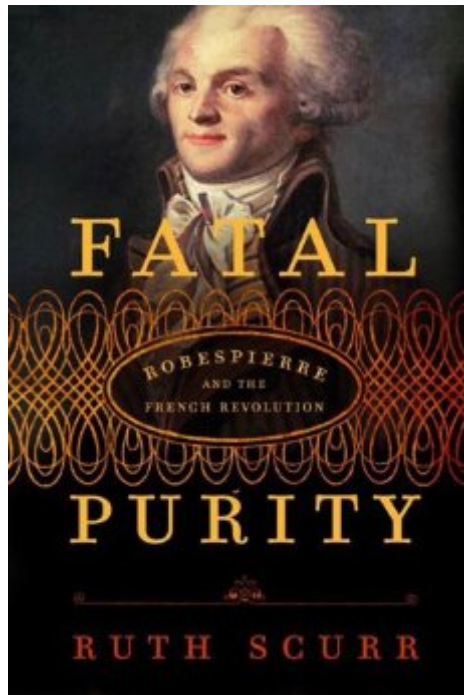


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Fatal Purity: Robespierre And The French Revolution



Synopsis

A riveting biography of the French Revolution's most enigmatic figure that restores him to his pivotal historic place. Since his execution by guillotine in July 1794, Maximilien Robespierre has been contested terrain for historians, at once the most notorious leader of the French Revolution and the least comprehensible. Was he a bloodthirsty charlatan or the only true defender of revolutionary ideals? Was his extreme moralism "he was known as "The Incorruptible" a heroic virtue or a ruinous flaw? Was he the first modern dictator or the earliest democrat? Against the dramatic backdrop of the French Revolution, historian Ruth Scurr follows the trajectory of Robespierre's paradoxical life, from his unprepossessing beginnings as a provincial lawyer opposed to repressive authority and the death penalty, to his meteoric rise in Paris politics as a devastatingly efficient revolutionary leader, righteous and paranoid in equal measure. She explores his reformist zeal, his role in the trial of the king and the fall of the monarchy, his passionate attempt to design a modern republic, even his extraordinary effort to found a perfect religion. And she follows him into the depths of the Terror, as he makes summary execution the order of the day, himself falling victim to the violence at the age of thirty-six. Written with epic sweep, full of nuance and insight, *Fatal Purity* is a fascinating portrait of a man who identified with the Revolution to the point of madness, and in so doing changed the course of history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"That man will go far. He believes what he says."It was Mirabeau, an astute politician in his own right, who recognized that Robespierre, when others regarded him as a "self righteous and hypocritical prig," was not what he first appeared to be.Scurr does a remarkable job of uncovering those qualities which led to Robespierre's rise to power and of explaining the features of his personality which made his name virtually synonymous with bloodthirsty tyranny.Lacking even a smidgen of charisma, a poor speaker, and paranoid even when he was still an obscure attorney in the provincial town of Arras, the young representative to the national Convention showed little evidence of ever achieving either fame or infamy. With the outbreak of the revolution, he had managed to get himself elected to the Convention, and from then on he perfected his political skills. Extemporaneous speeches were replaced by long and carefully prepared written ones. New allies were found and cultivated. He quickly surrounded himself with sycophants. Above everything else, he exuded patriotism.But underlying it all was paranoia--the conviction that enemies of the state were hidden in every crack and crevice, that those enemies (in many instances the newspapers which didn't share his views) were selectively threatening him because of his loyalty to the new French Republic. To that was added his own reluctance to ever admit mistakes, doing so only by blaming others for having deceived him, for having given him false information. His answers were always the same. If a remedy failed, then increase the dosage. If the deaths of a dozen "enemies" (including many of his rivals) were replaced by two dozen more live ones, then two dozen deaths were the answer.

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