

British Women Writers and the French Revolution, 1789–1815



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On 18 November, 1792, radical British expatriates in Paris met at White's Hotel to celebrate the new Republic and its military victory over the Austrians. Members of the "Friends of the Rights of Man associated at Paris," known as the British Club, this remarkable group of Irish, Scottish, and English citizens maintained their support for the French Revolution even after the recent September Massacres had alienated the majority of British at home. On this particular day, the British Club met to issue an address to the National Convention, a gesture of republican solidarity popular with such radical British associations.¹ The President of the British Club at this time was John Hurford Stone, who would soon become Helen Maria Williams's lover, and among those present were Thomas Paine, the poet Robert Merry ("Della Crusca"), John Oswald, and Helen Maria Williams.

Of the thirteen toasts which the British Club drank that evening, two specifically acknowledged the contributions of women, British and French, to the French Revolution and to liberty:

(11) [to] the Women of Great Britain, particularly those who have distinguished themselves by their writings in favor of the French revolution, Mrs. (Charlotte) Smith and Miss H. M. Williams;

(12) [to] the Women of France, especially those who have had the courage to take up arms to defend the cause of liberty, *citoyennes* Fernig, Anselm, &c.²

This clear connection between women's writing and the French Revolution drawn at such a significant historical moment speaks eloquently to the central purpose of this volume: the exploration of the remarkable diversity of British women's writings on the French Revolution.

As the second toast indicates, British women's interest in the French Revolution and the political debates it generated in Britain is not unrelated to French women's participation, both as agents and victims, in revolutionary events. Both toasts—celebrating women's contributions to the Revolution through their writings and through their public activism—must have seemed to those present to hail a new era in which women's public roles—political, intellectual, and even military³—were expanding, for the benefit of all.

Nearly one hundred were present for this occasion at the British Club, including Helen Maria Williams, who sang a song as part of the festivities. Williams, the second writer honored by the British Club, is increasingly recognized as an important, perhaps the most important, British interpreter of the French Revolution. Between the years 1790 and 1796, Williams published eight volumes of letters and essays on events in France, and these political writings, as well as her poetry, have steadily attracted increasing scholarly attention during the recent renewal of interest in Romantic-period women's writings. Charlotte Smith, too, has begun to regain the critical stature she enjoyed during her lifetime, yet studies of her poetry and novels have not done justice to her ongoing engagement with French Revolutionary politics. Recent criticism of her poetry, for example, has tended to privilege the *Elegiac Sonnets* and *Beachy Head* over the explicitly political *The Emigrants*. Author of three novels and one long poem that deal directly with the French Revolution—*Desmond*, *The Young Philosopher*, *The Banished Man*, and *The Emigrants*—Smith, in addition to being one of the most technically accomplished and influential of the Romantic poets, was also undeniably one of the most political, and politically radical.

Smith was in England when the British Club toasted her writings, immersing herself in radical politics; we imagine that she would have been honored by the British Club's praise of her writings, for a few days earlier she had commended a similar address to the National Convention, presented to the Convention on the same day as the British Club's. In her November 3 letter to the American radical Joel Barlow, Smith affirms her own republican beliefs, a dangerous creed in Britain after the September massacres and the abolition of the monarchy:

I am extremely flatterd [sic] Dear Sir by your early and very obliging attention to my Letter—& indeed have great reason to quarrel with D[octor] Warner for neglecting an appointment which would have been the means of introducing me to your acquaintance—I read with great satisfaction the “Address to the Privileged Orders”; and have been, as well as some of my most judicious and reasoning friends here, very highly gratified by the lesson had—Your Letter to the National Convention—Which cannot I think fail of having great effect not only where it is address’d; but on those who at present consider themselves as less immediately interested in the questions it discusses—⁴

Charlotte Smith was even more deeply involved with republicanism and French politics than hitherto acknowledged,⁵ given the radical republicans to which this letter refers. Joel Barlow was granted French citizenship as well as membership in the National Convention in 1793; the letter he presented to the National Convention on behalf of the London Society for Constitutional Information expressed the radical hope, as did the British Club’s toasts, that soon there would be a National Convention of England. His *Address to the Privileged Orders*, which Smith praises, was presented to the National Convention by Paine on November 7. The Doctor Warner whom Smith mentions was nominated for French citizenship in September 1792 by Brissot because of “his energetic speeches, in which he deploys his love of liberty and hatred for kings.”⁶ As she explained later in her letter to Barlow, Smith was at work on her important poem *The Emigrants*, a work in which her humanitarianism and republicanism coexist comfortably:

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It is thus not surprising that Smith, author of the controversial republican novel *Desmond*, merited a toast in the British Club alongside toasts celebrating the French Republic and “the coming Convention of England and Ireland.” Indeed, while the British Club was toasting her, Smith was writing to “Citoyen” Barlow, as she addresses

him, on November 18 from Brighton, denouncing “les formules de l’ancien esclavage,” and requesting assistance with her plans to visit Revolutionary Paris the following March or April, a plan, she writes, “on which my *rebellious* heart is set.”⁷

In Smith’s little-known correspondence with Godwin, she articulated the (proto)feminism that subtly informs all of her writing. Comparing the loss of her favorite daughter, Augusta, in 1795 to Wollstonecraft’s death in 1797, Smith suggests that her own private suffering is part of a larger system of injustice in Britain:

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In this remarkable letter, Smith’s inclusive gaze moves with ease from her personal loss, to the death of the era’s most famous feminist, to her own unhappy fate as a woman “sold to an idiot.” In an earlier letter to Godwin she notes that she “is reading (ought I to own for the first time?) Political Justice,” and the reformist tone rings clear throughout: she writes seeking Godwin’s assistance on behalf of her French future son-in-law, “a disciple of a better system & indeed there are few better Citoyens.”⁹ In contrast, her own son in the military is a “poor victim of our accursed systems.” As Judith Miller elaborates in her essay, and as these letters bear witness, Godwin’s (and Wollstonecraft’s) influence on Smith was more pronounced than is generally known, helping to shape her evolving political, philosophical, and authorial perspective.

Charlotte Smith’s intimate knowledge of this radical circle of British revolutionaries, and their recognition of her role in furthering their shared cause, attests to the complex interconnections between the world of women’s writing in the 1790s and the politics of the public sphere. In exploring this rich field of inquiry one must first unlearn unhelpful assumptions about women’s presumed relegation to the private sphere, even as one rediscovers these forgotten writers, texts, and questions. This volume thus shares with all recent work on women writers of the Romantic period the task of re-establishing the

public presence and influence of these writers, something their contemporaries never doubted, as the British Club reminds us.

