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Introduction to "A Genealogy of Terror in Eighteenth-Century France"

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A GENEALOGY OF TERROR IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

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On September 5, 1793, in the midst of a massive insurrection against the French National Convention, a group of insurgents approached the bar of the revolutionary legislature. The deputation comprised members of the Society of Friends of Liberty and Equality—otherwise known as the Jacobin Club—and forty-eight urban militants or sansculottes, one for each of the wards or sections of Paris. The orator, a Jacobin named Claude Royer, addressed the republican lawmakers:

> Mandatories of the people, the dangers to the *patrie* are extreme; the remedies must be equally [extreme]. You have decreed that the French shall rise en masse to repulse far from our borders the hordes of brigands who are ravaging them; but the henchmen of the despots of Vienna and Berlin, those tigers of the North who carry devastation everywhere, are less cruel, are less for us to fear than the traitors who agitate us from within, who divide us, who arm Frenchman against Frenchman; the impunity of the guiltiest ones emboldens them; the people are murmuring, are discouraged to see the most insolent conspirators ceaselessly escape the national ax; all the friends of liberty, of equality are astonished, indignant at seeing that the abettors of federalism have not yet been brought to judgment; in the public squares, in groups, all the republicans speak of the many crimes of Brissot; from one end of the Republic to the other his name is uttered only with horror; we remember that this monster was vomited by England to disturb our Revolution from the beginning and to impede its progress.
>
> We shall not list all his crimes when all of France accuses him; we ask you that he be immediately judged, together with his accomplices. The people can hardly conceive that there are still privileges under the

reign of constitutional equality; that the Vergniauds, the Gensonnés, and all the scoundrels degraded by their treasons from the dignity of representatives of the people should have palaces for prisons while the brave sansculottes languish in dungeons and expire every day under the federalists' daggers. It is finally time for all the French to enjoy that holy equality that the Constitution guarantees; it is time to overawe the traitors and conspirators with striking acts of justice.

Make terror the order of the day.

Let us look closely at Royer's words. The orator calls the representatives "mandatories" (*mandataires*) to emphasize their submission to the people who voted for them in France's first election based on universal male suffrage. He congratulates the legislators for having decreed mass conscription (*levée en masse*) to fight the Austrian and Prussian enemies. But his focus is on other foes: the Girondins. These were the deputies (led by Brissot and including Vergniaud and Gensonné) who proclaimed allegiance to the Republic but had been proscribed ("degraded from the dignity of representatives of the people") in an earlier insurrection (May 31–June 2). In the eyes of the insurgents these men were traitors, allied to the "federalists," who, during the summer of 1793, had risen up against the National Convention in a series of municipal revolts—in Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, and elsewhere—and imprisoned or killed "brave sansculottes." Yet the Girondins had not yet been punished for their treasonous activities, hence the need "to overawe the traitors and conspirators with striking acts of justice."

It was in this context that Royer uttered the famous words, "Make terror the order of the day" (*Placez la terreur à l'ordre du jour*). What he meant by "terror" he specified in the following sentences:

Representatives of the people, may the sword hover indiscriminately over all heads. Promptly organize a truly revolutionary army: let this army be divided into sections; let each of them be followed by a frightful [*redoutable*] tribunal and by the horrible [*l'épouvantable*] instrument of the vengeance of the laws until the entire surface of the Republic is purged of all traitors and until the death of the last of the conspirators.

The "truly revolutionary army," not to be confused with the regular national army, was to be composed of sansculottes who would have the authority to arrest suspects and bring them before revolutionary tribunals.[1] These "frightful" courts would in turn quickly mete out justice in the form of the guillotine, the "horrible instrument of the vengeance of the laws."

Royer concluded his speech with a peroration targeting the class of ene-
mies that he and his fellow insurgents believed to be at the heart of France's
troubles:

> Before doing anything else, banish from all the armies that insolent caste
> that has always been the enemy of liberty and equality. The nobles were
> always the scourge of humanity: may they be excluded from all civil
> and military positions; and to remove from them all means of harming
> [us] and augmenting the number of our enemies, may they be placed
> under arrest and imprisoned until the peace. Innumerable misfortunes,
> acts of treachery, treasons of all sorts attest to the danger of leaving that
> degraded and bloodthirsty race at the head of our armies for long. The
> souls of our eviscerated brothers ask you for vengeance, and the voice of
> the people commands you.[2]

In this brief oration Royer sketched out a set of policies that would in-
deed characterize the phase of the French Revolution cu tomarily known as
the Terror. He simultaneously outlined much of what would be thought of
as "terror" in the modern political sense: the empowerment of paramilitary
vigilantes to arrest political suspects; the use of special tribunals to deliver
summary justice (i.e., execution); and the proscription and preemptive in-
carceration of a su picious class (in thi case the nobility). He thus appears
to have spontaneously defined a modern political concept. On closer inspec-
tion, we shall see that a great deal of cultural work had to be done before
Royer's words could be understood and (perhaps more to the point) have an
emotional impact on those who heard or read them.

