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# Madame Tussaud and the Women of the French Revolution

Leah Craig  
*Hollins University*

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## Leah Craig: Essay

The process of research for my final paper for History 341 was quite a journey. Originally, I had intended to do in-depth research of the life of more than one notable woman of the French Revolution, with possibilities ranging from Therese Tallien to Josephine Bonaparte. However, upon my first research day at the library with my classmates, I found there were very few primary sources on these women, with minimal secondary sources. I had read a book about Madame Tussaud previous to taking my class with Dr. Nunez, and was highly intrigued by her life, and the legacy she left behind, including her history tied intimately with the French Revolution.

Utilizing the library's inter-library loan service, I was able to obtain a copy of Tussaud's memoirs. Getting ahold of those memoirs, however, was quite difficult, as I found out the book is extremely rare, out of print, and few institutions were willing to part with their copies, as they were too fragile to be shipped. I am eternally grateful to Jonathan Overturf for managing to track down a copy for me; without Tussaud's memoirs this paper could not have been written.

I was soon to find, though, that Tussaud's memoirs were not what I expected them to be. At some points Tussaud was intentionally vague, and there were very little specific dates mentioned throughout her works, making it difficult to piece together a timeline of her life. The entire memoir was also written in the third person, which was quite jarring, and as a result, difficult to glean personal feelings and details from.

Through inter-library loan I was also able to obtain some secondary sources about the life of Madame Tussaud—Kate Berridge's *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Times of Madame Tussaud*, and Pamela Pilbeam's *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks*. However, these scholarly works did not shed light on Tussaud's memoirs as I thought they would; instead they doubted and questioned Tussaud's testimony, due to lack of historical records on Tussaud's life.

This confusion led me to pursuing a new path in my research paper. I could not verify Tussaud's claims about her life in her memoirs, so I chose to examine why she may have presented herself in the manner that she did throughout her memoirs, and why she would choose to distance herself from the events of the French Revolution as she does throughout the work. Through guidance from Dr. Nunez, I also tied this argument into a greater conclusion about a lack of consistent scholarship about women in the French Revolution.

Combining a primary source from the library's collection—*Women in Revolutionary Paris*—and several scholarly works from Roanoke College, including Dominique Godineau's *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution* and Shirley Roessler's *Women and the Politics of the French Revolution*, I drew greater conclusions about women's representation in the scholarship of the French Revolution, and why Tussaud deserves her place amongst the Revolutionary women commonly cited in historical scholarship.

Through the use of the inter-library loan system, the fantastic collection here at the Wyndham Robertson Library, and the exchange program with Roanoke College's Finkel Library, I was able to conduct a thorough study of Madame Tussaud's life, and the historical portrayal of women in the French Revolution.

Madame Tussaud and the Women of the French Revolution

Marie Grosholtz Tussaud, better known as Madame Tussaud, was an extraordinary woman who lived during extraordinary times—Paris, at the height of the French Revolution and Reign of Terror. Well known both in France and throughout the world, her waxworks served as an important source of entertainment for all social classes, and as a point of information for the latest news of the Revolution for members of the Third Estate. Throughout her experiences during the Revolution as a Third Estate woman, Tussaud shows through her memoirs the shrewd way she used her waxworks to ensure her survival during the Terror. Yet, as a whole, scholarship on Third-Estate women involved in the French Revolution is polarized into two categories—impoverished, working class women, such as the women who marched to Versailles in 1789 or women involved in political actions and the fight for equal rights, such as Etta Palm d’Aelders. Madame Tussaud, a bourgeois member of the Third Estate, stands in-between contemporary scholarship on women in the French Revolution as a non-working class, non-political public figure.

