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"I wrote with my blood": Families of Jacobin Leaders and their Identities and Survival Strategies after Thermidor

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In my 2013 book, *Choosing Terror*, I listed the principal victims of "the politicians' terror," and spoke of the women who survived the traumatic events that robbed them of their husbands, sons, brothers, or fathers, but had to contend with the difficulties of that survival.[1] Uncovering their lived experiences presents numerous problems.[2] Most of them were stigmatized, particularly those related to men who had been high-profile leaders. Of all the victims of the politicians' terror, it was these forlorn survivors, perhaps, who paid the highest price for the ideal of revolutionary virtue as the code to which political men should aspire.[3]

These women appear as footnotes in the histories of the Revolution: their own histories are full of gaps and silences. Their education was limited in comparison with their menfolk; their lives

[1] My thanks to the editors, Mette Harder and Jeff Horn, for the enthusiasm and scholarly expertise that they brought to reading this piece, and for their encouragement to extend its conclusions.
[2] Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 291–2. Jennifer Heuer when she reviewed my book on H-France Forum mentioned that she would have liked to have heard more about the women, and she has a fair point, but the problem is that few women took any kind of leading role in politics, and their position was always problematic, subject to misogyny. Women in the sphere of revolutionary leadership, mostly wives and other womenfolk of leading Jacobins, Girondins, and Montagnards, remain for the most part shadowy figures. Madame Roland is an exception, as is shown in the excellent double biography of Madame Roland and her husband by Siân Reynolds, *Marriage and Revolution: Monsieur and Madame Roland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). The publication of many letters by Madame Jullien has given an opportunity to throw new light on the experience of Jacobin politics as seen from the perspective of a woman who was close to some of the leaders, including Robespierre, notably in Annie Duprat, ed., *"Les affaires d'État sont mes affaires de cœur": Lettres de Rosalie Jullien, une femme dans la Révolution 1775-1810* (Paris: Belin, 2016); and Lindsay A.H. Parker, *Writing the Revolution: A French Woman's History in Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Jacobin women were visible in the public galleries of the assemblies and the clubs, rowdy in their support of their favorite speakers, especially Robespierre, but we know little about them as individuals. On women supporters of Robespierre see Peter McPhee, *Robespierre: A Revolutionary Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Noah Shusterman, "'All of His Power Lies in the Distaff': Robespierre, Women and the French Revolution," *Past and Present* 223, no. 1 (2014): 129–60; and Linton, *Choosing Terror*. See also Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, "Robespierre, Old Regime Feminist: Gender, the Late Eighteenth Century and the French Revolution Revisited," *Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 1 (2010): 1–29.
[3] On the closely related subject of the trauma experienced by children of leading revolutionaries who had suffered execution or other forms of violent deaths, see Siân Reynolds, "Revolutionary Parents and Children: Everyday Lives in Times of Stress," in *Life in Revolutionary France*, ed. Mette Harder and Jennifer Ngaire Heuer (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 343–69.

circumscribed by gendered assumptions about their roles within the family and within politics.[4] Here I discuss two such women, Élisabeth Duplay (later Le Bas) and Robespierre's sister, Charlotte Robespierre, focusing on their lives after Thermidor[5], their strategies for survival, and how they negotiated safeguarding the memory of their menfolk, whilst shaping their own identities.

Much of our knowledge about the home life of Maximilien Robespierre comes from the testimony of these two women. Charlotte's *Mémoires de Charlotte Robespierre* (1834) are the principal source for Maximilien's childhood, whilst Élisabeth Le Bas's "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas" was published, along with other documents (many of which had been saved from the authorities by Élisabeth herself), in Stéfane-Pol, *Autour de Robespierre: le Conventionnel Le Bas, d'après des documents inédits et les mémoires de sa veuve* in 1901.[6] Both women depicted Robespierre in his private life as a kindly and virtuous man, if cerebral and abstracted, whose relationships with the people close to him were affectionate and honest. Do we believe these women? That is part of the enigma of Robespierre, a subject still hotly debated, even now, 230 years after his death.

After 9 Thermidor, Charlotte Robespierre and Élisabeth Le Bas faced particular dilemmas. The first was the question of whether to change their names. If they kept them – the names of their male relatives – they were making a statement about their identities. The second problem was whether they should venture into the public realm to write about their menfolk, and if so, what message to transmit, both to defend their posthumous reputations, and to justify their own actions. The third problem was the practical one of how to survive financially, what strategies to adopt to avoid further persecution or stigmatization, when the men on whom they had depended financially had been condemned as traitors and their property confiscated.

