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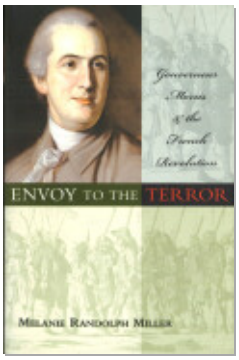
Envoy to the Terror

Melanie R. Miller



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Chapter 3

"Ces Indignes Français"

The impact of eighteenth-century Paris on a man who had spent his life in America was fully appreciated by Benjamin Franklin. On September 5, 1789, the ailing Franklin wrote to an acquaintance in Paris:

> I am sorry my Friend Morris failed in the Attention he ought to have shown you but I hope you will excuse it when you consider that an American transported from the tranquil Villages of his Country and set down in the Tourbillon of such a great City as Paris must necessarily be for some Days half out of his Senses.

Morris also described Paris as "a sort of Whirlwind, which turns [a man] round so fast that he can see Nothing."[1] He was deeply impressed by the grandeur of Paris and the apparent prosperity of the countryside, but, like Jefferson, he was not blind to the poverty and oppression they reflected. Paris's "Splendor is owing entirely to Despotism and must be diminished by the adoption of a better Government," he would tell Lafayette, and this conviction tempered his awe.[2] One beautiful morning in early May, he walked to the top of an aqueduct to take in the view of a well-cultivated valley, villages, and Paris in the distance.

> I stand at this Moment on a vast Monument of human Pride and behold every Gradation from Wretchedness to Magnificence in the Scale of human Existence. Oh! my Country, how infinitely preferable that equal Partition of Fortune's Gifts which you enjoy! Where none are Vassals, none are Lords, but all are Men.[3]

Yet, in spite of his perorations on the virtues of the new American republic, Morris was soon viewed as conservative, for he was skeptical of people who had "all that romantic Spirit, and all those romantic Ideas of

Government, which happily for America, we were cured of before it was too late."[4] As he made the rounds of his new acquaintances—as many as eight calls a day—he was naturally drawn into the political conversations engrossing all of the salons. He quickly concluded that the French were not ready for republican government, and said so. This was not welcome to his hosts. Mme de Lafayette took an immediate dislike to Morris, and told him he was an aristocrat.[5]

Jefferson, however, was friendly to the new arrival, and regularly invited him for dinner. The amount of time they spent together attests to their enjoyment of each other's company. They talked politics, finance, and viniculture, and took walks around Paris, during which Jefferson pointed out examples of architecture that had missed the less knowledgeable (and less interested) Morris. They had their profiles drawn, and visited a thread factory. When Morris was sick in June, Jefferson kindly stopped by twice to check up on him, bringing him a newspaper to read.[6] By July, when Jefferson wrote letters of introduction for Morris to his friends in London, he was unusually effusive, telling his close friend Maria Cosway:

> Receive then into your peace and grace the bearer hereof Mr. Morris, a countryman and friend of mine of great consideration in his own country, and who deserves to be so everywhere. Peculiarly gifted with fancy and judgment, he will be qualified to taste the beauties of your canvas.[7]

He wrote in a more sedate manner to other friends that Morris was a "gentleman of great talents," and "peculiarly distinguished in our councils."[8]

Jefferson even grew comfortable enough to suggest a business proposition involving a purchase of land "at the Falls of Potowmack," in the hopes that the new federal capital would be located nearby. He offered to go in shares with Morris and William Short, but Morris was reluctant, probably because Robert Morris still hoped that his holdings in Delaware, the "Delaware Works," would be chosen for the capital. ("[T]hose cursed Works," Gouverneur was calling them by 1791.)[9]

Morris clearly admired Jefferson, but he was cautious. The New Yorker did not believe in the general goodness of human nature, but on an individual basis, he was trusting. By contrast, while Jefferson professed "much confidence in the good sense of man," he was much more likely to believe the worst of individuals. After an evening of discussing "Characters, Politics &c." with Jefferson, Morris wrote:

> I think he does not form very just Estimates of Character but rather assigns too many to the humble Rank of Fools, whereas in Life the Gradations are infinite and each Individual has his peculiarities of Fort and Feeble.[10]

Still, he liked Jefferson, and told Robert that Jefferson "commands very great Respect" in France, "merited by good Sense and good Intentions.

