

RECASTING 1789: THE REVOLUTIONARY HEROINE IN
FRENCH AND BRITISH LITERATURE

by

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Recasting 1789: The Revolutionary Heroine in French and British Literature

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Jill Heydt-Stevenson

The Revolutionary Heroine—the female protagonist in novels of the French Revolution written by women between 1801 and 1871—is the unique literary manifestation of women authors’ head-on challenge to the promises of equality that the Revolution appeared to offer their sex, but which instead reduced it to “the most absurd mediocrity” (De Staël). By confronting a century’s worth of political, social, and sexual history, the Revolutionary Heroine recasts the drama of 1789: as an embodiment of all that is politically other, she presents at once a rewrite, a correction, an alternative, and a challenge to male literary heroes who are complicit with failed revolutionary policies, to literary heroines who have yet to realize the scope of the debate at which they are the heart, and to the Revolution itself. Deconstructing doctrines of propriety, redefining women’s nature, politicizing her domestic contributions, calling for her citizenship, denouncing revolutionary violence, and revalorizing the Enlightenment cosmopolitanism that perished in antagonistic Franco-British relations during the Terror, the Revolutionary Heroine neutralizes the period’s greatest sources of public and private anxiety with the philosophical justification that the crisis itself was unable to institutionalize.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my patient and loving husband, to our supremely adorable children,
and to Kathy's guest room.

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Since I quote from many of Madam de Staël's works, I will use the following abbreviations in order to be clear about which work I am referring to:

D = Delphine

C = Corinne

RF = Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution Française

DA = De l'Allemagne

LR = Lettres sur Rousseau

EF = Essai sur les fictions

Chapter I

The Origins of the Revolutionary Heroine

What “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive!” wrote William Wordsworth of the thrilling hopes that the French Revolution promised to the European world. Not surprisingly, such heroes’ despair as they watched the uprising collapse into violence and greater forms of absolutist tyranny has been the topic of many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels and subsequent critical analyses. Scholarship, however, has neglected the European literary heroine as a specifically revolutionary subject in her own right. Many capable studies of women writers resisting patriarchal structures during the Enlightenment exist, such those by Mary Siedman Trouille, Joan B. Landes, and Nicola J. Watson; Romantic scholars, in turn, have done much significant work on women authors’ striving for autonomy during the post-revolutionary period of conservative backlash, such as Madelyn Gutwirth, Pam Perkins, Naomi Nachumi, Anne K. Mellor and Doris Kadish. However, none so far has considered the extraordinary intersection of literary and historical circumstances that created what I am calling the Revolutionary Heroine—the female protagonist in novels of the French Revolution written by women between 1801 and 1871—that I propose to study here. While individually these different categories—the heroine, the female author, the narrative of the Revolution—are worthy of analysis, they coalesce to represent the period’s greatest sources of public and private anxiety: the emancipated and therefore subversive fictional heroine, acting autonomously during a period of social and political upheaval, penned by a flesh and blood woman doing the same. Indeed, women authors struggling against the exigencies of a patriarchal society that affords them little intellectual autonomy and virtually no civic role outside of the home is by no means a new field in the

critical analysis of women's literary presence during the period of time in question. And yet, the precise turn of events in the French Revolution—its historically unparalleled application of socio-political philosophy to the deconstruction of the public sphere, its initial embrace of women's participation in that process and subsequent brutal rejection of it, followed by the grossly over-corrective reduction of the sex to “the most absurd mediocrity”¹—allowed the authors analyzed in this study to reexamine Enlightenment ideals and the promises of revolution with greater force and depth than any study of the period has yet to concede. The degree to which they engage intellectually with a century's worth of political, social, and sexual history itself attests to the extraordinary synthesis that the French Revolution seemed to require, and which these writers were in the exclusive position to undertake. The act of recasting the drama of 1789, then, is multiplicitous and complex: as an embodiment of all that is politically *other*, the Revolutionary Heroine presents at once a rewrite, a correction, an alternative, and a challenge to male literary heroes who are complicit with failed revolutionary policies, to literary heroines who have yet to realize the scope of the debate at which they are the heart, and to the Revolution itself.

Who is the Revolutionary heroine? She is rich, like de Staël's Corinne, she is without fortune, like Edgeworth's Belinda. She is noble, like the Baroness' Delphine, she is a peasant, like Sand's Nanon. She is French and she is English, she is literate and illiterate, named and nameless, impeccably virtuous by the century's standards and less so. What, then, ties this disparate group of women together? It is the very synthesis of this failure, the unsuccessful break with a broadly prejudiced ontology despite promised social regeneration, that they collectively represent as they individually challenge the legacy left to women by the long eighteenth century:

¹ De Staël, *De la Littérature*, Part II, Chapter 4.

sexual determinism and philosophies of essentialized gender, the domesticating discourse that removed women from the public sphere while denying them the education that would offer them alternative destinies, the sex's glaring omission from the various declarations of rights and liberties underpinning the Revolutionary agenda, including the expanding parameters of citizenship, and the xenophobic and increasingly misogynistic nationalism that followed the descent of promises of exquisite liberty into national Terror on both sides of the Channel.