Late in 1832 a young revolutionary, Albert Laponneraye, sought out Charlotte Robespierre, then living in obscurity in a small Parisian apartment.[7] Charlotte was the sole surviving member of Maximilien's immediate family. For nearly forty years after the summary execution of both her brothers (Augustin was guillotined along with Maximilien), Charlotte had lived a respectable, if

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[4] On the relationship between gender and politics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see, amongst others, Jennifer Heuer, *The Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); and the historiographical essay by Anne Verjus, "Gender, Sexuality and Political Culture," in *Companion to the History of the French Revolution*, ed. Peter McPhee (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

[5] On Thermidor as a moment of continuity rather than rupture, and the function of denunciation in the post-Thermidor period, see Laura Mason, "Thermidor and the Myth of Rupture," in *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and on remembering "the Terror" as a period of trauma, see Ronen Steinberg, "Reckoning with Terror: Retribution, Redress and Remembrance in Post-Revolutionary France," in the same volume.

[6] Stéfane-Pol [pseudonym of Paul Coutant], ed., *Autour de Robespierre: le Conventionnel Le Bas, d'après des documents inédits et les mémoires de sa veuve* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1901). Paul Coutant was the son-in-law of the first Philippe Le Bas's grandson, Léon Le Bas.

[7] Laponneraye may have met Charlotte Robespierre for the first time in 1830, after publication of some apocryphal memoirs of Robespierre. On Charlotte Robespierre's relationship with Laponneraye, and his role in bringing Robespierre's ideas to a new generation, see Gérard Walter, *Maximilien de Robespierre* (1961; repr., Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 645–50; and Marc Belissa and Yannick Bosc, eds., *Robespierre, la fabrication d'un mythe* (Paris: Ellipses, 2013), 145–7.

lonely life, trying not to draw attention to herself and the family name that had become notorious. She never married, had no close relatives, and very few friends beyond the woman whose home she shared. She eked out a living through lacemaking (a skill she had learned as a child in Artois), supplemented by occasional handouts granted her by a series of regimes.

Just days after her brothers' execution, Charlotte, imprisoned, and – with good reason – terrified for her life, had repudiated her brothers, and denounced their "infernal conspiracy."[8] The pension she received from successive regimes was given her in large part to procure her silence about Maximilien. When Laponneraye met her, she was so moved that for a long time she gazed at him, unable to speak. As he later recounted, "she held my hands, with an expression that I will never forget."[9] On her death in 1834 she left Laponneraye her manuscripts about Maximilien. He published an edited version, though the extent to which he intervened to supplement and revise Charlotte's words remains uncertain.[10] Charlotte wanted to vindicate Maximilien's memory, to show him as a good man, not the monster portrayed by his detractors. If she had other, more complicated, memories of her relationship with her brothers in the fraught last months of their lives, she kept these out of her account.[11]

Charlotte was educated by nuns, at a school for girls of genteel but impoverished families. She managed the household in Arras of first Maximilien, then, when he went to the Estates-General, of their younger brother, Augustin. When Augustin arrived in Paris as a deputy to the National Convention, Charlotte came, too. At first they lodged with the Duplays, with whom their older brother had lived since the Champ de Mars in July 1791.Tensions grew between Charlotte and Madame Duplay – over Maximilien. In 1792, Charlotte persuaded him that his political dignity was diminished by living as a lodger *chez* the Duplays, rather than in his own establishment. He agreed to set up home under Charlotte's aegis. The experiment did not last long. He fell ill and was swept off back to the Duplays by Madame Duplay. Charlotte resented Madame Duplay for trespassing on what she felt was her own privileged status – as the closest female relative to "the great man." There was an incident over a pot of jam which Charlotte brought to the Duplays for the sick Maximilien, but which Madame Duplay threw away, declaring it to be tainted.[12] A dispute over a pot of jam sounds trivial and has often been trotted out as illustrative of Charlotte's small-mindedness. But there was an underlying issue at stake – Charlotte's precarious status as an unmarried woman, dependent on her brothers for her place in the world.

