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127 *Lettres Analytiques*... (1791), pp. 61-63.
‘journée’ prints, and is a particularly frequent feature in Prieur’s work; however, it should be noted that this element of their construction in itself has to do with the desire to neutralise and take the power out of some revolutionary events. The final effect is that these women are made to appear smaller and more anonymous than their Roman counterparts, dwarfed by their surroundings. Even in prints where all the participants are tiny compared to the architecture, such as the Prieur version (plate 31), the spatial positioning of the women and the whiteness of their dresses makes them seem distinctly Other. In this print, there is also the subtle threat suggested by the manner in which a chair is held precariously aloft above the heads of the last women to enter. Centrally positioned and delineated clearly against an area of light, this chair which overtly represents male assistance can also be read as a gesture of aggression which the women do not see.

The Chéreau print is also able to shape its representation of the women and the significance of their action through the inclusion of a long caption. In a complete reversal of the facts presented elsewhere, this text informs readers that for some time, donations had been arriving from around the country, and that now the women were joining in: ‘maintenant des Femmes partagent cet enthousiasme patriotique, semblables aux Romaines du temps de Camille, elles ne veulent plus être parées que de leur vertu.’ The implication is, therefore, that the idea and initial example came from men, not from the women at all. The part of Moitte’s speech which is reproduced in this text is the section which refers to the donation as symbolic rather than as an actual major plan of help: ‘Notre offrande est peu de valeur, sans doute, mais dans les arts on cherche plus la gloire que la fortune, notre hommage est proportionné à nos moyens, et non aux sentimens qui nous inspirent.’ In this way, this caption writer attempts to keep the significance of the event to a minimum. Moreover, he is careful to include the women’s reference to ‘gloire’. The literal meaning of Mme Moitte’s words was an explanation that the women were not rich because of their husbands’ and their own profession; however, this phrase could be read otherwise by those who might seek to understand the women’s action as...
motivated by a desire for attention and glory. As we saw from the attack of the critic in 1791, this idea could be used to condemn these women.

We find then that male perceptions of this event are sometimes supportive, sometimes equivocal, and even occasionally hostile. Analysis of them frequently reveals strategies which undermine the representation of the women's action as a significant and consequential event. The issue of where this action might lead in the future is the site of one of the most interesting intersections of these different voices. Raup-Baptestin's acknowledgement of the resulting increased female collectivity and requests for involvement in national financial decisions accords with the women's own assessment of the situation. It also, however, informs the other men's textual and pictorial moves to belittle and constrain the women, indicating a noticeable level of anxiety about the implications of such activity amongst respectable middle-class women.

We may note that by the end of the Revolution, when women's activism had been firmly suppressed, a work was exhibited whose theme portrayed the feminine gesture of jewellery donation as futile. Callet's Marcus Curtius se dévouant pour sa patrie (1799 Salon, no. 35, not located) depicted a scene from Roman history where a gaping hole suddenly opened up in the ground in a city centre square. The livret describes how the oracle advised that it would only close if the Romans threw into the chasm their most precious possessions. The women threw in their jewels but nothing happened. The ground only closed over once again when Marcus Curtius, 'jeune homme plein de courage et de religion', threw himself in as a human sacrifice. Thus in this painting, there is both a criticism of feminine values (how could they define their baubles as their most treasured possessions when they had sons?), and a negation of their gesture of generosity. Ultimately, only a man's sacrifice would do.
9. Different perceptions, different meanings: what can this evidence tell us about historical spectatorship of depictions of Cornelia?

In my view, the evidence presented above indicates that previous assumptions about what images of Cornelia signified, particularly during the Revolution, need to be revised. Through the case study of a closely related group of ancient women, we have seen how an apparently straightforward antique role model can in fact be a shifting, elastic concept; one which is open to differing interpretations by various spectators and participants.

When women actually did emulate an apparently modest gesture from the ancient world, they were electrified by the experience. They communicated their excitement to other women, indeed to anyone who would listen; they felt empowered and imagined the possibilities that this action opened up for them. They recognised the strength in their numbers, and began to demand a recognition of their power. These women privileged the idea of the generous Roman matrons as strident persuaders, showing all their compatriots how to behave in order to save the nation. This reaction was considerably different to that of the men who participated in the women’s emulation, forced to be passive receivers of their gifts, and to that of other men who represented the event afterwards. Male reporters consistently preferred instead to stress the ‘modesty’ element in the action emulated. Men highlighted the themes in the narrative which reiterated the notion that this behaviour conformed to a Rousseauvian ideal of womanhood, one bound up in simplicity and quiet self-sacrifice.

This incident and the varying representations of it that have been discussed intersect with this re-examination of Cornelia in two main ways. Firstly, they must be considered as having had a direct bearing on how people understood representations of Cornelia, so closely related to the generous matrons, both in the short term and over a period of time. Secondly, the evidence of the way in which this action was perceived and represented by different participants, spectators and reporters, is relevant to any analysis of the
significance of a broader range of consciously exemplary images, for instance other women from the ancient past.

How does this evidence feed into the model of spectatorship discussed earlier, where we understand meaning about visual representations to have been produced in the Salon by interpretive communities of viewers? It tells us something about the likely agendas of the people who formed the Salon audience, who were part of those communities; agendas which would have been highly relevant to their consumption of images of Cornelia. This in turn can help to answer the question I asked at the end of section 4: within interpretive communities which assume, debate and agree or disagree the meaning of whatever they see, how might different spectators have dealt with the dissonance between the various narratives and ideas about Cornelia which were current at the time of their viewing?

The following suggestions deal with distinctions between spectators which are drawn along gender lines rather than, or as well as, class differentiation or other variations. This is not because I wish particularly to privilege gender; nor does it suggest that I understand ‘women’ and ‘men’ to be separate homogeneous entities. It is simply because, as a whole, the evidence from which this argument has been developed is not aimed at any specific section of society. Moreover, the leaflets indicate that people from a wide range of classes were intended to be involved in, and actually took part in, the traits de générosité.

As we have seen from the different pamphlets about the incident and similar acts which it inspired, female participation in the initial donations ranged from the wives of established Academy artists to women who worked as jewellers for a living. Raup-Baptestin shows that the ripples of this action extended both upwards to women of Mme Necker’s class, and downwards to agricultural workers from Champdeuil who donated a much smaller amount. We can recall the broad spread of classes referred to in the plans for collectivity outlined by the author of the Motion à faire....; she also stresses, as does Mme
Motte, that this type of action is suitable for people of all classes: everyone should donate, however little they are able to give. The most noticeable differences between the views expressed in these pamphlets are based on gender rather than class; this then is the primary distinction which I continue through into my analysis of spectatorship.

Extrapolating from the evidence of masculine responses to the generosity incidents, we can imagine then that male viewers of Cornelia paintings may well have chosen to celebrate the modest mother on display, meanwhile seeking to ignore the more vigorous versions of her propagated by the plays, however current they were at the time. Men may well have privileged the most contained, manageable construction of Cornelia, and have praised only those virtues which they wished to highlight, for example her charming modesty. This may be why there is no discussion of her more forthright incarnations in the male dominated critical press. It might also explain the continued promotion and acceptance (up to the present day) of the assumption that the quiet, home-bound Cornelia is the only one in existence.

In contrast, we may imagine that female spectators might have made quite different choices. The experience for women of living out the virtuous conduct of Cornelia and the ‘dames romaines’, which for them represented an exciting taste of nascent power and influence, must have made a difference to how they looked at pictures of her. Women who had been part of a donations group, or read one of their pamphlets, or even just heard about them, must surely then have felt a more vital connection to women from the ancient past when encountered in paintings. These women may well have embraced the more feisty Cornelia from the plays as part of their understanding of visual representations of her, and might have speculated or fantasised about what they themselves were really capable of achieving in the Revolution. For such women, the seated, quiet Cornelia of the paintings was probably only the beginning of the panorama of ideas and ambitions which she actually represented to them.

This situation must surely have affected not just women’s spectatorship of Cornelia, but how they viewed other women from the ancient past too. We can consider the experience of the 1789 generosity incident to be an activating moment in female spectatorship of pictures of women from ancient and classical history. It must have affected to some extent their perceptions of all following images of women from the ancient past, leading perhaps to new levels of engaged spectatorship. For women who had actually emulated antique heroines, in however small a way in 1789, other ancient women like the Sabines or Virginia must also in some sense have moved a step closer to their own lives: and this meant action. Mme Roland certainly grew to conceive of her role of spouse à l’antique, as ‘la femme de Caton’, as more than just devoted motherhood: she became a pivotal advisor to her husband, and was extremely influential. Similarly, Charlotte Corday, also steeped in Plutarch, did not understand the emulation of antique ideals to mean child-rearing activities for the good of the state. Of course, for both these women, such antique-inspired action was to result in the most extreme form of censure: execution. We will examine further the problematic intersection of female antique heroic behaviour and contemporaneous social norms in the next chapter.

10. Conclusion

The calm surface that Cornelia presents in late eighteenth-century French art in fact conceals several areas of turbulence and hidden complexity. The representations of her, and responses to them that I have analysed, point to the problems inherent in depicting even such an outwardly straightforward paragon of female virtue. Moreover, art historians’ assumptions about what Cornelia is understood to have meant to revolutionary audiences clearly do not deal with the range of narratives and ideas about her which were current at that time. When these pictures are reconsidered within the context of this

129 Motion à faire... p.1, see also Moitte, Suite... (1789), p. 1 on how even a small amount donated by someone whose means are few can, joined with other donations, become a substantial sum.

information - particularly in relation to the plays which feature Cornelia, and revolutionary events which are connected to her - we are able to develop a more nuanced understanding of what the pictures might actually have meant to different people who saw them.

Let us return to my original questioning of Cameron’s assertion that the ideal image of women in Salon history paintings was hardly affected by the action that real women took. The evidence that I have presented here has begun to show that this was not the case. The ‘image’ of a particular antique heroine does not just consist of the shapes and lines placed onto a canvas; it is also how those marks are interpreted by people looking at them. In the light of the donations action and the practical emulation of feminine antique role models that it represented, it seems likely that depictions of Cornelia meant different things to different spectators; moreover, this situation arose out of actual events in the lives of real men and women.

Contemporaneous history encouraged women from a range of classes to interpret antique heroines in a new way. The fearless version of Cornelia, who not only sacrifices her sons for her country but also stands up and fights for it herself as a leader of the people, was there to be rediscovered: it is difficult to imagine that many women did not do so in the early years of the Revolution. The dissonance between masculine and feminine interpretations of precisely what constituted the role model to be emulated, was, however, to cause increasing problems for women during this period, as we shall discover in the following chapters.
Chapter Two

Strategies for the Sabines: re-examining the representation of women who intervene

‘Alors, par le conseil d’Hersilie, les femmes Sabines, dont l’enlèvement avoit causé cette guerre, les cheveux épars & les habits déchirés, forcées par la grandeur de leurs maux d’oublier la timidité naturelle de leur sexe, eurent le courage de s’avancer au travers des traits qui voloient de toutes parts. Tout hors d’elles-mêmes, tenant entre leurs bras les enfans nés de leurs mariages, & poussant des cris lamentables, elles se jettent à corps perdu au milieu des soldats acharnés pareillement les uns contre les autres, pour les séparer & les réconcilier.’


Morose: ‘Votre Hersilie, si fade et si majestueuse à contre-temps, ne devroit-elle pas être échevelée, palpitante, hors d’haleine.’
Le Beau: ‘Le peintre a voulu conserver la beauté dans la douleur.

Air - du vaudeville de la soirée orageuse
Parce que d’un bras furieux,
On meurtrit son sein dans la peine,
Faut-il qu’Hersilie à nos yeux,
Offre un sein marqueté d’ébène;
Parce que, on s’échauffe en courant,
Faut-il que son teint rouge éclate
Et qu’elle nous tende en pleurant,
Des bras et des mains d’écarlate.’

Frivole: ‘Il a bien fait, je n’aime pas les bras rôturiers.’
Morose: ‘La nature, monsieur.’
Le Beau: ‘Oui, la belle nature, monsieur.’
Morose: ‘C’est encore par respect pour la belle nature que le peintre a donné à la chevelure de ses personnages la roideur de la pierre.’

.....Frivole: ‘Pour ça, c’est vrai. (à Morose) Ecoutez donc.

Air: du coin du feu
Je veux bien qu’on censure
Le corps, ou la figure,
Les mains, les yeux;
Mais ici plus outrée,
La critique est tirée
Par les cheveux.’

*Le Tableau des Sabines, vaudeville en un acte* by citzens Jouy, Longchamp and Dieu-la-Foy (Paris, an VIII) [1799], sc.ix, pp. 23-24.
The intervention of the Sabine women, disrupting a battle between their kinsmen and their husbands from forced marriages in order to secure peace, is another subject of particular interest for my project. Firstly, because the Sabines are women who actively intervene in the public sphere. Their narrative therefore invites comparison with groups of actual French women who became involved in public action of a more transgressive nature than the admittance of women carrying donations to the Assemblée Nationale. How are representations of the Sabines at this moment in their narrative related to images of such French women who take collective action?

Secondly, the relatively small canon of French works on this theme from the end of the eighteenth century contains a major painting by Jacques-Louis David (L'intervention des Sabines, 1795-1799, Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 33), whose creation and initial reception is unusually well documented in the archives. There is also strong evidence to suggest that this painting was conceived by the artist as a work which could play a public and social role. This then makes it a particularly interesting case study for my project, since it is such a clear use of a feminine theme from the ancient past to comment upon and influence the present of France in the late 1790s. A considerable amount of research and analysis of David’s Sabines has already been published; however, there are some notable areas of tension within the work which have not yet been investigated, centred upon the representation of Hersilia, the leader of the women. My examination of these issues and my conclusions about their probable explanation then inform a reconsideration of representations of other women (both ancient and actual) who take part in similar types of action.

I will proceed by introducing the body of representations of the intervention of the Sabines produced during the period in question, and demonstrating the major shift which occurs in their depiction. I will then concentrate on the David painting, the final point in this developing trend. After an overview of the current state of research on this work, I will focus on a specific problem that I perceive in this painting. As I investigate this situation, and in order to examine the possible reasons behind it, I will contextualise the
production period of this work. Particular attention will be paid to the artistic strategies that David develops throughout the genesis of the painting: there is a considerable amount of evidence of his authorial intentions here which needs to be considered.

My examination will then develop into a broader analysis of the strategies developed during the Revolution to represent a range of other active, intervening women. I will make comparisons with other ancient women who decide, often heroically, to take part in what can be perceived as 'male' arguments, for example the Spartan women who help to defend their country, and Arria, who shows her husband how to commit noble suicide. My analysis will also refer to images of French heroines like the women who marched to Versailles and the exemplary 'femme de Saint-Milhier'. Following the concentration of available archive material, this chapter focuses on issues of authorial intent and strategy development; however, spectatorship of all of these images is also an issue which is reconsidered. Can one argue that artists attempted to negotiate the problem of women’s power moves in public places by introducing specific representational strategies? If so what were those manoeuvres, and what were women’s responses to them?

1. The intervention of the Sabine women: images and interpretations

The narrative for this episode from early Roman history is found in the usual sources: Plutarch, Livy, Ovid and the more recent histories like that of Rollin.¹ I will examine more closely the relationship between these textual depictions of the episode and the visual representations of it later in this chapter; in brief, the scene is the aftermath to the occasion three years earlier when the Romans had abducted the young women from the Sabine tribe and forced them to become their wives. When the Sabine men eventually engaged the Romans in a battle of revenge, the women intervened and stopped the

¹ Plutarch is the major source for this story, and David specifically cites him in his leaflet (see below); the account of the intervention of the Sabines appears in the life of Romulus. On the authority of Plutarch in late eighteenth-century France, see Mossé (1989), p. 61. Livy mentions the incident only briefly in his
fighting, pointing out that it was too late for reprisals and that the women were now wives and mothers as well as daughters and sisters. The peace achieved between the Romans and Sabines would put an end to years of aggression between the two warring peoples, and paved the way for the adoption of common religious and administrative systems.²

The theme of the intervention of the Sabine women is usually determined to have been a fairly rare one during the last part of the eighteenth century in France. Antoine Schnapper, for example, notes in his detailed catalogue entry on David’s canvas only the version which Vincent exhibited at the 1781 Salon (Angers, Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture, plate 35).³ In fact, several other depictions were produced during this period; although most are now lost, we can see that this was not an entirely untreated subject.

At the Salon of 1777, Lagrenée le Jeune exhibited a drawing of Les Sabines courant se jeter entre les Sabins & les Romains (no.42, not located). Two years later, the 1779 Salon showed a drawing by Bardin of Les Sabines, interrompant la bataille occasionnée par leur enlèvement, obtiennent la paix & l’union des deux Peuples (no. 171, not located). This was exhibited under the same number with two other drawings, one of the abduction of the Sabine women, and another of the Massacre of the Innocents. None of these were given critical responses which could enlighten us further about each work’s appearance or reception, beyond a blanket positive comment about Bardin’s collection of drawings as a whole.⁴

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³ Schnapper and Sérullaz (1989), p. 323. Robert Rosenblum was the first to note the connection between these two works, as well as to cite Guercino’s 1645 canvas as another possible inspiration for David. He also mentions the existence of a marginal sketch by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin of the lost Bardin on a Salon livret in the Bibliothèque Nationale, but confirms that this sketch gives few clues as to the appearance of the lost work, beyond a basic tri-partite structure. See R. Rosenblum, ‘A New Source for David’s Sabines’, *Burlington Magazine*, vol. CIV (1962), pp. 158-162.
⁴ The critic of the *Année littéraire* noted that ‘cependant les dessins que monsieur Bardin a exposés au Salon donnent la plus haute idée de son génie, particulièrement celui qui représente l’enlèvement des Sabines, la bataille qui fait la suite du même sujet et le massacre des innocens; ces trois compositions sont dignes des plus grands maîtres.’ See ‘Exposition de peintures, sculptures et gravures’, *Année littéraire*, 1779, C.D., vol. L, supplement for vol. V, no. 1336, p. 58.
François-André Vincent’s *Combat des Romains & des Sabins, interrompus par les femmes Sabines* was, as we have already noted, seen at the 1781 Salon (no. 193). This huge chaotic work, seething with emotion and presenting a close-up view of the violence involved in the battle, had one recorded drawing (currently unlocated, but known from a photograph).⁵ Another lost work from the same salon was Cochin’s *Dessin représentant l’enlèvement des Sabines* (no. 286); along with the Bardin drawing, this was one of the few depictions of the rape scene to be done at this time. Apart from David, the only artist who appears to have worked on the Sabines theme during the Revolution was Fulchran-Jean Harriet, one of David’s pupils. A tumultuous pencil and ink drawing by him of *Les Sabines séparant les armées ennemies* (Paris, Musée Carnavalet, plate 37), which appears on the back of a drawing of *Les forgerons à la Convention, lors de la fête du Salpêtre, le 30 Ventôse an II*, has been tentatively dated by the Musée Carnavalet as 1794.⁶

The most well-known work on the theme is of course the monumental canvas by David, accompanied by a substantial body of preparatory drawings. The catalogue for the 1989 exhibition *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825* outlines this collection of sketches: in addition to the thirty five which are found in the album in the Louvre (Cabinet des Dessins, inv. RF 9137), they cite another ten sheets bearing preparatory work.⁷

A survey of scholarly literature on this material reveals that almost nothing has been written about the surviving works by Vincent and Harriet. The latter is hardly known at all; the former, apart from Rosenblum’s tracing of possible antecedents in Rubens and Guercino, and his connection of it to the David canvas, has received little more attention besides a brief mention by Tom Crow in *Painters and Public Life*, as ‘pale, disjointed and strangely compressed’.⁸ It is still stored, unseen by the public, in the reserves of the

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⁵ This is illustrated in what appears to be a truncated form in J.-P. Cuzin, *François-André Vincent, 1746-1816* (Paris, 1988), no. 38. From this illustration, it appears that the drawing differed from the painting only by the inclusion of a rearing horse beside Tatius.


museum in Angers. Conversely, so much has been published on the subject of David’s *Sabines* in recent years that it is only possible to give here a brief overview of the current state of research.

Overall, there has been a shift away from interpreting David’s *Sabines* as an entirely apolitical work - a ‘retreat into the safe historical past’ - towards investigating its social and political significance in a number of different directions. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth has made a strong case to argue that in producing the *Sabines*, David was still deeply committed to the idea of politically engaged art. She finds substantial documentary evidence to support her claim that even after Thermidor, David still insisted on the validity of the civic artist’s role, and continued to place his art firmly in the service of the Revolution and of the French Republic.

Quite what the underlying political and social significances of David’s *Sabines* may have been is an area open to seemingly infinite different interpretations. Gender has often been a central concern of recent research into this area, with scholars focusing on issues of both masculinity and femininity. Several scholars, notably Stefan Germer and Dorothy Johnson, have considered various ways in which the central theme of reconciliation may have worked, examining the use of women and of the family as a paradigm for the foundation of society. Erica Rand has examined ways in which eighteenth-century concepts of femininity and the family (in particular the maternal role which was

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9 Anita Brookner defined the Sabines as a non-political work in her book *David* (London, 1980), p. 133. Robert Rosenblum has noted that it was his article ‘A new source for David’s *Sabines*’ (1962) which first suggested that the intervention theme was an allegory for France after the fall of Robespierre; see Rosenblum, R., ‘Essai de synthèse: les *Sabines*, *David contre David*, actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre, décembre 1989 (Paris, 1989), p. 461.


championed in Revolutionary festivals) were used by David to depoliticise the Sabine women. Lajer-Burchardt has elsewhere developed an analysis of the Sabines which links compositional restraints placed upon the Sabine women with debates about women’s activism during the Revolution, and uses psychoanalytic theory to unpick the dense range of possible significations in this work, focusing on male spectators and on the mirrors which were in the room where David’s private exhibition was held. She argues that this work defended the patrilinearity of the family and therefore reassured the male viewers who looked into the exhibition mirror and saw themselves as part of the backdrop of the painting. Most recently, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby has focused on the tensions between female dress and male nudity in the work, exploring debates about the appropriation by actual French women of classical nudity through the female fashion for wearing almost transparent antique-style dresses. She also considers female spectatorship to some extent, although her arguments focus on women’s vision of the naked men in the painting, and her construction of a female audience is somewhat limited in its scope.

I have found all of this work interesting and provocative, and indeed will engage with some of it more closely in the course of my own analysis, which builds on the contributions that scholars have already made in this area. However, as I mentioned in the introduction to this section, there is a significant problem in the painting which no one has yet highlighted or discussed. The more wide-ranging significance of David’s Sabines, in terms of its relation to the representation of other women from the ancient past, and to debates about female behaviour and the experience of actual women in late eighteenth-century France, also remains to be discussed. I will begin by looking at the three extant Sabines projects together, analysing how the representation of these women changes over the focus period.

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14 See E. Lajer-Burchardt, ‘David’s Sabine Women: Body, Gender and Republican Culture under the Directory’, Art History, Vol. XIV (1991) no. 3, pp. 417-424. This article has been particularly stimulating for my own work.
2. Degrees of violence: shifts in the representation of the Sabine women

If we look at the progression from Vincent’s depiction of the intervention of the Sabines, through Harriet’s to David’s, one key factor immediately becomes obvious. This is that the sense of violence and chaos communicated by this scene diminishes as successive artists treat the subject over time. This development is not merely confined to areas such as the composition, which could be explained by a formalist argument concerning the transformation of a late Baroque turbulence into the mapped and pinioned action of the Neo-Classical frieze: the emphasis on violence in the earliest work in this group is pervasive.

The most striking feature of Vincent’s enormous painting (plate 35) is the extent to which it appears to be a realistic representation of a battle in all of its violence and confusion. The composition does not facilitate an easy reading of the action; instead, the viewer is forced to search through a jumble of limbs and torsos to find the point at which Hersilia steps between her father and husband. Other scenes of intervention within this painting are not subordinated to this central narrative: another woman’s fearless and desperate attempt to save a man from being clubbed in the left foreground jostles for the viewer’s attention with the specific family drama of Tatius, Hersilia and Romulus.

This foreground drama also highlights the graphic nature of the violence in this work, brought into sharp focus for the viewer. The Sabine man grasps his club with powerful intent as he plants an enormous foot on the midriff of his victim. The intervening woman is in very real danger, not only of being clubbed herself but of losing her grip on her child as he tumbles dramatically backwards towards us, the only figure to engage directly with the viewer. At the extreme edge of the work, an agonised horse is juxtaposed to his impaled rider. We see the head of the pike immersed in his wound in an uncomfortable close-up, the flesh around it creased by the intrusion of the weapon, and blood spurting forth.
This work was not universally praised by the critics, several of whom felt that it did not fulfill the earlier promise of Vincent’s painting of President Molé, exhibited at the previous Salon. However, they were almost all struck by the overwhelming qualities of chaos and violence in this work. *Panard au Sallon* praised the overall sense of energy - ‘Celle-ci est bien plein de feu’ - but felt that the impression of chaos was too great: ‘L’ordonnance de ce Tableau offre trop de confusion’. His concluding remarks returned to praise the total effect of Vincent’s painting: ‘Malgré cela il y a de l’enthousiasme, & une expression qui produit la terreur & la pitié.’ Similarly, *Galimatias* felt that ‘Le tumulte de cette scène est représenté avec les nouveaux pinceaux de l’énergie’. Diderot commented on the ‘beau désordre’ of this work, and on the rather exciting sensations of danger that it communicated: ‘si l’on se place parmi les personnages, on craindra d’en être étouffè.’

Other critics were overtly unhappy with the formal disorder of the composition, the colouring, and the level of graphic violence. The author of *La Peinturomanie, ou Cassandre au Sallon* judged that there was too much disorder: he criticised Vincent for ‘trop de confusion; la peinture doit toujours être claire, même quand elle rend le désordre d’une mêlée’. The critic who wrote as *La Vérité* objected specifically to the violence in Vincent’s *Sabines*, exclaiming: ‘Quel tapage! Quel carnage! cela fait frémir d’horreur. Je crois bien que la guerre produit un effet épouvantable; mais n’étoit-il pas possible de la peindre d’un ton plus noble & plus tranquille?’ Similarly, the author of the *Réflexions joyeuses d’un garçon de bonne humeur* desired a more peaceful scene: ‘Voici encore un de ces Tableaux sur lesquels l’oeil ne saurait s’arrêter tranquillement.’

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Harriet’s version, produced possibly some thirteen years later, is evidently related to the painting which David eventually devised (this presumably was the result of Harriet’s close working relationship with David at this point).\textsuperscript{22} The tumultuous effect of the armies on each side of the swathe cut through by the women is emphasised by the fact that this is a line drawing, and has no shadows or modelling which might make some parts of the design recede and others stand out. Harriet’s composition, however, is more clearly organised than Vincent’s, dividing the figures into two opposing sides with the women in the middle. This design is still full of vigorous movement, however, from Tatius and Romulus in their poses of action to Hersilia as she rushes in with her arms flying. The flinching horseman in the foreground signifies the danger and pain of this situation, his horse bearing a broken-off spear still stuck into a chest wound; however, this work does not display the graphic level of violence found in the Vincent canvas.

When we consider David’s painting of the Sabine women in the context of these two preceding works, it appears to be a remarkably calm and sparsely populated composition. It may be more crowded than some earlier history paintings by David, but one can hardly agree with Robert Rosenblum when he says of this work that ‘on sent soudain l’impact tumultueux de la foule’.\textsuperscript{23} David’s technique of using scale, colour and tone to separate the foreground frieze of figures from the mass of soldiers and spears in the background means that the potential jumble of spears and limbs here fades from view; nor are they as tangled and oppositional as those in the Harriet or Vincent versions, since most of the spears point upwards. This putting up of weapons, a sign that the fighting has stopped, is echoed throughout the painting by other signs of cessation of violence - the abandoned axe at the left edge of the work, the spear below Romulus’ feet, the mounted soldier who sheathes his sword. There are no gaping wounds, and only one visibly prostrate soldier: this work exhibits far less violence than the earlier depictions of the same theme.


In his short article about the rediscovery of the Vincent painting, Rosenblum notes that ‘David appears to have been inspired by Vincent’s crowded scene of wanton, tumultuous horror’. He asks ‘Can the bloody experience of the Revolution have turned David’s memory back to a classical scene that reflected not the moral, intellectual resignation of the Horatii, Socrates, and Brutus, but rather the real physical consequences of such abstract beliefs?’

However, Rosenblum does not then analyse the fact that David does not actually choose to show those physical consequences in his final canvas.

The most obvious explanation for this move away from the depiction of the brutality and disorder of this interrupted battle is the suggestion that this painting was to function as a symbol of peace and reconciliation for Directoire France. The critic Chaussard described it as such in a leaflet published in part as a defence of David, who had received a certain amount of criticism since opening the doors to the private, fee-charging exhibition of his latest major history painting. He wrote that on seeing this huge canvas, ‘Je crus alors voir les Français prêts à s’égorgérer de leurs propres mains, et la mère-patrie se levant, se précipitant entre eux, et criant: “Arrêtez...”’ Ce rapprochement que je hasardais, je le communiquai à l’artiste; il me répondit: “Telle était ma pensée lorsque je saisís les pinceaux; puisse-je être entendu!”

The concept of warring tribes making peace after realising that they are in fact all one family, and that an end to war will benefit both sides, would have been particularly relevant in France during the Directoire, when the government was seriously weakened by constant infighting. Its metaphor also addressed the problem of the regenerated royalist threat to regain power which contributed to the state of instability. The intervention of the Sabine women is about the reconciliation of antithetical claims to legitimacy via a vision of the future: the initial holders of power (the Sabine men / Bourbons) fight the new holders of power (the Romans / Revolutionaries) for what was

once theirs. The combat is, however, shown to be pointless by the women: they refuse to be objects of exchange, and instead highlight the fruit that has been borne out of the situation (the children / new political, military and cultural power) whose secure future is worth protecting.

David created this painting between 1795 and 1798, and Lajer-Burcharth argues coherently that part of his project in this major artistic ‘come-back’ was to create a nationally, politically relevant piece of art that could help France during a difficult, unstable period. The use of a classical history narrative, rather than an overtly contemporary event, erected a safety screen behind which the artist could retreat if his commentary on France displeased some of his more powerful spectators.

It is perhaps for this reason that David did not spell out the symbolic relevance of this work himself in his livret. This explanatory pamphlet, written by David, was distributed to each of the thousands of paying visitors to the Sabines exhibition. However, the artist did not contradict Chaussard’s interpretation when it was published shortly after the exhibition opened. Nor did he object to the other writers who came to similar conclusions about the national relevance of this painting. For example, the critic of the Journal de Paris clearly understood David’s painting as a politically relevant prompt for the French authorities. He noted in his review that ‘Les artistes seuls ont commencé cette utile régénération; c’est au gouvernement à l’accomplir.’

3. A moment of violence in a symbol of peace

Yet at the very heart of this monumental embodiment of peace and harmony, there is a subtle but nevertheless distinct trace of violence. It is found in the place where we perhaps least expect it: not in the ranks of heavily armed soldiers or the figures raining down missiles upon them from the castle behind, not in the flailing horses’ hooves or the desperately gesturing women, but in the still, pale body of Hersilia, the woman who has just succeeded in calling a halt to the violence all around her.

I uncovered this undercurrent of aggression when I began to investigate a feature of Hersilia’s representation which had always struck me as odd, and yet which I had never seen or heard discussed. This is that her body is subtly, but noticeably disarticulated (see detail, plate 34). Firstly, in the lower half of her body, from the pelvis down: Hersilia’s right leg is twisted out at a strange angle from her hips, so that her knee and foot point in a painfully awkward direction from the rest of her body. The flesh that shows through her robe on her left side does not appear to have a hip or any kind of articulated bone structure at all. Her spreadeagled position extends and rotates her legs into a decidedly uncomfortable (and rather unfeasible) position.

In addition to this, there is a further level of disjunction, in that Hersilia’s serene, almost bland facial expression does not match either her vigorous gesture or the narrative of what is supposed to be happening in the picture. According to Plutarch’s version of the story, which David himself cites as his source, Hersilia is supposed to have just finished an impassioned speech. David reproduced an account of the event which included her words in the pamphlet, and it is clear that she is agitated - she shouts and cries as she explains that it is now too late to demand the return of the women. All of the historical texts which describe the women’s action are specific about the strength of emotion that Hersilia and her companions display. We can cite for example the description published by Rollin which appeared at the start of this chapter, and various translations of Plutarch
which were current at the time (and which incidentally show how reliant Rollin was upon Plutarch for his source material). Dacier’s 1778 edition of Plutarch’s *Lives* describes how the Sabine women ‘vinrent de tous côtés avec des cris épouvantables, & passant au travers des épées et des monceaux de morts, comme des forcenées, se présentaient à leurs pères et leurs maris.’

This impression of frenzied activity is then strengthened by the powerful speech which Hersilia delivers to the stunned men, which we will consider in more detail later: every source except Ovid’s *Fasti* prints it in full, and the reader is left in no doubt about the force and passion with which her words are delivered.

Several critics at the time noted this disjunction between the narrative, known to any classically educated viewer and told to every other literate visitor in the leaflet, and the image of Hersilia in the painting. They also queried her neat, unruffled hair and closed mouth. Dupont asked the most direct question: why, when ‘elle est censée venir avec précipitation au milieu des combattans, pour les haranguer’ is she in fact ‘muette comme une idole’? The characters Morose and Le Beau similarly debate this collection of faults in the critical vaudeville play from which the other introductory quote for this chapter was taken. Morose asks specifically why Hersilia is not flushed, dishevelled, quivering and out of breath. Beauty is the reason suggested by his companion (Le Beau) for this inaccuracy, but Morose counters this with the suggestion that respect for nature is still important, sarcastically pointing out the inadequacies of Le Beau’s concept of ideal beauty. He finds fault ultimately with Hersilia’s body, countenance, hands, eyes and hair because they are all out of keeping with the narrative.

Other critics also perceived a certain awkwardness in her body, even if none was specific about the pelvic disarticulation. For example, the journalist of the *Journal des Débats* noted that her arms were ‘étendus avec plus d’art que de grâce et de naturel’.

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However, many critics echoed Landon’s praise of the correctness of David’s draughtsmanship in this work. Chaussard is the only commentator to praise specifically the representation of Hersilia’s body, describing her as ‘idéal’, and noting the ‘beauté de ses formes’ and the ‘grâce inséparable de tous les mouvemens’. However, his comments appear as an insistence on this point, suggesting perhaps that this was an area in which Chaussard felt that David needed some defence. Ducis, referring only to the men’s poses and bodies, judged that David’s drawing was ‘à la fois pur, correct et gracieux’.

Indeed, one has to agree that apart from Hersilia, the standard of drawing in the *Sabines* is extremely good. Romulus in particular has an idealised, carefully perfected anatomy. Yet it is precisely this that makes the disarticulated way in which Hersilia has been represented so unusual and interesting. David was by this point in his career a highly experienced artist, with a good reputation for constructing anatomically correct figures. He himself drew attention to his ability in this area as part of his defence on the thorny issue of his portrayal of the chief male characters nude in this painting, a decision which caused great controversy amongst critics and visitors when it was first exhibited. In the pamphlet, he noted that it was a far more difficult test to paint the nude than the clothed figure, the implication being that he was more than capable of rising to this self-imposed challenge.

We are left with a central question: why, after four years of work on this canvas, did David exhibit a painting where the body of one of the key characters displays a flawed grasp of anatomy? Moreover, why does her facial expression communicate nothing of the dramatic narrative the artist was depicting, and which he presented to his spectators in a textual form?

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37 David (1800), p. 16. See also Schnapper and Sérullaz (1989), pp. 336-337 for an examination by Antoine Schnapper of the debate over the nudity in this work.
When I began to investigate possible explanations for these instances of disjunction, it became clear that a crucial issue would be authorial intent. If I found that the disarticulation was an element that had always been present in David's image of Hersilia, a problem of which he was perhaps unaware or was unable to solve, then I would need to consider why the artist found it difficult to make her body whole and fully connected. A different enquiry would be necessary if it appeared that the disjunction was an intentional move on the artist's part: what could make him decide to take such action?

When I examined the preparatory sketches for this work, it appeared that a degree of authorial intention was indeed present. David's initial conception of Hersilia's body, gesture and expression was significantly different to his final image of her. Through a progression of sketches and drawings, we see that Hersilia underwent a series of changes before she became the 'mute idol' of the finished painting.

4. The genesis of Hersilia

In order to be certain that the sketches I discuss do constitute a progression, I have chosen three which were evidently made in a certain order. The 'première pensée' in the Louvre is universally accepted as David's initial idea for the Sabines (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, RF 5200, plate 38). A study for the central group of women is the only sketch from the Louvre's album of drawings to be cited (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, RF 9137, fo. 62 verso, plate 39): differentiating between the dates of two or more sketches from this source would be unreliable, since the album was probably

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38 I investigated the possibility that Hersilia's disarticulation might be the manifestation of some form of disruption at an unconscious level within the artist. One interesting prospect was to consider it as an effect of the radical fragmenting of the body that was part of the Terror, in both its actuality and its subsequent visual representation. Might this effect have been concentrated in Hersilia's body because it was loaded with symbolic significance as the personification of France ('la mère-patrie')? However, for several reasons I found this to be a problematic reading; moreover, its fundamental presumption of an unconscious act on the part of the artist was denied by subsequent research which indicated that the disarticulation was a factor that David introduced and indeed developed.
in use for six years, and contains ideas for individual figures and groups from several different painting projects. Finally, I want to consider a highly finished drapery study for Hersilia at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow (plate 40) which is accepted as being one of the last pieces of preliminary work David did for this composition.

The ‘première pensée’ (plate 38) shows a vision of the intervention that is quite different from the final version: less densely populated, without the forest of spears that denotes the two armies in the finished painting. It also shows Hersilia frozen in a lively gesture of separation. Her body, rather androgynous at this stage, is fully articulated: she has hips, and her legs are not so brutally twisted. Her facial expression appears to be pinched, and her hair flies out behind her, giving the impression that she has indeed just run in between the fighting men.

The study for the central group of Sabine women from the album of sketches (plate 39) is a much less finished drawing, an idea for Hersilia and several kneeling or prostrated women. Although constructed from only a few lines, Hersilia’s face shows an anguished expression, her mouth clearly open in a shout. Her hair is wild and dishevelled, springing out from her head in all directions: utterly in keeping with her role and active gesture. However, her hips have now disappeared, and her right knee shows that leg to be strangely twisted outwards.

If we look at the finely worked drapery study for Hersilia (plate 40), we see that this distortion has been further exaggerated. Her right leg branches out from her body at a highly unlikely angle, the pelvic disarticulation now pronounced. She no longer embodies a sense of vigorous propulsion; and her hair is far more controlled, blowing in gentle wisps behind her shoulder. Her facial expression has also reduced in intensity, now one of deep shock rather than of anger. Her eyes implore, and although her lips are

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39 A note by David below the image refers to it as such; see also Schnapper and Sérullaz (1989), pp. 340-341.

still slightly apart as if she has just finished speaking, one would imagine her words to have been soft entreaties rather than the invective ascribed to her in the textual sources.

The final stage in this process of development - where straightforward concerns like the fact that the artist might just have been more concerned with the drapery than with anatomy do not apply - is of course the finished painting. Here, she stands awkwardly, painfully, quietly. If the pelvic disarticulation was at all accidental, a failure to resolve an anatomical problem that David had experienced in his working sketches of Hersilia, surely he would have corrected it in the final version. He had as much time as he wanted, since he was in complete control of the opening date of the exhibition. We can only assume that the version of her body that finally appeared was the one that he wanted.

According to his pupil Delécluze, it was the quest to beautify Hersilia’s face that caused David serious delay.\(^42\) The painted version of her face is striking for the calm neutrality of its expression. Her eyes are more vacant than imploring now; she may still retain a touch of reproachfulness, but no more. Her hair is neatly braided, just the very ends loose; her mouth almost completely closed and therefore her speech denied. Hersilia’s face has been carefully edited to remove all traces of anger from the final version. Visitors may read about it in the pamphlet, but David does not show it to them.

But to what extent \textit{did} the spectators read about Hersilia’s anger in the leaflet? If we contextualise the version of the event and her speech which David presents in his \textit{livret} with other contemporaneous texts on this subject, we find that there are some significant differences. These have not yet been noted by scholars; indeed unawareness of them has led some researchers to quite erroneous conclusions about the representation of Hersilia in this work. Dorothy Johnson, in her analysis of what she terms as David’s ‘celebration of the intervention of Hersilia’, asserts quite wrongly that ‘David diverged from the ancient sources and made Hersilia prominent as spokesperson and leader of the Sabine

women." As my research will show, David does indeed diverge from his ancient sources; however, the result is quite the opposite of what Johnson suggests.

5. Contextualising David’s words: how do they differ from other textual presentations of the intervention of the Sabine women?

The written representations of this subject which were in circulation at the end of the eighteenth century are nearly all historical works. Most closely related are various editions of French translations of Plutarch, whom David cited specifically as his source. Those under consideration here range from the 1778 edition of Dacier’s translation and the 1783 edition of Jacques Amyot’s (the two most popular translations in the eighteenth century, in terms of frequent republication), to Dominique Ricard’s 1798 rendition. In addition to these, I have looked at an earlier version, that of the Abbé Tallement from 1671. We can also contrast David’s version with the one which appears in Rollin’s Histoire Romaine, cited at the start of this chapter, and the passage quoted by Chaussard in his own pamphlet. Unlike the other women from the ancient past examined in this study, there were not also plays written and performed on the subject of the Sabines, apart from the vaudeville parody about the painting by Jouy, Longchamp and Dieu-la-Foy already mentioned. This text will be considered more fully in the part of this chapter which deals with spectatorship: since this play did not appear until the exhibition of the painting was well under way, analysis of it belongs in a consideration of the work’s viewing and reception rather than its creation.

A comparison between this whole range of texts shows that David made a series of significant changes in his own presentation of the narrative of the Sabine women. Firstly, he altered the way in which their arrival on the battlefield is described. It is clear from all

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of the other historical texts that this is a moment of great commotion, of violent interruption, precipitated by the appalling situation in which the women found themselves. Ricard describes how they arrive ‘avec de grands cris’; Dacier recounts that the women ‘vinrent de tous côtés avec des cris épouvantables’, as they risked their lives by running right into the thick of the battle, climbing over corpses and facing the spears.46 In every translation of Plutarch there is also a sense that these women appear to be possessed by some spirit which drives them forwards: Tallement describes them as ‘poussées de quelque fureur divine’, Amyot as ‘forcenées, ou possédées de quelque esprit’, and Ricard has them propelled by a ‘fureur divine’.47 Rollin, not tied as the others are to a particular text, adds for his readers the explanation that the women had been ‘forcées par la grandeur de leurs maux d’oublier la timidité naturelle de leur sexe’. He too then proceeds to describe as the other writers do how the women threw themselves into the mêlée with all the force that they could muster, shouting and screaming. The words that he uses give a strong impression of women whose bodies are wildly uncontrolled: they are ‘toutes hors d’elle-mêmes’, and ‘[elles] se jettent à corps perdu’ into the midst of the battle.48

Conversely, David frames the moment when the women appear in quite different terms in his text. Instead of citing as their motivation ‘la grandeur de leurs maux’, he exclaims: ‘Mais que ne peuvent à-la-fois l’amour conjugal et l’amour maternel!’. The women simply arrive, and David gives no impression of forcefulness or violence in the way they act. His Sabines shout to their men folk rather than haranguing them: ‘Elles appellent à grands cris leurs pères, leurs frères, leurs époux, s’adressant tantôt aux Romains, tantôt aux Sabins, en leur donnant les plus doux noms qui soient parmi les hommes. Les combattants, émus de pitié, leur font place’.49

Perhaps the most significant change that David makes is in the text of Hersilia’s speech. He edits out much of Hersilia’s anger at the crime committed against the women, and at their long three year wait for liberation. In the Chaussard, Dacier and Amyot versions, Hersilia stresses the violence and illegality of the rape; she is also bitterly critical of the Sabine men for failing to rescue the women when they were still virgins - the adjective used by Chaussard and Amyot is ‘entières’. Dacier’s translation makes all of these elements very clear. His Hersilia asserts:

“Nous avons été enlevées par force & contre toute sorte de droits, par ceux à qui nous sommes maintenant; vous ne vous en êtes pas mis en peine, nous avons eu la douleur de nous voir abandonnées de nos frères, de nos pères, de nos parents & de nos amis pendant un si long temps, qu’enfin nous n’avons pu refuser de nous unir, par les liens les plus sacrées, avec ceux qui étoient auparavant l’objet de toute notre haine, & que présentement notre devoir nous force de craindre pour nos injustes ravisseurs, & de verser des larmes pour leur mort. Vous n’êtes pas venus nous venger et nous délivrer pendant que nous étions encore filles, & aujourd’hui vous venez arracher des femmes à leurs maris, & des mères à leurs enfants.”

The Tallement version makes the women’s anger against their kinsmen’s actions, both past and present, extremely clear. Hersilia protests that: “Certes vostre secours est pire que vostre abandonnement, & vous estes aussi cruels par vostre pitié, que vos Enemis l’ont esté par leurs outrages”. She warns that if the Sabine men do not stop fighting, then “ce seroit nous traiter en captives, & nous faire de nouveaux maux au lieu de nous venger les premiers.” The implication here is that the kinsmens’ actions now add to the women’s injuries: almost that this is a re-run of the initial rape. Ricard translates the same passage with a similar sense that the Sabine kinsmen are adding insult to injury: ‘L’abandon et l’oubli dans lequel vous nous laissâtes alors, furent moins déplorables que le secours que vous nous donnez maintenant....Epargnez-nous un second esclavage.”

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52 Plutarch trans. Tallement (1671), vol. I, p. 113 and p.115.
Yet the women in these translations of Plutarch and other texts are no less angry with the Romans for their previous actions: their husbands as well as their kinsmen come under fire. Chaussard for example has Hersilia speaking words full of bitterness and anger: "nous avons esté violentement et contre les loix ravies"; moreover, she describes the Romans as "ceux que nous hayssions mortellement".\footnote{Chaussard (1800), p. 42.} In all of these versions, the women's love for their husbands is grudging, if not simply enforced by the fact that these men are now the fathers of their children. Dacier translated Hersilia's words on this subject as 'notre devoir nous force de craindre pour nos injustes ravisseurs'; Ricard's version also notes that the Romans were "l'objet de toute notre haine".\footnote{Plutarch trans. Dacier (Paris, 1778), vol. I p. 251; Plutarch trans. Ricard (1798), vol. I, p. 280.}

In David’s version (billed as a quote from the original Plutarch), the crime and violence involved in the rape is avoided. Instead, David stresses in his historical overview of the subject that the Romans married the women first before any sexual intercourse took place, and treated them very well: 'les jeunes Sabines, malgré leurs prières, leur désespoir et leurs cris, furent enlevées, et conduites à Rome, où les Romains les épousèrent, et les traitèrent d'ailleurs avec toutes sortes d'égards.'\footnote{David (1800), p. 12.} With these words, David implies that rape was not even committed, and that the women's initial fears about their fate were unfounded. This is in marked contrast with other translations of Plutarch, all of which mention the belief that the contemporaneous Roman custom of parting the bride's hair with a spear on her wedding day was a reference to the fundamental violence which marked early marriages in the region.\footnote{See Plutarch trans. Tallement (1671), vol. I, p. 101; the later translators mention the belief but cast doubt upon its truth: see for example Plutarch trans. Ricard (1798), vol. I, p. 266.}

David’s edition of Hersilia’s speech also presents quite a different view of the women’s anger at both their rapists and their kinsmen. His Hersilia cries out to the Sabine men:

"Ce ne sont point des filles que vous voulez rendre à leurs parents, ni des ravisseurs que vous voulez punir; il falloit nous tirer de leurs mains lorsque nous leur étions encore étrangères: mais maintenant que nous sommes liées à eux par
les chaînes les plus sacrées, vous venez enlever des femmes à leurs époux et des mères à leurs enfants.\textsuperscript{58}

David therefore has Hersilia saying that the Roman men are not rapists to be punished: ‘ce ne sont point ... des ravisseurs que vous voulez punir’.\textsuperscript{59} This is a far cry from the original mortal hatred expressed by Hersilia in the other translations. Moreover, the all important signifier of virginity - ‘entières’ - is transformed into a quite different ‘étrangères’, so that in David’s text, Hersilia complains not that the women should have been rescued while they were still virgins, but that any liberation attempt ought to have been made before the women had the chance to fall in love with their captors. David also changes the way in which Hersilia refers to marriage with the Roman men. In the Amyot version, she describes marriage ties as tight and possibly restrictive: ‘les plus estroits liens du monde’; David re-translates this as a much less ambiguous ‘les chaînes les plus sacrées’, and includes none of the sense of the women being forced to care about what happens to the Romans only because of their children.\textsuperscript{60}

All of this means that the version of Hersilia presented in David’s \textit{livret} is not so much angry about the rape and lack of early rescue attempts, as she is horrified at the suggestion that the women should break their ties of love and friendship with their adoring Roman husbands. These two grievances are significantly different. David’s reworking of the text presents us with a heroine acting far more in sorrow than in anger.

