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The Inequalities of Infamy

Valerie Mainz

When I was asked to contribute to this edition of the Oxford Art Journal in honour of Helen Weston, my immediate response was to offer something that had a close visual analysis for focus. The insightful scrutiny of the specifics of a particular image – whether of an object of high art existing from within an already accepted canon or whether of something deemed to be much more marginal, ephemeral and hitherto inconsequential - marks out Helen's scholarship. I also wanted to do something for the academic 'Northern Powerhouse' of the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities (WRoCAH), constituted by the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York. I have been attached to the University of Leeds for over 20 years and now belong to a WRoCAH Studentship Network entitled Beyond Charlie: Anticlericalism and Freedom of the Press. So my topic for this special edition of the Oxford Art Journal pitched up relatively easily on a consideration of a print image produced in England at the time of the French Revolution, the period of Helen's professional expertise, which was also one during which the issue of the right to offend came to the fore.

Post Charlie, the question of the place of offence in the make-up of visual satire has acquired a shocking significance. One way in which to address the horror of such acts is to locate the visual image, no matter how offensive, within appropriate contexts of production and reception, of dissemination and display, of material and medium. By analysing differing regimes of representation, respecting the processes of the chosen medium, taking into account the methods and changing modes of communication, we can judiciously address how a work functions in time and in space. For instance, not having been strategically organised, institutionally managed and professionally fashioned so as to be deliberately deceptive, the

visual imagery of the late eighteenth century cannot be said to constitute an effective vehicle of propaganda, in the modern sense of that term.[1]

Yet my case study here deals with the visual satire of a beheading, a phenomenon belonging to what Lynn Hunt has identified as the new political culture of the French Revolution.[2] Such satires were not considered to be, or used as, active combatants in the revolutionary agitation of the times of their own coming into being, but what we do know about them, their accessibility, their initial circuits of distribution, their formulated constructions and about how they functioned raises questions about whether such imagery can be compared to the beheadings that now feature so unfortunately on the web, in social media, on film and in photography. A critical scrutiny of the figurative and textual forms of the selected print to be addressed in this article and its caption and inscriptions can help in the understanding of how the violence of a political action comes to be transmuted into the

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[1] For a comprehensive guide to the production, reception, distribution, trade, display, audiences and contexts of visual satire during the reign of George III in Britain, see Diana Donald, The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1996). Douglas notes the diverse character of the satirical imagery, suggests 'a discourse conducted at many social levels', and stresses the gestural, oppositional, abusive, scurrilous functioning of such imagery. The singly issued, hand-coloured etching selling for around two shillings could be copied and recycled in cheaper print formats but was, however, never really a truly popular medium. According to Douglas, the cynicism of these satirical prints limited their political effectiveness and they declined with the rise of the organized radicalism associated with the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. See especially, pp. 2-9; 15-21, 184-5.

[2] Lynn Hunt, Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1984).

symbolic violence of a black and white picture printed onto a piece of paper and then hand coloured, but such a study will inevitably reveal not just the similarities with modern day phenomena but also and crucially, the differences.

Whilst the new political culture of the French Revolution did not encompass the moving imagery of today's terrorist attacks, the beheading of the Bourbon monarch, Louis XVI during the Revolution did prompt the permanent, irreversible change in the nature of kingship in France. In losing his head on 21 January 1793, the fiction of the king's two bodies – the one that was mortal and the one that was held to be sacred and that lived on in spite of the demise of the mortal – was lost to the imagery of French monarchical authority forever. In beheading the head of the French State, the King of France became just a man, like other men, having lost a sense of being endowed with an especially sacred mission to mediate between God above and his subjects below.[3]

[3] For the cultures of beheadings at this time, see the catalogue of an exhibition held at Musée de la Révolution française, Vizille, Valérie Rousseau-Lagarde and Daniel Arasse, La Guillotine dans la Révolution (La Stampa: Florence, 1987); Daniel Arasse, La Guillotine et *l'imaginaire de la Terreur* (Flammarion: Paris, c.1987); Ronald Paulson, 'The Severed Head: The Impact of French Revolutionary Caricatures on England', in French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799 (Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Wight Art Gallery: Los Angeles, 1988), pp. 55-65; Regina Janes, 'Beheadings', Representations, 35, summer 1991, pp. 21-51.