In her memoirs Tussaud shapes four different personas in the publically presented image of herself during the Revolution, and through these personas, distances herself from the radical, political aspects of the Revolution, such as republicanism, sans-culottes, and the Terror. Though penned by Tussaud in England in 1838, twelve years before the end of her life, the entire memoir is written in the third person point of view, with very little emotional reflection upon the turbulent events of her early life. Instead, her focus is on the descriptions of those she encountered and modeled, prominent figures such as Voltaire, Marat, Robespierre, and the royal family. Different aspects of her life and personality are interspersed with these descriptions of

the appearance and character of notable historical figures. These tidbits of her personal life are enhanced or diminished to cater to the readers of her memoir—as the memoir was published in English, in London, she appears to be writing for a British, anti-French, anti-revolutionary audience. She does not, however, explicitly state what sort of audience she is addressing through her memoirs. The four personas Tussaud uses to distance herself from the Revolution are as follows: Madame Tussaud the foreigner, Madame Tussaud the wax-modeler, Madame Tussaud the Royalist, and Madame Tussaud the public figure. These four personas define her point of view on the Revolution for a British audience, but also complicates modern scholarship of women and the French Revolution. Madame Tussaud serves as a compelling case study for modern scholarship, and the personas she creates speak to her deep-seated survival instinct during the tumultuous events of the Revolution.

Early on in the memoirs, Tussaud separates herself from the Revolution by denying her French-born roots. Her family was of Swiss origin, and according to her memoirs, “Madame Tussaud was born at Berne, Switzerland in the year 1760.”<sup>1</sup> However, baptismal records unearthed by scholar Kate Berridge prove that Madame Tussaud was born December 1761 in Strasbourg, France.<sup>2</sup> Tussaud’s denial of her French birth serves as a way of maintaining closeness to her family. Tussaud’s uncle, Philippe Curtius, was a native of Berne before moving to Paris under the patronage of the Prince de Conti to establish a waxworks.<sup>3</sup> Tussaud and her mother resided with Curtius in Berne from when Tussaud was two years old until she was six, when Curtius moved to France.<sup>4</sup> A close relationship between Tussaud and Curtius, her tutor in the art of wax modeling, is evident early on within the memoirs. She writes, “A digression is

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Pamela M. Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks* (London: Hambledon and London: 2003), 17

<sup>4</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 12

requisite, to state some particulars respecting her uncle, who afterwards assumed towards her the character of a father, both in regard to tenderness and authority—legally adopting her, in fact, as his child.”<sup>5</sup> Based on positive influence Curtius had, her claim within the memoir that she hailed from Berne is a subtle homage to Curtius as the father figure of her life.

Tussaud’s denial of her French origin is inherently tied to the violent acts of the Revolution that deeply affected her family. Tussaud states that her mother had seven sons, however only three of her brothers are mentioned again, in relation to the attacks on the Swiss Guard at the Tuileries Palace on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1792.<sup>6</sup> As noted by Jeremy D. Popkin, “The Duke of Brunswick issued a proclamation holding the inhabitants of Paris responsible for any attack on the king. When news of this “Brunswick Manifesto” reached Paris, the insurrectionary leaders decided to act. By 9:00 am on 10 August, thousands of their supporters were converging on the Tuileries. The king and his family took refuge with the Legislative Assembly, leaving their loyal Swiss Guards behind to defend the palace. In the course of the day; fighting broke out; the outnumbered guards killed at least 100 of the insurgents. This action infuriated the sans-culottes, who retaliated by massacring the guards who fell into their hands.”<sup>7</sup> This violent conflict hit Madame Tussaud personally, as three of her brothers were members of the Swiss Guard.<sup>8</sup>

As a departure from the tone of the rest of the memoir, her anguish at her brothers’ fate is clearly documented. “As Madame Tussaud beheld the mutilated bodies which strewed the ground, her feelings were the most painful that could be imagined; she involuntarily shrunk on

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<sup>5</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 136

<sup>7</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc, 2010), 67.

<sup>8</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 244.

beholding them; yet a torturing anxiety impelled her to ascertain whether any of the mangled remains scattered around her were those of the relations whom she sought.”<sup>9</sup> The outbreak of violence and sense of the unknown conveyed by Tussaud created a watershed moment for her. Her Royalist tendencies were certainly in place at this time as she already had contact with the Royal Family, especially the king’s sister, Elizabeth.<sup>10</sup> Yet this moment, when her family was victimized by mob violence, is telling in the overwhelming change of tone unlike any other section of her memoir. Nine pages in all are devoted to the incident, and Tussaud’s anxiety and stress are heavily noted. Therefore, her claim of Swiss birth serves another purpose besides tying her to Curtius. Her denial of her French birth is an act of dissent and defiance against a country that left her emotionally devastated by the unknown fate of her brothers.