Moreover, David plays down the importance of Hersilia’s words, whereas the other authors and translators present them as crucial to the resolution of the situation. Firstly, there is a sense in some versions of the women’s own perception of their power in these circumstances. For example, in Tallement’s translation, the women (notably Hersilia does not speak alone in this version) assert that their pivotal role in the events leading to this stand-off mean that they are the ones who can stop the battle now: “C’est par nostre moyen que vous estes beaux-pères, grand-pères et alliez de ceux que vous voulez

\textsuperscript{58} David (1800), p. 13.
\textsuperscript{59} See David (1800), pp. 12-14.
détruire, & nous devons faire cesser le combat au lieu de le faire commencer.°°

It is also clear that it is the women’s words in particular which cause the men to stop: ‘Hersilie & les autres Dames Romaines, tinrent de semblables discours, qui eurent tant de force sur les esprits qu’ils causèrent une suspension d’armes’. Ricard similarly states that ‘Ce discours d’Hersilie, soutenu par les prières des autres, amena une suspension d’armes’.

In David’s version, however, the women’s centrality as the cause of this battle is seen to give them rights not to intervene in the argument, but to ask for the men’s pity: ‘encore aurions-nous les droits à votre pitié, puisque c’est par nous que vous avez été faits aîeux, beaux-pères, beaux-frères et alliés de ceux que vous combattez.’ Nor is Hersilia’s speech specifically noted in David’s text as being the key element which stopped the fighting (although this is obviously the result). Her words are also framed within soft, tearful terms rather than the assertiveness that is so evident in other versions. David ends his account of her speech with the emotional note that ‘Ces paroles d’Hersilie, accompagnées de ses larmes, retentissent dans tous les coeurs.’

Overall, what is striking from a re-contextualisation of David’s written presentation of the event and of Hersilia’s speech, is that the artist omits key elements of the historical narrative. They are the details which signify the women’s anger, the violence with which they have been treated and with which they themselves now act, and the importance of their action and their words. In the various translations of Plutarch and other historical texts, the references to the women’s caring, maternal qualities and tenderness are balanced with accounts of their strident activity and anger. The overwhelming sense that the reader gets from these other texts is that the Sabine women used all of their capabilities to bring a halt to the fighting, and so did for example hold up their children to move the men to pity; however, they were also furious, and communicated this in such an effective way that the men stopped fighting firstly out of shock, and then because they

were persuaded by Hersilia’s logic. David removes this balance in his text, and presents only the women’s tenderness and appeals for pity without mention of their bitterness and anger.

When we look back at the painting, we see how this textual editing process also informs the result of the visual editing examined earlier, through the lack of anger on Hersilia’s face, and her closed mouth which belies the vehemence and importance of her words. The critic of the *Journal des Débats* was specific about how her speech is so crucial to the event’s narrative, and yet how it is not conveyed by this painting. He observes that: ‘Quand on lit, dans les historiens, l’événement que David a représenté, ce qui touche le plus, ce sont les paroles des Sabines, mais la peinture ne rend pas des paroles’.65

We are also given a strong idea of just how lacking in anger David’s painted Hersilia is when we compare her with Vincent’s 1781 version. This Hersilia is horrified and above all outraged: her face is flushed pink, her mouth turned down and her brow slanting into a frown as she faces her father at close quarters (see detail, plate 36). Her eyes flash, given an extra visible highlight to make them sparkle with fury as they engage directly with her father’s stare. Tears are present on the cheeks of some of the Sabine women, for example the woman holding the tumbling baby in the foreground, but Hersilia’s eyes and face are dry. We are also given a strong physical sense of her intervention, as she pushes her father back with one hand and blocks his sword with her thigh, and thrusts her other hand up to oppose Romulus’ spear. Compared with this prototype, David’s Hersilia is a strikingly calm, unemotional figure.

What emerges from this analysis and re-contextualisation of the *livret*, the sketches and the painting is that David’s Hersilia has been carefully edited, manipulated and altered by the artist. Her disarticulation, both in terms of her body and her speech, is clearly the result of authorial will. Yet the question remains: why is David prepared to sacrifice both

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the ideal beauty of the body of his key female character, and also the veracity of her
expression and her speech, in such a decisive manner?

In my view, the answer to this question lies in the context of late 1790s France in which
this symbol of peace was created and intended to function. Although a painter of David’s
experience and ambition may well have had a whole range of ideas in mind when he
created this painting, I cannot agree with Dorothy Johnson when she asserts that ‘the
work transcends current political, social, and cultural situations and events, for David,
who always thought in terms of posterity, seeks to convey a type of universal message to
the entire human family.’ David’s global aims do not negate the fact that this work was
created and viewed within a particular social, political and cultural situation; to deny this
is to deny the work its full range of possible signification.

There are two specific details about the narrative of the intervention of the Sabine women
that made this subject problematic for the particular environment in which it was
produced and seen. These factors are gender and collectivity.

6. Female activity - the context of Revolutionary France

We have already noted how apt the story is overall as a symbol of peace and
reconciliation, and one might assume that the gender of the peacemakers would only add
to this. The Sabine women themselves could be seen as a model for healing, for
surviving violation and carrying on, building a new life. These women have been raped;
but have made lives for themselves; they did not choose Lucretia’s option of suicide.

However, this is very much a twentieth-century reading of the situation. Rape was not a
crime against the woman at all in Roman law. In Hersilia’s case, Romulus had
committed an offence against Tatius, her pater-familias; the ensuing battle was fought
over the issue of which male authority now had official right to these women. The women were therefore intervening in a male dispute of ownership - this is made specific in Ricard’s 1798 translation, where the Romans are described as ‘les hommes à qui nous appartenons maintenant’. The Sabine women’s own apparent willingness to transcend their injuries, forget their legitimate grievances and move on is largely irrelevant: they do not have any right under the laws of the time and place depicted to take the course of action that they have chosen.

Therein lies the fundamental problem with what would otherwise be a perfect subject for David’s project to create a relevant symbol of peace for his country. The title of the painting alone makes it clear that it is essential to show women actively intervening in what was perceived to be a male argument. The sought after image of reconciliation could not be achieved without showing the women making their contribution. Yet this female intervention was unlawful, and did not fit into the utopian visual vocabulary that David aimed to promote in this work.

If we extend the contextualising process to include contemporaneous definitions of female heroism, we find that collectivity amongst women who take action is rarely heralded as a positive event. Only two incidences of joint female action are included in Bourdon’s *Recueil des Actions Héroïques et Civiques des Républicains Français*. One is the donation by the women artists and artist’s wives; as already mentioned in Chapter One, this event was somewhat played down when it was recorded in the context of Revolutionary history. The other is an account of the women of Laval, a village near Lens, who on 15 June 1792 were spotted by a traveller preparing torches ready to burn their houses should the Austrians invade. Otherwise, all of the other traits which focus on female heroism are individual acts of bravery by lone women.

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The best known of these is the ‘femme de Saint-Milhier’; a very short description is given in the *Receuil* of this woman who, armed with two pistols, defended her home and shop (including its stock of gunpowder) against counter-Revolutionaries. Her absolute commitment to the Revolution was signalled by her willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice: she was ‘disposée à faire sauter sa maison & toute sa famille plutôt que de tomber au pouvoir des brigands. Son courage & cette mâle contenance leur en imposèrent, & son asyle fut respecté.’

We can note of course that this woman is degendered when her demeanour is described as ‘male’; indeed, she holds a phallic object in the loaded gun. However, this action is a defensive move which takes place within the domestic confines of the woman’s home; therefore in the clear absence of a protective man, this mother’s extreme behaviour is to some extent legitimated.

These features are even clearer when we look at the numerous visual representations made of the ‘femme de Saint-Milhier’ (referred to as ‘Héroïne’ in the titles of the pictures, although only as ‘femme’ in the *Receuil*). Boilly’s drawing of the subject (private collection, plate 41), Thouvenin’s [sic] engraving after Cazenave (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 42), Le Sueur’s gouache cut-out (Paris, Musée Carnavalet, plate 43) and Vincent’s prize-winning entry for the Concours de l’an II (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 44) broadly adopt the same conventions. Apart from the more hesitant version produced by Cazenave, the woman does indeed have a strong, ‘male’ countenance as she points her pistols with a steady hand at the intruders and at the gunpowder beneath her. Moreover, she is firmly anchored within her maternal context, weighed down by children into a static seated position in every version but Vincent’s, where the child’s Davidian swoon enables the mother to support her daughter over one hip and thigh whilst she moves calmly forward towards her attackers. The defensive premise for her threatened (but not realised) action is strengthened by the text beneath some of these images: for example, Le Sueur implies that these men were potential

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69 Bourdon (an II), p. 6, no. V.
70 Bourdon (an II), p. 19, no. XXVIII.
rapists when he describes the attackers as ‘Des Brigands vinrent pour piller la Maison de cette femme et lui faire violence’.

It should also be noted that this is also one of the few incidents of female heroism in the *Recueil* to involve physical action, danger, and potential sacrifice of life. The vast majority of the other *traits d’héroisme* for women involve nurturing and sacrifice: hiding young wounded soldiers and caring for them until they are better (later to be rewarded with marriage), giving up money to those with families to look after, or, like la citoyenne Peigne, sacrificing good opportunities for herself in order to look after her sick mother for seventeen years.71 Female heroic behaviour was almost never defined in such ‘official’ texts as courageous action taken by large groups of women; hence we can see how different the Sabine women’s intervention was from the forms of brave feminine behaviour which were championed during the Revolution.

In fact, the disruptive, physical activity in which the Sabines participated was far more similar to a type of female conduct which was very far from being lauded in booklets read out in the Convention and distributed in vast numbers across the country. The Sabines were instead unavoidably reminiscent of the groups of lower class, often urban women who caused the French authorities such increasing concern throughout the Revolutionary decade. Dominique Godineau and Olwen Hufton have carried out extensive research into these women and their activities, with Godineau in particular focusing on archival evidence of what she terms as ‘militant’ women from the popular classes.72 Her definitions of the different sorts of women involved in political action during the Revolution are precise, and she aims to be as clear as possible about grey areas such as the links between subsistence issues and women’s intervention without letting the most

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71 Bourdon (an II), p. 15, no. XXIII.
obvious connections blind her to other reasons for the women's involvement. According to criteria based on specifics such as membership of popular societies, participation in at least two insurrectionary journées, and terrorist remarks and denunciations of a political nature, Godineau identifies as politically militant women from a range of different social and professional groups, from launderesses and market traders to domestics, merchants and skilled artisans.\(^{73}\)

Any parallel between these sorts of women and the Sabines cannot be an exact one, particularly as far as class similarities are concerned. The only information given about the women's class in the ancient sources is that Hersilia was both the daughter and wife of ruling men. We will consider what the Salon critics say about her class in due course. There are however some significant features of the Sabine women's actions which do connect them to actual women on the streets of France, and also ultimately to the women from a broader class base who took part in other types of action (for example, the more middle and occasionally upper class women involved in the donations episodes discussed in the first chapter).

One such element is their mode of intervention, which is strikingly similar to the way in which actual women made their presence and protests clear. As Olwen Hufton's research has shown, the main characteristics of lower-class female protests were that the women took collective action, and were usually unarmed or carrying only symbolic arms. Their interventions were generally not physically violent in nature, apart from the prairial journées of 1795 which were the product of desperation at a time of exceptional hardship. Instead, the women aimed to cause maximum disruption and embarrassment, heckling and refusing to budge: theirs was a physical and vocal protest.\(^{74}\)

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\(^{74}\) See Hufton (1992), pp. 6-26.
Godineau is specific about the importance both of female collectivity, and of the women’s use of words to shame men into action as key elements of their Revolutionary contribution. Collectivity is a constant feature of different aspects of the feminine political activity which she studies, starting with the sociability of married women, enjoying independence from their husbands as they attend political clubs and observe assemblies from the gallery with other women, and developing into their realisation of their collective disruptive power in numerous incidents.

That women were often detonators of action is also amply proved by Godineau’s archival research; moreover, she is specific about the crucial role played by women’s words in this process. She concludes that ‘the word of women, often a prelude to the act of insurrection, procreator of action, thus became one of the elements of action, a specifically feminine element. Numerous documents convince us that the word as an element of action was one of the original features of women’s participation in the Revolutionary process.’ It is clear, then, that the narrative of the Sabine women’s intervention intersects with that of the action taken by some women in France in the 1790s, from the women who entered the National Assembly in 1789 to make their donations and to appeal, in the politest of terms, for their fellow countrymen and women to follow suit; to the women who menaced the police and repeatedly insulted their husbands in public in order to goad the men into taking action to alleviate food rationing in Year III.

However, this association would not have brought positive connotations to the image of the Sabine women. There is no shortage of evidence that the women who intervened in the traditionally ‘male’ public sphere in Revolutionary France were not exactly welcomed there. It is clear that the men in the Convention were concerned about militant behaviour by such groups of women. For example, Isnard, when warning the Convention on 25 May 1793 of the forthcoming massacre of the Right, said that the pretext would be a

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75 Godineau (1990), p. 78.
76 Godineau (1990), pp. 73-75.
specifically engineered outbreak of disruption, started by organised groups of women.\textsuperscript{77} Collective lower class female intervention was seen as a formidable force, here imagined to be a weapon controlled by one particular political grouping for use against another. In fact, the evident lack of control held by anyone over such women made them feared by all sections of the Convention.\textsuperscript{78}

Ewa Lajer-Burcharth dates the tying of ‘notions of arbitrary violence, of return of the Terror and of sexual threat to the idea of female political intervention’ to republican discourse after 1795, in her analysis of texts and prints from the period during and after the prairial disturbances.\textsuperscript{79} My investigation has shown however that there was never a point in the Revolution when women who became involved in political action were represented in entirely positive terms.

For example, the prints which appear to champion the women’s action during the October days of 1789 are not without nuance. The masculinised leading characters in \textit{A Versailles, A Versailles!} (London, private collection, plate 45) may allude to anecdotes that some cross-dressing men took part in the action; on the other hand, their inclusion in this image gives the female group an air of square jawed, brawny strength that is deliberately contrasted with the more feminine, bonneted bourgeois woman that they coerce into action.

This print, along with others of the same subject, is unusual as a reportage subject in that it neither emphasises the reason why the women are being shown, nor anticipates the important and positive achievements that they will attain once they get to Versailles. No topographical or anecdotal detail is included to indicate the specific historical event which is being commemorated. The focus is just on the fact that they are women, and that they are not portrayed in an entirely positive light. The same is true of the \textit{Avant-}

\textsuperscript{78} Hufton notes that these women never committed themselves to the Jacobins, and did not stop their action after the Girondins had been eliminated. See Hufton (1992), p. 30.
Garde des Femmes Allant à Versailles (c. 1789, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 46), a coloured etching which again shows the coercion of a bourgeois woman, and is similarly lacking in positive historical detail. In another anonymous etching, Bataillon de femmes citoyennes 5 octobre 1789 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1789, plate 47), the women are openly ridiculed by their representation in ranks as if they were some sort of tin-pot army. Three smirking male soldiers fall in line at the rear of the female battalion, imitating the women in a manner which seems mocking because of their shared sideways glances and laughter (in marked contrast to the serious, focused demeanour of the ranks of women).

Another example of the more negative characterisation noted in A Versailles, A Versailles!, this time in a painted format, is Bizard’s Charles-Alexis Alexandre (?) protégeant une cargaison de sucre à Paris en février 1792 (1792-1793, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française, plate 48). Gen Doy has mentioned this confrontation between the guardsmen and angry women as ‘contemporary history in a plausible image’; however, she does not analyse the modes of representation used for the different participants. The women in this painting are represented as unruly, as disordered and disordering, and the main female who confronts the guards over the sought-after sugar is cast in the role of unattractive harridan. Conversely, the men watch silently on, the head guardsman having been given an expression of noble forbearance and compassion in the face of this ugly female aggression. Similar techniques are used in a mocking watercolour of Le Club des femmes patriotes, undated and signed by an otherwise unknown artist named Thérioux (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 49). The female club members are shown swarming all over their meeting room, a converted church, their brawny arms flailing and hag-like mouths either open in shouts or twisted into sinister-looking smiles.

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In these examples, politically active women are represented according to the same negative terms as the women involved in riots and the looting of food. Their masculinised features and pointed chins seem to prefigure the verbal images that abounded after the prairial disturbances of year III, when rioting women were referred to as 'les femmes-hommes', and as being 'laides à faire peur'. In both the visual and verbal images, the women are represented as if they want to be, and by their actions are, more masculine, and therefore unnatural. The general disorder of the women is also contrasted in both the Bizard painting and the Théricieux watercolour with quiet, self-contained groups of men.

There are numerous disparaging representations of forceful lower class women that illustrate just how negative the depictions of female intervention were. They progressed from generally ugly or brutalised features to more specifically condemnatory characterisations. One version of a print entitled *L'Anarchie*, published in February 1793 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 50), shows how the image of the rioting woman was clearly identified with the androgynous figure of Anarchy, who has a masculine face but also a coat with long flowing skirts and Medusa-like serpent hair. Stamping on the hand of justice and on stone tablets proclaiming the sacred and inviolable right of property, Anarchy brandishes a manifesto of violence. Juxtaposed to this figure are looting women in the background. A clear visual connection is made between this skirted figure of destruction and disorder, and the women who have broken open a barrel of sugar loaves and are now running off with them.

The ultimate in negative imagery with which to associate these problematic women was, of course, the Fury. In verbal terms, this connection was already being made in 1793: for example, Gorsas famously described the women who stopped anyone trying to leave the Assembly during the events of the 31st of May to the 2nd of June as 'une troupe de femmes, se disant révolutionnaires, troupe de furies, avides de carnage'. In visual

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representations, the monstrous image of the Fury is eventually collapsed into that of the militant active woman, creating a composite image that was particularly prevalent after Thermidor.

An example of this is the anonymous engraving *Le Miroir du Passé pour sauvegarde de l'avenir*, published in April 1797 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 51). In this complex anti-Jacobin image, which recalls the terrible excesses of Robespierre’s government as a warning not to support the Jacobins at the forthcoming elections, Furies play a central role. One intervenes in a very literal sense, bursting up through the floor in the foreground, scattering serpents into the Revolutionary Tribunal. The link between actual women and representations of the Fury figure displayed in this print has been established by Ewa Lajer-Burcharth. She notes that the text surrounding the image defines these figures both as allegorical representations of ‘Fury’ and also as historically specific women: as ‘tricoteuses’ and ‘furies de guillotine’. She identifies in the Fury ‘the symbolic collapsing of the Terror as a ‘disorder’ of Revolutionary history onto the Rousseauvian ‘disorder’ of women - the view of women as a permanently subversive force within the political order’. She also argues effectively that castration fear was one of the main reasons why the Fury (and, by association, the militant lower class woman) was so threatening to men.

7. Disabling the fury - disarticulation as solution

We are beginning perhaps to see the difficulty that David has to surmount if he is to achieve his aim of a positive image of reconciliation in his painting of the Sabine women. There is a problem, since by the late 1790s, the image of the female activist, long a negative one, had been effectively collapsed into that of the Fury. It was therefore very

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hard to show active, intervening characters like the Sabine women, and in particular their leader Hersilia, in a positive manner. Moreover, David himself in no way wished to be seen to be championing such interventionary action by real women. After Thermidor, he had to answer charges of rabble rousing amongst women in the Assembly, and did so with a vigorous denial: ‘jamais je ne me suis mêlé en aucune manière...je défie ce calomniateur effronté de produire un seul témoin qui ose appuyer cette odieuse et lâche supposition’.  

It is within these issues, in particular the negative image of intervening women, that I think we find the most plausible explanation for Hersilia’s disarticulation. David has to find a way to counteract or deal with the Fury implicit within her body, her action and her voice. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth has discussed the spatial and compositional limitations placed upon the women, trapped as they are between the two flanking armies of men. She suggests that the figure in red behind Hersilia is the spectre of Terror, the threat of what women can become if they are allowed too much activity; and that this threat is averted if still present by the fact that Hersilia displaces her.

However, I would assert that the woman with the most potential to be a Fury is in fact Hersilia herself. She is after all the ringleader, and the woman who takes centre stage when she intervenes, the only one with angry words to speak. In my view, this is why it is only her body that is so stretched and twisted that she is rendered vulnerable and powerless in her activity. This is why only her angry face has been turned into a strangely neutral, peaceful mask; and why her words have been carefully altered by David so that she pleads for the continuation of happy marriages rather than rails against unprotective kinsmen and husbands who began as rapists.

There is also evidence to suggest that David directly confronted the negative visual stereotype of the Fury when he developed his representation of Hersilia. One of the

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accepted sources for David's *Sabines* is James Gillray's caricature *Sin, Death and the Devil*, published on June the 9th, 1792 (London, British Museum, plate 52).\(^8\) Hersilia's pose is based on that of Gillray's 'Sin', the Fury-like figure who separates 'Death' and the 'Devil'. This is a caricature of a real female: Queen Charlotte, who was involved in a political scandal with the two men caricatured, the Prime Minister William Pitt and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Thurlow.

However, no explanation has been advanced for why David may have chosen these unsavoury figures as a basis for his painting, apart from the fact that this is also a 'family' problem being solved by the mediation of a woman. Is David confronting the Fury issue directly by using this source material? He can hardly have been unaware of the task of transformation ahead of him if he was to turn Gillray's 'Sin' into Hersilia. He could not achieve this metamorphosis by simply taking the scales off her legs and tying her serpent hair back into a neat bun. If one of the sources for Hersilia was a serpent-headed Fury, David had to find a way to give her the same energy and powers of arrest (necessary for the narrative to function) without turning her into just another version of the screaming defeminised hag on which she is partly based.

His solution was the subtle form of aggression, the disabling of Hersilia's potentially threatening body and the silencing of her angry voice already noted. David has mitigated the dangers of representing this assertive, intrusive female by spreadeagling her body in a pose of utter vulnerability. These moves to restrict, disable and silence echo the increasing constraints on actual vocal, active women in Revolutionary France, from the closure of women's political clubs in October 1793 to the successive laws that followed the prairial uprisings of year III. Women were forbidden first to enter the Tribunes, then

to take part in any political assembly, and finally to gather in public at all in groups of more than five. The leaders of militant female groups were a particular focus for this censorship. Claire Lacombe, feared by the Jacobins for her eloquence, was silenced when the club that had been the forum for her speeches was closed. She was also physically restricted through imprisonment, initially for one night only, but subsequently for nearly sixteen months.

In addition to his strategy of disarticulation, David also collapses the features of motherhood onto Hersilia’s immobilised body, effacing the ambiguous androgyny of the early sketches. Between the *Première Pensee*, the drapery study and the finished painting, Hersilia’s breasts grow from nothing to a full maternal bosom. They are progressively more accentuated by her clothing, which develops from several loose layers to a single piece of fine cloth, wrapped tightly across her chest and tied underneath to accentuate them. Her nipples, signs of regenerative properties, are clearly visible in the final version.

David further emphasises the maternal status of all of these women by dramatically increasing the number of children in the composition during the genesis of the painting. In the *Première Pensee*, there are only three clearly visible children; in the finished painting, there are nine. He uses maternity as a means of further defusing the women’s potentially explosive action: it legitimises their intervention as a one-off occurrence, a step that is taken by mothers who only want to protect and safeguard the future of their children. This characteristic also serves to distance the Sabine women from groups of actual French women, who almost never took part in crowd action if they had young children to look after. Those who did were of course roundly condemned, especially if they had left their children in order to take part in some action. For example, the deputy Chaumette warned women in November 1793 about the disastrous consequences of abandoning their children when he recounted the tragic death of two children in a house

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fire ‘chez une de ces femmes qui courent les rues en bonnet rouge et qui veulent régir la république, au lieu de s’occuper de leurs ménages.’ Such behaviour from women is described as ‘désordre’ and ‘une négligence criminelle’; for the Sabine women thus to be seen to be bringing their children with them shows that they are not such reckless women (as well, of course, as confronting the men with the young lives for which they too are responsible).91

The artist also differentiates Hersilia from groups of actual women by specific class references. Both her skin colour and her calmness were interpreted by David’s champions as an indication that she was of a noble rank, above the other women. Landon is one of several journalists who defend David’s somewhat criticised choice of a delicate colouring for Hersilia as a sign of her class status: ‘la finesse, la délicatesse du coloris...devait marquer le rang de ce personnage’.92 Chaussard replied to Dupont’s criticism of her being ‘mute as an idol’ by saying that she was supposed to be more controlled than the other women who act ‘avec abandon’, who are ‘les personnages vulgaires’. He asserts that ‘Le sentiment d’Hersilie est mêlée d’un majesté calme’, and that she is elevated above the other women ‘surtout par la dignité de sa douleur, dernier trait qui caractérise un être et une âme hors de la condition commune’.93

We may note that once again, as with Cornelia, qualities of calmness are advanced as a feminine ideal, in this instance made class specific. That this notion may have developed in response to the activities of women on the streets of Paris seems likely; however, we should note its presence even before the Revolution. It is interesting that there is a distinct sense in one critic’s response to the Vincent work that the kind of forcefulness which his Sabines display, whilst accurate for the narrative (and in his view, not expressed strongly enough by Vincent), would not at all be in keeping with ideas of feminine physical attractiveness. Moreover, he felt that these elements could not co-exist

92 Landon, Réflexions sur ce Tableau, p. 13.
in a painting of this sort of theme. The author of *Le Pourquoi, ou l'ami des artistes* assessed that the women should appear stronger, and should therefore be less pretty:

‘Des femmes assez hardies pour se mettre entre deux Armées, doivent avoir l’âme forte. Je sais que le courage se trouve dans les blondes comme dans les brunes, même dans les corps foibles: mais la Peinture parle aux yeux; il faut annoncer la force de l’âme par celle du physique, & il me semble que des femmes qui, sans être moins belles, eussent été moins jolies, auroient mieux rempli votre objet.’

The differentiation between ‘belles’ and ‘jolies’ makes the statement ambiguous; however, ‘jolies’ surely refers primarily to the more seductive qualities of physical feminine beauty, and it is therefore these which are felt to be in contradiction with the representation of forceful women.

In 1781 it is conceivable for a critic to recommend that the Sabine women, already visibly angry and assertive, could still be shown to be even more forceful; this is unimaginable in 1799. However, as we noted before, other commentators in 1781 do have problems overall with the lack of calm in the depiction of the intervention of the Sabine women which Vincent exhibits, grumbling that this painting made tranquil contemplation impossible. It seems surprising that critics would even expect a battle scene to be a site of calmness, especially at this dramatic moment of cease-fire; and yet this is what some of them demand. However, the elusive quality of tranquillity yet again proved to be completely at odds with the women to be represented, at least in the way that Vincent has interpreted the action of the Sabines. David’s Hersilia, on the other hand, could easily be

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93 Chaussard (1800), pp. 8-9.
95 It is notable that the critics who comment on Vincent’s Sabines generally take the subject seriously. This was not always the case with Le Barbier’s *Le Siège de Beauvais* (exhibited at the same Salon, no. 201), where some critics made flirtatious jokes about the female defence led by Jeanne Hachette. See for example *Sur la peinture...* (Hague and Paris, 1781), C.D., vol. XII, no. 267, p. 28. The author of *La Muette qui parle au Salon de 1781* (Amsterdam and Paris, 1781), C.D., vol. XII, no. 257, is the only one to make salacious comments about both works. Starting with the *Siège de Beauvais*, he notes that ‘Le sexe mêlé dans une bataille ne peut qu’y répandre plus d’intérêt’, and continues that ‘M. Vincent a pris le même moyen pour plaire dans un combat entre les Romains & les Sabins, arrêté par les femmes Sabines.’ (pp. 85-86).
described as tranquil; yet as we have already noted, this leads to a fundamental
disjunction between narrative and representation which contemporary commentators
noticed to be a problem.

The body of David’s Hersilia represents a composite of notions, some of which are very
much in keeping with Chaussard’s reading of her as the ‘mère-patrie’ angel of
reconciliation. However, the disarticulation of her body also signifies a denial of physical
activity and angry speech on the part of a woman who leads other women to intervene in
a male argument. It is a denial with a positive end in mind. In order for the subject of the
intervention of the Sabine women to function effectively as a symbol of peace - in order
for Hersilia to be any kind of ‘idol’ at all - she has to be disarticulated. It seems that in
this case, peace was not possible without a certain degree of calculated aggression against
a key female body.

8. Feminine disempowerment: an isolated case, or symptomatic of a definite trend?

If we study depictions of other women who take collective action, or whose bodies and
behaviour are forceful, we see that David was not the only artist to negotiate the problem
of women’s power moves in public spaces through representational strategies. We can
consider briefly two case studies: Arria, the courageous wife of Paetus, and
representations of Spartan and Lacedemonian women (Spartans were from the city
specifically, Lacedemonians from the territory as a whole; this was a shifting concept in
late eighteenth-century France).

Arria is an interesting comparison to make, not with the collective Sabine women as a
whole, but with Hersilia’s body in particular. These two women share the characteristics
of forcefulness and exhortation, and the surviving body of material which represents
Arria consists of a range of approaches to the theme worked out by one artist, Vincent
once again. The chief differences between these versions are focused on the bodily poses
of the two figures, Arria and her husband Paetus. The extent to which Arria’s strength of purpose is communicated by her body is one of the main issues explored in these works, and subsequently debated by the critics.

The two works originally shown by Vincent at the 1785 Salon present different moments of the narrative. The smaller sketch, no. 67 (now lost, but visible via an engraving in Landon’s *Annales du Musée...*, plate 53, and also from a drawing now in a Paris private collection, plate 54), shows Arria urging her husband to commit suicide.97 The *livret* description explains the narrative (whose source is Martial, book I, epigram 14):

Coecinna Poetus, s’étant attachée à Scribonius, qui avoit soulevé l’Illirie, contre l’Empereur Claude, fut pris et mené à Rome. Arrie, sa femme, sachant qu’il n’y avoit aucune espérance de le sauver, l’exhorte à se donner la mort. Indeed, Arria’s body in this version is utterly commanding, as she leans over the cowering Paetus, one hand offering him the dagger and the other pointing firmly to the forehead above her frowning brow, as if to urge him to think about the correct action to take.

The other painting, in a larger finished format, was no. 68 (Amiens, Musée de Picardie, plate 55 and also supported by drawings in Parisian private collections, plates 56 and 57). This showed the next moment, when Arria has decided to help her husband to make the right choice by setting him a good example. The *livret* describes how Arrie, voyant que Poetus n’avoit pas le courage de se tuer, prit un poignard, se l’enfonça dans le sein, & le présenta à son mari en lui disant, tiens Poetus, il ne m’a point fait de mal. Cette action détermina Poetus à se donner la mort. Since she has already stabbed herself, her body is shown to be less strong; she starts to fall backwards but still holds the dagger out to Paetus, who has, as she hoped, been galvanised into action by her suicide.

Vincent therefore tried out contrasting ways of representing Arria’s courage, two moments of the same narrative which position her in radically different ways. What is

particularly interesting about these works, in the context of the discussion of this chapter, is the range of responses made by critics to them, and in particular the attention they pay to Arria’s pose and demeanour. Also revealing is the privileging of one moment over the other, firstly as the subject was worked up to a finished state for the 1785 exhibition, and also later when the design was made into a tapestry during the First Empire (Gobelins, 1801-1812, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, plate 58).98

These works elicited considerable critical attention in 1785. Many commentators were decidedly unhappy with the way that Arria was represented in the second larger work, and preferred the determination of her pose in the smaller sketch. The author of the *Observation critiques* complained that the representation of Arria’s death ‘paroit même avoir manqué totalement le sujet d’Arrie & Poetus. Le mot célèbre non dolet, qui devoit être la base fondamentale de sa composition, n’y est point exprimé par l’attitude d’Arrie, qui laisse tomber sa tête, & ne nous donne point l’idée de la fermeté de cette femme courageuse.’ Her hand holds the dagger ‘d’une manière équivoque, & ne paroit pas même le presenter à son mari.’99

His feelings are echoed by others, for example Critès: ‘L’expression d’Arie [sic], me dit-il, est manquée. Une femme capable d’offrir un poignard à Poetus, comme un moyen sûr d’échapper à l’infamie, & qui a le courage de se donner la mort, pour engager son époux à suivre son exemple, doit avoir encore assez de force pour lui tendre d’une main ferme le fer ensanglanté.’100 The author of *Le Peintre Anglais au Salon de Peintures* is one of several commentators who felt that the smaller version captured the message of the narrative best: ‘son Arrie y est infiniment mieux sentie’.101 These commentators draw

98 For more analysis of these works and their critical reception, see Cameron (1983), pp. 164-170. Cameron focuses on the momentary adoption by Arria and Paetus of the code of behaviour of the opposite gender to their own, and notes the sexual innuendo of the way in which Arria holds the dagger when she is urging Paetus in the first version.
attention to the strength of Arria’s convictions and actions as they are represented in the
textual sources for her narrative, and argue that these elements should be foregrounded in
artistic representations of her.

Yet there was also equivocation about this judgement from other writers. One critic was
uncomfortable about the way that in the depiction of the earlier moment in the narrative,
‘Aria [sic] semble accourir en offrant le poignard à son mari: elle n’a dû cependant le
proposer qu’après quelques discours.’\(^{102}\) Another, Le Frondeur, agreed with his peers
that the exhortative Arria was the better of the two works, but he still preferred the other
version for her more gentle expression: ‘La foiblesse de la nature & la fermeté du courage
ne se combattent pas sur sa physionomie; elles s’y confondent par un doux accord’.\(^{103}\)
The female critic Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S. highlighted the exhortative moment as
problematic: ‘Ce sujet étoit difficile à rendre. Il me paroit presqu’impossible de donner à
la Romaine une action qui puisse presenter un sens clair & évident.’\(^{104}\) Perhaps, though,
the problem was that the version which depicted Arria’s firm resolve was altogether too
clear: this was why it made some male critics (although not all) in 1785 feel
uncomfortable.

The larger painting of Arria’s own death can be understood as an ingenious solution to
the problems posed by the disturbing sight of Arria bearing down upon a cowering
Paetus. In the later moment from the narrative, Arria’s exhortation is collapsed into an
act of self-sacrifice, the accusation upon her face softened by pain and - of course -
serenity, so closely related to tranquillity. The female critic offers considerable praise of
this version, particularly for the way that Vincent manages to combine Arria’s resolve
with a collapsing body and general air of serenity. She marvels that:

‘Dans ce tableau, Arria est un chef-d’oeuvre d’invention & de composition. Le
corps de cette Femme poignardée chancelle; ses genoux s’affoiblissent, se

\(^{103}\) *Le Frondeur, ou Dialogues sur le Salloon, par l’auteur du Coup-de-Patte & du Triumvirat* (no place,
1785), C.D., vol. XIV, no. 329, p. 43.
\(^{104}\) *Avis Important d’une Femme...* (1785), pp. 24-25.
dérobent sous elle: sa tête s’affaisse; les dernières angoisses assaillissent cette Héroïne; mais son visage conserve encore un air de sérénité & de fermeté que troublent à peine les vives douleurs & les approches d’une mort cruelle & précipitée. C’est l’accord le plus heureux & le plus ingénieux des affections les plus violentes & les plus contrastantes.¹⁰⁵

Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S.’ interpretation appears somewhat prescient when we look at the ultimate version of this work by Vincent, the Gobelins tapestry at the Victoria & Albert Museum. The decision has been to re-work the later moment rather than to develop Arria’s demanding pose. Arria now is more upright, and has been given the gesture of placing a firm hand on her husband’s shoulder; however, her face is kind and gentle, and she is very far from the threatening figure that she was in the smaller of the two 1785 works. The events of the Revolution did nothing to persuade the Gobelins jury, of which Vincent himself was a member, to choose the more assertive representation of Arria. Instead, the exemplary image is cemented as the supportive, self-sacrificing wife rather than as an exhortative, morally correct, scowling fury.

We cannot be sure of the extent to which similar strategies were adopted in the other Revolutionary depictions of Arria and Paetus, all of which were exhibited at the 1796 Salon: paintings by Joseph Leroy and Pierre Roger (nos 300 and 398 respectively), and ivories by Joplère (no. 619), as these are now lost. Since these artists received little critical attention at this Salon, there are no clues as to the appearance and reception of these works. The titles published in the livret do, however, make it clear that both artists chose the moment of Arria’s offer of the dagger to Paetus after stabbing herself, with the famous words Prends, mon cher Poetus, cela ne fait pas de mal, rather than the earlier instance of her urgent attempts at persuasion.¹⁰⁶ One last representation of this couple shows that by 1801, Monsiau had decided not to focus on the moment of Arria’s courage at all. He produced a saccharine version of an earlier, less problematic time in their lives,

¹⁰⁵ Avis Important d’une Femme... (1785), p. 25.
¹⁰⁶ Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure, dessins, modèles etc. exposés dans le grand salon du Musée Central des Arts... (Paris, 1796), C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 485, p. 59 and p. 76.
Le Mariage d’Arria et Poetus (signed and dated 1801, see Sotheby’s-Monaco sale catalogue 20 June 1987, plate 59).

Thus we can see from the representations of Arria that the elements in her narrative which concerned her insistent, empowered behaviour were evidently problematic. They were negotiated by male artists through the privileging of the moment where this active intervention has resulted in Arria’s own death (thereby removing the threat that she poses), or by ignoring the most famous parts of her narrated courage in order to present an image of her only as a loving wife, where her legitimate censorial attitude is avoided.

The potential reasons behind such choices of strategy - male discomfort at the sight of the empowered female with dominion over man, and an attempt to present a less threatening exemplar for women to emulate - can also be investigated further by a consideration of Spartan women. As with the Sabines, the specific issue of female collectivity is again important here. Shifts which are similar to those noticed in the group of Sabine women representations are also observable in depictions of the Spartan and Lacedemonian women, both in what they are shown doing and how they are represented as they carry out those actions.

Representations of them start in the focus period with Le Barbier’s Le courage des femmes de Sparte... (1787 Salon, no.137) (Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 60). The title and description from the Salon livret alone make clear the violence with which these women defend themselves from Aristomène and his Messenian troops when they try to snatch the women from a religious ceremony. The livret text is specific that:

‘ces femmes, appelant Cérès à leur secours, de défendirent courageusement, les unes avec des couteaux, les autres avec les broches dont on se servoit pour rôtir les victimes, d’autres avec des torches préparées pour le sacrifice, & forcèrent les Messéniens à se retirer. Aristomène lui même, terrassé à coup de torches, aurait perdu la vie, si la prêtrise Archidamie n’en eût eu pitié; elle le délivra de la fureur de ses compagnes.’

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Indeed, what we are shown is a representation where the Spartan women are shown to be all powerful, whether because groups of them are about to stab and club their assailants, or because other women have the influence to stop this violence and initiate a cease-fire, as Archidamie does. From both perspectives, the women are dominant over the men in this scene. Moreover, the potential for danger and disorder that these powerful women represent is made specific, through the reference to their destructive ‘fureur’.

A drawing shown at the same Salon, Charles-Nicaise Perrin’s *Esquisse...représentant les femmes Spartiates portant les secours nécessaires à leurs époux, dans le combat que Pyrrhus donna aux pieds des murailles de leur ville* (1787 Salon, no 169, current location unknown, plate 61) evidently shows the women in a more supportive and less combative role.\(^{108}\) Notably it is this strand of Spartan women narrative which is developed further during the Revolution, along side the images discussed in the first chapter of the solitary Spartan mothers urging their sons to fight to the death for their country. There are representations of the Spartan women offering to help or actually taking part in the defence of the city, but during the Revolution these incidents always privilege masculine power.

Moreover, strategies were developed to play down the assertiveness of the collective forces of Spartan women in these works. We can take for example the now lost work that Perrin showed at the 1793 Salon. The *livret* explains the action: *Une assemblée Spartiate délibérant si l'on ferait sortir de la ville de Sparte les femmes et les enfants, à l'attaque de la ville par Pyrrhus. Une femme entre au milieu de l'Assemblée & parlant au nom de ses compagnes, offre leurs services dans le combat pour la République* (1793 Salon, no. 102, not located). That this trait of bravery should appear in 1793 is perhaps not surprising, after the ‘patrie en danger’ calls of 1792. However, we should be wary of taking it at face value as an image which offered whole-hearted support of the idea of women joining with men to fight for their country. Vivian Cameron discusses this work

in the context of reports of women volunteering to carry arms and the Plan de défense which announced its intention to use armed women against the enemy, and interprets this work as championing such female action. She concludes that: ‘Perrin’s painting is one example of art mirroring reality. As such it is rare.’

What she does not observe, however, is that Perrin clearly made some decisions about his representation of the women which are similar to the sorts of strategies David developed, even at this point in the Revolution when it was perhaps most acceptable to show such a scene of female military volunteerism. The critical reaction to this work was limited; however, there is an in-depth comment from the author of the Exposition au Salon du Palais National. He notes that the woman who volunteers her services and those of her companions is far too fresh and pretty to be a believable Spartan woman:

‘On a observé avec raison que le tableau du citoyen Perrin, no. 102, ne présentait pas une assemblée des représentants du peuple de Sparte. Ces fiers républicains n’avaient nulle faiblesse pour le faste; et quand ils délibèrent sur le parti violent de renvoyer de Lacédémone leurs femmes et leurs enfants, et qu’une héroïne vient, armée, offrir ses services et ceux de toutes ces courageuses compagnes; il faut avouer qu’une femme vêtue à la légère, d’un visage austère et de formes vigoureuses, aurait été plus convenable au sujet que cette beauté fraîche, délicate et entortillée de draperies, que l’auteur introduit au milieu des Spartiates assemblés.’

Cameron interprets this comment rightly when she notes that ‘the code of beauty destroys the idea of bravery’. However, she does not consider that Perrin might deliberately have made his leading Spartan woman into a soft, attractive beauty swathed in undulating draperies precisely in order to make her a more acceptable figure for his male viewers. If he worked on the sketch in 1793, this would have been against the backdrop of the increasing anxiety about female political involvement which culminated in October in the closure of women’s clubs. There was by no means universal approval of the idea of armed women assisting men in the defence of the homeland. Dominique Godineau has noted that ‘there is a difference between claiming citizenship via the right to bear arms

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and obtaining this right’ in her comments on Levy and Applewhite’s reasearch, and insists that sporadic incidents of women’s self-arming were never part of the actual organised defences of France. Perrin appears to have negotiated the problematic issue of female involvement in armed combat by adopting a representational strategy similar to David’s: his Spartan warrior woman is softened and made feminine, thus less threatening. We might also consider the alternative possibility that this kind of artistic manoeuvre was intended to discourage combative female groups, rather than render them acceptable. Perrin may have hoped to highlight the notion that a fighting woman was, or at least should be in his view, a fundamental contradiction in terms.

Topino-Lebrun is another artist who chose to represent something other than his stated aim when it came to Spartan women. His sketch for Le Siège de Lacédémone par Pyrrhus (1799-1800, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française, plate 62) was the last work to feature the Spartan women as a collective group during the Revolutionary period. Philippe Bordes has noted that Topino derived the inspiration this painting from the political mobilisation of the summer of 1799, and that his idea was that the work should depict ‘Pyrrhus repoussé de Sparte par les habitants de tout sexe et de tout âge’. What he in fact showed, however, was the women playing a decidedly supportive role, bringing arms, cradling the dead and wounded, and lifting up their children in an echo of the Sabines and Lethière’s La Patrie en Danger (plate 16). Whilst the overall levels of violence and confusion in the work are considerable, the viewpoint distances the spectator from much of its impact. As far as the women themselves are concerned, they are not represented in poses of forceful action at all; some are supportive but most are beseeching on their knees. This work too demonstrates a very specific role for women in a defensive combat situation, and it is considerably different to the active, courageous roles that are described in historical texts.

12 Godineau (1990), p. 79.
Thus across the chronological spread of depictions of Spartan women, we see a progressive move away from the theme of potentially threatening collective feminine power chosen by Lebarbier in 1787. We can also note the proliferation of images of the single Spartan mother as discussed in Chapter One. These were increasingly popular from the mid-1790s onwards, and largely replaced images of active groups of Spartan women. As crowds of actual Frenchwomen caused concern in Parisian public spaces, so the exemplary antique women chosen to show them how to behave were depicted as having disbanded, stayed at home and practised steeling themselves for the sacrifice of their sons to the state. However, not even the lone Spartan mother’s special role was unassailable: we see from the livret for the Salon of 1800 that she was ultimately replaced by her husband. Here, it is the man who fulfils her previously dedicated role as giver of inspiration and ultimatum to their son, in L.A.G. Bouchet’s Un spartiate, donnant des armes à son fils, lui fait jurer, devant ses Dieux pénates, de défendre sa patrie (not located). We can understand these successive shifts as strategies to influence women’s behaviour away from the ideals of collective female action inspired by the generous Roman matrons. This recidivist action ends in a position where female influence, as depicted in these representations, is taken away to such extent that the Spartan woman’s role is reduced to nothing. Even the domesticated version of Cornelia surpasses it in terms of empowerment.

The examples briefly outlined here support my analysis of David’s representation of Hersilia and the Sabine women. He was one of a number of male artists who developed strategies to deal with the problematic prospect of representing actively intervening women from antiquity. We can understand the reasons behind these choices as both an attempt to find a solution that will counteract what will otherwise be an unwanted negative image, such as in the case of the Sabine women: the metaphor for peace, so necessary for this project of post-Terror healing, will be disturbed if the potential fury is not disempowered. At the same time, however, we can also understand these paintings and drawings as part of a broader and, during the Revolution, most vital debate about the limits of female empowerment. These are images which do not simply engage in this
discussion: they take sides. The artistic fate of ancient women who intervene, particularly collectively, is part of widespread, effective manoeuvres (textual, physical, legislative) to deal with the problem of actual interventionary women. The question then remains: how did different women react to these depictions, apparently calculated to keep them in their designated place?

9. Interacting with disempowerment: how does this evidence help us to rethink spectatorship of David’s *Sabines*?

The ways in which David’s *L’intervention des Sabines* was viewed, and what and how it may have signified to its spectators, has already been the focus of several scholars. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth was the first to analyse at some length David’s placing of a mirror in the room used for the work’s exhibition, which ‘incited the visitors to see their own bodies as part of the aesthetic experience’.114 Asserting that this mirror was of a type known as a *psyché* (a full-length pivoting mirror designed for domestic use), Lajer-Burcharth uses Directoire prints to establish a role and social specificity for this mirror. Drawing upon Lacanian principles, she develops an argument that ‘David’s installation could be said to have offered the Directorial bourgeoisie both the Imaginary body, a mirage of a unified and autonomous self, and a place in Revolutionary history, a history now sufficiently distanced and contained by the artist’s image to be, safely, theirs.’115

However, although she reads this painting as an attempt to fix gender roles for both men and women, Lajer-Burcharth does not consider how female viewers might have responded to this. She ends her article with the conclusion that this painting ‘sought to take its place among the different cultural rehearsals of closure and accomplishment - as a kind of safeguard image, indeed a ‘salutary imago’, of the male republican self at the end of the Revolution.’ Yet the question remains, how might women have reacted in the face of these depictions.

of such a visual statement? Whilst I do not intend to develop a feminine subject position along Lacanian principles in this work, I feel that the basic question of how different women may have perceived their own social position in this exhibition space is of interest.