> The french, who pique themselves on possessing the Graces, very readily excuse in others the want of them; and to be an Etranger (like Charity) covers a multitude of Sins . . . [A]n American Minster at this Court gains more than he looses by preserving his Originality—for the Rest, Mr. Jefferson lives well keeps a good Table and excellent Wines which he distributes freely and by his Hospitality to his Countrymen here possesses very much their good Will.[11]

Their different natures did not mean significantly different appraisals of France, at least not at first. Jefferson considered the king weak, though he was "honest and wishes the good of his people." Morris called Louis "an honest and good man," but called him "small beer."[12] Foreign minister Montmorin received a similar estimation: Jefferson said Montmorin was "weak tho a most worthy character. He is indolent and inattentive too in the extreme." Morris agreed that Montmorin had "more understanding than People in general imagine, and he means well, very well. But he means it feebly."[13]

They both criticized Lafayette, but Morris was much more pessimistic about Lafayette's ability to steer the Revolution, and events would confirm his judgment. Jefferson, though he recognized Lafayette's "canine appetite" for fame, believed Lafayette had "sound genius," and viewed him as the Revolution's standard bearer. He would have great difficulty reconciling that belief with continuing endorsement of the Revolution after Lafayette fell. Morris, by contrast, quickly lost faith that Lafayette could reform France. By July 1789 he described Lafayette as a "Lover of Freedom from Ambition, of which there are two Kinds, the one born of Pride, the other of Vanity, and his partakes most of the latter."[14]

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In the spring of 1789, opinion divided roughly into two "parties": those who favored reform were the "Patriots"; those who resisted it were the

"aristocrats." Although his views were too moderate for his Patriot friends, Morris favored reform, and sharply criticized the reactionary nobility. "The *Noblesse* who at this Day possess neither the Force the Wealth nor the Talents of the Nation have rather opposed Pride than Argument to their Assailants," Morris wrote. "Hugging the dear Privileges of Centuries long elapsed, they have clamored about the Court, while their Adversaries have possessed themselves fully of the public Confidence every where."[15] Nor was he impressed by his new noble acquaintances. He disdained their obsession with gambling, an occupation he found "[d]ull Drudging." On a visit to the duchesse d'Orléans, he watched in disgust as the guests, including a bishop, amused themselves in a chapel by surreptitiously putting lighted candles in each others' pockets, with "immoderate laughter . . . This Scene must be very edifying to the Domestics who are opposite to us and the Villagers who worship below." During dinner he noticed people at the windows. "Ah!" he wrote. "[D]id they but know how trivial the Conversation, how very trivial the Characters, their Respect would soon be changed into an Emotion extremely different."[16]

Nevertheless, Morris opposed the concept of voting *par tête*, at least once a constitution was formed. In March 1789, he made his first prediction of what would happen in France:

> [A]s the Constitution of this Country must inevitably undergo some Change which will lessen the monarchical Power, it is clear that unless the Nobles acquire a constitutional Sanction to some of their Privileges . . . the Result must be a Tyranny of one in the *first Instance*, or as a *Consequence* of the Anarchy which would result.[17]

France was a nation "not yet fitted by Education and Habit for the enjoyment of Freedom," Morris told John Jay. Jefferson was not much more optimistic, declaring that France would "in the course of the present year have as full a portion of liberty dealt out to them as the nation can bear at present, considering how uninformed the mass of their people is."[18]

Two days before the Estates General opened, Morris and Lafayette dined with Jefferson. Morris freely offered Lafayette advice on dealing with Necker and others.[19] Morris did not record what Jefferson said, but the American minister was alarmed by the prospect of an imminent breach in the Estates General and the difficulties it would pose for Lafayette, and afterward wrote Lafayette to recommend a two-house arrangement: one of the privileged (nobility and clergy) and one of the nonprivileged, because two

houses were necessary for "good legislation," something Morris also firmly believed. Jefferson carefully added that Lafayette should not consider his letter "as advice." Yet advice it certainly was.[20]

On the fifth of May 1789, the day the Estates General opened, Morris roused himself at four in the morning. Arriving at Versailles, he gave his ticket and found his seat in the crowded hall, and for four hours watched the representatives take their places. The warm reception of the king's speech brought tears to Morris's eyes, but there was no corresponding acclamation for the queen, and Morris was moved by seeing her appear to weep. He had pitied her the day before, watching the Procession for the Convocation, during which she was studiously ignored by the crowd. "I cannot help feeling the Mortification which the poor Queen meets with for I see only the Woman and it seems unmanly to break a Woman with Unkindness," he wrote, then, switching to a different train of thought, he went on, "Madame de C. tells me of a sprightly Reply of Madame Adelaide, the King's Aunt, who when the Queen in a Fit of Resentment, speaking of this Nation said 'Ces indignes Français' exclaimed: 'Dites indignés, Madame.'" ["These outrageous French!" "Say instead, 'these outraged French,' Madame."][21]