Tussaud does not mention her attitude towards the Revolution as these events took place, and the publication date of her memoirs is significant in that they are written nearly forty-six years after the creation of the French Republic. Far from the dangers of the Terror, Tussaud could afford to emphasize her foreignness without any sort of negative connotation or potential suspicion by the French government. According to a Revolutionary commentator, Tussaud’s uncle made no effort to portray any other persona beyond that of a patriotic French citizen, (though due to the political instability of the time, what defined a “citizen” would vary depending on who was in power at the time): “Curtius made a display of his patriotism from the start of the Revolution; he offered for the public approval or execration the men of the hour or the whirl of fashion, victors and vanquished, and awarded them a place of honour or infamy according to the circumstances.”<sup>11</sup> Curtius’s insistence on displays of patriotism stand in contrast

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<sup>9</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 244.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 123

to Tussaud's emphasis on the family's Swiss heritage, especially related to anecdotes involving her mother's famous German cooking that got the family much attention from figures such as the Emperor Joseph II.<sup>12</sup> One incident in particular is mentioned in the memoirs, in which the Emperor visited the wax museum, and "his olfactory nerves were greeted with a scent, to a German ever welcome...exclaiming, "Oh, mein Gott, there is sour krout"...and his Imperial Majesty seated himself at the table...joining the group *en famille*, and ate, drank, talked, laughed and joked with all possible affability."<sup>13</sup> The purpose of such an anecdote within Tussaud's memoirs serves to reinforce her Swiss ancestry among an English audience unreceptive to the sort of French nationalism Curtius made a point of displaying during the Revolution. Tussaud, being far from the danger of the Terror by the time her memoirs are published, can also afford to emphasize her foreignness and her family's connection to the Swiss Guard without the level of danger that would have been present during the Terror, the level of danger that caused Curtius to be so enthusiastically French during the Revolution.

Modern scholars of the French Revolution place very little emphasis on prominent female participants of foreign birth. One of these active female revolutionaries mentioned in several works is Etta Palm d'Aelders, a Dutch-born *femme-sans-culotte*. Palm d'Aelders founded the Societe Patriotique et de Bienfaisance des Amies de la Verite (the Patriotic and Beneficent Society of Female Friends of Truth) and was known for making impassioned speeches advocating for female equality.<sup>14</sup> Though most works, including scholar Dominique Godineau's *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution* expound upon Palm d'Aelder's contributions to both French feminism and the Revolution, her foreign birth is mentioned barely in passing.

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<sup>12</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud's Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 124.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Shirley Elson Roessler, *Out of the Shadows: Women and the Politics of the French Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998), 57.

Godineau mentions Palm d'Aelder's Dutch origin in relation to the Champs de Mars incident of 1791 in which nationalistic demonstrations in the street ended with gunfire courtesy of the National Guard.<sup>15</sup> Godineau describes the retribution that followed, "Men and women who, like Constance Evrard and Pauline Leon, insulted the national guards for their "glorious deeds" were held and interrogated. Anne Felicite Colombe, the owner of the printing press of Marat's *L'Ami du Peuple* was also arrested, along with Etta Palm d'Aelders (as a foreigner)."<sup>16</sup> Though the rest of the women placed under scrutiny for their actions on the Champs de Mars, only Palm d'Aelders appears to be singled out for her foreign birth. Yet, Godineau does not elaborate on this difference between Palm d'Aelders and the other *femme sans-culottes* arrested during the demonstrations. Acknowledging this difference between Palm d'Aelders and the other women would contribute a great deal to the understanding of women of foreign birth who participated in revolutionary activities.

Scholar Shirley Elson Roessler does mention the fate of Palm d'Aelders during the Revolution in regards to the club she founded: "The club dissolved sometime during the autumn months of 1792 and Palm d'Aelders left France and took up residence in Holland."<sup>17</sup> Her flight to Holland combined with her arrest in Paris as a foreigner indicates a larger motivation on behalf of the revolutionary government at the time, yet this motivation is not thoroughly explored in modern scholarship. However, with prominent public figures like Palm d'Aelders and Tussaud, the isolation of being a foreign woman during the Revolution deserves closer scrutiny from scholars.

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<sup>15</sup> Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Shirley Elson Roessler, *Out of the Shadows: Women and the Politics of the French Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998), 60.