Subsequent commentators have queried and extended Lajer-Burcharth’s initial analysis of the mirror used in David’s exhibition. Dorothy Johnson disagrees that it was a *psyché*, and says that it was much more likely to have been a large mirror placed at the end of the room, and would not therefore have offered either fragmentary views or the lexical connection of the word ‘psyché’ to psychoanalysis. She argues that the mirror had aesthetic and epistemological, not sociological, demonstrative roles, proposing the idea that David put the mirror there so that viewers could see that the painting was flawless.116

Johnson asserts that the whole exhibition organisation shows how concerned David was with the meaning and nature of viewing, and that the artist ‘hoped to increase the meditative possibilities of his composition’, enabling the spectator to ‘take time to reflect on the complexity of the subject and its possible meaning’.117 However, even with this belief in mind, Johnson is still unwilling to allow that there must have been social and political dimensions to the meanings produced by this highly staged process of viewing.

More recently, Frédérique Desbuissons has considered the exhibition of the *Sabines* as an installation. She finds that the type of mirror used is ambiguous, but follows Lajer-Burcharth in insisting that the mirror ‘was a trap intended to capture the spectators and integrate them into the fictional space of the installation....enlarging [the painting] to the whole space in which it was held: far from remaining circumscribed by its frame, the fictional scene overflowed into the real space and occupied it’.118 She too cites Chaussard’s remarks on the phenomenon of the mirror, where he describes how ‘le ton

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des figures s’y confond avec celui des spectateurs. However, although she notes briefly the ‘blurring of boundaries between pictorial space and reality’ when she mentions the fashion for antique dresses, the appearance at soirées of the Bellegarde sisters (supposed models for the painting), and the vaudeville play about the exhibition, Desbuissons offers no further thoughts about the possible effects upon different viewers of this conscious mingling of fiction and reality.

A consideration of the spectatorship of this work which places much greater emphasis on the narrative and the way that David has represented it is found in an article by Stefan Germer. He has used methods devised by theoreticians of Rezeptionsästhetik to explore how David, along with other artists Hennequin and Guérin, constructed their work in ways which required active participation from the viewer. He analyses the way in which David casts the viewer both in the role of witness to a récit unfolding without his participation (along the contained horizontal axis of the three central characters), and also as a final addressee needed to complete a fragmentary discours in the painting (the intervention of the women which runs along an orthogonal axis and connects with the viewer via the woman in red). By having this contrast between modes of narrative, but by making the intervention the only part to extend out into the present, Germer argues that ‘The picture thus prestructured the beholder’s response while still requiring ratification of that position. David thereby demonstrated that a reconciliation had yet to be achieved, and that it depended upon the beholder’s active participation.’ Hersilia, as the site of the intersection of both narrative systems, is a pivotal figure.

Germer argues that ‘in conceiving Hersilia as the pictorial counterpart of the viewer, he [David] underscored that the beholder would ultimately have to assume her point of view - that is, the addressee of the discours would have to participate actively in similar reconciliatory efforts. Ultimately, the efficacy of David’s narrative strategy thus

depended on his beholders' willingness to identify with the characters depicted. I find this a compelling analysis of the appellatory structure of the work. How though might this have functioned in practise? What happened when beholders of both genders, but especially women, identified with Hersilia?

Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby considers the gendered viewer in her recent article on the *Sabines*, and focuses partly on feminine spectatorship, although mostly on women's viewing of the male nudes in this work. Overall, she asserts that David's painting fails to signify in the way that the artist intended. Her principal focus is on the way in which women can be said to have appropriated antiquity through fashion in the late 1790s, and how this then makes antiquity an unstable element in David's project. Grimaldo Grigsby constructs an interesting analysis of the adoption by women of white classical dresses 'à l'antique', asserting that nudity 'à la grecque' was 'self-consciously performed by women as an intriguing game of revelation and deception' by élite Frenchwomen in the 1790s. She notes that Hersilia is the painting's 'most fashionably chic protagonist. Of all the figures within the painting, she most closely resembles members of the audience.'

Grimaldo Grigsby invites her readers to 'Imagine such nouveaux riches women moving through the *Sabines* exhibition space, appreciating their chic couture and resemblance to David's heroine reflected in the wall-length mirror, all for the price of a ticket. Could there have been a better showplace to celebrate the spectacular, exhibitionist pleasures of fashion and the erotics of public sociability?' She then asserts that 'Given the fashionability of the Sabine women and the prevalence of images like Boilly's *Make Peace*, would not viewers have been predisposed to see Hersilia as a chic Frenchwoman

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121 Germer (1992), p. 34.
122 Due to constraints of space and focus, I am not able here extend Germer's analysis along its other logical axis, by imagining a male viewer being the counterpart of Hersilia and assuming her point of view. Participating in reconcilatory efforts would of course be the most obvious result of a masculine assumption of her position, but more complex repercussions would presumably also have developed as part of such a gendered spectator position.
separating her competing lovers who abruptly, inexplicably, and quite extravagantly discard their suits?\textsuperscript{125}

Whilst a contextualisation focusing on the fashion for antique dress is certainly useful, this interpretation is ultimately problematic. Firstly, the audience which Grimaldo Grigsby posits is a decidedly limited one. These arguments rest on the premise that the viewers were all of the specific class of the fashionable élite. Whilst we may well imagine one interpretive community which consisted of the most fashionable ladies and gentlemen in Paris, we can surely not ignore the other huge numbers of spectators who saw the \textit{Sabines}. It has been plausibly estimated that approximately 50,000 people visited this exhibition during the five years that it was open, the majority of whom went in the early stages.\textsuperscript{126} Even given that these visitors had to pay an entrance fee of 1.80 francs, the audience was clearly not only limited to the most wealthy and fashionable upper middle classes.\textsuperscript{127} Would the men and women who were not of this elite, women who whilst adopting broad classical lines in their dress, did not opt for the full gauzy nudity so criticised in the textual evidence which Grimaldo Grigsby presents, have really interpreted this exhibition experience in the way that she suggests?

Moreover, I am not convinced that the interpretation that she gives of Hersilia as a chic Frenchwoman separating her lovers would have been the dominant strand of meaning developed by the full range of interpretive communities in that exhibition overall. Grimaldo Grigsby’s arguments, focused so tightly on the ephemeral qualities of fashion, seem to deny the narrative of the \textit{Sabines} any serious role in the exhibition experience she describes. Yet as we have seen, David took specific measures to reiterate the historical narrative of this scene, as far as he understood it, to his spectators. Moreover, the almost frivolous tone of Grimaldo Grigsby’s reimagined spectatorship is at odds with some

\textsuperscript{125} Grimaldo Grigsby (1998), p. 327.
\textsuperscript{126} See Schnapper and Séruillaz (1989), p. 335 for documentary evidence which supports this estimate.
\textsuperscript{127} Also indicating a broader class appeal, Stephanie Carroll has looked at the exhibition of the Sabines in terms of the theatrical milieu of Paris at the end of the century, noting its similarity to the hugely popular panorama shows of the period. See S. Carroll, ‘Reciprocal Representations: David & Theater’, \textit{Art in America} (May 1990), pp. 199-206 and pp. 259-261.
contemporaneous accounts of the atmosphere in the exhibition. Chaussard, for example, noted ‘ce silence religieux qu’elle [the audience] observe, soit que l’intérêt de la scène et ses dimensions majestueuses, soit que la réputation de l’homme célèbre et la magie de l’exécution en imposent, ce profond recueillement dont j’ai constamment remarqué l’expression sur le visage des spectateurs’. Of course, as David’s champion, Chaussard has an agenda to emphasise the seriousness with which the exhibition is taken. However, he could not write of such contemplative silence if in fact this were not at all the case; his description is strikingly different from what Grimaldo Grigsby imagines. I have already cited the numerous critics who took the narrative of this work seriously; their evidence weighs heavily in favour of other, less frivolous strands of meaning for this work. The fact that a vaudeville play was then written as a satire of spectator emulation of this painting is also indicative that weighty symbolic interpretations of the work’s relevance were common enough to be considered a target for deflation through comedy.

Grimaldo Grigsby asserts that ‘Women had indeed intervened in 1799, compromising classicism, compromising nudity, compromising the (fraternal) Republic.’ However, this female audience which she posits appears to have no connection with any women who had lived through the earlier years of the Revolution, and whose intervention was already constructed in seemingly indelible negative terms. She writes of ‘the return of the female spectator’ - but when did women viewers go away? Her analysis and her reconstruction of the audience of David’s Sabines does not sufficiently take into account the Revolutionary context out of which this work and its spectators grew.

The research carried out by earlier scholars indicates an exhibition space which was intended to be, and must to a certain extent have been, heavy with symbolism. The demarcation between reality and fiction, actual experience and historical narrative was deliberately blurred by the artist as he endeavoured to orchestrate the show. Contemporary commentators do note that women identified with, even ‘became’ the

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Sabine women that they were looking at. Chaussard for example is specific about how women imagined themselves in the situation depicted. He describes female reactions to emotive elements in the painting: ‘près du tronçon d’une épée sanglante, à côté d’un cadavre expiré, un petit enfant sourit, suce son doigt à la manière des nouveaux-nés: toutes les mères ont cru voir leur enfant, et leur coeur palpite.’ Ducis also refers to the ability of the painting to elicit identificatory responses when he praises David: ‘Quel coeur résisterait à ta chaleur divine? Chaque père est romain, chaque mère est sabine!...’ For Chaussard and Ducis, the feminine experience is defined strictly in terms of Rousseauvian motherhood. Yet would this have been the limit of female reactions to this spectatorship situation?

We return to the ambiguous, and yet so often assumed straightforward, issue of the emulation of antique examples. If Hersilia is, as Germer convincingly asserts, appealing to the viewers to participate in the narrative; if, as other scholars have shown, the mirror and installation of the exhibition as a whole worked to cast the viewers into the painting and its action, what then was the result of this in terms of spectator experience? What meanings were produced under these circumstances for different viewers of both genders? What did it mean for a woman to ‘be’ a Sabine - were a desire for reconciliation and an overflow of maternal sentiment the only forms of behaviour signified?

If we consider these questions in the light of the evidence presented earlier in this chapter, we see that all of the texts which describe what it is to be a Sabine woman (including David’s) state that it is to be a woman wronged, raped, and who comes back to influence the men in her life. This understanding is reiterated in the vaudeville play about the exhibition of David’s Sabines: even though this is a parody, it still underlines the narrative signification that the women have always had.

131 Chaussard (1800), p. 22.
This tale of star-crossed lovers blended with art criticism also describes the various stages of the young heroine, Laure, 'being' a Sabine. When her favoured lover Dercour takes her off from the entrance of David's exhibition to her uncle's house, this is referred to as an 'enlèvement'. When her mother is told of the deed, Laure's departure is described as 'elle fait la Sabine'. However, the acting out does not end there; it also involves, as did the historical narrative, Laure's intervention in the tussle which ensues over her recovery. The text is specific that this scene should resemble the painting: 'Cette scène devant offrir, autant que possible, la parodie du tableau, les acteurs du province, qui n'ont pu voir le chef d'oeuvre, auront soin de se dessiner d'après l'indication suivante...'. Laure intervenes between the men and shouts 'Arretez! qu'allez-vous faire?', in exactly the same position as Hersilia: 'Laure, le genou gauche ployé, la jambe droite en avant, étend ses deux bras vers les deux rivaux.'

However, as the evidence presented earlier in this chapter showed, being a Sabine woman did not only mean a return from abduction to an influential position of reconciliation. I have demonstrated the ways in which the narrative of the Sabine women unavoidably recalled visions of active, militant Frenchwomen, to an extent that David felt the need to make subtle but distinct changes to his representation of Hersilia. I have also shown that he was not alone in developing these sorts of artistic strategies for his representation of intervening women. That David felt the need to do this progressively up to 1799 indicates that the spectre of this feminine threat had not disappeared by this period; indeed, the laws of 1797 which were then codified under Napoleon attest to continued wariness about certain types of active female behaviour.

Perhaps because of this, male critics at least seem to have understood female emulation of the Sabines as safely restricted to the domain of maternity, as we recall from the remarks of Chaussard and Ducis above. These viewers may willingly have suppressed other

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133 Jouy, Longchamp and Dieu-la-Foy (Paris, an VIII) [1799], sc.xvi.
134 Jouy, Longchamp and Dieu-la-Foy (Paris, an VIII) [1799], sc.xx.
significatory possibilities. This might also have been the case with fashionably élite female viewers, focusing only on the dresses or the male nudity and whether indeed one could see ‘la Bellegarde’ in Hersilia. The issue of whether other women perceived David’s subtle constraints, and if so what result that had, remains a question of informed speculation.

As women responded to the painting’s appellatory structure, and imagined themselves in her position as Germer suggests, they must have felt the power of her influence, and related that in different ways to their own lives. Women involved in political activity in the past must have identified with her primarily through her role as leader of the interventionary discours, recalling perhaps their own exploits and the sense of empowerment that this behaviour had given them. This is not to suggest that all classes of women were able to attend the Sabines exhibition; however, we know that involvement in political activity and interventionary action was not solely the reserve of the lowest classes in urban France, therefore it is likely that some formerly active women were amongst the audience.¹³⁶

When the president of the Société des Amies de la République in Dijon replied to an attack on women’s clubs by Prudhomme in Les Révolutions de Paris in February 1793, she was eloquent about the value of the Revolutionary activities with which she and her female compatriots were involved.¹³⁷ Blandin Demoulin lists just a few of their good deeds, starting with the donations drive and including the ways in which women helped to manufacture equipment for the army and did vital work looking after the poor. She cites their collectivity as a central part of their success, ‘car que peuvent faire tous les individus isolés l’un de l’autre? C’est de la réunion fraternelle des républicaines que sont

¹³⁶ Women’s political clubs and the galleries of the national legislature have been highlighted as sites of middle-class female involvement in political activity; the Société des républicaines révolutionnaires in particular has been analysed as a club where issues of interest to both the radical middle classes and the Parisian poor were merged. See Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, eds., (1979), pp. 143-148.
résultés ces effets étonnants de lumières philosophiques, qui, en les affranchissant des antiques préjugés qui avilissaient les femmes, ont renouvelé en elles le germe des vertus qu’elles sont destinées à transmettre à tous les Français dès leur première enfance.\textsuperscript{138}

The Corneliaesque qualities of this last statement sit easily side by side in this letter with the justifications of the considerable extensions of women’s activity which have taken place by this time. Moreover, Présidente Blandin is clear that she and her members have no intention of accepting the limitations that Prudhomme has suggested. She insists: ‘Nous ne nous bornons point, citoyen Prudhomme, à chanter l’hymne à la liberté, comme vous nous le conseillez; nous voulons encore exercer des actes de civisme.’\textsuperscript{139} As we have seen, the next five years saw increasingly draconian attempts to enforce the ‘advised’ position of Prudhomme, Amar and their replacements in government. In 1799 or 1800, would then a woman like Blandin Demoulin, one of her Parisian counterparts, not enter the charged exhibition space of David’s \textit{L’intervention des Sabines}, and feel some regret for the limitations placed upon her own ability to take direct, collective action on political and social issues? Would she also feel that she was right to have believed in what she and her fellow ‘citoyennes’ were doing in the early 1790s?

We can imagine that the belief of these women in the contribution that they could make did not simply disappear when the clubs were closed in 1793, and that it would have played a role in their viewing and understanding of David’s painting in 1799. These women might also have felt the constraint of Hersilia’s position, and even felt pride that their own action had been so effective that it had generated actual measures of restraint similar to the pictorial ones enacted on the canvas. They may also have wondered, as so many of the critics did, why Hersilia seemed so calm and quiet while playing such a vital role.

\textsuperscript{139} Bibliothèque Municipale de Dijon (1989), p. 11.
At the same time, other women might have been quite relieved by Hersilia's tranquillity.
It is certainly not my aim to insist that gender overrode class differences between
audience members; we may remember the relatively well-dressed, bonneted woman
coerced unhappily into participation in the print of *A Versailles, A Versailles!* (plate 45).
Such a woman might have identified instead with Hersilia in her role as the central figure
of the horizontal *récit*. She would have been quite content to see the potentially unruly
women behind her constrained, and also so visibly preoccupied with their children.

Alternatively, women may have experienced the tension of both of Hersilia's roles, as
rupturing, active intervener and as the bridge which unites and bonds opposing parties.
Germer's analysis of the beholder's dual positioning, as witness to and participant in both
the *récit* and *discours* in this work, is particularly useful for helping us to understand how
this may have worked. A woman looking at Hersilia, placing herself at that point of
intersection, may well have experienced the contradictions of her position, whether she
had a past in bourgeois fund-raising or working class small donations, as an outspoken
aggressive demonstrator and agitator, or as a conscientious producer and rearer of
numerous little patriots.

Inevitably, in the absence of specific documentary evidence of female reception of
David's *Sabines*, such constructions remain at the level of speculation. However, any
posited interpretations of the meanings that this work may have produced for its huge and
varied audience must consider the two central factors which have been highlighted here.
Firstly, the extent to which violence and anger were key shifting elements in all
representations of women from the ancient past who take collective action, as part of a set
of artistic strategies. Secondly, that we must also acknowledge the effect of the many
intersections between this work and actual interventionary French women. The range of
feminine reactions described above must have been present in the discussions of different
interpretive communities looking at David's painting, and must therefore have
complicated its intended message of peace and reconciliation.
10. Conclusion

The Sabine women are unavoidably connected in contemporary understanding with recently seen groups of active, intervening Frenchwomen. This explains why David makes subtle but noticeable changes to both Hersilia’s body, and also to her words and the historical narrative within which they appear. This evidence unravels the contradictions apparently noted, but never before analysed, by successive scholars who reveal the problem in the bizarre juxtapositions which appear in their descriptions of David’s painting, as they note its ‘dynamic stillness’, or see it as ‘a veneration of feminine heroism that would cry out with a voice of peace’.\(^{140}\)

This was a difficult scene to represent at this point in France, an observation which is supported in general terms by Ricard’s 1798 translation of Plutarch. He includes a phrase which does not appear in any other versions of the text, noting that the fighting men were stopped ‘par le spectacle le plus étonnant et le plus difficile à représenter. Les Sabines qui avoient été enlevées, accourant de tous côtés avec de grands cris, et comme poussées par une fureur divine, se précipitèrent au travers des armes et des monceaux de morts...’\(^{141}\) [my italics]. For Ricard in 1798, this is the most difficult sight to depict; he does not specify why, but his addition of this phrase to the translation does emphasise the problematic nature of this scene at the time of writing. Moreover, we find a potential excuse for David’s future disabling strategies in Rollin’s explanation of the Romans’ original abduction of the women. Rollin argues that such violence is acceptable when necessity dictates extreme measures: ‘L’enlèvement des Sabines, qui fut l’effet d’une violence contraire à toutes les loix, ne peut paroître excusable que par la nécessité où Romulus se trouvoit réduit’.\(^{142}\) David found himself in a similarly tight spot, and used the necessary force to resolve his problem.

\(^{141}\) Plutarch trans. Ricard (1798), vol. I, p. 279.
We must allow that David’s ambitious project, whilst seeking to negotiate the problematic elements of a female antique narrative which otherwise served his aims, connected with actuality in complicated, unstable ways, particularly as far as certain highly visible types of women were concerned. The Revolutionary context which produced this work and its spectators must remain a factor in our examination of David’s representational strategies. Similarly it must inform any speculation about the meanings viewers made out of this painting in the highly charged exhibition atmosphere the artist devised.

This cultural and political environment was one where women’s power moves in public spaces were a source of considerable male concern, and would ultimately be suppressed. The evidence presented here has shown that male artists developed specific representational strategies for the depiction of active women from antiquity, strategies which engaged with these concerns and played a role in their resolution. Techniques of restraint and transformation were used in an attempt to turn empowered women into softer, more gentle incarnations of femininity.

So far, this research has included very little discussion of the role played by women artists in these evidently loaded representations of women from antiquity. This has been because there are no surviving images by French women artists of the ancient heroines discussed so far. The situation is quite different, however, with the material under consideration in the next chapter. The gender of artists as well as spectators will therefore be a central issue in the following discussion of a different kind of feminine empowerment: intellectual and artistic creativity.
Chapter Three

Sappho and Aspasia: contrasting approaches to intellectual women from the ancient past

‘Sapho, illustre favorite des Muses; qui mérita les honneurs divins. Tu brûles de tous les feux de l’amour pour un insensible; que vas-tu faire? Tu vas causer des regrets à l’univers entier, fille adorable, arrête; choisis entre les dieux et les mortels un amant qui puisse t’aimer. Qui ne sera jaloux de te voir, de te plaire, de t’entendre soupire! toi qui t’exprimes mieux qu’Apollon, mieux que les Graces.
Mais, tu n’entends rien...c’en est fait...Le rocher est franchi...Sapho brave la mort, pour se soustraire à elle-même.
Mortelle indifférente, contemple tes forfaits; vois combien tu es coupable, puisque tu donnes la mort à celle qui ne respiroît que la vie!
Mai arrachons-nous à ce spectacle douloureux; faisons diversion.’


‘Vivons, comme Aspasie, en sage épiscurienne,
N’ayons aucun tourment; quelque revers qui vienne,
Versifions sans cesse: occupons nos loisirs,
Consumons notre vie à flatter nos désirs,
Conduisons à profit une savante flamme.’


Extending the investigation of visual material that plays a role in debates about women’s behaviour and agency in Revolutionary France, this chapter considers the legitimacy of female creativity by focusing on images of two renowned women of intellect from ancient Greece: Sappho and Aspasia. They are an interesting contrast to the women examined so far, since they are associated with the pleasure and erudition of Greece rather than with the stoic morality of Rome. As such, the role of ‘exemplum virtutis’ was not thrust upon either woman during the French Revolution. However, Sappho and Aspasia were still analysed and understood in terms of their behaviour and exceptionality, albeit with sometimes ambiguous and contradictory results. The vacillating prose of the critic writing about Sappho in his review of Taillason’s painting cited above gives an
indication of the tensions inherent in ideas about these women at this time: she is admired, loved, blamed and forgotten in the space of a few lines.

Considering first Sappho and then Aspasia, I will explore the significance of the artist’s gender in understanding the representational strategies revealed. Challenging existing interpretations of these works, I will develop an analysis of intentionality and spectator response which takes into account the broad context within which these images were produced and contemplated.

1. Sappho: narrative, image and current research

Sappho was a lyric poet who was born in Lesbos in the late seventh century BC, and who seems to have lived for most of her life in Mytilene, the principal city of Lesbos. She wrote verse that would have been sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, both for choruses who would dance and sing the lyrics on religious and social occasions, and for solo singers who performed to a more intimate, informal group of listeners. Sappho was highly acclaimed for her poetry - to the extent that the Mytilenians featured her on coinage.

We now only have fragments of the verse that she wrote. It is passionate love poetry, some of which focuses on desire and love for women. This subject matter, and in particular the fact that it came from the pen of a woman and therefore can be seen as not just passionate but also homosexual, is the main reason why the verse has only partially survived - it has periodically been condemned and destroyed (for example, Gregory VII publicly burned Sappho’s poems in 1073).

Apart from these sparse facts, that she was a woman lyric poet who wrote about love, there is virtually nothing about her life that we know for certain. However, various versions of a story of the life of Sappho have been constructed over the last two and a half thousand years, literalising passages from her poetry, adding elements from myths and legends, and using large amounts of imagination.

I will consider these biographies in greater detail later, when I relate the depictions under discussion to contemporaneous ideas and assumptions about Sappho. At this point, I will simply outline the narrative that was predominant in the eighteenth century, to demonstrate what the artists who painted her believed had happened in her life. Joan DeJean has written a useful and highly interesting account of the French texts that she terms ‘fictions of Sappho’ from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. She gives a clear picture of the basic elements that formed Sappho’s story.

From the three page *Sapphus vita* that Henri Estiennes wrote to preface his 1566 edition of her fragments, through seventeenth-century translations of classical authors who mention her - Ovid and Longinus in particular - to the eighteenth-century translations of her poetry and ‘factional’ concoctions about her life, some features of the Sappho’s narrative were firmly established. In many versions, Sappho is initially married, and has a child; it is then following the death of her husband and / or her child that she begins a life of promiscuity. This sometimes encompasses sexual encounters with leading literary figures of the day; and always ends with one man in particular - Phaon. He is described as an exceptionally handsome young man, and is often connected to the mythical ferryman of the same name who unknowingly helped Aphrodite and was rewarded with the gifts of youth and beauty.\(^2\)

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2 This is noted, amongst others, by Pollux in the second century AD. Examples of such coins still survive: see L. Forer, ‘Les Portraits de Sappho sur les monnaies’, *Revue belge de numismatique*, vol. LVII (1901), pp. 413-425.


4 The homophone Phaon-paon here seems to add to the aroma of male spite which pervades Sappho’s narrative: the older blue-stockings falls for the vain, splendid, pea-headed young man who is all display and
Sappho falls passionately in love with Phaon. In most accounts, they have an affair, and Sappho is presented as being at the peak of her creative powers when they are together (it should be noted that all of the ‘histories’ make Sappho’s fame as a poet quite clear). However, Phaon then abandons her for another woman. In scenarios where Sappho is presented as running an academy for girls, this is sometimes one of her female pupils. Sappho is devastated, and after making failed attempts to regain Phaon’s love, she leaps from the cliff-top at Leucadia, some seven hundred miles from Lesbos, and dies.

The issue of Sappho’s homosexuality, which had been a key discussion point in seventeenth-century texts, ceased to be an area of such overt contention in the following century, as it was frequently avoided. DeJean notes that Sappho is ‘resolutely heterosexual’ in eighteenth-century French readings. I see this verdict as slightly problematic, as I will discuss later; however, it is certainly the case that in the final section of her life story, which features Phaon and the Leucadian leap, Sappho is always presented as a heterosexual woman.

Of all the women from the ancient past that were represented in late eighteenth-century French art, Sappho is perhaps the one who elicits the most noticeably increased artistic interest at this time. After some early book illustrations of her during the Renaissance, and an appearance in Raphael’s Parnassus in the Vatican, there are almost no visual representations of her in Europe until some illustrations made during the 1760s. She does not appear as a painted subject in France at all until Fragonard’s Sapho inspirée par l’amour, made around 1775 (Lugano, Thyssen Bornemisza Collection, plate 63).
Vien was the next to paint her - his lost work Sapho chantant ses vers was exhibited at the 1787 Salon (no. 4). After this, however, she was depicted steadily by French artists during the 1790s and at the turn of the century. This group of representations is fairly large: there are records of seventeen paintings and drawings of Sappho during this period, plus two sculpture models. There are also numerous illustrations to editions of French translations of her poetry, and to other literary texts where Sappho and her story featured prominently. Of the extant works, the most well-known today are Taillasson’s Sapho ne pouvant se faire aimer du jeune Phaon, se precipite du rocher de Leucate dans la Mer, exhibited at the 1791 Salon (no.96, Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts, plate 64), and Gros’ famous moonlit Sapho à Leucade of 1801 (Bayeux, Musée des Beaux-Arts, plate 66). These works are indicative of the development of a new trend towards the end of the century: privileging Sappho’s leap from the rock of Leucadia as artistic subject matter. Taillasson himself did another smaller painting and a drawing of the same theme; other artists to choose the suicide leap as a subject are Taurel, Courteille, and Hugler.8

To date, art historians have predominantly understood these images in stylistic terms, focusing particularly on Gros’ painting as an early Romantic statement. Taillasson’s version too, whilst the recipient of much less recent scholarly attention, is also generally interpreted in terms of pre-Romanticism.9 Judith Ellen Stein, the scholar who has written most about French imagery showing Sappho, sees these works as sublime and melodramatic precedents for the fate of Chatterton, the archetypal suicidally melancholic genius of the Romantic era.10 Alena Marchwinski also considers Gros’ Sappho as a model for the Romantic suicide - an indissoluble conjugation of self-determined death,
unhappy love and cult of the genius. At the same time, the suicide act is interpreted as a manifestation of individual liberty, an extreme consequence of man’s alienation.

Marchwinski analyses the painting in the light of David Hume’s essay *On Suicide* and Goethe’s *Sorrows of Werther*, categorising the Gros *Sapho* as a narcissistic or egoistical suicide. She also considers the suicide theory of Durkheim; however, although she mentions ‘the social disintegration characteristic of the period’, Marchwinski in fact does not write much about the historical context of the paintings she discusses. Derin Tanyol has considered the immediate Napoleonic context within which Gros’ *Sapho* was produced and seen, in his interpretation of the painting as an intentional and officially sanctioned anti-classicism: ‘a literal killing off of antiquity in favour of the present’; however, his project does not consider in depth any preceding works or context for Gros’ painting.

Whilst the focus on Romanticism is no doubt a valid one, there is also a need to set this aside as the dominant paradigm within which these representations of Sappho are interpreted. The prominence of the Gros painting within the canon has undoubtedly influenced the way that analysis of the group of works as a whole has developed, and I feel that it has perhaps closed scholars off from some other important routes of investigation. Rather than only seeing Gros’ painting as a pre-cursor, I would argue that it can also usefully be interpreted in the context of the earlier representations which precede it, as the most advanced development of certain other ideas.

Stein is the only scholar to study the whole range of images produced in France at the end of the eighteenth century, but her analysis is rather limited, as it is based on an understanding of representational shifts as part of a linear progression through artistic style periods. Whilst signalling a belief that ‘each age was to stress different aspects of

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the poet’s life and works, reflecting what they most valued’, Stein then makes it clear that by ‘age’, she means ‘style’. Stein then makes it clear that by ‘age’, she means ‘style’. Her analytical framework is based on the assumption that shifts in the way that Sappho was shown ‘were dictated by the changes in stylistic expression during the hundred years under study’. Thus once Romanticism was in the air, Sappho was shown in the dramatic suicide pose; the historical context of France during the Revolution is reduced in Stein’s thesis to a ‘tumultuousness’ whose chief significance was as a trigger for the germination of the seeds of Romanticism. Nor does Stein analyse the relationship between the works which show the leap, and the considerable proportion which do not.

My investigation of representations of Sappho has uncovered evidence which supports an alternative understanding of these works. It starts with an idea which has already been mentioned by two scholars, but examined only briefly or to a conclusion whose emphasis does not take into account a key area of evidence. This is the suggestion firstly that the move to privilege Sappho’s suicide leap can be interpreted as projection onto literature and painting of some form of public punishment or execution. DeJean advances this idea initially, and Tanyol takes it up in his interpretation of Gros’s Sapho. They then differ in their assertions of who or what is being punished or killed off. DeJean feels that female homosexuality was the object of this symbolic attack, as this was so clearly against the official propaganda campaign to promote marriage and motherhood. Tanyol, as has already been noted, insists that ‘Classicism’ is what is really under fire.

DeJean later notes that the treatment meted out to Sappho in the leap images and texts may also have been to do with her creative status ‘France’s new regime may have had a stake in the violent self-destruction of the original woman writer’, and Tanyol echoes this by citing DeJean’s words, but for both of them, this remains a subsidiary cause.

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16 Stein (1981), p. 3.
17 I first presented a version of this research in November 1995 (Ph.D. upgrade), before the publication of Tanyol’s article.
2. Diminishing returns: dominant shifts in the representation of Sappho

My study of representations of Sappho from this period has shown that the death leap images are not the only ones which enact some kind of punishment upon Sappho. They are in fact part of an overall dominant shift which develops during the Revolution, which moves away from showing her as an active poet, and towards other modes of depiction which diminish her in different ways. Fragonard’s *Sapho inspirée par l’amour* (plate 63), which was painted in about 1775, is a useful starting point from which this shift can be traced. It shows the poet engaged in her art, albeit in a flirtatious context. Sappho is presented as a celebrated poet, wearing a crown of laurels and with a writer’s tablet on her knee. The atmosphere is light-hearted and rather erotic: Sappho is shown with both breasts bare, a factor which underscores her femininity and lends her a slightly provocatively, *deshabillé* charm, but which also signals her antique status.

If we compare the painting to a closely related engraving by Papavoine after Fragonard from 1783, *L’Inspiration Favorable* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 67) Sappho’s renowned status becomes clear. Although the similarity of the poses also sets Sappho’s literary production in the perhaps rather demeaning context of feminine love letters (as opposed to great poetry), her dress and laurels differentiate her from the contemporary woman writer in the engraving. The engraving also emphasises the creativity implied by this shared pose: the Cupid positions an arrow by the writer’s hand, as if encouraging her to use it as a pen or stylus. This informs our reading of the painting: despite its playful air, it is primarily an image that shows Sappho as a historically renowned poet at work, benefiting from love to engage in creative intellectual activity.
The same was probably true of Vien’s interpretation, exhibited about twelve years after Fragonard’s version. The Salon livret for 1787 is frustratingly brief in its description of Vien’s lost work; however, the title Sapho chantant ses vers makes it clear that it was a representation of her performing her own work. This is confirmed by the critical response to this small work by the Premier Peintre: one critic introduces his examination of this work by claiming that his attention was attracted by the sounds of a harp, and Sappho sighing out a tender air.20 Whatever surroundings and attitude Vien gave to his Sappho, it certainly seems that he foregrounded her celebrated poetic talent in his conception of her.

This is not the case with the majority of the other depictions of Sappho under discussion. The next painting of her developed the mode of representation that many of the other artists followed: Taillasson’s Sapho ne pouvant se faire aimer du jeune Phaon, se précipite du rocher de Leucate dans la Mer, exhibited at the 1791 Salon (Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts, plate 64). As we see, she is shown at the edge of the rock, clutching some hidden memento to her breast as she looks back over her shoulder to the dry land she is about to leave. The spectator is told by the livret that she is saying an eternal ‘adieu’ to her lover.21

Sappho’s intellectual achievements, her famed poetry, are now reduced to a symbolic scroll of parchment in the foreground, left incomplete next to a broken lyre whose carved laurel decorations denote her fame before this destruction occurred. The words she speaks in this representation are those of a suicidally love-sick woman, about to jump off a cliff because she has literally been unable to make herself loved by the young Phaon (this is the unusual title which Taillasson chooses for his work). The emphasis has shifted away from her literary talents to focus on her failed love life, and for the first time

20 Promenades d’un observateur au Salon de l’année 1787, C.D., vol. XV, no. 372, pp. 14-15 and p. 29. He thinks at first that it must be a young harp virtuoso, Mlle Caroline d’Escarsin, then recognises Sappho; from his comments it is clear that she is shown singing - ‘elle soupiroit un air tendre que la reconnaissance lui inspiroit.’

21 ‘Le moment est celui, où elle est sur le point de se précipiter, en disant à son amant un éternel adieu.’ Explication des peintures, sculptures et gravures...Salon de 1791, C.D., vol. XVII, no. 432.
in French painting, Sappho is shown silenced - her lyre no longer functions - and preparing to die.

Images of her death had been seen before this point in book illustrations - for example, Blin de Sainmore's 1766 translation of Ovid's *Heroides*, which had illustrations by Choffard; and Moutonnet de Clairfons' 1773 translation of the work of four poets, including Sappho, with illustrations by Charles Eisen. However, I would argue that the Taillasson painting is a crucial turning point in Sappho's fate at the hands of French artists. In the books, the leap scene is just one of a series of engravings relating to her life and poetry. Eisen's depiction of Sappho going over the Leucadian cliff (plate 68) follows several other illustrations, including some which focus on her literary work: for example, one design is a literalisation of the poem fragment known as the 'Ode to Aphrodite' (plate 69). These images are of course also seen and interpreted within the immediate context of a tangible display of Sappho's literary achievement, the poetry itself translated in the book. It is only in the Salon painting that the moment of Sappho's suicide leap is privileged above other elements of her story in such a decisive way.

It is also in Taillasson's painting that the leap image becomes a frightening moment. In Eisen's 1773 illustration, the poet tumbles off a very small cliff, diving no more than five feet into the water below. A putto on the cliff cries theatrically, but this florid display of grief merely seems to blend with the swirling decorative curves of the image and its frame. Moreover, Sappho's poetry is still strongly represented here - the lyre, symbolic signifier of lyric poetry, hangs suspended in the centre of the design. As noted before, it is broken and discarded in Taillasson's 1791 painting. The cliff now appears considerably higher, and Taillasson gives us a clear view of the fear and distress expressed on Sappho's face. Her eyes are wide open with fright and pink from visible tears, her brow furrowed with apprehension (see detail, plate 65).

23 The institutional contexts of spectatorship for a book illustration and a Salon painting are of course quite different; however, it is worth making the comparison between these two images in order to reiterate how
It is worth noting however that in this painting, Sappho has not yet made her leap. The
tension in her body between the forward propulsion of her left leg and right arm, and the
hanging back of her head and other limbs mean that this energetic pose also signifies a
reluctance on Sappho’s part to jump. Her feet are also still planted firmly on the broad
flat rock that will serve as her springboard.

We do not know how Taurel and Courteille then showed Sappho’s leap in 1795 and
1800, but Gros’ 1801 version moved the moment that the painting depicted forward by a
crucial degree. The poet is depicted standing on a rocky precipice in the centre of a
dramatically moonlit scene, knees buckling, clutching her lyre to herself, just on the point
of falling over the edge: her body is no longer vertical, so her weight will soon pull her
over. I feel that this image is also decisive, in that it crosses another crucial boundary.
Whereas Taillasson left Sappho still firmly rooted to the ground, Gros actually takes her
over, focusing on the moment just after she has passed the point of no return. Her fall,
and thus her death, is inevitable.

Within these extant images of her suicide, Sappho is also shown in a progressively
weakened position. In Taillasson’s version, her stance thrusts her body forwards with
some force; despite the reluctant angle of her head, she is running to meet her fate. Gros
greatly reduces the energy of her pose; moreover, there is evidence that this was a quite
deliberate decision. A little-known preparatory oil sketch (1800-1801, private collection,
plate 70) shows that his initial conception of the moment was far more spirited.24 In a
position that takes Taillasson’s vision to an even more active level, Gros’ first Sappho
reaches forwards and upwards, making her whole body a strong diagonal gesture towards
the heavens. Her hair and clothing swirl around her, giving an impression of energy and
vitality. This is reinforced by the vivid colours and juxtaposition of the figure with the
fire burning brightly on the altar behind her. Even if this is Sappho’s last gesture, it is

24 Judith Stein notes the differences between the Gros sketch and the final version, but offers no further
presented here as a decisive move taken by a formidable woman, whose passion and poetry are centrally displayed: note the prominently positioned lyre. Yet all of this energy and resolve is edited out in the final version. Rather than leaping, she is reduced to merely falling, collapsing in on herself and gradually dropping, as if giving in to the inevitable pull of gravity.

Numerous elements in Gros’ painting echo the movement and deadliness of her leap: the shape of the rock behind her follows the line of her body and almost seems to push her off the edge; the highlighted areas of her thigh, knee and foot draw the eye to the line of her fall. The froth of highlighted transparent draperies around her feet lend an eroticised charge to her feet as they cease contact with the rock. The drop below her is then a remarkably steep one, emphasised by the vertical planes of rock on the cliff beneath her; moreover, Sappho’s precarious position is reiterated by the way in which the promontary from which she leaps is unsupported below by a cliff. If we compare back to the Taillasson version, we see how the spectator is also cast in what is potentially a much more precarious position. Instead of the cliff extending out towards the viewer as it does in the Taillasson, giving the spectator an imaginary platform on which to stand, in Gros’ version it cuts sharply away, leaving the viewer suspended in air as Sappho herself is.

How might different spectators have reacted to being placed in such a position? The critics noted the deadliness of Sappho’s pose, and some were uncomfortable with it. For example, the critic for the *Journal des Débats* objected: ‘Sappo tombe présentement: elle a déjà perdu l’a plomb, et nous croions ce moment mal choisi’.25 This was ostensibly on the grounds that painting should not try to create the effect of movement, but should choose a moment of rest. But two lines later we find out that the critic dislikes this moment because he finds it distasteful - he writes ‘Quoique fasse l’artiste, quoique dise le livret, une Sapho qui tombe ne saurait être qu’une femme suspendue, sans tenir à rien, entre un rocher et les eaux. Cela est également contraire au bon goût et au bon sens.’26

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On the other hand, one of the few critics who really praises Gros’ painting, writing for the *Journal de la Décade*, loves the sinister lighting and the abandon of Sappho’s pose: ‘Son pied replié, son corps hors d’a-plomb, annoncent que tout est fini pour elle. On ne peut pas mieux saisir un instant incommensurable, et qui exprime mieux le sujet.’

Whilst we do not have any records of female spectator’s reactions to seeing this work, we may imagine that such enthusiasm about Sappho’s deadly pose, or the similar suspended animation within which the spectator is placed, was less likely to be the feminine reaction. Would women spectators enjoy the voyeurism of witnessing at close range the moment of doom for this eroticised woman, her full breasts emphasised by tightly drawn fabric which erupts into a mass of curling transparent ruffles that intermingle with her hair? And / or, urged by the lack of a foreground to function as a platform for the spectator, would women identify with Sappho and imagine themselves in her precarious position? If so, does such a projection serve as a warning for any of those female spectators?

We can understand this image of Sappho as an admonitory figure for women in this spectatorship context. Neither her pleasure (her love for a younger man, and her pride in her work) nor her instruction (the motor behind her poetic creativity) can be acceptable models for feminine emulation. What we find, then, is a gendering of ‘plaire et instruire’, the tropes of the value of culture. The images, particularly Taillasson’s and Gros’ paintings, give (male) pleasure and (female) instruction in representing the futility of Sappho’s instruction, and the hopelessness of her pursuit of pleasure.

The moves to diminish Sappho in the leap images are also evident in the handful of works which do not show the suicide. Of the other paintings and drawings of Sappho produced in the 1790s and early 1800s, we know little as most are lost; however, we can anticipate that the majority probably echoed the representational modes used in the works already examined. Girodet painted a *Landscape with Sappho* in 1793 (private collection),

which reduces her to a tiny figure in the foreground. Noel sent a (now lost) landscape to the 1801 Salon, which also appears to have focused on the landscape rather than on the figure of Sappho.28

Similarly subtle in its diminution is Anatole Devosges’ representation of Sapho inspirée par l’amour, an drawing that was engraved by Copia (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 71); both were exhibited at the Salon of 1795. This ostensibly shows Sappho engaged in the creative process. The title informs us that she is receiving inspiration; this is reinforced by the symbols carved into the frieze in the background: Pegasus drinking at the fountain of the Hippocrene on Mount Helicon, sacred to the muses and a reference to fame and poetic genius. Yet in reality, Sappho has composed nothing yet in this image; the tablet simply bears the title of the first of her most famous poems, the Ode to Aphrodite. Her lyre in fact stands untouched on the table; indeed, rather than being inspired by Eros as he whispers into her ear, she seems more distracted. Love makes her turn away from her art, leaving her writing arm inert and her stylus pointing out of the scene.

Is it significant that there appear to be more words on the scroll behind the tablet, perhaps a letter to Phaon that recalls the epistle featured in Ovid’s Heroides (a despairing letter from the abandoned Sappho which Ovid invented)? If so, then this writing recalls her unhappiness and the desperation which led to her leap, rather than the glory attached to her poetry. The pose is also reminiscent of another Devosge image from the same period that Copia engraved, Innocence en Danger (c.1795, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 72), where the temptations offered by a cupid leaning over a young woman’s shoulder threaten to lead her astray. The lamb, symbol of innocence, purity and, notably, of unwarranted sacrifice, waits meekly for the outcome.

28 Noel, Sapho au printemps de son âge, va dans une forêt consacrée offrir sa lyre à Appollon (Salon of 1801, no. 259 bis). At the same Salon, Ansiaux exhibited a work simply entitled Sapho (no. 4, not located).
By association, this Sappho seems less inspired and instead to be morally weakened, a message which is reiterated by the carvings of Leda and the swan on the bed behind her. The swan was also renowned by classical writers as a bird which uttered a beautiful song when it died. Like the letter, this seems to recall her deathly leap. Added to the messages of diversion and inertia, this image ultimately presents Sappho as rather less than a great poet at work. Drawing on the same themes, Claude Ramey sent a plaster model of Sapho appuyée sur sa lyre, tenant une lettre adressée à Phaon to the Salon of 1796, (no. 645, illustrated here is the marble produced in an IX, Paris, musée du Louvre, plate 73). Here, Sappho leans on her lyre rather than sings poetry to its accompaniment, looking off dreamily to one side, accurately described by one critic in fairly diminishing terms as 'le petit nourrisson de Vénus'.

Harriet, David's young student, sent a drawing of Sapho et Anacréon to the 1796 Salon (no. 202), which is now lost. It presumably showed Sappho as a poet, but juxtaposed her with the male poet Anacreon. This pairing of the two archaic lyric poets was probably not an entirely egalitarian arrangement: since the first French translations of Sappho's poetry were published as appendices to translations of Anacreon, a tradition for Sappho to be the subordinate partner when paired with him was well established in France.

We should note that this diminishing treatment is specifically reserved for female poets from ancient Greece: this becomes obvious if we compare representations of Sappho with other depictions of Anacreon. Unlike Sappho, he is always shown as an active poet, as we see from some of the Salon works that featured him. At the 1795 Salon, Fleury exhibited a drawing, now lost, of Anacréon, le chantre des Amours, tenant sa lyre, sait resonner les louanges de Dieu par qui il est inspiré. Un jeune homme lui présente sa maîtresse, en lui disant: tu chantes l'amour et moi j'en goute les douceurs (no. 192).

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29 Observations tirées du Journal général de France sur l'exposition des Tableaux de 1796 par Mr. Ro...., C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 495, p. 1127. Another small sculpture, a clay figure by J.-P. Le Sueur referred to simply as Sapho, was also shown at the Salon of 1796 (no. 662, not located).

Anatole Devosges sent *Anacréon chantant ses poésies* to the same Salon (Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts), an image of the poet at work, if apparently in a rather dream-like state. Here, rather than distracting the poet, Cupid helps him to perform by plucking the strings of the lyre for him.

A last work to include here is an ink drawing by Hennequin of *Sapho*, which Jérémie Benoît dates between 1795 and 1798 (Silver Spring, Maryland, G. Levitine Collection, plate 74). Benoît does not comment on the curious iconography: Sappho is naked, perhaps having taken off her robe and placed it on the chair on which she tilts forward. The setting and Sappho’s action could refer to the descriptions in some versions of her story of the inscription of the names of all of those who have made the jump: is Sappho here acting as the muse Clio, writing her own name down for posterity?31 This reading may be reinforced by the laureated bust which stands behind her.

However, this potential reference to Sappho’s long term fame (notably as a suicide victim rather than as a writer), is accompanied by a rather strange treatment of her naked body. The upper part of her body appears masculinised: her torso does not seem to be that of a woman. Is this a reference to ‘mascula Sappho’, the epithet which Horace gave Sappho because of her public success and her questioned sexuality? Certainly, Hennequin has defeminised Sappho’s body by representing her with no visible breasts, and has thus depicted her in a way which might condemn her as an unnatural woman.32

What we see from studying this group of works as a whole is that there was firstly a great increase in the depiction of Sappho during this period, particularly during the 1790s and early 1800s. There was also an overwhelming move away from representing Sappho as an active, creative poet: whilst the early versions by Fragonard and Vien were couched in terms of soft erotic femininity and love, they still depicted her as *engagée* in her work in

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31 Lantier’s version of the narrative in particular is specific in noting that the names of all those who leapt from the rock were recorded at the site.
ways that later artists did not. Moreover, a prominent trend in Salon paintings to
privilege Sappho’s suicide leap and total abandonment of poetry is seen to be
underscored by progressive shifts, evident between Taillasson’s version and Gros’
successive renditions of the subject, both to weaken Sappho’s energy and resolve, and to
depict her fall at a stage where she has gone beyond the point of return. In order to
interpret these shifts with a degree of accuracy, I will trace and examine prevailing
assumptions and ideas about Sappho at the end of the eighteenth century, initially by
looking at the texts which presented narratives and opinions about her to artists and
audiences.

