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Waxing Revolutionary: Reflections on a Raid on a Waxworks at the Outbreak of the French Revolution

DAVID MCCALLAM*

Parisians from all walks of life were already accustomed to watching heads roll before the Revolution of 1789. This is not a reference to public executions of the time (beheadings were reserved for the nobility and were rare events) but to another cultural spectacle of late eighteenth-century Paris, one which was sufficiently well-known to become the object of a satirical print in 1787. Entitled ‘Avis au public: Têtes à changer’, the print by P. D. Viviez lampoons the unceremonious updating of fashionable or celebrated waxwork figures displayed in the popular entertainments district of the Boulevard du Temple [See Figure 1]. It shows wax heads being handed down from shelves; heads being replaced on models; one head about to be struck off with a chisel; another head lies discarded on the ground, being sniffed at by a little cat. All of this takes place in front of a crowd of curious, chatty onlookers.

The target of this satire was the *Salon de cire*, a popular waxworks gallery, run by Dr Philippe Guillaume Mathé Curtius. Curtius – whose real name was either Creuz or Kurtz – was a German-born entrepreneur who had formerly been a doctor in Berne, Switzerland. He had taken to modelling in wax to improve his anatomical skills and had become extremely proficient in the art. In 1761 the Prince de Conti, the liberal cousin of Louis XV, was travelling incognito in Switzerland and saw Curtius’s work. Conti admired it greatly and consequently invited the modeller to Paris. Through Conti, Curtius rapidly

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established himself in the capital, and was fêted for his portraits of high-society figures, such as those of Conti himself and the young Jeanne du Barry, later mistress to Louis XV. In 1767 Curtius in turn invited his housekeeper, Mme Grosholtz, and her six-year-old daughter Marie, to live with him in Paris. Marie always called him 'Uncle', and was to become his apprentice, equal and successor. In 1794 she inherited his collection and built on it. A year later she married François Tussaud, became Madame Tussaud, took her waxworks on tour to London in 1802 and was never to return to France, founding subsequently one of the most impressive entertainments empires of the modern era.¹

In comparison, Curtius's first public exhibition was a discreet affair. It was held in 1770 in the Palais-Royal, 'côté de l'Avenue de l'Opéra, par la cour Desfontaines'.² Yet it was clearly a great success, as by the end of the 1770s, Curtius's *Salon de cire* had moved to larger premises at no. 20, Boulevard du Temple, where it established itself as a major attraction both with Parisians and with many foreign visitors. In his *Le Chroniqueur désœuvré, ou l'Espion du Boulevard du Temple* of 1782, the satirist, François-Marie Mayeur de Saint-Paul calls Curtius 'cet allemand industriel' whose wax figures are indeed 'très ressemblans', attracting visitors of all ranks and social orders.³ Yet the self-appointed critic of popular entertainment cannot help but add that 'le débit des petits *groupes* gaillards et libertins qu'il vend aux curieux pour orner leurs boudoirs, est ce qui lui rapporte le plus'.⁴

In 1784 Curtius took advantage of the duc de Chartres's (the future duc d'Orléans) development of the Palais-Royal for commercial exploitation. He rented a boutique there at no.7 des Arcades. Here he exhibited a selection of his models, but this time segregated his audience by price, putting in two galleries, one at two sous (the boulevard price), the other at twelve sous allowing a richer clientèle to inspect his models more closely.⁵ So by the late 1780s, Curtius had two prime sites in popular entertainment districts in Paris and,

as Louis-Sébastien Mercier notes in his *Tableau de Paris*, ‘les figures de cire du sieur Curtius sont très célèbres sur les Boulevards, et très visitées. Il a modelé les rois, les grands écrivains, les jolies femmes, et les grands voleurs’.⁶ Yet, Mercier goes on to recount, there were two set-pieces in particular which caught the eye: ‘Le grand couvert’ which showed the royal family at dinner at Versailles with Marie-Antoinette’s brother, Joseph II of Austria; and ‘Le caverne des grands voleurs’ (the model for Tussaud’s later ‘Chamber of Horrors’) which housed a collection of celebrated criminals, murderers and highwaymen, such as Desrues and Cartouche, some of their likenesses allegedly taken directly from their cadavers.⁷

This last point is significant, as it reminds us that Curtius’s popular art had its origins in anatomical investigation, in the pursuit of medical knowledge. Indeed, there was an established line of doctors, especially anatomists, in France who modelled wax to improve their skills and to instruct students in their discipline (it was, after all, much more humane than the contemporary anatomical practice of dissecting live dogs nailed to operating tables).⁸ Thus at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Mademoiselle Bihéron sculpted anatomical figures from wax to help in the study of midwifery, keeping corpses in a glass cabinet in her garden which she macabrely called her ‘little boudoir’. There were also the doctors Desnoues and La Croix who pioneered anatomical waxes in Genoa and displayed them before the Académie des Sciences in Paris in 1711. Later in the century, there is record of a M. Pirson, a surgeon and wax-modeller who also had his figures approved by the Académie des Sciences in 1770, the year of Curtius’s first public exhibition. Pirson was to be attached to the military hospitals of Saint-Denis and Courvoie as well as to the *École de Médecine* during the Revolution, in which time he also made over five hundred wax models of funghi, distinguishing between the edible and the poisonous.⁹

More significantly, the Chevalier de Jaucourt, writing in the *Encyclopédie*, under the article ‘Cire’, reveals that Curtius’s predecessors were not exclusively drawn from medicine but also from other disciplines, blurring further the divide between the sciences and the arts by the staging of public displays of their waxworks – of both anatomical pieces and portraiture. Jaucourt thus acclaims the early eighteenth-century wax models of Antoine Benoît, a painter by profession, who produced ‘ces cercles composés de personnages de *cire*, qui ont fait si long-tems l’admiration de la cour et de la ville’. Benoît’s figures ‘revêtues d’habits, conformes à la qualité des personnes qu’elles représentoient, étoient si ressemblantes, que les yeux leur croyoient quelquefois de la vie’; yet the *encyclopédiste* adds still more admiringly, ‘mais les figures anatomiques faites en *cire* par le même Benoît, peuvent encore moins s’oublier que la beauté de ses portraits’.¹⁰ Jaucourt is here attempting to rescue Benoît’s art from its origins in the popular fairs and, as a true man of the Enlightenment, claim some pedagogical value from its practice. This is, to some extent, the very opposite of Curtius’s career which was based on taking this predominantly medical practice and making it into a popular attraction, albeit one that might be better defined as ‘neo-popular’, insofar as it was aimed at a more spectacle-oriented audience which included all social classes, distancing itself in this particular from strictly ‘plebeian’ forms of show culture. Nonetheless, in his passage from doctor’s cabinet to the boulevard’s ‘cabinet of curiosities’, Curtius represents more completely than Benoît the extreme fluidity of artistic and scientific disciplines of the time, the very porous division of scientific enquiry and neo-popular charlatanry as well as the often undifferentiated construction of illusion and knowledge.