Fig. 1 Isaac Cruikshank, The Martyr of Equality, 12 February 1793, etching with hand colouring, 237 x 204 mm. London, British Museum no. 1871,0812.2930. Photo: ©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

A print that depicts the beheading of Louis XVI is the English visual satire by Isaac Cruikshank having the title and subtitle The Martyr of Equality: Behold the Progress of our System (Fig. 1).[4] At the top of the print, the publisher is named as S. W. Fores and a publication date of 'Feb 12 1793' is given – that is three weeks after the French king, Louis XVI, had been guillotined in Paris. It is likely that the handwriting at the bottom of the print reading 'Louis 16th Guillotine'd/January 21. 1793.' has been added to the etching as an identifying label. Labels, titles and inscriptions are not fixed things and can sometimes appear anachronistic, even contradictory. In this case, the two dates that embellish the surrounds of this print can help serve to identify several different levels or layers of representation incorporated within the formal outlines of the composition. These different layers of representation demonstrate that the potential for meaning here is hardly simple and not at all artless.

It is possible to interpret the beheaded Louis as the martyr of equality by locating his severed head with its cascading bloodstream above and by the side of another face – that of a leering, grimacing, moustachioed grenadier who totes his musket with bayonet affixed. In France, such a type, or man of the people, was in the process of gaining far greater rights of

[4] For further on Isaac Cruikshank, see Edward Bell Krumbhaar, Isaac Cruikshank: A Catalogue Raisonné with a Sketch of his Life and Work (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 1966); the print is listed as 710, p. 110. See also the exhibition catalogue, Isaac Cruikshank and the Politics of Parody: Watercolours in the Huntingdon Collection (San Marino, Fisher Gallery and Henry E. Huntingdon Library and Art Gallery: Los Angeles, 1994); M. Dorothy George, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum, 8 vols (Trustees of the British Museum: London, 1870-1954), vol. 7, p. 12, no. 8302.

equality as a new type of citizen soldier.[5] Given the title of the print, we can thus interpret the execution of the sovereign here as a doing away with a hierarchical caste society of privilege in favour of the people as citizens of the French nation and not as inferior subjects of a sovereign ruler who, on one level, is shown here as a martyr to the principle of equality, personified by the new type of citizen soldier. The raising of the blue, white and putatively red French national flag, just above the grenadier's bearskin helmet, ties in with this radically new orientation that has arisen because of the potentially levelling effects of French nationhood with its newly Republican system of government. Of course not all the French were equal at this time - women never, for instance, acquired the legal rights of citizenship in this period.

The rhetorical devices of contrast, comparison and juxtaposition have here been activated so as to endow the visual and the verbal with more meaning. With its eyes half open and half-open mouth over which a somewhat ambivalent smile seems to play, the recently severed head almost appears to live on.[6] The coarser facial features of the grenadier, with bulbous nose and what appears to be a cigar butt in his mouth, are twisted into a boorish frown but they also appear to echo, somewhat anachronistically, those of the recently severed head that had belonged to the former sovereign ruler. Whilst condemning the principle of equality that has led to the proclamation of the first French Republic and the subsequent

[5] Earlier French caricatures, such as Le Retour triumphant des héroines françaises de Versailles à Paris le 6 octobre 1789 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale), depict the grenadier as part of the procession that brought back the King to Paris from Versailles; in these satires and at this earlier date, the mood is more playful for the soldier merrily sits astride a cannon whilst being amorously engaged with the women of the Parisian populace.

[6] For further on the use of the smile in art and during the French Revolution, see Colin Jones, The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2014).

decapitation of the monarch, the figurative forms of the English caricature simultaneously negate the making equal of an ostensibly less ennobled, much more apparently depraved type.

The subtitle of the printed image, Behold the Progress of our System, must be a further satirical reference to the specific system of execution on display here. Named after a Dr Guillotin, the first such machine was used in Paris on 25 April 1792 as a humane, equalising measure which, supposedly, despatched everyone in the same way, quickly and clinically.[7] Before the Revolution non-noble traitors could be hung, drawn and quartered whilst those of noble birth were entitled to decapitation by the sword. In this print, the decapitation of the monarch and the two streams of red blood that pour from the head as from the headless body are set against the harsh verticals and horizontals of the killing machine. The so-called progress of the system has resulted only in a mechanism for the instant severing of the head of the sovereign from the body of the sovereign where the abruptly breached neck is still to be seen, fixed within the lunette of the clinically effective works. The implication that the technology of killing was not an appropriate way for France to overtake Britain in its use of machinery co-exists here with the implication that the beheading of the sovereign was a perverse form of revolutionary justice in the making of the modern French Republic. In constituting a nationalistic, patriotic, British critique of the Revolution in its making of boorish citizen soldiers equal by having executed the French head of State, the English caricature can also be seen to incorporate a mocking, conservative, anti-Enlightenment satire on the principles of progress and civilisation for the betterment of humanity that some liberal French thinkers of the period were promoting. If we are to go by the print's given publication date of 12 February 1793, then the potentially bellicose anti-French sentiment on display here also accords well with the recent declaration of war on

[7] Rousseau-Lagarde and Arasse, La Guillotine dans la Révolution, pp. 32-9.