The personage of the Revolutionary Heroine and her changing literary circumstances, then, expose the gamut of reactions to historical events, ranging from the complex to the codified, and in order to establish her uniquely subversive role, we must first recognize what structures, discourses, stereotypes, powers, and models she is working against. The goal of this chapter, then, will be to delineate the various Enlightenment, revolutionary and post-revolutionary voices in both France and Britain with which these heroines engage, showing, at the same time, the ways in which they cast off various kinds of ideological and logocentric imprisonment while recasting themselves as the missing link in successful nation-wide social reform in both France and England.

What is woman?

Eighteenth-century literature could not exist, argues Nancy K. Miller, without a collective “obsessing about an idea called ‘woman’ and without a female reading public” (ix). Indeed, determining, precisely, what was the nature of woman—especially in respect to man—was an all-consuming occupation of the early 18th century, and therefore it would be impossible to make a statement about the rise of the novel and the literary heroine without referencing the construction of modern femininity and woman's gender identity, and vice versa. This

intersection of textual, sexual, and social practices confirms the collective justice of three primary theories on the origin of the novel: Ian Watt, who sees the birth of the novel as a result of burgeoning economic individualism, but who discounts women in his portrait, Nancy Armstrong, who reads the genre as having sprung from the century's explorations of sexual relationships, and Joan DeJean, who identifies the intellectual exchanges of the aristocratic salon as the birthplace of the novel. Indeed, all three approaches are relevant for understanding the complex overlapping of discourses that intimately linked "the woman question" and the growth of the novel, the sphere in which it was most fiercely debated, in the eighteenth century. From the point of view of literature, then, it was undoubtedly the women's century, since they were the period's primary producers and consumers of novels, so much so that men often lamented that it was more profitable to publish under a woman's name. Indeed, women's discursive practices in salons, Aurora Wolfgang has argued, "such as polite conversation, letter writing, and male-female sociability, inspired original, but vehemently debated, forms of modern French literature" (17). As progressive writers claimed the superiority of feminine discernment and sensitivity, which was tied to the then feminine discursive form of love letters, emotional exercises that emanated from the body, novelists tried to emulate and adopt a feminine voice that channeled the sex's natural sensibility. By the early part of the century, the practice in both nations of male authors appropriating the female voice in their fictions "had become a popular and innovative narrative ploy" (Miller 5), which took the form, as it did in Marivaux's novels, for example, of a "natural and transparent writing style, a refined analysis of love, and an examination of social manners" (Wolfgang 2), which authors constructed via intertextual allusions, imitations, and parody.

However, as Mary Poovey has astutely observed, “if eighteenth-century fiction is arguably gynocentric, eighteenth– and nineteenth-century English society was emphatically not” (ix), a truth that Revolutionary Heroines are not alone in exposing. It goes without saying that French society was in more or less the same boat. Indeed, the charming feminine traits of sensibility and penetration held little credit for women themselves outside of aristocratic social and intellectual circles and outside of fiction. Instead, as Miller has shown, “the heroine’s text,” while based on female experience and presented as feminocentric writing, is, in fact a fiction intended to circumscribe women’s identity and destiny, leading all heroines into marriage, the convent, or death” (3). That women’s style of writing stood in stark contrast to the scholastic, classical tradition made it a somewhat revolutionary undertaking when men appropriated it. That women, however, gained no political ground from this association between their allegedly innate sensibilities and the political doctrines that progressive authors were trying to force by linking their own subversive values to this feminized form of expression—what Marilyn Butler has called Sentimentalism’s “radical inheritance”—is the very kernel of the Revolutionary Heroine’s *raison d’être*.

