

The Liberal Libertine:

Gender and revolution in the writings of Francisco de Miranda

“Will you never tire of being so unjust?”¹

—Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, Les Liaisons Dangereuses

Introduction

Francisco de Miranda (1750-1816) lived a life that seems designed for historical study. From colonial Caracas, he embarked in 1771 on a globe-spanning journey that lasted decades, witnessing revolutionary moments in the nascent United States and republican France and building a family in England before returning to lead a botched attempt at revolution against the colonial order in his native Spanish America. He died after his failed attempts at nation-building in a Spanish prison cell, thoroughly defeated, but not without a substantial legacy as an early figurehead of Spanish American independence and anti-monarchical revolt. Over the course of the Atlantic odyssey that was his life, Miranda composed journals and exchanged correspondence that now serves as an important archive on international experiences of revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century.

In particular, Miranda’s documents offer a valuable window into questions relating to shifts in the perception of gender during the era of Atlantic revolutions. Miranda was an archetypical practitioner of “libertinism,” a phenomenon defined by Lynn Hunt as “an upper-class male revolt against conventional morality and religious

¹ Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, in *The Libertine Reader*, ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone Books: 1997), 1061.

orthodoxy” originating in the seventeenth century, whose devotees were “imagined to be free-thinkers [...] open to sexual, and literary, experimentation.”² At the same time, Miranda was an avowed leader of liberal, republican, and anti-colonial revolutionary movements, professing a profound devotion to the ostensibly egalitarian ideals that defined the rhetoric of the North American, French, and Spanish American revolutions. How did libertinism—a distinctly white, elite, and masculine practice born of the social structures of the *ancien régime*—survive and prosper as a character trait of a key figure in apparently democratic movements? Miranda stands alongside other revolutionary characters as a prominent example of what I shall term the “liberal libertine”: a figure who personified the libertine ideologies and behaviors of the European, masculine elite while spearheading sociopolitical reform based on apparently contradictory liberal ideologies. The liberal libertine serves as an exemplary figure to interrogate key ironies of the Atlantic revolutions and challenge popular interpretations of the various movements.

The historiography of gender in the American and European revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries correctly acknowledges dramatic changes in perceptions of femininity and masculinity as important cultural components of the movements, but studies of gender in revolution often fail to acknowledge the perpetuation of pre-revolutionary philosophies and behaviors of gender across the temporal boundaries set by the movements themselves. The example of Francisco de Miranda demonstrates how *ancien régime* phenomena could survive and prosper alongside revolutionary ideologies.

² Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800,” in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 36-37.

Libertinism is a prime example of such a phenomenon in the realm of gender and behavioral history, alongside such maintained pre-revolutionary practices as slavery in the United States and monarchy in Haiti. Social, cultural, and political structures of the *ancien régime* and the colonial order were not cleanly eliminated through revolution; in fact, they often accompanied and evolved alongside revolutionary ideologies. The survival and predominance of the European, elite, masculine libertinism exemplified by Miranda suggests that historians of gender in the Atlantic revolutions should make a special effort to recognize the maintenance of pre-revolutionary phenomena and to avoid conceiving of revolutions as clear breaks with past conceptions of masculinity, femininity, and gender relations.

Masculinity in Revolution

Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall point out in their introduction to *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1830* that ideas about gender were complex and actively shifting in conjunction with Atlantic revolutions at the turn of the nineteenth century.³ For the purposes of this study, I will first examine historiographical takes on masculinity and femininity in revolutions before detailing how libertinism and the example of Miranda himself offer a chance to reevaluate this historiography.