Tussaud stands on the opposite side of Palm d’Aelders in presenting herself as a distinctly Swiss entity in her memoirs as opposed to the French feminist persona that Palm d’Aelders embraces during the Revolution. In several speeches and pamphlets, Palm d’Aelders expounds upon the glories of the Revolution: “Rally around the tree of the constitution; it is the tree of life...may the love of the Fatherland, of liberty, of fraternity, be in your hearts as on your lips; let us all seek out ways of supporting another...”<sup>18</sup> While d’Aelders propagated the ideals of liberty, equality, and love of the nation, these ideals did not match up to the violent actions of the 10<sup>th</sup> August massacre. Therefore, Tussaud stands as a contrast to d’Aelders’ ideals due to her personal experience and loss tied to the murder of the Swiss Guards in the name of liberty.

Throughout the tumultuous events of the Revolution, Tussaud and Curtius continued the work of the Salon de Cire. Wax-modeling was the center of Tussaud’s life from an early age, and through the work she completed at the Salon de Cire, her models offer a unique glance into the history of the Revolution. According to the memoirs, “During Madame Tussaud’s residence with her uncle, she had early imbibed the greatest taste for the art in which he so much excelled, but in which his niece so closely imitated him, that it was impossible to distinguish as to the degrees of excellence between their performances.”<sup>19</sup> Tussaud was responsible for modeling several prominent figures during this time (models that still exist to this day) including Benjamin Franklin and the mythical Comte de Lorges.<sup>20</sup> The making of such wax models was labor-intensive with a complicated process involving a plaster-of-Paris mold of the model’s head, followed by a clay model of the mold, and the pouring of the wax into the mold in two parts.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Etta Palm d’Aelders, *Lettre d’une amie de la veritie*, in *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795*, ed. Harriet Branson Applewhite et, al, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 68.

<sup>19</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 17.

<sup>20</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 117.

<sup>21</sup> Pamela M. Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks* (London: Hambledon and London: 2003), 28.

Skin color tint was added, as were human teeth and individual strands of human hair that could take up to fourteen days to complete.<sup>22</sup>

Tussaud's attention to detail is even more remarkable to behold during the later years of the Revolution when she had no choice but to take control of the modeling completely on her own. As Kate Berridge notes, "The fact that Curtius was politically active, with a role in the National Guard and a member of the Jacobin Club, meant that it fell to Marie to keep the exhibition running smoothly from day to day."<sup>23</sup> With the Salon de Cire used by the public as a visual representation of current events as well as a source of entertainment, political instability left Tussaud, "working all hours on an ever-shortening cycle of removals and renewals."<sup>24</sup> This level of responsibility would have been daunting, yet Tussaud's memoirs do not reflect upon any manner of personal exhaustion. Instead, she mentions prominent names of the time as subjects of her modeling, emphasizing the claim she makes earlier in the memoir of her "degrees of excellence" in wax modeling.

Between 1789 and 1795 Tussaud modeled and displayed a variety of prominent figures of the Revolution. Her visual contribution to history and her own anecdotes within the memoirs as to the behavior of men such as Marat, a radical revolutionary journalist<sup>25</sup>, offer a unique insight into their character. As a wax modeler, Tussaud focuses primarily on appearance and state of dress of various figures, characterizing their outward persona with their actions during the Revolution. She describes Marat as follows, "He had often dined at M. Curtius's with Robespierre...on those occasions Marat would be gay and jocose...Madame Tussaud states that he appeared extremely nervous, and very cowardly; the slightest noise...would put him quit

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<sup>22</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 124.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc, 2010), 53.