At the heart of this paradox is what Madelyn Gutwirth has called “social woman,” or the “spectacular” (Joan Landes) Ancien Régime woman who rules with her sexual power, using *boudoir politics*, or what the Admiral in Burney’s novel calls a *petticoat government*, to meddle in public affairs. Though her penetration and sensibility were lauded, she was also seen as a scourge to public stability and an emasculating force on men. A variety of discourses were therefore erected in order to control this fearsome figure, including conduct books and novels, which, as Nancy Armstrong has shown, eventually developed a kind of symbiotic relationship to the point that they became one in the same, Richardson’s *Pamela* being the most evocative

example. Conduct books, Armstrong has demonstrated, portrayed aristocratic women as the “very embodiments of corrupted desire, namely, desire that sought its gratification in economic and political terms” (60). Rousseau, in turn condemned the feminizing effect of salon society, whose women, objects of spectacle that “crush our sex with its own talents” (LDA 286), turned men of letters into *femmelettes*. Such creatures were seen to be at the same time a perversion of all that women was supposed to be, and yet, all that woman always already—*naturally*—was, as the “Mother of miseries,” the descendant of Eve who took the apple, seduced Adam, and who continues to destroy men’s best-laid plans with her carnal appetite and hunger for sexual flattery. It was therefore relatively easy to justify refusing the era’s claims for greater education and mobility for women made by such apologists as such as Mary Astell and Elisabeth Elstob in England and Hortense Mancini and Gabrielle Suchon in France.

The Revolutionary Heroines in this study, however, powerfully counter these early-century practices with their purposeful reclamation of women’s sensibility, sociability, transparency, and even her potential for spectacularity, and their subsequent reassignment of them to political action. De Staël’s *Corinne* and *Delphine*, for example, will argue for the valorization of these traits in women and will demonstrate how society at large suffers when it forbids the second sex from exercising them outside of the domestic sphere; indeed, both heroines will point to this exclusion as a deciding factor in revolutionary failure. In so doing, they engage directly with Rousseau and his pronouncements on both dangerous public women and the necessity of women’s submission to men, “her lawful head,” in domestic roles. In *Emile* the philosopher asserts that “the reason of women is practical reason, which gives them great skill in finding the means for reaching a known end, but it does not cause them to find the end itself.” From this association he extrapolates the necessary influence of women’s “moral

personality” in domestic affairs. In their co-governing the couple forms a single body, in which “woman is the eye and man is the arm [...]. It is from the man that the woman learns what must be seen, and from the woman that the man learns what must be done” (275). If this is the case in the ideal family home, and if these rising discourses themselves represented, as Jacques Donzelot has argued, “the transition from a government of families to a government through the family” (qtd in Armstrong 18), what possible excuse could there be for excising the wisdom of women’s “moral eye” from public debates? In short, the Revolutionary Heroine boldly asks why, if man needs woman’s special capacities in private, does he not then need them in public as well. Both Corinne and Delphine, I will demonstrate in chapter 2, drive themselves to the grave in an effort to expose this paradox in Enlightenment gender theory. Nanon, in turn, a Revolutionary Heroine created nearly a century later, will take Corinne’s and Delphine’s political practices in far bolder directions, and will ultimately tie this same paradox to the economic health of the nation at large.

Propriety and the Angel in the House

And yet, the extinguishment of *social woman* required an extremely rigid and dogmatic doctrine that could convince women themselves of their alleged perversion while offering them appealing domestic alternatives. Constructed in accordance with the century’s growing fascination with the *natural*, an inheritance of Locke’s Family Romance and the core of Rousseau’s eventual founding portrait of ideal domesticity, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), nearly all of these texts in France and Britain identified women’s desire as dangerous and unbounded because of the very receptivity to sensation and penchant for emotion that writers prized and imitated earlier in the century. Most, therefore, established boundaries of *angelic* behavior and offered prescriptions of education that served to control a woman’s sexuality and

the way that she wielded her disruptive desirability. “At the heart of the explicit description of the ‘feminine,’ Angelic women, superior to all physical appetite,” Mary Poovey has observed, “resides the ‘female’ sexuality that was automatically assumed to be the defining characteristic of female nature” (19). The discourse that was constructed, then, defined women’s nature as essentially sexual at the same time that it called the prescribed behaviors and manners to obscure that latent sexuality “natural.” From the jumping off point of a kind necessary sexual repression to maintain the allegedly original state of feminine innocence, conduct book writers on both sides of the Channel encouraged women to “not allow or admit to appetites of any kind [and to] display no vanity, no passion, no assertive ‘self’ at all” as the surest way to avoid overindulgence. “In keeping with this design, even genuinely talented women were urged to avoid all behavior that would call attention to themselves” (Poovey 21), because, as Rousseau explained it, “any woman who shows herself off disgraces herself” (LDA 312). The reward offered to women for this self-deprivation was the promise of reinstatement of superiority and glorification in the duties of wife- and motherhood, an oath that the philosopher fulfilled with exquisite international success in *Julie*.