In the case of Europe, much of the scholarship on gender in revolutionary contexts comes from twenty-first century analyses of changing perceptions of

³ Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, "Introduction: Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Wars of Revolution and Liberation, 1775-1830," in *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1830*, ed. Karen Hagemann et al. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 3.

masculinity in France. The most common argument regarding redefinitions of masculinity during the revolution comes as a result of studies of popular and official discourse (especially pro-revolution propaganda) during the recruitment of soldiers for revolutionary and Napoleonic armies, beginning with the *levée en masse* instituted in 1793.⁴

Alan Forrest and Joan B. Landes concur in the opinion that mass male conscription altered French conceptions of masculinity, creating a new standard for masculine citizenship and military camaraderie under the guidance of the revolutionary state. Landes points out specifically that this new standard of masculinity was contextualized in connection to femininity, with feminized visual representations of the French Republic serving to unify conscripts not only as brothers-in-arms but also as defenders of the sexual virtue of a feminized nation.⁵ The propagandists of revolutionary and Napoleonic France drew on martial pride and male heterosexual desire as tools for state-building, creating an idealized image of the male citizen as an egalitarian warrior and a virtuous husband, defending both his family and his homeland.

In the case of Spanish America, historiographical opinions on masculinity vary. Historians conflict in particular over the extent to which accepted masculine values remained intact from the colonial period to post-independence. Sarah Chambers posits that the end of the colonial regime in Peru brought about a shift in primary masculine values from “status” (a class-based claim to greater rights from birth) to “virtue” (a

⁴ Alan Forrest, “Citizenship, Honour and Masculinity: Military Qualities under the French Revolution and Empire,” in *Gender, War and Politics*, 95.

⁵ Joan B. Landes, “Republican citizenship and heterosocial desire: concepts of masculinity in revolutionary France,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 101.

claim to the rights of citizenship based on good behavior and participation in the new state).⁶ This perspective, based primarily on an analysis of legal records, is generally convincing.

However, using a conflicting example from New Granada (modern-day Colombia), Víctor Uribe-Uran argues that the principle of class-based “honor-status” remained the central element of masculine identity after independence was achieved across Spanish America, and that the new bureaucrats that dominated independent Spanish American politics eventually merged with the former colonial elite as they pursued this form of status, composing “an economically heterogeneous ruling class.”⁷ Uribe-Uran’s elite-centered analysis does little to acknowledge variations in masculinity across class lines—especially among subalterns—but it is useful to gain a sense of elite masculine self-perception. Chambers’ study presents a more generalized picture of gender shifts during independence, but Uribe-Uran’s helps to reveal how male elites could maintain *ancien régime* social structures even as active participants in revolutionary republics.

There is a general tendency among historians to ignore the unabashed maintenance of *ancien régime* and colonial sociocultural structures across lines of revolution, as revolutions tend to serve as breaking-off points in the historical narrative. Uribe-Uran’s analysis of maintained conceptions of honor-status in revolutionary New Granada is particularly useful as a diversion from this tradition, indicating that *ancien régime* beliefs and behaviors were perfectly capable of surviving—and thriving—despite

⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁷ Víctor M. Uribe-Uran, “The Changing Meaning of Honor, Status, and Class: The *Letrados* and Bureaucrats of New Granada in the Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Period,” in *State and Society in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution*, ed. Víctor M. Uribe-Uran (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), 59.

the apparent sociocultural challenges of revolution. The example of Francisco de Miranda proves that the phenomenon of libertinism similarly jumped the gap between pre-revolutionary and revolutionary contexts.

Femininity in Revolution

As Joan B. Landes emphasizes, feminized images of the nation were central in the process of national rebuilding during and after the French Revolution. As an appeal to masculine sensibilities, women and women's bodies were tremendously important to the propaganda machines of revolutionary states. But, of course, the feminization of the nation did not imply the real inclusion of women within new republics, in French or American contexts.

In fact, a unifying current between the historiographies of the French and Spanish American revolutions is the recognition of women's practical exclusion from citizenship, despite intermittent legal and rhetorical gestures toward enhanced equality. In this sense, the Atlantic revolutions were not particularly revolutionary for women. In fact, their social statuses within Atlantic society tended to experience little—or even detrimental—change. Geneviève Fraisse reveals how “enlightened” discourses of reason found a place in revolutionary France in order to cement the maintenance of “sexual equality in inequality,” with sexist social structures maintained around a supposedly egalitarian legal frameworks.⁸ The new French republic could reject gender inequality on paper while denying any effective social shift toward equality.

⁸ Geneviève Fraisse, *Reason's Muse: Sexual Difference and the Birth of Democracy*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 92.