3. Contextualising Sappho - written fictions and how they inform our understanding
of shifts in visual representations

As Joan DeJean’s work has shown, the quantity and range of textual sources about
Sappho produced in the eighteenth century is substantial. They include history books like
Rollin’s counterpart to his history of Rome, the Histoire Ancienne des Egyptiens, des
Carthaginois... (Paris, 1730-1738), which has several brief mentions of Sappho; and
dictionaries like Bayle’s Dictionnaire Historique et Critique (Rotterdam, 1697,
consistently republished in the eighteenth century), and Fabricius’ Biblioteca Graeca
(Paris, 1704, updated in 1791). Many translations of Sappho’s poetry appeared in the
eighteenth century, usually with some biographical notes attached to them. Most
frequently republished were the editions by Moutonnet de Clairfons (1773, 1774, 1780),
and Billardon de Sauvigny (1777, 1781).

32 We know that Hennequin did later produce a single sheet edition lithograph of a Sapho au Rocher de
Leucade, which appeared in the Recueil de lithographes that he collected together and published in 1825 (a
complete set of which can be found in the Bibliothèque du Séminaire de Tournai).
33 Moutonnet de Clairfons trans., Anacréon, Sapho, Bion, et Moschus (Paris, 1773); Billardon de Sauvigny,
trans., Poésies de Sapho, suivies de différentes poésies dans le même genre (Paris, 1777). See DeJean
(1989) for a full list and analysis of all editions of Sappho’s poetry from the mid sixteenth to early
twentieth centuries.
Fictional works which presented themselves as history are a particularly strong element in the textual construction of Sappho during this period. Often taking their cue from Ovid’s *Heroides*, a collection of letters from famous abandoned lovers which included an epistle from Sappho to Phaon, these works provide some of the most detailed additions to the range of contemporaneous information and ideas about Sappho. Blin de Sainmore’s *Lettre de Sapho à Phaon* (Paris, 1766) is a direct update of the Ovidian concept, whilst other authors extend their Sappho histories into other literary genres. Jean du Castre D’Auvigny’s *L’Histoire et les amours de Sapho de Mytilène, avec une lettre qui contient des reflexions sur les accusations formées contre ses moeurs* (Paris, 1724) is a loose biography that focuses on Sappho’s love life, its author described by DeJean as ‘the reinventor of Sappho as a heroine of his century’s equivalent of the dime-store novel.’

The most popular, and according to DeJean, the most influential of these fictional histories were two travelogues, where history is presented via the matrix of travellers journeying around the regions where ancient history took place, meeting important characters and hearing their stories or witnessing their actions. The first to appear was Abbé Barthélemy’s *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* (Paris 1788, with subsequent editions in 1790 and 1799). Etienne Lantier’s *Voyages d’Anténor en Grèce et en Asie* followed in 1797 (reprinted in 1801), a fictional work that presented itself as a translation of a manuscript recently excavated at Herculaneum. These two works give a comparatively large amount of detail on Sappho’s leap at Leucadia; Lantier foregrounds the leap further by starting his account of the meeting between his protagonists and Sappho with this event, and then using flashbacks and an account supposedly by Sappho herself to tell the rest of the story. In response to these works then came Chaussard’s fiercely critical *Fêtes et courtisanes de la Grèce: supplément aux voyages d’Anacharsis et d’Anténor* (Paris, 1801), which attacked the way in which these authors (particularly Barthélemy) defended Sappho’s often criticised morals.

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There were also several theatrical productions in the 1790s which may further have informed both artists and spectators about Sappho. One is by a woman author, Constance Pipelet (later the Princesse de Salm-Dyck): *Sapho, tragédie mêlée de chants*, with music by J.P.E. Martini, performed 1794 in Paris at the Théâtre des Amis de la Patrie. Marsollier’s *Le Rocher de Leucade* (1799) and Charles Louis Didelot’s ballet *Sappho et Phaon*, first produced in Paris in 1797, also added to the dramatic renditions of Sappho’s final and fatal love affair. Finally, there are also other works which refer to Sappho in a more indirect but still significant manner. These include the anonymous pornographic novel *La Nouvelle Sapho, ou histoire de la Secte Anandryne* (Paris, an II), and a succession of works by Mme de Staël, whose heroines identify or intersect in some manner with Sappho (such as *Delphine, Corinne* and later *Sapho*).

An examination of this range of texts enables us to reconstruct an overview of the main ideas and assumptions in operation about Sappho’s life and death in late eighteenth-century France. Firstly, we find that they do support the notion that her suicide can be interpreted as a symbolic punishment rather than as self-repossession, as a form of destruction which is not necessarily self-imposed, even if it is presented as suicide.

Firstly, we should note that leaping from the Leucadian Rock was not strictly speaking an act of suicide. All of the texts which describe the leap in detail make it very clear that making the jump was a kill-or-cure ritual ceremony. The love-sick person would either survive and be cured of their unhappy state, or would perish in the sea and find peace through death. The decisive factor was usually the gods; still, the possibility of Sappho’s survival and cure is presented in all of the texts. Secondly, we should remember that this is not Sappho’s own story - there is no evidence whatsoever that Sappho actually died in

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35 DeJean (1989), p.137
36 This was only published privately in 1810.
37 Madelyn Gutwirth, for example, argues that Sappho’s suicide is self re-possession as written by Mme de Staël in successive novels, citing Starobinski’s analysis of Staël’s heroine Delphine, for whom ‘only in the act of dying can she be restored to the sense of self she had lost in love.’ (See M. Gutwirth, *Mme de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Urbana, 1978), p. 265.
38 For example, see Lantier (1797), vol. I, p. 210; or Barthélemy (1799), vol. III, p. 345.
this way. It is a fiction produced and developed by later writers and painters. I would
dispute that from the very first time the leap appears in a fiction of Sappho, it is done to
diminish her. The initial source for stories about Sappho’s supposed leap seems to be
Menander, the comic playwright working in the fourth century BC who, along with his
contemporaries, delighted in ridiculing Sappho in his work. The fact that the end result
of this leap is death - the silence of Sappho’s poetic voice and the destruction of her
person - should not be overlooked. Through both texts and visual representations,
Sappho is made to collude with the fiction of her suicide.

The texts also indicate that this particular form of suicide has a strong connection with
punishment and ritual sacrifice. The blending of the story of the love-cure leap with the
cult of the white rock of Cape Leucas adds an element of victimisation to the suicide.
Strabo, a contemporary of Ovid, originally mentions both Sappho’s suicide and an
ancient ritual practised by the Leukadians where they sacrificed a guilty person to Apollo,
by throwing him over the cliff in order to avert evil. DeJean notes the link made in
seventeenth-century French fictions of Sappho between her suicide and her ability to
function as a scapegoat. I have found that this scapegoat sacrifice tradition is reiterated
in the eighteenth century and juxtaposed with Sappho’s leap in Abbé Barthélemy’s
influential book. His two protagonists witness the enforced leap from the rock of a
criminal as part of a ritual sacrifice ceremony, just before Sappho’s attempt and death are
noted.

Through this textual juxtaposition, Sappho’s ability to function as a scapegoat when she
makes her leap is affirmed. It is also explicit in Pipelet’s play, where Sappho is referred to
several times as being a victim. Her father angrily denounces the idea of letting the gods
decide her fate at Leucadia, and refers to the leap in terms of a sacrificial offering, saying

39 A fragment of Menander’s play The Leukadia contains an allusion to Sappho jumping to her death
41 See DeJean (1989), pp. 69-70. It is found specifically in Anne Le Fèvre Dacier’s 1681 translation of Les
Poesies d’Anacréon et de Sapho.
42 Barthélemy (1799), vol. III, p. 344-345.
in exasperation to his stubborn daughter: ‘Allez leur présenter une victime humaine!’.

Sappho retains this terminology to describe herself and her action in her dying speech. Looking down from the rock, she sees the boat containing the fleeing Phaon and her ex-pupils Cléis and Damophile, rocked by the stormy sea. She cries: ‘Sauvez-les, sauvez-les, c’est à moi de mourir!’, and at the moment of her leap, forgives Phaon and asks to be taken in his place. Her last words are addressed to the gods: ‘Contentez-vous d’une victime, / Voilà Sapho, recevez-la.’

The sacrificial tradition is also visualised in the frontispiece by Bomet to volume one of Lantier’s *Voyages d’Anténor*: this shows boats filled with people waiting for the outcome of the leap.

The form of death which ends Sappho’s narrative is a punitive addition, where the poet functions as a scapegoat victim.

How do these texts then inform specifically the prominent visual representations of the death? Of course, both Taillasson and Gros have to edit out much of the information they might have found in the source texts in order to arrive at a single moment for the action in the painting. However, it is interesting to note that as well as choosing the scene of her suicide rather than any of the passages which tell of her work as a poet, teacher or mentor, they also both choose to edit out other key elements of the textual descriptions of her death leap.

DeJean has noted how often writers ‘revel in fictions in which Sappho is transformed into the archetypal abandoned woman, is physically humiliated, and in which her sexuality is normalized.’ However, the writers who describe her death scene in detail all retain some kind of balance between Sappho as desperately unhappy, and Sappho as extremely angry and forceful. In Lantier’s version, when a priest tells Anténor and Phanor where to look for Sappho before the leap, he describes her mood as not only melancholic, but also angry: "Vous la voyez non loin qui se promène sur le bord du promontoire, le visage

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43 Pipelet (1810), Act I, sc.ii.
44 Pipelet (1810), Act III, sc.vii.
45 Frontispiece to vol. I of Lantier (1797), designed by Bomet, engraved by Jourdain, which carries the legend ‘Qui que vous soyés, je vous recommande ma sépulture. Je meurs victime de l’amour et de l’ingratitude.’
pâle, abattu, ses yeux sont attachés à la terre, elle rêve profondément et paraît immobile: maintenant elle marche à grands pas, l’air très agité, le visage enflammé de colère; elle gesticule, regarde le ciel, qu’elle accuse de ses malheurs; elle s’avance sur l’extrémité du rocher.”

This is just one of many points in this text, as in the others, when Sappho’s anger at the loss of her dignity and her poetic gift is made explicit. In Pipelet’s play, Sappho is also a woman who, amidst her misery, still has the capacity to be extremely angry. For example, when her ex-favourite pupil Cléis comes back to beg forgiveness, after having run off with Phaon and thus causing Sappho so much pain, the poet is furious. Later, when Sappho finds Cléis with Phaon for a second time, the stage directions are that she should explode with anger against Phaon - ‘elle éclate’; she pushes Phaon away when he tries to calm her down. Even Rollin, who overall says comparatively little about Sappho, describes the same balance of anger and misery: ‘On dit qu’au désespoir & furieuse de l’opiniâtre résistance que Phaon jeune homme de Lesbos opposoit à ses désirs, elle se précipita dans la mer du haut du promontoire de Leucade’.

That some form of force or strength is missing from these visual representations was a criticism voiced in the texts of several commentators. The author of the *Lettres analytiques, critiques et philosophiques sur les tableaux du Sallon* was disappointed with the way that Taillasson interpreted the subject in 1791: he wrote that ‘elle ne montre pas qu’elle veuille se précipiter de ce lieu, et si elle tombe ce ne sera pas par une volonté particulière’. The critic of the *Chronique de Paris* goes further in his assertion that Taillasson’s Sappho does not seem to be leaping of her own volition: ‘il semble que Sapho a plus l’air de fuir un ennemi qui la poursuit, et d’être arrêtée dans sa course à la [gré?] d’une précipice, que d’être arrêtée au sommet d’un rocher pour s’en précipiter dans

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47 Lantier (1797), vol. I, p. 213.
48 Pipelet (1810), Act I, sc.iii.
49 Pipelet (1810), Act II, sc.ix.
50 Rollin (1730-1738), vol. XII, p. 41.
Similarly, the critic for the Journal des Débats in 1801 felt that Gros’ Sappho looked too frightened: ‘Il y a peut-être trop de peur dans l’expression de la tête de l’amante désespérée de Phaon’. This seems to indicate that there was some interpretation of these representations as showing a figure who appeared to be persecuted, rather than one who reclaimed her life for herself through death.

The contextualisation of the paintings with written sources about Sappho also makes it clear that both Taillasson and Gros chose not to show her surrounded by crowds of witnesses as the narratives described, but instead leaping alone. All of the textual sources presentations of Sappho’s narrative note that the Leucadian leap was a ritual watched by a great many people. They emphasise that the crowds were particularly heavy when Sappho jumped, because she was such a celebrated figure. Lantier’s notes on the funeral rites then make it clear that she was properly mourned, her body on show for twenty four hours whilst a chorus of wailing women mourned her death. Pipelet also describes such hommage in her play, where Sappho’s death is even described as ‘un trépas glorieux’. However, this implied glory does not appear in the paintings. The fact that both Taillasson and Gros show Sappho alone is something that was heavily criticised at the time. While noting, as many of Gros’ critics do, that his Sappho is too green and too sleepy, the author of Arlequin au muséum also objects to the lack of historical verisimilitude here:

‘Le saut de Leucade, cette épreuve terrible que tentaient quelques amans malheureux, pour trouver la fin de leurs peines, était une cérémonie, une fête presque se faisant avec pompe, en plein jour et à la vue d’une foule immense qui se portait sur le rivage. Pourquoi nous représente-t-on ici Sapho seule au milieu de la nuit?’.

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54 This evidence indicates that commentators noticed to some extent this diminishing strategy; however, I do not wish to imply that they defended Sappho or what she represented. Their criticisms are far more likely to be those of the classically educated professional viewer who sees an opportunity to score points through an attack on a painting’s apparent lack of verisimilitude.
56 Pipelet (1810), Act II, sc.i.
By making this decision to show Sappho alone, and with less force and energy, both Taillasson and Gros also deny her one of the central conventions of the heroic historical suicide. This is not to say that it would ever have been likely that Sappho would have been shown arranging her own death with the same forceful conviction as Socrates, Cato or Caius Gracchus. As I will investigate via analysis of representations of Lucretia in the next chapter, gender is a key complicating factor in the depiction of historical suicides, and women are rarely allowed such grand and noble gestures as their male counterparts.

However, women from the ancient past who attempted or succeeded in suicide were frequently shown with a group of witnesses. It was central to the heroic representation of historical suicide that other people be included in the picture. As we see from Topino-Lebrun’s 1798 painting of _La mort de Caius Gracchus_ (1798, Marseille, Musée des Beaux-Arts, plate 75), the public nature of this act is crucial to its communication of moral censure. The other figures in the painting function both as a sign of regret that this action is necessary, imploring the hero not to carry out his action; and also act as witnesses for posterity. As we will see in the next chapter, witnesses were a consistent element in representations of Lucretia’s suicide. They were also a common factor in depictions of the attempt by Seneca’s wife Pauline to follow her husband into death, an action which was discovered and halted by Nero. Taillasson painted this theme for the state after winning a Prix d’encouragement in 1791, and the result was exhibited at the 1793 Salon (no.112, now in Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 76). Pauline, even though ultimately prevented from achieving her noble aim of loyal self-sacrifice, is attended by a crowd of men and women who both revive her, and are both shocked and awed by her heroic attempt at self-sacrifice and public censure of Nero. Even though Sappho is not making her leap as a moral gesture in quite the same way as Lucretia and Pauline, it could have been shown as a more noble end.

Instead, these artists (particularly Gros) align the leaping Sappho with other far less heroic models. The strangely inert pose that Gros ultimately chose for Sappho is
reminiscent of the posthumous portrait of Christine Boyer that he was working on during the same period (1800-1801, Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 77). Boyer was the first wife of Lucien Bonaparte, who died on 14 May 1800 at the age of twenty four. She stands similarly marooned on a rock surrounded by water, pale and folded in on herself. The movement of Sappho’s fall is here transferred to the rose, which has been interpreted as a symbol of Boyer’s life, that is swept away by the fast-flowing water below her.\(^5\) In both cases, the rock functions as a boundary between life and death.\(^6\) The similarity with Boyer’s portrait informs the representation of Sappho with the same air of melancholic meditation on death, where melancholy manifests itself as inertia. As a choice of a mode of representation, this aligns the Gros painting with a very quiet, private strand of the art of death, that of grieving at tombs, rather than with the passion and vigour of the heroic historical suicide.

Finally, we see from a comparison of the paintings and the texts that it is only really in the visual representations of her that she is truly silenced. In Pipelet’s play, it is interesting that Sappho only momentarily loses her words (quite literally), at the point of her discovery of Phaon’s renewed betrayal. She stutters: ‘Je lui dirai ... Là-haut ... Là-bas Partout ... Ici! ... / N’est-il point là? ... Je le vois! ... Oui ... / Que me disiez-vous donc? ... Non, non, ce n’est pas lui! ... / Ce n’est pas lui ... Ce n’est rien ... Je frissonne; / Il n’est point là! ... Cependant je le vois ... / Je le vois là ...’.\(^6\) However, her voice returns to its customary eloquence for her later decisions about her fate and her death speech. In the other texts, her words live on to some extent, either through her poems, or in the case of the Lantier version, through the manuscript which she arranges to have posthumously published should she die during the leap. It is with a statement of great control over the

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\(^{5}\) The story is found as a supplement to the account of Seneca’s death in Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.


\(^{6}\) Gregory Nagy has examined the appearance of the white rock of Leukas in ancient texts, pointing out how in both Anacreon and Euripides, falling from the white rock is parallel to falling in a swoon, either from intoxication or from love. He traces the motif of jumping as sexual relief, followed by unconsciousness or sleep, and asserts that ‘the White Rock is the boundary delimiting the conscious and the unconscious - be it a trance, stupor, sleep or even death.’ See G. Nagy, ‘Phaethon, Sappho’s Phaon and the White Rock of Leukas’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. LXXVII (1973), p. 147.
presentation of her words to posterity that Sappho hands the manuscript to Lantier’s two protagonists before mounting the rock: ‘vous direz que Sapho trahie, désespérée, déjà couverte des ombres de la mort, a eu assez de force d’esprit, d’empire sur sa douleur, pour déposer dans le sein de la postérité son infortune et le crime de Phaon.’ However, the painted Sapphos have no such control over their words; their lyres are abandoned or silenced, and so consequently are they.

The evidence of the paintings viewed in the context of textual evidence of contemporaneous ideas about Sappho indicates that in the increased visual imagery of her produced during this period, she was diminished. In some cases, she was even ritually killed off, shown in just the moment when she is seen to collude with an imposed fantasy of her death. We will discuss the question of why it appears that artists demean Sappho to a greater extent than writers later in the chapter. At this point, I want to focus on the issue of what Sappho signified to those who enacted these strategies upon her represented body.

4. Finding the target: who or what is censured in these works?

We have noted DeJean’s assertion that the target of this strategy is female homosexuality, and Tanyol’s that what is chiefly under attack in the Gros painting particularly is Classicism. Yet the evidence does not in the first instance point to either of these suggestions as an effective explanation for this particular ritual sacrifice. Apart from the analysis of visual representations which has shown the extent to which moves to diminish Sappho focus on her work as a writer, the textual evidence similarly shows that first and foremost, Sappho was a signifier for the creative female.

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61 Pipelet (1810), Act III, sc.vi.
62 Lantier (1797), p. 216.
Firstly, the Sappho that is presented in these texts is not overwhelmingly homosexual. DeJean indeed argues at length that this element of Sappho’s biographical narrative is not part of her eighteenth-century incarnation, and asserts that after the seventeenth-century debates, the fictions of Sappho and fictions of the lesbian do not intersect again until the late nineteenth century. It is then difficult to accept that homosexuality is the primary target of this strategy of diminution at the end of the eighteenth century: what is being killed off is already not there. Nor is female homosexuality re-inserted in any visible manner into the beautiful, highly feminine Sapphos which the artists who depict the leap envisage.

However, to play devil’s advocate, a re-examination of the texts shows that in fact, there are some references to Sappho’s homosexuality. Barthélemy’s defence of Sappho’s love for her female pupils as part of her passionate form of expression and the emotional, friendly nature of the Greek people, indicates that this issue had not totally disappeared. Lantier also felt the need to refute the charge of homosexuality when he explained it as a vicious rumour started by spiteful women on Lesbos; however, even by denying it, he restated the accusation: ‘les femmes l’ont accusée d’un goût très-vif et illicite pour leur sexe’.

Further evidence that homosexuality was still an issue which Sappho evoked is provided by an erotic text from the period. Oddly, Joan DeJean insists that lesbian stories which use Sappho’s name, like ‘Sapho ou les Lesbiennes’ in V.J.E de Jouy’s La Galerie des Femmes (1799) have nothing to do with the traditional poet figure. However, this is certainly not the case in the anonymous work La Nouvelle Sapho, ou histoire de la Secte Anandryne (Paris, an II). Apart from the obvious similarity of the names, many other references are made to the ancient poet and her irrevocable function as a signifier for female homosexuality.

63 DeJean (1989), p. 120.
64 Barthélemy (1799) vol. II, p. 61.
In this work, the central character is a young girl who recounts her sexual adventures, many of which occurred when she ran away from home and ended up as the lesbian partner of a Mme de Furiel, who operates a homosexual sect for women on the lines of an erotic house of vestal virgins. The girl is given the name of Sapho because of her much commented upon clitoris, described both as ‘diabolique’ and ‘magnifique’, and the equal of her ancient poetic predecessor: ‘Sapho n’en eut pas un plus beau; tu sera ma Sapho.’ During her initiation into the sect, a statue of Sappho is venerated, and she is described as ‘la plus ancienne et la plus connue des Tribades.’ Songs mostly taken from her poetic oeuvre are sung as part of the ceremony; moreover, in a report by the president of the sect (the actress Mlle de Raucourt) to the assembled lesbians, Sappho’s poems are understood as a systematisation of the art of female homosexual love, and as a central element of the world history of lesbianism.

However, the girl who is given Sapho’s name is not only a signifier of lesbianism; indeed much of the novel deals with her life after she discovers men and leaves the sect to become first a mistress then a prostitute, her story following the familiar pattern of downfall until she is pregnant with an illegitimate child. In fact, the dominant characterisation of this young woman is that she is a nymphomaniac driven by the uncontrollable urges of her clitoris; these start with disturbing antics in early childhood and blossom into a wide range of depraved behaviour, of which lesbian sex is just one. This ‘Sapho’ is then ultimately a sign for general female sexual immorality and excess.

This, I would argue, is the most dominant signification of Sappho’s sexuality in all of these texts: she is portrayed as overly passionate and immoral. References to her lesbianism are made only as part of this general characterisation. Moreover, this presentation of Sappho’s uncontrollable passion is in turn inextricably linked to her creative talents. The two elements are frequently juxtaposed in initial introductions of

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65 Lantier (1797), p. 336, n. 46.
66 Note the homophonic reference to the Fury in this transgressive woman’s name.
68 La Nouvelle Sapho (an II), p. 52.
For example, Rollin’s assessment of Sappho notes her fame as a poet, but also takes a stern moral stance on her reputed sexual conduct: ‘Il seroit à souhaiter que la pureté de ses moeurs eût répondu à la beauté de son génie, & qu’elle n’eût pas déshonoré son sexe par ses vices & par ses dérèglements.’ In the very title of his book, d’Auvigny highlights the conjunction of her love-life and criticised morals with her writing. Sappho’s ability to write is then frequently linked to the fluctuations of her passions, whether she is writing to celebrate her love, to soothe her aching heart after betrayal, or despairing because the loss of the object of her passion has silenced her muse.

Notably the only author to foreground the issue of Sappho’s homosexuality and general immorality, Chaussard, does so in order to attack her writing. In his 1801 reply to the works of Barthélemy and Lantier, he is furious at the way that these authors glossed over what he terms ‘cette perversion de goûts qui font rougir la nature’. He is particularly outraged by Barthélemy’s explanation of Sappho’s lesbianism as simply excess passion: ‘Détour ridicule! vain et pusillanime ménagement! tracer ainsi l’histoire, c’est la défigurer.... Oserai-je le dire! Barthélemy a écrit l’histoire en abbé ... il a peint Sapho en fantaisie, et il a presque donné le voile d’une vestale à une tribade.’ However, Chaussard’s real motivation for this outburst soon becomes evident. It is part of an overall slur on her morals, and inextricably linked to his presentation of her work: Chaussard uses Sappho’s homosexuality as a basis for a denigration of her poetic talents. The chief aim of her poetry according to Chaussard is to ensnare lovers, and her fame is described as specifically related to the production of erotic poetry only.

Thus Sappho’s homosexuality is only a weapon with which Chaussard can attack his real target: her status as a great poet. We cannot ignore that this is what Sappho chiefly signifies in these texts: the celebrated writer, the successful (if doomed) literary woman. Barthélemy for example gives her a top rating along with the male poet Alcaeus: ‘tous

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70 See for example Lantier (1797), pp. 252-253; and Pipelet (1794), Act II, sc.xi.
72 See Chaussard (1801), vol. IV, pp. 211-212.
deux placés au premier rang des poètes lyriques." In Lantier’s version, Sappho herself foregrounds her talents and fame when she criticises her thankless, treacherous lover: ‘l’ingrat Phaon me doit tout, son esprit, ses connoissances, sa célébrité; j’ai rendu son nom immortel en l’attachant au mien. Si Vénus m’a dénié la beauté, cette fleur fragile, Minerve m’a donné les talens, le génie, présents célestes, bien supérieurs à la beauté’.

Sappho represents the woman writer far more than she represents female homosexuality in these texts; her immorality is part of that portrayal of the creative female. This is an area which we will investigate further in the examination of representations of Aspasia, who is characterised in remarkably similar ways and yet who is never accused of homosexuality. I would also say that Sappho stands (and falls) as a sign for the creative female far more than as a symbol of Classicism. This is not to discount Tanyol’s arguments altogether; however, his interpretation of what Sappho signifies is rather unbalanced. As he himself notes, the narrative of Sappho’s suicide does not resound with the sorts of stoic gestures most associated with classical heroes and heroines: ‘her choice of suicide for love, not honour, though a moving scenario for the Werthers and Atalas of the literary world, was unbecoming of a classical poet.’

Does Sappho then function so effectively as a symbol of the Classicism so associated with the pre-Napoleonic revolutionary authorities? It rather seems as if Gros has chosen the runt of the litter for his state-sanctioned execution.

The person that so many French artists chose to represent was not the embodiment of a deviant sexuality, nor of Classicism; she overwhelmingly signified the creative female. She also had characteristics which were noticeably similar to the sorts of women writers and intellectuals who frequently came under attack in late eighteenth-century France. The texts reveal that Sappho was not only thought of as a woman poet with questionable morals; she was also portrayed as a ‘salonnière’, and as a teacher or leader of women. D’Auvigny described her as a salonnière playing host to the town’s most ‘galant’ society;

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74 Lantier (1797), p. 215.
Barthélemy is only one of many writers to describe her as the leader of an informal female academy after the death of her husband. Pipelet's play portrays her as the head of a school for girls, whose pupils are amongst those who both betray and support her.

In Bathélemy's text, she is even presented as a political activist. This attribute seems to have been entirely invented by French Hellenists, who wilfully misread a worn section of the Parian marble to corroborate their fiction. In his first edition, published in 1788, Barthélemy explained Sappho's voyage to Sicily as political exile after being involved by Alcaeus in a conspiracy against the dictator Pittacus. It is interesting that this fiction was initially very short lived in French texts. It had been changed by the time the 1799 edition appeared (notably, it was the only element of Barthélemy's representation of Sappho that did change between the editions). In the later version, the trip to Sicily was described as being in response to rumours and unpleasantness started by jealous women from amongst those studying with her. This serves to take away from Sappho any image of her as a heroic fighter for liberation from Dictatorship; simultaneously, it reduces the notion of her academy from one of a serious place of literary discussion and learning to a group of vituperative, bickering women whose collectivity will be short-lived because of their jealous natures.

In the light of the evidence already presented in Chapter Two of this thesis, we can see that a potentially politicised leader of women might well be the target of an aesthetically enacted attack. As a female writer too, she does not win over many more allies. There is no shortage of contextual evidence which shows that female authors, and indeed creative and intellectual women in general, were often the subject of attack in debates about women's role in society. As Carla Hesse has recently shown, these debates increased both during and immediately after the Revolution in direct response to an increase in

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76 Barthélemy (1799), vol. II, p. 61.
female publishing activity, as women took advantage of the breakdown in publishing controls to advance their work and opinions.80

Geneviève Fraisse has traced the debates on the reasoning capacity of women at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century in France.81 She explores the ideas from earlier periods, developed by Rousseau, Diderot and others, which culminate in Sylvain Maréchal’s proposal of 1801 that women should be forbidden to learn to read, or indeed engage in any other form of creative activity (including writing and painting).82 Obviously, this particular document and the debate that it started is situated at the end of the period in which these images of Sappho were produced and seen; however, Fraisse shows that it reframes (in a radical form, and for the post-revolutionary context) ideas which had been current since the 1760s.

Fraisse examines the arguments, often circular, around concepts of nature, reason, biology and soul; and how these factors were differently perceived as determinants of women’s intellectual capacity. She also explores how often these debates are ultimately rooted in questions of the appropriateness of women’s knowledge for their social destiny, and their exclusion from citizenship.

There are strong claims in the texts which Fraisse examines that intellectual activity leads to unhappiness for women themselves, particularly as far as love is concerned, and that it has disastrous results for marriages and child rearing.83 This is a theme which is also explored in an anonymous satirical play which ridicules women writers and so-called female intellectuals, Les femmes Beaux-Esprits, ou les Beaux-Esprits Femelles, Comédie

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82 S. Maréchal, Projet d’une loi portant défense d’apprendre à lire aux femmes, Paris, 1801. This is to some extent a tongue-in-cheek fictitious document, but it uses a serious legal format and its author was not ridiculing the views he expressed. Several pamphlets were published in reply to it; see Fraisse (1994), pp. 1-36 for full details. Earlier discourse centres around works like J.-J. Rousseau, Émile, ou l’éducation (1762), D. Diderot, Sur les femmes (1772), and P. Roussel, Système physique et moral de la femme (1775).
en Cinq Actes et en Vers (London and Paris, 1788). The main characters are two women, Mme Forlis and Mme de l’Arson, who live apart from their husbands and spend so much time writing verses that they neglect their domestic and maternal duties. Mme Forlis is on the point of losing her daughter (who almost elopes to certain ruin) before she realises that she must stop holding salons and concentrate instead on caring for her children.

Interestingly, this play makes frequent references to antique intellectual women, in particular Sappho: Mme Forlis is repeatedly referred to as ‘Sapho’ or ‘moderne Sapho’. The women’s intellectual activity is specifically denounced as ludicrous self-deception in this play. They are shown throughout to be utterly stupid, and in a condemnatory postscript, the author ends with a cutting question: ‘Vous, dames si pénétrantes, si lumineuses, ne vous doutez jamais qu’on vous flatte par intérêt, & qu’intérieurement on se moque de vous?’

Maréchal’s text makes direct links between knowledgeable women and immorality, infertility, and the decline of republics, citing historical examples which include Louise Labbé, who was dubbed the ‘Sappho of her age’. Fraisse notes from her overview of these texts that such presentations of intellectual women were common during this period, noting that: ‘their excellence is denied; they are accused of changing their sex; they are denounced as courtisans’. She then cites Virey’s assertion from 1823 that ‘Women who were most distinguished in their careers have often deserved the epithet *mascula*, which Horace gave to Sappho: for many women of letters have been noted for their more erotic constitution, in comparison with other women.’

Fraisse also considers the views of some literary women and ‘femmes d’esprit’, exploring how they are often denigrated and ridiculed in the debate, how they take part in it themselves and how they express their own experience of being an intellectual woman. Two women’s opinions are frequently expressed: Mme de Staël and Constance de Salm,

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who was formerly Constance Pipelet, author of the 1794 play about Sappho. Again, intersections with Sappho are apparent: apart from the fact that both women engaged with her as a character in their literary work, there were also similarities with Sappho in their personal circumstances. Both were successful writers who presided over literary salons. Although neither produced memoirs, both women alluded to their life in their writing, and managed to suggest what their experience was: for instance, Mme de Staël devoted an entire chapter of her book *De la Littérature*, published in 1800, to women who ‘undertake the pursuit of letters’ and the difficulties of taking up this challenge.

Madelyn Gutwirth has explored the parallels between the problems faced by the women of genius that Staël writes about, such as her characters Delphine and Corinne, and the difficulties that Staël faced in her own life. In particular, she returns several times to an issue which is played out in Sappho’s personal drama: the troublesome question of how love and genius could be reconciled in a woman, or whether the two were mutually exclusive and doomed to result in unhappiness. We should note that there were several portraits painted of Staël in the guise of these characters, for example Vigée Lebrun’s 1808 portrait of *Mme de Staël as Corinne* and Gérard’s 1819 posthumous painting of *Mme de Staël as Corinne at Cape Miseno*, where the poet finds she is so overcome by emotion that she is unable to sing. These portraits, in particular Vigée-Lebrun’s, which bears a very strong resemblance to other portraits of Staël, reinforce the notion that Staël and her contemporaries perceived a strong connection between herself and women like Sappho and Corinne. As Gill Perry has discussed, women artists outside France also frequently appropriated Sappho’s identity for use in portraits of literary women.

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87 Fraisse (1994) traces how both Salm and Staël deal with issues of freedom for women, both in love and in thought, in their literature (in her fourth chapter, ‘The Politics of the Exception’, pp. 103-137).
Texts about intellectual women also reveal anxiety over the rebirth of female salon culture; this in particular may inform the artistic moves to diminish Sappho. Fraisse finds in contemporary discourse both an acceptance of this kind of female influence, as a compromise position on the involvement of women in the public sphere - it is a relatively indirect form of involvement - and also an unease about influence where it is visible, for example in a salon, which is a semi-public space.91 There were, for example, scathing attacks in the press in autumn 1792 on Mme Roland, where she was depicted as a Messalina and a whore, her salon as a hotbed of intrigue.92 Later on, Napoleon exiled Mme de Staël not only because of her views about France, but also because of the place in which she discussed them. He considered her salon to be a political club, and he used this as a legitimating excuse for exiling this woman whose consistently oppositional stance he found to be a threat.93

It seems therefore that there are a substantial number of points of intersection between the dominant diminishing rhetoric about intellectual or literary women, and the shifts that I have examined in visual representations of Sappho. The issue of subtle disparagement is a factor that Fraisse considers directly. She examines the way that Sappho was referred to as the 'tenth muse' by Plato, and at how contemporary women writers were also referred to in the same way. Her interpretation that this is not simply a straightforward accolade is one that I very much support. Judith Stein, for example, refuses to see it as anything other than wholehearted praise for a creative woman; however, the evidence clearly indicates that this was in fact a double-edged compliment.94

Fraisse asserts that it is simpler to elevate woman to the status of a muse - in Sappho's case, her own muse - because she is then at least partially out of the real sphere of actual creativity, so she cannot rival man in his achievement.95 We can note that in the preface to her play, Pipelet locates the source of the criticism levelled at Sappho as just such a

discontent on the part of male writers, who ‘se voient exposés au danger de trouver des rivales dans un sexe où ils ne cherchent que des admiratrices’.\textsuperscript{96} Not only does a muse not rival man, she also helps and supports him in his own talent. This brings us back to the notion of woman being in a position of limited influence over a man through the assistance she provides, rather than being an active agent herself: the Corneliaesque ideal which so many male politicians, journalists and artists were advocating for all women during the Revolution.

There is also another crucial point of evidence which indicates that it was Sappho as sign for the successful creative woman who was being diminished and killed off. This is that this treatment was entirely gender based on the part of the artists. The women artists who depicted Sappho during the same period in France simply did not diminish her as the male artists did. For example, we know of two sketches in an album of work by Marie-Guillemin\-e Leroulx-Delaville, also known as Mme Benoît, that seem to present a different interpretation of Sappho’s life and death. Leroulx-Delaville exhibited a Tableau représentant Sapho at the 1795 Salon. Both the sketches and the painting are now lost; however, the sketches were examined by Ballot when she was researching her 1914 book on Mme Benoît. Ballot describes one sketch as showing a woman who holds a lyre lying beneath a tree, and another as depicting a woman lying on the ground, surrounded by lamenting people.\textsuperscript{97}

Interestingly, whichever version she may have chosen as the basis for her painting, the only woman artist to show her at this time in France envisaged Sappho either as a living, working poet, or as a much loved figure who was mourned and missed. Leroulx-Delaville may have considered showing Sappho’s death as well as her life, but it appears that ultimately, she avoided the sensationalistic drama of the suicide leap in favour of an image which reflected the great esteem felt for this important woman, echoing perhaps the heroic death scenes witnessed by friends and disciples discussed earlier.

\textsuperscript{95} Fraisse (1994), p. 144.
\textsuperscript{96} C. Pipelet (1810), \textit{Oeuvres complètes} (Paris, 1842), p. 4.
A well-known female artist seeking further respect by addressing a historical subject, Leroulx-Delaville deliberately opted for a scheme of representation that did not diminish Sappho, even in death. It may also be significant that Nanine Vallain showed her as an active poet, in her now lost *Sapho chantant une hymne à l’amour*, exhibited in 1806 but not mentioned in the Salon *livret*.⁹⁸ Sappho as a successful, creative, intellectual woman was also a subject that attracted female artists outside France: Angelica Kauffman and Maria Cosway both painted her in an active role.⁹⁹ One example is Kauffman’s *Sappho inspired by love* from 1775 (Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, plate 78), an early version of several that she did on this theme. Here, not only is the poet clearly engaged in her work - the Greek writing she points to is a line from the ‘Ode to Aphrodite’ - she even seems to assume a position of dominance over the cupid. He appears to be the one listening attentively here, rather than the other way round.

This evidence suggests that the explanation for Sappho’s differing treatment may have some roots in issues of gender. As far as male French artists are concerned, the predominant shifts that we see are largely changes that serve to diminish Sappho’s stature as an intellectual woman. Almost without exception, she ceased to be envisioned as a poet, and became instead a terminally lovesick woman, her verses either reduced to the status of sentimental *bILLEts doux* or discarded altogether. The ultimate extrapolation of this diminution is her destruction, masked as suicide, which in Gros’ version ceases even to be presented as a conscious, decisive act. The women artists who depicted her however, did not adopt the same strategies.

This observation helps to explain why artists - male artists - were more extensive in their diminution of Sappho than their literary counterparts. The decision by male artists not only to focus on Sappho’s death, but also to edit out her anger and the force of her will, the decisive power of her mind, results in a double disempowerment of this character.

The difference in degree of attack by artists as opposed to writers could be explained by the position of women in the diverse institutional contexts in which each worked. Professionally, male artists still had a great deal more to defend from their female counterparts than writers did. Literature was not governed by such a controlling institution as the Académie Royale de Peinture and its successors; women writers had already made their presence felt on the French literary scene. Male writers did not for the most part appreciate this, as we have noted; however, their strategies for preventing or discouraging women from publishing were by no means as effective as the powers exercised by the officers of the Académie and successive Salon juries.

Many male artists clung on to their privileged position by restricting access to the upper echelons of the governing institution of their profession. In the ancien régime, a few women had been allowed to become exceptional members of the Académie; after the Revolution, however, even this possibility was closed off to them. Women artists were ultimately completely excluded from their own professional institution. Such high stakes in terms of power and career opportunities may explain why the artistic disempowerment of Sappho went further than similar moves within literature, and also why this strategy is located entirely within the oeuvres of male artists.

Overall, the depictions of Sappho reveal a concerted attack by male artists on female agency when expressed in the form of a celebrated creative woman from antiquity. Even though Sappho was evidently not herself an artist, she functioned very effectively as a sign for the creative, talented woman in general. These masculine moves against the figurehead Sappho must also be understood in the context of the Enlightenment, whose first principles suggest that women are ‘nature’: to let them be ‘culture’ is to invite vicious hybrids. For the works produced and viewed from the early 1790s onwards, we

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must also consider the general context of the Jacobin take on vocal women, perpetuated as we have already noted in Chapter Two by successive Directoire régimes and the Napoleonic code: such women were considered to be a problem that had to be dealt with. Vociferous females of all types, whether singing poetry or shouting for lower prices, needed to be silenced; they and the other members of their sex had to learn their place in the male Republic.

These conclusions are further supported by an examination of a group of images which are closely related to depictions of Sappho: representations of Aspasia, the other great intellectual woman from ancient Greece. She was painted in a major project by a young woman artist in the mid 1790s, resulting in a work that has led to considerable disagreement between feminist scholars. My research will suggest that this artist, Marie-Genviève Bouliar, has developed a particular strategy to overcome the problems that her intellectual subject presents; moreover that these too differ from male artistic responses to the same material.

5. Aspasia: narrative, image and current research

Aspasia was a hetaera (a type of high class courtesan), a native of Miletus who established herself in Athens from about 450BC onwards. Famed both for her beauty and her intelligence, she became the influential mistress of Pericles and reputed teacher of Socrates. She gained unprecedented levels of both admiration and notoriety, as much for her mind as for her body.102 I will consider specific details of her history as it was constructed in eighteenth-century French texts and translations of ancient historical

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mixed race. The painter Lethière, for example, was one of a number of ‘mulattos’ who for no publicly acknowledged reason did not achieve the high office they sought. It has been suggested that this was because of their mixed race: see G. Florent Laballe and G. Capy, Exposition organisé par l’Association des Amis de Guillaume Guillon-Lethière (exhib. cat., Savigny-Sorge, 1992); catalogue entries reproduced without page numbers in the Witt Library.

102 Basic historical facts about Aspasia are uncertain. See M. Henry (1995) on the problems of evidence here, and on the construction of Aspasia’s bios as a whole.
accounts in due course; at this point I want to give a brief overview of the different representations of her from my focus period.

There is not a strong tradition for the depiction of Aspasia in Western art. In terms of eighteenth-century French precedents, there are two book illustrations which immediately predate the revolutionary period, both frontispiece medallion portraits which preface texts about Aspasia. One illustrates Le Conte de Bièvre’s [sic] generally admiring *Histoire des Deux Aspasies* from 1737 (British Library, plate 79), and frames Aspasia within ‘formidable woman’ signifiers. She wears a Minerva helmet, and a breastplate embossed with a screaming head and fringed with a border of curling snakes: anxiety-inducing signs of Medusa. Below her medallion are portraits of Pericles and Socrates; Aspasia is the dominant figure here. This depiction differs considerably from the other frontispiece, that of the Aspasia volume of the *Galerie Universelle des hommes* (published 1787-1788, and a decidedly negative account of her life and talents). This contains no references to her exceptional status or intellectual prowess, simply depicting an attractive woman with elaborately plaited hair and deep décolleté (but no bared breast): a bland image in contrast with the sometimes vituperative text.

The first painting of her to be exhibited during the focus period is a particularly interesting work for my project, Marie-Geneviève Bouliar’s *Aspasie* (Musée d’Arras, plate 80) signed and dated as 1794, exhibited at the Salons of 1795 and 1796. This painting has previously been assumed by scholars to have been shown only in 1795, where it received no critical attention: thus it was believed that no contemporaneous commentary upon Bouliar’s *Aspasie* was available for analysis (see for example Nochlin and Harris (1976), p. 204). However, it is clear from archival material that it was re-exhibited at the 1796 Salon: it appears in the *livret* (no. 64),
an unusual example of a history painting by an eighteenth-century woman artist (or at least a large-scale portrait of a woman from ancient history, equally as rare). The other extant representations of Aspasia from this period are by Nicolas-André Monsiau, who worked on the theme of Aspasie s'entretenant avec Alcibiade et Socrate, versions of which are in the French art market (plate 81) and in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow (this was shown at the 1798 Salon, plate 82). Later, Monsiau also developed a different scene, Aspasie s'entretenant avec les hommes les plus illustres d'Athènes (1806 Salon, Musée de Chambéry, plate 83), an almost identical drawing for which is in the Smith College Museum of Art (Northampton, Mass.). An engraving by Simon which was exhibited at the 1799 Salon, Deux têtes, d'Aspasie et de Périclès (no. 626), is now lost. My focus will be on the work by Bouliar, which I will interpret in the context of the discoveries already made about depictions of Sappho, in particular the conclusions on representational strategies which are gender specific in terms of the artists who deploy them.

To date, the vast majority of scholarship on images of Aspasia has focused on the rare image by Bouliar, and has been carried out by feminist art historians who do not agree about the significance of the way that this female artist has chosen to represent this exceptional woman. I will give an overview here of the feminist debate about this work, and point out the problems that I have with the conclusions reached so far.

The first feminist research to appear was the analysis presented by Ann Sutherland Harris in the catalogue for the exhibition Women Artists 1550-1950. Harris clearly finds Bouliar’s presentation of Aspasia to be problematic. ‘Aspasia would seem to be a somewhat ambiguous example for feminists, especially as presented by Bouliar. Aspasia was certainly more than a high-class hetaera, but the exposed breast, flimsy undergarments, flowers and glance in the mirror all undercut her reputation as a learned woman.’ However, this contradiction is immediately rationalised. Harris points out that ‘it was a great advantage for any woman seeking a career in male professions to be

along with several other works including a study for Aspasia (no. 66), and was commented upon by several critics, whose opinions will be examined later in this chapter.
beautiful as well as talented’, and concludes that ‘Bouliar’s message seems to be that a
learned woman can also be feminine, and is thus a gentle plea, couched in the most
respectable of artistic language, for the equality of women.’

This analysis does not convince Vivian Cameron: she feels that Bouliar’s Aspasie is
distinctly conservative in tone. Given ‘the emphasis on the femininity and passivity of
Aspasia’, she finds Harris’s ‘interpretation of this figure as a “plea” for equality rather
dubious. Clearly there were other, less sensual ways of relating equality’. Cameron
implies that Bouliar’s Aspasie was a missed opportunity for a feminist statement from a
woman artist.

This could not be further from the response of Madeleine Henry in her 1995 book about
Aspasia’s biographical tradition. She heralds this painting as an ‘amazingly feminist
vision’, and embarks upon a detailed analysis to support her claim. Like Harris, Henry
feels that the choice of Aspasia as a subject must be significant for Bouliar, since
Aspasia’s sexual reputation makes her problematic in terms of self-identification on the
part of the female artist, and since there were so many other heroic women which she
could have chosen.

However, Henry does not address the question of how Bouliar may have dealt with
Aspasia’s problematic sexual history. Instead, she posits a theory of alternative meanings
for some of the key elements of the painting, explaining how they could well have been
intended as proto-feminist references which largely focus on Aspasia’s mind and not her
body. Citing the lack of a comb or other cosmetic accoutrements, she asserts that the
mirror in her hand is dissociated from a ‘toilette’ context, and is therefore not a sign for
beauty. Recalling Christine de Pizan’s divine instructress (who advised her pupil to look
in the mirror to find herself and to refuse to listen to what men said about her), and

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107 Nochlin and Harris (1976), pp. 203-204.
Socrates’ action of holding up a mirror to his students, Henry argues that the look into the mirror signifies that Aspasia is on the path to self-knowledge. ‘The image suggests that Aspasia is practising a technique that she would later pass on to Socrates. Her response to her image is one of thoughtful engagement; she does not smile coquettishly or narcissistically.’

Henry does not feel that Aspasia’s body is eroticised in Bouliar’s version, asserting that the bared breast is an Amazonian signifier as well as an erotic one, and is ‘suggestive of the self-sufficient and forceful woman’. Moreover, she insists that the rest of Aspasia’s body is at ease, exuding self-confidence. ‘Aspasia sits as men do, with her legs casually apart and with no attention drawn to her genital area.’ Henry points out that Pericles is signified only via a bust, tucked away in the shadows behind Aspasia, and that she does not appear to be eagerly awaiting his visit or that of any other man. In this analysis, Bouliar is celebrated for presenting an assertively feminist version of the best of Aspasia, one which minimises the erotic parts of her narrative as much as possible.

My problem with all of these interpretations is that none of them is entirely convincing, since none manages to encompass the totality of what Bouliar presents in her vision of Aspasia. The degree of eroticisation in Aspasia’s body is evidently a major point of contention, yet neither Harris, Cameron nor Henry comes up with an analysis which is tenable. Bouliar’s Aspasie is neither completely devoid of sensuality as Henry would have us believe; nor is she as ‘dubiously’ feminine and passive as Cameron declares. Harris presents a more accurate picture when she notes the ambiguity of this Aspasia, but she constructs a hasty solution to clear up this contradiction.

Moreover, there are points in all three accounts where the authors’ own political projects seem to influence perhaps too enthusiastically the theories of what Bouliar’s aims and

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intentions may have been, or of how the painting may have been understood. For example, Henry’s re-interpretation of the mirror, however plausible, does not alter the fact that along with the bared breast, it would also unavoidably have signified beauty and an eroticised body to spectators in the mid 1790s.\textsuperscript{113} No matter how much feminist art historians - and I include myself in this category - might long for Bouliar to have painted a proto-feminist statement, her picture of Aspasia is just not so simple to interpret. The choice of subject for a young, female portrait painter must surely be significant: it is unusual. What is not at all clear, however, is what precisely Bouliar wanted to signify with this work: her Aspasie is an elusive, paradoxical woman.