Certainly, rival distractions to that of Curtius in the boulevards exploited expertly the blurring of symbolic and real orders, insinuating their acts between the imaginary and the concrete, creating there, as in the Palais-Royal, what Mercier calls ‘ce lieu de féerie’ –

a fantastical realm seamlessly mixing illusion and reality.¹¹ It is not incidental that, like Curtius, many of the boulevard spectacles were staged by immigrants – the German Zaller’s optical illusions, the Italian Torr ’s pyrotechnics, the Englishman Astley’s circus – representing in their own persons the novelty and exoticism which appealed to the French of the time and which many of the shows also tapped.¹² In the Palais-Royal in particular in the late 1780s, one could see ‘la belle Zulima’, allegedly the perfectly preserved and half-naked body of a two hundred-year-old African princess, which was in reality a wax model with fake hair. The wood-turner and tailor duo of Delomel and Gardeur similarly produced marionettes carved and dressed to resemble well-known figures of the time, later developing this show into a very successful puppet and child theatre troupe.¹³ The vast majority of these spectacles used, as did Curtius, the basic commodity of popular entertainments in eighteenth-century Paris: the human body, be it that of farceurs, conjurers, acrobats, contortionists or prostitutes of both sexes and all ages.

Only Curtius, however, combined a key number of these elements in his waxworks. Firstly he drew on his own medical expertise as well as on the growing interest in the pseudo-science of physiognomy, which the writings of Johann Kaspar Lavater had done much to popularize; he also exploited the popular fascination with the famous, infamous and powerful in an age when there was neither mass media nor photography to disseminate their likenesses among the general public. Moreover, he mixed titillatingly the public and private spheres, putting homely royal scenes on public display, not only ‘Le Grand Couvert’ but also Marie-Antoinette preparing for bed, while exhibiting at the same time common criminals offered up as individuals for intimate inspection. Did he not, after all, call his display a *salon*, that notoriously slippery social space of the eighteenth century that oscillated ceaselessly between the private and the public; a cultural ambivalence compounded in the Palais-Royal display by its situation in the Arcades, considered at once

as interior and exterior social spaces? More significantly still, as Mercier noted, Curtius's knowing juxtaposition of heroes and villains, of vaudvillians and *philosophes*, most crucially of royalty and criminals, was made without comment or distinction.¹⁴ So his exhibition constituted the manufacture of a certain 'celebrity' which served as a highly ambivalent medium for its subjects, one that could easily switch from heroism to villainy in a trice.

As the 1780s neared their end, all of these socio-cultural aspects of Curtius's art carried an increasingly explicit political charge. Of course, the Parisian boulevards had long offered dissenting voices from authority. In addition to the explicit farces on government officials, the very existence of these shows represented the flouting of the corporate privileges of the state-protected and sponsored Comédies française and italienne, as well as the Opéra. As Robert Isherwood has shown, by the late 1780s, the boulevard spectacles were also getting increasingly moral in their choice of productions.¹⁵ Yet, even more than the boulevards, it was the Palais-Royal which constituted the real epicentre of pre-revolutionary political radicalism. Lording it there was its owner, Louis Philippe Joseph, duc d'Orléans, Louis XVI's progressive cousin, a reforming prince, an enlightened royal who accommodated calls for political change in his public gardens and at his table. Orléans was renowned for surrounding himself with an army of pamphleteers and hacks, as well as street agitators, whose mission was to associate his name with any popular calls for reform and who received handsome rewards for their work.

Having a vested interest in both sites – the boulevards and the Palais-Royal – and being a seasoned cultural weathercock, Curtius had been quick to seize on the political changes being rung through late 1788 and into the spring of 1789, namely the elections to the Estates-General and the latter's rapid self-reconstitution into a radical National Assembly. The waxworks historian, Pauline Chapman claims that, by June 1789, Curtius

was profiting from his long-cultivated social connections to dine regularly with leading reformers and deputies at no. 20 Boulevard du Temple, and was updating his *Salon* accordingly.¹⁶ Thus visitors to his waxworks in early July 1789 could see there in wax Mirabeau, abbé Sieyès, Lafayette, Target, a celebrated lawyer-deputy, and Bailly, first president of the National Assembly, as well as more enduring figures of reform, such as Voltaire and Rousseau. The busts of this emerging political elite also connoted something more disturbing and subversive for the forces of tradition. For the busts, by their very nature, focussed the attention on the head of their subjects and suggested implicitly, in a way incompatible with their celebrity courtesan, soldierly and criminal predecessors, that a new ‘head’ or leadership had grown organically from the new unified ‘body politic’ of the National Assembly.¹⁷

In similar vein, Curtius also displayed proudly the busts of his landlord and possibly political totem at the time, the duc d’Orléans, and that of Jacques Necker, the very popular Swiss protestant Minister of Finances. It was these two busts, and that of Necker in particular, which were to put Curtius’s *Salon de cire* and the first throes of the French Revolution on a collision course. For Necker, who had endeared himself equally to the people and reformers and who had championed the Estates-General process from its inception, was summoned by the king on Saturday 11 July 1789 and summarily dismissed. If, as Munro Price has shown, there was no unified ‘Court conspiracy’ mounted against the Minister of Finances, there was sufficient hostility among certain reactionaries at Court, notably Louis XVI’s youngest brother, le comte d’Artois, shared to a lesser extent by an exasperated Marie-Antoinette, for Necker to be singled out as the lamb of reform whose sacrifice was to put a halt to the radical politics pursued by the National Assembly, newly confident in the wake of the king’s apparent capitulation before it in late June 1789.¹⁸ Cosseted in Versailles, and possibly still distracted by grief (the Dauphin had died in early

June), Louis XVI, thus sent Necker and his family into a brief but highly inflammatory political exile.