The rallying cry took off quickly. Later that day Deputy Bertrand Barere,
speaking on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety, declared that the
proposed "revolutionary army" "will finally execute this great expression
that we owe to the commune of Paris: '*Plaçons la terreur à l'ordre ju jour.*'"[3]
The Commune was the municipal government, which was largely under
the control of the sansculottes. Perhaps it was there that revolutionaries in-
vented the slogan.

Whoever originated the expression, soon revolutionaries throughout
France were repeating it. On September 20 the Popular Society of Langres
in the Haute-Marne department sent a letter to the Convention urging it
to "'make *terror* the order of the day,' as our brothers in Paris have said."[4]
On October 2 the Convention received a letter from sixty-seven citizens
who called themselves "the free Montagnards of the commune of Moyen-
vic" (Moselle) and who urged the lawmakers, "Leave terror as the order of

the day."[5] On October 6 Deputy Jacques Boilleau of the Yonne department
affirmed "that it was right to make terror the order of the day, for liberty
must be terrible when it is in the presence of despotism."[6]

In the coming months many more revolutionaries spoke or wrote simi-
larly. The *Archives parlementaires*, a multivolume compendium of docu-
ments relating to the revolutionary legislatures, records 139 instances of peo-
ple calling for or praising terror as "the order of the day" from September 5,
1793, to the fall of Robespierre on July 27, 1794 (9 Thermidor).[7] Among the
lawmakers who used the expression were Danton, Barère, Billaud-Varenne,
Hérault de Séchelles, and Prieur de la Marne, all of whom served on the
Committee of Public Safety and were active in implementing the Terror,
and more than a dozen other deputies are recorded as having supported ter-
ror as the order of the day.[8] Representatives of the Parisian sections came
repeatedly to the Convention to make the same demand,[9] as did members
of the Jacobin Club of Paris.[10] More than fifty provincial Jacobin clubs wrote
to the Convention, sometimes appending hundreds of signatures, to call
for terror as the order of the day or praise the legislature for having accom-
plished that goal. At least twenty municipal governments sent in similarly
worded communications, as did officials in charge of districts and depart-
ments, members of local "revolutionary committees," soldiers at the front,
National Guardsmen, gendarmes, and ordinary citizens.

In addition to these 139 instances, the *Archives parlementaires* records
nearly six hundred occurrences of revolutionaries advocating or praising
terreur between the beginning of September 1793 and the end of July 1794.
What they meant by the word varied. In some cases "terror" simply referred
to the emotion, the extreme fear that enemies of the Republic, foreign or
domestic, supposedly felt or ought to feel. In other cases it referred to the
legal apparatus of the Terror: the laws that facilitated bringing suspects up
on political charges, the Revolutionary Tribunals, and the guillotine.

It is impossible to know just how influential Royer's oration was in
the proliferation of statements promoting terror during the following ten
months. But my aim is not to determine the Jacobin's personal impact on
revolutionary discourse. I am more interested in why Royer and other revo-
lutionaries spoke or wrote of *terreur* when describing their goals and val-
ues. To twenty-first-century sensibilities the word is jarring. It is so satu-
rated with implications of injustice, irrationality, fanaticism, and cruelty
that it requires a great deal of historical imagination—to say nothing of
research—to comprehend the thinking of those who conceived of terror as
a good thing. It may be surprising to many nonspecialists, as it was to me

when I first began to study the French Revolution, that this was not a term of abuse invented by counterrevolutionaries to discredit the Revolution, but rather a rallying cry designed by revolutionaries themselves to *legitimize* their measures.