Morris listened without enthusiasm to the other speeches. At last it was over. "Here drops the Curtain on the first great Act of this Drama in which Bourbon gives Freedom," Morris wrote to Robert's wife. "His Courtiers seem to feel what he is insensible of, the Pang of Greatness going off."[22] Morris ate dinner in a nearby tavern and talked with members of the Third Estate, giving his frank opinion on the impasse with the other two orders, "telling them that I think when their Constitution is formed it will be well for them to vote *par Ordre*, but in forming it to vote *par Tête.*"[23]

With the opening spectacle over, he went back to business and social calls in Paris. On May 14, he returned to Versailles and wandered about the Petit Trianon, unimpressed and even repelled by its grandeur. He observed several delegates also walking around, and commented, "Perhaps there is not one of them who thinks of what ought to strike them all, that this Expense and others like this have occasioned their Meeting."[24]

Morris's attention was not entirely consumed by the political drama, and his diary describes other less momentous but entertaining experiences in this period, such as the request by the great sculptor Houdon to pose for the body of Washington. Though flattering, the request might still seem odd except for the fact that even with a wooden leg, Morris was reputed to have a "superb physical organization," and "[f]ew men ever equaled his commanding bearing."[25] Morris was amused, writing that he

was to undertake the "humble Employment of a Manakin. This is literally taking the Advice of St. Paul to be all Things to all Men." He also agreed to allow Houdon to make a bust of him "*to please himself*" (for Morris had no intention of purchasing it).[26]

He joined the Club Valois, which was chaired by the duc d'Orléans and whose members included reformers such as Lafayette, the provocateur abbé Sièyes, and Jefferson's friend, the *philosophe* marquis de Condorcet. Morris's sponsor was a royalist, the marquis de Boursac. The club was an excellent source of political news, and Morris stopped by regularly.[27]

In the meantime, the three orders remained deadlocked at Versailles. On June 2, Morris told a friend of Necker that the king should "cut the Knot which the States cannot untie, viz.: that he should at once prescribe to them the future Constitution and leave them to consider it." Jefferson was discouraged, and told Morris that he was "out of Hope of anything being done to Purpose by the States General." Morris commented to himself that Jefferson's disillusionment came

> from having too sanguine Expectation of a downright republican Form of Government. The literary People here, observing the abuses of their monarchical form, imagine that every Thing must go the better in Proportion as it recedes from the present Establishments and in their Closets they make Men exactly suitable to their Systems, but unluckily they are such Men as exist nowhere and least of all in France.[28]

Morris must have repeated the advice he had given Necker's friend, for Jefferson met with Lafayette the same day he saw Morris and they agreed that the king should take the initiative and offer the Estates a "charter of rights" for review and adoption. Jefferson wrote a draft, a single-page combination of a constitution and bill of rights.[29]

A week later, the Third Estate made a final appeal to the other Estates to join it and start preparing a constitution. Three days later, the dam cracked when parish priests deserted the First Estate. Soon the others followed suit, and on June 17, the National Assembly declared itself in existence. The king attempted to nullify the new Assembly, offering instead a progressive program of fiscal and government reform, but it was too late: the Assembly refused to dissolve. On June 27, Louis capitulated and ordered the three Estates to meet jointly. "[T]he sword has slipped out of the Monarch's hands, without his perceiving a tittle of the matter," Morris wrote to John Jay.[30]

The next night, Morris drove to Versailles for dinner. Lafayette was there, and told Morris that he "injure[d] the Cause, for that my Sentiments are continually quoted against the good Party." Morris did not hesitate:

> I seize this Opportunity to tell him that I am opposed to the Democracy from Regard to Liberty. That I see they are going Headlong to Destruction and would fain stop them if I could. That their Views respecting this Nation are totally inconsistent with the Materials of which it is composed, and that the worst Thing which could happen would be to grant their Wishes.