The same model applies in the historiography of femininity in Spanish American revolutions. In her foundational study of gender during the transition from colony to state in Arequipa, Peru, Sarah Chambers notes how conceptions of “republican morality”—particularly related to the capacity for public work—were the exclusive property of elite men, placing all women in the same camp as slaves and servants as unsuitable candidates for citizenship.⁹ So, as perceptions of masculinity shifted to encourage wider sectors of the male population to participate in the state, male elites still obstructed women from membership in the nation.

In the European and American environments that Francisco de Miranda explored during his travels through the various arenas of Atlantic revolution, women were rhetorically included but practically shut out of new republics. Their bodies formed the bases of revolutionary propaganda and their rights were supposedly enhanced through legal changes, but in concrete terms they suffered as exiles from the mechanisms of state power. While the roles of men in new republics actually changed as a result of military mobilization and its implicit universalized masculinity, the double-sided rhetorical inclusion and practical exclusion of women from new nations suggested little real change in perceptions of femininity. Francisco de Miranda expresses this reevaluation of masculinity, together with maintained *ancien régime* perceptions of femininity, in his simultaneously liberal and libertine writings.

Ancien Régime *Libertinism*

⁹ Sarah C. Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender, and Politics in Arequipa, Peru, 1780-1854* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 189.

The evolution of libertinism as a historiographical premise is itself caught up in confusing definitional ambiguity. In the introduction to their broad-based collection of essays, *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century*, Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell emphasize the multiple potential applications of the terms “libertine,” “libertinism,” and “libertinage.”¹⁰ They seek to break the bonds between notions of libertinism and its conventional connection to “the sexually free behaviour and norms of upper-class men.”¹¹ Successive essays in their collection go on to highlight usages of libertine discourse outside the realm of sexual behavior, as in the accusations of *libertinage des sens* levied against the philosopher Voltaire owing to his evidential *libertinage d’esprit*.¹² Only as the collection’s studies gain chronological distance from the origins of the Enlightenment do they begin to focus more specifically on the class- and gender-defined notions of libertinism that apply most readily to the case of Francisco de Miranda.

Jonathan Mee’s contribution to *Libertine Enlightenment* focuses on radical exposures of “aristocratic libertinism” during the French revolution, employing the term to summon up the preconceived notion of elite male promiscuity to which it normally refers in nonacademic discourse.¹³ Despite the various definitional possibilities of libertinism, which have undeniable usefulness in a wider historiographical context, in the case of Francisco de Miranda it is helpful to rely on Lynn Hunt’s definition of

¹⁰ Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell, “Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 2.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Marc Serge Rivière, “Philosophical Liberty, Sexual Licence: The Ambiguity of Voltaire’s *Libertinage*,” in *Libertine Enlightenment*, 75.

¹³ Jonathan Mee, “Libertines and Radicals in the 1790s: The Strange Case of Charles Pigott I,” in *Libertine Enlightenment*, 185.

“libertinism” as an “upper-class male revolt against conventional morality and religious orthodoxy,” as I did at the beginning of my analysis.¹⁴ This definition has particular relevance to the term’s real-world use in the context of the French Revolution as a tool for the social condemnation of aristocrats, as is recognized by both Jonathan Mee and Lynn Hunt in her essay on the mockery of aristocrats through pornographic images in revolutionary France.¹⁵

The examples provided by Mee and Hunt indicate that, in its contemporary context at the turn of the nineteenth century, libertinism appeared as a distinctive trait reserved to a white, elite, masculine realm. Despite the legitimacy of other definitions of the term—which is inevitably subjective, after all—a definition based on the phenomenon’s origins and its contextual significance rather than its multifaceted sociocultural products is both more useful in a discussion of Francisco de Miranda and more accurate as a historiographical tool.

Miranda’s Life in Scholarship

Studies of Miranda’s life are inextricably caught up in his legacy as a hero of Venezuelan independence and nationhood. He is often recognized in scholarly as well as popular discourse as the *Precursor* to Simón Bolívar’s *Libertador*, setting the stage for the continent-wide wave of revolutions that swept Spanish America in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The exciting nature of his international travels makes it tempting for students of his life to depict him only as a heroic adventurer rather than a

¹⁴ Lynn Hunt, “Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800,” in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 36-37.