Yet Royer's language is not only startling in light of present-day associations. It also clashes with certain elements of eighteenth-century thought, in particular with aspects of the Enlightenment. Historians have long linked the Enlightenment to the Revolution, either by positing a direct influence or by noting the esteem in which revolutionaries held Enlightenment thinkers.[11] Yet the Enlightenment is known for having militated against all forms of fear. Even Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, the movement's greatest critics, claimed that Enlightenment "pursued the goal of taking fear away from human beings and establishing them as masters."[12] Where could a positive conception of terror have fit into such a worldview? Moreover, eighteenth-century sources would appear to support the position of Horkheimer and Adorno. For example, Montesquieu famously identified fear (*la crainte*) as the "principle" of despotism.[13]

Why, then, did revolutionaries who otherwise aligned themselves with Enlightenment principles—liberty, equality, and human rights—extoll terror as a legitimizing principle and a priority ("the order of the day")?

Of course, this question is not new; contemporaries posed it as soon as the Terror began, and apologists and critics of the Revolution have argued over it for more than two centuries. The debate was particularly heated in the years leading up to the bicentennial in 1989: "Jacobins" claimed that the Revolution had faced real enemies and needed to take emergency action, while "revisionists" saw the Terror as the product of a political culture in which compromise was unthinkable. I will discuss at least some of the voluminous historiography of the Terror in the conclusion to this book. For now I am mainly interested in addressing a set of related questions that historians have not posed up to now. Why did the Jacobins and sansculottes conceive of their goals for the French Republic in terms of terror? And to return to Royer's speech, why did it call for *la terreur à l'ordre du jour*? What was the appeal of the word "terror"? What did it mean to Royer and others who embraced it? And finally (and more speculatively), how did the word *feel*? What emotions did it evoke in those who uttered, heard, wrote, or read it?

These questions are relevant to an understanding of why the revolutionaries adopted the policies conventionally understood as the Terror. The name a political group adopts for its program is no doubt relevant to its success. Appealing slogans help to solidify loyalties, and it seems likely to me

that by using the language of terror, revolutionaries stimulated enthusiasm for the Terror. But it would be naive to assume that this language was the only cause, or even the principal cause, of the Terror.

At one level, then, my goal in this book—explaining the appeal of the word "terror"—is more modest than that of historians who have sought an overarching or comprehensive explanation of the Terror. Yet at another level my goal is more ambitious. To explain why requires a clear statement of my thesis: the appeal to terror in the French Revolution was conceivable and popular because it drew on a long tradition of writing and thinking in which terror was a good thing. According to this tradition, God instilled terror in his creatures—and rightly so. Kings derived their power from God and were consequently praised for the terror they inspired in enemies. (They were often flattered precisely as "the terror" of their enemies.) Society depended on the "terror of the laws." Terror had positive aesthetic value, providing a precondition for both high-quality theater and "the sublime." It even had medicinal value and was widely believed capable of treating or curing numerous illnesses. To support these claims, it is necessary to delve into the much-neglected history of attitudes toward terror prior to the Revolution.[14] I have chosen approximately one century of this history because a longer sweep would have been beyond my capacities, but I also believe that a century is sufficient to make my case. The result of this investigation—and here is the book's more ambitious goal—will be a contribution to the history of Western attitudes toward terror. So much of our contemporary political discourse takes an orientalist approach to terror and characterizes it as an invention of the inveterate foes of Western civilization. It is important, I believe, to disrupt this narrative by recounting a significant chapter in what might be called the Western romance with terror.

But what exactly is the subject of this book? Is "terror" an idea? A concept? A discourse? A word? And what methods will be employed in its study?

On one level, this book is a traditional contribution to intellectual history, with significant attention paid to *ideas*. I do not believe that the word "terror" corresponds precisely to a discrete idea, but certain recurrent ideas appear in conjunction with the word. To give just one example, there is the idea of *salutary terror*, according to which the experience of terror is productive of health, safety, or even salvation. I would even go so far as to argue that salutary terror is a "unit-idea," as defined by Arthur Lovejoy, insofar as it appears in different periods in history (from the Bible to Augustine to the Enlightenment and finally the French Revolution), in different "provinces

of history" (e.g., theology, jurisprudence, aesthetics, and medicine) and in both canonical and noncanonical sources.[15]