To be fair, as Paul G. Spagnoli has proven in a convincingly argued account of the early Revolution, popular unrest was already manifest in the sacking of certain tollgates, or *barrières*, around Paris on the night of 11-12 July; an economic revolt bred of rumours of price rises and food shortages in the capital.¹⁹ Yet Necker's dismissal gave this rather cyclical, typical sort of popular violence an explicitly political motivation as well as a hero in exile. Hence when news of Necker's dismissal reached Paris around midday on Sunday 12 July 1789 confusion, rumour and panic immediately reigned. 'La consternation fut générale', wrote Jean Dussaulx, an eye-witness of the scenes and an early historian of the Revolution.²⁰ The situation was made all the worse by the ominous manoeuvres of many foreign and artillery regiments brought up around Paris, allegedly to prevent any criminal elements from exploiting this difficult time of year between harvests.²¹ It seems that the Court reactionaries had decided to break the news of Necker's dismissal on Sunday to prevent the National Assembly from debating it; but they had badly miscalculated, and had not reckoned on the strength of popular reformist sentiment in the capital, focussed specifically in Palais-Royal which quickly became the seat of open resistance. The actual order of events that followed is confused and varies from account to account, but Spagnoli in particular locates a number of crucial actions which occurred, overlapped and reinforced the general tendency toward popular insurrection. By about four o'clock in the afternoon, a crowd of between 5,000 to 6,000 people were milling excitedly about the grounds of the Palais-Royal. Street orators (of which Camille Desmoulins is only one among many, despite his subsequent and successful campaigns of self-publicity) were haranguing the crowds from table-tops outside the cafés of the Arcades.²² They called for two things in the main: the closure of the theatres and other public entertainments as a sign of general

mourning (one which significantly was normally reserved for a royal death); and the search for arms to defend themselves and the city against what they believed to be imminent and certain attack.

It was the first of these – the call for signs of mourning at Necker’s loss – that was directly to affect Curtius and his waxworks and drag them, however reluctantly, into the political limelight. Prompted by someone, somewhere, to move towards the popular theatrelands of the boulevards in the north-east of the city, a section of the agitated crowds, about one thousand-strong, paid a visit to Curtius’s *Salon de cire* in the Boulevard du Temple.²³ They confronted its owner, locking up shop at the time, who somewhat reluctantly but ‘patriotically’, handed over the wax heads of the duc d’Orléans and Necker. These were immediately covered in black crêpe and, borne aloft, they were paraded through the streets, accompanied by black banners and muffled drumming. After a brief return via the Palais-Royal, the cortège accompanying the waxes was about 6,000 strong by the time it reached the Place Vendôme. While some contemporary and subsequent accounts situate the first violent encounter with royalist troops in the Place Vendôme, it seems clear from Spagnoli’s painstaking research that there is little evidence of a bloody clash here between the protesting crowds and the ill-famed Royal-Allemand guards, albeit that a detachment from this regiment under the Prince de Lambesc was stationed in the square earlier in the day.²⁴

The real site of the encounter was the Place Louis XV (today’s Place de la Concorde), and it was occasioned when a group of unspecified dragoons not only refused to salute the wax busts that were presented to them but opened fire and charged at the crowds carrying them. Hence the busts have a principal role in triggering what is generally taken to be the first bloody encounter of the French Revolution in Paris. In the turmoil of the dragoons’s charge, the citizen carrying the bust of Orléans, a pedlar named François

Pepin, who was later to testify in the Châtelet about the events of 12 July, received a slight sabre wound to the chest, then was shot in the left ankle when fleeing over the swing-bridge at the entry of the Tuileries gardens. He was relieved of the wax bust of Orléans and was taken back to the Palais-Royal to have his wounds treated, where his appearance provoked further outrage, panic and redoubled calls to arms.²⁵ The citizen carrying the wax figure of Necker was allegedly not so lucky: he was killed by one of the dragoons as he fled. Often situating this particular action in the Place Vendôme, a number of venerable sources claim that Necker's bust was thus smashed.²⁶ As we shall see, this was not the case, and throws some doubt on these specific sources. Disparate reports concur, however, that in the *mêlée* following the dragoons's charge a Garde-Française who had come over to the popular cause was killed in the Place Louis XV.²⁷

As the large crowds fled from the square, spilling into the Tuileries gardens, they gained the ramparts of the park and began taunting and stoning the royalist forces behind them, not least a contingent of Royal-Allemand, led by their commanding officer, the Prince de Lambesc, which controversially 'charged' through the park, seriously wounding at least one 'small, unarmed, old' man and injuring many others.²⁸ Spagnoli interprets the subsequently exaggerated place that Lambesc's charge was to take in early revolutionary historiography as largely the result of the prosperous and aspiring professional middle classes seeing their own collective interests and self-perceptions threatened by the prince's investment of the park with troops. As it was they who were, initially at least, to determine the course of the Revolution both politically and rhetorically, so they denounced an action which they perceived to menace them most directly.²⁹ Yet Spagnoli also makes clear that it was not Lambesc at all but the parading of Curtius's wax busts which had really sparked the violence and the insurrection among both lower and middle classes, and which was in the space of that night to spread citywide. The Revolution had indeed begun.

Let us pause here and examine the events connected with the wax busts more closely, not least as their significance resonated through a frightened and angry people. The first question we need to ask is: why should the people resort to Curtius's *Salon* at all? One simple answer is the need for heroes, for popular figureheads; a need much fostered by Curtius's art itself on a day-to-day level. Spagnoli, again, remarks that the crowd indeed sought to 'pay homage to their heroes'; but he also notes that 'the precise purpose of the march remains elusive'.³⁰ If not the 'precise purpose', it is the manifold significance of the parading of these wax busts that I would like to investigate in some detail here. Certainly, the real absence of Necker and Orléans, heightened by their symbolic, political loss, was to be filled immediately by their wax effigies. Their busts thus served as a sort of *pis-aller* solution, a makeshift replacement for the political leaders so brutally snatched from the people. The nineteenth-century historian, Edgar Quinet, claims that Necker's symbolic importance in particular far outweighed his actual worth. Yet this was all the more cause for the authorities to beware 'la puissance d'un individu en qui le peuple résume, pour un moment, ses aspirations, ses ressentiments ou ses colères'. For, Quinet adds, in many people's minds Necker had become 'l'image de ce bien inconnu, la liberté'.³¹ The hoisting aloft of his bust, then, not only identified Necker as the champion of popular freedom, but in its connotation of individuality, of particularity, it also suggested that the freedom he represented at this time was that of the individual, that he was the symbol of personal civil liberties, those dearest to the better-off, reforming classes, which were duly to be wrested from the state. As for Orléans, his bust was paraded alongside Necker's because it was rumoured that he too had been summarily exiled; although Jules Michelet, in his great narrative of the Revolution, is more cynical, imputing

the parading of the duke's bust to the work of his opportunistic henchmen paid to associate their leader's name with any reformist, popular action in the capital.³²