Charlotte accompanied Augustin when he went on mission to Lyon, Nice, and Toulon, along with a fellow deputy, Jean François Ricord, and his wife, Marguerite. It was a dramatic mission, involving escapes from hostile crowds and midnight rides fleeing through the mountains. But it ended in disaster for Charlotte when she fell out with Augustin. The cause of the rift seems to

[8] Cited in Hector Fleischmann, *Charlotte Robespierre et ses mémoires* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1910), 85–7.
[9] Albert Laponneraye's Introduction to Charlotte Robespierre, *Mémoires* (1834; repr., Paris: Nouveau monde, 2006), 40.
[10] The question of how far Laponneraye revised and reshaped Charlotte's words is discussed by Jean-Clément Martin in his Preface to the 2006 edition of Charlotte Robespierre, *Mémoires*, 7–17.
[11] Charlotte's view of her brother's early years is often compared by historians with the hostile account by Proyart in Lievin-Bonaventure Proyart (abbé), *La Vie et les crimes de Robespierre, surnommé le tyran, depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort* (Augsburg, 1795). Even before the Revolution, Proyart was strongly opposed to political and religious reform; he protested vehemently against religious toleration for Protestants in 1787.
[12] Robespierre, *Mémoires*, 79-80.

have been again Charlotte's loudly-voiced resentment of another woman, this time Madame Ricord, with whom it seems likely that Augustin was having an affair.[13] "If modesty did not restrain my pen," Charlotte would assert in her memoirs, recalling that far off time, "I could say much to the detriment of Madame Ricord."[14] Augustin protested to his brother, "My sister doesn't have a drop of blood in her body that resembles ours. I have heard and witnessed so many things about her that I regard her as our worst enemy." Augustin accused Charlotte of having slandered her brothers, blackening their "spotless reputation," and of threatening "to cause a scandal."[15] Maximilien's motives for his part in what followed are unclear, though as J.M. Thompson points out, "it was his reputation that was threatened both by his brother's misconduct and his sister's lack of self-control."[16] Maximilien sided with his brother, against their sister. Charlotte was sent back to Arras, passed round from pillar to post at the will of her brothers. She returned to Paris on her own initiative, and was living at the home of citizeness Laporte, estranged from her brothers at the time of their arrest and execution. The estrangement almost certainly saved her life.

In her memoirs, Charlotte described herself on 10 Thermidor going to the Conciergerie prison in an attempt to see her brothers:

> I rushed out onto the streets, my head in turmoil, despair in my heart; I call my brothers, I look for them. I learn that they have been taken to the Conciergerie. I run there, I ask to see them, I ask with my hands joined in supplication; I fall on my knees before the soldiers; they push me aside, they laugh at my tears, they insult me, they strike me.[17]

Charlotte said that some people took pity on her and led her away. She lost all sense of what was happening. When she came to herself again, she was in prison. A woman imprisoned with her told Charlotte that "several people had been arrested at the same time as me, and because of me, and probably they would mount the scaffold along with me." She begged Charlotte to write to the Great Committees, or they would all die. Charlotte says that after fifteen days she agreed at last, signing a letter the woman put before her without even knowing what was in it. The next day they were all released from prison and she never saw the woman again.[18]

The reality seems to have been rather different from how Charlotte remembered it. Whether she really went to the Conciergerie is not known. But she was aware enough of her danger to take shelter with another woman, citizeness Beguin, and to use her mother's maiden name, Carraut, in an effort to hide her identity. But three days later, on 13 Thermidor, she was denounced by a man

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[13] Paul Barras – if we can believe him – was more explicit than Charlotte was prepared to be about the nature of the relationship between Augustin Robespierre and Marguerite Ricord. See J.M. Thompson, *Robespierre* (1935; repr., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 416–7.
[14] Robespierre, *Mémoires*, 97. Charlotte blamed Madame Ricord for contriving to cause the rift between herself and Augustin. Charlotte's bitter account of Madame Ricord's part in the breakdown of her relationship with her brothers is in her *Mémoires*, chapter 4, 93–8.
[15] Letter from Augustin Robespierre to Maximilien Robespierre, no date, around 10 Prairial, in Maximilien Robespierre, *Correspondance de Maximilien et Augustin Robespierre*, ed. Georges Michon (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1926), 293.
[16] Thompson, *Robespierre*, 416–8.
[17] Robespierre, *Mémoires*, 121.
[18] *Ibid*, 121–2.

