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Cesare Vetter, Marco Marin, Elisabetta Gon, *Dictionnaire Robespierre. Lexicométrie et usages langagiers. Outils pour une histoire du lexique de l'Incorruptible, tome I*. Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2015. 768 pp. €60.00 (cl). ISBN 978-8-8830-3701-6.

Review by Masano Yamashita, University of Colorado-Boulder.

The *Dictionnaire Robespierre, Lexicométrie et usages langagiers. Outils pour une histoire du lexique de l'Incorruptible, tome I* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2015), is the product of a team of Italian historians working on the French Revolution in the department of social sciences at the University of Trieste. It presents itself as a print edition of a work-in-progress. Utilizing the digital technology of computational linguistics, this paper dictionary aims to provide provisional yet useful information to scholars working on the French Revolution and Robespierre as they await a comprehensive and fully accessible digitalized database of documents related to printed materials from the French Revolution and the reign of Terror. While Stanford University has now entirely digitized the *Archives Parlementaires*, the members of the University of Trieste have focused on publishing print editions of lexicographical studies of key Revolutionary terms and concepts. Cesare Vetter, one of the three researchers behind volume one of the *Dictionnaire Robespierre* has published two volumes on *La felicità è un'idea nuova in Europa* (in collaboration with Elisabetta Gon and Marco Marin, who are also the co-authors of the dictionary). The Robespierre dictionary aims to facilitate the study of Revolutionary historiography by providing empirical data on word-clusters deployed by Robespierre in his public speeches and writings.

A “linguistic turn” is arguably central to gaining a full understanding of the tenor of Robespierre’s ideas and can correct some interpretations of Robespierre’s political thought that have resulted in what the dictionary authors deem to be vital misunderstandings in Robespierriest studies: namely, the reputation of a terroristic Robespierre who denies individuality to citizen-subjects and who evades the issue of women’s role in French society, as well as questions of gender. In fact, the qualitative data yielded by the scientific study of Robespierre’s vocabulary demonstrates the importance of the concept of happiness in the politician’s thought (491 occurrences identified in the eleven volumes of Robespierre’s *Œuvres*), and helpfully tracks the references to “liberté des femmes” and usages of figures of the maternal in Robespierre’s political speeches. The authors grant that this reference work best serves as a modest launching pad rather than a destination point for scholarly enquiries that would deepen historical studies on Robespierre by paying stylistic attention to the emotive modulations of Robespierre’s rhetoric and to the study of political contexts. The Dictionary also does not investigate Robespierre’s private writings, which could lend an alternative light to his public addresses, but it does include an introductory essay on the importance of the notion of private existence and the individual in Robespierre’s meditations on human happiness.

The reference book positions itself as entering into fruitful synergy with recent Anglo-American scholarship on the Revolutionary period. For instance, it can provide qualitative corroboration of Marisa Linton’s recent insights into the importance of friendship in French revolutionary moral culture and

Jacobinism, Sophia Rosenfeld's conceptual study of "common sense" in eighteenth-century political thought or Timothy Tackett's analysis of patriotic discourse and its recourse to the idiom of "extermination" (extermination of counter-revolutionaries, for one).<sup>[1]</sup> As pointed out by Cesare Vetter, co-author and principal investigator of the dictionary project, the dictionary is also very useful in that it sheds light on what it cannot do. For instance, it does not provide historical and political contextualization of Robespierre's key words: perhaps by studying the shifts and nuances in addressee and situations, students of the French Terror could glean useful information in how Robespierre was able to adapt to specific political circumstances.

The 767-page dictionary does not lend itself to being a portable dictionary in the tradition of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*. It is the first installment of a projected eight-volume dictionary. It is prefaced by four helpful introductory chapters that explain the potential uses of qualitative approaches to language, and that equally propose a frank assessment of the limitations of computational linguistics. Of particular interest is Marco Marin's chapter on the alleged secretaries of Robespierre. This chapter is a meta-reflection on the methods used by historians to ascertain hypotheses regarding whether certain individuals served as actual "secretaries" for Robespierre, who might have transcribed speeches for him or written under his dictation.

Marin highlights the murky task met by historians who are faced with elliptical fragments of information (for instance, documents stemming from police interrogation, wherein a person might have good reason for giving unreliable information) and must learn how to read between the lines, even when confronted with a stark piece of information such as an inscription on an epitaph. Between 1929 and 1932, someone had the following engraved on the tombstone of François-Eloi Bègue, "Ycy repose Bègue dit Magloire / peintre en bâtiment / patriote, poète, philosophe et secrétaire / de Monsieur / de Robespierre / 1793." The generic term of "secrétaire" in fact encompasses, in the case of Robespierre's entourage, a range of activities, many of which have little to do with texts and textual production. Charles-Leopold Nicolas, although described in a letter by Joseph-Antoine Boisset as a secretary of Robespierre, was by professional training a violin maker before becoming a printer. Marin argues that Nicolas more likely than not fulfilled the unofficial function of a bodyguard to Robespierre. Others, such as Pierre Villiers, were occasional roommates of Robespierre rather than (writing) partners in crime. Marin sketches brief biographies and professional trajectories of the five figures who all supposedly worked at some juncture in time as scribes for Robespierre. He argues that out of these five individuals, only one, Simon Duplay, was likely to have veritably transcribed speeches for the Incorruptible.

In order to compile the data for the *Dictionnaire Robespierre*, the Trieste researchers used three software programs: *Lexico3*, *Concordance*, and *Wordle.net*. These aid in creating visual tools for grasping the significance of keywords. There are graphics that capture the frequency of proper names cited by Robespierre originating from Antiquity (p. 67) versus contemporary proper names (p. 142). The study of influences is indubitably facilitated by qualitative approaches to the study of the principal actors of the French Revolution. Geographical mapping of the Revolution is also effectuated thanks to the data collected by the aforementioned software programs. For instance, the user of the dictionary will learn with great interest that after Paris, Avignon is the French city most frequently mentioned by Robespierre (p. 666).

There are a few minor defects to the dictionary that I would be remiss not to mention. Attentive proofreading would have avoided regrettable typos and grammatical errors: the authors refer to "une garde du corps" instead of "un garde du corps" (p. 57) and describe Villiers as "d'être été le rédacteur du Courier de la Scarpe" (p. 58) instead of "d'avoir été le rédacteur." We know that John Locke is the author of an *Essay on Human Understanding* and not an *Essay on humane understanding* (p. 39) while Francis Hutcheson is mentioned to be a "philosophe écossai" (p. 49) rather than "écossais." These minor errors do prove to be a bit distracting in the eyes of this particular reader but they should not take away from the usefulness of this otherwise meritorious reference book.

## NOTE

[1] Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Timothy Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

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