

From Glory to Darkness-the Tragedy Faith of the French Revolution

The Book Review of *The Gods Will Have Blood*

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ABSTRACT

Through the text analysis of Anatole France's "terror of the French Revolution" and the novel the gods will have blood, as well as the concrete performance of terror of the French Revolution, this paper studies the historical, economic, social and accidental factors that lead to the historical tragedy.

Keywords: *French Revolution, factors, historical*

1. INTRODUCTION

Anatole France's historical novel *The Gods Will Have Blood* is a very good example to study the history and the silhouette of social life during the period after the France Revolution. In fact, the corruption of the French Revolution from 1792 was not only an incident but also a fate. It was a trial-and-error approach to the ultimate ideals of the French revolution, led astray by the remnants of centuries of monarchy and the over-radical Jacobins. The Reign of Terror of The French Revolution has become a lesson for the future Revolution and reform of France and other countries. It can be said that this period of history played an important role in the repeated political reform of France. It worked like a red line and warning of both the cult of personality and the abuse of law. However, although this period had positive influence on the future, it came at the cost of nearly 50,000 deaths, numerous family disasters and a long period of trauma. The Comite de Salut Public was funded to deal with "enemy of people" and sentence innocent people to death. For example, "The following week, Évariste and his Section moved off the heads of forty-five men and eighteen women [1]." The Revolutionary Tribunal turned to a killing machine.

2. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF ARTICLE

To start with, the structure of this book shows the fate of and author's attitude to this revolution. The author shows a rather pessimistic attitude in this book. To

express the fatalism of the Terror of the French Revolution, he used a creepy cyclic structure. It seems that after Robespierre's death, the sun light returned to this country. However, with the development of the last two chapters, an atmosphere similar to that of the previous chapter quietly enveloped the article. Whether it is the "happy and excited" crowd watching the execution, the modified critical painting in the window of the print shop, or the cry "Down with the Marat [2]" in the theater, the sunny Paris is drawn into the shadow of the Paris of 1792-1794, full of terror. The last part of Elodie's instructions to her lover Philip were exactly the same as those she had given to Gamelin in Chapter 11[1]. The same words filled with love and passion spoken to different people in different times have put the last chain on the cycle of this novel. At this moment, the real Paris overlaps with the distant vision of 1792-94. After Robespierre's death, "Paris in all her spacious beauty lay smiling in the sunshine [1]", was again enveloped by a similar terror. The author expresses his view through this structure, he does not think that Robespierre's death means the end of terror, but the beginning of a new terror. He had good reason to be worried. Because the mechanism of the occurrence and development of the reign of terror is not accidental, but structural.

The book *The Gods Will Have Blood* also shows this kind of idea that the tragedy of the corruption of the French Revolution didn't just come from coincidence through its story telling. What's brilliant is that, its main character Évariste Gamelin on one side represent a huge

group of fanatical patriotic French youth who ready to die for their country, but also, this character symbolizes Robespierre. This ingenious design enables the novel, on the one hand, to depict The Terror of The French Revolution's social mass paintings, and on the other hand, to criticize Robespierre from an unprecedented Angle. At the same time, a considerable amount of ink is devoted to the social atmosphere and mass psychology of the period. Through these descriptions, he points out another root cause of the tragedy, the nature of the French. An over-zealous nationalism can easily combine with patriotism and nationalism to push revolutions to extremes. A broad and vaguely defined "enemy of the people" was set as a scapegoat. And the reasons how the French Revolution came to the terror and blood would be discuss later in this paper.

3. HISTORICAL REASON ANALYSIS

One of the most important historical reason is the remains of the monarchy, which greatly influence this republic and its running logic and management patterns were still rooted in people's heart. On the one hand, most of the officers worked in the republic's government were the same group of people who serviced the monarchy before the revolution, especially those in the Revolutionary Tribunal. "The old monarchical idea of reasons of State still inspired the Revolutionary Tribunal. Its judges were moulded by eight centuries of absolute power, and it was by the principle of divine right that the Tribunal even now tried and sentenced the enemies of Liberty [1]." The brutal philosophy of killing still deeply affects the country. The bloody past has not gone away, and the blood that has flowed for centuries has made the new Republic unafraid to use torture to resolve crises. Its people always had a balance in their mind that, did the republic produce more blood than the monarchy produced? The history of monarchy increased people's tolerance of terror and torture. And in some way, trained people's cruel sides. Gamelin thought "the Royal monster kept his power by imprisoning four hundred thousand people, by hanging fifteen thousand, by breaking three thousand on the wheel every year and yet the Republic hesitates to sacrifice a few hundred heads to secure its domination [1]." This partly cultivated the social psychology of the Terror of the French Revolution.