called Waleffe, a refugee from the Principality of Liège, and arrested, along with Beguin. Both women were interrogated by the revolutionary committee of the Contrat Social Section. The official account of the interrogation gives some indication of how terrifying the moment was for her. Under pressure from her interrogators who "invited her to declare whether she had any knowledge of the infamous conspiracy hatched by her elder brother and who were the men who frequented his home," Charlotte replied:

> That she loved her country too much, that she was entirely ignorant of this infernal conspiracy, that she had had the courage to tell him every time she had the chance that the men around him sought to deceive him, that if she had known about the infamous conspiracy that was being hatched that she would have denounced it rather than see her country lost.[19]

After thirteen days she was released. Keeping the name Carraut, she went to live with a friend, citizen Mathon and his daughter, in the rue de la Pitié, where she stayed till her death. On the walls hung two portraits of Maximilien. Through the advocacy of Amand[20] Guffroy (once Robespierre's friend and colleague, but in 1794 one of the conspirators against him), she received some financial aid from the Thermidoreans.[21] Later she received pensions: first from Napoleon when he became consul, of 3,600 francs; under the Bourbon monarchy this was diminished to 1,200 francs and may have been suppressed altogether for several years; but under the July Monarchy she received 1,200 francs until her death. During the Restoration, she found it judicious to change her name again, to Mlle La Roche.[22] The changes of name were not to hide her identity from the authorities as she was in receipt of a pension, but from her neighbors.

Élisabeth Le Bas (née Duplay) was born in 1772, the youngest of four daughters in the household where Maximilien Robespierre lodged. By all accounts, the Duplays were much more to Maximilien than his landlords; they became his surrogate family – much to Charlotte's chagrin. Years later, in her manuscript, Élisabeth described Maximilien as like "an elder brother" to her. Aged just 21, she married Philippe Le Bas, Robespierre's trusted friend and political ally on the Committee of General Security, on 26 August 1793. Robespierre and Jacques-Louis David, along with Élisabeth's uncle, were the witnesses. Her son was born on 17 June 1794.

When the arrest of Robespierre and Louis-Antoine Saint-Just was decreed on 9 Thermidor, Philippe Le Bas broke free of the friends who were trying to restrain him to insist that he too be arrested and share their fate. It was an extraordinary act of courage and of loyalty. It cost him his life. That night he shot himself at the Hôtel de Ville, moments before the forces of the Convention broke in to arrest Robespierre and the others. It was a moment of utter disaster for Élisabeth and her family. According to Élisabeth, on the morning of 10 Thermidor, a mysterious woman, dressed in black and covered in a long veil, came to the Duplay house, saying she had

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[19] Cited in Hector Fleischmann, *Charlotte Robespierre et ses mémoires* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1910), 85–7.
[20] Alternatively, his name might have been Armand, but see his entry in Michel Biard, Philippe Bourdin, and Hervé Leuwers, eds., *Dictionnaire des Conventionnels 1792-1795*, 2 vols. (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, 2022), 1:591–593.
[21] Walter, *Robespierre*, 646.
[22] On the pensions that Charlotte Robespierre received, and the question of why the Bourbons gave her a pension, see Fleischmann, *Charlotte Robespierre et ses mémoires*, 109–12, and on her change of name, 107, 115.

been sent by Philippe Le Bas (by then already dead) with a message for Élisabeth which she insisted she could only give to Élisabeth alone. But her sister-in-law, Henriette, and other members of the family who remained said that on no account should she see the woman alone, as she could be there to assassinate Élisabeth and her baby.[23] Élisabeth did not say what the mysterious message was, but the incident recalled the fear of assassination experienced by many Jacobin leaders, especially of murder carried out by lone women inveigling their way into the home, following the precedent set by Charlotte Corday.[24] Newly widowed, Élisabeth feared this danger to herself and her child.

Women in prison were subject to particular difficulties and dangers. Élisabeth's mother, Françoise Duplay, was found hanged in her cell the day after her arrest. The official version was that she committed suicide, and historians have often repeated it. Élisabeth would have none of that: she maintained, "my poor mother was strangled by atrocious monsters."[25] Though decisive evidence is lacking, she may well have been right about this.[26] At first, Philippe Le Bas's sister, Henriette, came voluntarily to join her in prison, but as a young, single girl, she was particularly vulnerable, Élisabeth implies, to seduction or sexual assault, and so later Élisabeth was joined instead by her own sister, Éléonore.