Not all British women writers who responded to the Revolution were republicans or even sympathetic to republicanism, of course, and this volume seeks to help redress the tendency of scholars to see women writers as a homogeneous group with identical economic and political interests. Conservative writers such as the formidable Hannah More, Elizabeth Hamilton (author of *The Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*), and Laetitia Matilda Hawkins (author of a two-volume critique of Helen Maria Williams's early *Letters from France*), wrote confidently in defense of British nationalism and bourgeois propriety, and their contributions to political dialogues on revolutionary politics enjoy ample presence in this collection.¹⁰

Hawkins, the least well known of the three in modern criticism, offers a helpful glimpse into the thorny intersection of gender, nationalism, and class that any writer discussing the French Revolution in 1793 had to negotiate. Hawkins's *Letters on the Female Mind*, addressed to Helen Maria Williams, verbalizes the restrictions under which we know women writers of the 1790s labored, but which we should not imagine they fell silent beneath. She reproves Williams for violating feminine propriety (and natural intellectual limitations) by venturing into politics and the public sphere, and thus aspiring to masculine regimes of power and knowledge. Hawkins writes in her public letter to Williams that women's natural vulnerability and their need for men's protection, is actually their strength, sheltering them from moments of political crisis such as the French Revolution:

from all ten thousand miseries of power, we happy women, and double happy as Englishwomen, are providentially exempt. Protected by laws, by custom, and the general sentiment of our country, we may, if we chuse it, live undisturbed in the possession of every earthly good. Public calamity must become personal suffering, it must pervade the recesses of our dwellings, before we, housed and sheltered as we are, in the hearts of our generous protectors, are exposed to it. The whole world might be at war, and yet not the rumor of it reach the ear of an Englishwoman—empires might be lost, and states overthrown, and still she might pursue the peaceful occupations of her home. . . .¹¹

Rather than making "inroads into the hostile lands of public feuds and political contest" like Williams, Hawkins suggests, English women

must “render ourselves as amiable as possible—we will not throw by the cestus to put on the helmet” (2: 195, 126). Of course, it is highly unlikely that many Englishwomen would agree with Hawkins that “[t]he whole world might be at war, and yet not the rumor of it reach the ear of an Englishwoman.” Written before war with France began in 1793, Hawkins’s vision of Englishwomen existing in a sheltered domestic sphere is, of course, undermined by the public and overtly political nature of her own response.

On the eve of the declaration of war and just following the execution of Louis XVI, Hawkins does in fact “put on the helmet” by issuing a call to arms in her *Postscript*, effectively becoming one of “the odious . . . ministers of vengeance” (2: 126) she had accused Williams of being:

For the sake of justice, for the sake of innocence, for the sake of all mankind, may the European powers rise and crush these execrable wretches; but should the Almighty defeat our designs, still punishment, the most dreadful of all punishments, impends over guilty France. (2: 210)

Hawkins published two volumes of political and public argument urging women to refrain from such intellectual speculation and to limit themselves to the domestic emotions of love and nurturance, even while she issued the above call to international warfare. Similar contradictions characterize much of women’s writing from the Romantic period, writing that ostensibly argues for traditionally feminine values such as domesticity and the separate spheres, as in the polemics of Hannah More and the poetry of Felicia Hemans. In writings on the French Revolution such as Laetitia Hawkins’s, these familiar contradictions are even more acute given the undeniably political subject matter and the traditionally “unfeminine” genres involved—polemic and political essay.

Conservative women writers like Hawkins and More are invaluable to our understanding and appreciation of the French Revolution’s impact on Britain because they demonstrate that all women writers of the Romantic period, even those who published the most feminine domestic poetry, introduced with meek and self-effacing apologies to their readers, took part in a public sphere from the moment they read and responded to literature until they circulated and published their own work. Women writers who participated in the French Revolution debates assumed bolder public voices than did poets of domesticity because they had no choice, which is perhaps

why, Laetitia Hawkins included, they were interested in these debates in the first place.

Despite the richness of women's writings on the Revolution and on the counterrevolutionary and Napoleonic wars that followed, no single study has yet attempted to account for the full spectrum of British women's participation in these political, social, economic, philosophical and poetic debates.¹² This collection thus restores an important part of British literary and political history: women's contribution to the public sphere, and to the most heated debates of their day. This important contribution was lost for nearly two hundred years, and remains obscured in current, prevailing models of women's writing from the Romantic period that focus on women's interest in and restriction to the private sphere and the realm of the heart. Already, new studies of women's writing from the Romantic period, such as the ground-breaking work of Marlon Ross, Anne Mellor, Stuart Curran, Margaret Homans, and others, have begun to impose gendered limits on our understandings of how women wrote and what they wrote about. These scholars emphasize how women writers were inhibited by the cultural identification of women with nature and with domesticity, and how they often chose to celebrate the domestic sphere and its associated feminine virtues of nurturance, cooperation, and empathy.¹³ This collection, and the over one dozen women writers featured here, challenge these gendered, often complementary models of women's writing, and reveal the extent to which women writers of the Romantic period did indeed write on those most "masculine" of subjects: politics, revolution, and war.

In addition to our central goals of emphasizing the political range of women's responses, acknowledging their contribution to public sphere debates, and giving visibility to noncanonical writers, our volume also ranges far beyond the usual focus on novels and poetry by including plays, travel writings, letters, prophecies, and political essays. The French Revolution demanded a revolution in formal and generic conventions, and several of the writers discussed, i.e., Helen Maria Williams, Helen Craik, and Mariana Starke, wrote in ways that redrew generic lines. With these larger goals in sight, we have arranged the essays according to four subject groupings: Revolution and Nationalism, Revolution and Religion, Revolutionary Subjects, Revolutionary Representation. While all of the essays address questions of, for example, nationalism and representation, these groupings highlight four key recurring subjects—nationalism, religion, representation, and female subjectivity—that emerged as central to women's writings on the Revolution. This organizational device is

meant to evoke questions crucial to all the essays collected here rather than to fix categories. Clearly, for example, though Ann Frank Wake's essay on Amelia Opie is grouped under the rubric of revolutionary subjectivity, it is also and fundamentally a discussion of religious and political dissent. And Judith Miller's analysis of Charlotte Smith's efforts to represent historical reality within the generic limitations of the courtship novel reveals Smith's astute understanding of the economic underpinnings of late eighteenth-century female identity and subjectivity.

The impact of the French Revolution on British literary history has been understood traditionally in terms of the apostasy of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey, and the continued revolutionary enthusiasm, albeit tempered, of William Blake, William Hazlitt, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Wordsworth's (reluctant) abandonment of his French lover, Annette Vallon, and their child in 1792, prefigures his abandonment of radical politics in France and in Britain;¹⁴ likewise, his disillusionment and his yielding up of moral contraries in despair after his initial enthusiasm, as described in *The Prelude*, have been until recently regarded as the quintessential Romantic response to the painful realities of the Revolution.¹⁵ This narrative of initial bliss and eventual betrayal has also been applied to Coleridge and Southey, both by the younger Romantics Byron and Percy Shelley, and by modern scholars, who have thoroughly documented the impact of the French Revolution on these canonical writers.¹⁶ This is not a narrative, however, that satisfactorily explains British women's responses, because like their male counterparts, women did not form a homogeneous group with identical interests based on their gender, but instead were subject to a complex and often contradictory set of cultural and political forces. In fact, the surprising range, politically and generically, of British women's responses to the Revolution attests to the complex, and often contradictory, nature of British literary responses as a whole, beyond the range of responses traditionally ascribed to canonical writers.