Lafayette replied that he knew his party was "mad," but was not the less determined to die with them. Morris fired back:

> I tell him I think it would be quite as well to bring them to their Senses and live with them. He says he is determined to resign his Seat, which Step I approve of because the Instructions by which he is bound are contrary to his Conscience.[31]

Morris had already concluded that "the materials for a revolution" in France were "very indifferent." "Every Body agrees that there is an utter Prostration of Morals," he wrote to Washington, "but this general position can never convey to an american Mind the Degree of Depravity." It was

> from such crumbling Matter that the great Edifice of Freedom is to be erected here. Perhaps like the Stratum of Rock which is spread under the whole Surface of their Country, it may harden when exposed to the Air; but it seems quite as likely that it will fall and crush the Builders.[32]

Two months later, reviewing the Assembly's preliminary constitution, Jefferson made a very different use of the masonry metaphor:

> You see that these are the materials of a superb edifice, and the hands which have prepared them, are perfectly capable of putting them together . . . While there are some men among them of very superior abilities, the mass possesses such a degree of good sense as enables them to decide well.[33]

Jefferson's optimism would not bear out.

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Although he was fascinated by Paris, Morris needed to go to London, but fell ill in mid-June with a bad cold. It "plagues my Head and Breast," he wrote, "sad Fruit of a Climate where Winter lingers in the Lap of Spring and even chills the Breast of Summer."[34] In the meantime, tensions in Paris were increasing. The king, worried by outbreaks of violence, ordered troops to Paris; by July 1 there were more than twenty thousand in the vicinity of the capital. There were food shortages, and the price of bread was at an all-time high for the eighteenth century. On July 2, Morris noticed a convoy of grain arriving in Paris under military escort.[35]

At Jefferson's house on July 4, he urged Lafayette to

> preserve if possible some constitutional Authority to the Body of Nobles as the only Means of preserving any Liberty for the People. The Current is setting so strong against the Noblesse that I apprehend their Destruction, in which will I fear be involved Consequences most pernicious, tho little attended to in the present Moment.[36]

Events would prove Morris's warning was sound. The noble privileges were abolished in August and their titles abolished the following year, and many of the nobles would flee and become involved in plots to restore the old regime. This threat, combined with the foreign military threat, would feed the Terror.

On the sixth of July, Morris fell ill again, and began a round of "Purgatives and Clysters" and bark with ipecac, prescribed by a doctor recommended by Jefferson. Perhaps as a result of these ministrations, he did not feel really well again after until the fourteenth, but he got out of his rooms on the twelfth, and visited the maréchal de Castries, minister of the navy.[37] The arrival of troops had heightened fears that the king would retract his concessions, and these fears seemed realized when Castries, in Morris's presence, learned that the king had dismissed Necker, an act Morris would later describe as "mad" (Louis soon conceded, and reappointed Necker). "The executive and aristocracy are now at [the National Assembly's] feet," Jefferson wrote triumphantly to Thomas Paine, and Morris thought the same, telling Castries that the Assembly was "now in complete and undisputed possession of the sovereignty." He advised Castries to

> warn the King of his Danger which is infinitely greater than he imagines. That his Army will not fight against the Nation. . . . That the Sword has fallen imperceptibly from his Hand . . . He makes no precise Answer to this but is very deeply affected.[38]

Morris then went to visit a friend at the Louvre, where he learned that the entire ministry had been dismissed in an attempt by Marie-Antoinette and the comte d'Artois (Louis's youngest brother, who would later help lead the counterrevolutionary émigrés) to retrieve royal authority from the Assembly. The comte de Narbonne was there, and spoke of joining his regiment in anticipation of what he believed to be the inevitable civil war, and of the resulting conflict between his duty and his conscience. Morris replied that he knew of "no Duty but that which Conscience dictates," adding dryly to himself, "I presume that his Conscience will dictate to join the strongest Side."

Morris's nonchalance probably reassured the others, who were frightened. He offered to escort one of the guests, the little abbé Bertrand, to his home. "His Terror as we go along is truly diverting. As we approach the Rue St. Honoré his Imagination magnifies the Ordinary Passengers into a vast Mob, and I can scarcely perswade him to trust his Eyes instead of his Fears." Leaving him off, Morris drove by a pitched battle between a "Body of Cavalry with their Sabres drawn" and a number of civilians throwing stones. After watching for a while, he went on to Jefferson's residence. On the way home he saw a mob breaking into shops for arms. "These poor Fellows have passed the Rubicon with a Witness," he observed. "Success or a Halter must now be their Motto."[39]

The next day, July 13, the outbreaks intensified as people roamed Paris to seize "Arms wherever they can find any." Morris put a green cockade in his hat—this symbol of support of the Third Estate was required if one was to be left alone on the street—and walked about to "observe as much as I can for I consider this as a fine Display of human Nature. It claims my Attention more than all the Palaces Paintings and Statues put together," he wrote to Carmichael.[40]