6. Contradiction and ambiguity in Bouliar’s Aspasie

There are a number of areas of uncertainty in this work. Aspasia’s facial expression, for example, is curiously difficult to determine. Her look into the mirror is particularly ambiguous. Henry is right in that it is not the smile of the narcissist or the coquette, but what exactly is this look? It is not particularly one of self-confidence or blossoming self-knowledge either. After close scrutiny of this work, I do not find it possible to read one dominant line of signification in Aspasia’s look. Is there a hint of wariness, of sadness or even of pain in those eyes? How does that relate to her open lips, and are these in a slight smile? No clear answers emerge.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{113} The mirror had a range of possible significations, depending on its context. Allegories, particularly those made during the Revolution, use the mirror as a sign of truth and enlightenment, although this is not only limited to self-knowledge as Henry defines it. However, in the \textit{fête galante} tradition from earlier in the eighteenth century, its symbolic properties were far more erotic, sometimes signifying auto-eroticism (see for example the discussion of Lancret’s \textit{Young woman on a sofa} (c. 1735-1740) in Rand, R., \textit{Intimate Encounters: Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France} (Hanover, N.H., 1997), pp. 96-98).

\textsuperscript{114} At this point I would like to note that the fulsome praise given by critics to Bouliar’s other portraits convinces me that the lack of clarity in Aspasie is not the result of a lack of ability or poor technique on the artist’s part, but is the result of a conscious decision. See ‘Observations sur l’exposition des tableaux au Salon du Louvre 1796’, \textit{Mercure de France}, C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 491, 973; and ‘Observations de Polyscope sur le Salon de Peinture et de Sculpture de 1796 tirées de la Décadaire’, C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 493, pp. 1056-1057.
On the rest of her body, and the question of eroticisation, I feel that the certainty expressed by both Cameron and Henry is unwarranted. Aspasia’s body is to some extent eroticised, yet also to some extent it is not. The bare breast with its pale rose-coloured nipple, framed in gently rippling white fabric, is undeniably sensual. In contrast, the lower half of her body seems to have a far less sexual emphasis. There is instead a square solidity to Aspasia’s seat, with a strong horizontal fold of fabric skimming over both thighs instead of falling between her legs as it could do. Henry likened her position to a male posture, but within the context of late eighteenth-century French art, I would argue that it is more strongly reminiscent of the heavy maternal lap of the good wives and mothers from historical and biblical narratives, for example Cornelia, Andromache or the Virgin Mary.

There are other ambiguities. One is the text-covered scroll: it looks like Greek characters but in fact they are illegible, or at least meaningless in the combination in which Bouliar has placed them. Why has the artist painted them in this way? Maybe she did not know Greek herself; still, she could presumably have found a Greek text book and copied from that. Whatever the reason behind it, Bouliar has here produced a text which draws the spectator in to study it, but which in fact can be read by no one.

Another element with potentially contradictory interpretations is the flower garlands. Are these a feminine touch, referring to Aspasia’s beauty, her decorative properties? Or are they, because of their garland formation, a reference to her intellectual capabilities and role as the hostess of an important salon? Françoise Maison has suggested that these garlands may be a reference to Julie d’Angennes, emblem of the précieuses of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁵ They may also have been included as a reference to Bouliar’s first Salon exhibit, a portrait of a young woman crowned with roses, which had won her the Prix d’Encouragement in 1791 and therefore financed her work on Aspasie to the tune of

1000 livres. If this is the case, then the garland is a signifier of her acknowledged public success, the equivalent of a laurel crown. Bouliar could therefore be drawing attention to the public recognition of professional status and ability that she has already received.

When we consider Aspasia's relationship to Pericles and other men, again conflicting interpretations are possible. Clearly she dominates the picture space, but she is not entirely alone. The bust of Pericles could be said to be an essential element of the picture in that it identifies her by association, although of course at the same time this reduces Aspasia to the category of 'Pericles' intellectual girlfriend'. We can read her as displacing him, putting him in the shade (and in a less life-like form); on the other hand, this bust has also been interpreted as a protective force, hovering over her like a guardian angel.

Bouliar's decision not to include other living figures in the composition can similarly be read in different ways. Henry compares Bouliar's version with the later depictions by Monsiau, and judges that Monsiau has 'engulfed' Aspasia with men. On the other hand, one could argue that in these versions (particularly the 1806 painting), Aspasia is shown positively in a public context, in the act of impressing and influencing these highly intelligent men. In choosing to depict Aspasia alone, Bouliar gives her the status of a subject worthy of independent portrayal; however, it is in a private context and without the audience which signifies her celebrated intellectual status.

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116 Now lost, probably the painting dated 1785 that was exhibited in Paris in 1926 at the Exposition des femmes peintres, photograph in the Witt Library. Its earlier date suggests that it was perhaps a favourite work, submitted in 1791 when the Salon was first opened up to non-Academicians, because it displayed Bouliar's talents so well. As far as the Prix d'Encouragement is concerned, it should be noted that this work was made as the result of a prize, and did not receive one itself. Brigitte Gallini has explained the confusion over this (often both a work winning an award and a work produced as a result of an award were noted as 'Prix d'encouragement' in the livret). See La Révolution française et l'Europe, 1789-1799 (1989), vol. III, p. 831.

117 Henry's phrase, used to describe the dominant portrait of Aspasia that antiquity handed down to the West. See Henry (1995), p. 56.

7. Contextualising Aspasia

Verbal representations of Aspasia from the eighteenth century range from translations of Plutarch’s *Life of Pericles* and other historical accounts to an epistolary novel and a (comic) opera.\(^{119}\) For reasons of brevity, I will not analyse each in depth here, but will instead outline the texts that I have found and then proceed to highlight some of their key areas of interest for me. What is striking about all of these texts, when analysed individually and when considered as a group (collectively as context), is the high level of contradiction and ambiguity they contain and indeed create around the entity ‘Aspasia’.

The dominant historical account is Plutarch’s *Life of Pericles*, part of a series already noted as a work that was constantly re-published in various translations throughout the century, and upon which great authority was conferred.\(^{120}\) This was the major source of information for dictionary and encyclopaedia writers, as well as the producers of other historical texts. Overall, Plutarch makes no overt judgement about Aspasia, but he includes accounts of both her celebrated talents and the reports of criticisms levelled at her. A historical text which attempts a pro-Aspasia stance is Le Conte de Bièvre’s *Histoire des Deux Aspasies*: the author admires the exceptional woman in history and aims to recover some of her significance in a piece that he hopes will approximate ‘le Plutarque du beau sexe’.\(^{121}\)

\(^{119}\) There are also two texts which do not concern the fifth-century Aspasia directly, but which still feed into the outer reaches of discourse about her: an anonymous novel titled *Les Erreurs d’une Jolie Femme, ou l’Aspasie Françoise* (Brussels and Paris, 1781), and a play by Berquin-Duvallon: *Aspasie, ou la Destruction de l’Empire d’Orient, tragédie en cinq actes* (Nice, re-published in 1809, initial publication date not yet determined but clearly earlier). The first woman is a foolish, pretty young girl with too keen an eye for finery and barely enough sense to keep out of (moral) trouble; the second is a proud, ambitious woman plagued by violent passions and jealousy, a princess who eventually causes the downfall of an entire empire. The use of the name Aspasia in both cases shows the range of possible significations of this name.


\(^{121}\) Le Conte de Bièvre (1737), p. iii. The second Aspasia signalled by the title was Cyrus’ favourite mistress, a modest and virtuous woman (and no intellectual), reputedly renamed after the fifth-century Aspasia as a mark of honour and status. Bièvre presents separate accounts of the two women here. This is the only eighteenth-century Aspasia text which Madeleine Henry mentions, apart from brief references to dictionaries, encyclopedias and the continued influence of Plutarch. She neither cites nor analyses the other texts which I have found.
Lighter in tone is the anonymous epistolary novel *Lettres d'Aspasie*, a collection of sixty-two letters supposedly from Aspasia which have been found and translated by a young Frenchman (published in 1756).\(^{122}\) As the author makes clear in the preface, these are intended to comment upon mid-eighteenth-century Parisian society, and they present Aspasia as a sweet, rather naïve and largely unintellectual girl whose experiences in the city and in love are an endless trial (Pericles here is an inconstant lover). A comic opera by Morel [de Chédeville], published and performed in 1789, presents her instead as a leading intellectual, but with (mis)adventures in love and moral choices to make. There is no mention of Pericles in this version; instead, Aspasia and Alcibiades (Socrates' young pupil) inadvertently fall in love with each other. However, Alcibiades is already betrothed to Hipparète; Aspasia decides that her rival is the more suitable wife for him, and tricks him into going through with his original marriage plans.

There are also two rather more overtly negative historical accounts of Aspasia which were published on the eve of the Revolution, both parts of separate series on great historical figures. The first is the volume by Imbert de la Platière already noted for its frontispiece, and the second is the Aspasia essay in Ternisien d'Haudricourt's *Femmes célèbres de toutes les nations, avec leurs portraits* (Paris 1788).\(^{123}\)

These accounts create a context of often conflicting ideas and assumptions about Aspasia, to do with sex, intellect and power. There is of course the fundamental opposition of those authors who seek to present her in a positive light (like Bièvre) and those who state their aim to expose Aspasia and women like her as a dangerous phenomenon (Imbert de la Platière and Ternisien d'Haudricourt). Problems and paradoxes also arise within individual texts.

\(^{122}\) Anon., *Lettres d'Aspasie, Traduites du Grec* (Amsterdam, 1756), pp. iv-v.

\(^{123}\) Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII. The volume of Ternisien d'Haudricourt's work on Aspasia is currently not located in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; however, we can assume that it was not an entirely positive account. The preface to the series makes it clear that this is to be a moralising work which unmasks influential women; specific reference is made to Aspasia as a woman who deserves more fame, but it is not praise - instead, we are to be warned about the destructive effect of her influence over Pericles. See vol. I, p. 6.
There are two main areas where contradiction and ambiguity seem to occur most: discussion of Aspasia’s morality, and of her intellectual skills.

8. Conflicting Ideas about Aspasia’s Morality

Her status as a courtesan was always going to mean that morality would be an unavoidable and problematic issue in representations of Aspasia. On a most basic level, the Plutarchian biography where she lives with the divorced Pericles and has an illegitimate child by him before he marries her, sets up an image of her which is likely to undermine the potentially positive attributes of beauty and intellectual talent. Moreover, Plutarch dutifully reports salacious details about Aspasia’s sexual reputation with other men, and accusations about her undue influence over Pericles’ political decisions, particularly foreign policy. The rumour, probably started by fifth-century comic playwrights but legitimated by Plutarch’s restatement here, was that she persuaded Pericles to start the Peloponnesian War on a personal whim.124

Bièvre, who relies so heavily on Plutarch for the ‘facts’ of his history, clearly struggles with Aspasia’s morality. He consistently tries to balance his account of the more negative details with reassertions of her talents. For example, he states that ‘Elle fut, il est vrai, une Savante libertine, elle rechercha avec la même ardeur les plaisirs des sens & ceux de l’esprit; mais à des vices odieux, elle sut joindre des vertus aimables.’125 We sense in such language Bièvre’s reluctance that he has to include such information at all, for he must be aware that it clouds the positive representation of her that he wants to construct.

He also faces difficulty when he seeks to refute some of the wilder claims about Aspasia’s reputation as a power hungry Madam training scores of young prostitutes.

125 Le Conte de Bièvre (1737), pp. 1-2.
Even though Bièvre ultimately concludes that at least some of the accusations against her must have been falsehoods motivated by jealousy and hatred, the negative ideas about Aspasia’s morality have been given a space and therefore sit within his text subverting the more celebratory statements.

Other authors positively relish the chance to present Aspasia as morally bankrupt. Imbert de la Platière portrays her love for Pericles as entirely born out of her ambition and realisation of what such a powerful man could do for her.\footnote{Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII, p. 2.} He dwells upon her ‘régulation de facilité’, and highlights the most scandalous rumours reported by Plutarch.\footnote{Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII, p. 28. The Plutarchian source for this information can be found in Plutarch trans. Dacier (1778), vol. II, p. 415.} For example, not only is his Aspasia the keeper of a house filled with girls ‘dont les moeurs n’étoient pas fort pures’, but she organises them so that Pericles is always kept satisfied even when she herself cannot fulfil all his desires. It is also asserted that women of quality who went to her house to hear her speak (there is a tradition that Aspasia instructed women in basic philosophy), ended up becoming involved in these assignations.\footnote{Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII, p. 4.}

We should also note the connection between Aspasia and generalised sexual vice through successive illustrations of a related theme, Socrates removing Alcibiades from the bed of his mistress (who is sometimes just described as ‘la volupté). Aspasia is connected with the apparently sexually voracious young man in a number of ways: in serious histories, because he visited her house with Socrates (the theme depicted by Monsiau, where Alcibiades stares longingly at Aspasia), and in Morel’s play, where he falls in love with her. It follows that Aspasia becomes identified with the ‘volupté’ character, the woman whose sexual allure distracts the young man to such an extent that he neglects his other duties and training, in a narrative reminiscent of Paris’ dereliction of duty over Helen. Christopher Sells, who has traced the various treatments of this Alcibiades theme (Peyron in 1785 (musée de Guéret), Regnault in 1791 (Paris, musée du Louvre, plate 84), Garnier

\footnote{Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII, p. 2.}
in 1793, Perrin in 1801 (Quimper, musée des Beaux-Arts) and Regnault again in 1810
(lost, but engraved by Normand for Landon), describes Aspasia as ‘le symbole de la
volupté’, and notes that the two subjects eventually combine at the Salon of 1861 in
Gérôme’s *Socrate venant chercher Alcibiade dans la demeure embaumée d’Aspasie*.

We also find a specific reference to Aspasia in Landon’s description of the later Regnault
version: ‘Alcibiade s’est laissé vaincre par les charmes d’une courtisane à laquelle il
sacrifie un temps précieux’... ‘Peut-être aussi le Peintre a-t-il choisi pour le lieu de la
-scène la maison de cette Aspasie que son éloquence et ses talents en politique avaient
rendue si célèbre, que Socrate lui même venait quelquefois l’entendre.’ He wonders
whether Aspasia’s celebrity, mind and beauty ‘faisaient en quelque sorte oublier la honte
de ses moeurs déréglées? Aussi, plus ses charmes avaient d’empire sur tous ceux dont
elle recevait les hommages, plus Socrate était attentif à prévenir son disciple contre les
dangers de la volupté.’

It seems that Aspasia is understood to be a sign for voluptuous
vice, and one from which young men need to be protected.

9. Ambiguous presentations of Aspasia’s intellectual skills

In addition to these elements which raise questions and cast doubt and damnation on
Aspasia for her morals, further ambiguity is generated within the accounts of her
intellectual talents. Plutarch reports the story that Pericles became involved with Aspasia
because she was ‘une personne très savante & très habile dans tout ce qui regarde la
politique & le gouvernement des états.’ All of the texts foreground her fame and
talents in cerebral matters to some extent.

However, this praise is often also damning. Even in the most positive text, we find some
equivocation creeping into the language used to describe Aspasia’s achievements. Bièvre

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129 C. Sells, ‘Socrate et Alcibiade de J.-B. Regnault au Louvre’, *Revue du Louvre*, vol. XXVII (1977) no. 5-
6, p. 357.
130 Landon (1829), vol. II, pp. 73-74.
refers to Aspasia’s skill and teaching ability in rhetoric as ‘l’art de bien dire, de gagner les coeurs, de persuader, de gouverner les esprits’. This is surely an account of her talents which evokes manipulation and control as much as it compliments Aspasia.

Similarly, we find that the initial reason that Plutarch included Aspasia in his history of Pericles was to study the phenomenon of her influence. Because of the rumours of Pericles going to war to please Aspasia, Plutarch (as translated by Dacier) wants to investigate ‘quel art si merveilleux & quelle si grande force de persuasion cette femme pouvait avoir pour gouverner ainsi à son gré les plus grands personnages de la république, & ceux qui avoient le plus d’autorité & pour obliger les plus grands philosophes à parler si avantageusement d’elle.’ [my italics].

Imbert de la Platière overtly presents Aspasia’s intelligence as a malign force which she uses for her ambitious aims. Like Dacier, the language he chooses for his description of Aspasia’s intellectual skills often refers to sorcery and power: for example, he notes that ‘Socrate...alloit souvent chez Aspasie goûter les enchantemens de sa conversation’. In the same breath as Aspasia is credited with helping Pericles write speeches, this accolade is undercut by a reference to her talent again as a kind of black art: he describes it as ‘cet art enchanteur de bien parler’. This author presents Aspasia as spellbinding, and his only way of understanding Pericles’ loyalty to her is to present him as helpless in the face of such a phenomenon: ‘Enfin, Aspasie fut une personne merveilleuse, & on doit pardonner à Périclès les mouvemens qui l’obligerent de l’épouser.’ [my italics; in this context I feel that there is a sense of the supernatural in the use of the adjective ‘merveilleuse’].

Morel similarly has one of the characters in his opera present Aspasia as a manipulative woman, whose intelligence is only directed towards seduction. Aristophanes, the central narrator, describes her as ‘Sage avec coquetterie, / Et sophiste jolie, / Pour séduire plus

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132 Le Conte de Bievre (1737), p. 12.
134 Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII, p. 4.
135 Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII, p. 17.
sûrement, / Son art à tous les tons se plie.' Aspasia herself in this play says that the gods gave men strength and courage, but gave women beauty so that they could triumph over men; she advises other women to cultivate their talents as reserve armaments for the time when their beauty fades. Yet at the same time, this Aspasia is also a decent human being who does not set out to conquer male hearts just because she can. She takes no delight in having won Alcibiades once she finds out that he is betrothed, and after a struggle with her desire for him, arranges for the marriage with Hipparète to go ahead.

Morel also uses comedy and Aspasia’s physical beauty to undermine the idea that she is a serious intellectual figure. One of the most frequent themes in the opera is that the collected philosophers all swear that they only admire Aspasia for her mind, whilst Aristophanes demolishes this insistence in comic asides to the audience about the real reason why they ‘admire’ her - she is an object of physical desire. One disdainful assertion from a ‘philosophe’ that ‘Je rends à son génie / L’hommage que je dois’ is destroyed by Aristophanes, when he says (in an aside) ‘Un sourire de cette belle / Exalte leur esprit & trouble leur cervelle.’

This differentiation between Aspasia’s intellect and her body, and the placing of these two elements in opposition to each other, evokes another area of contradiction which appears in these texts. It occurs not just in male reactions and assessments of Aspasia, but also within herself as she is presented here. In Morel’s opera, great weight is placed on the mind/body division when Aspasia realises that she is in love with Alcibiades. Surprised at her physical reaction, Aspasia declares that ‘Un feu dévorant / M’agite & me tourmente’; she longs to escape the demands of her body and retreat into the more tranquil ‘asile’ of her mind. Another internal struggle is constructed in the *Lettres d’Aspasie*, when the best efforts of the mind of our heroine are shown to be in opposition to the messages sent out by her body: ‘Déchirée par les deux tyrans, incertaine, agitée, je

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136 Imbert de la Platière (1787-1788), vol. XLIII, p. 18.
137 Morel [de Chédéville]: *Aspasie, Opéra en trois actes* (Paris, 1789), Act II, sc.iii.
138 Morel (1789), Act III, sc.iv.
139 Morel (1789), Act I, sc.ii.
This text presents Aspasia as essentially contradicted.

It is striking how many of these ambiguous and conflicting details in literary accounts of Aspasia are, as with Sappho, also closely related to key elements in contemporaneous writing about intellectual and influential women in general. The texts discussed earlier in connection with Sappho similarly explore some key themes about women, intellect, nature and morality that are found in the textual presentations of Aspasia. Moreover, debates about creative, intelligent women cite Aspasia as well as Sappho amongst their examples of troublesome, over-educated women.

These texts argue for example that learning and intellectual activity is unnatural for a woman, and is fundamentally in conflict with her weak, inconstant body and its destiny (which is to perform practical domestic tasks and make men happy at home). This recalls the inner struggles experienced by Aspasia in several of the texts outlined above, and is also echoed in the *Lettres d’Aspasie*. When Anaxagore replies to Aspasie’s request for philosophical tuition, he replies ‘Je savois il y a long-temps que Milet possédoit une jeune beauté qui, faite pour être l’ornement du monde, préféroit le mérite de l’éclairer. Je félicite la Philosophie de cette conquête’ [my italics]. This Aspasia has chosen a future other than her ‘natural’ destiny; interestingly, the language of conflict is used to express this here.

Aspasia is also cited specifically as a bad example of motherhood in the play *Les femmes Beaux-Esprits, ou les Beaux-Esprits Femelles*. When Mme Forlis receives a letter warning her to take better care of her daughter, she dismisses it and prefers to return to her favourite ‘Aspasian’ way of life. She cries: ‘Vivons, comme Aspasie, en sage épícurienne, / N’ayons aucun tourment; quelque revers qui vienne, / Versifions sans

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140 Morel (1789), Act I, sc.iii.
141 *Lettres d’Aspasie* (1756), letter LV, p. 225.
To live like Aspasia, then, is for a woman to neglect her child and to live a life of irresponsible pleasure-seeking and self-indulgence, whilst deluding herself into believing that she is usefully employing her talents.

Aspasia is cited as a historical example by Maréchal of ‘how the great female figures in literature and politics have always had disagreeable manners or dissolute morals’. The connection made here between writing and political activity is another idea which is frequently expressed in texts about intellectual women. They warn of the danger that an educated woman poses, because she will seek influence in the public sphere; this is seen as disastrous for the state. Once more, Aspasia’s example is used by Maréchal: ‘Que si la belle Aspasie n’eût point été à la hauteur des lumières acquises de Périclès, Périclès ne voyant en elle qu’une femme aimable, destinée au délassements d’un homme d’Etat, Athènes n’aurait point achevé de perdre ses moeurs sous le gouvernemen tacite d’une courtisane.’ The moral laxity of Athens, so often cited as a negative characteristic in Revolutionary discourse about the relative merits of different ancient republics, is here attributed to the malign influence of Aspasia. Note how the author also reverses the historical tradition that it was Aspasia who taught Pericles: here, he denies her innate talent.

She is also referred to in Valcour’s 1794 vaudeville play Le Vous et le Toi, as the opposite extreme of female conduct from the virtuous Cornelia. Père Marcel asserts that women should not meddle in public affairs, and the gardener Thibaut agrees, using Aspasia as an example: ‘T’ouviens-tu de c’te Demoiselle d’la Graisse qui s’melait de politiquer? C’etait....(je ne scais plus son nom, moi!) Arpa...Astrapa....Aspasie, je crois. Eh bian! qu’est qu’il en arrivit? qu’aille brouillit un menage pour apouser Piricles; & que,
quand i’ fut mort, alle devint une intrigante & une...je ne veux pas dire...Eh bian!1

Aspasia is a homewrecker, a political intriguer and a whore in this play; when compared to the virtuous Cornelia, Aspasia is deemed to be worthless. We can also interpret this particular pairing of these two women as a specific comment upon the issue of female domestic influence. As if in answer to women like Mme Roland who had endeavoured to interpret the Corneliaesque role as an invitation to lead a public life through her husband’s affairs, Valcour neatly demonstrates that such behaviour would instead align the female practitioner with the harlot Aspasia.

There are two points that I want to make overall about the significance of this textual material. Firstly, that Aspasia was clearly seen as, and written as, a problematic woman. Narratives about her are full of ambiguity and contradiction: her beauty, her sexuality, and her intelligence are in conflict with one another, and none of these attributes is presented as uncomplicatedly positive or negative. Moreover, there are obvious points of convergence between accounts of Aspasia and the anxious, condemning texts about intellectual and influential women in French society.

This indicates a particular context for Bouliar’s painting, a set of possible interests and assumptions, which must be taken into account when we consider what meaning may have been produced around this work. Obviously, we cannot be precise about the degree to which the artist and different viewers may have been familiar with the texts and issues outlined above. It is notable, however, that the editors of the guide to the 1795 Salon did not feel that the subject needed any explanation beyond the name, Aspasie.

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1 Valcour (1794), p. 18.
10. Making meanings - artistic intentions and interpretive communities

This context may also help us to think about what Bouliar’s intentions may have been - or at least, what they probably were not. Harris, Cameron and Henry each want the artist to have resolved the problems inherent in Aspasia’s history, to have made an unambiguous statement about this exceptional woman, because the artist herself is unusual (a female artist, undertaking this kind of subject). Yet Bouliar’s extraordinary position in itself makes such an unequivocal statement unlikely, given the context within which she was working. She developed the painting from 1791 to 1794, and exhibited it in 1795 and 1796. During this period Bouliar would have witnessed measures like the closure of female political clubs in 1793, and the execution of two influential women writers, Mme Roland and Olympe de Gouges (women who wrote against precisely the sorts of ideas about female reason examined here).

It was clearly not in the interests of a woman artist in the 1790s who wanted to continue working (and indeed to stay alive) to resolve the conflicts which Aspasia evoked into an affirmative statement in praise of her achievements. My contention is that this is precisely what Bouliar avoided. Instead, she created a representation of Aspasia which itself embodies the problems and ambiguities inherent in her history.

This would explain why her facial expression is so hard to determine, and why the mirror and scroll are ambiguous signifiers. It also accounts for the body which is both eroticised and solidly devoid of sensuality, dressed in garments of both crimson and white. Bouliar has divided Aspasia’s body along the diagonal of her white undergarment as it falls beneath her breast, continuing along the line of the shadow. To the left of this divide is the eroticised body, the part of Aspasia which seems to refer most to her beauty and sexuality: the nipple, the mirror. To the right is the more substantial, less sexual part of Aspasia: the solid thighs and knees, pointing towards her writing and the other sign of her intellect, the astronomer’s globe on the table. The slight contrapposto in her body seems
to support the idea that these two aspects of her life are in contradiction with each other; indeed, it articulates that opposition.

In my view, Bouliar was not only constructing a safety mechanism for herself as a woman artist by avoiding resolution of the conflicts of Aspasia (if such a thing were even possible); she went further, and actually made those problems explicit. If we accept that meaning is produced by interpretive communities of spectators as they look at and discuss the pictures on display, as they conduct debates (verbal and written, immediate and developing over time), as they agree and disagree, we can understand Bouliar’s *Aspasie* as a painting which presents problems (about women, sex, talent, intellect and influence) in a manner which positively invites contemplation and debate, in order that those issues be resolved or at least considered by the viewers.

As usual, we have only the recorded comments of one interpretive community, the critics, but from their responses we know that they did indeed discuss the issue of talented women and whether they should be stopped, and considered how this related to Bouliar herself. The critic of the *Mercure de France* praised her other portraits, but felt that *Aspasie* was not her best work.\(^{149}\) *Polyscope* denounced those who wanted to prevent women from writing and painting, incredulous in the face of their prejudice as he declared: ‘Que je trouve insensés ceux qui voudraient leur ôter des mains les pinceaux ou la lyre! je vous en conjure par le Dieu du goût, laissez Sapho chanter ses amours et Marie Bouliar nous peindre Aspasie.’ However, whilst he was highly encouraging to Bouliar in general terms, *Polyscope* was clearly not impressed with the painting of Aspasia, although he did not specify precise reasons.\(^{150}\)

Other criticism focused on just the sort of context for Aspasia discussed earlier: the *Critique du Salon ou les tableaux en vaudevilles* mentioned that Aspasia had turned Socrates’ head and that ‘[elle] sut enchanter les hommes et les dieux’. However, this

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author also used Aspasia’s famed erotic appeal to attack both Bouliar’s product and the artist herself, declaring: ‘Mais celle-ci d’aimer ôte l’envie: Qui peut la voir sans détourner les yeux!’. He continued that ‘Elle a pourtant l’air sot’, and joked that the artist must have taken herself as a model. \(^{151}\)

The issues raised and positions taken in these responses encourage my conviction that Bouliar deliberately expressed Aspasia’s conflicts so that key related issues would be discussed by those who saw her painting. Choosing not to clarify but to retain ambiguity may also have been a shield designed to protect the artist; however, as we saw from the attacks of the *Critique du Salon* above, this strategy did not always work. After the exhibition and criticism of her *Aspasie*, Bouliar stayed almost exclusively within the genre of portraiture for the rest of her career: she did not attempt such a bold gesture ever again.

Overall, this evidence shows that Bouliar developed a strategy which enabled her to depict the problematic but symbolically important Aspasia in a way which did not denigrate her, and which positively invited discussion of the tricky issues which her status as an intellectual, influential woman raised. This appears to have been a particularly effective stategy from a female artist when we compare Bouliar’s painting with Monsiau’s range of representations of Aspasia. When he depicts her with Socrates and Alcibiades (plates 81 and 82) she is shown speaking and gesticulating; however, the response from the men focuses heavily on her erotic powers. Socrates is shown either frowning at her or looking past her, and Alcibiades is universally represented with a smitten smile of lust on his face. Of course, the pairing of Socrates and Alcibiades in this context of the latter’s sexual desire also recalls the numerous works of the younger man being removed from the clutches of mistresses and prostitutes in the past.

\(^{151}\) *Critique du Salon ou les tableaux en vaudevilles (No. 2)* (Paris, 1796), C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 488, p. 7 and (No. 3) C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 489, p. 4.
There are also subtle moves to diminish Aspasia in Monsiau’s larger 1806 version (plate 83), where Aspasia is shown in the company of her usual escorts Pericles, Socrates, Alcibiades, but also the historian warrior Xenophon, the painter Parrhasius, dramatists Sophocles and Euripides, the sculptor Phidias, Plato and the orator Isocrates. As Henry noted, one might interpret this as an engulfing of Aspasia within this sea of famous men. On the other hand, even if we interpret this work as Landon did, as presenting Aspasia ‘entourée de ceux qui se plurent à lui rendre hommage’, this painting does not show universal celebration of Aspasia’s talents. Aspasia, although highlighted, in fact has the attention of only a few of the men.

Some stare at her with an amused and desiring smile: notably Parrhasius, wearing the laurel crown he supposedly adopted when he decided he was the best painter, his arms folded as he contemplates Aspasia. Pericles, on the other hand, stares at her from behind with an intensity that is almost threatening, echoed in the tense grip of his hand on the back of her chair. However, at the other end of the table, there is a decided lack of interest in either Aspasia’s person or in what she is saying: indeed, Socrates has set up a rival discussion with Alcibiades. He turns sharply away from the woman whose ideas he supposedly listened to so carefully, and leads the viewer into the far more sceptical left hand group of listeners. Compared to Bouliar’s carefully ambiguous Aspasie, this work and Monsiau’s other representations of Aspasia would appear to direct spectators far more strongly towards an understanding of her as fascinating primarily in sexual terms, and not worthy of serious intellectual consideration.

11. Conclusion

This re-examination of representations of Sappho and Aspasia indicates that they were sites of considerable debate about creative, intelligent and influential women. Some male

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152 Landon (1829), vol. II, plate 39, p. 71. We should note however that Landon in this description also repeats the salacious rumours about Aspasia’s use of her seductive qualities over Pericles and her general
artists developed strategies of diminution and even ritual execution for Sappho; however, women artists found ways to present both her and Aspasia in a positive light. These particular women from the ancient past were ultimately a resource for female artists, who like their literary counterparts, used them to initiate debate about issues that were crucial to their own lives and work.

The wider implications of the discussions, attacks and defences enacted around these images affected women of all types, not just those actively seeking a career as a writer or artist. Fraisse has noted that discussions of exceptionally talented women are usually carried out in order to establish the rule for the general mass of women. She concludes that the refusal to accept women's intellectual capabilities is inextricably linked to a refusal to grant women the status of citizen. 'Behind the rejection of the woman author, the rejection of the exception who might rival man, lurks the real fear of all women, potentially independent and equal to man.'153 Indeed, far less intellectual women than Mme de Staël or Mme Roland felt included in these attacks, and were moved to defend the principles at stake. We see this for example in Blandin Demoulin’s vigorously argued response to Prudhomme’s suggestion in 1793 that women should no longer learn to read.154

In a sense, all women who were literate, or who wanted to learn to read and write, were the target when Sappho was pushed off the cliff at Leucadia. Similarly, we can say that when Bouliar invited contemplation of the unresolved ambiguities of Aspasia, she was responding to this attack, and asking that the notion of the educated and creative female not be rejected out of hand.

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Chapter Four

The Visibility of Lucretia: Rape, Revenge and Representation

‘A la tête des chastes Romaines doit paraître Lucrèce, dont l’âme virile eût à reprocher à la fortune de lui avoir donné le corps d’une femme.’


‘La vue du corps de Lucrèce porté encore tout sanglant dans la place de Collatie, cause une douleur universelle, & jette dans les esprits un vif désir de vengeance.’


In the light of the arguments developed in the previous sections, this final chapter reconsiders depictions of a woman in whom virtue, strategic intervention, and eloquence converge: Lucretia. She is the virtuous Roman woman who publicly committed suicide after being raped, and whose dying wish for revenge led to the first Roman Revolution. Lucretia has been particularly marginalised and, I would argue, misunderstood in critical discussions of imagery which depicts her from this period. My research has uncovered previously unpublished visual material, and constructs a wide ranging examination which disputes the assumptions currently made about Lucretia.

Considering also two related women from Roman history, Camilla and Virginia, I will analyse the representational strategies used to depict all three women, challenging prevailing interpretations of the relationship between them. I will also explore the ways in which these pictorial modes relate to the context of the Revolution, particularly with regard to certain spectatorship practices which were widespread in the mid-1790s. Artistic strategies used to represent Lucretia are revealed as positive solutions to the difficulties that she presented, necessary because she had an important symbolic role to play in France at this time.
1. Lucretia: narrative constructions and representation in late eighteenth-century France

Ian Donaldson has produced a useful overview of the story of Lucretia as it appears in its earliest sources, the histories written by Livy, Ovid, Plutarch, and Valerius Maximus, and in later versions and translations. Donaldson notes that there are variations in her narrative from the start; however, a basic version does emerge of the events that describe Lucretia, her rape, her suicide and the political consequences of the episode.

The events took place in 509 BC, during the siege of the city of Ardea. In the course of a drinking session one evening at an army camp, a group of Roman noblemen, including the sons of the Roman king, Tarquinius Superbus, began to boast about the virtues of their various wives. Tarquinius Collatinus (a kinsman of the king) insisted that his wife, Lucretia, was more virtuous than the other women. At Collatinus’ suggestion, they rode back to visit all the wives to check on what each one was doing that night. When they surprised the princesses, they found them playing games, eating and generally enjoying themselves, but when they rode on to Collatia, they found Lucretia quietly spinning wool with her maids. She was unanimously praised as indeed being the most virtuous of all of the wives.

However, this occasion had a striking effect on one of the men, Sextus Tarquinius (one of the king’s sons). The early sources differ about whether it was Lucretia’s beauty, virtue or reputation that attracted him - whatever the reason, he became determined to seduce her. Tarquin returned later to Collatia, alone. Suspecting nothing, and wanting to be hospitable to a kinsman of her husband, Lucretia fed him and provided a bed for him. In the middle of the night, Tarquin entered Lucretia’s bedroom, armed with a sword. He tried to seduce her by every possible means - from promises of marriage, riches and the

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2 See Donaldson (1982), p. 4 for details of which author advances which possible motivation.
position of queen, to threats of death if she did not comply. Lucretia steadfastly refused, preferring death to such dishonour.

Ultimately, Tarquin used Lucretia’s unshakeable sense of honour against her. He blackmailed her, threatening to kill not only her but also his slave. His plan was to place their naked bodies together on the bed, and declare that he had killed them when he discovered them together. The horrendous prospect of such posthumous disgrace, which would have affected her family very badly, persuaded Lucretia that she had to give in to her aggressor.³ She stopped resisting Tarquin; he carried out the rape and then returned to Ardea.

The following morning, Lucretia sent for her father Lucretius and her husband Collatinus, telling them both to bring a trusted friend. They duly arrived with Valerius Publius and Lucius Junius Brutus. Lucretia told her story to these four men, and announced her intention to kill herself. Although she proclaimed her fundamental innocence, she was determined nevertheless to commit suicide in order to prove her virtue. Lucretia was also concerned that no other woman (particularly adulterous ones) should be able to use her as an excuse to escape punishment, as an example of a woman who survived the loss of her reputation.

Despite protestations from her father and husband that such an action was not necessary, Lucretia was insistent; but before killing herself, she exacted a promise from the men present to avenge her rape by ensuring Tarquin’s death. Only when this was agreed did Lucretia take out a knife from her robe and stab herself in the breast. Her husband, father and Valerius stared in shock or wept, but Brutus straight away took up the pledge that had just been made to Lucretia. Berating the other men for such a feeble response, Brutus seized the knife and swore by Lucretia’s blood and by the gods to rid Rome once and for all of the Tarquin family. He proceeded to do just that: Lucretia’s publicly displayed

³ Relations between a married woman and a slave were thought to be particularly heinous in Rome; see Pomeroy (1994), p. 160.
corpse became a rallying point as Brutus spoke powerfully against the Tarquins to crowds of Romans. He recalled their history of violent despotic rule and presented Lucretia’s rape and suicide as the last straw. Eventually, the populace rose up under his leadership to banish the entire family, and as a result of this, the first Roman Republic was established.

The basic elements of Lucretia’s story are therefore her virtue; her resistance and rape; her public announcement of the decision to commit suicide along with her demand for revenge; and her death, followed immediately by the swearing of the oath which it had prompted. Although the earlier parts of her story, in particular the rape, had been popular subjects in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nearly all the later eighteenth-century French depictions of Lucretia focus on the events surrounding her death.4

The exceptions to this are works that are now lost. The first was by Lagrenée le Jeune, who sent Les fils de Tarquin, admirant la vertu de Lucrèce to the 1781 Salon. A full description of the subject was given in the Salon livret - the moment shown is the men finding Lucretia worthy of their prize as they come across her quietly doing needlework, ‘occupée à l’ouvrage le plus digne de son sexe’.5 Lagrenée sent a drawing of the same subject to the 1783 Salon, and there is subsequently a record of a very similar work (possibly the same painting) being sent to the 1791 Salon with the title Lucrèce travaillant avec ses femmes. This may well have been an attempt by Lagrenée to recycle an existing work as a suitable entry for a revolutionary Salon.

No other artist appears to have painted this aspect of Lucretia’s story at this time; similarly, only one French artist seems to have attempted the rape scene in the late eighteenth century. Tardieu sent Lucrèce et Tarquin to the 1793 Salon (not located); very little is known about this work, since the critics did not comment on it; however, from the

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4 Earlier representations of the rape of Lucretia include those by Titian (c.1570, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum) and Artemisia Gentileschi (c.1645, Potsdam-Sanssouci, Neues Palais).
5 See Explication des peintures, sculptures, et gravures de messieurs de l’Académie Royale...1781, C.D., vol. XII, no. 251, p. 11.
two characters involved we can deduce that it showed the rape scene. The moment later was chosen by Sigisbert for the sculpture he exhibited at the 1799 Salon, *Le buste en marbre de Lucrèce, sortant du lit après l'action de Tarquin* (no. 439, not located). We can only imagine the appearance of this work, since the critics again do not enlighten us; however, it is a highly unusual choice of subject.

The majority of the artists chose instead to focus on the final scene in Lucretia's life: her death. The best known of these images today are all multi-figured compositions, where Lucretia is joined by witnesses, usually her husband, her father, Valerius Publius and Brutus. We will look at these works presently; however, we should note that this mode of representing Lucretia's death was not the only way that artists conceived of the event. Initially there is a different mode of representation: the single figure composition, where Lucretia is shown alone, either about to stab herself or actually engaged in the act of plunging the dagger in.

One example of this long established pattern for representing Lucretia, which dates back to the early Renaissance, is a small painted sketch by Suvée of *La Mort de Lucrèce* (not dated, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, plate 85). This presumably preparatory work shows a Lucretia who dominates the composition, moving diagonally across it. She looks away from the dagger in her outstretched hand, whilst her other hand prepares her breast for the blow. Pellegrini chose a slightly later moment for his *La Mort de Lucrèce*, engraved by Cathelin in 1782; the resulting print was exhibited at the Salon of 1783 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, plate 86). In this work again Lucretia dominates the composition, but here she is actually shown in the act of her suicide, plunging the knife with all her force into her midriff.

The other images of her death from this period, all multi-figured compositions, give Lucretia's suicide its more public context. A previously unpublished drawing by

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6 Earlier examples of the single figure tradition include Raimondi's engraving after Raphael (c.1511-1512, London, British Museum), and Cranach's *Lucretia* (1533, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie).
Philippe-Louis Parizeau (Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, no. 1389, plate 87) is a faithful representation of the death scene as presented by the historical source texts: Lucretia is shown in the act of killing herself with the male witnesses there. She is the principal agent in the action - seated (almost enthroned) in the centre of the composition, she grips the handle of the dagger that she has plunged into her chest, and looks to Brutus as if to say 'You know what to do next.' He in turn extends his hand ready to receive the dagger when she takes it out. This design seems to capture all the necessary elements of the story, and presents it as a dramatic moment, one which will have repercussions outside the frame of this work (through Lucretia’s urgent look towards and past Brutus).

Given this fidelity to the textual sources, it is somewhat surprising then to note that Parizeau’s envisioning of Lucretia is not at all typical of artists in late eighteenth-century France. The date for this work is very unclear: it is perhaps most likely to have been done in the early 1770s. Very little is known about Parizeau: he was at one point a pupil of Wille and trained primarily as an engraver. This is one of a number of drawings of historical themes which he did, but it was not the genre in which he usually worked, and I have not so far located an engraving of this work.7

Interestingly, Parizeau’s drawing is markedly different from the version of Lucretia’s death that was the norm during my focus period. The majority of artists shift the action to a few moments later in the narrative, when Lucretia is dying or already dead, and the knife is in Brutus’ hands. This process can be seen to have started at the Salon of 1759 with Michel-Ange Challe’s representation of Lucrèce présentant à Brutus le poignard

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7 Parizeau (1748-1801) showed several historical subjects at the Place Dauphine exhibitions of 1769 and 1770, including a Mort de Socrate, a Ferme de Mucius Scévola, Le Respect Religieux d’Albinus pour les Vestales and the Piété Filiale de Coriolan. After this period, he produced a series of coloured drawings of La Chasse d’Henri IV, exhibited in 1776, and then seems to have concentrated on genre subjects. No mention is made here of the death of Lucretia. Perhaps the most plausible option is that Parizeau worked on this idea around 1770 when the main focus of his exhibited output was history subjects; we should also remember that Beaufort’s painting of the theme was exhibited in 1771 to considerable critical discussion, so Parizeau may be developing his own version of this theme in response to this. See E. Bénézit,
...dont elle vient de se frapper, & lui demandant vengeance de l'affront dont elle s'est punie (no. 33), known from a 1763 engraving by Henriquez (La Mort de Lucreèe, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, plate 88). This is unique in its depiction of Lucretia handing over the knife to Brutus, reaching out from the cocoon of her deathbed to exert an influence in the public domain through the conduit of Brutus.

The narrative is moved on still further, to the start of the swearing of the men's oath, by two works. One is attributed to Deshays, and dated to around 1760 (Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts), and the other is Tardieu's engraving after Gabriel de Saint-Aubin in 1762, an illustration for a projected historical account of Rome by Etienne André Phillipe de Prêtot. However, the configuration of the death and oath scene which was most influential was Gavin Hamilton's Death of Lucretia (1763-4, New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, plate 89), engraved by Cunego. The press in 1764 noted the extent to which this was an innovative treatment of the subject matter, since the men in the scene paid much more attention to Brutus than to Lucretia. In France, the moment depicted was further chronologically advanced by Beaufort's work, Brutus, Lucretius Père de Lucrèce, et Collatinus son mari, jurent sur le poignard dont elle s'est tuee, de venger sa mort et de chasser les Tarquins de Rome. This work, Beaufort's reception piece for the Académie, was sent to the 1771 Salon (no. 152) where it generated a good deal of interest (Nevers, Musée Municipal Frédéric Blandin, plate 90).

After this, all of the other late eighteenth-century French depictions of this scene feature a Lucretia who is already dead, and some form of oath-swearing. Most of these representations were made either just before or during the Revolution. I will briefly

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10 For example, just one of the critics to note that this work received ‘une attention singulière’ from the visitors was the author of ‘Exposition des peintures, sculptures et gravures’, in the *Journal Encyclopédique* (1771), C.D., no. 1320, pp. 549-550.
outline this body of work here, and will return to focus on individual works later in my analysis. In chronological order, the next to appear was an etching of the death of Lucretia by J.-L. Delignon after Sylvestre Mirys. Initially published in 1785 as a single print, it was part of a series on the history of the Roman Republic which was then re-published as a complete series in 1799 (private collection, plate 91).11

Two little known works are Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s overpainted version of a rare print by Gauthier d’Agoty from 1787 (Grasse, Villa Fragonard, plate 92), and an engraving by Baquoy after Borel which illustrates a volume of Cussac’s edition of Putarch’s lives (Paris, 1787). Unusually, this shows the Roman people gathered around Lucretia’s body with Brutus urging them to overthrow the Tarquins, rather than the initial moment of her death and his oath. Desmarais then painted two versions of the death of Lucretia around 1788: one is in Bourges, Musée du Berry (plate 93, attributed); the other is in Montpellier, Musée Fabre (plate 94).12

Jean-Baptiste Wicar worked extensively on this subject while in Rome in 1789, and a substantial group of sketches and drawings from this project survive; four are illustrated here, all now in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille (plates 95, 96, 98 and 99). Wicar apparently left a canvas depicting the death of Lucretia to his pupil Camillo Domeniconi in 1834, but this and the three painted sketches of this subject also present in his studio are now all untraced.13 Moitte produced a drawing for a sculptural frieze in 1791, later engraved by F. Janinet in 1795 (Paris, Bibliothèque d’Art et d’Archéologie, plate 101). Réattu’s painting of this theme has been dated approximately between 1792 and 1796 (Arles, Musée Réattu, plate 102); a painting of La mort de Lucrèce by Jacques Lebrun was exhibited at the 1793 Salon (no. 648, now lost). Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard’s

12 The date of this work, as for several others in this section, cannot be precisely determined because of a lack of documentary evidence. Where approximate dates are given here, these are the current estimates given by the relevant museums, either indicated via correspondance with the museum in question or cited in the most recent relevant catalogue, Bordes (1996).
dramatic version is believed to have been made in about 1797 (Grasse, Villa Fragonard, plate 103). This painting has not so far been analysed by art historians working on depictions of this theme. Sophie Janinet sent an ink drawing of the death of Lucretia to the 1799 Salon (no. 169), now lost. There are also two further recorded paintings which featured the dead Lucretia and the men’s oath but which are now untraced: one by Rocques was exhibited at the 1801 Salon, whilst another by Saint-Omer was shown in 1804. Both were worked upon whilst the artists were studying in David’s studio at the turn of the century.

2. The current state of research on this material: challenging assumptions and re-focusing attention

To date, there has been no sustained art historical investigation into visual representations of Lucretia from this period. Donaldson’s study focuses on literary texts rather than images, although he does examine briefly a number of the key pictures in the overall European canon. Other in-depth studies which have concerned the late eighteenth-century French material have tended to be part of work whose primary focus lies elsewhere. Consequently, some central issues about Lucretia’s representation have not been discussed; moreover, as a result perhaps of her marginal position in this research, some highly questionable assumptions have been made about the way in which Lucretia’s death is depicted.

The first supposition is that once Brutus and the men swearing the oath are included in the picture, the focus shifts irreversibly off Lucretia and onto the men. This is an interpretation that privileges the Hamilton and Beaufort versions, making a simple comparison between the dynamics of the group pictures compared to the single figure

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tradition. The initial exponent of this view was Robert Rosenblum, the scholar who in the 1960s rediscovered the Beaufort painting and highlighted the influence that it must have had on the dramatic composition of David’s powerful Le Serment des Horaces (1785, Paris, musée du Louvre, plate 105). Rosenblum asserted that Beaufort’s canvas showed a shift of focus away from Lucretia, a move ‘from the traditional scene of feminine suicide after erotic dishonour to a vengeful, steadfast trio of male oath-takers’. He compounded this by referring to most depictions of this scene as The Oath of Brutus, even though some were clearly originally entitled The Death of Lucretia, and thereby set up an instability around the title of works on this subject which persists in many museums today.