Great Britain and Holland that had been proclaimed on 1 February by France's National Convention.

What of the later manuscript addition identifying the event as being that of the execution of Louis XVI? I suggest some curator or conservator felt it was necessary to provide this caption because the central figure of this print is not the body or even the severed head of the king but the putative hangman holding up the head. This person represents a distant cousin of the king, Louis Philippe Joseph duc d'Orléans who, in September 1792, took on the name Philippe Egalité when he was elected a deputy to the new government of the National Convention.[8]

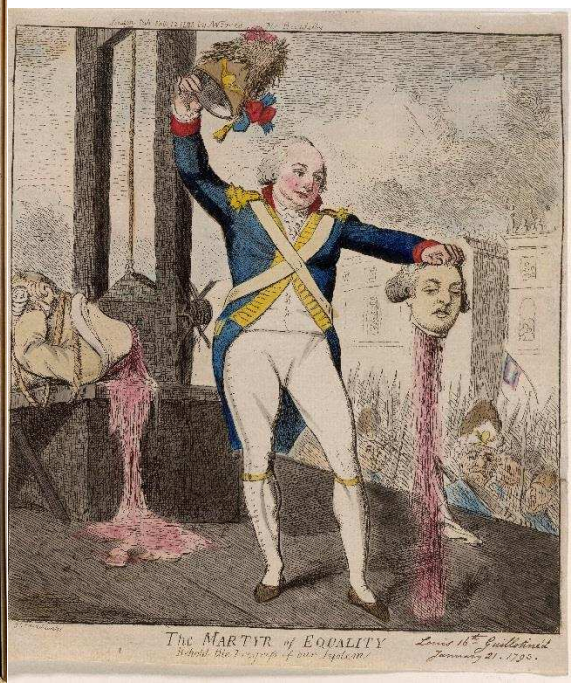

Fig 2 Thomas Lawrence or Richard Evans after Sir Joshua Reynolds, Louis Philippe Joseph *d'Orléans, duc de Chartres*, after 1785, oil on canvas, 67 x 43 cm. Chantilly, Musée Condé. Photo© RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/Thierry Le Mage.

[8] Evelyne Lever, Philippe Égalité (Fayard: La Flèche, 1996), pp. 446-8.

The duc d'Orléans was a prince of the blood, the highest rank of aristocracy in France after the immediate house of the king and a descendant of the younger branch of the Bourbon dynasty. Known as a somewhat debauched roué in his youth, he became a naval officer but left this service in near disgrace after his poor command at the Battle of Ushant in 1778 when he allowed the British fleet to escape. He was then made a Colonel of Light Troops. A frequent visitor to England before the Revolution, Reynolds made a dashing military portrait of him in 1779. The image shown here (Fig. 2) is of an early copy of the original now fire-damaged painting.[9]

In Paris in 1789, there was some suggestion that the duke was aiming to set himself up as an alternative sovereign to Louis XVI so, in order to get him out of the way, he was sent back to London as an envoy from the court of France. Returning to Paris the following year, he was elected a deputy to the National Convention and then, with his new name of Philippe Egalité, he voted for the death of the king, his distant cousin. One level of representation is, thus, tied to a more obviously literal interpretation of the printed title in that the king is shown as having been martyred by his distant cousin Philippe Egalité, clothed in the uniform of another grenadier National Guardsman but with the added gold epaulettes of an officer – and thus hardly equal to the citizen soldier behind. The reference to Philippe Égalité standing on the scaffold as the king's executioner works, above all, metaphorically over and beyond any literal understanding. There is no attempt here to present a true-to-life record of something that had actually happened. Other more commemorative and factually convincing views of the event, such as the well-known one designed by Charles Monnet

[9] For further on the painting, see Mark Hallett, Reynolds: Portraiture in Action (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2014), pp. 371-3.