On Tuesday, July 14, Morris was busy with Robert's affairs all morning, and in the afternoon suffered another bout of fever and headache. He dragged himself over to meet with the businessman Laurent Le Couteulx, and learned of the taking of the Bastille. He was moved by the symbolism of the action, which he considered an "Instance of great Intrepidity."[41] Major Elnathon Haskell, an American living in Paris, wrote that night to William Constable:

> The Governour and Lt. Governour were put to death and their heads elevated upon long poles, which were carried through the principal streets and exhibited in Palais Royal (which Mr. Govr. Morris very properly calls the Liberty pole of France) before six o'clock this evening.[42]

Morris made this surprisingly sanguinary comment in the first flush of enthusiasm for what he considered righteous resistance to the king's advisers' attempts to subdue Paris and quash the National Assembly. He even asked Lafayette for a pass to visit the Bastille (seeing "[m]ore than I wish to see, as it stinks horribly").[43] Yet Morris had not actually *seen* the heads of Launey, the governor of the Bastille, or Flesselles, the municipal administrator of Paris (he had once met Flesselles), and he was greatly sobered by his first encounter with real brutality. On July 22, he was strolling under the Arcade of the Palais-Royal, waiting for his carriage to pick him up, when

> the Head and Body of Mr. de Foulon are introduced in Triumph. The Head on a Pike, the Body dragged naked on the Earth. Afterwards this horrible Exhibition is carried thro the different Streets. His Crime is to have accepted a Place in the Ministry. This mutilated Form of an old Man of seventy five is shewn to Bertier, his Son in Law, the Intendt. of Paris, and afterwards he also is put to death and cut to Pieces, the Populace carrying about the mangled Fragments with a Savage Joy. Gracious God what a People!

Lafayette had been unable to protect them from the fury of a mob at the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall), where they were seized. Foulon's mouth was stuffed with straw, apparently because he was rumored to have said that if the people were hungry, they could eat hay.[44]

That night, Morris did not sleep, but wrote all night, probably to distract himself. Just before five in the morning, exhausted, he began a letter to Mrs. Robert Morris. "If I should paint to you the Scenes which [illegible] witnessed you would from that Picture alone without further Assurance be convinced of the ardent Desire I feel to return to my native Country," he wrote. Telling her of what he had seen, he continued:

> I was never till now fully apprized of the mildness of American character. I have seen my countrymen enraged and threatening . . . But we know not what it is to slay the defenseless Victim who is in our Power. We cannot parade the Heads of our fellow Citizens and drag the man-

> gled Carcasses through the streets. We cannot feast our Eyes on such Spectacles. That these People were tyrannical I shall agree tho I do not know it. But to be executed without Trial without being heard and then with such a horrid Spectacle.[45]

Whether Jefferson had occasion that summer to look a severed head in the eye is unclear. He had tea with Morris the day after the incident, and Morris undoubtedly described it, for the same day Jefferson wrote to Jay of the people's "bloodthirsty spirit," but that the objects of the people's anger should have the sense "to keep out of the way."[46] Jefferson was a sensitive man, who believed in due process of law, and it is difficult not to speculate that had he actually seen the butchery of a man as Morris did, his views would have been tempered and perhaps radically changed. As it was, he was able to write on July 29 that he had

> observed the mobs with my own eyes in order to be satisfied of their objects, and declare to you that I saw so plainly the legitimacy of them, that I have slept in my house as quietly thro' the whole as I ever did in the most peaceable moments.

More facetiously, he told Maria Cosway, "The cutting off heads is become so much á [*sic*] la mode, that one is apt to feel of a morning whether their own is on their shoulders." [47]

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It was typical of Morris to have written about the horror at the Palais-Royal to a woman; his letters to his male friends could be eloquent but rarely discussed his private emotions. In fact, if it were not for Morris's keen appreciation of women, the story of his stay in Paris would make for duller reading. This is not simply because his pleasures provide a leavening of the risqué to his narrative. Morris's respect for the many remarkable women he met, and his willingness to give them full credit as wits and political thinkers, permit the scene to be viewed in fuller depth. In this he is a sharp contrast to Jefferson, who objected to women having anything to do with politics, and told Washington that the "desperate state" of France was due to the "omnipotence of an influence which, fortunately for the happiness of the sex itself, does not endeavor to extend itself in our country beyond the domestic line."[48]