Élisabeth recounted how on two occasions two men came to see her in prison and said that she and her baby would be released if she would agree to give up her name by marrying a deputy who was ready to perform this office. Her child would be declared an "orphan of the patrie" and so receive financial aid. By her account, she refused disdainfully.[27] The story about a marriage offer made to her in prison seems unlikely, if not impossible, and other evidence calls into question Élisabeth's memory of the length of time she and her baby spent incarcerated. Élisabeth claimed that she was imprisoned for eight months, along with her six-week-old baby, but it was probably closer to five months. Her health was severely undermined, and her eventual release was ordered on those grounds; also, presumably, because she was not seen as a substantial threat to the new regime.[28]

Her time in prison, the treatment she was subjected to there, and the losses she had suffered, all seem to have hardened Élisabeth's determination. She later wrote:

> There is no suffering which they did not make me endure; the monsters thought they would intimidate me; I made them see that they would never succeed…. I love liberty;

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[23] Élisabeth Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," in *Autour de Robespierre*, ed. Stéfane-Pol, 139–40.
[24] On Jacobin leaders' fear of assassination, see Marisa Linton, "The Stuff of Nightmares: Plots, Assassinations, and Duplicity in the Mental World of Jacobin Leaders, 1793-1794," in *Experiencing the French Revolution*, ed. David Andress (Oxford: Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 2013), 201–17.
[25] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 140–1.
[26] On the lack of indisputable evidence for whether Élisabeth's mother committed suicide in prison or was murdered, see Michel Biard and Florent Hérichier, "Mourir avec ses amis, revivre par eux: *Le Bas et la Famille Duplay*," in *L'amitié en révolution, 1789-1799, de l'histoire à la mémoire*, ed. Philippe Bourdin and Côme Simien (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2024), 307–8.
[27] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 146.
[28] For evidence for the length of her imprisonment and the reasons for her eventual release, see Biard and Héricher, "Mourir avec ses amis," 307–8.

> the blood that flows in my veins now, at the age of seventy, is that of a republican. I have never abandoned my name, so dear to my heart, the name that I take glory in bearing.[29]

After her release, she was "alone, without resources." The rest of her family was still imprisoned, and she had a baby to care for. She found work on the washerwomen's boats on the Seine, rather than accept money from the men who had "murdered our poor friends." The question of whether or not she would agree to change her name was evidently fundamental to how Élisabeth remembered her experience. She insisted, and protested that, contrary to reports, it was not she, but Charlotte, who abandoned her name.[30] About a fortnight after her release from prison, a friend of Philippe Le Bas, thinking to help her, put in a request for her husband's property to be restored to her. This led to a dramatic scene where she was summoned to the "Comité des secours" and told that she would receive financial aid if she agreed to give up her name. She describes herself as so determined to show her defiance that she seized a pen and a piece of paper, then cut herself and wrote in her own blood that she "would not ask for help from her husband's assassins," signing it "Veuve Le Bas." The officials were so outraged they wanted to rearrest her, and she was saved only by the sudden appearance of the friend who had tried to help her, who pointed out the "inconveniences" of keeping a mother and baby under long-term arrest.[31]

Élisabeth remade her life, but never forgot the past. Like Charlotte, she depicted Robespierre and his close friends and political associates, amongst whom was her dead husband, as men of virtue. For Élisabeth, their integrity was demonstrated by the fact that none of them had profited personally from their time in power, "these men were so virtuous in all their dealings, they all died poor."[32] Jules Michelet recalled how as a boy his mother took him to meet Élisabeth Le Bas and impressed upon her son that "these men were saints."[33]

Élisabeth lived through two further revolutions until 1859. She raised her son to be a pillar of society – and defend his father's memory. The boy, also named Philippe, was educated by the Oratorians of Juilly, had a brief military career under Napoleon, but was much better known for his scholarly pursuits. He was for a time the tutor of Louis-Napoleon, the future Napoleon III. He had his radical moments; he was actively involved in the July Revolution of 1830, after which he was a prime mover in the decision to reinstate the words above the Panthéon, "Aux grands hommes, la Patrie reconnaissante."[34] He was elected a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, and became a librarian and administrator at the library of the Sorbonne as a Hellenist scholar and translator.