4. DIRECT REASON-- THE JACOBINS CAME TO POWER

The direct reason for The Terror of the French Revolution is that the Jacobins came to power. After the overthrow of the monarchy in 1792, the Jacobins began to dominate the National Convention. "The National Convention soon split into factions over the fate of the king. The two most important were the Girondins and the Mountain. Both were members of the Jacobin club [2]." This radical club overthrew the Girondins and

imposed a dictatorship through the Comite de Salut Public. Later, the leader of Jacobins, Robespierre even sent his old friend Danton and Chaumette, who later disagreed with him and turned away from him to the guillotine. Robespierre came to a total power in 1793. He was a pure revolutionary. And Robespierre had always dreamed of a virtuous republic. On the whole, the aim of virtue republic and virtue politics, which Robespierre pursued, was a kingdom of eternal justice. In his Principles of Political Morality, he said: "What is the object of our pursuit? This is the peaceful enjoyment of freedom and equality, this is the kingdom of eternal justice." In Robespierre's Virtue Republic, public virtue and human morality were homogeneous with democratic and republican government, law, order, people, freedom, equality, justice, religious belief, happiness, revolution and other issues [3]. Ethics and morality were closely linked with each other. Such political ideals do help to raise the moral standards of citizens and officials and stabilize the social environment. In addition to the need for coercive force to carry out state and political rule, it also needs virtue to maintain. But if the state and political virtue, form political morality, political anesthetization, will inevitably lead to the utopia of politics, leaving space for the expansion of political violence. The ideal of the Republic of Virtue provided the theoretical basis for public power to flourish in the realm of private morality and for political power and state violence to interfere in the lives of individuals. In other words, this ideal became the theory support for the Terror of The French Revolution. Robespierre's Utopia became a hell.

5. CHALLENGES FRANCE FACED

The challenge France faced also pushed it towards a much more radical side. "The situation was disastrous...two-thirds of France either invaded or in revolt [1]." There's fire within this country. Some of France's major provincial cities, including Lyons and Marseilles, also began to break away from the central authority [2]. They didn't want a strong central but a scattered republic, neither, they didn't like such a powerful and bloody leader. In this case, they choose to turn away the Pairs. Also, in the meantime, there's still small amount of royalists exist in this country. Most of them were noble, and they missed the king and they sweet old days. In this case, they wanted the republic to disappear. Domestic turmoil was paralleled by a foreign crisis. This double crisis heightens the danger facing the Republic, which is under attack from both sides. Early in 1793, after Louis XVI had been executed, much of Europe—an informal coalition of Austria, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Britain, and the Dutch Republic—was pitted against France [2]. The initial purpose of the Comite de Salut Public was to deal with the revolution inside the republic and encourage people to join the army and fight.

6. ECONOMIC CRISIS

The economic crisis was also a very important reason for the Terror of the French Revolution. “The Revolution had killed business completely. Food was scarce and beyond their means [1].” Food riots were very serious that it could almost influence all the people living inside this republic. “The Convention had decreed the maximum: hence corn and flour had instantly disappeared. Like the Israelites in the desert, the people had to get up before dawn if they wanted to eat [1].” In the 18th century, lower-class families had to spend a little more than half of their income on bread. On the eve of the Revolution, the proportion rose to 88% [4]. It affected the purchasing power of the masses and led to industrial crises, factory closures and rampant unemployment, which lasted from before and after the French Revolution. In the two years before the Jacobins came to power, the food crisis was exacerbated by intense foreign warfare and defeat. Due to this hard situation, on April 11 and May 4, due to the serious food shortage and the increasing urban and rural riots, the National Convention passed the mandatory bond circulation law and the price restriction law [4]. However, these measures were also quite weak in the face of the food crisis. On the one hand, the situation on the battlefield continues to worsen, adding to the panic. “Paris within reach of the Austrian cannon, without money, without bread [1].” On the other hand, counterfeit money runs rampant in the market, causing chaos. “Business was being ruined by the large number of forged notes that were being circulated [1].” And this crime was hard to stop, those counterfeit notes were coming from every cellar, Swiss and England.

Under this situation, the problem of food scarcity and both the democratic and foreign crisis exacerbates social conflicts and leads to a huge increase in the cost of living for people. As a result, social sentiment is relatively negative, and people are in urgent need of some targets to vent their hatred. That’s how the scapegoat, the enemy of people, appeared and people’s will perfectly combine with the government’s will and then formed a Terror. People blamed those “enemy of people” for every negative event and situation, including moral failure, food shortages and soaring prices, and foreign military failures. For example, Gamelin believed that “the scarcity we’re suffering from is caused by the monopolists and speculators who starve the people and conspire with our enemies outside the country to turn the citizens against the Republic and to destroy liberty [1].” This is far simpler than blaming the system. It also released people’s pressure of social frustration they faced. Then, again, they had confidence to live and to their republic. They believed that, if they could sweep out those enemy of people, they could live a much better life and the republic would be great. This gave them energy to report. “This multitude which the zeal of the

informers has crowded into the prisons [1].” At the same time, they stand on high moral ground compared to the enemies of the people. They became the possessors of virtue and thus became sublime. This made people addicted to it.