Yet the history of terror before the Terror is more than the history of an idea. The word "terror" had (and no doubt still has) too many meanings to be contained by a single idea. Conceivably, then, it is more of a concept than an idea. Reinhart Koselleck characterized concepts (*Begriffe*) as inherently *mehrdeutig*, a term that can mean "ambiguous" but is more literally translated as "polysemous" or "multivalent." According to Koselleck, a concept, unlike a mere word, contained a "plenitude" (*Fülle*) of meanings. Koselleck gave as an example the concept of the state (*Staat*), which included within it such diverse things as "dominion, territory, citizenship, legislation, jurisdiction, administration," and so on.[16] Could terror also be an example of such a "plenitude" or concentrate? Certainly it was multivalent. It could indicate an emotion, a form of fear (specifically, an extreme, gripping fear), a style of rule, or a military tactic; or, metonymically, it could stand for the source of terror, as when rulers, commanders, or nations were the "terror" of their enemies. During the Revolution it often meant the policies adopted between September 1793 and July 1794, and subsequently the word served as the name of a period that had ended with the fall of Robespierre.

There is an argument to be made for terror having become a concept precisely during the Year II, when a disparate field of the word's earlier meanings came together in the Terror. Indeed, the capitalization of the word, a practice as early as December 1793, suggested a kind of congealing or concentration of prior meanings.[17] That terror became a concept at this point is suggested by the "Terror, Terrorismus" entry in the monument to conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*), the multivolume lexicon that Koselleck coedited: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Basic concepts in history). Actually, to call it an entry does it a disservice: it is more of a monograph, comprising 122 pages, 622 footnotes, and roughly 60,000 words. But nearly one hundred of these pages are devoted to the postrevolutionary period, and only eleven pages are allocated to the meanings of "terror" under the Old Regime. This is because the author, Rudolf Walther, sees references to terror in the prerevolutionary period as constituting the "prehistory" (*Vorgeschichte*) of the concept. The section on the Revolution also comprises eleven pages. But for Walther, terror becomes a concept only in 1793–94, when for him its actual history begins; and the remainder of the article, approximately one hundred pages, deals with *Terrorismus* as understood throughout Europe from the fall of Robespierre to the 1970s.[18] A similar pattern can be seen in Gerd van den Heuvel's article "Terreur, Terroriste, Terrorisme," in the *Handbuch*

politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich, 1680–1820 (Handbook of basic political and social concepts in France, 1680–1820), edited by Rolf Reichardt and Eberhard Schmitt. In this eighteen-thousand-word entry fewer than three thousand words are allocated to the Old Regime.[19]

My objection to treating the meanings of terror in the Old Regime as a "prehistory" is that the term is teleological and suggests an inevitable unfolding of "history." Of course, one could object that the term "Old Regime" is equally teleological, as is the adjective "prerevolutionary." But some of Koselleck's other remarks about *Begriffe* and especially *Grundbegriffe* (fundamental concepts) indicate a belief in a metanarrative about the course of history that I do not share. Specifically, Koselleck believes that the proliferation of *Grundbegriffe* between 1750 and 1850 reveals "the dissolution of the old world and the emergence of the modern world."[20] My emphasis is much more on continuities than on "the emergence of the modern world." Indeed, the value placed on terror (and "the Terror") in the Revolution depended heavily on traditions that might otherwise be dismissed as "prehistory." Moreover, Koselleck wrote of words' being "promoted" to the status of "modern concepts," which similarly hints at a predetermined telos.[21] As a heuristic device, the distinction between words and concepts has some value. Specifically, it could be used to argue that the long-standing valorization of the word *terreur* facilitated a similar valorization of the concept of *la Terreur*. I shall return to this question in the conclusion, but for now it is important to observe that even if terror (or the Terror) can be understood as a concept, this takes place only at the end of my story. Ultimately, the unit of analysis in this book is a word (or, to be linguistically precise, a lexeme), not a concept.[22]

To use a distinction adopted from semantics, the emphasis is on semasiology (the study of what particular words or phrases mean) rather than onomasiology (the study of the words or phrases that are used to indicate a particular concept or idea). In other words, rather than asking the onomasiological question, "What words or phrases were used to express the concept or idea of terror?" I will be asking the semasiological question, "What did the word 'terror' and phrases including it (such as 'salutary terror' or 'the terror of his enemies') mean to those who wrote, uttered, heard or read them?"[23] And I will be adding the question, "How did it feel to say, hear, write, or read it?"