¹⁵ Lynn Hunt, “Pornography and the French Revolution,” in *The Invention of Pornography*, 301.

multifaceted participant in revolutionary movements, and his libertinism is predictably caught up in his overall imagining as a romantic wanderer. Appropriately, Miranda was perhaps the first to write the term “*romántico*” in Spanish, using it to describe a German landscape in 1788.¹⁶

English-language scholarship has been particularly prone to hagiography, depicting Miranda as a praiseworthy (and distinctly Latin) figure. William Spence Robertson’s expansive *The Life of Miranda*, published in 1929, set the standard for hagiographical presentations of Miranda in English. In its final chapter, tellingly titled “The Man and His Role in History,” Robertson imagines the prospect of a “spicy article on his amorous adventures,” making use of as-yet unrevealed journals and letters, with laddish excitement.¹⁷ For all its thoroughness, Robertson’s biography fails as effective history due to its tendency to lionize Miranda.

Karen Racine’s 2003 biography, subtitled “A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution,” helpfully contextualizes Miranda’s life within the framework of Atlantic studies, but also falls into the trap of praising Miranda as a romantic hero. Racine bases this praise both on Miranda’s revolutionary ideology and on his sexual behavior. In its final paragraphs, the book highlights how he “romanced women of all social ranks” as if his willingness to interact sexually with subaltern women indicated a greater sense of social justice.¹⁸ This tendency towards hagiography is potentially damaging to any attempt to gain an accurate understanding of Miranda’s perspectives on gender,

¹⁶ Oscar Rodríguez Ortiz, “Presentación,” in *Diario de Moscú y San Petersburgo*, ed. Josefina Rodríguez de Alonso (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1982), 6.

¹⁷ William Spence Robertson, *The Life of Miranda* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), 229.

¹⁸ Karen Racine, *Francisco de Miranda: A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 258.

particularly as his interactions with women are often cited as a specific reason for his status as a supposed hero. For my purposes, it is helpful to ignore past scholarship on Miranda's life and focus as much as possible on his own words and those of his acquaintances.

Miranda's Liberalism

I do not intend to go into specific detail regarding the facts of Miranda's life; I will limit my attempts at biography to contextualizing the documents from his archives that offer evidence on the interaction of his politically liberal and personally libertine tendencies. His actions as a revolutionary leader speak as loudly as his words to confirm his identity as an avowed anti-colonial rebel and proponent of classical liberal ideals. Nonetheless, a brief glance at documents related to his political philosophy serves to cement his status as a revolutionary liberal.

One of the clearest indications of this designation's validity comes from Miranda's proposals for new government in northern Spanish America after the planned ousting of the colonial order. His draft of a "*Proyecto de Gobierno Federal*" proposes a system of oligarchic republicanism typical of the liberal regimes of the day, with local councils and a dual executive elected by popular vote among citizens—who must, of course, be propertied men able to prove their lack of African ancestry.¹⁹ Using a blend of titles from republican Rome and indigenous American tradition, Miranda formulates a

¹⁹ Francisco de Miranda, "La capital establecida tal vez en el istmo de Panama llevará el augusto nombre de Colombo," in *Documentos fundamentales*, ed. Elias Pino Iturrieta (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1992), 120.

liberal regime along typical European lines, marked as distinctly American mostly by the presence of “*Incas*,” “*Curacas*,” and “*Amautas*” as functionaries of the new state.²⁰

Even in symbolic terms, Miranda’s political vision conformed to European models of revolutionary liberalism. In a list of necessary supplies for his planned coup against the Spanish regime in New Granada, he highlights both the need for proper weapons and uniforms and his special desire for “*10 banderas, los colores de la divisa: rojo, amarillo y azul, en tres franjas*” as part of the expedition’s cargo.²¹ Miranda’s desire for a tricolor flag like that of revolutionary France reveals his hope that Spanish America will follow the mold of European revolutionary liberalism, even visually. As a thinker and a military leader, Miranda was enmeshed in the symbolic language of the French Revolution and its liberal ideals.