(Vizille, Musée de la Révolution française), clearly do not show Philippe Égalité on the scaffold as the chief executioner.[10]

There is a clear visual affinity between the boorish citizen soldier and the severed head of the sovereign and also between these two heads and the face of Philippe Égalité. The, standing, animated full figure has a bluff, rosy complexion, possibly indicating too much drink and good living. Yet a slight air of regret hangs over this man's facial features and his glance is downward and aligned with the severed head he holds, in spite of the ribbon-bedecked bearskin helmet he raises up with his other hand in celebration. The posing might evoke other depictions of the raising up of a severed head in triumph, as in the celebrated bronze sculptural group by Benvenuto Cellini of Perseus holding up the head of Medusa (Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi) which, in something of a similar manner, has the protagonist holding up the severed head from which blood cascades downwards. In the guise of the executioner of his sovereign ruler and royal relative, Louis Philippe certainly does not, however, emulate the mythical Greek hero. The severed head he holds also does not appear, here, to have the potential to be petrifying. Is there even a near half smile playing over the half open eyes and mouth of the dead king's face? Arrested on 7 April 1793, Philippe Égalité was in turn sent to the guillotine on 6 November that year.[11] I suggest that the similar fate of the duc d'Orléans to the one just suffered by his royal cousin might well be anticipated here. Once again, rhetorical devices of repetition, juxtaposition and likeness, without being exactly alike, allow for potential meanings to accrue to the visual image in the eyes and understanding of the spectator.

As has been demonstrated, the word 'Equality' can, here, be interpreted in several different, interdependent ways reinforcing, in the processes of interpretation and translation,

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[10] See further Rousseau-Lagarde and Arasse, La Guillotine dans la Révolution, pp. 48-9.

[11] Lever, Philippe Égalité, pp. 481-92.

the satirical import of the print as a whole. But what about the word 'Martyr'? This word had different connotations in Protestant Britain than in Catholic France even at this time of dechristianization in France. The forms as well as the content of this caricature need to be addressed to bring out a fuller understanding of the workings of this imagery. The print format has, for instance, little in common with that of a devotional altarpiece incorporating episodes in the life and death of a martyr. The secular, political lampooning of the visual satire sits, instead, rather uneasily with the religious connotations of the word 'martyr', particularly in a non-Catholic country and language. This unease is, in part, to be explained with reference to another print produced by Isaac Cruikshank to which The Martyr of Equality (Fig. 1) can be said to act as a pendent, albeit one that follows up and, in a sense, undermines its earlier precedent.

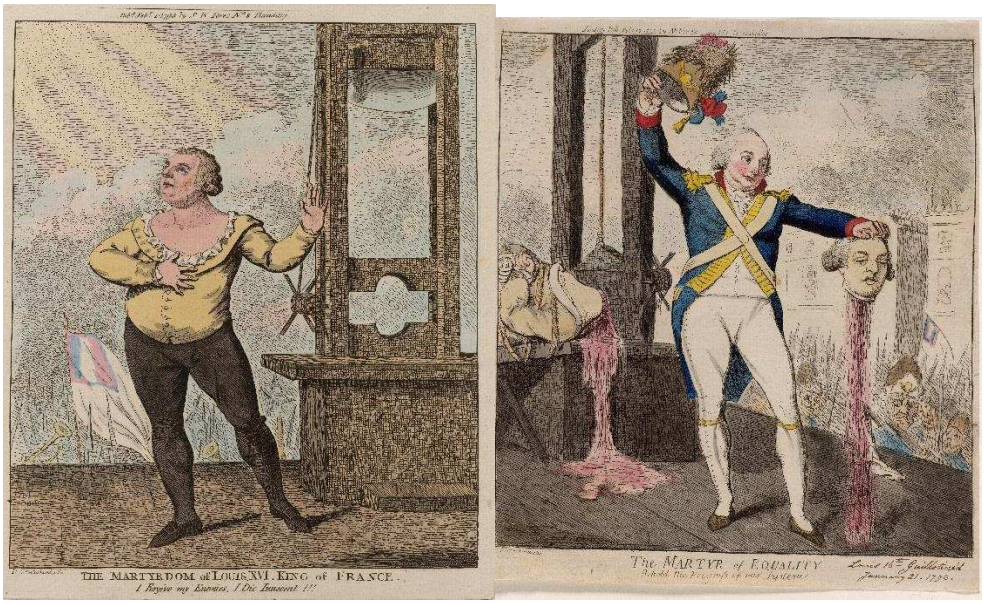

Fig. 3 Isaak Cruikshank, The Martyrdom of Louis XVI, King of France, 1 February 1793, stipple and etching with hand colouring, 235 x 208 mm. London, British Museum no. Mm15.7. Photo: ©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