The subject of this book, then, is what I am choosing to call "terror speech." This terminology deserves explanation lest it be misunderstood. The word "speech" often refers to the act of talking and could potentially be reminiscent of the expression "rights talk," which the conservative American legal scholar Mary Ann Glendon simultaneously popularized and dis-

paraged.[24] Although Dan Edelstein has more recently used the expression evenhandedly, Glendon's imperious attitude toward "talk," which looks very much like "chatter," might remain in some readers' minds.[25] In the present book, however, the word "speech" is strictly descriptive. Rather than implying the laziness of "talk," it describes both oral and written expression and includes both systematic statements and casual remarks. In this respect it borrows from the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's idea that speech (*la parole*) is simply language as it is used in everyday life, as opposed to language (*la langue*), which is conceived as a formal system of rules.[26]

My research questions and methodology are informed by the kind of historical semantics practiced by Nietzsche and embraced by Foucault. Trained in the nineteenth-century philological tradition, Nietzsche was sensitive to the changing meanings of words, and he applied this awareness most famously in his book *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he argued that the word "good" had originally referred to amoral personal attributes such as strength, health, and power but with the advent of Christianity came to have moral meanings (e.g., meekness, selflessness), while what the pagans had valued as "good" came to be seen as "evil."[27] As Foucault observed, Nietzsche's notion of "genealogy" is a corrective to the tendency of historians to search for origins. Whereas "origins" imply inevitable outcomes, genealogy "must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality."[28] *A Genealogy of Terror* likewise eschews a teleological search for origins and recognizes that the history that occurred is not the history that had to occur. It does not argue that a tradition of valorizing terror made it inevitable that revolutionaries would embrace the language of terror, still less that the Terror as we know it was the unavoidable consequence of a culture in which terror was praised. In other respects the revolutionaries departed from past practice; they were not doomed to embrace this particular tradition. Moreover, other European countries similarly had traditions of valorizing terror in multiple contexts, whereas the Terror took place only in France.[29] Nietzsche is also helpful—and not only filtered through Foucault's interpretation—because his genealogy provided a classic example of what he called "transvaluation" (*Umwertung*).[30] Just as Christianity turned "good" characteristics into "evil" ones, in Nietzsche's view, beginning in late 1794 France saw a revolution in common understandings of terror. Long an indicator of glory, majesty, legitimacy, and other positive qualities, "terror" came to stand almost exclusively for cruel and pointless violence. Although my study focuses on the "before" side of this revolution, a Nietzschean conception of *Umwertung* enables us to appreciate the historical changes that have occurred in attitudes toward terror since 1794.

A further advantage of the genealogical approach is that it highlights emotions. Foucault writes of genealogy, "It must seek [events] in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts."[31] This proposition is particularly appropriate for the study of the word "terror," which among other things refers to an emotion. Any attempt to trace the history of an emotion word must reckon with the "emotional turn" in the humanities and social sciences. Particularly relevant to this study is William Reddy's *Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. In that groundbreaking work Reddy introduces the concept of the "emotive." Drawing on J. L. Austin's distinction between "constative" or purely descriptive statements and "performative" statements (such as "I hereby pronounce you man and wife") that *do* things, Reddy adds a third kind of statement that he calls an "emotive."[32] One example of an emotive is "I am angry." Drawing on studies of cognitive psychology, Reddy notes that people change their emotional state in the process of uttering statements about what they perceive that state to be. Thus a person who says "I am angry" might become even angrier in the process and immediate aftermath of making the statement; on the other hand, she might also notice that she is not as angry as she thought and as a result become calmer. In either case, the act of making an emotional claim changes the emotional condition of the person who makes it.[33]

Emotives allow Reddy to make a larger argument about the importance of assessing the "liberty" or oppressiveness of "emotional regimes" by gauging the range of emotions they allow. My aim in this book is not to assess the emotional liberty of the Old Regime or the Revolution, but Reddy's concept of the emotive is helpful because it provides a model for interpreting statements about emotional conditions. Strictly speaking, most of the statements in this book that include the word "terror" do not meet Reddy's standard for emotives, since Reddy restricts this designation for first-person, present-tense statements, and most of the statements analyzed here are in the second or third person.[34] But I would like to suggest that even second- and third-person statements regarding terror can be understood as emotives insofar as they changed the emotional condition of the person who uttered or wrote them. Take, for example, the words of Bishop Jean-Baptiste Massillon in a speech he made in the 1720s or 1730s (later published in a book) to priests about "the need for ministers to renew the spirit of their vocation." Massillon claimed that whereas priests typically grew "insensitive" to the environment of the Mass, infrequent churchgoers responded much more emotionally. He claimed, "The believer who rarely approaches the altar is struck with holy terror [*d'une sainte terreur*] when he has to participate

