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Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror. Virtue, Friendship, and Authenticity in the French Revolution*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. x + 323 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, and index. ISBN: 9780199576302 (cl). US\$99.

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Linton's title aptly captures the central themes of her fascinating and careful study. *Choosing Terror* argues that Terror was dictated neither by inescapable social or ideological structures nor by overwhelming circumstances; it was instead the product of collective choices. Indeed, her gerund, "choosing," does more. It defines the path towards and during the Terror as a process, a series of decision-making moments rather than a single fateful decision or turning point. The title further emphasizes the act of choosing, rather than the individuals responsible for those choices. This is not to say that Linton ignores agency; on the contrary, individual politicians are central to her story, and she looks closely at their actions and possible motives. But she portrays those individuals as struggling with similar tensions in different—and increasingly serious—circumstances.

The book's subtitle reflects another layer of Linton's approach; it emphasizes the connections and tensions between virtue, authenticity, and friendship. Linton argues that Revolutionary leaders identified themselves as "men of virtue," concerned only with promoting the public good. This rhetoric was potentially powerful (and empowering). It helped men to claim a new career in politics and to distinguish themselves both from their opponents and from Old Regime practices and hierarchies. But it was also immediately problematic. Virtuous men could not appear self-interested. They could not openly campaign for office, identify themselves as members of a party, or otherwise promote themselves. They had to embody virtue without being seen to claim it. Such contradictory imperatives opened the way for charges of hypocrisy and, as the Revolution progressed, of hiding counter-revolutionary treachery under patriotic masks.

Linton is, of course, not the first person to call attention to French revolutionaries' obsession with authenticity. This has sometimes been framed as "transparency," but both terms refer to largely the same phenomenon: a desire for revolutionaries to be honest and self-sacrificing and for private and public life to be both visible and consistent. It also corresponds to a deep-seated suspicion of hidden motives, of dangerous dissembling, and of pervasive conspiracies.[1] But Linton gives the theme of authenticity a centrality in her analysis. The challenge for revolutionaries was not simply recognizing true patriots but also of embodying patriotism.

Linton also innovatively connects friendship to virtue and authenticity. Virtuous men and women (though she focuses less on women, apart from Madame Roland) were supposed to cultivate natural, affectionate bonds with others. Personal connections were also more likely to be genuinely and predictably trustworthy than those with strangers or recent acquaintances—an increasingly important consideration as the Terror began to take shape. But privileging private friendships suggested favoritism, nepotism, and corruption, rather than concern with the public as a whole. Moreover, friendship could transform into particularly bitter and destructive enmity. Indeed, Linton is especially interested in this last dynamic. While she touches the origins and dynamics of the Terror as a whole, she is specifically concerned with the "politicians' terror," in which the men directing the revolutionary nation, many of whom had worked together in intense circumstances and had close bonds, turned directly on one each other.

To explore these dynamics, Linton takes us from the last days of the Old Regime through Thermidor and Robespierre's execution. Her goal is not to retell the full narrative of the period or to illuminate many of the issues that the Revolution touched upon. Instead, she focuses on the behavior and interactions of revolutionary leaders in Paris. She presents this not as a rehashing of traditional political history, but rather as a new look at a specific and central problem. The politicians' terror was proportionately more destructive than state-sponsored violence as a whole, and its origins and dynamics need to be evaluated on their own terms.

Building on her first book, *The Politics of Virtue in Enlightenment France*, Linton begins with a quick survey of the rhetoric of virtue in late eighteenth-century France and its origins in both classical republicanism and ideas of natural virtue. She shows that it was a pervasive oppositional discourse, but not an ideology. It could be adopted for many different purposes. Here she is countering those who argue for any form of long-term ideological determinism, as well as Furet's contested, but still influential, claim that 1789 brought an unprecedented conflation of politics and morality.

Linton then moves quickly into the early Revolution and shows how leaders of the emerging Left claimed this rhetoric and used it to forge a new identity as "men of virtue." She calls attention to the patriot nobles, who led much of the revolutionary movement in 1787-88 without realizing that they were helping to create a political world that would destroy them. The self-presentation of revolutionary leaders as men of virtue could also contribute to more immediate acts of conscious self-sacrifice—most famously the abolition of privilege on August 4, 1789—although Linton also notes the limits to that sacrifice. More generally, she traces the awkward mixture of a new political culture and persistent Old Regime practices and expectations. Her analysis of the literal spaces of politics here—especially the increasingly problematic status of dining at some one's home—is particularly insightful in this regard. She shows how an act of socializing could also appear as a means of politicking behind closed doors and points to the tensions between serving guests a respectable dinner and the risk of being seen to indulge in collective gluttony rather than virtuous restraint.

