

## DANCING TO THE PRECIPICE: LUCIE DE LA TOUR DU PIN AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Caroline Moorehead  
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### REVIEWED BY GISELA ARGYLE

Caroline Moorehead's biography of Lucie de la Tour du Pin (née Dillon) elaborates her subject's own memoirs, which were published by her great-grandson as *Le Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans* in 1907 and soon translated. The memoirs have never been out of print. For the years after the conclusion of the memoirs with the Congress of Vienna Moorehead relies on de la Tour's unpublished correspondence and other archival sources. A biographer of several prominent figures and a human rights advocate, Moorehead has for her subject here a woman of whose "bottomless reserves of courage" her husband could justly write, in a letter to Lucie's goddaughter: "Ah, how admirable it is to be so completely buffeted by storms, yet to remain so fundamentally unbroken." Moorehead's portrait of the French Revolution and its aftermath focuses on the perspective and experiences of a woman born in Paris in 1770 as an aristocratic heiress close to the French court, who died in 1853 as an impoverished widowed marquise in Nice, having survived as daughter and wife of liberal monarchists the Revolution, the Directoire, the Consulate, the Empire and the two Restorations. Intervening stages included high office, exile in England and America and imprisonment.

Moorehead takes her title from Lucie de la Tour's own metaphor. De la Tour began writing the memoirs

when she was fifty; she addressed them to her only surviving child, to recall for him the family's manner of life before the great political and social changes. Implicitly for a larger audience, she repeatedly rejects the role of a historian while stressing her authority in contrast to other memoirists as an eyewitness of events and their causes and effects and of personalities and their character and motivations. Moorehead closely follows the memoir's chronological order and quotes de la Tour copiously, besides quoting many other witnesses. Like de la Tour, she moves abruptly from private to public conditions, accounts of social customs, court protocol, household economy and fashion. Lucie was born into the two powerful elites of the ancien régime, the nobility and the clergy. Her Irish paternal ancestor had come to France with James II and stayed. She attributed her character to her unhappy childhood. The household was despotically and viciously ruled by her grandmother and her grandmother's uncle and lover, Archbishop Dillon, who was believed to be the father of Lucie's mother. Lucie's mother being too weak to protect her and her father mostly absent on military campaigns in the American Revolutionary War, Lucie's only ally against the openly libertine household was her maid and lasting friend, under whose tutelage she developed "reserve and discretion" with a strong moralistic, even prudish, streak.

As an escape from her misery two areas of useful knowledge became available to her. Her escape into the "world of the mind" was aided when the family decided against the normal convent education. (The convent and disinheritance would become a threat that ensured compliance once her mother had died, when Lucie herself was twelve.) Instead, a tutor taught her comprehensively, and she eagerly learned from the many experts who

visited as the Archbishop's guests. Education continued in the salons where she met the surviving encyclopédistes. Trained in music she also participated as a contralto at musical soirées, when Paris had become the European centre of music. On her own initiative she arranged to learn from the servants and their rural families many of the practical skills and handicrafts that she feared she might need one day. Her "prophetic instinct" was to prove only too right. After her mother's death Lucie took up her mother's place as one of the twelve ladies-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette, with her characteristic revulsion from immorality.

When the Revolution started she had had direct experience of the moral and financial bankruptcy of the royal court, the nobility and the higher clergy, on which she blamed it. In retrospect she marveled that in the 1780s the debates in her milieu about the problems in France and the example of the American Revolution, of which many of the military men had personal experience, would lead to plans for a top-down rebirth of France but never to the mention of revolution. Despite her sharp criticism of the ancien régime, she held on to her faith in paternalistic rule by the (reformed) monarchy, nobility and clergy. In fact, her own and her husband's families' conduct on the principle of *noblesse oblige* caused repeated help and rescue during the Terror from former dependants, including Jacobins.