Miranda was an exemplary revolutionary of his day, conforming to standards of political radicalism set in France and the United States as he sought to impose a liberal, republican vision on Spanish America. His egalitarian liberal language stands in ironic juxtaposition to his elite libertinism, and examining the latter in the context of the former reveals both the irony of Miranda’s condition and the need for flexibility in historical analyses of sociocultural change during revolution.

Miranda’s Libertinism

The roots of libertinism run deep in Miranda’s biography, beginning with an adherence to structures of white, masculine privilege as an elite participant in Spanish American colonial society. Miranda was born and educated in the highly racialized

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Francisco de Miranda, “Banderas tricolores, rojo, amarillo y azul—en tres franjas—para el empeño bélico,” in *Documentos fundamentales*, 126.

society of Spanish Caracas, and one of the early dramas of his life was an attempt to prove his whiteness to the province's governor in order to continue his university studies. His message to the governor describes his need and desire to "*hacer constar la limpieza de sangre de mis padres y mi conducta*," specifically highlighting his supposed lack of African ancestry.²² Miranda's studies and social role were contingent on a European identity—even if his true genealogical roots were not entirely European—and he never turned away from this element of his own identity, despite his avowed attempts to promote racial equity in later revolutionary rhetoric.

His classical formation included the breadth and depth of subjects required of an Enlightened aristocrat, and libertine interests played an early role in his intellectual life. In 1780 he made an expansive list of the volumes in his growing library—which accompanied him on all of his travels—and included works on "*onanismo*," "*ninfomanía*," and "*enfermedades venéreas*" alongside theological texts, multilingual dictionaries, and literature in Spanish, French, and English.²³ The presence of these texts in his library indicates his early adherence to elite European norms of libertine interest, with a fascination with sex—and particularly with taboo sexual practices—as a necessary component of his overall intellectual formation. His class and gender identity required him to evolve into a well-rounded classical scholar. He was socially obligated to engage in a wide range of study and lived experience including sexual and romantic liaisons, even as he learned to criticize the social structures that led to this behavior. As he began his travels through Europe in the 1780s, a fascination with sex and sexuality

²² Francisco de Miranda, "Yo pretendo servir. Necesito hacer constar la limpieza de sangre de mis padres y mi conducta," in *Documentos fundamentales*, 1.

²³ Francisco de Miranda, "Principios de una famosa biblioteca," in *Documentos fundamentales*, 9-10.

marked his reading, indicating, at least in intellectual terms, his participation in the *ancien régime* culture of libertinism.

Miranda's real-life involvement in the world of libertinism is affirmed through the letters included in his personal archives, which also begin to indicate how he conceived of this white, elite, masculine phenomena as a legitimate component of his liberal, republican, revolutionary ideology. After having traveled through the newly independent United States and arrived in France, Miranda embraced the identity of the aristocratic European libertine with gusto. While serving as a general in the army of revolutionary France in 1792, he exchanged corresponded with the famous humanist Jean-Baptiste Gaspard d'Ansse de Villoison. The thinker described Miranda thusly in a letter urging him to return to Paris and pay a visit to "Mademoiselle Saussure":

*Ce voyageur si remarquable, dont elle a oublié le nom, est un colonel mexicain, plein de génie, de feu, et d'imagination, qui a parcouru tout l'Univers, l'a examiné en observateur, étoit poursuivi par l'Inquisition, connoissoit beaucoup l'Impératrice de Russie et potemkim [sic], annonçoit le plus violent amour de la liberté, étoit avide de toutes les connoissances. á ce traits, monsieur, je vous ai reconnu sur le champ.*²⁴

Villoison's praise of the "Mexican colonel," offered in the context of a flirtatious interaction between Miranda and a potential amorous partner, ironically highlights both Miranda's closeness with Empress Catherine II of Russia (which I will address in greater detail later) and his "violent love of liberty." The letter's purpose affirms Miranda's libertine identity, while its content suggests an irony central to his identity. Miranda was

²⁴ Jean-Baptiste Gaspard d'Ansse de Villoison, "Letter to Francisco de Miranda," in *Colombeia*, ed. Josefina Rodríguez de Alonso (Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República, 1978), 304.

capable of subscribing to radical revolutionary ideologies while maintaining strong links to *ancien régime* traditions such as monarchism and libertinism.