The ‘shift of focus’ theory is one that has proved to be enduring over the last thirty years. The notion has prevailed that after the Beaufort painting, Lucretia was marginalised as successive artists chose to focus on the moment of the oath and the chance that it offered to make a visual quotation of David’s famed and much discussed motif of male arms meeting in a gesture of resolve. The currency of this interpretation is evident if we look at the most recent work on this material, Philippe Bordes’ 1996 exhibition catalogue on Brutus. The overall subject of this catalogue of course reveals how the focus is still firmly on Brutus as far as the author is concerned; it does though include a reasonable

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17 Duncan Macmillan takes Rosenblum to task over his re-titling of Hamilton’s work in his article ‘Woman as hero: Gavin Hamilton’s radical alternative’, in G. Perry and M. Rossington eds., Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture (Manchester, 1994), pp. 78-98. Philippe Bordes too entitles any work on this theme which does not have a specific title inscribed in it as Le serment de Brutus. Many museums which own works on this theme are unaware that the two titles La mort de Lucrèce and Le serment de Brutus can and often do denote the same scene. Thus what is a subtle distinction can be either ignored or applied in an arbitrary fashion (see Le Chevalier Wicar (1984) p. 39 for an unconvincing argument for the re-titling of one of the Wicar drawings). Yet apart from the Beaufort work, all of the other versions of this scene to be noted in the Salon livrets have the title La mort de Lucrèce. Taking this into account, and in order to redress the balance in the aftermath of Rosenblum and Bordes, I therefore give the title of La mort de Lucrèce to the works for which documentary evidence of an original title does not exist. However, the point that I would like to stress is that we must retain an awareness of the instability of these titles, and of the inseparable connection of Brutus’ oath to Lucretia’s death. Above all we should beware of making assumptions about the importance of the oath based partly upon titles that are not as reliable as some scholars have led us to believe.
amount of discussion of the later *Death of Lucretia* images because of the formulations of
the oath that they offer.

However, whilst Bordes’ catalogue is provocative about the deployment of different
 constructions of Brutus during the Revolution, it is far less challenging about the role
 played by Lucretia in these images. The author reasserts the view that in contrast to
earlier centuries which were ‘fascinée[s] par Lucrèce’, there has been a transition by the
late eighteenth century to another era ‘qui ne remarque plus que Brutus’.18 Like
Rosenblum, Bordes cites Hamilton’s *Death of Lucretia* as a key transitional work,
judging that when Hamilton’s Brutus turns away from the agonised Lucretia, he is
already projecting himself into the next sequence of pictures (for example the Beaufort
version). Lucretia’s grip on Brutus’ robe is interpreted as a vain attempt to remind him
that she is still there, ignored as Brutus moves on.

Bordes clearly sees no need to challenge the view that with a dead Lucretia in the picture,
the focus and empowerment in the scene, and consequently the site of interest and
importance in each work, switches to Brutus. This notion is given the thinnest of
feminist glosses, when he comments in a footnote on the marginalisation of women in
such works. Bordes states that ‘On a souvent souligné qu’elles n’y sont jamais les
protagonistes de leur propre histoire.’ With a nod to ‘nos collègues féministes’, he
continues that Brutus robbed Lucretia of the intimate tragedy of her rape, when he
appropriated the dagger and, brandishing it, gave it the public function of provoking the
fall of the tyrant.19

I find this problematic on several counts. Firstly, the visual evidence simply does not
indicate that the focus in these works moves off Lucretia. If we consider the extant post-
Beaufort images, all of those from the late 1780s and 1790s, we can see how in every
case Lucretia’s body is positioned centrally, how frequently the men actually swear the

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oath over her body, and how unavoidable her body is for the spectator whether it is prostrate on the floor, elevated on a chair or in her husband’s arms (see plates 91-104). Perhaps this has not so far been noticed because no one to date has brought together all of these images; however, it may also be connected with the dominant interest of art historians in Brutus rather than in Lucretia.20

Bordes’ view - and it is a prevalent one - assumes one single fixed focus in these works, and perhaps because of the visual link to the great Davidian gesture of resolve, assumes that this focus is just on the dagger and the oath swearing arms. This seems to have led to a kind of blindness to the incontrovertible fact of Lucretia’s presence, and also to its extreme importance - Brutus’ oath means very little without the signifier of Lucretia’s body. Moreover, seen in the context of the other images, the Beaufort painting (which is a key part of the construction of this prevailing interpretation of the Lucretia / Brutus action) is revealed as an exception in the way that it relegates her body to the shadowy background. The subsequent imagery most definitely foregrounds her, making her body a central, highlighted part of the composition. Lucretia’s body demands the viewer’s attention as much as the fraternal gesture of resolve that it has inspired.

I am also uncomfortable with the assertion that Brutus in these pictures ‘appropriates’ the dagger and steals all the glory. This is misguided given the textual narratives of the story presented at the time, to artists involved in history painting, and to any spectators who could read or listen to someone reading out of the Salon guidebook. Moreover, I am troubled by the fact that this reading is presented as the ‘feminist’ analysis of the material: it is shallow and suggests that the most that feminist art history can do is to hold these images up as yet more examples of how women have been wronged over the years.

Ironically, the other highly questionable assumption in prevailing thought about this material stems from research precisely aimed at understanding Lucretia in terms of

20 Bordes does cite and indeed illustrate most of them, but it would appear that neither he nor any other scholar has ever found or discussed the works by Parizeau and the two Fragonards.
gender and culture in the eighteenth century. Its basic premise is to interpret representations of her according to different codes of behaviour, usually broad oppositional ones like ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. Specific examples of this are the work of Duncan Macmillan, whose essay on Gavin Hamilton’s Lucretia analyses some of the French versions, and also Florence Viguier’s catalogue notes and essay.21

The difficulty here is the surprising tendency to assume that Lucretia’s actions are unproblematic in terms of gender and culture. For example, in broadening his discussion to include representations of other women from Roman history, such as Camilla, Agrippina and Volumnia, Macmillan analyses Lucretia’s female heroism as one based on what he terms a ‘feminine’ code of humanity and feeling, as opposed to the ‘masculine’ code of violence, honour and vengeance through which male heroes usually act. He asserts that just like these other women from antiquity, Lucretia ‘is the champion of the social value of the ‘feminine virtues’ as the foundation of society.’22

Yet this assertion is not supported by the evidence of Lucretia’s narrative as it was constructed in eighteenth-century texts. In many ways, she does not act according to any ‘feminine’ code. Her suicide is emphatically not the impulsive, private act of a desperate woman, nor does it have a basis in notions of ‘feeling’ or ‘humanity’; it is planned, public, heroic, violent and ‘male’. We should be careful not to conflate Lucretia’s evident status as a victim in this narrative with victim-like behaviour, which may be close to the kinds of feminine codes of behaviour that Macmillan discusses. For Lucretia does not act like a victim. She is unquestionably the agent in her death; she also extends the possibilities open to her as a woman by commanding action on her behalf from men.

This is not to make of her a feminist heroine: we should remember that her intervention results in the disruption of one patriarchy so that it can be replaced by another. However,

21 Macmillan (1994), and Viguier in La Révolution française à l’école de la vertu antique (1989), pp. 28-44. Macmillan’s article argues overall that Hamilton did give Lucretia a degree of agency in this representation, interpreting her gripping hand as a sign of her will, and stressing Hamilton’s protofeminism.
her behaviour at the point of her death is undeniably not that of a woman acting in a
‘feminine’ manner. At times, Lucretia is described as more manly than the men around
her: in a fragment from Rousseau’s unfinished play on this subject, Brutus compares
Lucretia’s husband unfavourably with her, saying that ‘il n’est qu’une femme et qu’elle
est plus qu’un homme.’23 Similarly, Binet in his translation of Valerius Maximus notes
that with her ‘âme virile’, Lucretia ‘eût à reprocher à la fortune de lui avoir donné le
corps d’une femme.’24

The single figure representations of Lucretia’s suicide, which we should remember
continued well into the 1780s, reiterate her masculine action, although this has not so far
been noticed by scholars.25 For example, Florence Viguier has described Suvée’s figure
as ‘Cette pauvre Lucrèce, détournant ses yeux du poignard pour se donner du courage’;
yet this interpretation seems to deny the clear determination of her vigorous movements.26
Lucretia’s fingers dig into the flesh of her breast, spreading as if to make a taut area for
the entry point of the knife. Her eyes are raised away from the dagger - but is her
expression so easily read as fear? She may look towards the gods as she expresses the
gravity and horror of the situation, but she does not flinch from what she is about to do.
Rather, the movement of her body is diagonally downwards towards the blade - she is
fully committed to her suicide. In Pellegrini’s version, we see the full potency of the
single figure mode: Lucretia’s body dominates the picture space, and her muscular action
is foregrounded for the spectator. Moreover, this is a deep stab to the vital organs rather
than the more often seen shallow cut around the breast area: there is nothing feeble and
feminine about the way that this Lucretia takes her life.

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23 Rousseau, La mort de Lucrèce (fragments) in B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond eds., Oeuvres complètes de
25 The single figure compositions by Suvée and Pellegrini have been almost completely ignored by scholars
working in this field.
Also, an overview of how Lucretia in fact does relate to other women from ancient and classical history shows the extent to which she is fundamentally different from women like Camilla, whose love for an enemy of her country meant that she did indeed disagree with the 'male' code of honour, and was subsequently killed according to that code by her own brother. I will make this comparison now by focusing on Camilla and Virginia, women whose narratives intersect with Lucretia’s on a number of key points, and yet who remain different in several crucial respects.

3. Contrasting codes: relating Lucretia to other women from Roman history

In response to Macmillan’s analysis, it seems clear firstly that Lucretia is radically unlike both Agrippina and Volumnia. Apart from the fact that the latter two do not die in the sections of their narratives most often represented during this period, they both clearly act in gentle, feminine, unthreatening ways to achieve their aims. Agrippina is quiet and dignified, shaming the killers of her husband Germanicus by her presence; Volumnia persuades her husband Coriolanus with words of peace and reason not to go to war. There is no violence or transgression in their actions, and they seem utterly different to Lucretia from this point of view. However, the assumed similarity with Camilla is more complex, and I will look at it in more detail here, considering also Virginia, a woman who is also often likened to Lucretia. What are the similarities and differences between these women, and how can they help us to understand the depictions of Lucretia?

Both Camilla and Virginia are, like Lucretia, most frequently shown at the moment of their deaths. Camilla is occasionally shown as a background figure in the other great event of her family, the oath taken by her brothers to fight the Curatii brothers to the death, in a battle between Rome and its neighbours. The best known version of this is of course David’s *Le Serment des Horaces* (plate 105), where Camilla is included as one of the group of grieving women. Her grief on this occasion is presumably the certain knowledge of sadness ahead for her: since she has strong emotional ties to members of
both the battling parties (a brother in one, and a fiancé in the other) she knows, as the Sabine women had known before her, that she is certain to lose a loved one in the fight to come.

It is in the aftermath of this fight that Camilla dies, and is most frequently represented. The details of her story are almost identical in all of the historical texts which describe her (for example the versions by Livy, Valerius Maximus and Rollin). As the victorious Horatius entered Rome, sole survivor of the crucial battle against the Curatii, the townspeople including his family flocked out to meet and congratulate him. However, when Camilla drew near to him, she saw a coat that she herself had sewn for her fiancé amongst the bloodstained garments of the enemy which Horatius held aloft as trophies. The sight of this confirmed that her brother had killed her fiancé, and she became distraught.

The expression of her grief varies amongst the different sources. Most, like the eighteenth-century translations of Livy, make her actions appear to be the ‘natural’ reaction of a sensitive woman: ‘elle délia ses cheveux, & se mit à pleurer son cher Curiae, répétant plusieurs fois son nom d’un ton de voix triste & douloureux.’27 This grief is usually carried out in public. The exception to this is the account given by Valerius Maximus, where Horatius finds his sister crying inside his father’s house.28 He could not accept what he saw as a vastly unpatriotic gesture: he immediately drew his sword and killed her, pronouncing that this should be the fate of all Roman women who cry over the death of Rome’s enemies. The crowd were horrified, and demanded justice for Camilla’s death. However, Horatius was saved by his father, who spoke movingly in his son’s defence and reminded the Romans of the young man’s vital heroic victory for them.

David considered depicting both the death scene and the father’s defence of his son during preliminary work for what eventually became the *Serment des Horaces*. Two sketches indicate his initial conceptions of each moment: *La mort de Camille* (1781, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, plate 106) and *Le Père d’Horace défendant son fils* (c.1784, Paris, Musée du Louvre, plate 107). In both cases, regardless of the differing urgent male action surrounding her, Camilla’s body is a collapsed, lifeless form in the foreground. Moreover, we find that the same representational mode is adopted by all the other artists who depict the dead Camilla around this time.

The majority of late eighteenth-century French depictions of Camilla were made by students competing for the Prix de Rome competition in 1785. The competition context is an important factor: student artists had certain goals and had to work in the mould of their masters, so it is therefore not surprising that in some respects they are all quite similar. However, although these young artists each tried different ways of representing Horatius, the key male figure in the action, their choice of pose for Camilla seems unanimous. This is clear from an examination of the works by Desmarais and Potain (both 1785, Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieur des Beaux-Arts, plate 108 and 109); a canvas by Girodet which was produced outside of the official competition, although at the same time (1785, Montargis, Musée Girodet, plate 110); and a version attributed to Lethière (1785, Providence, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, plate 111).

First prizes were awarded to both Potain and Desmarais, but in all of these contending canvases, we see the same vision of Camilla: lifeless, inert and either falling back or already virtually horizontal in the arms of one or several women in a version of the ‘lamentation’ pose used in religious art. Visual contrasts are made between Camilla’s

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29 Although Marandel has argued that Potain came first and Duvivier second (see J. P. Marandel, ‘The Death of Camille: Guillaume Guillon Lethière and the 1785 Prix de Rome’, *Antologia di Belle Arti*, vol. IV (1980), nos. 13-14, pp. 12-17), Simon Lee has drawn my attention to the documents which confirm both Potain and Desmarais as winners: Desmarais’ prize was *en réserve* from 1783 when no first prize was awarded. See A. de Montaiglon ed., *Procès verbaux de l’Académie Royale de Peinture...* (Paris, 1885-1892), vol. IX, p. 233. Rosenblum has noted the use of the lamentation pose in these works; see Rosenblum (1967), p. 29.
soft, collapsing flesh and the hard, defined musculature of her brother; between her scant,
flowing clothes and his tough, protective armour; between her fragile, ‘female’ sensibility
and his unyielding, ‘male’ patriotism.

What is interesting about a comparison between Camilla and Lucretia is that there are
some clear visual similarities between them, most notably the inclusion of the limp
female corpse in the foreground. We will consider this aspect in more detail later. At
this point, it is important to register the fact that otherwise, these two women are vastly
different. Like Lucretia, Camilla’s death is concerned with posterity and providing an
example to women in the future. However, unlike Lucretia, Camilla does not take that
decision herself. This is a crucial difference between them. Camilla clearly acts
according to what one might term a ‘feminine’ code of behaviour, unable to stop her
emotion from overflowing at a fatally dangerous moment.30

Virginia is another Roman woman who often appears to be similar to Lucretia, but who is
actually quite different in terms of character and motivation (as constructed by
eighteenth-century source texts). Florence Viguier has equated these two women on the
grounds of narrative similarity. She categorises Lucretia and Virginia as examples of
filial devotion, noting that: ‘Les filles savaient aussi se dévouer à leurs parents au point
d’en perdre la vie, telles Virginie et Lucrece acceptant de mourir pour éviter que le
déshonneur n’afflige leur famille.’31 Such a statement conflates two startlingly different
narratives, and ignores the clear element of filial disobedience in Lucretia’s story: her
father begs her not to kill herself.

Virginia was a young virgin who in around 450BC fell victim to Appius, one of the
despotic Decemvirs governing Rome after the collapse of the first Roman Republic. He
fell in love with her; however, several obstacles prevented any marriage between them.

30 We should note that in one version of Camilla’s narrative, Rollin’s Histoire Romaine, she is also angry
with her brother, but this anger is not framed in terms which might be deemed ‘male’. She publicly
condemns him for his action, but it is a protest couched in tears which is motivated because she has been
Firstly, Appius himself had imposed a law which forbade marriage between his ruling
class and her plebeian class. Moreover, her father, Virginius, was a committed republican
who detested the rule of the Decemvirs; he had betrothed his daughter to Icilius, a young
man with similar political views to his own. Since Virginia herself also rejected his
secret advances, Appius resorted to less noble means. He persuaded one of his associates,
Claudius, to claim Virginia as his property, saying that she was the daughter of one of his
slaves and not at all from Virginius' family. Appius' plan was that once he had ruled (in
his capacity as Decemvir) that Virginia was indeed Claudius' possession, he could take
her for himself.

This claim was initially made when Virginius was away from Rome fighting in the army,
but Virginia's uncle and Icilius managed to postpone Appius' trial and decision until the
following day, by which time her father had been sent for. Despite Appius' best efforts,
Virginius arrived in Rome and disputed the claim, but to no avail. When he realised that
Appius had his own agenda and was uninterested in justice, Virginius took extreme
action. Seizing a knife from a nearby butcher's stall, he stabbed his daughter, telling her
that death was the only way he could see to save her honour (meaning to save her from
rape and slavery). As with Lucretia's death, the political aftermath was huge: Virginius
escaped from the death scene to rouse both the army and the people. On hearing the story
of yet another example of injustice against such an innocent party, and on seeing
Virginia's blood-stained body, the Romans successfully rose up against the Decemvirs.

Once more, an examination of visual representations of Virginia reveals that she often
looks like Lucretia as she is portrayed in late eighteenth-century French depictions.
Nearly all of the artists who represented Virginia chose to focus on the moment of her
death. The only exceptions that I have found so far are a lost painting by Lebarbier of the
Jugement de Virginie, sent to the Salons of 1795 and 1796, and an original engraving
entitled simply Virginie et Icile by Avril, exhibited at the Salon of 1804 (also lost). The
Avril version may have been an image of the two young fiancés, or it might have

31 See La Révolution française à l'école de la vertu antique (1989), p. 31.
followed Lebarbier’s vision, which according to the description in the Salon *livret* showed the initial judgement before Virginius’ arrival, when Icilius threatened Appius and the women of Rome gathered round Virginia to protect and defend her.32

The other paintings usually depict Virginia as a collapsed or collapsing form, very similar to the way in which Camilla is shown. The tradition of representing her in this manner seems to have been established in the eighteenth century by Gravelot, in his engravings for the second English edition (1754) of Rollin’s *Histoire Romaine* (plate 112). As Peter Walch has argued, Gravelot’s designs influenced a number of important Neo-Classical artists later in the century.33 Unusually, this collapsed pose was not chosen by the first two French artists to represent the death of Virginia in the second half of the century: Doyen at the Salon of 1759 (Parma, Pinacoteca) and Brenet at the 1783 Salon (for which there is an oil sketch in Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française, plate 113, and the final painting in Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, plate 114). Both of these artists elected instead to represent the moment before the death, with Brenet’s Virginia in particular seeming to surge forward to meet her fate, flinging back her arm to make room for the knife in a move that echoes her father’s. This vigorous pose was criticised by several commentators as inappropriate for the timid Virginie.34

Lelu may have developed Brenet’s energised vision in the version of *La Mort de Virginie* which he exhibited at the 1793 Salon (now lost). The Salon livret description ascribes an agency to Virginia which is never attributed to her in the source texts: ‘Virginie condamnée par les vils suppots du Proconsul Appius, à lui être livrée, implore le courage

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32 The only commentaries on this work appear in criticism of the 1796 Salon; it centres on charges of a dry academic tone and too much borrowing from other artists. See for example *Les Etrivières de Juvenal, ou satire sur les tableaux Exposés au Louvre l’an V* (Paris, 1796), C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 490, pp. 11-12.

33 Walch cites the example of Nathaniel Dance’s *Death of Virginia* (exhibited at the Society of Artists 1761, now known only by an engraving by J.G. Haid, British Museum).

34 Particularly in the Brenet version, this was found to be an inappropriate choice of moment and pose by many of the critics. They found that the father appeared to be too eager to strike the blow, and that Virginia was not frightened or fainting enough: see *Le Triumvirat des arts, ou dialogue entre un peintre, un musicien et un poete, sur les tableaux exposés au Louvre. Année 1783. Pour servir de continuation au Coup de Patte & à la Patte de Velours*, C.D., vol. XIII, no. 305, pp. 7-8 and p. 32; and ‘Observations sur les ouvrages de peinture et sculpture 1783’ from *L’année littéraire*, C.D., vol. XIII, no. 311, p. 949.
240

de son père, qui, saisissant un couteau sur l’étau d’un boucher voisin, lui donne la mort qu’elle préfère à l’infamie’ [my italics].

This then appears to have been an image of Virginia begging her father to be courageous and to kill her.

However, the foregrounded limp body is central to the numerous designs made by Lethière from the mid-1790s onwards. Lethière’s monumental version of *La Mort de Virginie* (Paris, Musée du Louvre) was not finished until 1828 and was finally exhibited at the Salon of 1831. The collapsed, inert mode of representation was though part of this composition from its early inception, as we see from one of the very early drawings, now in the Musée de Pontoise, which was exhibited originally at the 1795 Salon (plate 115). Here Virginia appears as a twisted, lifeless rag doll. Lying almost horizontal, her body appears broken and crumpled. She is not though cradled by women in the traditional lamenting pose; instead, the only support that lifts her slightly off the ground is the back of her father’s leg as he drags her body behind him. This initial version was engraved by Coqueret (formerly held in Paris by the Bibliothèque Nationale, now lost), the result winning a ‘Prix d’encouragement’ when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1798. Lethière was to experiment with ideas for this complex scene for the next thirty years, and there are sketches in different media in several different museum collections; however, a constant in all of the variations is the use of some form of the collapsed woman motif for the representation of Virginia (see plates 116 - 119).

Yet apart from this visual similarity, we find that otherwise, Virginia and Lucretia are most unlike each other, particularly in terms of their actions. Throughout different versions of her narrative, Virginia has little agency. Livy is typical of the ancient authors when he presents Virginia as a pawn who is moved about in what is almost an argument.

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35 *Description des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture et gravure exposés au Salon du Louvre par les artistes composants la commune générale des Arts, le 10 août 1793 l’an IIe de la République française, une et indivisible*, C.D., vol. XVIII, no. 457, p. 51.

36 See for example sketch in the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (plate 116); the oil on paper sketch at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille (plate 117); the ink and chalk sketch at the Musée Ingres in Montauban (plate 118) and the privately owned oil sketch on loan to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque (plate 119).
over property between the key male characters. Icilius speaks of how she must remain in her father’s house if he is to accept her as his wife (the implication being that she will be ‘spoiled goods’ if Claudius is allowed to remove her). Virginius declares that he has promised to give Virginia to Icilius and will not renege on that agreement. Virginia herself is seized and moved about without ever expressing a view on the situation herself; and when she dies, it is her father’s decision entirely: there is no consultation with her, and she gives no assent.

This lack of agency is carried on also by the later writers of histories of Rome. In Abbé Vertot d’Aubeuf’s *Histoire des Révolutions arrivées dans le gouvernement de la République Romaine*, the only hint of any action or reaction from Virginia is that she bursts into tears on several occasions. Rollin follows Livy in most aspects of the story, and Virginia’s status as a voiceless object seems to be confirmed every time it is decided that she should be ‘remise entre les mains’ of another party: a phrase which communicates her powerless state whilst also hinting at the underlying sexual nature of the argument, implying the manner in which she is ‘man-handled’.

There are some late eighteenth-century dramas based on Virginia’s story which do give her a voice and some agency, understandably since she is a key character in the work. As Leblanc explained in the introduction to his 1786 *Virginie, tragédie en cinq actes*, although some people may feel that Virginia should appear but speak little, ‘mais qui ne voit qu’il seroit absurde que l’héroïne d’une pièce ne fut qu’automate souvent invisible, sans mouvement, presque sans voix?’ Consequently, Leblanc’s Virginia (along with the character created by Alfieri in his play *Virginie*, first published in France in 1788) takes a major role in the action, frequently and volubly desiring death. However, there is still a crucial difference between even these most active of Virginias and Lucretia. Even though

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40 See for example Rollin (1738), vol. II, p. 113.
it is clear that Virginia would rather die than submit to her aggressor, she herself never acts upon this desire. Leblanc's Virginie highlights this difference when she sighs regretfully: "si j'ai pu me soustraire au destin de Lucrece."\(^{42}\) Her father is the one who decides when and how to kill her, and Virginie always remains a dutiful, demure girl who is described as beautiful because she is melancholic and defenceless.\(^{43}\) She is always the ideal daughter.

It is clear, therefore, that whilst in visual terms the depictions of these dead women closely resemble each other, there are also vast differences between them, in terms of who they are and how they act. The key issues are agency and power. Lucretia, Camilla and Virginia do have certain elements in common: they are women, they die, and the reason for their deaths is bound up in issues of sex, politics and posterity. However, they are fundamentally different in terms of the amount of will and control that they themselves exercise over their own deaths. They are at three different points on the spectrum of agency: Camilla neither desires nor seeks her demise, which is imposed upon her very much against her will; Virginia is a passive but willing participant, obediently acquiescing in her death at her father's hands; and Lucretia is the sole architect of her ultimate fate; performing the act of death herself.

There is also a great deal of evidence which indicates that, in contrast to both Camilla and Virginia, Lucretia did not fit easily into any acceptable mould of femininity for this period. If we study a broader but related cultural field of material on Lucretia, we find that she was in fact considered to be a highly problematic woman in terms of gender and culture.

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\(^{42}\) Leblanc (1986), Act IV, sc.iii.

\(^{43}\) See for example V. Alfieri, Virginie, tragédie en cinq actes (Paris, 1788), Act III, sc.iii; and Rollin (1738), vol. I, p. 117.
4. A context of controversy: Lucretia’s problematic status

Lucretia is a woman with a long history of bothering Christian writers and philosophers, dating back at least to Saint Augustine, and different takes on the arguments over her problematic moral status are presented in a wide range of historical texts and dictionaries that were in use in late eighteenth-century France. These were debates bound up with concerns over the sinful nature of suicide, and Lucretia’s reasoning that she did not want to be used as an excuse by adulterous women.44

The basic dilemma was why Lucretia insisted that she had to die, given that she was an innocent victim of rape: after all, if this were true, then there was no need for her to die and she was wrong to take this action which would have been against the will of God. Other questions were asked: did she commit suicide because she was in fact adulterous? Did she even perhaps enjoy the rape in spite of her objection to it (Lucretia herself made a distinction between her mind and body when she explained her suicide plan to the witnesses, emphasising that although her mind was pure, her body had been forced to sin; it then followed that commentators wondered whether her body had experienced pleasure during the rape). Was Lucretia guilty of excessive pride in her reputation? Was she vain in seeking the glory of a noble suicide? Alternatively, how could any suicide be seen as noble since any taking of life was a sin? Overall, should Lucretia continue to be praised as virtuous and courageous at all?

In reference works like Bayle’s *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* and Rollin’s *Histoire Romaine*, compromise views were presented, which urged the reader to judge Lucretia by the customs and morals of her own time and not the later Christian period, where the idea of praiseworthy suicide had become rather a contradiction in terms. Bayle for example concludes: ‘On ne peut donc la justifier au Tribunal de la Religion: mais si on la juge au

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44 See Donaldson (1982) for a detailed examination of these debates from early Christian texts onwards, pp. 21-39.
Tribunal de la Gloire humaine, elle y remportera la couronne la plus brillante.\textsuperscript{45}

However, these texts present all sides of the debate first, so any reader would have been well aware of the historically problematic moral status of Lucretia’s suicide.

For example, Rollin’s version of Lucretia’s story included a succinct account of the moral and philosophical arguments around her, worth citing here in full for its completeness.

He wrote:

‘La mort tragique de Lucrece, qui a donné lieu à cette grande révolution, a été louée & vantée par le paganisme, comme le dernier & le plus noble effort de l’héroïsme. L’Evangile n’en juge pas ainsi: c’est un meurtre injuste, même selon les principes de Lucrece, puisqu’elle punit de mort une innocente, du moins reconnue de sa part pour telle. Elle ignorait que nous ne sommes pas maîtres de notre vie, & qu’il n’y a que celui de qui nous la tenons qui ait droit d’en disposer. Saint Augustin, qui examine avec soin dans les Livres de la Cité de Dieu ce qu’il faut penser de la mort de Lucrece, ne la regarde point comme une action de courage, partie d’un véritable amour de la chasteté, mais comme une faiblesse d’une femme trop sensible à la gloire & à la réputation humaine, & qui dans la crainte de paraître aux yeux des hommes complice d’une violence qu’elle détestoit, & d’un crime qui lui étoit tout-à-fait étranger, en commet un véritable sur elle-même volontairement & de propos délibère. Mais ce que nous ne pouvons trop admirer dans cette Dame Romaine, c’est l’horreur qu’elle a de l’adultère, qu’elle regarde comme un crime si affreux, si détestable, qu’elle n’en peut soutenir l’idée. Tel étoit le jugement qu’en portoient les payens même.’\textsuperscript{46}

In these three paragraphs, Rollin makes her problematic status in the eighteenth century quite clear, so any artist or spectator reading this would be well aware of the complex moral issues surrounding Lucretia and her actions.

By the late eighteenth century, there were definite moves within French literature to present Lucretia in a positive light, probably to do with her significance in Roman republican history, an area which will be discussed more fully in due course. What is interesting here is just how difficult this rehabilitation proved to be. For example, several plays which were published and or performed in 1792 and 1793 provide

\textsuperscript{45} Bayle, \textit{Dictionnaire Historique et Critique} (Rotterdam 1657; Amsterdam, 1740, fifth edition), p. 205.

\textsuperscript{46} Rollin (1738-1741), pp. 318-319.
fascinating evidence of how eighteenth-century authors struggled to make the stern Lucretia into a more understandable, sympathetic and acceptable character for their audiences. Each author attempts a transformation only to find that it creates more problems.

Rousseau, in the unfinished play *La Mort de Lucrèce* that was published posthumously in 1792, tried to make her into a 'femme sensible'. In the opening scene, Lucrèce is presented as a sensitive, emotional woman who is 'tourmentée d’une secrète inquiétude'. She is weak from lack of sleep, but is disturbed by terrible dreams; her maid is very worried by her state of 'agitation extraordinaire' and how her health has been attacked by ‘une subite mélancholie’.47

This Lucretia is also represented as good wife: when she has had to stay at home because she feels so weak and troubled, and her maid Pauline sympathises that is a shame to be thus imprisoned, Lucretia rebukes her with a litany of the benefits of her situation. ‘Appellez-vous une prison la douceur de vivre paisiblement dans le sein de sa famille? Pour moi je n’aurai jamais besoin d’autre société pour mon bonheur ni d’autre estime pour ma gloire que celle de mon Epoux, de mon Père et de mes Enfans.’48 The author could be seen here to be attempting to address and redress any hint that Lucretia seeks self-glorification in her own virtue, by having her state that all her happiness and esteem lies within the confines of her family.

In Rousseau’s version, Lucretia already has some kind of relationship with Tarquin: he had intended to marry her some time before, and she had been willing, but the union had been forbidden by her father. Lucretius had arranged the marriage with Collatinus; however, although his daughter professes to be completely happy with her husband, the servants in the play (plus the audience) are left wondering if she does not secretly have

some feelings still for Tarquin, since the mere mention of his name seems to make her so agitated.

Brutus is the character who seems to understand most what is happening: he tells Lucretius that his daughter is in love with Tarquin, although she does not know it. He also hints that if Lucretia realised she still had feelings for Tarquin, it would cost her life (because she would feel compelled to suicide). This may be an attempt to emphasise the logic expressed by Lucretia herself in some of the historical texts, that her mind was innocent even if her body sinned. However, as Donaldson notes, the plays which give prominence to Lucretia’s struggle between her ‘natural feelings’ and her sense of wifely loyalty quickly enter problematic areas. This is a risky option for any author to take up, since the thread of reason strays dangerously close to the problem of wondering whether she actually enjoyed the rape; Donaldson suggests that this may have been the reason why Rousseau did not finish this work.49 This does seem plausible; we can see that in trying to make Lucretia seem more feminine in order to solve one set of problems, Rousseau then found that this strategy had created a new range of difficult issues which had to be negotiated.

Moreover, one of the primary problems still remained: the ‘âme virile’ of the lead character had not been edited out entirely. Lucretia is given the agency of initiating the revenge oath in one of the fragments of speech not incorporated into the unfinished text: ‘Tiens, Brutus, j’ai fait mon devoir, fais celui de Rome et le tien.’50 Her ultra-masculine character is expressed clearly in another fragment, already noted here. Collatinus is portrayed as a weak, ambitious man, who contradicts his wife when she asks for protection (as much from the consequences of her own feelings as from Tarquin); when Brutus criticises Lucretius for believing Collatinus over Lucretia, he contrasts the couple in terms of a reversal of gender: ‘Victime du préjugé, tu as préféré dans ta confiance ton

gendre à ta fille sans penser qu’il n’est qu’une femme et qu’elle est plus qu’un homme."[my italics].

That this succinct characterisation did not find its way into the text before Rousseau abandoned the project may indicate that this was another factor that made Lucretia an extremely awkward subject. We can see that the author may have found himself in an impossible vicious circle: Lucretia was an uncomfortable and problematic woman to deal with, both when her masculine characteristics were expressed and when they were covered with supposedly more feminine behaviour.

In Arnault’s play *Lucrece, tragédie en cinq actes* (Paris, 1792), the author also uses the storyline of a previous liaison between Lucretia and Sextus Tarquin, which was thwarted by her father. The conflict between wifely duty and old smouldering feelings for her former love is more overtly played out here; Lucretia progressing from worrying that Tarquin may still have some feelings for her to realising eventually that she is still in love with him. We see her confusion when Tarquin first professes his love for her: ‘Mon coeur semble avec lui d’accord pour me confondre, / Dans quel trouble il me jette & comment lui répondre! / Quel supplice!’.

In the second interview between them, Lucretia tries to fight these feelings but eventually weakens and admits that she loves him, although she vows that she will succeed in fighting these emotions and by doing this will remain virtuous:

‘Je rougirais d’un crime & non d’un sentiment.
L’amour peut se glisser dans un coeur innocent;
Mais qu’il y soit vaincu bien loin de l’abattre.
La honte est de céder & non pas de combattre.’

This Lucretia becomes stronger in her resolve the more that Tarquin begs and tries to bribe her, becoming most decided when he talks of marriage and offers her the throne:

53 Arnault (1792), Act IV, sc.v.
she rebukes him for insulting marriage, duty and honour. When she tells him ‘Vous me faites pitié, vous me faites horreur’, he realises that he cannot win her heart and decides then to take her by force, carrying out the rape shortly afterwards.\(^4\)

Arnault’s Lucretia embarks upon an emotional rollercoaster, switching between ‘femme sensible’ tormented by emotions and ‘femme honorable’ who remains firm in the face of temptation. The ultimate victor in this internal battle is the latter, the loyal wife who after some doubts and emotional turmoil ultimately masters her romantic feelings for Sextus, and finds that this was the right choice to make. This solution works perhaps better than some of the others - by her vacillations, Lucretia is seen to be human (and female), but by her ultimate decision, she manages to stay on the side of virtue.

The benefits and problems involved in making Lucretia more sympathetic by making her more feminine are clear when we consider a third dramatic version of her story, Citoyen Piquenard’s *Lucrece ou la Royauté Abolie. Tragédie en trois actes* (Brest, 1793). In this version, the author stresses above all her virtue, and presents her as a model republican wife and mother: she never entertains any thoughts of affection past or present for her rapist, and there is no grey area of emotional turmoil over him. There is a history of his attraction to her, but this was never reciprocated by Piquenard’s Lucretia, who gladly accepted the help of her father when he suggested marriage with Collatinus.

This play presents Lucretia first as a mother (her opening words are telling her women to go quietly so they do not wake her sons); then as virtuous wife and daughter (she spends her time making clothes for her family); and also as a dedicated republican. This Lucretia is not troubled over love, but because Rome is oppressed by tyrants. This is expressed in a speech where she says as a ‘mère tendre et chérie, épouse fortunée’ she should be happy - but cannot be because of the political situation her country is in:

\[
\text{‘Le puis-je goûter ce bonheur domestique,}
\]
\[
\text{Lorsque j’entends gémir l’infortune publique,}
\]

\(^4\) Arnault (1792), Act IV, sc.v.
Quand mes concitoyens, opprimés, avilis,  
Sous le joug d'un tyran languissent asservis?  
Oui, mon âme toujours fière et républicaine,  
Pleure en larmes de sang la liberté romaine.\textsuperscript{55}

This is a very different use of the motif of tears to the other confused, love-stricken Lucretias that we have seen in the works by Rousseau and Arnault. This is the first time that we see Lucretia overtly desire a change in her country’s political régime before her death. However, she remains true to the model of the Cornelia-esque good republican woman by realising that she cannot do anything about the situation herself, contenting herself instead with dreaming that one of her sons might be the man to free Rome in the future.

When the rape happens at the end of Act I, the spectator is in no doubt of Lucretia’s sexual virtue, and of the fact that she took no pleasure whatsoever in the crime against her. However, this uncomplicated vision of Lucretia is not without its problems. These lie principally in her maternal status. This is a new development, presumably added as part of the desire (strong in 1793) to portray her as the ideal republican woman, part of whose purpose is to regenerate the state by producing new young republicans. However, the presence of these children then makes Lucretia’s decision to commit suicide and abandon them seem extremely harsh and unmaternal.

The author tries to address this problem in Act II, when Lucretia has a long speech where she is alone and debating her future course of action. She wants to commit suicide after such dishonour, but stops to consider the effect on her husband and children:

\begin{quote}
‘Mais une voix gémit dans mon coeur combattu:  
Je l'entends qui me crie: ‘arrête, que fais tu?  
Songe que par ta mort, o malheureuse mère,  
Tu laisses tes enfans aux soins de l'étrangère;  
Que ta cruelle main va porter mille coups  
Dans le coeur déchiré d’un vertueux époux.  
Puis-je fermer l’oreille aux cris de la nature?\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{55} C. Piquenard, \textit{Lucrece ou la Royauté Abolie. Tragédie en trois actes} (Brest 1793), Act I, sc.ii.
Pourquoi rompre les noeuds d’un amour aussi pure?’

Indeed, this is a good question, and one that is not satisfactorily answered by Lucretia’s reasoning that since the dishonour would otherwise be too great for her family, she should kill herself: to leave her children motherless is better than to submit them to such disgrace. As she speaks later of this unbearable shame, she shudders at the prospect that if she remained alive, ‘Peut-être mes enfans rougiront de leur mère.’

Yet this hardly seems a substantial enough reason to warrant depriving the children of a mother, and indeed, the idea that her actions are too harsh is confirmed by her father when he tries to persuade her not to carry out her suicide, with the warning ‘Ne deviens pas barbare’. He makes an emotional appeal to his daughter, but she resists him and goes ahead with her plan. Her farewell to her husband, who is in tears, combines instructions to look after the children and to avenge her. It is a speech which shows what a gulf there is between Lucretia’s maternal love and her desire for vengeance:

‘Je te laisse mes fils, gages de ma tendresse,
Veille sur leurs destins; dirige leur jeunesse,
Conduis, soutiens leurs pas au chemin des vertus.
Tu leur diras: ‘Mes fils, votre mère n’est plus;
Et vous êûtes, objets des plus tendres allarmes,
Et ses derniers soupirs et ses dernières larmes.’
J’impose, en expirant ces devoirs à ta foi;
Amour pour mes enfans...et vengeance pour moi!’

The last line contains this paradox - the demand for love and the demand for violence. Ultimately, the idea of perhaps softening Lucretia’s stern moral values by introducing the element of maternity seems to backfire. As her father suggests, it only serves to make her final actions seem even more unnecessary and barbarous.

56 Piquenard (1793), Act II, sc.iii.
57 Piquenard (1793), Act II, sc.iv.
58 Piquenard (1793), Act II, sc.iv.
59 Piquenard (1793), Act II, sc.iv.
From the many debates and literary reconfigurations of Lucretia for a French audience of the 1780s and 90s, it is clear that as far as historians and writers were concerned, she was problematic. We see the extent to which authors try to adapt the difficult figure of Lucretia to make her more acceptable and understandable to their readers and spectators, but how this is an extremely difficult operation to carry out successfully.

This is also the case for artists: again, the evidence shows that they too are trying out different visual solutions to the problems that Lucretia’s death poses. It is striking how many of the images from 1788 onwards are experimental works, sketches in different media that as far as we know were never given definitive forms. Desmarais tried two versions of the scene before moving on to other subjects; Wicar approaches Lucretia from a variety of different angles in 1789. I resist the desire to put these sketches by Wicar into a particular order, because I do not believe that we can be clear about this, and it would be misleading to assume authorial intentions from a sequentiality that we have imposed. However, we can see that the artist is testing a range of solutions.

For example, Wicar has clearly tried different positions for the all-important knife - in plate 96, he has drawn a dagger just below Lucretia’s hand as if she has just dropped it, whilst also trying it out in Brutus’ raised hand, and including the suggestive outline of a sword behind her shoulder and neck. He has also pondered the relative importance of the sign of Rome, the statue of the she-wolf with Romulus and Remus, preferring it here in a central position above Lucretia which emphasises the political nature of the action. In the body of Wicar sketches as a whole (plates 95 - 100), we see a range of people acting and reacting in different poses in various settings; Lucretia ignored in some versions and in others, as we see from the detail shown in plate 100, cradled, in a pose reminiscent of the ‘pietà’, by a visibly crying husband. The only constant in all four drawings is the decision to depict Lucretia in the moments after the stab wound rather than before or during it. Apart from this fundamental choice, there was not as far as Wicar was concerned an obvious way of representing Lucretia.
What is ultimately striking about all of these pictures of Lucretia is the extent to which she is still visible, despite her problematic nature. Artists do not decide to leave her out or to make her an ever more marginalised figure. Even in the case where she appears to be most occluded, the Beaufort painting, she is still there, and several art critics at the time discussed her and the way in which she was visible. Her important role as an instigator of action was emphasised: for example, one critic described Brutus as acting as a result of being ‘enflammé par le courage de l’illustre Romaine’, and noted that she only stabbed herself after having made the men promise to avenge her.60 Diderot seems to have been somewhat unhappy with the way that this Lucretia was ‘étendue sur son lit assez nonchalament’, hinting that there needed to be more drama in the presentation of her body.61

However, one of the most interesting comments in my view came from the critic who noted that Beaufort’s Lucretia ‘est bien placée pour être vue, sans détruire le groupe principal’.62 There are two ways that we might interpret this observation. On the one hand, we may want to comment that despite her obvious importance in the narrative, still this person did not feel that she was one of the principal figures in the work. On the other hand though, he emphasises that it is important that spectators can see her body, and praises the artist for achieving this visibility.

I think we can take this as a point of departure. If we focus on Lucretia’s visibility rather than assuming her effacement, and consider this within the context of the difficulties she brings to those who want to represent her, some new - and in my view, far more useful - paths of inquiry appear. Firstly, how exactly is Lucretia displayed: what representational strategies have artists used to make her visible? Secondly, why in fact does she remain so centrally on display? Can this help us to understand the modes of representation which appear to operate in this material?

5. Lucretia’s visibility: what representational strategies have been used in this work?

If we review plates 91-104, we can see that certain modes are commonly shared by these images. Firstly, as we have noted, Lucretia is shown as already dead, rather than at the point at which she plunges the dagger into her breast. She is also depicted as a pale, inert form who at first glance often seems to have fainted rather than stabbed herself. In my view, these strategies can be understood as motivated by issues of gender and culture.

Firstly, the shift from the actual moment of suicide to the oath over the corpse achieves several goals in this area. It makes the men appear to be much stronger, united in their fraternal gesture of resolve. This is far closer to contemporaneous ideals of masculinity than their initial reaction of shock and grief at the moment of Lucretia’s stab. Parizeau’s drawing, we should remember, depicts the majority of the men throwing their hands up in horror. That Brutus criticises his companions for their initial reaction of ‘useless’ and even womanly tears is also a constant in the source texts. Guérin’s translation of Livy for example stresses how the men eventually admire and imitate Brutus, ‘qui les exhorte à laisser aux femmes des larmes et des plaintes inutiles’; similar words are used by the playwrights of the 1790s. This unmanly scene is avoided by the choice of a slightly later moment of action.

The narrative shift can also be seen as an attempt to make Lucretia appear to inhabit a more ‘feminine’ code of behaviour. Showing Lucretia already dead, instead of at the point at which she plunges the dagger in, is a way of avoiding the difficult moments when she is acting like a man and also committing the sinful act of suicide. Spectators are shown the results of her action - the male reaction that she has set in motion - but are not

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63 See for example Rollin (1738-1741), vol. I, p. 314; Arnault (1792), Act V, sc.iii; and Piquenard (1793), Act II, sc.iv.
forced to confront the potentially disconcerting sight of her demanding the promise and carrying out her suicide.

Lucretia’s importance as an actor in this scene is still highlighted, since the foregrounding of her body emphasises her central role. However, the difficulties surrounding the fact that she has taken control of the situation are side-stepped. The advice of one of the critics who commented on Brenet’s inappropriately pro-active Virginie describes an attitude which may well have prevailed amongst artists. In 1783, he had warned: ‘Peintres et poètes, connaissez les moeurs de votre nation et de votre siècle. Vos auteurs dramatiques n’ont-ils pas adouci quelquefois sur vos théâtres cette férocité romaine? Le peintre doit employer le même artifice que le poète, ne présenter au spectateur que les objets qui peuvent le toucher, et dérober à la vue tout ce qui peut le révolter.’

It is useful at this point to remember the Parizeau drawing (plate 87), and to try to imagine what that scene would actually be like if it had ever been worked up into a large scale oil painting. In the context of all the other representations of women from ancient and classical history that I have studied during my research as a whole, Parizeau’s enthroned, imperiously gesturing Lucretia is strikingly similar to a group of women who for reasons of space could not be part of this study: powerful queens who are seen as evil, particularly Phaedra. These women tended to have very negative connotations at this time in France, particularly during and after the trial of Marie-Antoinette: they were presented as having abused their power and committed unspeakable (usually sexual) crimes. The outstretched arm which signals ‘go and do as I say’ is particularly associated with these women when they appear in visual representations, thus it would surely have been difficult for artists to portray Lucretia in this way without attaching these problematic connotations to her.66 Showing Lucretia already dead was the practical alternative. It is a strategy which avoids the moments when she does not act according to

66 This is particularly the case for the powerful queens who were known through Racine’s plays. The illustrations for Didot’s 1801 édition de luxe of Racine’s Œuvres complètes give a succinct overview of the negative connotations of the imperious queenly arm, contrasted with the gentle beseeching positions usually adopted by the good women in these plays, as noted on p. 57 of this thesis, n. 47.
the acceptable ‘feminine’ code, and it therefore allows her to be visible as a positive figure.

The tendency to depict Lucretia as a pale, inert form who initially seems to have fainted rather than stabbed herself can also be seen as a strategy to make her appear to fit the feminine mould. The drained, limp corpse is the representational norm for women from ancient and classical history who die by the sword; it is entirely reasonable that some artists will adopt this pose for Lucretia too. However, using this position for Lucretia is also particularly beneficial, in that it makes her appear to be more like the other women who remain within the ‘feminine’ code of behaviour, when, as we have seen, she is in fact far more transgressive. The fact that she looks like Camilla and Virginia invites the viewer to believe the fiction of their similarity. This is clearly an effective strategy: it is still working on art historians today, to the extent that they still often assume that because Lucretia is shown to be like these other unproblematic women, that is in fact how she is.