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[29] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 146.
[30] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 147. See too, the subsequent notes in Stéfane-Pol, ed., *Autour de Robespierre*, 325.
[31] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 140–4; also the notes in Stéfane-Pol, ed., *Autour de Robespierre*," 324–31.
[32] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 147.
[33] Cited in François Wartelle, "Lebas, Philippe François Joseph," in *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française*, ed. Albert Soboul (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), 655.
[34] On the life of Élisabeth's son, Philippe Le Bas, there is information in M. Billet, *Philippe Le Bas, Membre de l'Institut de France (Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres)*, (Arras, 1866). For more information about his life, and that of other members of the Duplay family after Thermidor, see too, Biard and Hérichier, "Mourir avec ses amis."

Élisabeth, in her own name and through the intermediary of her son, constituted herself as a defender of the memory of Robespierre and the men who died with him. She bought Saint-Just's portrait from his former landlady – selling her husband's coat to do it – a portrait which is now kept in the Musée Carnavalet.[35] When Alphonse de Lamartine wrote his *Histoire des Girondins*, he consulted both mother and son. When his *Histoire des Girondins* was published, they annotated the margins with corrections where Lamartine got details wrong.[36] Élisabeth wrote "when one writes history one should write the truth."[37] It was Élisabeth who hid some of Robespierre's papers, including drafts of his speech on 8 Thermidor. Éléonore Duplay, Élisabeth's sister, whom Élisabeth said would have married Robespierre if Thermidor had not intervened, also kept some of Robespierre's papers, only for them to be destroyed, possibly along with a portrait of Robespierre, by their brother, Simon Duplay, in 1815 when he was afraid of discovery.[38] Many of the papers that Élisabeth kept were published in the volume by Stéfane-Pol. Some remained in the keeping of her descendants for over 200 years, and only came to light in 2011 when they were offered for sale. The French government declined at first to buy them, though was later embarrassed into intervening when appeals were being made to the public to raise funds to stop them from passing into private hands.

In later years Charlotte and Élisabeth had some degree of reconciliation, overcoming old grievances. Who else after all could they speak to about their shared memories? Jules Simon recalled an occasion in 1833 when, as a young student at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, he lunched at the home of his history tutor, Philippe Le Bas, and of his mother, where they were joined by an aged lady, very upright and correct, though wearing plain and old-fashioned clothes that recalled the fashions of the Directory. According to Simon, Élisabeth and her son treated the lady "with great respect, as though she were a sovereign."[39] After she had left, they explained that this was Charlotte Robespierre. It seems possible, however, that Simon exaggerated the extent of the respect the Le Bas family showed Charlotte. Years later, Philippe Le Bas *still* judged Charlotte harshly, saying "she had not blushed to receive a pension of 6,000 livres from the assassins of her brothers" and that her *Mémoires* contained much that was "false" as well as interesting information about her brother's early life.[40]

Élisabeth's own posthumous reputation has inevitably been caught up with that of Robespierre himself. She was vilified by some historians, including Richard Cobb who wrote with surprising rancor of Élisabeth that she was one of the "professional widows" who "saw to it that their sons never forgot," one of the "irreconcilables" who "nourished the coming generation on a mixed diet of reverence, revenge, romantic republicanism, and the purifying beauties of violence."[41] I

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[35] Stéfane-Pol, ed., *Autour de Robespierre*, 325–6. The portrait saved by Élisabeth is the best authenticated likeness of Saint-Just still in existence, see Louise Ampilova-Tuil and Catherine Gosselin, "Une note sur l'iconographie de Saint-Just: L'histoire du pastel Le Bas," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 390 (2017): 203–214. https://www.cairn.info/revue-annales-historiques-de-la-revolution-francaise-2017-4-page-203.htm

[36] The notes and annotations are reproduced and discussed in Stéfane-Pol, ed., *Autour de Robespierre*, 324–31.

[37] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 147.

[38] David Jordan, *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 230. The portrait of Robespierre was by Gérard. See Belissa and Bosc, eds., *Robespierre, la fabrication d'un mythe,* 26–8.

[39] Stéfane-Pol, ed., *Autour de Robespierre*, 85–7.

[40] Cited in Stéfane-Pol, ed., *Autour de Robespierre*, 86–7.