The widely accepted account of the "general" British response to the Revolution unfolding in France is useful to keep in mind, however, in order to appreciate how individual women writers were and were not representative of their culture. With notable exceptions, such as Edmund Burke, the British generally welcomed the rise of the French constitutional monarchy from 1789 to 1792; with the September massacres of 1792, and the execution of the king in January 1793, however, British public opinion turned sharply against the Revolution, and the government ushered in a series of counter-

revolutionary repressive measures that amounted essentially to a “state of emergency.”¹⁷ When we look at noncanonical women writers, however, we discover remarkable differences between their responses and the familiar narrative of bliss and betrayal that is generally applied to the “first generation” Romantics, differences which often reflect the impact of gender on class and nationalism, a factor unfortunately not always taken into account in the case of male writers. Thus, the revolutionary chronicler Helen Maria Williams emerges as the most staunch and outspoken British supporter of the Revolution in the Romantic period. As Deborah Kennedy demonstrates in her essay, Williams maintained her support for the Revolution even as her British reviewers and British popular opinion turned against the French, and against Williams herself, after the execution of the king and queen.

A wide range of political perspectives emerges once we depart from more familiar authors, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, and even Wollstonecraft and Austen. Our section devoted to Revolution and Religion, for example, features writers who supported and even furthered the increasingly nationalistic counterrevolutionary British response to the Revolution. The laboring-class prophet Joanna Southcott is one such woman who, as Kevin Binfield demonstrates in his essay, spoke and wrote publicly in favor of the war against France. In her remarkable prophecies, often written in verse, Southcott called for a just war with France as a fulfillment of God’s millennial plan for Britain. Modern readers may be surprised to read of this religious woman writing publicly in favor of war, but Southcott actually represents a larger trend that Linda Colley has described in *Britons*, one in which British women actively supported both the war effort and the climate of nationalism.¹⁸ The Evangelical polemicist Hannah More, as Angela Keane shows, shared with Southcott a counterrevolutionary politics, in More’s case centered on her vision of virtuous femininity and its central role in Britain’s economy, in both the financial and moral senses of the word. Ironically, and as with Southcott, opposition to More’s charitable and political efforts in the interests of British nationalism focused on her gender, demonstrating how More’s counterrevolutionary politics found both their strength and ultimate opposition in women’s uneasy relationship to the French Revolution.

The influential but neglected Mariana Starke offers another example of the volatile conflict between class and gender revealed by women writers’ responses to the French Revolution. Jeanne Moskal demonstrates how, in her influential *Letters from Italy* (1800), the conservative and anti-Catholic Starke found surprising affinities with

Napoleon because of his defeat of papal power in the Italian campaigns. Moskal's account of Starke, expanding on Simon Bainbridge's reassessment of the emperor in *Napoleon and British Romanticism*,¹⁹ challenges prevailing modern assumptions that writers of the Romantic period did not admire Napoleon, and instead demonstrates that British writers like Starke invested Napoleon with surprising religious and political significance, while maintaining their nationalism. Like Southcott, Starke grounds her nationalism in her Protestant identity; considered together, Starke's ambivalent praise of Napoleon's victories in Italy and Southcott's support of Britain's war against France serve as powerful reminders of the complexity of women writers' investment in and complicity with church and state.

In contrast, it is reconciliation across such religious and nationalistic lines that Fanny Burney urged in *The Wanderer* (1814). As Maria Jerinic argues, Fanny Burney's last novel suggested that her persecuted English heroine's unlikely ally was the unmarried Catholic clergy exiled by the Revolution, not the intolerant British gentlemen and ladies who persecuted her. Burney and More, along with Charlotte Smith and others, had written in support of the French emigrants, particularly the clergy, urging their fellow Britons to show mercy to these refugees of war despite the political and religious differences between Britain and France.²⁰ The pamphlets More and Burney published—*Remarks on the Speech of M. DuPont* and *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy: Earnestly Submitted to the Humane Consideration of the Ladies of Great Britain*, respectively—are part of a large-scale charitable response to the Revolution in which British women played a significant role. That both the fervently nationalist More and the distinctly antinationalist Smith and Burney could agree on the treatment of Catholic clergy reveals the significance of gender in the politics of nationalism, though gendered interests here cannot be defined in a politically consistent, feminist, sense. More was sympathetic to the French emigrant clergy because they were fellow Christians who shared her opposition to French atheism and political reform; Smith and Burney, on the other hand, saw in the exile and disenfranchisement of the clergy the political and economic disenfranchisement of larger groups—women and working people—and thus in *The Emigrants* and *The Wanderer*, women and clergy wander through the same treacherous British landscape, victims of a patriarchal ethos of economic and political violence. When we consider these authors together, we learn much about the untidy complexities of British responses to the Revolution, and how gender was a central force in shaping them.

Unlike Burney and More, Starke and Southcott are unfamiliar writers to most scholars of British literature, and for this reason these essays, in fact most of the essays in this collection, focus closely on the works and lives of a single, little-known writer. In addition to making a case for the significance of these noncanonical writers for a fuller understanding of the times and traditions in which they wrote and which they helped shape, these essays present detailed new research which we hope will serve as a starting point for new work. As Terence Hoagwood and Jeanne Moskal remind us in their essays, a prevailing trend in scholarship on women writers from the Romantic period is to project anachronistically onto these writers modern, liberal, and often feminist images of what a woman writer should write about, and what her values (feminist, liberal, antinationalistic, egalitarian) should be. Yet the essays on Revolution and Religion remind us that women writers held much more divisive, and often self-divided, views on the French Revolution, political reform, and nationalism, without ever undergoing the fall from bliss to disillusionment that canonical accounts emphasize. Furthermore, while writers such as More, Starke, and Southcott would not have confessed to any illusions about the Revolution they consistently opposed, they did encounter resistance to their public politics because of their gender. As religious outsiders, moreover, More and Southcott faced additional opposition and controversy, yet also articulated a conservative vision of British nationalism that is remarkably similar given their vast class and religious differences.