in such a frightful [*redoutable*] action: the approach of a solemn ceremony [i.e., the Eucharist] . . . reminds him of himself; he feels all of his indignity; he throws himself at our feet, filled with fear [*crainte*] and compunction." Priests, on the other hand, are used to "this terrible [*terrible*] ceremony," and therefore it loses its effect. The Mass "does not awaken anything in us, neither fervor nor terror [*terreur*] of holy things, nor pain at our faults, nor resolutions of a more priestly and faithful life."[35] It is reasonable to assume that Massillon felt something as he employed the word *terreur* (to say nothing of the related words *terrible*, *redoutable*, and *crainte*), though he did so in third-person statements. Without speculating in depth on how Massillon felt, we are justified in believing that it felt *good* to use this word, which was so closely linked to the holines and majesty of God and the prospect of personal salvation. Indeed, the word *terreur* was linked with its opposite— hope or confidence—and was only truly fearful when Massillon considered its absence in the hearts of jaded priests.[36] It is perfectly plausible that the word had similar emotional connotations for those who heard or read Massillon's speech.

Or consider the letter that General Jean-Baptiste Jourdan wrote to the National Convention on October 16, 1793. It described a "bloody battle against the vile slaves of despots" in which 6000 enemy troops were killed and 200 republican soldiers were lost but which resulted in the restoration of the city of Maubeuge to French control. The letter ended with the claim, "Terror has taken hold of our enemies and I believe it will be impossible for these slaves to withstand the courageous efforts of our brave republicans."[37] Jourdan's statement about the emotional condition of the enemy was a third-person claim and therefore (according to Reddy) a constative. But was it not pleasurable for Jourdan to de cribe the terror he imputed to the enemy? The accompanying claim about the "courageous" condition of the "brave" republicans suggested that it was precisely the prospect of a terrified enemy that emboldened or encouraged Jourdan and hi soldiers. Presumably the general also expected the lawmakers and the French public (who read his letter in newspapers) to feel similarly encouraged.

Of course, in the former example terror was a good thing for a good person to feel, and in the latter it was good for the enemy to feel. Paradoxically, Massillon expected feelings of terror to be reassuring, but Jourdan's reasoning was more straightforward, suggesting that it was salutary for the French when the enemy experienced terror. But in both cases a claim of terror made in the third person appears to have felt good to the person making the claim and may also have felt good to the claimants' readers or auditors. Thus in both cases the word *terreur* had a positive emotional valence.

It might be objected that any speculation on the emotional condition of people in the past is, well, speculation. But historians are normally confident that they can apprehend the cognitive state of people in the past or, to use Keith Michael Baker's expression, to describe their process of "intellection."[38] How different are emotions and cognition? Again *The Navigation of Feeling* can be helpful. In that book and elsewhere Reddy relays the findings of many cognitive psychologists who have failed to distinguish between the two mental processes.[39] I am therefore less skeptical than historians such as Peter and Carol Stearns, who have contented themselves with "emotionology," or the examination of which emotions a particular society deemed appropriate, though a considerable part of the present study will be to determine who was expected to feel terror and under what circumstances.[40] Nor do I think it necessary to stop at the "emotional communities" that Barbara Rosenwein argues will "help us understand how people articulated, understood, and represented how they felt," and I disagree that this is "about all we can know about anyone's feelings apart from our own."[41] Absolute certainty in such matters is unlikely, but a reasonable approximation on the basis of evidence is possible.

What were the emotional connotations of *terreur* before and during the French Revolution? In order to provide at least a partial answer, this book examines six distinct subjects or genres—or, to use Lovejoy's expression, "provinces of history"—in which "terror" played a prominent role.[42] The first of these genres consists of theological expressions, specifically in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Chapter 1 examines both the Latin and French editions of the Bible available to Old Regime readers as well as a diverse array of theological writings by ultramontane Catholics, heterodox Jansenists, and even some anticlerical *philosophes* to show that "terror" (Lat. *terror*, Fr. *terreur*) was widely described as the proper condition of human beings before their Creator. (We have already seen this in the example of Massillon.) One of God's principal attributes was accordingly his terror (or terribleness),[43] a trait that corresponded to his power, glory, and righteousness. In short, referring to God as the being who most appropriately instills terror was another way of highlighting his majesty. Chapter 2 examines another form of majesty: that which was attributed to kings and expressed in what might be called the speech of sovereign terror. Here the principal sources are political writings, some more philosophical, others more strictly acclamatory, in which kings are described as rightfully instilling terror in their enemies or even as *being* the terror of those enemies. Insofar as kings reputedly derived their power from God, their terribleness was every bit as holy and therefore legitimate as God's. Chapter 3 explores legal