[41] Richard Cobb, *The French and Their Revolution: Selected Writings Edited and Introduced by David Gilmour* (London: John Murray, 1998), 212.

disagree with this view. There is certainly reverence in Élisabeth's account of the Robespierrists, but nothing about seeking revenge or the purifying beauties of violence. Deputy Marc-Antoine Baudot, who was no friend to Robespierre, said as much with regard to the whole Duplay family, declaring them to be "very moral people…. All the Duplay family languished for a long time in prisons: men, daughters, infants. When this crisis ended (but it lasted a long time for them) this family had nothing more pressing than to enclose themselves within their domestic circle and their occupations." Baudot also pointed out that when Maurice Duplay was rearrested for being implicated in the "Babeuf conspiracy," he was ultimately acquitted when it was established that he knew nothing about Babeuf, the other men accused, or their projects.[42] As for Élisabeth's son, though she ensured that he was proud of his father and saw him as having "died for the patrie," he was highly respected. This accords with Élisabeth's account of the final words her husband said to her when they parted on the street outside the Hôtel de Ville where the Robespierrists made their last stand. His last words had been about their son. He urged her that she "should not make him hate his father's assassins," instead that she should "inspire him with noble sentiments" and "to love his patrie."[43] We cannot know how far she held Philippe's words verbatim in her memory. Perhaps his exact words were less important than how she chose to remember them; memory helped to sustain Élisabeth, giving her a narrative that she used to shape her future identity as a courageous widow, mother, and republican, faithful to the legacy of her husband and his friends, and to the cause for which they died. Her memory underpinned her continued political engagement, above all her determined guardianship of papers relating to Robespierre and his allies, a guardianship she passed down to her descendants in the shape of a cache of papers that would be brought back into the public light long years after her own death.

By contrast, Charlotte had no final loving words from her brothers to comfort her. She had to live with the memory of her estrangement from them, together with her knowledge of the declaration that she had made, in terror of her life, denouncing them as conspirators; written words that could not easily be denied. Nor could the fact of her pension, the visible sign of her accommodation with successive regimes, and the tangible indication that she had been paid to keep silent, be easily repudiated.

Charlotte lacked Élisabeth's bravery, perhaps, and strength of mind, but she was also more isolated, and her position more exposed. Charlotte's struggles were mostly limited to ensuring her own survival, consequently her strategy was rather different to that of Élisabeth; but towards the end of her life, she did commit her memories of her brothers to paper and entrust them to Laponneraye for publication. Charlotte has been judged harshly by many survivors of Thermidor, including Élisabeth, yet her acceptance of the invented narrative of her brothers and their supporters as part of a "conspiracy" is symptomatic of many erstwhile supporters of Robespierre, who, confronted by the coup of Thermidor, frantically ditched their loyalty to doomed and dead men in order to save their own lives. How many of us would venture to maintain that, given such circumstances, we would not act as Charlotte did?

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[42] Marc-Antoine Baudot, *Notes historiques sur la Convention nationale, l'Empire et l'exil des votants* (Paris: D. Jouaust, 1893), 243.
[43] Le Bas, "Manuscrit de Mme Le Bas," 137–8.

What impresses me most about both these women, Élisabeth Le Bas and Charlotte Robespierre, was the quiet courage they showed during the long years after the drama of Thermidor had subsided, the courage that it took for them to go on living. If anything, Charlotte's life was more difficult and therefore Élisabeth's judgement of her seems excessively harsh. Élisabeth lost a great deal, but she still had a network to sustain her. The surviving Duplays were a close-knit group, and they rallied around her and Éleonore. The Le Bas family too, kept strong connections with Élisabeth, reinforced by her second marriage – to Charles Le Bas, younger brother of Philippe, with whom she had two more children.[44] By this marriage, she established some emotional and financial security, and strengthened this network; it also enabled her to fulfill her avowed resolution to keep the name of Le Bas. Charlotte had no close family left, no other means of support, and no child on whom to lavish her love. She also labored under the additional difficulty that the name "Robespierre" was always going to be more instantly recognizable and notorious than that of "Le Bas." The name of Robespierre casts a long shadow, even now, so what life must have been like for the women who were close to him and who survived Thermidor can only be imagined.

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[44] As Siân Reynolds points out, Élisabeth was not the only widow of a revolutionary executed as a "traitor" to subsequently marry her husband's brother, in part to strengthen ties and support. Reynolds, "Revolutionary Parents and Children," 351.