[quite] in a tremor... whenever he heard a strange voice, he would run away and hide himself.”<sup>26</sup> Tussaud uses his behavior at Curtius’s as a contrast to the crimes she accuses him of in her memoirs, where she states, “He made a calculation of how many people could be killed in one day, and decided that number might amount to 260,000... He was one of the greatest promoters of the massacres which took place in the prisons in September.”<sup>27</sup> Tussaud’s use of contrast in describing Marat comes from the unique perspective of a witness who interacted with him in a simple, domestic setting, allowing weaknesses of his character to be exposed. In placing this contrast between Tussaud’s perception of Marat’s nervous disposition with her accusation of his “cruelties”<sup>28</sup>, Tussaud insinuates that Marat is morally weak. Her interactions with Marat at the domestic level create a new perspective to evaluating his character, despite Tussaud’s own Royalist bias. Her descriptions of Marat interacting with others non-politically portrays him with a distinctly human element—he emerges as a real person with fears and reactions to those fears that may offer an alternative explanation for his political radicalism. Tussaud also claims responsibility for modeling Marat’s death mask directly from his waterlogged corpse in the bath, a model that is still on display today at Madame Tussaud’s in London.<sup>29</sup> The resemblance of her model to David’s famous painting *The Death of Marat* have led some art historians to speculating that Tussaud’s model influenced the iconic painting.<sup>30</sup>

Tussaud’s model of Marat’s killer, Charlotte Corday, served as a significant contribution to the portrayal of the near-mythical young woman. As Elizabeth Kindleberger observes, scholars who study Corday’s story are split between two camps. One of these groups “centered

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<sup>26</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 197

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>29</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 149.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

on the background, motivation, actions, and impact of a historical figure...Romantics, contemplating their own reactions to her, imagined what she *must* have been like.”<sup>31</sup> As a contrast, other scholars have, “little interest in such an unrepresentative figure...they find that reactions to [the events] surrounding Corday’s murder of Marat constitute a rich site of the intersection, indeed, the collision of gender and politics.”<sup>32</sup> Tussaud’s observations of Corday fulfill neither of these scholarly expectations. She does not imagine what Corday’s character is like simply based on her crime, nor does she focus on the political implications of what was done specifically in terms of Corday as a woman. Instead, Tussaud serves as a unique eye-witness to both the murder of Marat and the character of Corday in prison. Tussaud writes, “[Madame Tussaud] was brought to the scene of action a short time after it happened and took the cast...She visited Charlotte Corday in the Concergerie Prison, and found her a most interesting personage; she was tall and finely formed...her manners were extremely pleasing, and her deportment particularly graceful...fond of history, she had made it much her study, and naturally became deeply interested in the politics of her country.”<sup>33</sup> Tussaud’s observations on Corday strike a balance between behavior and appearance that is characteristic throughout her memoirs. Though not without bias, referring to Marat as a “monster”, and Corday as “heroic”, Tussaud’s description of Corday in prison highlight important characteristics of Corday that are missing in the scholarship described by Kindleberger. Tussaud’s bias in the matter, demonizing Marat and making Corday the savior is reflective of her anti-Revolutionary leanings throughout her memoirs. Due to the violence that affected her and her family during the Tuileries massacre, Tussaud appears to inadvertently blame revolutionaries such as Marat for her sufferings through

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<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth R. Kindleberger, “Charlotte Corday in Text and Image: A Case Study in the French Revolution and Women’s History,” *French Historical Studies* 18, no 4 (1994), 938.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 340

her memoirs by referring to Marat as, “[having] laboured under a species of insanity... capable of such brutal atrocities.”<sup>34</sup> Tussaud’s emphasis on the negative qualities of Marat and the positive attributes of Corday serve to further distance herself from the Revolution.

As a wax modeler, Tussaud brings to her memoirs a keen eye for physical detail that reveals personality and character. Through her place as a modeler and artist at a highly popular venue, Tussaud received a rare chance to observe the figures that brought the Revolution into existence. Through her anecdotes of the figures she modeled and who visited her home, Tussaud provides a different picture of numerous important personalities of the Revolution. Her significance, through the medium of wax, provided the general public with popular entertainment as well as a visual representation of the Revolution. As her uncle fought for the Revolution as part of the National Guard,<sup>35</sup> Tussaud represented the Revolution through the visual portrayal of Marat, Corday, and others.

Throughout her memoirs, Tussaud makes it quite clear that she has a deep connection to the Royalist cause, and is quick to justify the presence of figures such as Marat and Philippe Egalite, a member of the royal family who detested the Ancien Regime, at the Grosholtz dinner table. Her memoirs state, “Therefore, for the sake of self-preservation, for that of his family and his property, [Curtius] adhered, in appearance, to that side which he knew must prevail; although he always declared to Madame Tussaud and her mother, that if he proclaimed himself as much it would not serve the king a single iota, nor retard for an instant the thunderbolt that threatened him and his with annihilation.”<sup>36</sup> Curtius’s motivations for being, as Tussaud claims, “a Royalist at heart” are multi-faceted and survival-focused. For Tussaud, who is writing her memoirs after

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<sup>34</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 197.