The bearing aloft of crêpe-covered busts proved something else too. The inspiration for the raid on Curtius's waxworks had classical overtones: it was redolent of an education in the *collèges* of the Ancien Régime in which, in the 1770s and 1780s, the cult of Antiquity was to breed the Desmoulins, Robespierres, Brissot and Pétions of the Revolution, as well as inspiring Jacques-Louis David's famous neo-classical canvases.³³ For, as any assiduous *collégien* of the time would know, the funerary procession of every patrician Roman was led by his covered wax bust.³⁴ There was, however, a sacred, as well as lay, symbolism in the carrying of wax busts on 12 July 1789. For wax casts or figures, often of diseased or missing limbs, were frequently used in religious services as votive offerings.³⁵ More significantly still, wax busts had served in France before to unite both secular and sacred powers in their public display, specifically the political and religious authorities vested in the king. Drawing to a certain extent on classical Roman tradition, the royal authorities of France in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries used wax busts of the deceased monarch to ensure, on the one hand, the survival of monarchic power in a body external to the mortal remains of the late king (the bust thus representing his undying body politic or *Dignitas*) and, on the other, to forestall any attempts by the heir to usurp power before his predecessor had been duly interred.³⁶ Hence the funeral processions of monarchs accompanied by their wax effigies assumed a dual aspect, being both funereal and triumphant, presenting to the crowds the king's personal mortality in the shape of his corpse and his immortal office in the form of his wax effigy.³⁷ According to this model, a politico-cultural echo of a specifically royal Renaissance practice might be located in the parading of the busts of Necker and Orléans, offering a half-funereal, half-triumphant spectacle to the crowds of Paris in July 1789, displaying to them the 'immortal' effigies of

their own newly constituted ‘body politic’ – Necker and Orléans (metonymic of the National Assembly) – who were thus not only to be conjured back to wholeness, and political health, by the wax offerings of the people (as missing limbs in votive offerings) but also, should their own political ‘reign’ prove short-lived, to be assured of the safe and certain transfer of their full powers to their rightful ‘heirs’.³⁸ In other words, if the busts transported around Paris on 12 July 1789 were to arrogate some sort of power to the people carrying them, then the power seized by the crowds was specifically monarchical, deriving from the people’s appropriation and redeployment of the dual-body doctrine which perpetuated the *ancien régime* monarchy itself.

Annie Jourdan takes the sacralizing aspect of the event yet further. She remarks in her fascinating study on *Les Monuments de la Révolution*, that this popular parading of busts represents an important shift in their use at the time, one which was, in fact, retrograde in relation to the disabused personality cults of the enlightened elite. No longer used as secular exemplars or ornaments of knowing reference, the people reinvest the individualized bust with another atavistic, sacred significance. Jourdan writes: ‘Le peuple, et ce spontanément, manipule les bustes comme s’il s’agissait d’icônes, telles celles que l’on promène dans les processions religieuses, mais, dans un même temps, il leur concède valeur de manifeste, comme si l’image dans le cas précis du 12 juillet avait valeur de discours ou d’exorcisation’.³⁹ She compares the people’s recourse to the bust here to the function of the ‘double’ in supposedly ‘primitive’ societies where it constitutes an insurance against death; even if, in more ‘civilized’ minds and cultures, it subsequently comes to represent a more malevolent force at work.⁴⁰ So, as an instinctive gesture on the part of the insurgent people, the taking of these wax ‘doubles’ might have served once more to ward off the death-like absence of their political champions.

Whether the inspiration for the visit to Curtius's *Salon* was elitist or popular, royal or 'primitive', classical or religious – or more likely a powerful combination of these pairings – the wax busts, in all their human proportion, likeness and frailty certainly made a striking contrast to the domineering equestrian statues that were encountered in both the Place Vendôme, where Louis XIV was mounted in marble, and in the Place Louis XV, where a statue of the eponymous king dominated the square. This point is emphasized in popular iconography of the time, especially in Jean-Louis Prieur's 1790 drawing (and later popular print by Berthaut) of the violent clash between the reactionary troops and the insurgent masses, which Prieur situates clearly in the Place Louis XV in order to connect it more completely with the subsequent – or in Prieur's version, consequent – assault by the Prince de Lambesc on the Tuileries gardens [See Figure 2]. While, as we have seen, some contemporary accounts, including that accompanying Prieur's prints in their first edition of 1792, locate the principal clash of troops and people in the Place Vendôme, Prieur's drawing explicitly seeks to associate the fighting with the statue of Louis XV which had been the site of significant popular protest and dissent since its installation in 1763.⁴¹ As Warren Roberts has shown, Prieur freely invents his version of the events of 12 July 1789 in order to emphasize the viciously repressive nature of royal rule and the courageous resistance of the people in the face of it.⁴² Hence the head of Louis XV is turned downwards to preside disdainfully over the violent quashing of his people's demands; and the mounted monarch, while sanctioning the violence of the mounted troops, remains regally aloof by virtue of the sheer expanse of sky in the print, belittling the human pantomime played out there. Clearly visible below the king is the bust of Orléans still borne aloft by a fleeing citizen, who is about to be shot down, while the bust of Necker already lies smashed on the ground next to its dead bearer. Elsewhere the people armed with cudgels and pikes are met with musket-fire and sabres. The polarization of the

implacably opposed forces of royalist oppression and of popular resistance could not be clearer.

In fact, in the earliest journalistic accounts of the outbreak of the Revolution, hot off the press later that July, as well as the earliest historical narratives of these events in the early 1790s, the episode of the wax busts looms large.⁴³ So we can talk of a certain rite of passage for the people here. The parading of the two wax figures realizes a general rite of mourning, albeit of angry mourning, carried out in tandem with the search for arms. It is the ritual aspect of this action, as with later revolutionary festivals, that allows popular instinct to be raised to a symbolic level, that allows for the sacrifice of their heroes to be sanctified.⁴⁴ Yet, as such, it also invoked something else, another sanctifying act: a rite of revenge to be crowned by the incontestable triumph of the people. This was, of course, provided two days later in the search for arms, with the fall of the Bastille. As Simon Schama has perceptively noted, there is an eerie symmetry set up between the two events, of the 12 and 14 July respectively:

The Revolution in Paris had begun with heads hoisted aloft over the crowd. They had been the heads of heroes, made in wax, carried as proxy commanders. It needed a symmetrical ending: more heads, this time serving as trophies of battle.⁴⁵