For the rest of her story, Linton looks at a new model for political interaction, the political club, and especially the shifting membership of the Jacobin Club. She argues that the "triumvirs," the early leaders of the Club, appropriated the language of virtue to assert their leadership and to denounce the ambition and venality of their political opponents, especially Mirabeau. Like the patriot nobles, they contributed to creating an ideology that would ultimately turn against them. But here Linton focuses less on the unexpected consequences of well-intentioned action than the results of power-grubbing and personal rivalry. She judges that these politicians "bear their own responsibility for all that followed. Had they put personal enmity and ambition aside and worked together then the monarchy might have survived and war and terror been averted" (p. 94). It is an interesting, if untestable, speculation.

The interactions between the Jacobins and the Girondins form the next, and crucial, stage of her narrative. Like all labels for French Revolutionaries, the term Girondins is a loose one, primarily referring to the journalist Brissot de Warville and his allies. While the Girondins are often identified as more politically moderate than the Jacobins, Linton argues that the distinctions between them, at least in 1792, had less to do with ideology than political tactics and personalities. These tactics would contribute towards the Terror in several ways. First, and is well known, the Girondins championed war in the spring of 1792, a decision that would have dramatic consequences. But their particular strategies for promoting war—and themselves—were also crucial. She argues that they, rather than the Jacobins, were first responsible for using denunciation to attack political opponents, accusing others of using the rhetoric of virtue to conceal nefarious ambition and calculating self-interest. By employing and intensifying the language of betrayal, conspiracy, and *lèse-nation*, the Girondins brought the Terror much closer. Concretely, Brissot and other Girondins also pushed for the end to parliamentary immunity in March 1793; its end would leave them and other deputies vulnerable not just to political disgrace, but to the much greater risk of arrest and possible execution.

Linton traces the ascendancy of the Girondins, their conduct in power—returning to the problem of private gatherings for conducting public politics—and the increasing obligation for politicians to choose between Girondin and Jacobin leaders. Here, as in her subsequent analysis of Danton and Desmoulins's ultimate arrest and execution, she shows the competing pulls of loyalty to friends and the difficulties of taking sides. Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is to show the cost of choosing Terror even for those who seized power, or remained in power (even if that power was only for the short term) as well as for their opponents or victims.

The politicians' terror in a stricter sense began with the trial and execution of the leading Girondins. Linton emphasizes the importance of General Dumouriez's treason (and to a lesser extent, that of Lafayette): the betrayal of prominent political and military leaders made other accusations of conspiracy more credible and guilt by association more plausible. She suggests, however, that even after Girondins were denounced for duplicity and conspiracy, their execution was not a given until Marat's assassination changed the political climate dramatically.

Once in power, the Jacobins struggled to combine their ideal of a Cincinnatus (a leader concerned only with public good, and willing to retire as soon as he was no longer needed) with the desire of individuals for the rewards of power. Linton argues that the decision to shelve the constitution of 1793 was significant but, like David Andress, also emphasizes that the frameworks supporting the Terror were more improvised than inevitable. Here she also seems to support Jean-Clément Martin's argument that much of the Terror was ad hoc—however much ideology colored people's understandings—and that some aspects were intended more as rhetoric to appease popular militants than as real programs for action.[2]

In this context, Linton also shows how denunciations could take on a life of their own, outlasting the men who authored them and even their specific targets. She observes, for example, that Brissot's attack on Barnave as an "unprincipled turncoat" outlived the man who invented it. The most famous example is probably Fabre's allegation in late 1793 of a massive "Foreign Plot," a conspiracy among leading revolutionaries and the British and Austrians to bring down the Republic. Fabre himself was discredited when he was found guilty of corruption in the East India Company scandal. But his accusations remained potent. Neither Robespierre nor other Committee Members rejected his narrative; instead, they imagined a super-conspiracy than extended beyond those Fabre initially denounced.

In looking at the Jacobins in 1793-94, Linton paints a vivid portrait of Danton, but she seems more interested in Desmoulins. She makes it clear that while he used the *Vieux Cordelier* to call for moderation, his reputation as the Jacobin who publicly rejected Terror was partially created and "frozen" by his death. His actions were inconsistent and not necessarily clear headed. He seems to have been acting in part based on confidence that his friendship with Robespierre would protect him.

Indeed, Robespierre, and the question of his personal responsibility for the Terror, including the politicians' terror, inevitably looms large in this account. Linton is relatively sympathetic to him, although not exculpatory.[3] In addition to arguing that he was far from the only revolutionary to embrace the politics of virtue, she shows that he was not inherently power hungry or bloodthirsty. She emphasizes his role in promoting the self-denying ordinance of May 16, 1791, which made him and his fellow deputies in the Constituent Assembly ineligible for election to the Legislative Assembly. She also notes his initial opposition to the death penalty in 1791, as well as his later attempts at moderation, perhaps most significantly in his efforts to keep the persecution of the Girondin deputies in Paris in October 1793 from affecting their more distant supporters. There are some signs that he was still considering limiting the Terror in late 1793.