The properties of paleness, of limpness - almost of spinelessness - of this mode of representing the dead female form are not only used as a diversionary tactic; they also enable artists to negotiate the specific difficulties that Lucretia’s suicide presents in a visual format. There is strong evidence from other related eighteenth-century rape narratives that the ‘acceptable’ aftermath of rape is that the woman should die, but not by her own hand. Ideally, she should fade away from some mystery illness, if not from an unbearable burden of shame.

This is essentially what Samuel Richardson has Clarissa do in his novel, which was very popular in France: she is drugged and raped by the villainous Lovelace, and eventually dies some time after the ordeal.67 This is not to say that Clarissa plays an entirely passive role: she desires an end to her life, and sees death as a way of escaping the constraints that

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67 Richardson’s *Clarissa* was translated into French by the Abbé Prévost in a rather free translation that was enormously successful: S. Richardson trans. A.F. Prévost, *Lettres angloises, ou Histoire de Miss Clarisse Harlove* (Dresden, 1751). For a detailed analysis of different translations of Richardson’s work, see T. O. Beebee *Clarissa on the Continent: Translation and Seduction* (Pennsylvania and London, 1990).
the patriarchal society in which she lives has imposed upon her. Moreover, she exercises a great deal of control over who comes to her deathbed and how they interact, leaving letters which instruct her mourners on how her body should be displayed and who should see it. Clarissa’s death is often now referred to by commentators as suicide, and analysed as a form of self-textualisation.68

However, we should not forget that Richardson was very concerned that her end should be presented as a ‘good’ Christian death. We may say that Clarissa decides not to live, but she does not in fact enact a swift and brutal death upon her own body. At one point, earlier in the story, she picks up a knife and threatens to use it on herself - but she does not go through with the action. The way that she actually dies, gradually fading away, is an effective compromise between the different social and religious conventions that Richardson clearly has under consideration.

It is important to see the death that he constructs for Clarissa as a solution to some serious problems. Donaldson is rather critical of Richardson’s choice of death for his heroine, because he feels that the assumption that ‘the shock of rape must be registered in Clarissa by ill-health, decline and death (‘convincing proof of the highest chastity’’) is a point at which ‘the novel seems weakest, skirting dangerously close to cultural and fictional stereotype.’69 This analysis fails to recognise how problematic alternative dénouements would have been, in a society where death was to be preferred to dishonour, yet suicide was a temptation to be shunned. Fading away from grief and shame was indeed an effective compromise.70

68 See for example E. Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body (Manchester, 1992), pp. 145-151.
70 This is of course not the only text to use this solution; it is cited here as an example which is closely related to Lucretia’s narrative. A similar comparison could also be made with other works, for example Choderlos Laclos’ Les liaisons dangereuses (Geneva, 1782), a text which is similarly preoccupied with the dynamics of female agency and virtue. The death of the famously virtuous Présidente, again not by her own hand, brings forth similar catastrophe and destruction for the court of vice.
This is a strategy which was copied directly by citizens Duval and Monvel in their comedy *La Jeunesse du duc de Richelieu, ou le Lovelace Français* (Paris, an V). This play tells the story of a virtuous married woman, Madame Michelin, who despite herself falls prey to the charms of the French Lovelace, the Duke (a despicable aristocrat who abuses his position of power in many ways). There are repeated parallels with Lucretia’s story, particularly as it appears in Arnault’s version: Mme Michelin is a ‘femme sensible’ who is tormented, ‘réveuse’ and ‘mélancholique’, and who secretly wonders about the kind of love she has never known in her dutiful marriage to her parents’ choice of suitor, the respectable (but also greedy bourgeois merchant) M. Michelin.71 Meanwhile, as in Lucretia’s story, the Duke is attracted to her precisely because of her virtue: ‘Une vertu [sic], des remords qui l’emporteroient sur l’amour que j’ai inspiré!....Cela me pique...Il faut que je lui fasse une visite, il faut absolument que je renoue avec elle’.72

Madame Michelin’s struggles with her own conscience thereafter offer a similar parallel with Arnault’s Lucretia. Our heroine here remains physically faithful to her husband throughout, but is clearly attracted to the Duke; her response is an acute feeling of guilt and desire for death. Mme Michelin constantly pre-figures her own death, as early as Act I, sc.vi, when she hears rumours of the Duke’s affair with another woman in her neighbourhood, and feels both that she will die of jealousy, and also that she should expire from shame for this initial emotion alone. As the plot advances through the usual devices of concealed and mistaken identities, Mme Michelin increasingly states ‘il faut mourir’ and ‘je me meurs’ as she is buffeted by successive emotions connected to her desire and sense of duty.73

However, her actual death is not a decisive act of suicide. From the end of Act IV onwards, she becomes increasingly ill, and at the beginning of the final act is ‘pâle, tremblante, [les] habits trempés’. She literally begins to fade away: falling back onto a

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72 Duval and Monvel (an V), Act II, sc.ii.
73 Duval and Monvel (an V), for example Act III, sc.iii and sc.v; Act IV, sc.xiii; and Act V, sc.ii.
chair, she says that ‘J’éprouve une foiblesse, un anéantissement...le ciel, je crois, me regarde en pitié...Oui, je le sens...je n’ai plus long-temps à souffrir...’ [my italics].

When M. Michelin finds out what has happened, he forgives her and wants her to live, but it is too late. Once Mme Michelin has determined that both her husband and heaven have pardoned her, she falls into a deathly coma: ‘(elle tombe sans connoissance); Michelin: ‘La force l’abandonne...’. The maid Marie suggests sending for help but the men do not respond, moralising instead over this sad end that is the result of one single moment of weakness.

What interests me is how similar this strategy for representing death after rape or erotic dishonour, which we might term the ‘Clarissa solution’, is to the representational strategies adopted by artists working on images of the death of Lucretia. Were the benefits that Richardson, Duval and Monvel clearly derived from this solution also part of the reason why all of the artists except Parizeau chose to show Lucretia as a pale inert form, who seems at first glance to be falling into an eternal swoon? If she is shown as fainting and limp - spineless - then perhaps the viewers would have been able to avoid a confrontation with the disturbing part of her narrative that emphasises what backbone and determination she actually had.

However, at the same time as artists might have sought to persuade viewers that Lucretia faded into death, they also articulated the violence with which she died, denying this convenient fiction. This varies from the inclusion of a small mark or dash of red paint on her breast to indicate the cut (these are sometimes difficult to see in photographic reproductions, but are visible on the actual works), to more large scale strategies like Wicar’s twisting of Lucretia’s body into agonised lines in his different sketches. This is particularly noticeable in plates 96 and 97, through the sharp line from her breast to her jaw. Fragonard’s version also presents a Lucretia whose neck is painfully angled, and

74 Duval and Monvel (an V), Act V, sc.ii.
75 Duval and Monvel (an V), Act V, sc.vi.
whose wound is clearly visible (plates 103 and 104). Blood has saturated the cloth that is pulled tightly beneath her breast, and in the shadows is a definite deep red cut mark.

These marks and movements of violence are far more in evidence in Lucretia’s corpse than on the bodies of Camilla and Virginia. It is with Lucretia’s body that artists take the inert, collapsed form to its most extreme usage: she is more supine, more painfully broken than any of the Camillas or Virginias. Simultaneously, her body is also more eroticised than their still virginal bodies. Lucretia is more naked, often with both breasts bared rather than one; this is particularly the case with the Wicar drawings and the A.-E. Fragonard painting. In plate 96, Wicar increases the eroticisation of her body by clothing it in robes that are at once revealing, tight and transparent. Lucretia is also often placed in a pose of abandon and abandonment on a bed without the crowds of supportive (and to some extent chaperoning) women that both Camilla and Virginia are given. Pellegrini’s single figure Lucretia (plate 86) is naked to the waist, and casts her eyes upwards with a gasp which of course echoes the tradition of expiring saints, but which when juxtaposed here to such extensive nudity and the penetration of the phallic dagger, could also be read as a more ambiguous kind of ecstasy. However, it is in the later representations of the already dead Lucretia that the violence and eroticisation combine most effectively to construct a corpse which has been utterly victimised: raped, and then penetrated fatally a second time by Lucretia’s own dagger.

The investigation into the ways in which Lucretia is made visible has therefore highlighted two key elements. Lucretia is made to look as acceptably feminine as possible, given the obvious problems that her narrative poses. At the same time, she is also shown as a victim of substantial sexual and violent abuse. Let us now consider why Lucretia was increasingly represented in the late 1780s and 1790s in France, and investigate whether the reasons for her visibility also help to explain the representational strategies noted so far.
6. Why is Lucretia made so visible in late eighteenth-century France?

We should firstly consider whether Lucretia was intended to function as a role model for actual women. This may be conceivable for the images which showed her working with her women, like that (or those) exhibited in 1781, 1783 and 1791 by Lagrenée le Jeune. Indeed, Bayeux, one of the late eighteenth-century translators of Ovid, wrote long footnotes comparing Lucretia with the women of his own time, preferring the Roman for her contentment to stay at home occupied with needlework. He described an idyllic ancient society where women sewed and looked after their children, and found ‘modern’ women distinctly lacking in similar virtues.

However, as we have seen, the majority of pictures of Lucretia focus on the moment of her death, and this means that they are far more problematic to interpret in terms of direct role models. Less so as far as men were concerned: there is for example some evidence that representations of women like Lucretia were seen as having a beneficial effect on the sexual behaviour of some men. As part of his speech of 6 frimaire an VI on the moral force of the arts if properly directed, Hertault de Lamerville (a deputy from the Cher) cited these paintings as a warning to rapists. ‘Le tableau de Lucrèce ou de Virginie arrêtera la main profane qui voudroit attenter à la pudeur et à l’innocence.’ Male spectators were also obviously expected to respond to the swearing of the oath, a factor to which we will return shortly.

As far as female role models are concerned, however, the possibilities are more complex. The very fact of Lucretia’s determined action and suicide makes her death a difficult example to hold up to contemporaneous women. However, in the light of my research on

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76 The emulatory function of these works was not mentioned in the critical reaction these works received; however, it was only the painting exhibited in 1781 which was comprehensively reviewed. Most of the comments focused on condemning the theatrical poses of the men. See for example ‘Exposition des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure au Sallon du Louvre, année 1781’ from the Journal de Paris, C.D., vol. XII, no. 269, p. 422; and ‘Exposition des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure exposés au Salon du Louvre en 1781’ from the Mercure de France, C.D., vol. L, suppl. vol. V, no. 1339, p. 123.


representations of other women from the ancient past, we could consider the possibility that one reason for depicting Lucretia was precisely her problematic behaviour. There are elements in her narrative which correspond to certain disputed areas of female behaviour: for example courage, defiance and self-determination. These issues may well have been explored and commented upon as artists represented Lucretia and spectators responded to what they saw. We could interpret the predominant move (by male artists) to show Lucretia as already dead as a type of (male motivated) social proscription related to the 'death sentence' enacted upon Sappho. Overall, however, the case as far as Lucretia is concerned is less convincing, since she so obviously chose to die herself, and punished her body when the men around her insisted that this was not necessary.

There are, however, other ways in which Lucretia’s behaviour and motivation are the focus of some unflattering commentary upon her. Her celebrated virtue is the usual target of these occasional attacks. This is clear for example in the gentle mockery of *Le Projet Manqué, ou Arlequin Taquin, parodie de Lucrèce, en un Acte en Prose et en Vaudevilles* (Paris, 1792). In this comedy, the womanising but essentially harmless Arlequin Taquin takes Tarquin’s role, chasing after his old flame, the virtuous and now married Lucrèce, and leaving a trail of ruined reputations behind him. The role of Brutus is given here to a robust benedictine monk, Dom Brutal.

Lucrèce’s morals appear fairly questionable, and indeed she herself wonders about them. When distracted from her sewing by constant thoughts of Taquin with other women, she muses: ‘Il faut convenir que pour une femme vertueuse, j’ai un caractère bien singulier, bien étrange, bien inconcevable...’. This Lucrèce then sings of how she is ‘inconsciente’, to the tune of *Résiste-moi, belle Aspasie* (yet another example of how women from antiquity were used in order to situate and comment upon each other).79 When eventually the strain of Taquin’s advances becomes too much, Lucrèce acts

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according to type by falling into a faint, saying 'Je me meurs.' The rape is then negated: Lucrèce wakes up and believes that Taquin has taken advantage of her; however, the audience knows that the pair were never alone and nothing has happened. The play of course has a happy ending: Dom Brutal coerces Taquin into marrying Columbine, one of his other former conquests, and Lucrèce survives with her reputation just about intact.

This parody therefore undermines the serious elements of rape and death in the Lucretia narrative, as well as calling into question her famous virtue. These elements were also the basis for later sniping by critics commenting on Rocques’ lost painting of La Mort de Lucrèce, shown at the 1801 Salon. One ridiculed the rape, and Lucretia’s resistance of it in the form of a song, telling her story thus:

‘Un jour arrive son amant
De son mari, pendant son absence,
Il lui fait assez brusquement,
Une assez douce violence’

This critic continues that if contemporary women killed themselves after such an event (merely illicit love), then the death toll would be enormous. One of his colleagues is similarly insulting in his tone, telling the reader that he is looking for this ‘séduisante’ Lucrèce who could get so much tenderness out of Tarquin, but that all he can see is ‘une croute’.

Such mockery was by no means a new development in Lucretia narratives: Ian Donaldson looks at many similar examples in earlier periods and in other countries. We could interpret these moves to question her morality and to make light of the rape as attempts to undercut Lucretia as an object of admiration. It must be said, though, that there are remarkably few such attacks during the revolutionary period in France, a time when the moves to present and understand her in positive terms are very much in the

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80 Le Projet Manqué... (1792), sc.xxii.
majority. Indeed, the rather nervous tone of the closing verse of the parodic Projet manqué indicates that the anonymous writer is aware that he is taking a risk by lampooning this subject. The actors sing that the censor may well disapprove of their parody, but they insist that it is only a bit of entertainment. The implication is therefore that in 1792, such a parody was contrary to the official view of the Lucretia subject. The very fact that Lucretia’s story was the basis of an Arlequin parody suggests that her narrative was well known and usually attributed a certain gravitas.

Indeed, further research has shown that Lucretia’s primary intended importance may well have been of a symbolic nature rather than as a direct role model. The significance for the French revolutionaries of the events surrounding the death of Lucretia (amongst other moments in Roman history) is well established in literature on the use of antiquity in the Revolution, although Brutus’ role is usually the one emphasised. This was the moment that the Romans, great historical republicans, began the fight to overthrow their corrupt royal rulers: the parallels with France are clear.

Lucretia narratives published during the early revolutionary years all convey some type of politicised symbolic message. In his play, Arnault debated different extreme governmental approaches. Ultimately though he was too cautious in his condemnation of both absolutist régimes and anarchy. Performances of the play were stopped in August 1792 when vacillation over the alternative benefits of monarchy and revolution became less welcome. Piquenard’s version is clearly also highly politicised, with Lucretia and the other characters uttering long propaganda speeches as the story unfolds. Even Le projet manqué contains frequent political references, though these are usually included for comic effect.

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84 Le Projet Manqué... (1792), sc.xxiv.
85 See for example Bordes (1996).
87 For example, Lucrèce’s father Cassandre is ridiculed in this play for his refusal to think about anything except politics.
Lucretia herself appeared in revolutionary children’s text books and manuals as an important historical figure, and the republicans of the future were encouraged to learn her story. The *Livre Indispensable aux Enfans de la Liberté*, published in Paris in an II, is constructed around a mother, Sophie, teaching her small son Fanfan about history, morals and the republic. Lucretia’s story is told here as a historically significant event that all children should know about. Similarly, she is cited in another educational work, Citoyen Bulard’s *Brutus, ou tableau historique des républiques tant anciennes que modernes, où l’on voit leur origine et leur établissement, ainsi que les causes de leur décadence et de leur ruine. Ouvrage propre aux écoles nationales* (Paris, an II). This book aims to etch a hatred of royalty in the hearts of its readers by using the histories of other republics to show how it is the abuse by kings of their authority, ‘leurs débauches et leurs crimes’, which has toppled them from their thrones. The recounting of Lucretia’s story is a key part of this project.

Brutus is given more coverage than Lucretia in these books, and indeed in other forms of official rhetoric, but this is understandable given the context of a political situation where women engaged in active politics caused considerable discomfort to successive authorities. I would also argue that even if Lucretia’s name does not appear as often in revolutionary pamphlets and parliamentary debates as those of the male actors in her narrative, her narrative and her action are implied every time there is a reference in documents from the 1790s to this part of Brutus’ life. Similarly, Lucretia’s rape and suicide are connoted by descriptions of Louis XVI and various politicians - France’s enemies and corrupters - as evil ‘Tarquins modernes’. These are found particularly in the speeches and writings of Saint-Just and Robespierre. Whilst in one sense they may refer to the dynasty and its despotic rule as a whole, their abusive connotations also signal Lucretia and her experiences.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Citoyens Dusausoir & G***, *Livre Indispensable aux Enfans de la Liberté...* (Paris, An II). Neither this nor the following book contained illustrations of Lucretia.


⁹⁰ Cited in Mossé (1989), p. 121; for other examples of the use of the term ‘Tarquin’ as a derogatory reference to the king or a politician, see p. 91 of this work and Parker (1937), p. 90.
The element which is communicated particularly strongly in revolutionary references to Lucretia is her status as a martyr. The *Livre Indispensable aux Enfans de la Liberté* is specific about this identification. Lucretia appears in its second section, which is ‘un précis historique et moral de quelques fondateurs, et des rapports des actions héroïques de quelques martyrs de la liberté’. However, she also clearly represents more than just a woman who gave up her life for the sake of liberty.

Lucretia is attributed a far more precise symbolic function: she represents the abused nation. Firstly, she is often paired with her country in the plays produced during the 1790s. In Arnault’s version, Lucretia asks Brutus to ‘venge Rome & Lucrece’; in Piquenard’s play the highly politicised Lucretia says specifically in one of her last speeches that she hopes her death will lead to revenge for Rome. Brutus later tells her that he will indeed avenge her and her country after they have both been ‘par un monstre outragées’.

Moreover, there is also evidence that Lucretia’s violated body represented specifically the abused French state. When the Depute Bengy de Puyvallée addressed the Assembly on 1 August 1791 on the issue of ‘la censure’, he compared the state of France, mismanaged as it had been by a system of arbitrary laws, to the ‘corps sanglant de Lucrèce’. With this vivid picture in mind, he urged his colleagues to take remedial action. Lucretia’s bloodstained body signified the French nation after years of assault and mistreatment, and Puyvallée evoked this image as a motivational tool.

We can also note the use four years later of the image of a raped and dying woman from antiquity, in a print which criticises those responsible for repeated and crippling seizures of governmental power. The allegorical representation of the *Constitution de l’an III* (c.1795, Paris, Musée Carnavalet, plate 120) is a woman whose clothes are distinctly Roman. She sinks back onto a sofa declaring ‘En me violant trois fois ils m’ont causée la

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91 Dusausoir & G*** (an II), frontispiece.
92 Piquenard (1793), Act II, sc. iv.
mort!!', a reference to the constitution's failure through the repeated coups d'état of Fructidor, Floréal and Prairial.\textsuperscript{94} Again, this is an image which uses the body of a raped and dying Roman woman to symbolise the damage done to the state; it too is intended to provoke an active response.

Both this print and Puyvallée's use of the violated corpse of Lucretia for his rousing metaphor, of course only echo the way in which Lucretia's actual body was reportedly used to start the revolution in Rome. A constant element of the source texts is that it was the display of Lucretia's ruined body, its visibility, which incited action in those who saw it. Montesquieu, who at one point in his influential \textit{Esprit des Lois} of 1748 ridiculed Lucretia and Virginia as two 'little women' of Rome, and argued that their deaths were just the occasion of revolutions that would have occurred sooner or later anyway, conceded an increased importance to them when he described the effect of the sight of their dead bodies. 'Le peuple romain, plus qu’un autre, s’émouvoit par les spectacles. Celui du corps sanglant de Lucrèce fit finir la royauté.'\textsuperscript{95}

Similarly, the other source texts all stress how crucial the public display of Lucretia's dead body was in rousing the populace to fight against the Tarquins. In Guérin's translation of Livy, we are told how the people were 'attendri par un spectacle si touchant, qu’irrite contre la tyrannie & l’impiété des Tarquins...en même temps, [ils] admirent & imitent, autant qu’il est en eux, le courage héroïque de Brutus....à déclarer la guerre à des gens qui exercoient contre eux de si horribles hostilités.'\textsuperscript{96} Later historians too described the important catalytic effect of the sight of Lucretia's body on the public. Rollin for example asserted that it was the spectacle of Lucretia's body which caused universal grief and inspired a desire for revenge in the minds of all who saw it.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{93} Unreferenced copy in the documentation centre, Musée de la Révolution, Vizille.
\textsuperscript{94} See Gutwirth (1992), p. 267.
\textsuperscript{95} Secondat, C.L. de, Baron de Montesquieu, \textit{Oeuvres Complètes de Montesquieu} (Basle, 1799), 'L'esprit des lois', book XI, chapter 15.
\textsuperscript{96} Livy transl. Guerin (1738), vol. I, pp. 181-182.
\textsuperscript{97} Rollin (1738), vol. I, p. 315.
According to these narratives, Lucretia’s actual bloodstained body was used as a powerful, public stimulus to political action. It seems clear, then, that the visibility of Lucretia’s body which is such a feature of the representations of her during this period, has much to do with the awareness of the effect of her dead corpse on the minds and subsequent actions of those who saw it. A similar response was presumably expected from those who ‘saw’ it represented on stage or in literary texts or in visual imagery. This function also explains some of the representational strategies which have been revealed, in particular the inclusion of visible marks of violence and eroticisation which mark her corpse as a site and object of wrongful desire, violation and victimisation.

7. Looking at revolutionary martyrs: a framework of viewing rituals

At this point we need briefly to consider for whom Lucretia was visible through these images: what was the likely spectatorship for these pictures, both intended and actual? In most cases, the documentation which would enable us to be precise about this does not exist. Although several of these pictures were exhibited at the revolutionary Salons, there is very little published criticism of them. Moreover, there are no exhibition records during this period at all for many of the key extant works. This could be because so many were unfinished; this factor in turn due probably to the rapidly changing political context and the loss of effective state patronage systems.

However, we can still engage in informed speculation about these artists’ targeted audiences. Because of the historical subject matter and the usual exhibition practices of the artists involved, we can assume that most of these representations, finished or not, were conceived with the audience of the Salon exhibition in mind. The likely actual audience for much of this material, particularly the unfinished works, may have been limited to the interpretive community of artists (still potentially a gendered group). However, some form of the Salon crowd was probably always part of each artist’s intended, imaginary group of viewers.
Whether a broader public function was envisioned by these artists is difficult to
determine, but I think it might well have been. The death of Lucretia is fundamentally
not a ‘private’ kind of subject matter; and we might read something into the fact that
several of these works have prints made after them (albeit rather luxurious ones).
Moitte’s project seems to have been an architectural frieze initially; and Mirys’ designs
were certainly conceived with their educational potential in mind. Therefore, we may
imagine that these works were intended potentially to have a very broad audience in what
was effectively a public context.

The suggestion that Lucretia’s body was displayed and seen as the brutalised corpse of a
symbolic martyr in these representations seems particularly useful when considering the
period from summer 1792 onwards, both as far as the production of new imagery was
concerned, and also for the consumption of the existing representations. Obviously there
are difficulties in being precise here about the spectatorship of individual images, since
the dates of so many of the works in this chapter remain imprecise. However, the basic
point to take into consideration here is that after the summer of 1792, the context within
which these representations were viewed was one increasingly populated by martyred
bodies, each with an array of public ritual surrounding them. This context does not
consist only of the most famous cases like Lepelletier and Marat; research by Antoine de
Baecque has shown that in different French towns and in various types and sizes of
assembly, the seriously or mortally wounded bodies of many lesser known heroes were
placed in the spotlight.

Often, the actual body itself was initially used, so that its horrible wounds and
bloodstained clothes could be clearly visible; later, a simulacrum (a bust, painting, print,
button) was sometimes made so that the rituals of veneration surrounding the most
important martyred bodies could continue to be enacted and indeed take place in a
profusion of places, long after the body itself had decomposed. David’s portrait of Marat

eternally frozen in the act of exhaling his last breath was intended to fulfil such a function in 1793 (Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, plate 121). De Baecque describes martyr veneration ceremonies as taking place constantly between the summers of 1792 and 1794, and continuing occasionally even after the fall of Robespierre and the thermidorean reaction. He asserts that they were a familiar and frequent part of life at all levels of society for several years.100

It is well established that revolutionary politicians and artists appropriated strategies from Christian iconography in their construction and use of contemporary martyrs, hence we should remember that these viewing processes would have been very familiar for the spectators. We should also remember that the basic idea of the display of martyred bodies came from antiquity in the first place, precisely from narratives such as Lucretia’s; the relationship is thus circular. In terms of how the spectatorship process was supposed to work, properties common to all of these contexts emerge. De Baecque’s analysis of texts written and pronounced around these wounded bodies from 1792-4 reveals that they were meant to elicit a series of responses: pity, anger, emulation and, particularly during the Revolution, a desire for revenge. It was frequently proclaimed that the spectators’ patriotism would be proved by their lively responses, and they were often urged to identify themselves with the worthy figure before them. This prescription applied equally to the simulacra, the long-lasting representations of the martyrs, and we can see how it may have informed both their construction and viewing, and that of the representations of the dead Lucretia.

If we compare David’s Marat and Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard’s Lucretia, for example, we see some clear similarities between the way that their bodies have been presented. Both are foregrounded, centrally displayed for a close-up view. Both have painfully twisted necks and a limp, dangling arm; both have a clearly visible wound and signs of blood. These are beautiful, exemplary bodies which have been violated by some evil

unseen force. Both have slightly parted lips to indicate dying words frozen in perpetuity. The Marat portrait was certainly designed to evoke his supposedly exemplary life, and to inspire pity and hatred for his assassin, Charlotte Corday. Might this representation of Lucretia not have functioned in a similar way?

It could certainly have evoked pity and anger at this tragedy, and it could be seen to designate an invisible enemy, the rapist son of a despotic king. The political significance of the scene is clear from the inclusion of the statue of the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus. Moreover, Lucretia’s self-sacrifice is placed within the context of martyrdom by its juxtaposition to the frieze on the wall, which depicts bodies being placed onto a procession of chariots. The tip of Brutus’ extremely bloody dagger touches this commemorative scene of lost lives. This work may well have inspired thoughts of revenge, and have stirred up men in particular to emulate Brutus’ determination to take action.

This kind of spectator response might have been hoped for by the artist, if Lucretia’s body symbolized her ravished country for the young Fragonard as it had for Puyvallée and his colleagues in the National Assembly. Or, this result may just have been produced anyway by viewers steeped in the ritualised viewing processes associated with revolutionary martyrs. The visual similarities between the representations of Marat and Lucretia suggest that any spectatorship of Lucretia’s body thus displayed would unavoidably have evoked immediate connotations of martyrdom.

Moreover, whilst there is a distinct lack of specific critical writing from the 1790s on pictures of Lucretia, there are some more general statements which support the idea that these kinds of pro-active viewing rituals were associated with representations of historically important martyrs, and indeed that increased numbers of such images were called for. The critic who wrote the *Explication par ordre des Numéros et jugement motivé...* in 1793, calls for public places to be filled with monuments ‘qui retracent sans

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cesse à tous les yeux les événements nationaux, [et] ceux des anciens peuples dignes de nous servir de modèles’. This critic is therefore specific that ancient figures as well as modern heroes should serve as examples. He also describes them in martyr terminology as figures to be studied, emulated and avenged, and mentions a broad range of groups of spectators in the audience that he casts. In his vision,

‘Nos guerriers, à l’exemple des Athéniens, viendront sur les mausolées de nos héros morts pour la patrie, aiguiser le fer destiné à les venger; les mères y conduiront leurs enfans; leurs jeunes coeurs se formeront de bonne heure aux sentiments de magnanimité; de courage; et comme de nouveaux Annibals, ils jureront, dès leur plus tendre enfance, une haine éternelle aux dévastateurs du monde.’

We can also note that the author includes women as a spectator group in his utopian plan, involved through their role as maternal educators. Of course women would have been amongst the spectators who saw the Lucretia pictures which were shown at the Salon exhibitions in the 1790s. What interests me is how they might have reacted to these images, given the degree that these works appear to function within the viewing framework of martyrdom.

For the gendered spectatorship of this work is complicated by the active viewing process associated with martyr veneration. Male viewers who saw these eroticised, passive, female bodies with their bare breasts and tinges of blood may have reacted in a range of ways. As well as horror and pity, we must also consider the possibility of some pleasure, even at an unconscious level. Theorists of the ‘male gaze’ would assert that the violence of the rape is perpetuated by each spectator’s gaze upon the half-naked, prostrate body of Lucretia, whose closed eyes mean that she cannot return the look. In spite of, or as well as this potential reaction, however, male viewers also had the strong gesture of the oath as a visible response with which they could identify, and which they could clearly emulate through their own ‘revenge’ action on France’s actual enemies (whoever these


\(^{102}\) For example, G. Pollock, Vision and Difference (London, 1988).
were named to be at different moments). This outraged body of the wife / mother / France became a rallying point for solidarity and military commitment. Any such attack on similarly virtuous women should be avenged, and any such attack on France should arouse patriotic fervour to defend ‘la patrie en danger’, as the call was issued in both 1792 and 1799.

How though did this work for female spectators? The theory of gendered spectatorship would have us accept that there is a masculine spectatorship position for viewers of both sexes. However, knowledge of Lucretia’s agency, and the sight of violence which is partly the result of her own act, surely complicates this when we imagine a woman viewer. Is Lucretia’s own act of aggression, her fatal cut, necessarily subsumed within the masculine gaze as yet more aggression against a feminine body, where rape and murder (suicide) are followed by gaze as rape and gaze as murder? Or do the courage and self-determination which that stab wound also represents come into play?

We must consider these complications, because otherwise, we gloss over the perennial problem of the emulatory function of antique figures, and perpetuate the sorts of assumptions that I argued against in Chapter One. De Baecque’s evidence about the rituals surrounding the spectacle of revolutionary martyrs and their simulacra shows how important emulation was as part of the viewing process. The critic who wrote the *Explication par ordre des Numéros* in 1793 suggested that warriors and children would look and imitate, but seems to have assumed that women would just be there focusing on their children’s experience. Yet women would have, and must have had their own responses to this sort of material. When a female spectator encountered a female martyr like Lucretia, perhaps with thoughts of admiration and emulation uppermost in her mind but also in the full knowledge that Lucretia decided to martyr herself, the resulting signification for that woman must have been complex.

For a female viewer, any thought of emulation of Lucretia would include not just her virtuous conduct before the night of the rape, but also the problematic areas of her
courageous behaviour, her defiance of patriarchy, and her brutal suicide. In the woman’s own mind, this death could easily have been seen as a positive one, in terms of its redemptive force, its compulsion to steadfastness, and its self-sacrifice for honour and the national good. However, in the light of the research presented so far, both in this chapter and earlier ones, the masculine reaction to any such ideas of emulation would probably have been decidedly negative. The latter parts of Lucretia’s narrative offer an example of supreme female agency, which transgresses acceptable codes of feminine behaviour and ignores the wishes of her father and husband in order to make a significant difference to the political sphere. Actual imitation of this heroic behaviour by French women would surely have caused considerable masculine disquiet.

As I suggested earlier, there may have been a sense that since the moment depicted in these images focused on Lucretia’s death, this was effectively a warning against actual female emulation of this Roman heroine’s response to her circumstances. Alternatively, male artists might have preceded male art historians by simply failing to consider the complications that they were setting up as far as female viewers were concerned? Ultimately, there seems to have been relatively little chance for these possible results to have occurred on a significant scale during the revolutionary years, since relatively few large format works were finished and shown during this period. On the other hand, perhaps these problems were part of the reason why Lucretia was never quite the billboard success that she might have been.

8. Conclusion

If Lucretia was meant to symbolise her martyred country in these pictures, then this helps to explain why she was depicted according to the paradigms that we have observed. Artists had to develop representational strategies which enabled them to negotiate the culturally problematic characteristics of her actions, in particular her courageous but brutal suicide. They also had to find ways of depicting Lucretia as an abused victim.
whose body could represent the violated state. Her wounded corpse was therefore centrally displayed, and in the mid-1790s, we can argue that this was intended to motivate spectators politically, according to a series of established revolutionary viewing rituals.

What is not plausible, in my view, is the continued assertion that Lucretia is unimportant and uninteresting in these images. By making Lucretia visible again in art historical discussion, a range of possible new interpretations has been opened up. Her importance in the political and social programme of reforms that was being implemented during the revolutionary decade throughout France can no longer be in serious doubt.
Conclusion

"Comme absolument nécessaires, ils [les beaux-arts] éclairent et vivifient le monde moral, comme le soleil éclaire et vivifie le monde physique, ils ressuscitent pour ainsi dire, les siècles et les nations qui sont ensevelis dans la nuit des temps. ...

... Un tableau d'histoire, est un tableau qui représente un fait arrivé dans un temps présent ou passé; de manière à faire sentir aux spectateurs les diverses impressions, qu'il aurait éprouvé en raison de son organisation physique et de ses lumières morales, s'il eut participé au fait que le tableau représente."


"...je vous dirai que le danger n'effraya pas ces nouvelles Romaines qui se précipitèrent au milieu du tranchant des armes... Mais je ne m'arrêterai pas là, et je dirai à ces hommes qui se croient nos maîtres: ... A qui Rome a-t-elle dû sa liberté et sa République? A deux femmes. Quels étaient ceux qui donnaient la dernière leçon de courage aux Spartiates? Les mères et les épouses, qui en leur remettant leurs boucliers, ne leur disaient que ces mots: _reviens dessus ou dessous._ ...

Si les femmes sont propres au combat, elles ne le sont pas moins au gouvernement. Combien d'elles n'ont pas gouverné avec gloire! ... De-là, on peut conclure qu'elles sont dignes de gouverner, je dirais presque, mieux que les hommes. Sous le despotisme des rois, on ne pouvait se permettre ces réflexions; mais, sous le régime républicaine, c'est autre chose. Je ne tirerai aucune autre conséquence de mon discours; je demande que la société examine dans sa sagesse ce rang que les femmes doivent tenir en république, et s'il faut continuer à les exclure de toutes les places et administrations."

Speech by _La femme Monic_ to the Club des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires, autumn 1793, reported by P. J. A. Roussel in _Le Château des Tuileries, ou récit de ce qui s'est passé dans l'intérieur de ce Palais, depuis sa construction jusqu'au 18 Brumaire de l'an VIII_ (Paris, 1802), pp. 38-41.¹

¹ Although these words are reported by a man who is clearly not without an agenda, there is every indication that they are an accurate rendition of what Monic actually said. Roussel's subsequent attack on her reasoning rests upon the fact that this was what she really said; moreover, the speech is similar in tone and content to other female authored addresses and texts. It is accepted as genuine in Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, eds., (1979), p. 166.
I end with two passages which are highly suggestive of the relationships my research has revealed. In the first, history painting is described as a vital means of involving people in moral reflection and debate; one which operates effectively because of its power to make people feel that they are taking part in the events depicted. This commentator is by no means alone in his belief in the engaging powers of history painting, in particular subjects from ancient and classical history. Another example is the critic of the Courrier français, who wrote in 1793 that it was well worth going to the Salon and writing about it, ‘parce que je voudrois engager mes citoyens à lire l’histoire ancienne; c’est par là qu’on arrive à la liberté.’

Art historians have tended to make two main assumptions about this kind of evidence. Firstly, that such notions of significant history paintings and engaged viewers were the dream but not the reality: people surely did not really respond to these works according to the terms of active participatory viewing prescribed by these commentators. Secondly, that if this level of spectator involvement did occur at all, then it concerned male viewers primarily. Feminine responses have largely remained unconsidered.

My research has demonstrated that both of these suppositions are unsound. The reasons for this are suggested by the second passage. This text does not specifically mention visual imagery; however, the female speaker (a working class Parisian who cannot have enjoyed a classical education) has an understanding of key female narratives from antiquity which is remarkably closely aligned to the moments represented in Salon paintings and described in the livrets. It is hard to imagine that her knowledge has not to some extent been informed by this visual material. Even if this were not the case, this is still evidence of a woman who may well have visited the Salon. She would obviously have brought a sense of personal involvement with antique heroines to her viewing experience, and to her participation in interpretive communities in the exhibition.

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This excerpt from her speech shows that people, women included, did engage with narratives from ancient and classical history. In this instance, we see a woman citing key female players from the ancient past, both as examples to other women of the limitless capabilities of their sex, and as justifications to men that women should be allowed to be involved in all levels of French public life. Many of the points made and figures of speech used recall the words of the women involved in the generosity actions of four years before. Olympe de Gouges replies to Monic’s speech, and reminds women of their special and historically proven ability to enflame patriotic ardour in men as well as women: ‘L’art que nous avons d’émouvoir les sens des hommes produirait l’effet salutaire d’enflammer toutes les âmes. Rien ne résisterait à notre organe séducteur.’ For both women, the examples of their ancient feminine forbears are very much a part of their active participation in arguments over female social and political destiny.

Similarly, a key part of the masculine engagement in this debate is their use in turn of antiquity. The male response to Monic and de Gouges’ words, which periodically intercuts the report, is also indicative of some of the other masculine responses to female action inspired by women from the ancient past that have been examined in this thesis. The narrator and his friend laugh at the speech and the assembled women’s enthusiastic responses to it. In particular, they ridicule Monic for her transgressive appropriation of ancient and classical history: ‘Rien ne nous parut plus comique que d’entendre des passages de l’histoire débités par une femme qui écorchait tous les mots avec une assurance difficile à décrire. Les claquements de mains furent suivis d’un long murmure, au travers duquel perçoient quelques paroles, et des propositions plus ridicules les unes que les autres.’

This passage is also, however, evidence that the women’s action did force male spectators to engage with the arguments they raised. Roussel and his English guest Lord Bedford

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3 Monic also cites women from the bible, medieval history and contemporary France too; I privilege women from antiquity here firstly because this is the focus of my project, but also because more women from the ancient past are cited than from any other period in this speech.

4 P. J. A. Roussel, Le Château des Tuileries... (Paris, 1802), p. 43.
are induced to discuss the position of women in society as a result of witnessing the club meeting. There is in their words an overt recognition of the anxiety that such groups of vociferous women provoked in men: Lord Bedford finds that ‘ces extravagances sont bien amusantes’, but Roussel agrees only with a certain trepidation. ‘Je l’avoue; mais en y réfléchissant, le délire de ces femmes me fait naître des craintes. Si leurs têtes s’échauffent, vous connaissez l’entêtement de ce sexe, elles sont capables de se porter à quelque excès.’

The Englishman jokes that the famous French weapon of ridicule will deflate these women’s pretensions. However, he also notes that the women have a point. He asks whether there is not indeed a fundamental contradiction in the fact that women play such a central role in society and yet that this importance is not reflected in the legal code. Roussel’s justification of this anomaly is based on women’s dangerous sexual power: ‘J’avoue cette contradiction; mais vous conviendrez aussi qu’elle est pleinement justifiée par cet ascendant universel, et conséquemment dangereux, que vous reconnaissiez dans le sexe.’

Roussel also appropriates antiquity to justify women’s exclusion from political representation, noting that the first legislators (the Greeks and Romans) never mentioned women. What man could overturn such a long tradition? Bedford suggests that it might be just the sort of men who could create a revolution like the one they were witnessing. Roussel however argues that this unstable situation means that there has already been enough upheaval, and that the current need for stability requires that reform stop short of rectifying the question of female political representation. His final words seal women’s fate, their ultimate exclusion from the benefits of Revolutionary change:

‘C’est justement ce bouleversement qui empêchera le vrai philosophe de jeter un nouveau sujet de discorde, en présentant quelque projet pour donner aux femmes une consistance dans le Gouvernement. Elles sont assez fortes avec leur ascendant sur nous. Laissez-les avec l’empire des graces et de la beauté.’

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5 Roussel (1802), p. 41.
6 Roussel (1802), p. 44.
7 Roussel (1802), p. 45.
8 Roussel (1802), p. 46.
I have analysed this text at some length because it so concisely introduces the main conclusions of my research. Women from the ancient past did play a significant role in the aspirations and actions of different groups of actual French women. They were also central to debates carried on amongst women and with men about female political and social destiny. If we are to comprehend something of the full range of significatory possibilities that visual representations of women from the ancient past had during the Revolution, art historians must recognise that these depictions intersect frequently with those debates about women’s place in French society. Moreover, we need to think imaginatively about the consequences of that intersection: how does this realisation change the interpretations that we have formed of these paintings, drawings, prints and (occasionally) sculpture? It seems clear that different women formed a range of meanings around these representations, and that these meanings were potentially divergent both from those produced by other women, and also those imagined by a similar spread of men. Can art historians posit a variety of possible meanings for each work? Moreover, can we understand the interaction of these different interpretations as part of a communal viewing process, one which did not necessarily result in the election of a single meaning upon which all were agreed, but whose debates were in themselves the site of the continual production of meaning?

My work has shown that these questions are important, and moreover that they can be answered affirmatively. Overall, the evidence presented and arguments developed in these four case studies show that many current assumptions about visual representations of women from the ancient past are limited and often highly questionable. Depictions of these women are interesting and important in their own right, and should be opened up to further debate, not marginalised after a cursory glance. These images have been found to have complicated but definite relationships with actuality during the Revolution. In contradiction to Vivian Cameron’s conclusions, my analysis has shown that these works are closely tied to the many different, complex and shifting positions of French women in this period. They make their own contribution to contemporaneous constructions of femininity and discussions of women’s social and political status.
The feminine presence in the Salon audience has been acknowledged and explored, and we have seen how the use of related words and images produced by women can help to overcome the problem of a lack of direct evidence of what these pictures meant to female spectators. The process by which these images were intended to function as role models has also been questioned, rather than assumed. The emulatory function of images of women from the ancient past has been demonstrated to be an unpredictable and confusing part of spectatorship. Even the most apparently straightforward cases of *exempla virtutis* proved to be problematic in reality, for example Cornelia. The ability of these images to invite imitation has also proved to be unavoidable and occasionally problematic, surfacing to disrupt the apparent intentions of successive artists who wished to use particular narratives only for their value as transcendent metaphors. Such artists consequently faced problems as far as female spectators were concerned (we see this with the Sabines and Lucretia, for example), and had to negotiate or try to ignore them. Both the signs and their spectators sometimes resisted the usage mapped out for them; artistic depictions of antique role models for women were definitely more slippery entities than art historians have so far allowed.

One particular use of these images’ potential to demonstrate exemplary behaviour has been continually revealed in this thesis. This is the deployment of representations of women from the ancient past to censure actual women, on a symbolic but still ominous level. In all four case studies to some extent, but particularly in the research on the Sabines and on Sappho and Aspasia, we found the use of representations of these women to be part of a concerted male attack on female agency. Male artists negotiated female power moves through the strategies they developed in these depictions. Female artists too went as far as they safely could to state alternative cases through their own interpretations of the same symbolic women.