"[T]his is the Woman's Country," Morris wrote, with no sign of disapproval, after reviewing a proposed contract with Jefferson's merchant friend, Ethis de Corny, and his wife, who was "acquainted with the whole."[49] Though Morris occasionally made humorous comments about the role of women in French politics, he had as many serious discussions with women as with men. "Walk with Madame de Ségur and converse on the Situation of their public Affairs," he wrote in a typical diary entry on July 10, 1789, "which she understands as well as any Body."[50]

He had arrived in France with the reputation for "gallantry," but told the licentious vicomte de Ségur (Mme de Ségur's brother-in-law) that he did not expect "Amours" in France, and confided to his diary that his heart was "shut up."[51] Here Morris deluded himself, for in late March he observed the unhappy duchesse d'Orléans and spoke feelingly of her need to be loved, a comment which surely applied to himself.[52]

His academic French initially made it difficult for him to display his conversational talents, particularly his ebullient flirtatiousness. It was a lonely first few months, despite the numerous invitations he usually accepted, for Morris hated to dine alone.[53] "[M]ost of the Jests escape me," he wrote after a dinner at the home of the comtesse de Beauharnais (aunt by marriage of Napoléon's Josephine), in the company of several down-at-the-heel poets. He left immediately after the very bad meal. "[D]ream of my own Country and converse with my absent Friends," he wrote after a day alone.[54]

He was unaccustomed to the sophisticated rules of the game of love in France. He thought at first that the duchesse d'Orléans was interested in him, but soon realized this was a "Badinage which I begin to comprehend and there is nothing in it to flatter my Vanity."[55] He was flattered but repelled by what he called Mme de Staël's "Leer of Invitation," and later resolved, after talking to her long-suffering husband, the Swedish ambassador, never to join the list of those who had enjoyed his wife, a list that included the comte de Narbonne and Talleyrand.[56] By early June he was looking for comfort from prostitutes, although it appears that in neither of the instances he mentioned did he follow through.[57]

The woman who can fairly be described as the object of Morris's most profound attachment fits the conventions of late eighteenth-century Paris: Adélaïde Filleul, comtesse de Flahaut, was married to a man about thirty-five years older than she, and had a young illegitimate son by another man. She was lovely. "A graceful figure, a charming face, expressive eyes and so amiable that one of my pleasures was to spend the evening with

her," wrote the famous painter Mme Vigée-Lebrun.[58] She was also an extremely intelligent woman with a great interest in politics. She wrote beautifully; "I thought well of myself but I submit frankly to a Superiority which I feel," Morris would confess in his diary, and noted that "this amiable Woman shews a Precision and Justness of Thought very uncommon indeed in either Sex."[59] Morris in the end gave up his whole heart to her.

Adèle was about nine years younger than Gouverneur. She was the child of Irène Filleul, a mistress of Louis XV, who had sired Adèle's half sister. Adèle's father had dissipated a large fortune and committed suicide, leaving his mistress and their daughter without resources.[60] Irène died when Adèle was about six years old and Adèle went to a convent, where her closest relationship was with an English nun who taught her to speak fluent English. The year she was eighteen, she married Charles de Flahaut, keeper of the king's gardens, a position he held thanks to his brother, the comte d'Angivillier, who was in a powerful position as administrator of the king's buildings. Flahaut and Adèle had a tiny apartment in the Louvre and lived on three modest pensions, two from the Crown and one from the comte d'Artois.[61]

Although Morris's attention was caught by Adèle from their first meeting in late March at Mme de Corny's, the interest was not serious for some time.[62] She, too, was intrigued by him, and asked their hostess to invite him again; a week after that, he paid his first visit to her apartment in the Louvre.[63] He enjoyed the company she kept, and visited her throughout the spring, but his diary entries show no conscious romantic feelings stirred until the summer. In this he may again have been deluding himself, for when he did not see her for a few days in early May, he found himself very out of sorts. Equally telling was his first reaction to Talleyrand, the father of Adèle's child; Morris found his future rival to be "sly, cool, cunning, and ambitious," adding with remarkable obtuseness, "I know not why Conclusions so disadvantageous to him are formed in my Mind, but so it is and I cannot help it." [64]

Some years later he was told that Talleyrand used to beat Mme de Staël during his affair with her, a revelation that clearly troubled him because of the implications for Adèle. He was not alone in his reservations about Talleyrand, who was also the Bishop d'Autun (Morris always referred to him as "d'Autun.") Étienne Dumont, an astute political writer who knew many of the principal actors of the early Revolution, met Talleyrand three years later, and left a fine portrait of the canny future statesman in his late thirties:

> I am not sure that he was not somewhat too ambitious of producing effect by an air of reserve and reflection. He was always at first very cold, spoke little, and listened with great attention. His features, a little bloated, seemed to indicate effeminacy; but his manly and grave voice formed a striking contrast with this expression. . . . He was particularly fond of social conversation, which he usually prolonged to a very late hour. . . . [H]e yielded to a species of intellectual epicurism, and became amusing that he might be himself amused. . . . The points of his wit were so acute, that to appreciate them fully required an ear accustomed to hear him speak.[65]

Longer acquaintance with Talleyrand convinced Morris that he was talented but indolent. He was also an inveterate gambler, something Morris despised. The bishop, like Morris, admired Adèle's intellect, often asking her for advice, and their relationship seemed more collegial than romantic. However, they continued to be at least occasional lovers, despite her denials to Morris. (In July 1790, for example, while Morris was in London, Talleyrand and Adèle thought she might be pregnant with a "brother or a sister" to Charles, their son.)[66]

The upheavals of early July provided the impetus for Morris's affair with Adèle, for she feared for her husband's safety, and began to lean on Morris. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the impression that a significant factor in Adèle's interest was her need to obtain security for herself and her son in the event that her elderly and impecunious husband should die; she could count on nothing from Talleyrand.

Morris was almost from the outset thoroughly rude to the outmatched old count, who alternately tried to exploit his wife's relationship with the American and to reassert his marriage rights with her, in vain. On the day the Bastille fell and Morris went to the Louvre, "Madame having on her Lap an Escritoire," he gave in to the temptation to "scribble some wretched Lines," which Flahaut unfortunately asked him to translate. They were indiscreet and unkind, beginning, "In fever [Morris was still unwell], on your Lap I write; Expect then but a feeble Lay," and, later, "No Lover I. Alas! too old, To raise in you a mutual Flame." During another visit, when Flahaut would not leave, Morris complained, "it is clear that he means to give us the Pleasure of his Company that we may not have the Pleasure of his Absence. This is absurd; People who wish to please should never be troublesome." The best that can be said for Morris's conduct toward Flahaut was that he considered the enormous difference in age to

make the marriage a travesty, and could not regard the count as a legitimate husband.[67]

By this time, Morris was in love with Adèle. He lost one of her handkerchiefs to a pickpocket and recorded that he valued it "far beyond what the Thief will get for it and I would willingly pay him for his Dexterity, could I retrieve it." On July 20, he told Adèle that he could not

> consent to be only a Friend, . . . that I know myself too well. That at present I am perfectly my own Master with Respect to her, but that it would not long be the case. That having no Idea of inspiring her with a Passion I have no Idea either of subjecting myself to one. That besides, I am timid to a Fault. That I know it to be wrong but cannot help it.[68]

Adèle thought this over and "to cure me of the Passion, she avows a Marriage of the Heart. I guess the Person [presumably Talleyrand]. She acknowledges it and assures me that she cannot commit an Infidelity to him. By Degrees however we come very near it." Morris believed she was also in love with him, "but in Effect Mankind deceive themselves more in believing the Duration than in believing the Existence of this Sentiment."[69] In view of their ultimate separation, Morris may have been right in this assessment, and that it was Adèle whose love ran cold—or was never as strong as his; it is hard not to suspect that their failure was due in part to Morris's unwillingness to lower his defenses entirely. The record of his relationship with Adèle is largely one of games. He noted repeatedly that he did not think her love would last and then seemed to take steps to ensure that this would be the case, either by direct coldness or by flirting with other women. Howard Swiggett considered Morris's conduct "often calculating and abominable," but there are comments in Morris's diary indicating that his exuberant self-confidence was in places a thin crust over self-doubt; although Adèle never failed to respond to his strategies (until the end of their affair), one senses that she at all times had the upper hand, and Morris knew it.

On July 27, Morris and Adèle became lovers, two days before he left for London. The details are hidden behind the veil drawn by Ann Morris thirty years later, thick black lines blotting page after page of the diaries from that day forward.[70] They made love again the following day, and then, on the twenty-ninth, he took a "perfectly platonic" leave of her. "In this I do myself Violence, but it is right," he noted, congratulating himself.