These heads were the roughly severed heads of the governor of the Bastille, Bernard-René Jordan, marquis de Launay, and the Prévôt des Marchands, Jacques de Flesselles, which jogged above the crowds, impaled on pikes.⁴⁶ It seems to have mattered little that, as George Rudé has shown, the composition of the crowd storming the Bastille and decapitating its overwhelmed defenders was very different from that of the Palais-Royal two days earlier.⁴⁷ Composed largely of skilled and unskilled artisans from the

surrounding Saint-Antoine district, this crowd seems unlikely to have been guided by any classical influences. Nonetheless, the ritual of heads carried above and before the insurgent crowd is mirrored.⁴⁸

In fact, another contemporary image of the parading of Curtius's wax busts appears to confuse this scene with what happened two days later in the Place de Grève. Pierre Étienne Lesueur's rendering, in gouache, of the early insurrectionary events of 12 July 1789 precisely portrays wax heads on pikes, even though the majority of accounts of the time, and since, stress that the wax heads were carried in hand (one account claims on pillows) and covered in black crêpe [See Figure 3].⁴⁹ There is perhaps a willing conflation of the two events here to indicate how the one rite (waxes) was to lead inexorably to the other (severed heads). Whatever reservations one might have about this interpretation of the revolutionary dynamic (and there are a number), it is probable that, on a politically symbolic level at least, the people's carrying of Necker and Orléans's wax busts did sanction the beheading of the people's enemies. For it represented an arrogation of state power to the people, just as on a less literal plane, the parading of wax effigies appropriated the mourning rites of dead kings and redeployed them in the popular cause. (In similar vein, was not the simultaneous closing of the theatres by the people on 12 July an act formerly decreed exclusively by the authorities of state, in the event the Lieutenant of Police, on the occasion of a royal bereavement or for a religious holiday?) So the carrying of the wax busts intimated that a more literal beheading, which had hitherto been the prerogative of condemned nobles to be enacted by the *bourreau* or state executioner alone, was henceforth to be a democratic punishment to be realized by the people for what they perceived to be 'crimes' committed against them.⁵⁰ It would, however, be going too far to claim that these crude decapitations necessarily paved the way for the reign of the guillotine more than two years later.

There are other interesting links between the wax busts of 12 July and the beheadings of 14 July. Indeed, one unsubstantiated account claims that the severed heads of de Launay and de Flesselles were taken later on 14 July to Curtius to be modelled as wax busts for his 'Caverne des Grands Voleurs'.⁵¹ Certainly, Philip Astley, horse showman extraordinary, and Curtius's neighbour on the Boulevard du Temple, displayed the following advertisement in London on 30 Sept 1789:

Mr Astley has brought with him finely executed in wax by a celebrated artist in Paris, the heads of Monsieur de Launay, late Governor of the Bastille, and M. de Flesselles, Provost of the Merchants of Paris, with incontestable proofs of their being striking likenesses.⁵²

The evidence points overwhelmingly to Curtius as the 'celebrated artist' in question. Yet if further proof were needed that Curtius had begun modelling directly from the severed heads of the Revolution's earliest victims, it can be found in his original and very successful sculpting of the head of Joseph Foulon, a reactionary official of the Ancien Régime who had brought down the people's wrath upon himself and who had been lynched and decapitated (along with his unfortunate son-in-law, Bertier de Sauvigny, the *intendant* of Paris) on 22 July 1789, just over a week after the fall of the Bastille.⁵³

Foulon's bust caused a sensation when it was first shown because Curtius modelled it with the effect of blood still dripping from its base, as though freshly hacked off. In fact, such was its horrible appeal that it was taken on a tour of India in late 1794 by the showman Dominick Laurency who displayed it alongside a scale-model of the Bastille, the wax figure of Louis XVI and a number of celebrities from the first National Assembly, some of whom had since met a similar fate to that of Foulon.⁵⁴

Thus, we seem to have come full circle: Curtius's wax busts allegedly inspired the beheading of a number of officials of the *ancien régime* whose lopped heads, in turn, became models for wax busts. If this is a little too neat, we can nonetheless maintain that, as a symbol and, later, sanction of the people's political will, Curtius's waxworks neatly dovetailed the popular spectacle of the boulevards with the spectacular politics of the Revolution. This was all the more adroit, on his part, as popular idolatry, tending toward sacralization, was needed more and more for politicians to prosper.⁵⁵ Thus a curious sort of parallel exists between Curtius's (re)production of popular idols on a daily basis at street level and the moves to inaugurate a national Panthéon to the heroes of the Revolution at the highest institutional levels. After all, Curtius's *Salon* had long been home to Mirabeau's bust before the Church of Sainte-Geneviève was refurbished and secularized in order to house the tribune's mortal remains in April 1791. Yet the posterity of Mirabeau (as of Marat later) also revealed in striking fashion how popular affection could turn to general execration overnight, so that Curtius, more so than most, had to be alert to the slightest shifts in political fortunes and to register the changes accordingly in his displays. One very obvious marker of these political shifts was Curtius's *crieur* or barker who announced his exhibition to the passing crowds on the Boulevard du Temple. This character was dressed successively as a master of ceremonies, in a frockcoat and holding a cane, before July 1789; then the uniform of a National Guardsman until June 1792; then the characteristic garb of a sans-culotte, sporting long trousers, a liberty-cap and holding a pike.⁵⁶

In such a volatile cultural and political climate, it becomes impossible to gauge whether Curtius is merely following the trends or whether he has a hand, however slight, in setting them. His constantly evolving gallery of revolutionary models and monsters, saints and sinners, certainly reflects, and probably in some small measure determines, the

contemporary perceptions of history as recently lived happenings of much longer-term significance. If nothing else, his waxworks signified a certain 'History' for his contemporaries, since they drew directly on the predilection of many revolutionaries to cast themselves as historical figures, framed 'between role models from an heroic past and the expectations of the judgements of posterity', as Schama has it.⁵⁷

But what of Curtius himself in all of this? Can his survival, even success, through the vicissitudes of the Revolution be attributed to his self-effacement behind his constantly updated wax figures? Can he be compared to that other handler of famous heads, Sanson, the State executioner of Paris? After all, both Curtius and Sanson were loyal Jacobins and, unlike the individuals they 'executed' in wax or in the flesh, they appear to have successfully divested themselves of any dangerous particularity other than the excellent exercise of their respective crafts. In other words, they both executed unquestioningly whomever was brought before them. Moreover, there are a number of important symbolic modalities shared by Curtius's waxworks and Sanson's guillotine. By the workings of both, the looks of the model or victim are frozen, supposedly for posterity; the bust is displayed to the public, just as the executioner was to show the severed head to the people. Also in both processes, the subject is individualized, literally set apart from the crowds, whether for admiration or execration. This is part of an interesting dynamic common to both the waxworks and the guillotine according to which the model/victim is reduced to silence while the crowds discourse, comment and judge the subject. Even more so than Curtius, however, Sanson's work produced the the ultimate portrait, the final bust, after which there could be no other likeness from life. Curtius's art was indeed 'très ressemblant', as we have seen, but however lifelike the figure, it could not realize what Daniel Arasse has called 'l'idéal de tout portrait' executed quite literally by the guillotine

which ‘donne à voir, fixé le visage de l’ultime moment, le *masque* où se condensent et se résumant toute l’histoire et son sens’.⁵⁸