The Martyrdom of Louis XVI, King of France (Fig. 3), also published by S. W. Fores but on February 1, 1793, is figuratively close to its later companion piece in depicting the

moment just before, rather than the one just after, the guillotining of the king.[12] To the right side of the earlier composition, rather than to the left side, there stands the killing machine with its open lunette, waiting ominously for its occupant, to pass through on to the other side. The single standing figure of this slightly earlier image is not that of Philippe Égalité, but the king, Louis XVI, who is about to be executed. He has been caught in the rhetorical pose of orating his last words that are inscribed beneath this print's title: 'I Forgive my Enemies, I Die Innocent!!!' These words accord with the account of the king's last moments given by his confessor, the abbé Edgeworth. The Irish priest had apparently just pronounced the aspirational laudation: 'Fils de saint Louis, Montez au ciel! [Son of St Louis, ascend to heaven]'.[13] This counter-revolutionary showing of the execution of the king thus conforms to projections of sacredness onto the royal body of the king from the time of the ancien régime. By graphically countering the views of those, like Robespierre, who had demanded the death of the king because the king was just a man as other men were and thus deserved the punishment that was meted out equally to all men who had betrayed the Republic, the beheading of the royal body at the time of the Revolution was turned into a sacrilegious event.

With its rays of light shining down from on high onto the king, this view of Louis XVI is far less satirical in its import than the later targeting of Philippe Égalité. Both similarly sized prints show the attendance of the crowd by depicting, in the background and below the scaffold, flags, raised muskets and bayonets but the bugles of the earlier scene give way in the later image to the faces of boorish citizen soldiers and to the dominant foreground figure of their officer who has, metaphorically, become the prime instigator of this act of demonstrably graphic violence. The subtitle to the later print, Behold the progress of our

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[12] George, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, vol. 7, p. 9, no. 8297.

[13] Rousseau-Lagarde and Arasse, La Guillotine dans la Révolution, p. 54.

system, can thus be said to be a knowing reference to an earlier, less satirical pendant image.[14] That the printmaker and print publisher exploited the political circumstances of the day by relying on high levels of topicality for the commercial success of their enterprise is brought out by the speed with which these pendent works succeeded each other. The publication date of The Martyrdom of Louis XVI, King of France coincided with the French Declaration of War on Great Britain and Holland and then the more biting satire of The Martyr of Equality followed on just eleven days later.

In discussing some of the processes of Gillray's caricatures, Mark Hallett has drawn attention to the ways in which these works relied on the presence of associations with more respectable types of imagery, either explicit or implicit, which the spectator might be able to recognise.[15] The dialogue with polite, more decorous forms of representation was constant, at times even insistent and it was achieved by the use of parody and a gesture towards other, more normative, forms so as to raise the aesthetic status of the printed satire. By referring to the manners of high art, the processes of this type of subversive imagery were thus able to fuse aesthetic formats and categories with moral considerations. The point works well in

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[14] The use of the word Behold has, furthermore, distinct religious connotations associated with the Ecce Homo/Behold the man of the Latin Vulgate Bible (John, 19:5). In French nineteenth-century caricatures, sacrilegious connotations accrue to the conventional biblical imagery of the scourged Christ, bound and crowned with thorns, when presented to a hostile crowd shortly before his execution. See, for instance, Auguste Bouquet, Ecce homo! in La Caricature, 115, 1832, no. 239, and André Gill's caricature of Louis Veuillot, Ecce Homo in La Lune, 26 May 1867, no. 64. I am indebted to Stephanie Williams for bringing these caricatures to my attention.

[15] Mark Hallett, 'James Gillray and the Language of Graphic Satire', in Richard Godfrey, James Gillray: The Art of Caricature (Tate Publishing: London, 2001), pp. 22-37.

relation to the discussion of the subversion of the sites and sights of martyrdom as displayed in Cruikshank's later print of the decapitated Louis XVI and Philippe Égalité, but it also works well in relation to the oil painting after a work by Reynolds (Fig. 2).[16]