Nationalism naturally remains central to any study devoted to the French Revolution, and the writers featured in our section devoted to this subject—Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith, and Fanny Burney—stand in significant contrast to Starke, Southcott, and More because of their shared opposition to nationalism. All three women were thoroughly professional writers who earned their living from their writings, part of the bourgeois cultural revolution and feminized print culture that Gary Kelly, among others, has written about at length.²¹ Wollstonecraft's feminism, initial support of the French Revolution, and disparaging remarks regarding French women's perceived frivolity are widely known; what is not generally acknowledged is Wollstonecraft's subtle critique of nationalism and the ideology of national character. Jan Wellington illuminates these cosmopolitan qualities of Wollstonecraft's feminism, connecting Wollstonecraft's critique of gender as a natural category to her equally revolutionary critique of national character.

Charlotte Smith and Fanny Burney, highly regarded writers in their own day and increasingly so in ours, also critiqued nationalism and national character from their vantage points as women. Kari Lokke demonstrates how, in *The Emigrants* (1793) and in her popular sonnets, Smith employs the moon as an emblem of female transcendence, in an effort to represent a potentially emancipatory distance from and utopian resolution of what she perceives as the largely male-dominated political crises of 1792 and 1793. Smith's use of transcendence, then, differs significantly from William Wordsworth's, because it does not allow the poet to displace and escape from the political realities of the Revolution, but rather allows her a gendered vantage point from which to critique both French and British politics. In *The Wanderer* (1814), Burney also shows how women are outside of male political and economic institutions, but in Burney's case, women's exclusion from masculine political institutions is figured as a profound alienation and disenfranchisement. Maria Jerinic illuminates how Burney's last novel enacts a devastating critique of Britain's most cherished ideological constructs: companionate marriage, Protestantism, and British liberty. In Burney's bleak post-revolutionary England, and contrary to prevailing British nationalist self-images, women are helpless wanderers, preyed upon both economically and sexually, and excluded from the benefits of these central British institutions. As a privileged Englishwoman married to a French aristocrat, and exiled in France, Burney offered a controversial and unique perspective on nationalism and the war against France, one which emphasized their destructive consequences for women of different nations, classes, and races.

For Burney, whose southern English landscapes are ceaselessly crisscrossed by alienated figures, the act of wandering offers no liberation, no mystical transport, and no solace in nature, unlike the more familiar effects of wandering (and solitude) in the works of Wordsworth and Rousseau. In fact, Burney's *The Wanderer* appeared in the same year as Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, the poem for which he was best-known to his contemporaries. While in his poem the Solitary retreats from the grim realities of the French Revolution into the English pastoral landscape, Burney's novel suggests that no solace exists for solitary women Wanderers, either in the city, the country, or (especially) in fashionable society: her heroine "had severely experienced how little fitted to the female character, to female safety, and to female propriety, was this hazardous plan of lonely wandering."²² Burney's novel provides one example among many in these collected essays of how women writers engage and revise canonical Romantic

tropes and figures such as “transcendence,” “the wanderer,” “the sublime,” and do so from their perspectives as women, and from overtly politicized perspectives as well. Such revision of canonical Romantic tropes, however, does not mean that these writers were not Romantic. While Burney and More certainly reject most qualities we associate with canonical Romanticism, and would in fact be more accurately described as anti-Romantic (in distinct ways), writers like Charlotte Smith, Mary Hays, and Amelia Opie are Romantic given their explorations of transcendence, passion, and the sublime, respectively. Thus Kari Lokke’s essay on Smith, Miriam Wallace’s essay on Hays, and Ann Frank Wake’s essay on Opie, in addition to foregrounding these writers’ engagement in revolutionary politics, also contribute significantly to current debates over women’s relationships to Romanticism. When taken as a whole, this volume suggests that we must continue to widen our field of inquiry when we ask questions of women’s relationships to Romanticism, since they continue to surprise us with their divergent political and poetic insights.

While scholarship on British women writers’ involvement in French Revolutionary debates is in the initial stages of development, the last decade has seen much excellent work on French women and their significance in the Revolution. Joan Landes’s *Women and the Public Sphere in the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt’s *The Family Romance and the French Revolution*, Madelyn Gutwirth’s *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*, and Sara Melzer and Leslie Rabine’s *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, have focused the attention of French cultural historians on the significance of gender and sexual politics for the French public sphere.²³

Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution engages in a dialogue with this influential work on the significance of gender in French Revolutionary culture at the same time that it complements that previous scholarship by offering a specific focus upon the discursive contributions of women to the French Revolutionary debates in late eighteenth-century Britain. Jürgen Habermas’s original formulation of the notion of the public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* does indeed make room for women as readers essential to the literary public realm, but the essays gathered here suggest that British women played a crucial and active role in the creation of religious, philosophical, and political opinion and policy as well. Writers such as Helen Maria Williams, Charlotte Smith, Helen Craik, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Mary Wollstonecraft clearly saw themselves as vital

participants in an international, cosmopolitan conversation about the moral and political fate of Europe.

Geoff Eley, scholar of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British radicalism, and feminist critics Nancy Fraser and Joan Landes have all persuasively argued that Habermas's model of the eighteenth-century British public sphere as essentially limited to property-owning males does not do justice to the diversity of the participants in the crucial literary, philosophical, and political conversations of the era.²⁴ Building upon the concept of *Gegenöffentlichkeit* developed by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, whose early revisions of Habermas were meant to acknowledge and to make room for contributions of the proletariat to public discourse, Fraser and Eley articulate concepts of "counter-public spheres" that emphasize the diverse and conflictual nature of the public sphere from the outset.²⁵ Fraser defines these counter-publics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (123). The essays collected here provide valuable insights into and information about the precise nature and terms of women's participation in that ostensibly masculine arena, the public sphere, as well as offering a variety of responses to the question of whether women's writings on the French Revolution were indeed the product of an oppositional counter-public sphere as it is defined by Fraser and other feminist theorists such as Leonora Davidoff.²⁶

That British women's voices did claim a powerful presence in the ideological debates surrounding the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars does not, however, mean that British patriarchy sanctioned the breakdown of barriers between masculine and feminine roles, between public and domestic realms. Rather, the writings of the eighteenth-century authors represented here confirm Linda Colley's assertion that in the decades following the American Revolution, "separate spheres were being increasingly prescribed in theory, yet increasingly broken through in practice" (251). These writings clearly testify to the urgency with which women of a wide spectrum of political persuasions felt compelled to respond to the moral and political questions raised by the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, despite societal taboos against such intervention. Charlotte Smith's angry preface to her revolutionary novel *Desmond* (1792) gives eloquent expression to the conflicts engendered by such prescriptions:

Women it is said have no business with politics.—Why not?—
Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around

them, in which they have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged!—Even in the commonest course of female education, they are expected to acquire some knowledge of history; and yet, if they are to have no opinion of what is passing, it avails them little that they should be informed of what *has passed*, in a world where they are subject to such mental degradation; where they are censured as affecting masculine knowledge if they happen to have any understanding; or despised as insignificant triflers if they have none.²⁷