writings, especially those works of jurisprudence that commented on the kinds of punishments most effective in instilling terror in criminals and potential malefactors. Here one encounters such expressions as "the terror of the laws" and "the terror of punishments." We retain these concepts in the word "deter," which literally means "to terrify from [committing an act]," though when using the word "terror" Old Regime legal commentators simultaneously evoked the majesty of the law and of the earthly and heavenly sovereigns who created it. Chapters 4 and 5 examine aesthetic writings. In chapter 4 the emphasis is on theater criticism, and in particular commentary on the perceived necessity of terror as a component of tragedy. The argument is that while many commentators recalled Aristotle's maxim that a tragedy must evoke terror and pity in spectators, increasingly in the course of the eighteenth century theater critics ignored the "pity" side of the dyad and stressed the need for terror. The effect of terror on audiences was thought to be morally improving, whether spectators then "purged" the emotion (as Aristotle prescribed) or maintained it. In similar fashion, chapter 5 shows the link in aesthetic philosophy between terror and "the sublime." Focusing on Edmund Burke's key contribution to the discussion—his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) was translated into French in 1765 and clearly influenced Diderot, among other French writers—it traces the notion that in order for a work of art or experience of nature to be "sublime" it had to impart terror. A crucial component of Burke's plea on behalf of terror was the conviction that the emotion was healthful. (Burke maintained that terror impacted the mind in the same way that physical exercise affected the body.) In chapter 6 we shall see that many medical writers concurred on the "salutary" effect of terror on the human organism, and that both learned treatises and popular digests of medical knowledge made extraordinary claims on behalf of the emotion. Thus terror (though recognized to be typically dangerous) was capable on occasion of curing a variety of illnesses. Notably, a doctor named Jean-Paul Marat shared the widespread belief that terror could imbue the human organism with extraordinary strength.[44] This chapter raises the question of whether revolutionary beliefs about the salutary effects of terror on the "body politic" might have been informed by Old Regime medical thinking. Taken together, the first six chapters of the book point to a tradition of valorizing "terror" and suggest that the word often had positive emotional connotations.

The last two chapters trace terror speech, both spoken and written, in the Revolution. The principal source for this section is the *Archives parlementaires*, particularly volumes 9 through 93. Chapter 7 analyses "terror

before the Terror," or terror speech from June 1789 through August 1793. It argues that the revolutionaries of this phase inherited from the Old Regime both the language of judicial terror, which was used to legitimize new laws (including the Constitution), and the idea of terror as a weapon to be wielded against the nation's enemies. It also shows that "terror" was an ecumenical term, used not only by radical Jacobins or Montagnards but by their "moderate" enemies the Girondins, and even the conservative Feuillants, who sought to preserve the power of the monarchy. This universality helped to make it an attractive rallying cry during Year II of the Republic.

Chapter 8 examines terror speech during the Terror itself (September 5, 1793–July 27, 1794). Here we find a decline in utilitarian or "exemplary" terror, in which the prospect of punishment deters adversaries, and an increase in the sense of terror as a principle of vengeance and extermination. Moreover, terror paradoxically became holy in much the way it had been for Bishop Massillon. This can be seen in the language surrounding "the Mountain," a term that originally meant simply the radical members of the National Convention who sat on the highest benches of the assembly hall but came to be described as a "holy Mountain," capable of casting thunderbolts and spewing lava at France's enemies. The atmospheric effects of this figurative geographical feature also resembled prerevolutionary statements about the terrible sublime, and those revolutionaries who praised the Mountain for conjuring fresh air and drying up the miasmas of the counter-revolutionary "swamp" (*marais*) recalled medical ideas about salutary terror. In addition, chapter 8 argues that terror speech was therapeutic to the revolutionaries of the Year II. Specifically, those who used it contrasted the terror supposedly felt by enemies with their own feelings of "consolation," "hope," "confidence," and "courage."