Rejecting her grandmother's choice of a husband for her, she had married in 1787 a young military friend of her father's, Frédéric Gouvernet. Frédéric and his father, M. de la Tour du Pin, were liberal monarchists like her own father. They came to agree with Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*. When M. de la Tour was made Minister of War in 1790, Lucie, then 19, entered the

first of her several roles as political hostess, in this case and together with her sister-in-law, for the Constituent Assembly. She entertained, among others, Robespierre, Danton, Desmoulins and Marat. The dismantling of the ancien régime and the abolition of feudal income—“Everything was swept away”—practically reduced Lucie and her husband’s families to earned income, despite periodic hopes of restoration of their property. Her own inheritance had long been illicitly spent by her grandmother and the Archbishop. From now on and during changing regimes Lucie proved herself a resilient and resourceful partner and promoter in her husband’s search for and occupation of public office, both military, in the Garde Nationale, and political, as ambassador to Brussels, the Congress of Vienna and Turin. A righteous sense of Frédéric’s and her own exceptional integrity and their loyalty to France assisted her in an aristocratic wife’s pre-eminent duty to further her family’s fortunes, including a successful over-night dash for a personal intervention with Napoleon. However, she denied the truth of the gossip that she had dominated her husband in his career decisions. And indeed she yielded reluctantly but without protest to his wish to return from their American farm to French political life during the Directoire. The Reign of Terror, during which both her own and Frédéric’s fathers were guillotined as enemies of the Revolution, had driven them to flee to America, where as a hard-working farmer for two years she spent the happiest period of her life. She appeared in idyllic renderings in contemporary poetry and painting. Frédéric’s wish to settle near French-speaking Canada made them decide on Upper New York State, near Albany. Lucie’s good English helped their new venture. They had the help of four slaves, whom they freed at her

wish before returning to France. She lovingly and energetically engaged herself in her children’s well-being and education and later their vocation and marriage. Of their six live-born children five would die in childhood or early adulthood. After the death of one of the young children who had accompanied them to America Lucie experienced a religious awakening, which would sustain her for the rest of her life.

With respect to her own public offices, her pride of caste continued to rule her conduct, whether in the courting of the Brussels nobility, when she and Frédéric replaced their vulgar predecessors in the embassy, or in being the only one to refuse a position as lady-in-waiting to Napoleon’s Empress Josephine. For Napoleon’s genius she professed unreserved admiration and proudly recounted his singling her out in conversation, as she did other important men’s attentions. However, comparing herself with Mme. de Staël she stressed that she herself was no woman of intellect. Their other main difference, for which de Staël reprimanded her, was Lucie’s unfashionably faithful love for her husband. The two women had much contact but were not close friends. Besides her friendship for her maid, Lucie’s only close female friendship was with the troubled and troublesome Claire de Duras, whom she tried in vain to caution and comfort with her own sober good sense. With the Revolution the salons, such as Mme. de Staël’s, came to serve as places for political debate, but it was their pre-Revolutionary style that de la Tour celebrated in her memoirs for their learning, easy good manners and harmony. She also deplored that Revolutionary ideology and laws reduced the social and political influence of upper-class women to a citoyenne’s matronly domestic duties. In Italian retirement with her husband and only surviving child, a

son condemned to death *in absentia* for a Bourbon plot, she compared in a letter her life’s changes of fortune to a series of drawers in which she stored her talents: “When those of a lady and an ambassadress were called for I closed that of the housewife; now I know exactly where to look for what I shall need in my new situation, and I have completely forgotten all the other drawers, without experiencing the least vestiges of regret or complaint.” She consistently styled herself as exceptional and superior, whether in comparison with other, frivolous court ladies; other, self-pitying émigrés; or other, opportunist seekers of public office.

In Lucie’s life Moorehead has all the circumstances and adventures for a historical romance: sudden turns of fortune’s wheel, royal pomp and protocol, hide-outs from the Terror, disguises and false identities, dangerous travels by carriage and a single-mast sail ship, milking and butter-churning in America, preferment, intrigue and persecution, imprisonment and exile. For her main protagonist Moorehead has a woman of strong affections, principles and mental powers, who together with her husband was “strangely out of tune with the evasions and scheming of [their] age” and consequently courted risk under every successive regime, unlike their life-long friend and occasional protector, the wily Prince Talleyrand. The novelistic tendency of Moorehead’s biography alternates with a miscellaneous effect that results from the pressure of background material. Even in excess of de la Tour’s narrative, Moorehead frequently moves within a chapter from domestic life to public affairs, to mini-biographies of minor figures, to material culture, so that one reads quasi-expanded editorial notes. This is not to detract from the great usefulness of such material for a just portrait of Lucie de la Tour and the period, as

it is revealed through both what was typical and what was unusual in her.