Yet on the heels of this defiant logic, Smith still finds it necessary to reassure her public, though with sharp irony, that, in becoming a novelist she is earning the money necessary to support her family, and thus fulfilling, rather than neglecting, her domestic duties:

Knowledge, which qualifies women to speak or to write on any other than the most common and trivial subjects, is supposed to be of so difficult attainment, that it cannot be acquired but by the sacrifice of domestic virtues, or the neglect of domestic duties.—I however, may safely say, that it was in the *observance*, not in the *breach* of duty, *I* became an Author. (6)

Such tactics of claiming to remain within the sphere of properly female behavior while in fact blurring the boundaries between public and private or even enacting a “masculine” role are common among the women writers represented in this volume. Indeed, these tactics are keys to understanding the formal and intellectual complexities as well as the ideological contradictions identified by several contributors to this collection as central to the texts under discussion. One such tactic common among these late eighteenth-century women writers is to assert the apolitical nature and thus the acceptable femininity of their writing by claiming its disinterestedness, impartiality and lack of partisanship.²⁸ Thus, as Maria Jerinic notes, Burney presents *The Wanderer* as a politically neutral novel, a picture of life and manners, devoid of “materials for political controversy,” or “any species of personality, either in the form of foreign influence, or of national partiality” (*Wanderer*, 4). Similarly, Angela Keane shows More channeling her counterrevolutionary sentiments into humanitarian efforts on behalf of the emigrant French clergy, efforts that she explicitly asserts are of “no party.” Judith Miller identifies a strategy of “open concealment” as a means by which Smith’s novels assert a clear political

philosophy while seeming to remain within the confines of the apolitical genre of romance and courtship. And Kari Lokke demonstrates that Smith in *The Emigrants* portrays “party rage perverse and blind” as the ultimate threat to a utopian ideal of universalist and disinterested compassion figured in the explicitly female “mild dominion of the moon.” In asserting the universality of their positions under cover of a “feminine” refusal of politics, these writers are paradoxically asserting their right to public speech and political influence by challenging the false universalism of the bourgeois public sphere that excluded women, as Landes has argued, on the basis of their perceived association with “particularity, interest, and partiality” (144), and most specifically with “bodily and affective particularity” (144).

Many of the women writers represented in this collection chose the genre of the letter for their means of self-expression as a way of both camouflaging and legitimating their entry into public and political debates. The essays collected here on women writers of the Romantic era fully confirm Mary Favret’s assertions in *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* that during this period, “the letter—public and private—became the focus of ideological and political struggle.”²⁹ Rather than simply reinforcing women’s association with the sentimental and domestic, the epistolary genres examined here were powerful polemical tools that allowed women to redefine the terms of their political and intellectual engagement with the most pressing concerns of that historical moment.

Deborah Kennedy shows how the choice of the letter as the genre best-suited to the recording of Helen Maria Williams’s immediate eyewitness responses to the Revolution, as well as to expressing her emotional commitment to its original ideals, allowed Williams to create a new and influential form of history. Similarly, as Jeanne Moskal argues, Mariana Starke’s *Letters from Italy*, written while she was travelling there as nurse to an invalid relative, provide a venue for the assertion of her conservative, Anglican responses to the Napoleonic invasion of Italy at the same time that they enable her to challenge and redefine the Grand Tour as no longer an exclusively male and aristocratic tradition. As travel-writings, Starke’s works formed the basis for a new genre of tourist travel literature, John Murray’s popular and lucrative *Handbooks for Travellers*, begun in the 1830s.

The epistolary works of Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft also offer innovative uses of the letter that combine forms of public and private address as well as reminding us of the importance of the non-rational in women’s contributions to the public sphere. In *The Memoirs*

of *Emma Courtney*, Miriam Wallace demonstrates that Mary Hays incorporates letters to her mentor William Godwin and to her beloved William Frend as a courageous means of seeking control over the raw material of emotion and of redefining true philosophy as encompassing sensibility and passion. In an inverse gesture, Mary Wollstonecraft presents her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) not just as travel memoirs meant for publication, but also as love letters to an anonymous beloved, when in fact they represented an entirely different set of texts from those sent to her American lover Gilbert Imlay. In his *Memoirs of the Author of a "Vindication of the Rights of Woman,"* William Godwin may have read these *Letters* as "a book calculated to make a man in love with its author,"³⁰ but according to Jan Wellington, they represent a serious and radical effort to challenge stereotypic and fixed conceptions of character, both individual and national.

Finally, Charlotte Smith's most explicitly political novel *Desmond* takes an epistolary form that enables her to represent in detail a variety of positions in the revolutionary debates, and to claim, as Judith Miller argues, the objectivity of Desmond's explicitly stated radical politics. As Smith asserts with customary cleverness in her Preface, "I have given to my imaginary characters the arguments I have heard on both sides; and if those in favour of one party have evidently the advantage, it is not owing to my partial representation but to the predominant power of truth and reason, which can neither be altered nor concealed" (5–6). The framing correspondence between the older mentor, E. Bethel, and the younger Desmond clearly responds to Edmund Burke's epistolary framing of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as a letter to Charles-François Dupont, a young gentleman in France. Thus not only does the letter as form challenge the distinction between public and private through its presence in such traditionally feminine forms as the memoir, the travel journal, and the epistolary novel. In the hands of these women writers, the letter also lends itself easily to a kind of generic hybridization that ultimately authorizes Revolutionary-era women to write philosophy, politics, and history.

Along with Mary Robinson, who set two of her novels, *The Natural Daughter* (1799) and *Hubert de Sevrac* (1796), in France and on the Continent during the turbulent early 1790s, Helen Craik and Charlotte Smith were among the earliest British writers to develop the historical novel as a genre. Traditionally traced to Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels which began to appear after Napoleon's defeat, the origins of the historical novel and the new historical consciousness

that made this genre possible are actually found in the French Revolution. Speaking of the European scale of the changes brought about by the French Revolution and its accompanying wars, Georg Lukács argued in his seminal study, *The Historical Novel*, that “the quick succession of these upheavals gives them a qualitatively distinct character, it makes their historical character far more visible than would be the case in isolated individual instances.”³¹ Yet contrary to Lukács’ assumption that novels before Scott lacked “[the] derivation of the individuality of their characters from the historical particularity of their age” (19), historical villains and heroines walked the pages of Helen Craik’s innovative novel *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet* [sic] (1800). Marat and his assassin, Charlotte Corday, are central players in Craik’s novel, who alongside fictional characters drawn from Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* offer readers an illuminating historicization of the Gothic novel’s central literary and gender conventions. As Adriana Craciun shows, Helen Craik used Corday’s controversial example of public and violent agency to imagine new forms of female subjectivity, and by doing so, established a threshold between the Gothic and the historical novel. Craik’s is not the only woman’s novel inhabited by historical figures; Marat and Robespierre are the villains of Robinson’s *The Natural Daughter* and, although he never appears in Burney’s *The Wanderer*, Robespierre signifies the gravest threat to women in Burney’s novel. In these pioneering works, as in Williams’s *Letters from France*, the historical Marat and Robespierre emerge as the age’s archetypal patriarchal villains, embodiments of the sexual and economic threats that British women, like their French counterparts, faced in this period of turbulent gender and political relations.