While in London, he got at least one letter from her, but by the time the separation had stretched to a month he was again talking of returning to America, and describing himself as a confirmed "old Batchelor."[71] Yet his first move on return to Paris—after taking a bath—was to send to the Louvre to see if she was there. She was out of town, and Morris consoled himself by drinking too much, approaching "at least to Debauch." As soon as she heard he was back, however, Adèle set out and made a fifteen-hour gallop "over very bad Roads" to see him. He was extremely pleased:

> A feeble Health, a wretched Carriage, a bad Road, and worse Weather: charming Sex, you are capable of every Thing! We talk a little Politics and a little of family Affairs and a little of *Projets*, and go through the first, second and third Part of Oratory upon the Principles laid down by Demosthenes.[72]

Their physical relationship was extremely passionate. They made love at nearly every opportunity, often at considerable risk of discovery—in his carriage; in Adèle's room while her near-sighted niece sat reading in the window seat; in the waiting room at the convent of Adèle's beloved old nun. "Celebrate in the Passage while Mademoiselle is at the harpsichord in the Drawing Room," he wrote of one breathless encounter. "The Husband is below. Visitors are hourly expected. The Doors are all open. *N'importe*." While Ann Morris excised the frankest language, Morris was just as apt to describe their lovemaking with sly classical euphemisms. "After Dinner we join in fervent Adoration to the Cyprian Queen," reads a typical entry, "which with Energy repeated conveys to my kind Votary all of mortal Bliss which can be enjoyed."[73] Despite the risks they took, Morris wrote that "[a]ppearances are scrupulously observed." He never spent the night with her; she asked him only once, and then only if he would arrive in a hired coach rather than his own, which he refused to do.[74]

The comte de Flahaut having gone on a long trip to Madrid, their unfettered indulgence received a check at the end of September, when she thought she might be pregnant.[75] Morris was not concerned: "If, however, nothing happens, we are to take Care for the future untill the Husband returns, and then exert ourselves to add one to the Number of human Existences," he wrote, adding roguishly, "This is a happy Mode of conciliating *Prudence* and *Duty*." For her part, Adèle was extremely worried, and asked Morris to agree to marry her.[76] Morris's immediate response, to his discredit, was to draw back. "[T]his is I know a Business to which there is

no End and therefore I refuse." Adèle told him that Talleyrand was pressuring her to sleep with him, and that if Talleyrand "abandons her she is lost. What shall she do?" Morris, undoubtedly stung by the reference to Talleyrand, replied unpleasantly, "Whatever your Mind dictates to be right in the Circumstances of the Moment."

It is clear that Adèle was hoping that Morris's jealousy would lead him to commitment, but Morris, though he *was* extremely jealous, was unwilling. He was driven to "plead a prior Promise," presumably a fabrication. She responded with outrage:

> How could I think then of violating that Engagement by which she was bound to her Lover [Talleyrand]. Was it meerly for Amusement and to pass a vacant Hour that I had planted Misery in her Bosom. She feels guilty. She is not wicked enough to enjoy Pleasures which violate the Principles of Honor.[77]

Morris apparently responded to this by embracing her. She asked if he would "ask a Release from my Promise in Case Circumstances permit of an Union," and requested a plain gold ring. Morris agreed.

Yet Morris was extremely uncomfortable with the situation of being "engaged" to a married woman with a child by another man, and went home feeling "very heartily tired of myself and every Thing about me." Although he went with her to choose a ring, he told Le Couteulx that he was "going to England, being heartily out of Humor with every Thing in France." Two days later he told Adèle he did not love her, which "wounded her to the Soul. However, we must always forgive, and therefore I at length consent to bury . . . my Dissatisfaction," and he made love to her. The same evening he gave serious thought to sleeping with the promiscuous Mme Le Couteulx. He went back and forth on trusting Adèle with Talleyrand, leaving them together in a situation in which they "have every Opportunity to cornute me but I have every Confidence in my Mistress," but only days later suspecting them of doing just that, so that he went out and got drunk. Adèle was angry and told him frankly, "I tell you that I love you because I love you; if I did not it would be very easy to get rid of you for I am under no Obligation to be upon Terms." Morris was briefly reassured, but it could not last, for he knew very well that his ties with Adèle, unlike Talleyrand's, could be easily discarded.[78]

She was a creature of European taste and sophistication and a complex moral code unfamiliar to Morris. Morris may have toyed with settling

permanently in Paris to be near her, but given her situation as a married woman, they could make only conditional commitments; when Morris left Paris in February 1790 for an absence of more than nine months, their attachment was permanently strained and their happiness never fully retrieved.