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## **GENDER AND MODERNITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE: THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MONARCHY AND ITS LEGACY**

Agatha Schwartz, Ed.  
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### **REVIEWED BY ADRIAN MITTER**

Memory of the fin-de-siècle Austro-Hungarian monarchy is usually male-dominated and connected to famous thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, the painter Gustav Klimt or the writer Robert Musil. The reader of the volume *Gender and Modernity in Central Europe: The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its Legacy* recognizes very quickly that the late Habsburg monarchy was much more than Klimt and Freud. Life in the empire was characterized by an astonishing plurality and innovation of ideas and discourses that were produced in an atmosphere full of contradictions, as the editor of the volume Agatha Schwartz states in her introduction.

Schwartz claims that the contributions in this volume “address the

necessity for a creative discussion between representatives of disciplines, regions and countries” on gender and modernity. The multidisciplinary of this volume is indeed one of its strengths. It contains contributions from the fields of history, art history, sociology, literary studies, and psychology. Furthermore, this volume excels in merging two dissonant discourses into one transatlantic narrative.

This collection proves that research on the Habsburg Empire is particularly rewarding because of its high transnational potential. Helga Thorson's article on Grete Meisel-Hess, an under-researched feminist Austrian writer, takes up the transnational aspect and shows how ethnic and sexual tensions were intertwined in the early twentieth-century and played a significant role in the formation of female identity. In another essay, Susan Ingram highlights an interesting connection between Czech nationalism and feminism which opposed traditional constructions of empire and gender roles within the Habsburgian presence at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exhibition.

Moreover, research on developments on a local level makes a valuable addition to this volume. Michaela Raggam-Blesch looks at the biographies of three pioneering female Jewish students at the University of Vienna who were facing discrimination in a predominantly male setting. These students, despite their marginalization, managed to integrate into university, but spaces of female agency mostly remained private, as Alison Rose shows in her contribution on the salons of Jewish Women. According to the author, these salons played an important role in the development of modernity and enabled women to “operate as leaders and still maintain their bourgeois femininity.” Salons and universities enabled women, at least in the bigger

cities of the empire, to take up careers in emerging fields of science. One of them was psychoanalysis.

The part on early psychoanalysis unfortunately includes only one chapter on the female aspect of this modernist science by Anna Borgos who describes how femininity was mirrored by Freud and his followers. Borgos claims that most psychoanalysts “had an interest in maintaining the equations male = active and female = passive in an age that [...] was facing the threat of a major transformation of these ideas.” The ambivalent position of female psychoanalysts in this debate, especially Freud's daughter Anna, is very interesting and could have been elaborated on. The two other chapters in this part, however, are devoted to Sandor Ferenczi, Freud's most prominent Hungarian follower. In general, some contributions, although framing the thesis around modernity, lack a strong emphasis on gender issues and dynamic.

A major disadvantage of this volume is the fact that the proclaimed dialogue of regions is almost exclusively limited to the Western parts of the Habsburg Empire and developments in Vienna, Budapest, and Prague. However, discourse on gender relations and modernism significantly affected life in many other cities of the empire such as Cracow, Lemberg, and Sarajevo. Tina Bahovec's contribution on the post-1918 Austro-Yugoslav border conflict shows that a change of perspective to the imperial periphery can be very rewarding. Her study exposes how both Austrian and Yugoslav propaganda used “pre-modern, conservative concepts of masculinity and femininity” in order to win votes in a plebiscite for national belonging in this mixed German-Slavic region. The author also demonstrates how women organized themselves in the region in an attempt to influence the