There is another interesting difference between the wax modeller and the state executioner. Despite an edition of apocryphal royalist memoirs being attributed to him, Sanson did not write publicly of his unique experiences during the Revolution; in contrast, Curtius did publish some reflections on the Revolution, printed for his own ends. This little-known, slim brochure entitled the *Services du sieur Curtius*, which appeared in 1790, relates the waxworker’s own part in the momentous events of the early Revolution from 12 July to 6 October 1789. It is largely a succession of boasts and moans, designed to make political capital out of events, for want of being able freely to make economic capital out of them. Hence he details his recruitment to the National Guard at its very inception; his stalwart defence of the Opéra from six hundred ‘incendiaires’ bent on burning down the whole district; and his presence at the storming of the Bastille. Yet his revolutionary fervour is tempered a little by the conclusion that so much time spent in fulfilling his patriotic duties in the militia ‘est une perte pour un Artiste. J’y dois ajouter des dépenses inévitables et extraordinaires’.⁵⁹

Curtius’s brochure also contains an interesting account of the events of 12 July 1789, one which reveals the unique mix of the canny and the ‘uncanny’ in his art, and which sheds a subjective light on the early revolutionary events in which he and his waxworks became embroiled. Hence it is worth quoting at length:

Le 12 Juillet, à la suite d’une motion faite au Palais-Royal, à l’occasion du départ de M. Necker, dont on venoit de recevoir la nouvelle, une foule de citoyens se rendit à mon sallon du Boulevard du Temple. On me demande avec instance le buste en cire de ce

Ministre et celui de M. le duc d'Orléans, pour les porter en triomphe dans la Capitale. Je les confiai avec empressement, suppliant la multitude de n'en faire aucun mauvais usage.

[...] Je ne retracerai ici les horreurs auxquelles [les ennemis de la Patrie] se sont livrés ce jour à jamais mémorable, je dirai seulement que le porteur du buste de M. le duc d'Orléans fut blessé d'un coup de baïonnette dans le creux de l'estomach, et que celui qui portoit M. Necker, fut tué par un Dragon à la place de Vendôme.⁶⁰ Le buste de M. le Duc d'Orléans me fut rapporté sans dommage: mais celui de M. Necker ne me fut remis que six jours après par un Suisse du Palais-Royal; les cheveux étoient brûlés, et le visage portoit l'empreinte de plusieurs coups de sabre.

Ainsi je puis me glorifier que le premier acte de la Révolution a commencé chez moi.⁶¹

In many respects, this passage gives a good measure of its author and his preoccupations. Written to provide pre-emptive proofs of his 'patriotisme' and revolutionary zeal, should they be needed in the future, the text none the less focusses, almost to the exclusion of everything else, on what happens to his waxworks.⁶² The insurrectionary violence of the Place Louis XV is only recounted insofar as it affects the bearers of his busts, and insofar as the busts themselves were seen to bear the brunt of the dragoons's attack. The wounding and death of their carriers in the popular cause do not subsequently give rise to political musings on the justness of the people's uprising but lead directly to the happy report of the return of his waxes. Orléans's bust is returned undamaged while that of Necker is brought back with its hair singed and scarred by sword blows, no doubt to be displayed again as quickly as possible in order to take full advantage of its notoriety as a revolutionary icon. Similarly, the conclusion he draws, that 'le premier acte de la

Révolution a commencé chez moi', reads much more like an advertisement for his *Salon* than accurate political commentary.

Yet beneath the self-interested nature of the account and the glibness of its conclusion, there may be quite another signification which contributes something else not only to our appreciation of Curtius but also to our understanding of the early Revolution. For the text also suggests that, when all else in the socio-political realm is unprecedented and highly ambivalent in its outcome, it is the German-born waxworker who is most alive to the possibilities and limitations of the situation. His advantage over his contemporaries is that for almost twenty years he had worked in the cultural space between *their* fact and *their* fantasy, creating figures whose indeterminate state between life and death – being merely lifelike – both thrilled and threatened the spectator. So when both the social order and the accompanying ideology of the *ancien régime* are called so thoroughly into question, especially by the events of June and July 1789, it is less surprising than it might be that Curtius is able quite literally to find himself at home, 'chez moi', in the confusion. On the basis of this same reading, the key to the early Revolution is to perceive it as the result of many unpredictable and unprecedented choices and actions in which the Real is often taken for the Symbolic (troop movements for an attack, food shortages for famine plots) and the Symbolic taken for the Real (cockades for brotherhood, wax busts for real persons); in which psychic states and political realities sometimes become indistinguishable and interchangeable – a process that was to culminate in the aptly named Terror. In such a socio-political climate, it is increasingly comprehensible not only that Curtius should be at home but that his home, his *Salon*, should be chosen to represent the birthplace of the revolutionary movement itself. For his wax works were raided by the insurrectionaries of 12 July 1789 precisely because, on the one hand, they appealed to the self-perception and self-regard of the emerging political elite, in all its aspiring historical

grandeur, and on the other, they appeared to place the people's representatives within reach of the populace. In other words, they offered at once a democratic reflection of the times and the illusion of democracy at work.

¹ A. Leslie and P. Chapman, *Madame Tussaud: Waxworker Extraordinary* (1978); P. Chapman, *The French Revolution as seen by Madame Tussaud: Witness Extraordinary* (1989), especially pp. 7-58.

² Chapman, *The French Revolution*, p. 11.

³ F-M. Mayeur de Saint-Paul, *Le Chroniqueur désœuvré, ou l'Espion du Boulevard du Temple* (Londres [Paris?], 1782), pp. 135-6.

⁴ Mayeur de Saint-Paul, *Le Chroniqueur*, p. 136, his italics.

⁵ R. M. Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 1986), p. 231.

⁶ L-S. Mercier, *Le Tableau de Paris*, (2 vols. 1994), i. 543.

⁷ Chapman, *The French Revolution*, p. 40.

⁸ For reference to late eighteenth-century anatomical practice, see Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, i. 209.

⁹ E. J. Pyke, *A Biographical Dictionary of Wax Modellers* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 16, 38-9, 75-6, 107.