7. CULT OF LEADERS

At the meantime, the cult of leaders was spread among the society, and this pushed the situation to even more radical side. Many people had blind faith that either Marat or Robespierre could save France from internal and external threats. In part because Louis XVI was executed by the Jacobins. Hatred of the monarchy was naturally transformed into admiration for the leader of the republic. On the other hand, unlike in other countries, the worship of French leaders coincided with the worship of Enlightenment philosophers like Rousseau. In other words, they sometimes see political leaders as thought leaders. They invested their worship of Enlightenment philosophers in political leaders. At this time, political leaders have a dual identity. This dual identity, especially that of a thought leader, made the cult of personality popular in the Republic. At the same time, common resolve against the enemies of the people has further undermined people’s judgment by automatically aligning themselves with their leaders’ positions. And then, the political leader was covered under a dazzling halo, people could not see their dark side, but support them without thinking twice. The atmosphere of fanaticism and blindness intensified the Terror of the French Revolution. For example, Marat was called “the Friend of the people”. In every theatre the bust of Marat was to be seen [1]. And after Marat’s death, there they all stood, like a flock of lost sheep. Sadly they were thinking: “Marat who was never mistaken, who saw through everything, who dared reveal everything! ... We’ve lost our counsellor, our champion, our friend [1].” And Robespierre was called “The Incorruptible”, and he had “all-revealing insight [1]” to see any crime.

8. RESULT

The result was clear and painful. Patriotism, combined with hatred, fueled the terror. They believed they were doing what was good for the country. They wanted the republic to be so strong that no plot could harm it. At the same time this patriotism was combined with hatred of the nobility. Coupled with the catalytic effect of the Revolution, the social atmosphere of this era was an extreme passion. This was reflected in people’s passion for participating in social construction. This was reflected in people’s enthusiasm to watch the execution of a public enemy. An immense crowd of joyfully curious spectators pressed round the scaffold awaiting the arrival of the laden tumbrils [1]. It was also reflected in the fact that people are willing to die for the sake of the motherland, and are willing to exclude themselves from the ranks of human beings for the sake

of the future and development of the motherland. When Gamelin knew the failure of Robespierre, even he could foresee his own death, he still said "I have nothing to reproach myself with. What I've done, I'd do again [1]." In general, public opinion had no way of directly causing systemic bloodshed. But added to the ideal Virtuous Republic's legal system, hatred was translated into reality.

Twisted laws became killing machines. This was the era of irrational justice. The law lost its standard and was thus abused. The Revolutionary Tribunal even became like a show court. "The Revolutionary Tribunal was like William Shakespeare's show who introduces crude buffoonery in the midst of his most tragic scenes [1]." A characteristic of the Jacobin reign of terror, which began in September 1793, was the combination of vague and extensive laws and the judicial powers delegated to the French people, which became the main way for the revolutionary government to deal with the social crisis. The Law on Suspects devolves judicial authority to the public, and ordinary people have the right to dispose of the personal freedom of "suspects", which will greatly magnify the irrationality of justice [5]. As the later Utopian socialist and French historian Louis Blanc put it, "more than 210,000 arms were handed over to the reign of terror [6]." Compared with the "suspects" in the "Law on Suspects", the "public enemy of the people" in the Law of Prairial has an even wider extension and a bigger hitting surface. Any person who harms or has not harmed only the possibility of destroying the revolution is included in the category of "enemy of the people". The Revolutionary Tribunal under the Law of Prairial was more comprehensively combined with the Revolution and the reign of terror, and became a tool for punishing "counter-revolutionaries" and even a tool for Jacobin's dictatorship. The judicial rationality and judicial neutrality due to the judiciary were basically lost. "Yet salutary, form of justice, which would no longer be administered by gowned pedants weighing pros and cons at their leisure in their gothic balances, but by sans-culottes judging by patriotic inspiration and seeing the truth in a flash of illumination [1]." What's funny is that Robespierre deprived the "enemies of the people" of the

protection of the law, took away their pretrial system and their defenders, and in the end in 1794, this simple and crude justice came back to him.

9. CONCLUSION

It was grown from a decaying monarchy and difficult political and economic environment at home and abroad, led by an immature ideal of "virtuous republic", carrying the patriotism and hatred of wildfires, using irrational legal trial scapegoat – "enemies of the people", the cult of personality grows out of the blind deformity monster. Its causes were so complex, accidental and structural that no single person or group of people is to blame. This doomed this period of extremely complex and extremely volatile social life and social mood. But enough for posterity to draw lessons from.

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