From the very beginning of the Revolution to the fall of Robespierre, as both chapters 7 and 8 will show, "terror" retained its prerevolutionary emotional connotations. It still felt good to utter, write, hear, or read the word. The source of this feeling was a set of ideas—and here again ideas and feelings are closely linked—including security, safety, and salvation. Terror was salutary not only in the sense of saving the person experiencing it by deterring dangerous behavior, but also in the sense of preserving society from the danger posed by its enemies. Moreover, it recalled the salvation that according to prerevolutionary generations had come from a terrible, glorious God. In this context the revolutionary word *salut*, often translated as "safety," also alluded to salvation.

Finally, a conclusion will place this book's findings in the context of the historiographical literature on the Terror, navigating between ideological

and circumstantial explanations and addressing more recent scholarship that takes an "emotional turn." The conclusion will also highlight the sudden shifts in the meaning of "terror" that took place in the days and weeks following the fall of Robespierre. It identifies the Thermidorian period as the moment when the word lost its connotations of justice, legitimacy, majesty, and salvation and came instead to indicate unjust and pointless violence.

The following excursion through six provinces of history—not counting revolutionary France—might at times feel like a frenetic dash, the first casualty of which will be contextualization. I will rarely linger in my descriptions of the historical actors behind the statements that constitute the core of this story, and—until my account of the Revolution—I will say little about the social and intellectual contexts in which they were uttered or written. Contextualists in the tradition of Quentin Skinner might be disappointed by this approach, but part of the rea on for this contextual sparseness is simply practical. I am not a pecialist in biblical studies or the history of French Catholicism. I am not an expert in Old Regime political theology, jurisprudence, theater critici m, aesthetics or medicine. A fully contextualized study of each prerevolutionary chapter would al o add considerably to the book's length. Nor do I believe it would ub tantially change the argument. For example, in the chapt r on medical under tandings of terror, I could linger over the eighteenth-century transition from Galenic to neurological models or discuss how a new generation of vitalists oppo ed their Cartesian/mechani t forebears, but none of thi would change my main point in that chapter, which is the fact that phy icians— whatever their intellectual or social affiliations—often credited terror with the power to cure illnesses or impart strength to th body. Peter Gordon ha recently argued that contextualism ha limited explanatory power in works of intellectual history.[45] I believe this book to be an example of a tudy that calls for only limited contextualization.

Did "terror" always have positive emotional connotation during the prerevolutionary period? Certainly not. For Old Regime and revolutionary commentators alike, the word could be a term of abuse denoting de potism, and though Montesquieu typically used the word *crainte* (fear) to de cribe the "principle" of despotism, others substituted the term *terreur*.[46] Similarly, for numerous *philosophes* "terror" (or, more frequently, "terrors") denoted the "superstitious" fear of hell promoted by the church and allegedly designed to control credulous people.[47] My argument is not that terror was always a good thing in the utterances, oral or written, of Old Regime and revolutionary commentators, but that there was a strong enough tradition of positive terror speech to make the term an attractive option for a rallying

cry in September 1793. I am not suggesting that "terror" as the "order of the day" was an inevitable slogan; rather, I am providing reasons for its having been a thinkable one.[48]

The difference between terror speech for most of the eighteenth century and terror speech after the Terror is not that "terror" was initially considered a good thing and subsequently a bad thing. Rather, the word went from having both positive and negative meanings to having almost exclusively negative ones. "Terror" most certainly has a postrevolutionary history as well, with the conflation of terror and (a specific form of) terrorism after 9/11 defining the most recent chapter. But it was the Revolution—or more specifically a set of narratives about the Revolution produced after the fall of Robespierre—that largely bequeathed to us the set of emotional connotations attached to the word today.

Robert Darnton has advised students of history, "When we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a poem, we know we are on to something. By picking at the document where it is most opaque, we may be able to unravel an alien system of meaning."[49] A more old-fashioned way of putting this comes from Herder, who believed that one of the primary goals of historical study was "to feel oneself into" (*sich hineinfühlen*) a different age.[50] Few things are harder to "get" today than the expression *Placez la terreur à l'ordre du jour*, and few things are harder to "feel oneself into" than a culture in which *la terreur* could sound and feel good. But the stakes are high. Even partial success will provide a better understanding of both the French Revolution and the history of Western attitudes toward terror. Let us therefore look more closely into the genealogy of terror in eighteenth-century France.