



Fatal Purity: Robespierre and the French Revolution

Ruth Scurr

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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.

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