¹⁰ L., Chevalier de Jaucourt, Article 'Cire', in *L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. by D. Diderot and J. Le Rond d'Alembert, nouvelle édition en facsimilé de la première édition de 1751-1780 (35 vols. Stuttgart, 1966), iii. 472.

¹¹ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, ii. 930. Regarding the same spectacles in the Palais-Royal, including that of Curtius, Mercier had earlier written: 'Le monde imaginaire est pour [l'homme faible et curieux] le monde réel' (i. 475).

¹² Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy*, pp. 199, 202, 208-9.

¹³ Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy*, pp. 222, 226.

¹⁴ Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, ii. 1396. Mercier draws a political lesson from Curtius's juxtaposition of a model of Frederick II of Prussia with one of the Baron de Trenck. Trenck had been imprisoned without trial by Frederick II for an affair with the king's sister, Amélie, and Mercier sees in Curtius's display a useful reminder of the despotic practices of the supposedly enlightened monarch and friend of the *philosophes*.

¹⁵ Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy*, pp. 187-90.

¹⁶ Leslie and Chapman, *Madame Tussaud*, pp. 38-40.

¹⁷ Later revolutionary violence was to suggest that not only the bust or political 'head' was an important totem for political change but also other metonymic devices, especially the clothes of the hero or victim, were to be paraded by the crowds.

¹⁸ M. Price, 'The "Ministry of the Hundred Hours": A Reappraisal', *French History*, 4, 3 (1990), 317-39. Price is particularly good at nuancing the distrust of Necker, from Artois's consistently hardline opposition, to the Queen's initial backing, subsequent wavering and final rejection of the Minister's offices. He also spells out the reluctance and uncertainty that characterized Breteuil's ill-fated ministry – the 'Ministry of the Hundred Hours' that succeeded that of Necker – revising the more usual portrayal of a reactionary government keen to quash the National Assembly by military force.

¹⁹ P. G. Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins: Lambesc's Charge, 12 July 1789', *French Historical Studies*, 17, 2 (Fall 1991), 466-97.

²⁰ J. Dussaulx, *De l'insurrection parisienne, et de la prise de la Bastille (1790)*, p. 7.

²¹ W. Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, (Oxford, 1990), pp. 108-9. It is the Royal Allemand regiment that is most commonly cited – and vilified – in contemporary and subsequent accounts of early revolutionary troop movements; yet Spagnoli has shown that it was neither the most belligerent nor

indeed wholly foreign in its composition, as is often alleged. See Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', pp. 486-8.

²² For the 'thorough debunking' of Desmoulins's exaggerated part in the events of 12 July 1789, see Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', pp. 470-1.

²³ Although it is unlikely that the instigator or instigators of the raid on Curtius's waxworks will ever be known, it is quite probable that it was one or more of the well-known 'personnalités du Palais-Royal', famous for organizing various 'chahuts publics' there in the late 1780s, and of which Antoine Joseph Gorsas might be taken as a model. See A. de Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire: la culture des rieurs au XVIIIe siècle* (2000), pp. 235-87.

²⁴ Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', pp. 472-4.

²⁵ Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', pp. 473-4. The account of the busts sparking conflict in the Place Louis XV was furnished by a civil servant, Saugnier, at a hearing in the Châtelet in October 1789 designed to prosecute those military leaders, specifically Besenval and Lambesc, who were accused of seeking to crush the popular protest by an iniquitous force of arms. Pepin testified at the same hearing, as did Curtius himself, whose later account of events [see his *Services du Sieur Curtius* (1790) cited below] wrongly asserts that Pepin suffered a bayonnette thrust to the stomach (p. 7). For other Pepin references, see J. Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille, July 14th 1789* (New York, 1970), p. 189; and S-R. N. Chamfort, *Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française*, in *Œuvres complètes* (5 vols. 1824-1825), ii. 205, which states that Pepin was shot in the left leg in the Place Louis XV itself.

²⁶ See L-M. Prudhomme, *Révolutions de Paris* (16 vols. 1789-1793), i. 2-3; also Chamfort, *Œuvres complètes*, ii. 205; and J. Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution française* (2 vols. 1998), i. 137-8.

²⁷ Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', pp. 474, 484. The latter reference suggests some confusion as to the actual place in which the Garde-Française fell to the dragoons's attack, extending the possibility that he was killed not in the Place Louis XV but shortly afterwards in the Tuileries.

²⁸ Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', pp. 478-83.

²⁹ Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', pp. 490-7.

³⁰ Spagnoli, 'The Revolution Begins', p. 471.

³¹ E. Quinet, *La Révolution* (2 vols. 1869), i. 82. This is a real case of wisdom through hindsight in assessing Necker's ultimate worth; yet the point might also be tentatively made that the very absent Necker lent himself, perhaps through his eventual mediocrity, to heavy and positive symbolic investment in the same way

that the very present Lambesc constituted the ideal candidate for negative symbolic election during these early revolutionary events.

³² Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution*, i. 137-8. Munro Price suggests that, far from promoting the unrest of 11-16 July 1789, Orléans was secretly negotiating with Breteuil's Ministry in an attempt to reconcile himself to king and Court. See 'The "Ministry of the Hundred Hours"', pp. 333-4.

³³ D. Mornet, *Les Origines Intellectuelles de la Révolution française 1715-1787* (1967), pp. 319-35.

³⁴ Pyke, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. xxxv.

³⁵ Pyke, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. xxxvi.

³⁶ See E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J., 1957), pp. 420-36. Kantorowicz notes that the Roman tradition comes down from Herodian's *Roman Histories*, but that a more immediate and palpable tradition informing the French adoption of royal funereal effigies was that of contemporary England (p. 428).

³⁷ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, pp. 424, 430.

³⁸ R. E. Giesey, in his *Cérémonial et puissance souveraine: France, XV-XVIIe siècles* (1987), builds on Kantorowicz's seminal text and notes, interestingly in the present connection, that the funereal practice of displaying an effigy in wax of the deceased king was extended to certain royal princes and dukes of the realm, including in 1503 to Pierre de Bourbon, duc d'Orléans (pp. 89-90). Another practice of the French Renaissance concerning royal funerals was the serving of meals to the assembled notables of the Court in the presence of the wax effigy of their late monarch; Giesey reports this specifically in the case of François I [died 1547] (pp. 102-3). This sets up strange echoes, perhaps purely coincidentally, with Curtius's own very successful 'Le Grand Couvert' waxworks tableau which assembled the royal family at dinner, and at which, of course, the paying public was titillatingly able to assist.

³⁹ A. Jourdan, *Les Monuments de la Révolution 1770-1804: une histoire de représentation* (1997), pp. 94-5.