Linton argues, however, that the experience of living through the Revolution caused Robespierre to change his mind about many political principles; she seeks to understand the experiences and circumstances that led to those reversals. At the same time, she argues that Robespierre cultivated, and seemed to embrace, a consistent image of himself as embodying self-sacrificing virtue. This image presented particular challenges as he agonized over Danton's fate, and especially, that of Desmoulins. The ideology of virtue meant that he could not defend Desmoulins on the basis of friendship without losing credibility and potentially risking himself. Linton nonetheless emphasizes, that while Robespierre may have felt trapped by his identity as a virtuous revolutionary, he still had a choice; he was not required to condemn his childhood friend.

Linton also assesses Robespierre's responsibility for the Great Terror in June and July 1794, when the rate of revolutionary executions increased dramatically. She acknowledges that Robespierre drafted the fatal law of 22 Prairial, which dramatically reduced defendants' rights. But she notes that he had little role in implementing the law and attended few subsequent committee meetings. The import of Linton's argument is somewhat limited here; it may incriminate others more than it relieves Robespierre of responsibility.

As she moves towards the end of her story, Linton touches on the central questions of Thermidor: how Robespierre was actually overthrown, and why this particular government purge brought an end to other purges. In examining Robespierre's downfall, she argues that there was a real conspiracy against him—but one that he had partially brought into being. She acknowledges both the problematic nature of the evidence and the complexity of actions and alliances, but insists repeatedly on the central role of emotion. For her, intense emotion helps explain both the Terror and its end.

Ending the Terror, however, was not easy. Linton dismantles the myth created by the Thermidorians (a myth that has been discredited by numerous historians, but is still remarkably pervasive), that the Terror was the work of one man—Robespierre—and that once he was removed from power, the machinery of the Terror lost its *raison d'être* and was quickly dismantled. She notes that over a hundred of Robespierre's supporters were guillotined in the immediate wake of his arrest; he was not initially seen as a lone actor. While there were few death sentences in the following year, political purges continued, with substantial numbers of deputies arrested in Year III. Yet here—presumably because looking more at the aftermath of the Terror would lead to a longer or separate book—Linton's analysis seems rushed. It is not quite clear whether she wants to argue that the politics of virtue and struggles over authenticity slowly disappeared after July 1794 or only became less deadly.

The final chapter breaks with the narrative thrust of the rest of the book to consider how condemned revolutionaries faced death. Linton also draws on rather different sources here, primarily scraps of private writings and, as she acknowledges, the inherently questionable reports of eyewitnesses to executions. She suggests that suicide—including collective suicide—could seem like a heroic sacrifice inspired by classical antiquity, as well as a last attempt to show that the judgment of the Revolutionary Tribunal was false. Dominique Godineau's recent study of suicide overlaps with Linton's conclusions here, although Godineau also emphasizes that politically-inspired suicide was actually most common in the immediate aftermath of the Terror.[4]

Throughout the book, Linton emphasizes emotion, linking it to claims to virtue and legitimacy, as well as to the experience and limits of friendship. Linton insists on the extraordinary power of one emotion, fear, in shaping revolutionaries' responses and actions. Few historians would dispute that fear played a crucial role as the Terror unfolded, but Linton gives it an especially strong and consistent explanatory weight.[5] At the same time, she touches on the political spectacle of emotion. Revolutionaries' speeches and exchanges were often filled with emotive language. Linton suggests, although she does not fully foreground, a fundamental ambivalence towards such displays: passion could suggest authenticity, a direct and true expression of a speaker's thoughts and sentiments. Passion convinced; it could be

rhetorically effective. But it could also be faked; tears and even laughter were part of an actor's repertoire, and politicians might be able to use them to manipulate their audiences. Moreover, revolutionaries could not openly acknowledge many strong emotions, including ambition, personal enmity, doubt, and fear. In this context, Linton offers a thoughtful discussion of why the need to deny fear kept Jacobin leaders from using bodyguards even when there was a clear threat of assassination.

More generally, Linton's work raises questions about the significance of her themes—virtue, authenticity, and friendship—in different aspects of the Revolution. Most immediately, how, and how much, did these cultural frameworks and expectations matter in the more general workings of the Terror? Linton is careful to acknowledge that other factors, from counterrevolution to religious polarization, need to be considered to understand the Terror as a whole. She brackets the Vendée as a case of civil war with its own distressing dynamics. But I would still be interested in her speculations about how distinctive the politicians' terror was and what elements of it may have had parallels or resonances elsewhere.