The generic innovations represented by many of the authors in this volume thus reaffirm Tilottama Rajan and Julia Wright’s argument in *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre* that we should reconceive genre as a “mobile category” which allowed authors to enact a process of cultural and political intervention. Rajan and Wright argue that writers such as William Godwin, in his historical fiction, and Lady Morgan, in her travel writings, “sought to change the very shape of history by drawing on new modes such as periodicals and travel writing to hybridize the more conventional genres of historiography and the historical novel.”³²

The focus on the letter and the novel should not, then, be allowed to obscure the striking variety of genres in which women writers of the Romantic period wrote about the Revolution. From Joanna Southcott’s prophecies to Joanna Baillie’s plays, from the influential travel

writings of Mariana Starke to the *Cheap Repository* tracts of Hannah More, women's writings on the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars were as diverse generically as they were politically. Furthermore, the women writers represented here did indeed also appropriate more prestigious and conventional generic forms as well as exploit the freedoms allowed by the hybrid forms discussed above. Thus Charlotte Smith announces *The Emigrants* as a response to her friend William Cowper's long blank verse poem *The Task* and, with the epigraph from Virgil's *Georgics* that opens Book Two, implicitly asserts her identity as poet of the British nation, all the while advocating transcendence of party spirit and national prejudice. Ann Frank Wake argues that the conventional nature of traditionally masculine poetic forms—the ode, for example—and of the poetic tropes and stylized landscapes chosen by Amelia Opie clashes with received notions of female agency, in an aesthetic and ideological conflict that brings her to the brink of poetic exhaustion and artistic silence.

As previously noted, many of the women writers represented here took advantage of their culturally sanctioned roles as guardians of private and public morality to assert themselves in the name of both religious truth and religious tolerance. Habermas's concept of the public sphere, limited as it was to rational debate, must be broadened and substantially transformed to accommodate the religious prophecies of Joanna Southcott, products of clair-audience or direct revelations of the voice of God, and the enormously influential evangelicalism of Hannah More, founded not upon reason, as Angela Keane shows us, but upon absolute metaphysical faith. As David Zaret has emphasized, "Habermas's account glosses over the relevance of religion for the emergence of a public sphere in politics at a time when religious discourse was a, if not the, predominant means by which individuals defined and debated issues in this sphere."³³ This volume, then, reveals the central role played by British women in the formulation and the expression of religious opinion as it overlapped with positions taken on the counterrevolutionary and Napoleonic wars, thereby underlining the limitations of any purely secular understanding of the late eighteenth-century public sphere.

Yet women's relationship to public spiritual authority was profoundly conflicted, despite the powerful cultural influence of such figures as Southcott and More. Ann Frank Wake's essay on Amelia Opie, for example, reveals the gulf between the progressive demands for religious tolerance on the part of the Dissenting community in which she was raised and its rigidly patriarchal codes of proper female behavior that restricted women to private expressions of sensibility

and shared (bodily) pain. Kevin Binfield shows that Southcott's efforts to sustain a public role as both woman and millenarian through the manipulation of mainstream nationalist and anti-French sentiments ultimately failed. Instead, the sixty-five year old prophet retreated into the refiguration of the virgin and post-menopausal births attributed to Mary and Sarah in the Bible by proclaiming herself pregnant with Shiloh, the future British redeemer. Similarly, Angela Keane depicts how, in response to the perceived Methodist and levelling tendencies of her Sunday school movement, Hannah More was vilified by members of the established church as a Pope Joan whose voracious sexuality drew members of the clergy and the peasantry into "the vortex of her petticoats." Thus the fate of each of these intensely spiritual women was marked by cultural efforts to limit woman to her own body and sexuality.

Given the double binds that ensnared women who sought to embody traditional feminine roles in public, it is wholly understandable that a number of the authors represented here sought to create new models for women as public subjects. As Adriana Craciun shows, Craik, in *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet* [sic], imagines Charlotte Corday as a new Romantic heroine, a "free agent" who desires justice and who ultimately enacts it. Indeed, Craik's portrait of Corday as a revolutionary subject whose greatest desire is justice, not love, is her unique contribution to the newly forming tradition of revolutionary historical novels discussed above. Similarly, Miriam Wallace argues that Hays, in her novel *Emma Courtney*, envisages a model of active, public, and revolutionary subjectivity that privileges sensibility as well as reason and comes into being through rational reflection upon private emotion and sensation.

In her recent novel, *City of Darkness, City of Light* (1996), Marge Piercy asserts that she chose to write a novel about the French Revolution because, for her, modern politics—the modern left as well as the women's movement—began there.³⁴ The essays collected here do indeed emphasize the relevance of French Revolutionary debates for current political struggles, as well as suggesting links that may allow us to trace contemporary political movements back to that earlier historical era. The antinationalist, cosmopolitan stances of Burney, Smith and Wollstonecraft, for example, bear comparison with the pacifist strain of the international women's movement today. And, as Wallace shows, the tensions between the claims of sensibility and rationality, the personal and the abstract, individual identity and universality central to the works of Mary Hays prefigure debates about the role of the body and the specifically "feminine" in feminist

theory today. And, according to Terence Hoagwood, Joanna Baillie's theory of drama, as expressed in the "Introductory Discourse" (1798) to her plays on the passions, with its emphasis upon the curiosity and pleasure induced by the spectacle of intense and violent emotion, initiates and celebrates a commodity culture still alive and well in Hollywood today.

In concluding our introductory essay by emphasizing contemporary political and cultural questions raised by these analyses of British women writers' constructions of the French Revolution, we wish to make clear that this collection represents only the first step in the exploration of a rich field of literary and historical scholarship. We have thus sought to raise questions and suggest new directions for research rather than to provide definitive answers. We also hope that future studies will examine, in depth, the writings of working-class British women on the Revolution, represented here by the sole example of Joanna Southcott. And Mary Robinson is an absolutely central figure in English radical culture whose political writings deserve serious study and generous commentary.³⁵ Women's responses to the Seven Years War, the American Revolution, and to Napoleon are also fascinating and largely unexplored fields of inquiry, as is the question of an identifiable and cosmopolitan response on the part of women throughout Europe to the cataclysmic political and cultural upheaval represented by the French Revolution. Lucia Maria Licher, for example, terms Karoline von Günderrode "the poet of revolution," and warns us to be wary of the conclusion drawn by Maria Mies in her contribution to Helga Brandes's collection on *Frauen und die Französische Revolution (Women and the French Revolution)* that, for women, the French Revolution did not take place.³⁶ In the spirit of the British women writers to whom this book is dedicated, we look forward to future dialogue on the significance of the French Revolution to women throughout Europe and beyond.