Another exemplary letter from Miranda's time in France is a brief note mailed in 1791 by a correspondent whose name is only recorded as "Pepa." In a few lines of cursive, Pepa tells Miranda to bring a book he promised to lend her in person rather than sending it along with a messenger. She concludes with lines written in verse, telling the revolutionary, "*Venez qu'ant / vous voudres sans lui—un Mentor / vous est inutile.*"²⁵ The flirtatious tone and the implicit invitation included in the letter once again indicate the lived reality of Miranda's libertinism, while the letter's subtext reveals a greater truth about his ironic identity. His libertine behavior coexists with his liberal ideology, and the two do not exist in separate spheres; rather, they paradoxically contribute to each other, with egalitarian liberalism as a persuasive force in libertine seduction and libertine personal freedom as an element of a liberal philosophy focusing on freedom in both individual and national terms.

Miranda engaged frequently and enthusiastically with women on an intellectual level. He was well known for his personal library, and a good deal of the correspondence between Miranda and the various women included in his archives involves the exchange of books. Miranda clearly enjoyed conversing with women about scholarly and artistic subjects, as any Enlightened male aristocrat of *ancien régime* Europe should. However, Miranda's epistolary interaction with women is limited to this variety of discourse. He does not include women in conversations about revolution or practical political change, instead relegating female friends to the realm of flirtation and courtly conversation. In this subtle sense, Miranda conformed to the revolutionary paradigm of excluding

²⁵ "Pepa," "Letter to Francisco de Miranda," in *Colombeia*, 268.

women from real social change as a component of his libertine identity. A social trend common to Atlantic revolutions fit into his preexisting aristocratic, specifically masculine lifestyle. Much like the revolutions themselves, Miranda did not practically alter his behavior towards women based on novel liberal ideology. Instead, he maintained a previous paradigm of excluding women while professing the social justice of his political mission.

After the turn of the nineteenth century, while living in London, Miranda composed documents promoting the cause of Spanish American independence that affirm his belief in new revolutionary conceptions of masculinity as well as femininity. An 1801 message to fellow American revolutionaries calls on Spanish Americans to follow “*las huellas de nuestros hermanos los Americanos del norte,*” suggesting universal masculine solidarity between movements marked by violent struggle against colonial powers.²⁶ He goes on to affirm masculine equality as an essential trait of a just republic, suggesting that the racial castes that define Spanish American society should disappear and that “*un gobierno libre mira todos los hombres con igualdad*”—through the revolutionary process, he declares, “*seremos libres, seremos hombres, seremos nacion.*”²⁷ Based on this declaration, Miranda perceived liberty, universal masculinity, and citizenship as equally necessary and concordant goals of his sociopolitical project. By gendering participation in the nation, as well as personal freedom, he simultaneously maintained preexisting structures of privilege while calling out for the destruction of oppressive norms in favor of a supposedly egalitarian society.

²⁶ Francisco de Miranda, “Por la patria el vivir es agradable y el morir glorioso,” in *Documentos fundamentales*, 95.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

While adhering to class- and race-based factors of identity in his personal life, Miranda decried inequality (at least between men) in his political writings. His actions and opinions did not necessarily translate from the private to the public realm, and he was perfectly capable of maintaining an affection for aspects of *ancien régime* monarchies and aristocratic lifestyles (including libertinism) while proclaiming a need for radical sociopolitical change toward universal freedom and equality. William Doyle's study of aristocrats during the French Revolution indicates how members of the European nobility justified their elevated social status in the supposedly rational terms of Enlightenment philosophy in the buildup to revolution.²⁸ In a similar sense, Miranda could argue for universal equality along men using the rhetoric of liberal philosophy, all while occupying a space within the white, male elite.

While engaging in libertine behaviors, inextricably caught up in perceptions of gender, Miranda adopted interpretations of femininity and masculinity that conformed to the revolutionary paradigms of gender that surrounded him. His archives indicate not only that the seemingly ironic coexistence of a pre-revolutionary lifestyle and revolutionary ideologies was possible, but also that revolutionary ideologies could even serve to justify pre-revolutionary behaviors. This paradox is particularly apparent in Miranda's records of his time spent at the Russian court in the company of Empress Catherine the Great.