⁴⁰ On this function of the double, see S. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in *Art and Literature*, Penguin Freud Library, (15 vols. 1984-1991), xiv. 356. Following Jentsch, this study also associates waxworks with the 'Uncanny' insofar as they provoke uncertainty whether the subject is alive or dead (xvi. 347). Freud subsequently gives a psychoanalytical twist to this reading by claiming that, among other things, severed heads – and so wax busts – heighten the sense of the 'Uncanny' because of their unwitting resuscitation of the castration complex in certain observers (xiv, 366).

⁴¹ The historical commentaries accompanying the first fifty of Prieur's prints were, of course, the *Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française*, the first twenty-six of them written in 1791 and 1792 by S-R. N. Chamfort and the remainder by P-L. Ginguené. Chamfort's fifth tableau deals specifically with the taking of Necker and Orléans's wax busts and the author is keen to make political capital not from the contrast of the righteous people and Louis XV but from a contrast of the insurgent people and their subjugated ancestors under Louis XIV: 'ces Parisiens, ridicules héros de la Fronde, fuyant devant quelques soldats soudoyés pour contenir ou châtrer des bourgeois' (*Œuvres complètes*, ii. 204). Chamfort is inspired to make this comparison by a reference to the Sun King's statue, clearly, and erroneously, siting the insurrectionaries and their first skirmish with the royalist troops in the Place Vendôme.

⁴² W. Roberts, 'The visual rhetoric of Jean-Louis Prieur', *Canadian Journal of History*, XXXII: 3 (Dec 1997), 415-36. Spagnoli, who also illustrates his article with this print, assesses Prieur similarly as one who 'drew vividly, though not necessarily accurately'. See 'The Revolution Begins', p. 476.

⁴³ For example, Prudhomme, *Révolutions de Paris* (1789), i. 2-3; Dussaulx, *De l'insurrection parisienne* (1790), p. 7; and Chamfort, *Tableaux historiques* (1791), in *Œuvres complètes*, ii. 202-5.

⁴⁴ E. Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven & London, 1989), p. 49.

⁴⁵ S. Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (1989), p. 405.

⁴⁶ Restif de la Bretonne maintains, however, that the second head on a pike, next to de Launay's, was that of Major Losme-Solbrai, the governor's second-in-command at the Bastille. While de Flesselle's head had undoubtedly been cut off, Restif claims that 'la tête de Flesselles, défigurée par le coup de pistolet qui venait de terminer sa vie, roulait avec les flots de la Seine'. See N-E. Restif de la Bretonne, *Les Nuits révolutionnaires* (1978), p. 58.

⁴⁷ G. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959). This crowd of 'small tradesmen, artisans and wage-earners' (p. 57) on 14 July is to be contrasted with the 'more or less peacefully disposed Sunday crowd of strollers' in the Palais-Royal on 12 July (p. 220). Ironically, while his busts were paraded at the head of the latter crowd, there is documentary evidence that Curtius himself was among the eight hundred or so people storming the Bastille two days later, a fact recognized by the municipal 'Commission de la Bastille' (which included the historian Dussaulx), in April 1790, ratified by the National Assembly on 19 June 1790, thereby conferring on Curtius the official title of 'Vainqueur de la Bastille'. See Chapman, *The French Revolution*, pp. 89-90.

⁴⁸ The argument here is not so much that severed heads were not borne by angry crowds before the Revolution in France, but that the replication of the use made of wax busts and decapitated heads in the same cause, in the space of a couple of days, signifies that an important symbolic and political ritual is being rehearsed and defined here.

⁴⁹ The account claiming the busts were carried on cushions is that of Chamfort, *Œuvres complètes*, ii. 204.

⁵⁰ On the general condemnation of the decapitation as a solely noble form of execution, see Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*: 'Il est ignoble d'être pendu pour un vol très réparable; il est presque honorable d'avoir la tête tranchée pour avoir trahi son pays, délit que rien ne répare' (ii. 203-4).

⁵¹ The claim is made in M. Willson Disher, *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1937), cited in Leslie and Chapman, *Madame Tussaud*, p. 44. The claim is seriously doubted in this work, although Chapman reprises it eleven years later in *The French Revolution*, seemingly without reservation. Had she uncovered new proof in the intervening years?

⁵² Cited in Leslie and Chapman, *Madame Tussaud*, p. 44.

⁵³ Foulon's 'crimes' were essentially twofold: to have accepted a position in the baron de Breteuil's ill-fated 'Ministry of the Hundred Hours' on the announcement of Necker's dismissal and, on being told the people of Paris were starving, allegedly to have said: 'Let them eat hay'. Hence some of the murderous crowd stuffed the mouth of his decapitated head with grass, hay and dung. See respectively, Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, pp. 112-3; and Schama, *Citizens*, pp. 405-6.

⁵⁴ Reported in the *Calcutta Gazette* of December 1794, cited in Pyke, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 35.

⁵⁵ The flipside of Curtius's idolization of prominent revolutionary figures was that his own displays, which also vilified politicians, lent themselves to anti-revolutionary parodies or satires, such as the brochure entitled *Les Bustes vivants du sieur Curtius distribués en appartements* (1790) which set out groups of leading revolutionary 'députés' in compromising decors and comic tableaux. If the reader found this anti-revolutionary spectacle amusing, s/he was exhorted to visit the National Assembly where the even funnier 'originals' could be seen. See de Baecque, *Les Éclats du Rire*, pp. 212-3.

⁵⁶ Chapman, *the French Revolution*, p. 113.

⁵⁷ Schama, *Citizens*, p. xvi.

⁵⁸ D. Arasse, *La Guillotine et l'imaginaire de la Terreur* (1987), p. 173, his italics.

⁵⁹ P. G. M. Curtius, *Services du sieur Curtius, Vainqueur de la Bastille, depuis le 12 Juillet jusqu'au 6 Octobre 1789* (1790), pp. 7-9, 12.

⁶⁰ We have already suggested that Curtius's rendering of Pepin's fate is a little inaccurate; it is also noteworthy that by 1790 Curtius was to situate the death of the carrier of Necker's bust in the Place Vendôme, when more immediate and corroborated evidence pointed strongly to the Place Louis XV as the likely place of his murder.

⁶¹ Curtius, *Services du sieur Curtius*, pp. 6-7.

⁶² The insistent references to 'la Patrie', 'cette pompe patriotique' that accompanied the parading of his wax busts, to 'mon patriotisme' and two more in conclusion to 'ma Patrie' signify the desire of this foreigner to be recognized as a French national, using the political notion of 'patriote' as actively pro-revolutionary, as a passport to this end. See Curtius, *Services du sieur Curtius*, pp. 6-7, 12.