Notes

1. No fewer than eleven such addresses to the Convention were made by similar groups in Britain between November and December 1792. This particular address was read on November 28. See Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: the English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 508–09; see also David Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790–93* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 219.

2. The toasts and declaration to the National Convention are reprinted in David Erdman's excellent *Commerce des Lumières*, from which this quotation is taken (230), as well as in John Goldworth Alger's *Paris in 1789–94: Farewell Letters of Victims of the Guillotine* (New York: J. Pott & Co.; London, G. Allen, 1902); for a more concise account of the British Club, see Alger's essay "The British Colony in Paris, 1792–93" *English Historical Review* 13 (1898): 672–94 and chapter 8 in Erdman.

3. Women's armed militancy was on the rise in Paris in 1792 and 1793. The Citoyennes referred to in the toast had famously joined General Dumourier in battle, and were also praised by Mary Robinson in her 1799 *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination: A Romantic Circles Edition* <www.rc.umd.edu/editions/robinson/cover.htm>, ed. Adriana Craciun, Anne Irmen, Megan Musgrave, Oriane Smith (December 1998), 28. Theroigne de Méricourt gave a speech asking to form a battalion of armed women; on 31 July 1792, the women of the Hôtel de Ville Section petitioned the Convention for permission to bear arms and defend the city. See Section 3, "The Escalation of Women's Protest" in Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1781–1795: Selected Documents Translated with Notes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). This collection of primary documents is invaluable for understanding women's perspectives on and involvement in the Revolution. See also Marilyn Yalom, *Blood Sisters: The French Revolution in Women's Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), which tells in narrative form the stories of many leading female figures in the Revolution.

4. Smith, letter to Joel Barlow, 3 November 1792, Brighthelmstone (Huntington Library, MS BN404). This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Contrary to Erdman's speculation that Smith may have been present at the British Club toast, it seems impossible for her to have been in France then, given the dates of her letters from England in and around November 1792. According to Loraine Fletcher, Smith had been to Paris the previous year (*Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* [Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, and New York: St Martin's, 1998], 142).

5. The extent of Smith's connections to radical politics has been questioned by some modern scholars; reviews of *Desmond*, however, alluded to these connections, which seem to have been public knowledge. For example, the *Monthly Review*'s positive review of Smith's novel noted that her depiction of radical politics was based in "conversations to which she had been a witness in England and in France, during the last twelve months." See *Monthly Review* 9 (December 1792): 406–12. The *Critical Review* 6 (September 1792): 99–105, wrote that Smith was "[c]onnected with the reformers, and the revolutionists," and that "she has borrowed her colouring from them, and represented their conduct in the most favourable light"; see also

her obituary, "Memoirs of Mrs. Charlotte Smith," in the *Monthly Magazine* 23 (April 1807): 244–48. Smith's sister, Catherine Dorset, in her well-known memoir, writes that during 1791 Smith moved from Chichester to Brighton, "where she formed acquaintances with some of the most violent advocates of the French Revolution, and unfortunately caught the contagion, though in direct opposition to the principles she had formerly professed, and to those of her family" (49). Dorset writes with regret of the negative reception Smith's politics received from critics, friends, and "literary ladies," and she would have little reason to exaggerate Smith's politics. *Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. 4: *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1834), 21–70.

6. Brissot, as quoted in Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières*, 189.

7. Charlotte Smith, *Letters*, ed. Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming), 86. Our thanks to Judith Stanton for making these letters available to Smith scholars and to Bill Brewer for sharing his copy of selections from the manuscript with us. There is no evidence that Smith actually made this 1793 trip.

8. Smith to William Godwin, December 7 [n.d., probably 1797], Bodleian Library (Abinger Deposit) Dep. C. 526, by kind permission of Lord Abinger, through the Bodleian Library. Smith (mis)quotes letter eight in Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1987), 112.

9. Smith to William Godwin, September 1797, Bodleian Library (Abinger Deposit), Dep. b. 215/6, by kind permission of Lord Abinger, through the Bodleian Library. This earlier letter was probably sent during the week of Wollstonecraft's lying in and death, given that Smith asks for news of Wollstonecraft's health: "It will give me very sincere pleasure to hear a good account of Mrs. Godwin."

10. On women's investment in conservative patriarchal interests, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father's Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). M.O. Grenby includes Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Fanny Burney, and Helen Craik in his list of anti-Jacobin conservative writers in "The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Fiction, British Conservatism and the Revolution in France" (*History* 83 [1998]: 445–71). On the intersection of class and gender in eighteenth-century women's literature, see Donna Landry's excellent *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739–1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

11. Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits; Addressed to Miss H. M. Williams, With Particular Reference to Her Letters from France*, 2nd ed. (London: J. and T. Carpenter, 1801) 2: 194; first published in 1793 by Hookham & Carpenter. On Hawkins and

Williams, see Steven Blakemore, "Revolution and the French Disease: Laetitia Matilda Hawkins's 'Letters' to Helen Maria Williams," *Studies in English Literature* 36.3 (1996): 673–91.

12. Several recent books focus on a select number of well-known British women writers: Steven Blakemore's *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997) and Gary Kelly's *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790–1827* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). The latter study discusses the work of Helen Maria Williams, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Mary Hays. In addition to these major studies, two earlier essays survey British women's responses to the French Revolution, the first limited to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and Mary Shelley, the second discussing a much larger variety of writers, many of them noncanonical: Anne Mellor, "English Women Writers and the French Revolution," Sara Melzer and Leslie Rabine, eds., *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 255–72, and Margaret Doody, "English Women Writers and the French Revolution" in *La Femme en Angleterre et dans les Colonies Américaines aux XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles: Actes du colloque tenu à Paris les 24 et 25 Octobre 1975* (Lille: L'Université de Lille III, 1975), 176–98. See also Eleanor Ty's *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1993). More recently, Stephen Behrendt has discussed British women poets and radicalism: "British Women Poets and the Reverberations of Radicalism in the 1790s," in *Romanticism, Radicalism and the Press*, ed. Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 83–102. For essays on the French Revolution and individual writers mentioned in this introduction, e.g., Williams, Wollstonecraft, Smith, see the notes to the respective essays in *Rebellious Hearts*.

13. Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) and *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Marlon Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Anne Mellor *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Anne Mellor, ed. *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

14. Ronald Paulson writes: "The nodal point, the hidden center of Wordsworth's revolutionary experience, comes in book IX, and this is the experience of Annette Vallon," who hence becomes "interchangeable" with the Revolution for Wordsworth (*Representations of Revolution* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983], 265). Wordsworth's account of this romance with Vallon, fictionalized in the "Vaudracour and Julia" episode in *The Prelude*, was itself influenced by Helen Maria Williams's *Letters from France*; see Deborah Kennedy, "Revolutionary Tales: Helen Maria Williams's

Letters from France and William Wordsworth's 'Vaudracour and Julia,'" *The Wordsworth Circle* 21 (1990): 109–14.