<sup>35</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 124.

<sup>36</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 155

the danger of the Terror, her motivations for her Royalist persona appear to be related to personal ties to the royal family, as well as economic prosperity during the Ancien Regime.

Tussaud's ties to the royal family are overtly detailed within her memoirs, and her experiences related to living at Versailles are given particular attention. According to Tussaud, "Madame Elizabeth, the king's sister and being desirous herself of learning the art of modeling in wax, Madame Tussaud was appointed to teach that princess, who, from having her young protégée often with her, became so attached to her, that she applied to M. Curtius to permit his niece to reside at the palace of Versailles, Madame Elizabeth desiring to have the constant enjoyment of Madame Tussaud's society."<sup>37</sup> While there has been some scholarly debate regarding whether or not Tussaud actually spent time in Versailles<sup>38</sup>, her presentation of various royal figures, including Marie Antoinette, is highly sympathetic to the royal family as a whole. In the memoirs, Tussaud describes the queen as, "combining every attribute which could be united to constitute loveliness in a woman; possessing youth, beauty, grace, and elegance, to a degree, perhaps never surpassed, a sweetness and fascination in her manners, enchanting all who ever had the happiness to be greeted by the beam of her smile."<sup>39</sup> Again, the publication date of Tussaud's memoirs is key to her positive portrayal of the Queen. If Tussaud had dared publish such a defense of the Queen during the Reign of Terror, she would have, without a doubt, been executed.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the freedom of publishing her memoirs in 1838 allows her to openly share any

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<sup>37</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud's Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 21

<sup>38</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 63

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>40</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, (Upper Saddle River, Pearson Education Inc 2010), 80.

sort of royalist point of view, especially considering she published her memoirs in England, a country that warred against France during Napoleon's rule.<sup>41</sup>

Tussaud's presentation of herself as a Royalist appears to stem, according to the memoirs, from a deeply personal connection between Tussaud and the Princess Elizabeth. After being called to Versailles to be Elizabeth's wax-modeling tutor, Tussaud appears to have grown quite attached in friendship to the princess. "Had not the rank and misfortunes of Madame Elizabeth claimed the sympathy of posterity, her virtues alone so endeared her to those who knew her, that her memory would have still been indelibly impressed upon the hearts of those who enjoyed the charm of her friendship...in fact, so amiable does Madame Tussaud represent her to have been, that even at this distant period she cannot speak of her [Princess Elizabeth] without shedding tears—the merited tributes of affection and gratitude for the numerous kindnesses she had personally experienced from the Princess."<sup>42</sup> A deep personal connection between Tussaud and the Princess appears to have affected Tussaud for all of her life. The circumstances of the royal family after the Revolution (with the overthrow of the monarchy and execution of most of the royals) appears to have also played a factor in the overly sympathetic portrayal of the monarchy by Tussaud. Tussaud also states that, "like all the French royal family she [Madame Elizabeth] was particularly partial to the Swiss."<sup>43</sup> Thus Tussaud's distancing of herself from the Revolution by emphasizing her foreignness also goes hand in hand with her Royalist persona. By declaring herself a Royalist through the memoirs, and her patriotic uncle "a Royalist at heart" she creates for herself a far distance from the radical acts of violence during

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>42</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud's Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 26.

the Revolution, especially since some of these prominent acts of violence were directed against the royal family.