Journals and Letters from Russia

²⁸ William Doyle, *Aristocracy and its Enemies in the Age of Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57.

Miranda traveled through Eastern Europe and Russia in 1787, often in the company of Prince Grigory Potemkin, the famous favorite of Catherine the Great. Potemkin introduced the Venezuelan revolutionary to the Empress of Russia on Valentine's Day of 1787, and Miranda describes the occasion with typical libertine flair in his diary: "...besé la mano de Su Majestad que con sumo agrado la sacó de su maguito y me la presentó de paso—pues no se usa aquí genuflexión ni nada."²⁹ Miranda writes in his diary how he became an exotic favorite at Catherine's court in St. Petersburg, invited by the empress to stay and form a part of her entourage due to his excellent manners and her legitimate fear that he would be persecuted if he fell into the hands of Spanish authorities due to his prior involvement in movements against the Spanish crown.³⁰

With Spanish American revolution weighing heavily on his mind, Miranda had no choice but to turn down this offer in a letter to the empress. This document is itself a summation of Miranda's paradoxical identity as a liberal libertine and a practitioner of *ancien régime* behaviors wrapped up in revolutionary ideology. Miranda begins by describing his "*profundo agradecimiento por todos los favores y bondades que V.M. se ha dignado concederme,*" which had "*penetrado de tal modo en mi alma que no podré sino quedar inviolablemente atado a su Augusta Persona.*"³¹ He then reaches the ironic climax of his message, citing the need for his involvement in Spanish American anti-colonial revolution as his only excuse for leaving the Russian court behind:

²⁹ Francisco de Miranda, "Con la Zarina y Potemkin. El tema de América Libre." in *Documentos fundamentales*, 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

³¹ Francisco de Miranda, "Carta a Catalina de Rusia," in *Diario de Moscú y San Petersburgo*, 189-190.

*Solamente un gran e interesante asunto como el que me ocupa actualmente, sería capaz de hacerme diferir el agradable y dulce placer de poder, por mis servicios, pagar en parte lo que debo a la benevolencia de Vuestra Majestad, y de compartir con sus súbditos las ventajas inestimables e insignes de que goza la sociedad bajo su ilustre y glorioso reinado.*³²

In a letter designed to both excuse his abandonment of the Russian court and secure financial support from Catherine in future, Miranda simultaneously praises the Enlightened benevolence of an *ancien régime* monarch and uses his international opposition to monarchical, colonial regimes as a justification for his need to move on. He couches his self-defense in the flirtatious language of libertinism, politely sexualizing himself in order to appear more convincing to the monarch whose favor he so desperately needs. The record shows that Miranda was successful in obtaining financial support from the empress, and he indicates in his journal that she was reluctant to let him go despite his well-crafted letter of resignation from her court. According to Miranda's diaries, Catherine sounded almost revolutionary herself in her response, telling the traveler,

si el Imperio Español estaba en peligro por mí, en ninguna parte podría yo estar mejor que en Rusia, pues era estar a la mayor distancia, y que, en cuanto al aprecio que Su Majestad hacía de mí, no era por el rango

³² Ibid., 190.

*que yo tenía en España, sino por mis calidades personales que Su Majestad conocía particularmente...*³³

Much has been made of a rumored romantic relationship between Catherine the Great and Miranda, but there is no conclusive evidence to indicate that their interaction extended beyond written correspondence and conversations at court. It is true, however, that their interaction proves a general truth about Miranda's revolutionary identity, and, by extension, his practice of libertinism. The apparent friendship between the imperial monarch and the American revolutionary proves that ideological loyalties did not necessarily define personal behavior and interpersonal connections during the period of Atlantic revolutions. An apparent radical like Miranda could wholeheartedly oppose one empire while praising another, and an empress like Catherine could endorse revolutionary projects while maintaining autocratic control over her own lands.