Visual representations of women from the ancient past did not exist only on an elevated academic or aesthetic plane which was largely inaccessible to the diverse Salon audience. People - women as well as men - were encouraged to contemplate these images, to
understand their narratives, and to relate them to their own lives. They appear to have done this, with results that were diverse and unpredictable. Representations of women from the ancient past were a resource open to appropriation by all sides, whether to back up a woman’s claim for political power, or to support a man’s suggestion that all vociferous women (particularly creative ones) should be permanently silenced. They could function as national allegories, ranging from the wounded state (urging defensive reaction) to the healed fatherland, (pleading for peace and reconciliation). The possibilities were - and still are - endless.
1. Noel Hallé, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1779 Salon, oil on canvas, 76 x 96 cm, Montpellier, Musée Fabre
2. Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1781 (possibly exhibited at the 1785 Salon), oil on canvas, 54.5 x 84.5 cm, London, National Gallery
3. Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1781, oil on canvas, 93 x 132 cm, Toulouse, Musée des Augustins
4. Joseph-Benoît Suvee, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1795 Salon, oil on canvas, 318 x 420 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

5. Joseph-Benoît Suvee, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, 1790-1795, oil on panel, 36 x 46 cm, Paris, private collection
6. Jacques-Louis David, *Le triomphe du peuple français*, 1794, black pencil, ink and wash with white highlights, 32.5 x 71 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet
8. François-Xavier Fabre, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, undated, graphite on paper, 35 x 24 cm, Montpellier, Musée Fabre
9. Charles Meynier, Cornelle, mere des Gracques, undated, pen and brown ink and brown wash over black chalk on buff paper, 45.5 x 60.5 cm, exhibited in Master Drawings at Colnaghi (New York and London), 1998
11. Jean-François-Pierre Peyron, *Cornélie, mère des Gracques*, c. 1780-1781, oil on canvas, 24.5 x 32.5 cm, French art market
12. Angelica Kauffman, *Cornelia, the Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures*, 1785, oil on canvas, 100 x 125 cm, Richmond, VA, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

15. Attributed to Jean-Baptiste Mallet, *Sacrifice à la patrie, ou le départ d’un volontaire*, 1793 Salon, oil on canvas, 71.5 x 59 cm, Grasse, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire
16. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *La patrie en danger*, 1799 Salon, oil on canvas, 59 x 100 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution
17. Avril designed and engraved, *La mère Lacédémonienne remet à son fils un bouclier, lui disant, reviens avec ou dessus*, 1795 Salon, engraving, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes
22. Hubert Robert, *La Grande Galerie du Louvre*, c. 1794-1796, oil on canvas, 37 x 41 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
24. Hubert Robert, *Projet d’aménagement de la Grande Galerie du Louvre*, 1780s, oil on canvas, 33.5 x 42 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
27. Nicholas-Guy Brenet, *La piété et générosité des dames romaines*, 1785 Salon, oil on canvas, 330 x 258 cm, Fontainebleau, Musée Nationale du Château
28. Louis Gauffier, *La générosité des dames romaines*, 1791, oil on canvas, 81 x 112 cm, Poitiers, Musée des Beaux-Arts
29. Ruotte after Boizot, *La générosité des dames romaines*, c. 1790-1792, stipple engraving, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française
30. Anonymous artist working for Chéreau, *Don patriotique des illustres françaises*, 1789, etching and aquatint, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française
32. Frussotte after Desrais, *Allégorie d’un impôt volontaire ou d’une caisse patriotique*, frontispiece to Olympe de Gouge’s *Lettre au peuple*, 1788, engraving, Bibliothèque Nationale
35. François-André Vincent, *Combat des Romains & des Sabins, interrompus par les femmes Sabines*, 1781 Salon, oil on canvas, 330 x 430 cm, Angers, Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture
36. François-André Vincent, *Combat des Romains & des Sabins, interrompus par les femmes Sabines*, 1781, detail of Hersilia’s head
37. Fulchran-Jean Harriet, *Les Sabines séparant les armées ennemies*, c.1794, pencil and ink, 63 x 78 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet
38. Jacques-Louis David, 'première pensée' for *L'intervention des Sabines*, 1794, black pencil, ink, grey wash and white highlights on buff paper, 25.5 x 36 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins
39. Jacques-Louis David, study for Hersilia and three women for *L'intervention des Sabines*, c.1794-1796, graphite on paper in an album of sketches, 17.5 x 13.5 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, RF 9137, fo. 62 verso
40. Jacques-Louis David, drapery study for Hersilia for *L’intervention des Sabines*, c.1796-1798, black pencil and stump with white highlights on buff paper, 47 x 38 cm, Moscow, Pushkin Museum
41. Louis Boilly, *L’héroïne de Saint-Milhier*, 1794, black ink, grey wash with white highlights on paper, 41 x 52 cm, Paris, private collection

43. Le Sueur, *L'éroïne de Saint-Milhier*, undated (1790s), gouache on card silhouette, 35 x 52 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet
44. François-André Vincent, *La citoyenne de Saint-Milhier*, c.1793-1794, pen, ink and grey wash on paper, 28 x 44 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes
47. Anon., *Bataillon de femmes citoyennes 5 Octobre 1789*, 1789, etching, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes
48. Bizard (first name unknown), Charles-Alexis Alexandre (?) protégeant une cargaison de sucre à Paris en février 1792, 1792-1793, oil on canvas, 99.5 x 80 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française
49. Thérieux (first name unknown), *Le club des femmes patriotes*, undated, watercolour on paper, 41 x 55 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes
50. Anon., *L'anarchie*, 1793, etching, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes

54. François-André Vincent, study for Arrie exhorte Poetus à se donner la mort, 1784-1785, pen and ink with grey wash on paper, 41.5 x 50.5 cm, Paris, private collection
55. François-André Vincent, Arrie, voyant que Poetus n’avait pas le courage de se tuer, prit un poignard, se l’enfonça dans le sein, & le présenta à son mari en lui disant, tiens Poetus, il ne m’a point fait de mal. Cette action détermina Poetus à se donner la mort, 1785 Salon, oil on canvas, 324 x 257 cm, Amiens, Musée de Picardie
56. François-André Vincent, study for Arrie se tue et présente le poignard à Poetus, 1784, pen and ink, grey wash, white highlights over red chalk on paper, 53 x 42.5 cm, Paris, private collection
57. François-André Vincent, nine studies for *Arrie et Poetus* mounted together, 1784-1785, brown wash on paper, 27.5 x 42 cm total area, Paris, private collection
59. Nicholas-André Monsiau, *Le mariage d'Aria et Poetus*, 1801, oil on canvas, 64 x 81 cm, Sotheby's-Monaco sale 20 June 1987
60. Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier, *Le courage des femmes de Sparte*, 1787 Salon, oil on canvas, 318 x 324 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
61. Charles-Nicaiis Perrin, *Les femmes Spartiates portant les secours nécessaires à leurs époux, dans le combat que Pyrrhus donna aux pieds des murailles de leur ville*, 1787 Salon, black pencil, brown wash and white highlights on paper, 37 x 52 cm, sold at hôtel Drouot in 1986, current location unknown
62. Jean-Baptiste Pierre Topino-Lebrun, *Le siège de Lacédémone par Pyrrhus*, 1799-1800, oil sketch on paper mounted on canvas, 46 x 53 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française
63. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Sapho inspirée par l'amour*, c.1775, oil on canvas, 63 x 53 cm, Lugano, Thyssen Bornemisza Collection
64. Jean-Jacques Taillason, *Sapho ne pouvant se faire aimer du jeune Phaon, se précipite du rocher de Leucate dans la mer*, 1791 Salon, oil on canvas, 225 x 190 cm, Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts
65. Jean-Jacques Taillasson, *Sapho ne pouvant se faire aimer du jeune Phaon, se précipite du rocher de Leucate dans la mer*, 1791 Salon, two details
66. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Sapho à Leucade*, 1801 Salon, oil on canvas, 122 x 100 cm, Bayeux, Musée Baron Gérard
68. Mayard after Charles Eisen, illustration of Sappho going over the Leucadian cliff from Moutonnet de Clairfons tr. *Anacreon, Sapho, Bion et Moschus* (Paris, 1773)

70. Antoine-Jean Gros, sketch for *Sapho à Leucade*, 1800-1801, oil on canvas, 33.3 x 25.2 cm, private collection (on loan to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque)
73. Claude Ramey, *Sapho appuyée sur sa lyre, tenant une lettre adressée à Phaon*, 1800-1801, marble (after the plaster model exhibited at the 1796 Salon), Paris, Musée du Louvre
74. Philippe-Auguste Hennequin, *Sapho*, c. 1795-1798, ink on paper, size unconfirmed, Silver Spring, Maryland, G. Levitine Collection
75. Jean-Baptiste Topino-Lebrun, *La mort de Caius Gracchus*, 1798 Salon, oil on canvas, 387 x 615 cm, Marseille, Musée des Beaux-Arts
76. Jean-Jacques Taillasson, Pauline, femme de Sénèque, ne voulant pas survivre à son mari, s'était fait ouvrir les veines; Néron apprenant sa résolution, envoie des ordres pour la sauver; elle avait perdu connaissance, on arrête le sang, on la rend à la vie, 1793 Salon, oil on canvas, 147 x 190.5 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
77. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Portrait de Christine Boyer*, 1800-1801, oil on canvas, 214 x 134 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
78. Angelica Kauffman, *Sappho inspired by love*, 1775, oil on canvas, 132 x 145 cm, Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art
79. Anonymous frontispiece to Le Conte de Bièvre [sic], *Histoire des Deux Aspasies*, (Amsterdam, 1737), London, British Library
80. Marie-Geneviève Bouliar, *Aspasie*, 1794, oil on canvas, 163 x 127 cm, Arras, Musée d’
82. Nicolas-André Monsiau, *Aspasie s’entretenant avec Alcibiade et Socrate*, 1798
Salon, oil on canvas, size unconfirmed, Pushkin Museum, Moscow
83. Nicolas-André Monsiau, *Aspasie s'entretenant avec les hommes les plus illustres d'Athènes*, 1806 Salon, oil on canvas, 146.5 x 106.5 cm, Chambéry, Musée de
84. Jean-Baptiste Regnault, *Socrate arrachant Alcibiade du sein de la volupté*, 1791
Salon, oil on canvas, 46 x 63 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre
85. Joseph-Benoît Suvée, *La mort de Lucrèce*, undated, oil on canvas, 26 x 20 cm, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts
87. Philippe-Louis Parizeau, La mort de Lucrece, undated (early 1760s), ink and brown wash, 30.6 x 39.7 cm, Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts
89. Gavin Hamilton, *Death of Lucretia*, c. 1763-4, oil on canvas, 213.3 x 264 cm, New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection
90. Jacques-Antoine Beaufort, *Brutus, Lucretius Père de Lucrèce, et Collatinus son mari*, jurent sur le poignard dont elle s’est tuée, de venger sa mort et de chasser les *Tarquins de Rome*, 1771 Salon, oil on canvas, 129 x 167, Nevers, Musée Municipal Frédéric Blandin
93. Attributed to Frédéric Desmarais, *La mort de Lucretè*, c.1788, oil on canvas, 195 x 260 cm, Bourges, Musée du Berry
94. Frédéric Desmarais, *La mort de Lucretè*, c.1788, oil on canvas, 23 x 31 cm, Montpellier, Musée Fabre
95. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrièse*, c.1789, pencil on paper, 13.7 x 17 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 183
96. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, pencil on paper, 23.5 x 36 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 149
97. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrèce*, c.1789, Beaucamp no. 149, detail
98. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, charcoal and stump, 21.9 x 28.7 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 150
99. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1789, ink and grey wash, 51.5 x 79 cm, Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Beaucamp no. 148
100. Jean-Baptiste Wicar, *La mort de Lucrèce*, c.1789, Beaucamp no. 148, detail
101. Janinet after Jean-Guillaume Moitte, _La mort de Lucrèce_, 1795 (after drawing shown at the 1791 Salon), etching and aquatint, Paris, Bibliothèque d’Art et d’Archéologie
102. Jacques Réattu, *La mort de Lucrece*, c. 1792-1796, oil on canvas, 22 x 31 cm, Arles, Musée Réattu
103. Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1797, oil on canvas, 121 x 138 cm, Grasse, Villa Fragonard

104. Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard, *La mort de Lucrece*, c.1797, detail
106. Jacques-Louis David, *La mort de Camille*, 1781, black chalk with pen and wash, 27.5 x 38.7 cm, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina

382

110. Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson, *Horace rue sa sœur Camille*, 1785, oil on canvas, 111 x 148 cm, Montargis, Musée Girodet
111. Attributed to Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Horace tue sa soeur Camille*, 1785, oil on canvas, 116.8 x 147.3 cm, Providence, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design
113. Nicholas-Guy Brenet, *Virginius prêt à poignarder sa fille*, 1783, oil on canvas, 55 x 45 cm, Vizille, Musée de la Révolution Française
114. Nicholas-Guy Brenet, *Virginius prêt à pognarder sa fille*, 1783 Salon, oil on canvas, 324 x 259 cm, Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts
115. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille pour lui sauver le déshonneur de servir d’Appius Clodius [sic]*, 1795 Salon, brown ink and wash with white highlights on paper, 54 x 98 cm, Pontoise, Musée de
116. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, undated (c. 1794?), black pencil, 14.6 x 22.9 cm, Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts
117. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, undated (1795-1830), oil on paper mounted on canvas, 40 x 61 cm, Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts
118. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, undated (1795-1830), ink and chalk on paper, 38.5 x 58.7 cm, Montauban, Musée Ingres
119. Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Virginius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille...*, c.1800, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 76.2 cm, private collection (on loan to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque)
120. Anon., *Constitution de l'an III*, c.1795, etching, Paris, Musée Carnavalet
Appendix

The incidence of works depicting women from ancient and classical history in Salon livrets 1774-1804

The following list demonstrates the substantial number of representations of women from the ancient past produced during the focus period. We should remember that in addition to these exhibited works, others which were never shown at the Salon were also made: these range from preparatory sketches and models in a range of media, to prints and book illustrations.

1775 Salon

Lagrenée le Jeune - 139
Albinus fait monter sur son char les Vestales qui fuient de Rome.

Berruer - 236
Thalie, modèle en plâtre.

Houdon - 262
Tête de Méduse, imitée à l’antique.

1777 Salon

Lépicié - 11
Courage de Porcia, fille de Caton, femme de Brutus.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 24
Albinus, s’enfuyant de Rome, offre son char aux Vestales, qu’il rencontre chargées des vases sacrées.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 29
Des Vestales faisant un sacrifice dans l’intérieur de leur Temple.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 42
Les Sabines courant se jeter entre les Sabins & les Romains (dessin au bistre).
Beaufort - 109
Charité Romaine.

Jollain - 113
Persée délivre Andromède enchaînée au rocher: l'Amour transforme les chaînes en guirlandes de fleurs.

Jollain - 114
Ulysse, ayant fait naufrage à l'Isle de Corcyre, se présente à la Princess Nausicaé, en implorant son assistance.

Jollain - 117
Le berger Faustulus apporte à sa femme Rémus & Romulus, qu'il avait trouvé exposé sur les bords du Tibre, allaités par une louve.

Menageot - 202
Les adieux de Polixène à Hécube, au moment où cette jeune Princesse est arrachée des bras de sa mère pour être immolée aux mânes d'Achille. Hécube tombe évanouie de douleur, en recevant les derniers adieux de sa fille, qu'Ulysse entraîne à la mort.

Gois - 226
Agatis fait défiler son Armée devant les jeunes filles Samnites, & montre, à Télespon son père, Céphalide, qu'il choisiroit pour épouse, s'il revenoit vainqueur (dessin).

Houdon - 255
Une Vestale en bronze.

Strange - 299
Cléopâtre, d'après le Guide (gravure).

1779 Salon
Hallé - 1
Cornélie, mère des Gracques, recevant la visite d'une Dame Campanienne, richement vêtue, & qui tiroit vanité de toutes ses parures, lui dit, en lui présentant ses Enfans, qui revenoient des Ecoles publiques: pour moi, voilà mon faste & mes bijoux.
Lagrenée l'Aîné - 6
Mithridate devient amoureux de Stratonice, qui chante devant lui, pendant qu’il est à table avec ses femmes.

Doyen - 24
Hector reporté par Priam, après l’avoir retiré des mains d’Achille. Il est exposé dans la cour de son palais, au milieu de toute sa famille [includes Andromache].

Lagrenée le Jeune - 36
Fermeté de Jubellius Taurea. [In receipt of a last minute stay of execution after his involvement in a rebellion, Jubellius Taurea proves a point to his captor, Fulvius Flaccus.] ... `je vais te donner un spectacle digne de ta cruauté & un exemple au-dessus de ton courage.’ A ces mots, il poignarde sa Femme, ses Enfants, & se tue lui-même.

Renou - 76
Agrippine débarque à Brindes, portant l’urne de Germanicus, son époux.

Huet - 98
Hercule chez la Reine Omphale.

Vallayer - 102
Une vestale couronnée de roses, & tenant une corbeille de fleurs.

Bounieu - 136
Le supplice d’une vestale.

Bardin - 171
Trois dessins au crayon noir & blanc; l’un représentant l’enlèvement des Sabines; le second, les Sabines, interrompant la bataille occasionnée par leur enlèvement, obtiennent la paix & l’union des deux Peuples; le troisième, le Massacre des Innocens.

Bardin - 173
Réception d’une Vestale.

Suvée - 191
Deux esquisses - l’une, la mort de Cléopâtre; et l’autre, une prédiction de Saint Paul.

Gois - 213
Tullie, fille de Tarquin, fait passer son char sur le corps de son père (dessin).
1781 Salon

Vien - 1
Briséis emmenée de la tente d’Achille.

Lagrenée l'Aîné - 5
Laïs, célèbre par sa beauté & ses galanteries, dans la ville de Corinthe, reçoit un billet accompagné d’un riche présent.

Lagrenée l'Aîné - 6
Alcibiade aux genoux de sa maîtresse; elle le traite avec mépris, parce qu’ayant eu dix guerriers à combattre, il n’avoit triomphé que de neuf & avoir été vaincu par le dixième.

Lagrenée l'Aîné - 8
Hercule et Omphale.

Brenet - 27
Adoption d’Oedipe par la Reine de Corinthe.

Brenet - 28
Remus & Romulus. Faustule ayant trouvé Remus & Romulus, allaités par une louve, les prend dans son manteau, & les porte à sa femme Larentia.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 34
Les fils de Tarquin, admirant la vertu de Lucrèce...

Lagrenée le Jeune - 36
Ulysse secouru par Nausicaa.

Aubry (feu) - 134
Les Adieux de Coriolan à sa femme, au moment qu’il part pour se rendre chez les Volsques.

Suvée - 145
La Vestale Emilie rallumant le feu sacré.

Martin - 165
Sacrifice d’Iphigénie.

Vincent - 193
Combat des Romains & des Sabins, interrompus par les femmes Sabines.
Julien - 286
Tête de Vestale, en marbre.

Cochin - 286
Un dessin représentant l’enlèvement des Sabines.

1783 Salon

Vien - 1
Priam partant pour supplier Achille de lui rendre le corps de son fils Hector [includes Andromache].

Brenet - 11
Virginius prêt à poignarder sa fille. Le moment est celui où Virginius, après avoir demandé à Appius, de parler à l’écart un moment à sa fille, suivie seulement de sa nourrice, saisit un couteau sur l’étal d’un Boucher, & en tue Virginie, en lui disant: ‘Voilà le seul moyen de sauver ton honneur et ta liberté’.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 18
Charité Romaine.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 24
Les Tarquins adjugeant à Lucrece le prix de la vertu (dessin).

Ménageot - 29
Astyanax arraché des bras d’Andromaque par l’ordre d’Ulysse...

Ménageot - 31
Charité Romaine.

Mme Guiard - 132
Tête de Cléopatre.

Wille - 146
Cléopatre.

David - 162
La douleur & les regrets d’Andromaque sur le corps d’Hector son mari.

Renaud - 166
Persée délivre Andromède, & la remet entre les mains de ses Parens.
Renaud - 168
Tête de Vestale.

Taillasson - 184
Hector sur un lit funèbre & entouré de sa famille en pleurs (esquisse lavée).

Julien - 185
Triomphe d'Aurelien. Cet Empereur après avoir vaincu Zénobie & Tetricus triomphe dans Rome; les Romains voient avec déplaisir pour la première fois, une femme à la suite du char du Triomphateur.

Julien - 190
Psiché portée par les Nymphes sur l’autre bord du fleuve, où elle voulait se noyer.

Cathelin - 281
Mort de Lucrece, d’après Pellegrini (gravure).

Miger - 285
Hercule et Omphale, d’après Dumont (gravure).

1785 Salon

Vien - 1
Retour de Priam avec le corps d’Hector...Andromaque, après s’être livrée à la plus grande douleur, lui prend la main, & semble se plaindre aux Dieux de la mort de son époux.

Lagrenée l’Ainé - 2
Mort de la femme de Darius.

Brenet - 7
Piété et générosité des Dames Romaines.

Ménageot - 19
Cléopatre rendant son dernier hommage au tombeau d’Antoine.

Ménageot - 20
Alceste rendue à son mari par Hercule.
Suvee - 22
Enée, au milieu de la ruine de Troye, n’ayant pu déterminer Anchise, son père, à quitter son palais & sa patrie, veut, dans son désespoir, retourner au combat; Creuse, sa femme, l’arrête, en lui présentant son jeune fils Ascagne.

Suvee - 23
Mort de Cléopatre.

Suvee - 25
Une Vestale.

Callet - 62
Achille traînant le corps d’Hector devant les murs de Troye & sous les yeux de Priam & d’Hécube, qui implorent le vainqueur.

Vincent - 67
Coecinna Poetus, s’étant attaché à Scribonius, qui avoir soulevé l’Illirie, contre l’Empereur Claude, fut pris & mené à Rome. Arrie, sa femme, sachant qu’il n’y avait aucune espérance de le sauver, l’exhorte à se donner la mort.

Vincent - 68
Arrie, voyant que Poetus n’avoit pas le courage de se tuer, prit un poignard, se l’enfonça dans le sein, & le présenta à son mari en lui disant, ‘tiens Poetus, il me m’a point fait de mal.’ Cette action détermina Poetus à se donner la mort.

Renaud - 108
Psiché venant à la faveur d’une lampe, pour poignarder son amant qu’elle croit un monstre: elle reconnoit l’Amour.

Martin - 140
Des Vestales.

Julien - 157
La Vestale Tutia, accusée d’inceste, pour prouver son innocence & sa chasteté, porte au bord du Tibre au Temple de Vesta un crible plein d’eau, sans en répandre.

Peyron - 178
L’héroïsme de l’amour conjugal. Alceste s’étant dévouée volontairement à la mort, pour sauver les jours de son mari, fait ses adieux....
Peyron - 181
Cornélie, mère des Gracques.... (esquisse).

Peyron - 184
Reconnaissance d'Oreste et d'Iphigénie (dessin).

Pajou - 199
Psiché abandonnée (plâtre).

Mouchy - 212
Dibutade trace l'ombre de son amant.

Moitte - 253
Une Vestale (sculpture).

Moreau le Jeune - 287
Olimpie (dessin pour l'édition de Voltaire).

1787 Salon

Vien - 1
Les Adieux d'Hector & Andromaque.

Vien - 2
Une femme Grecque ornant d'une couronne de fleurs la tête de sa fille, avant de l'envoyer au temple.

Vien - 4
Sapho chantant ses vers en s'accompagnant de la lyre.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 13
Ulysse arrivant dans le Palais de Circé.

Vincent - 24
Clémence d'Auguste envers Cinna. Le moment est celui où Auguste semble dire
'Soyons amis, Cinna, c'est moi qui t'en convie'. A cet acte de grandeur d'âme, Livie, la femme de l'Empereur, exprime son admiration; Emilie tombe à ses pieds, Cinna est frappé d'étonnement, & Maxime pénétré de honte.

Regnault - 120
La reconnaissance d'Oreste & d'Iphigénie, dans la Tauride.
Virgile lisant l’Enéide à Auguste & à Octavie... Octavie s’évanouit quand le poète prononça, ‘tu Marcellus eris...’

Electre. Cette Princesse, mise par Egiste au rang des esclaves, va faire des libations au tombeau d’Agamemnon; elle y aperçoit les cheveux, des fleurs, une épée. Elle pense qu’Oreste seul a pu faire ses présents; elle se livre à l’espérance de revoir un frère qu’elle aime, & de trouver en lui le vengeur de sa famille.

Le Barbier l’Aîné - 137
Le courage des femmes de Sparte.

Perrin - 164
Cyanippe, Roi de Syracuse, ayant été condamné par l’Oracle, fut sacrifié par sa fille aux pieds de l’autel de Bacchus; ensuite, pour appaiser la colère de ce Dieu, elle-même s’immola, ne voulant point survivre à ce malheur.

Perrin - 168
Esquisse...représentant Sophonisbe, recevant la coupe empoisonnée que Massinissa est forcé de lui envoyer.

Perrin - 169
Esquisse....représentant les femmes Spartiates portant les secours nécessaires à leurs époux, dans le combat que Pyrrhus donna aux pieds des murailles de leur ville.

Julien - 187
Cléopâtre, Reine d’Egypte, vient trouver Marc-Antoine.

Julien - 188
La Vestale Amélie.

Houdon - 257
Une Vestale.

Moreau le Jeune - 318
Sophonisbe (dessin pour l’édition de Voltaire).
Alexandre consulte l'Oracle d'Apollon... La Prêtresse refusa d'entrer dans le Temple. 
Alexandre, qui ne pouvait souffrir de résistance, l'ayant prise brusquement par le bras, & 
la conduisant au Temple, elle s'écria: ô mon fils, on ne peut te résister! Il n'en demanda 
pas d'avantage; & regardant cette parole comme un Oracle, il prit le chemin de 
Macédoine, pour se préparer à sa grande expédition.

Vincent - 19
Zeuxis choisissant pour modèles les plus belles filles de Crotone.

David - 89
Les Amours de Paris & d'Hélène.

Taillasson - 93
Sabinus & Eponine avec leurs enfants, découverts dans leur retraite par les soldats de 
Vespasien.

Le Barbier - 98
Ulysse sortant de Sparte avec Pénélope pour retourner à Ithaque, ou la Pudeur.

Le Barbier - 100
Coriolan chez les Volsques, cédant aux prières de sa mère, de sa femme, & aux larmes 
des Dames Romaines, renonce à se venger de Rome (dessin).

Le Barbier - 101
Clélie & Neuf Dames Romaines étant en otage dans le camp de Porsenna, passent le 
Tybre à la nage & retournent à Rome (dessin).

Monsiau - 194
Mort de Cléopatre (dessin).

Foucou - 256
Ariane abandonnée dans l'Isle de Naxos.

Bocquet - 259
Une Vestale.
Fortin - 261
Léonidas entrant dans le Temple de Neptune pour y faire arrêter Cléombrotus qui s’y 
étoit retiré pour se soustraire à la vengeance du Roi; Chélonis, sa femme, obtient, par ses 
prières, qu’il ne soit qu’envoyé en exil.

Giroust - 341
Oedipe à Colone...accompagné de ses deux filles Ismène & Antigone (gravure).

1791 Salon

Bachelier - 5
Charité Romaine.

Brenet - 7
Générosité des Dames Romaines.

Lagrénee le jeune - 8
Ulysse aux pieds d’Alcinoüs & de sa femme.

Lagrénee le jeune - 9
Une mère qui apprend à sa fille de jouer de la lyre.

Lagrénee le jeune - 10
Lucrèce travaillant avec ses femmes.

Ménageot - 11
Méléeagre entouré de sa famille, qui le supplie de prendre les armes pour repousser les 
enemis prêts à se rendre maîtres de la ville de Calidon. Méléeagre outré de colère de ce 
que Althé, sa mère, au désespoir de la mort de ses frères, qu’il avoit tués, faisoit contre lui 
les plus affreuses imprécations, se renferme chez lui avec sa femme, & refuse de prendre 
les armes pour défendre sa patrie. Cependant les Curettes assiègent la ville & se sont déjà 
emparés des avennes et des tours. Dans cette extrémité les parens et les amis de 
Méléeagre, son père Oenée, sa mère touchée de répentir, le conjurent avec larmes de 
défendre la ville, rien ne le touche; enfin la belle Cléopatre vient se jeter aux pieds de son 
mari; il se rend & demande ses armes.

Suvee - 13 and 16
Dibutade, ou l’origine du Dessin.
**Suvee - 14**
La Vestale Emilie rallumant le feu sacré...

**Jollain - 50**
Oedipe aveugle conduit par Antigone.

**Taillasson - 95**
Dénouement de la tragédie de Rodogune [l’empoisonnement de Cléopâtre].

**Taillasson - 96**
Sapho ne pouvant se faire aimer du jeune Phaon, se précipite du rocher de Leucate dans la mer. Le moment est celui, où elle est sur le point de se précipiter, en disant à son amant un éternel adieu.

**Lebarbier - 101**
Clélie passant le Tibre à la Nage (dessin).

**Peyron - 115**
Naufrage d’Ulysse [includes Nausicaa].

**Peyron - 116**
Mort d’Alceste, faisant ses derniers adieux à son époux & à ses enfants.

**Peyron - 117**
Un dessin de Nausicaa.

**Perrin - 126**
Cyanippe, Roi de Syracuse...sa Fille le sacrifie elle-même & se tue.

**Monsiau - 156**
Ulysse, de retour dans son palais, tue les prétendants, & ordonne aux femmes de Pénélope, qui avoient participé au désordre, d’emporter leur corps.

**Gauffier - 193**
Générosité des Dames Romaines.

**Chaise - 198**
Les filles de Pélias demandant à Médée le rajeunissement de leur père.

**Pajou - 200**
Psyché.
Caffieri - 202
Une Vestale entretenant le feu sacré (terre cuite).

Moitte - 260
Ariane (plâtre).

Moitte - 265
Mort de Lucrece (dessin).

1793 Salon

Bonvoisin - 80
Enée retenu par Creuse sa femme, à l’instant où il allait combattre au milieu de l’embrasement de Troies.

Perrin - 102
Une assemblée Spartiate délibérant si l’on ferait sortir de la ville de Sparte les femmes et les enfants, à l’attaque de la ville par Pyrrhus. Une femme entre au milieu de l’Assemblée, & ... offre leurs services dans le combat pour la République.

Garnier - 102
Hippolite saisit d’horreur après l’aveu que Phèdre, sa belle mère vient de lui faire de sa passion...

Taillason - 112
Pauline, femme de Sénèque, ne voulant pas survivre à son Époux, s’étoit fait ouvrir les veines...

Suvee - 117
Dibutade traçant le portrait de son amant.

Lethière - 118
Orphée et Euridice.

Bosio - 145
Hector sur son lit funèbre avec Andromaque & Astyanax, son fils, pleurant sa mort.

Taillason - 148
Esquisse du Tableau de Pauline, femme de Sénèque.
Bonvoisin - 204
Euridice rendue à Orphée (dessin).

Vallain - 211
Ceyx et Alcyone.

Fougeat - 218
Psyché endormie, entraînée par Zéphir.

Chevreux - 222
Psyché conduite au Rocher.

Vien - 306
Hélène, au moment de l’incendie de Troyes.

Lefebvre - 317
La Charité Romaine.

Lelu - 497
Mort de Virginie.

Lelu - 498
Polyxène immolée par Pyrrhus.

Bosio - 512
Cornélie, mère des Gracques.

Lelu - 528
Psyché et l’Amour (dessin).

Naigeon - 530
Une Lacédémonienne voyant, au siège d’une ville, son fils ainé, qu’on avait placé dans un poste, tomber mort à ses pieds, qu’on appelle son frère pour le remplacer, s’écrie-t-elle. Le sujet est l’instant où le frère arrive.

Lagrenée le Jeune - 531
L’Amour et Psyché.

Tardieu - 552
Tarquin & Lucrèce.

Potain - 609
Fabinus [sic] fait monter dans son char les Vestales.
L’action courageuse de la femme d’Asdrubal, qui égorge ses enfans, voyant que son époux aînait être lâchement se rendre au vainqueur de Carthage.

Ariane donnant à Thésée le peloton de fil.

La mort de Saphire, femme d’Ananie.

Mort de Lucrece.

Une jeune vestale ayant laissé éteindre le feu sacré, est reprimandée par une autre Prêtresse.

Nausicaa apporte des vêtemens à celui qui vient d’échapper au naufrage, pour le conduire à la cour du Roi, son Père.

Oedipe, près du temple des Eumenides; se livre aux remords & au désespoir; Antigone le serre dans ses bras, & tâche de le consoler.

Orphée abandonné à la douleur, fait préparer un sacrifice aux compagnes d’Euridice qui ornent son tombeau de fleurs.

Lisimaque & Philippe son fils sont égorgés dans les bras d’Arsinoé, leur mère, par les ordres de Ptolomée Ceranne, son nouvel époux (dessin).

Cléopatre endormie - dessin d’après la Bosse.

Aspasie.
Sapho inspirée par l’amour (dessin).

Austérité des moeurs des Romains. Caton chassa du Sénat Manilius Sénateur à la veille d’être Consul, pour avoir donné un baiser à sa femme en préférence de sa fille.

Nausicáa, fille d’Alcinoüs, reçoit Ulysse dans l’isle des Phéaciens

Consternation de Priam et de sa famille après le combat d’Achille & d’Hector; Andromaque tombe évanouie dans les bras de ses femmes à la vue du corps de son époux.

Vestale.

Olimpias: Cassandre fils d’Antipater, tenant la Régence par les Enfans d’Alexandre, ayant envoyé cent satellites, qui lui étoient dévoués, pour tuer Olimpias, femme d’Alexandre. Ceux-ci furent frappés de l’aire auguste & majestueux de cette Princesse, qu’ils se retirèrent, sans oser exécuter cet ordre sanguinaire.

Antigone implorant le pardon de son frère.

Tableau représentant Sapho.

La mère Spartiate disant à son fils, ‘rapporte ce Bouclier ou que ce Bouclier te rapporte’ (dessin).

La campanienne à qui Cornélie présente ses enfans, comme ses plus rares parures (dessin).
Virginie. C’est l’instant, où Virginie est appelée en jugement devant le Décemvir
Appius, qui donne ordre à Claudius d’enlever la jeune Romaine. Mais Icilius, à qui elle
était promise vient l’enlever à ses ravisseurs & menace Appius. Munitorius oncle de
Virginie écarter un licteur, qui s’opposait à son passage, & les Dames Romaines défendent
la pudeur outragée. La scène est dans la place publique.

Oedipe descendant de la montagne appuyé sur Antigone.

Virginius Capitaine de Légion, tue sa fille, pour lui sauver le déshonneur de servir

Papyrius & sa mère. Le jeune Papyrius, nouvellement sénateur, étant sollicité par sa
mère de lui révéler les délibérations secrète du Sénat, se tire de ce pas par une fausse
confiance, en lui disant, qu’il va être permis aux hommes d’épouser plusieurs femmes.

Cléopâtre aux pieds de César-Auguste, dont le dessein étoit de la mener en triomphe à
Rome.

Cornélie mère des Gracques.

Sapho sur le point de se précipiter du Rocher de Leucade, adressant encore à Phaon ses
derniers soupirs & ses derniers regards. Dessin.

Hercule rendu furieux par la jalouse Junon, a tué sa femme & ses enfans; revenu à lui-
même, il se livre au désespoir.

Sapho se précipitant du Rocher de Leucade. Marine.

La femme Spartiate donnant un bouclier à son fils.
Lesueur - 1049
Sapho adressant ses vers au Buste de Phaon (esquisse en terre).

Marin - 1061
Vestale. Modèle en terre.

Alix - 3001 (d’après Moitte)
Rien de plus honteux chez les Grecs que de revenir du Combat sans son Bouclier, & rien de plus glorieux que d’être reporté dessus au sein de sa Patrie; ce qui fit dire à une Lacédémonienne parlant à son fils, qui partait pour Combattre, ‘reviens avec ou dessus ton Bouclier’.

Alix - 3007 (d’après P. Chéry)
Mort d’Eriphile dans la tragédie d’Iphigénie en Aulide.

Alix - 3008 (d’après P. Chéry)
Bérénice, dans la tragédie de ce nom.

Avril - 3010
Cornélie, présentant à la jeune Campanienne, ses Enfans, comme sa parure & ses ornements.

Avril - 3011
La mère Lacédémonienne remet à son fils un bouclier, lui disant, ‘reviens avec ou dessus’.

Copia - 3016
Sapho, inspirée par l’Amour, d’après Devosge.

1796 Salon

Auzou - 11
Dinomaché, mère d’Alcibiade, pleurant sur les cendres de Clinias, son époux.

Auzou - 12
Alcibiade et Timandra.

Bernard - 21
Psyché reconnaît l’Amour dans son époux (dessin).
Bouliar - 64
Aspasie, demie-figure grande comme nature.

Bouliar - 66
Aspasie et deux têtes d’étude.

Bourgoin - 69
Persée qui délivre Andromède du monstre qui allait la dévorer.

Bourgoin - 70
Orphée qui perd Euridice; Orphée déplorant la perte d’Euridice.

Chaudet - 94
Les honneurs divins rendus à Psiché.

Fortin - 171
Ariane abandonnée dans l’Ile de Naxos.

Gérard - 194
Les Amours de Psyché (quatre dessins).

Harriet - 200
Ariane abandonnée par Thésée, dans l’Ile de Naxos.

Harriet - 202
Oedipe à Colonne; Sapho et Anacréon (dessins).

Lambert - 234
Oedipe à Colonne. Antigone et Isménie, sa soeur, dans les bras de leur père, implorent le pardon de Polinice leur frère.

Landon - 240
La mort de Cléopatre.

Le Barbier - 255
Virginie dans le moment qu’Icilius son amant l’enlève en présence du décemvir Appius, et que les dames Romaines prennent sa défense.

Le Barbier - 256
L’éducation des enfans à Sparte. On les berçait sur un bouclier et la mère faisait briller à leurs yeux les armes de leur père.
Le Roy - 300
Arria et Poetus:...Arria, présentant le poignard dont elle vient de se frapper, prononce ces mots si célèbres: ‘Prends, mon cher Poetus, cela ne fait pas de mal.’

Le Roy - 301
Oedipe et Antigone.

Martin - 317
Monime, femme de Mithridate, acceptant le poison qu’il lui envoie.

Menjaud - 324
Virgile lisant le sixième chant de l’Enéide, devant Auguste et Octavie. Lorsque Virgile, récitant ses vers à la louange de Marcellus, fils d’Octavie, mort à la fleur de son âge, prononça ces mots: ‘Tu Marcellus eris’, Octavie s’évanouit. Elle fit ensuite donner à Virgile dix sesterces pour chaque vers de ce morceaux sublime.

Peyron - 371
Fulvie révèle à Cicéron la conjuration de Catilina (dessin destiné à une édition de Saluste, grand in-folio).

Roger - 398
Arria et Poetus...

Serangeli - 434
Orphée et Euridice.

Thévenin - 458
Clytie épris du soleil.

Thonesse - 466
Psyché, cherchant l’Amour, rencontre le vieillard qui lui aide à passer le ravin par la conduire dans sa grotte.

Verzi - 494
Les amours d’Hercule et d’Omphale.

Joplère - 619
La mort d’Arria et de Poetus (morceaux en ivoire).

Lesueur - 622
Sapho (terre cuite).
Sapho appuyée sur sa lyre, tenant une lettre adressée à Phaon (terre cuite).

1798 Salon

Chaudet - 87
Les honneurs divins rendus à Psyché.

Desoria - 117
Achille délivrant Iphigénie, au moment où Calchas allait l’immoler.

Devosge - 121
Harmonie, fille de Trasibule. Les habitants de Syracuse, soulevés contre Trasibule qui voulait se faire Roi, l’obligèrent à fuir, et déterminèrent la mort de tous ceux de sa race.
Il ne restait plus que sa fille Harmonie, on découvrit sa retraite: mais sa gouvernante présenta une autre fille sous les vêtements de la Princesse, et qui eut le courage de se laisser poignarder sans désabuser ses assassins. Harmonie admirant ce sacrifice généreux, ne voulut point y survivre; et rappelant les meurtriers, elle se fit connaître et fut tuée par eux.

Gérard - 191
Psyché et l’Amour.

Hennequin - 208
Pâris s’arrachant des bras d’Hélène pour aller combattre Ménélas.

Lagrénée l’Ainé - 226
Cassandre avait envoyé des soldats déterminés pour tuer Olympias, mère d’Alexandre, ils ne purent soutenir le regard de cette Princesse, et s’en retournèrent sans avoir exécuté cet ordre.

Lagrénée le Jeune - 231
Psyché dans le palais enchanté.

Leroy - 272
Oedipe et Antigone.
**Martin - 291**
L’enlèvement d’Hélène. Au moment de s’embarquer, cette princesse sent qu’elle est mère et balance à partir...

**Martin - 292**
Cléopâtre devant Marc-Antoine. Ce consul romain vit déséter son audience pour aller au-devant de Cléopâtre au moment où l’on apprit son arrivée dans la ville de Tarse. Restant seul, il s’en retournait chez lui: l’auteur suppose que cette reine superbe le rencontra dans sa marche.

**Martin - 293**
Repas donné par Cléopâtre à Marc-Antoine. Jamais on n’avait vu un festin aussi magnifique, une nuit aussi lumineuse; c’est l’instant où la reine d’Egypte va faire le sacrifice de cette fameuse perle en faveur d’une homme qu’elle voulait captiver.

**Monsiau - 312**
Socrate et Alcibiade chez Aspasie...

**Pajou - 324**
Orphée perd son Euridice pour la seconde fois.

**Perrin - 332**
Après le meurtre de Dion, sa soeur et sa femme furent mises en prison par l’ordre de Callipus. La femme y accoucha d’un garçon qu’elle résolut de nourrir. Elles en demandèrent la permission à leurs gardiens, qui l’accordèrent.

**Peyron - 334**
Ulysse demandant l’hospitalité à Nausicaa, fille d’Alcinoüs, roi des Phéaciens...

**Roger - 350**
Artémise pleurant sur les cendres de Mausole.

**Serangeli - 368**
La mort d’Euridice.

**Thévenin - 390**
Oedipe et Antigone.

**Deseine - 516**
Une Vestale alimentant le feu sacré.
Virginiius, capitaine de légion, tue sa fille pour lui sauver l’honneur et la liberté. Gravure
d’après Lethière.

1799 Salon

Anonyme - 1
Regulus abandonnant sa famille pour se rendre à Carthage.

Bouillon - 31
Oedipe et Antigone.

Debret - 67
Aristomène [aidé par une jeune fille]...Pour lui marquer sa reconnaissance, il l’emmena
avec lui, et la maria à son fils Gorgus.

Dubost - 84
Brutus, désespérant de ses affaires en Italie, poursuivi par les soldats d’Antoine, est au
moment de s’embarquer sans faste et sans suite. Sa femme, Porcie, fille de Caton, prête
de le quitter, jette, pour se consoler, ses regards sur une peinture consacrée aux Dieux;
elle y voit les adieux d’Hector et d’Andromaque, qui doivent être éternels; elle se trouble,
et pour se rassurer, elle ramène ses yeux sur son époux: ses larmes s’échappent, son
courage l’abandonne, l’amour conjugale l’emporte sur l’amour de la patrie.

Dupuis - 101
Psyché à l’instant où elle vient de recevoir de ses soeurs le poignard et la lampe.

Fragonard fils - 113
Psyché montrant ses richesses à ses deux soeurs.

Janinet (Sophie) - 169
Un dessin à l’encre de Chine, représentant la mort de Lucrece.

Lebrun - 185
Porcia, dont le courage soutenait dignement le gloire de Caton son père...

Lebrun - 186
Clytemnèstre, ayant découvert que, sous le prétexte d’unir sa fille à Achille, Agamenmon
ne l’avait fait venir dans le camp des Grecs que pour immoler Iphigénie, s’échappe et fuit
avec elle. Ériphile, leur captive, instruite de leur fuite, en prévient aussitôt le grand-prêtre Calchas, qui ordonne, au nom du ciel, ce barbare sacrifice, et de concert avec Ulysse, excite l'armée à la poursuite d'Iphigénie.

*Lefèvre* - 194

Andromède attaché à un rocher par l'ordre de Junon, pour être dévorée par un monstre marin. L'amour pleur sur le sort qui attend cette malheureuse victime.

*Rabillon* - 267

Reproches d'Hector à Pâris... [includes Helen].

*Taillason* - 308

Olympias. Cassandre, un des successeurs d'Alexandre, envoya une troupe de soldats pour tuer Olympias, retirée avec sa famille dans Pydna. Désarmés par le respect, ayant eux-mêmes horreurs d'un assassinat, ils ne voulurent pas obéir. Le peintre suppose qu'elle était dans un lieu où il y avait une statue de son fils, et qu'en découvrant son sein, en montrant la statue, elle s'écria "Osez frapper la mère d'Alexandre".

*Lucas* - 429

Une vestale (terre cuite).

*Sigisbert* - 439

Le buste en marbre de Lucrèce, sortant du lit après l'action de Tarquin.

*Godefroy* - 607

Un sujet de la tragédie d'Andromaque, pour la nouvelle édition de Didot l'aîné, des Oeuvres de Racine, gravé d'après le dessin de Girodet.

*Massard (père)* - 619

Oreste et Hermione, d'après Girodet.

*Simon* - 626

Deux têtes, d'Aspasie et de Périclès (gravure).

**1800 Salon**

*Bounieu (Emilie)* - 50

Hélène occupée à broder, voit arriver Laodice.
Hélène, s’étant retiré dans le temple de Vesta, pendant l’embrasement de Troyes, est secourue par Vénus, au moment où Enée allait l’immoler à la vengeance de sa patrie, dont elle avait causée les malheurs (dessin).

Sapho à Leucade, déplore l’insensibilité de Phaon.

L’enlèvement d’Hélène du temple de Diane, par Thésée et Pirithoüs.

La consternation de la famille de Priam après la mort d’Hector [includes Andromache].

[5 drawings in one frame for Didot’s edition of Racine Oeuvres]
1) Oreste vient, de la part des Grecs, demander à Pyrrhus qu’il lui livre Astyanax
2) Entrevue d’Oreste et d’Hermione
3) Pyrrhus ordonne à Andromaque d’aller l’attendre au temple où il doit l’épouser
4) Hermione abandonnée de Pyrrhus le menace de sa vengeance
5) Oreste, après avoir tué Pyrrhus par l’ordre d’Hermione, se présente à elle: Hermione lui reproche son crime.

Un paysage agreste; on y voit Oedipe et Antigone traversant un röttent sur un pont de bois.

Eponime et Sabinus (esquisse). C’est le moment où cette vertueuse femme vient rejoindre son mari dans le souterrain où il s’était caché après la bataille qu’il perdit contre Vespasien.

Phryné, accusée d’un crime capital, par Euthyas, est traduite devant l’Aréopage, pour y être jugée. Au moment où l’Orateur Hypéride, son défenseur, après avoir employé toutes les ressources de l’éloquence sans avoir attendri les juges, qu’il voit tous disposés à la
condamner à la mort, arrache comme par inspiration les vêtements qui la couvrent, et abandonne à la beauté et aux larmes le succès de sa cause.

Roger - 321
La séparation d’Ovide et de Julie, par ordre d’Auguste.

Seignoret - 334
La seconde femme de Phocion étant un jour visitée par une dame Ionienne, à l’affectation de celle-ci de faire pompe d’une riche parure, et de la tenter par de précieux bijoux, l’athénienne répondit qu’elle s’estimait mieux parée par la gloire de son époux, qu’elle ne le serait par toute la magnificience asiatique. Phocion est occupé à répondre aux offres du roi de Macédoine, par une lettre de refus.

Vafflard - 355
Arthemise et Mirza, princesses du sang royal, d’une des principales îles de la Grèce, aiment Illissus, jeune homme d’une naissance distingué; son coeur était tout entier à Mirza...L’amour d’Arthemise augmentait en lui le dégoût qu’elle lui avait inspiré. Le mépris d’Illissus pour cette princesse excita en elle les plus violentes passions... pour se venger et punir sa rivale, elle fit poignarder son amant, et le fit transporter dans une des salles de son palais, ou elle réservait à Mirza le dernier effet de sa vengeance. Elle la fit venir, et fit découvrir à ses yeux le cadavre de celui qui avait charmé son coeur. A cette vue, Mirza s’évanouit; et par un excès de sensibilité, perdit la vie en tendant le bras à son cher Illissus. Pour Arthemise, elle jouissait du succès de son vengeance.

Taillasson - 723
Andromaque offrant des dons funèbres à la cendre d’Hector.

Massard - 632
Deux gravures, sujets tirés de la tragédie d’Andromaque.

1801 Salon
Ansiaux - 4
Sapho.

Bouchet - 37
Cléobule donnant des leçons de sagesse à sa fille.
Gros - 164
Sapho à Leucate.

Honne - 176
Pyrame et Thsibé retrouvé par leurs parens.

Lebarbier l’aîné - 215
Hélène et Paris. Hélène, dans son appartement, est entourée de femmes qui travaillent à la broderie, tandis qu’Hector vient faire des reproches à Paris de son inaction, et lui ordonne de venir au combat, et défendre sa patrie.

Noel - 259 bis
Sapho au printemps de son âge, va dans une fôret consacrée offrir sa lyre à Apollon.

Perrin - 262
Phaon transformé en jeune homme. Vénus voulant donner Phaon de charmes capables d’enflammer Sapho, lui donna l’essence divine avec laquelle elle lui conseille de se transformer. Il n’y eut pas plutôt exécuté ses ordres, qu’il fut saisi d’étonnement en voyant son changement. L’Amour, par un sourire, témoigne à sa mère le plaisir qu’il en ressent.

Perrin - 263
Socrate surprenant Alcibiade entre les bras de Volupté.

Peytavin - 266
Le Supplice d’une Vestale.

Rocques - 300
La mort de Lucrèce.

Devosges - 705
Le Divorce (Hipparète et Alcibiade).

1802 Salon

Mongez (Mme) - 207
Astyanax arraché à sa mère. Lorsque les Grecs entrèrent dans Troie, Andromaque renferma, selon quelques traditions, son fils Astyanax dans le tombeau de son père
Hector. Ulysse l’apprit, força l’asile de ce malheureux enfant, et le fit arracher des bras de sa mère pour le précipiter du haut des murs de Troie.

*Lefèvre* - 245

Les Callipiges grecques (sujet tiré d’Athénée).

*Rosset-L’Etourville* - 257

L’entrevue de Téléméaque et de Pénélope, à Ithaque.

*Taillason* - 270

Ptolémée à qui Bérénice reproche de juger pendant son jeu... ‘Ce n’est pas en jouant, dit-elle, qu’il faut décider de la vie des hommes; on y doit apporter la plus sérieuse attention: autre chose est le sort des corps et celui des dés.’ Ce discours plût beaucoup à Ptolémée. Depuis ce moment, il n’en entendit plus, durant son jeu, de rapport en matière criminelle.

*Vafflard* - 280

La mort de Jocaste.

*Cramail* - 711

Sabinus et Eponine, cachés depuis dix ans dans un souterrain, sont découverts par des soldats envoyés à leur poursuite par l’empereur Vespasien.

*Hugler* - 717

Sapho se précipitant dans la mer.

*Gianni* - 742

Une Vestale enterré toute vive.

*Krafft* - 745

Oedipe et Antigone.

*Buguet* - 900

La mort de Procris dans les bras de Céphale.

*Regnault* - 920

La mort de Cléopatre.

*Danloux* - 964

Le supplice d’une Vestale.
1804 Salon

*Aparicio* - 3

Athalie (Acte II, sc. 7).

*Bounieu (Emilie)* - 58

Vénus blessée par Diomède, est soutenue par Iris qui l’entraîne loin du camp des Grecs, et la conduit vers le char du dieu Mars.

*Courteille* - 110

Persée et Andromède

*Fleury* - 176

Thésée allant combattre le minotaure, et recevant d’Ariane la pelote de fil qui doit lui servir à se retrouver dans le labyrinthe.

*Giacomelli (Mme)* - 206

Les dames romaines apportant au Sénat leurs bijoux pour compléter la somme qui avait été promise aux Gaulois pour la rançon de Rome.

*Marlay* - 317

Les Sabines sortant de Rome (dessin à l’encre).

*Mongez (Mme)* - 324

Alexandre pleurant la mort de la femme de Darius.

*Monsiau* - 327

Eponine et Sabinus.

*Pajou* - 352

Oedipe. Il repousse avec indignation son fils Polynice, qui implore son pardon; et Antigone sollicite la grâce de son frère.

*Pastor* - 359

L’arrivée de Tydée et de Polynice à la cour d’Argos, au moment où les princesses Royales Argie et Déphile leur sont présentées. Esquisse.

*Saintomer* - 416

La mort de Lucrece. L’auteur a saisi le moment où Lucrece vient d’expirer. Brutus saisi d’indignation, tire le fer sanglant du sein de Lucrece en invoquant les Dieux, il fait jurer à Lucretius, père de cette victime, à Colatinus son époux, et à Valérius, de venger sa mort.
Taillasson - 445
Hercule ramenant Alceste à Admète.

Vafflard - 446
Mort d'Oedipe.

Errante - 908
Artémise pleurant sur l’urne qui renferme les cendres de Mausole.

Avril - 808
Virginie et Icilius (gravure).

Desnoyers - 835
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