15. M.H. Abrams's characterization of "the spirit of the age" represents, and indeed, founded, this interpretative tradition: "The great Romantic poems were written not in the mood of revolutionary exaltation but in the later mood of revolutionary disillusionment or despair," (53) when "the militancy of overt political action" had evolved into "the paradox of spiritual quietism," (58). See "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," *Romanticism Reconsidered*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). Blake most obviously does not fit this model of quietism and despair, and neither do many of the women discussed in this volume. More recent work on canonical (male) writers has also begun to question the accuracy of this teleological model of Romantic disillusionment with the Revolution. Robert Maniquis, for example, argues that contrary to the assumption that writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey abandoned the Revolution after the Terror, they actually still spoke nostalgically of the Revolution, and for the most part blamed England for the Terror, because of its declaration of war ("Holy Savagery and Wild Justice: English Romanticism and the Terror" in *Studies in Romanticism* 28 [1989]: 365–96). See also *Revolution in Writing: British literary responses to the French Revolution*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991), and *Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric*, ed. Keith Hanley and Raman Selden (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf and St. Martin's, 1990). Both of these volumes approach the impact of the Revolution on (largely canonical) Romanticism by examining the impact of recent methodological shifts on the field as a whole, i.e., the emergence of new historicism and poststructuralism. Hanley and Selden conclude that "the familiar outlines of revolutionary and counter revolutionary positions in British culture of the Romantic period dissolve and form contradictory and ambiguous formations when we read texts with close attention to the interplay of their figurative and linguistic modes of interpretation" (xv–xvi).

16. For general accounts of the impact of the Revolution on British literary scenes, see: P.M.S. Dawson, "Poetry in an age of revolution," *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *The French Revolution Debate in English Literature and Culture*, ed. Lisa Plummer Crafton (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997); David Bindman, ed., *In the Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution* (London: British Museum, 1989); Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution, 1789–1820*; Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Backgrounds 1760–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Marilyn Butler, ed., *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Stephen Prickett, *England and the French Revolution* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989). For

major studies on individual authors and the Revolution, see especially Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); David Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (rev. ed.; Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969); David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

17. The term is Ronald Paulson's, but the characterization is a common one (*Representations of Revolution*, 39). For cultural and political studies see: Ceri Crossley and Ian Small, eds., *The French Revolution and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); H.T. Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789–1815* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

18. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging a Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

19. Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

20. Seamus Deane identifies two distinct phases in British responses to the emigrants: "The first was marked by the view that the Revolution was a crusade against Christianity itself and that the émigrés, especially the clergy, were the direct victims of it. The second, less melodramatic, began to replace the first after the Peace of Amiens (1802); it was governed by the sensible conviction that the new Napoleonic France threatened the existence of England." In the second phase it was the constitutionalists, such as Staël, not the royalists, whom the British supported. Deane's cogent analysis does not consider the impact of gender on British nationalism, or on Staël's cosmopolitanism. See Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England 1789–1832* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 23.

21. Gary Kelly, "Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism: Women, Writing, and Cultural Revolution," in *Revolution and English Romanticism*, ed. Keith Hanley and Raman Selden (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 107–30; *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London, 1992).

22. Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 671.

23. Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance and the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Sara Meltzer and Leslie Rabine, eds. *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*. Other major studies include

Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Harriet Applewhite and Darlene Levy, eds. *Women and Politics in the Age of Democratic Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), and Shirley Elson Roessler, *Out of the Shadows: Women and Politics in the French Revolution, 1789–95* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996). On French women writers, see *Literate Women Writers and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. Catherine Montfort (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1994).

24. Geoff Eley, “Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures; Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century,” and Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 289–349 and 109–42. See also Joan B. Landes, “The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration,” *Feminism, the Public, and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 135–63.

25. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labyani, James Oswen Daniel, and Assenka Oskiloff; foreword by Miriam Hansen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

26. Leonore Davidoff, “Regarding Some ‘Old Husbands’ Tales: Public and Private in Feminist History,” *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 164–94. Davidoff speaks of “multiple publics” rather than “counter-public” spheres.

27. Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*, ed. Antje Blank and Janet Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997), 6.

28. Having its roots in the outsider status of women in relation to bourgeois patriarchal institutions, this claim of non-partisanship bears comparison with the rejection of party politics attributed to the radical opposition of the 1790s and beyond by Kevin Gilmartin in *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11–64. See also, Gilmartin, “Popular Radicalism and the Public Sphere,” *Studies in Romanticism* 33.4 (Winter 1994): 549–58. This volume of *Studies in Romanticism* on “Romanticism and its Publics,” contains excellent articles devoted to “publics and publicness” in Britain between 1780 and 1830. For a specific focus on British women poets and radical press politics, see Stephen C. Behrendt, “British Women Poets and the Reverberations of Radicalism in the 1790s,” *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press*.

29. Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 18. See also Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in*

the *Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) and Deborah Heller, "Bluestocking Salons and the Public Sphere" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22.2 (1998): 59–82.

30. William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of "A Vindication of The Rights of Woman"* ed. Richard Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 249.

31. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, intro. Frederic Jameson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 23.

32. Tilottama Rajan and Julia Wright, Introduction, *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre*, ed. Rajan and Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10–11.

33. David Zaret, "Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 213.

34. Marge Piercy, *City of Darkness, City of Light* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996), x.

35. On Robinson, see Sharon Setzer, "Romancing the Reign of Terror: Sexual Politics in Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*," *Criticism* 39.4 (Fall 1997): 531–55; Adriana Craciun, "Violence Against Difference: Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Robinson," *Making History: Textuality and the Forms of Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. Greg Clingham (Bucknell: Bucknell University Press, 1998), 111–41; for new evidence regarding Robinson's radicalism see Craciun's essay on Charlotte Corday in *Rebellious Hearts*. An edition of *The Natural Daughter* edited by Setzer is forthcoming from Broadview Press.

36. Lucia Maria Licher, *Mein Leben in einer bleibenden Form aussprechen: Umriss einer Ästhetik im Werk Karoline von Günderrodes (1780–1806)* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1995), 50. Maria Mies, "Die Französische Revolution findet für die Frauen nicht statt," *Frauen und die Französische Revolution*, ed. Helga Brandes (Wiesbaden, 1991). For a discussion of two novels about the French Revolution set in France and written by German women writers of the Romantic era, Therese Huber's *Die Familie Seldorf: Eine Erzählung aus der französischen Revolution* (1796) and Caroline de Fouqué's *Magie der Natur: Eine Revolutions-Geschichte* (1812), see Gerhart Hoffmeister "The French Revolution in the German Novel around 1800," *European Romantic Review* 2.2 (Winter 1992): 163–171.