Tussaud and Curtius also appeared to benefit from the Ancien Regime financially, which would hold considerable influence in shaping Tussaud's opinion on the Revolution. According to an anonymous, contemporary source, during the Ancien Regime, "Curtius's receipts were 300 francs daily."<sup>44</sup> According to Kate Berridge, Curtius played on the monetary divisions of the Estate system in France with a "tiered admission system" that charged a simple fee of two sous for admission, and an extra twelve if you wanted to be closer to the wax models.<sup>45</sup> His system appears to have worked well for him financially, and the waxworks became, "highly recommended in the growing number of consumer oriented publications in which there was a new emphasis on fashionable pursuits... It became a must-see destination, and was very much a la mode."<sup>46</sup> Curtius and Tussaud benefitted greatly from this consumer culture, and could easily adapt their waxworks to the public opinion of the moment, allowing their exhibit to stay fresh and popular. However, with the collapse of the Ancien Regime, the egalitarian ideals propagated from the Revolution, and the economic crisis in 1792-93, the waxworks began to suffer financially. Marie was forced, at one point, to take out a loan of over 60,000 livres in order to keep the exhibition afloat.<sup>47</sup> She was also forced, due to a lack of customers, to abandon Curtius' tiered admission system and reduce the price for admission overall.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, despite her personal attachments to the royal family, Tussaud's Royalist stance in her memoirs can also inherently be tied to her financial difficulties during the Revolution. As a more financially stable member of the Third Estate, Tussaud did not need the abolition of the Estate system in order to

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<sup>44</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 28.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 130.

prosper, and based on her financial success during the Ancien Regime, appears to have enjoyed the decadence of that period far more than the austere circumstances of the new French Republic.

Finally, Madame Tussaud's fourth persona that she embraces through her memoirs is that of a public figure. Through the numerous people she claims to have met, from Queen Marie Antoinette to Voltaire to Emperor Joseph II, Tussaud appears to be right in the middle of the Revolution as it is occurring. She does not shy away from mentioning what she considers the immoral characters of the Revolution, such as Robespierre and Marat, yet in condemning them she obviously aligns herself with a Royalist point of view. Still, as a wax modeler, she uses these notorious figures to her benefit post-Revolution, in her waxworks in London. The death mask she took of Marat in the bath is still on display at the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's in London today.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the mention of such historical figures appears to have brought her material success.

According to Kate Berridge, throughout Tussaud's time in France, it was Curtius that received the majority of the acclaim for the Salon de Cire.<sup>50</sup> However, by the time Tussaud emigrated to England, Curtius was dead, and she was running a struggling business on her own. Thus, emigration to a country not ravaged by Revolution, a country where she could establish for herself a public image outside of Curtius' reputation in France, was a golden economic opportunity. Tussaud herself states this in the final pages of her memoir: "She was much rejoiced at being able to visit that country which had always provided a safe and hospitable retreat to the foreigner; where the stability of government has ever been such as to lull all fears of revolution, with consequent scenes of carnage...and not only have her works received the meed of praise from its inhabitants, but her talents have been justly appreciated by a generous and discerning

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<sup>49</sup> Kate Berridge, *Waxing Mythical: The Life and Legend of Madame Tussaud* (London: John Murray, 2006), 149.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

public...she has had the satisfaction to find, that after a residence of thirty-six years in England...her exhibition has become more than ever a favorite and fashionable resort.”<sup>51</sup>

Tussaud herself ties some of her reasons for distancing herself from the Revolution in a single paragraph: an emphasis on her foreignness, her personal experience with the violence of the Revolution, and the economic opportunities England provides that a post-Revolutionary France does not. Tussaud’s persona as a public figure, presented in this paragraph as well as the various anecdotes throughout the memoir, caters to a curious and receptive English audience that she praises at the end of her memoirs, for they are the key to her economic success.

Madame Tussaud is a figure of great complexity. Though born in France, her family was of Swiss descent that she later reclaims as a way of distancing herself from the traumatic events of the Revolution. Though of the Third Estate, she is not a *femme sans-culotte*, instead she sticks to a Royalist leanings and loyalty to the Ancien Regime. Benefitting far more from the free-spending of the Ancien Regime than the radical Jacobin regime, Tussaud is not an Etta Palm d’Aelders nor the royalty she holds such close alliance to. Thus, she straddles the line between a polarized sense of scholarship regarding gender and the French Revolution. She embraces four different personas to distance herself from the events of the Revolution and any sort of radical or republican political tie, yet mentions infamous figures like Marat throughout her memoirs. Reaping the benefits of the radical history of the Revolution through her waxworks in London, she remains loyal to the royal family overall, effectively presenting herself as an unwilling participant in the Revolution through the deeds of those she immortalized in wax.

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<sup>51</sup> Marie Tussaud, *Madame Tussaud’s Memoirs and Reminiscences of France, forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution*, ed. Francis Herve (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 505.

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