This irony extends to the practice of libertinism, which Miranda maintained alongside his revolutionary identity at the Russian court, employing it as a rhetorical tool in his interactions with Catherine. Miranda was an object of interest at the imperial court precisely because he was a seemingly paradoxical combination of an American radical and a European aristocrat—he could simultaneously manifest ideologies of revolution and engage in the libertine experiences generated by the *ancien régime* elite. Miranda's journals and letters from his time spent with the Russian court prove that libertinism, along with fealty to monarchs, could easily survive and intermingle with systems of thought that called for dramatic shifts away from the sociocultural origins of such phenomena.

³³ Miranda, "Con la Zarina y Potemkin. El tema de América Libre." in *Documentos fundamentales*, 44.

Miranda as Liberal Libertine

Returning to questions of historiography, it is important to reaffirm the link between wider interpretations of gender in revolution and the primary evidence offered by Miranda's archives. In general terms, Miranda manifests the perceptions of femininity and masculinity that many historians put forth as consequences of revolution. In his public discourse on the need for independence in Spanish America, he argues for universal martial masculinity as a qualifying factor for citizenship. In his private discourse with female friends and romantic partners, he engages in intellectual conversation without including women in his political projects, mirroring the rhetorical inclusion and practical exclusion of women that Sarah Chambers and others identify as a common failing of Atlantic revolutions. Based on the conceptions of gender that modern readers can gather from his archives, Miranda conformed accurately to contemporary historiographical models of gender in revolutionary contexts. He also conformed to the model of the revolutionary liberal, endorsing violent action in favor of personal and national freedom and the foundation of egalitarian new republics. In terms of politics, ideology, and rhetoric, he was every inch the Atlantic revolutionary.

At the same time, Miranda's archives provide conclusive proof of his intellectual and lived identity as a libertine, following the pattern set by generations of European elite men before him. He maintained the "upper-class male revolt against conventional morality" that was paradigmatic in the *ancien régime* while fighting for causes that directly opposed the social norms that gave rise to the paradigm itself. His dealings with Catherine the Great are particularly illustrative of his ironic juxtaposition of ideology and behavior; he lived as an aristocratic libertine at a royal court, benefitting from every

element of his elite identity, all the while planning a violent revolt against a similar royal court based on universalistic philosophies of individual freedom and generalized equality. By embodying this paradox, Miranda serves as an illustrative example of the liberal libertine and as a helpful tool for the historiographical reevaluation of gender in Atlantic revolutions. His case indicates that historians must be willing to accept permanence as well as change as a factor in evolving perceptions of gender. Not every element of pre-revolutionary thought was lost as a result of revolution, and Miranda proves this point concretely as both a revolutionary leader and a practicing *ancien régime* libertine.

Conclusion

In his seminal novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos has one of his libertine protagonists protest plaintively to his love interest, “Will you never tire of being so unjust?”³⁴ Reversing the gender orientation of this question, it applies equally as a critique of liberal libertines, like Miranda, who perpetuated hierarchical and exploitative models of *ancien régime* libertinism even as they served as figureheads of supposedly egalitarian revolutions. As in the cases of many other pre-revolutionary phenomena, such as African slavery, authoritarian monarchy, and the subjugation of indigenous Americans, elite libertinism was incorporated into Atlantic revolutions using the discursive tools of the revolutions themselves. Dramatic shifts in gender during revolution, including as the universalization of masculine citizenship and the rhetorical

³⁴ Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, in *The Libertine Reader*, ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone Books: 1997), 1061.

exclusion of women from new republics, could be adapted by leaders such as Miranda to justify and uphold behaviors that seemed ostensibly antithetical to revolutionary ideals.

The integration of liberal libertinism into revolutionary processes suggests that historians of gender in Atlantic revolutions should be prepared to acknowledge the survival of *ancien régime* notions of gender during revolutionary processes not only as isolated incidents but also as central components of the revolutions themselves. The perpetuated white, elite, masculine libertinism of Francisco de Miranda is only one example of the crossover of pre-revolutionary phenomena to revolutionary and post-revolutionary contexts. Miranda's example makes it clear that Atlantic revolutions—especially when perceived beyond their geopolitical implications as sociocultural events—were not terminal ruptures with the past, but multifaceted projects including diverse processes of permanence and change.

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