Other historians have, of course, proposed different concepts for making sense of the dynamics of 1793 to 1794. A far from exhaustive list includes both emphasis on key terms used at the time, like those of regeneration or natural rights, and more modern analytical frameworks, like class struggle (or in less Marxian terms, social conflict), civil war, psychological trauma, and global transformation. They have differed in how much explanatory weight they have attributed to these frameworks and the extent to which they emphasize contingency and shifting circumstances.[6] It could be productive to examine further which aspects of these models are compatible with the themes Linton emphasizes; some may be more relevant for understanding the Terror as a whole than the politicians' terror in particular. Certain aspects associated with her concepts of virtue and authenticity—particularly that of sacrifice—may also have had a life of their own. The virtuous, at least in theory, were willing to give up luxury, comfort, and the possibility of private gain and were to be seen as making those sacrifices. (Even if the external signs of restraint, like Brissot's Quaker clothing, could not be trusted.) But the idea of sacrifice for the *patrie* was ubiquitous in the Revolution; it was not always directly discussed in terms of virtue, nor was it always unrewarded. Soldiers and their families, for example, could invoke their sacrifices openly—and with an expectation (or more often an unfulfilled hope) of compensation. Revolutionaries also promised that other forms of sacrifice to the *patrie* would bring the recognition and respect of posterity, if not immediate reward.

Linton is also conscious that she is using a gender-specific construction by invoking a “man of virtue.” She has written earlier about women and the politics of virtue in the eighteenth century.[7] Here she draws on work by feminist scholars to examine political identity during the Revolution, and her analysis is especially illuminating about Madame Roland's actions and tenuous position in the political world of the Girondins. But presumably because her focus is the politicians' terror—where the deputies and club leaders were male—she does not consider in depth the gendered construction of these definitions of virtue. It is unclear what claims to authenticity or the dynamics of friendship meant for women in the revolution or how much they mattered.

Overall, this is a richly textured, well-researched, and thought-provoking account, which vividly reveals the tragedy of the politicians' terror. As Linton acknowledges, she describes a claustrophobic universe, a small world closing in on itself, relentlessly if not quite inevitably. This is the Revolution as individual anguish, uneasy ambition, and internecine power struggle. Linton does not want to offer a reductive or determinist account. Yet because she is most interested in the Paris Jacobins and the National Assembly—literally and figuratively central to the Revolution, but far from its totality—it can sometimes be hard to see beyond their chambers. She is well aware of the broader context, alluding, among other things, to the pressure Paris militants placed on the National Convention and to the importance of war and civil war. But the specifics of the counterrevolution, war, regional differences, and popular militancy often remain a bit distant in this analysis. It is even harder to see from this

vantage point what revolutionaries hoped to accomplish. We are left understanding better how and why revolutionaries turned on themselves, but not what they might have succeeded in changing even as they destroyed each other.

#### Notes

[1] The term seems to have been particularly popular in the 1990s. Among others, see Antoine de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997). Not surprisingly, scholars concerned with theater in the Revolution have been particularly interested in the question of transparency and deception. See, for example, Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002). Elite women may have been particularly associated with dissimulation and the intrigues of court culture, rather than republican transparency; for the classic interpretation of this, see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[2] David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2006); and Jean-Clément Martin, *La Terreur, part maudite de la révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

[3] Her analysis here is similar to that of Peter McPhee, *Robespierre: A Revolutionary Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012).

[4] Dominique Godineau, *S'abrégé au XVIIIème siècle: le suicide miroir de la société*. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012).

[5] Here her analysis intersects with that of Sophie Wahnich, although they present rather different interpretations. Wahnich, "De l'économie émotive de la Terreur," *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 57:4 (2007): 889-913.

[6] Mona Ozouf, "La Révolution et l'idée de l'homme nouveau," in Colin Lucas, ed., *The Political Culture of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), pp. 213-32; and Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For psychological interpretations, see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); and, while his emphasis is earlier, Barry Shapiro, *Traumatic Politics: The Deputies and the King in the Early French Revolution* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009). On civil war and international comparisons, see especially Annie Jourdan, "Les discours de la terreur à l'époque révolutionnaire (1776-1798): Etude comparative sur une notion ambiguë," *French Historical Studies*, 36, no. 1 (2013): 51-82. See also Ronald Schechter, "The Terror of Their Enemies: Reflections on a Trope in Eighteenth-Century Historiography," *Historical Reflections*, 36:1 (2010): 53-75.

[7] Marisa Linton, "Virtue Rewarded? Women and the Politics of Virtue in 18th-Century France," *History of European Ideas* 26:1 (2000): 35-49, 51-65.

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