The portrait depicts a swaggering military officer in the flamboyant uniform of a dashing Hussar with gold chevrons on his sleeve and red boots and, across his chest, the blue sash of the chivalric, noble Order of the Holy Spirit. Still evidently enjoying the name and title of Louis Philippe Joseph d'Orléans, duc de Chartres, the soldier's dominating presence in this painting looms out over the land and castle behind, above his truncated steed and, even lower down, his small black servant who dutifully looks up to his master. The graphic outlines of the later etching, with some quite summary, grotesque details like the gushing bloodstream, differ from the oil painting in scope, size, function, manner and tonalities. Yet the central figure of Philippe Égalité still stands in a pose that is not dissimilar to the one used in the composition after Reynolds; the position of the legs and the way in which the holding of the head evokes something of the holding of the shako helmet in the painting. The etching obviously does not purport to be a work of high art whereas the painted portrait in oils does. The adaptation of the grand manner format for the depiction of someone who is showing off the severed head of the sovereign, his relative, who had been the king of France, the head of State, therefore also satirises the type of portrait tradition hitherto used for the display of great kings, heroes and commanders. The high and the low codes of representation are here

[16] Isaac Cruikshank had exhibited works at the Royal Academy in 1789 (Return to Lochabar), in 1790 (Visit to the Cottage) and in 1792 (The Distresses and Triumphs of Virtue). Algernon Graves, The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904, 2 vols (Henry Graves & Co. Ltd., and George Bell & Sons: London, 1905), reprint S P Publishers Ltd., and Kingsmead Reprints, 1970, vol. 1, p. 220.

visually fused and thus both have also become martyrs of equality. And ironically for us looking at both pictures in the present, the black servant no longer has to serve today as a foil to aggrandise his master but brings out, instead, the empty grandiloquence and pomposity of the oil painting's conceit whilst also pointing forward to the lack of supposed equality present in the later satirical caricature in which the French nation's soldiers have taken on the guise of the mock heroic.

The visual satire elides the coming into being of the French nation's Republican government with the principle of equality for newly established citizens which had motivated the leaders of the Revolution in the institution of a new political system for France. From the several available layers of potential meaning, it is clear that the inversions of the caricature counteract any sense of a single, controlling, political consensus – whether in England or in France.

In ways that could not have been foreseen at the end of the eighteenth century, the potential now exists to disseminate subversive satirical imagery much more widely and globally. The example I have chosen to discuss here from the period of the French Revolution, nonetheless brings out some of the complexities of the visual image as rhetorical construct in the forming of nations, heroes and, in this case, anti-heroes. Even in our own days of mass communication and of the world-wide web, it is to be hoped that, no matter how violent the visual imagery might appear to be in targeting individual and/or collective identities, the careful analysis of the particular processes that pertain to a specific scene, spectacle, view, composition, artefact, object should encourage responses that can continue to be judged, measured and appraised with a modicum of reasoned thought over time and in history – and this in spite of the changing media, modes of production and processes of distribution.

List of Figures

1 Isaac Cruikshank, The Martyr of Equality, 12 February 1793, etching with hand colouring, 237 x 204 mm. London, British Museum no. 1871,0812.2930. Photo: ©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

2 Thomas Lawrence or Richard Evans after Sir Joshua Reynolds, Louis Philippe *Joseph d'Orléans, duc de Chartres*, after 1785, oil on canvas, 67 x 43 cm. Chantilly, Musée Condé. Photo© RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/Thierry Le Mage.

3 Isaak Cruikshank, The Martyrdom of Louis XVI, King of France, 1 February 1793, stipple and etching with hand colouring, 235 x 208 mm. London, British Museum no. Mm15.7. Photo: ©The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Abstract: The Inequalities of Infamy (Valerie Mainz)

The contribution has for focus the etching by Isaak Cruikshank, entitled The Martyr of Equality: Behold the Progress of our System. The critical analysis of the satire conjoins the figurative forms of the visual imagery with its words investigating, in the process, several of the interdependent layers of meaning that can be imputed therefrom. Produced in the days after the execution of the French king Louis XVI, which had taken place on 21 January 1793, this satirical view of the beheading of the monarch shows off the mechanism of the guillotine as a bloody, equalising, killing machine. The central figure of Philippe Égalité, the king's distant cousin who had voted for the death of the king, is in the guise of the executioner here, but he, too, would be sent to the guillotine on 6 November of the same year.

Biographical Note: Valerie Mainz

Valerie Mainz is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds. She completed her Ph.D, entitled 'History, History Painting and Concepts of Gloire in the Life and Work of Jacques-Louis David' and supervised by Helen Weston, at University College, University of London in 1992. She has curated exhibitions on the topic of the French Revolution at the University Gallery, University of Leeds, at the Musée de la Révolution française, Vizille and at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. Her most recent publication is the monograph entitled Days of Glory? Imaging Military Recruitment and the French Revolution (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).