Indeed, Rousseau’s role in the creation of the domesticating discourse and its complicated relationship with eventual revolution cannot be overemphasized, for his novel was the source of a profound transformation in the century’s conception of virtue. By channeling woman’s empire into the home, where she was meant to embrace her calculating nature and sexual potency in order to guide her husband’s conduct and steer him toward sound moral choices, Rousseau intended to preserve the nation from the perceived threat that her sexual wiles, when wielded in the realm of politics, posed to matters of state. As long, therefore, as the effects of her desire did not overflow into the public space, she no longer presented any danger. In the

context of his most successful work of fiction, the heroine, Julie, who has transgressed social and religious law by giving herself to her lover St. Preux, ultimately finds redemption for this sin in the abandonment of her individual, female desire in favor of marriage to M Wolmar, according to her father's wishes. Her reward for this act of self-abnegation that maintains the flow of patriarchal authority is, first, her continued appellation of "a virtuous woman," and second, her reinscription into the patriarchal family model at Clarens, where she becomes the single most influential figure of domestic bliss in all of eighteenth-century literature. In addition to being indicative of France's longstanding relative indifference, as compared with Britain's, to the demand for women's absolute sexual purity, Rousseau's oxymoronic ideal of "virtuous fornication" had more to do with politics than sexual transgression. Indeed, Julie's return to the fold of virtue and patriarchal inscription hangs, essentially, on her public silence and invisibility, which stand in stark contrast to the deep political and philosophical discussions in which she engages with her forbidden lover in the first quarter of the novel. Instead, it forms the inaugurating literary gesture of the gradual modification of the meaning of virtue during the course of the eighteenth century in France, which transformed the ideal from a religious and sexual imperative into a socio-political principle; the hallmark of the doctrine was woman's "confinement to the private realm," which, Joan Landes has argued, "functions as a public sign of her political virtue" (69). In short, women's willing self-removal from the public sphere to the domestic sphere represents what many scholars have called "the sexual contract"—women's political atonement for their inherent sexual transgression—that the century used to justify the sex's exclusion from the gradual march toward equality. In this new compact, which, for women, took the place of the Social Contract that Rousseau proposed to men only one year after publishing *Julie*, they were freed from the taint of original sin but had willingly consigned

themselves to political inferiority in exchange. Indeed, they had essentially acquiesced to and ensured their definitive exclusion from citizenship by their own admission of their quintessentially private destiny. However, we must not forget that standards of sexual virtue were far from forgotten: women were now held to two oppressive standards, especially in Britain, where “the restrictions on them were harsher in some respects than elsewhere” (243), as Linda Colley has observed.

Both the severity of doctrines of propriety, which in England quickly came to be associated with anti-Jacobin social prescriptions at the outset of the Revolution, and of injunctions of women’s political virtue represent discourses upon which the Revolutionary Heroines in this study will operate astonishing transmutations. The English heroines in particular—Belinda and Juliet—will challenge prescriptions of propriety and definitions of women’s nature head on, identifying both as a source of real physical danger for women, who become increasingly exposed when the conduct that is supposed to mask their innate sexuality comes, instead, to represent the very exhibition of it and an invitation to exploit it. While Belinda encourages her readers to consider the civic and political utility of women’s confinement to a narrow sphere of behaviors and occupations, Juliet exposes how doctrines of propriety put women in an impossible double bind that operates at the public as well as the private level: the exclusion of women from the national economy, because of the undesirable association with the value of the material body that the idea of working women infers, threatens the nation’s economic stability as much as women’s personal safety and happiness. Delphine, in turn, objects to the application of “virtue” to any concept that is not strictly moral in quality. For this Revolutionary Heroine, virtue is independent both of politics and sex, in the sense that it represents the individual moral action that the Revolution proposed rather than the conformity to

the arbitrary moral injunctions and interdictions of the Ancien Régime that it claimed to oppose. Nanon takes this same interpretation of virtue to greater heights, both in terms of her self-actualization and the role that she plays in the reformation of the nation in Sand's novel. She and her partner Émilien perfect the practice of de Staël's virtue and institutionalize it as a necessary benchmark of civic becoming, that is, the journey that men and women both take on the path to earned citizenship.

Intensification of exclusion

Because of these discourses throughout the century on women's nature and appetites and the accompanying corrective assertions on their natural duties, women's participation in the French Revolution was rendered all the more extraordinary and controversial in 1789 than it might have been even just decades before. Middle- and lower-class French women themselves had a long history of grass-roots political involvement in the form of marches and petitions, including the submission of hundreds of cahiers for the meeting of the Estates General meeting in 1789, their more overt usurpation of political action such as the raid on Versailles, and their establishment of women's political clubs in the early 1790s. Calling for divorce, rights for progeny, protection against physical abuse, increased education, and political equality, bold *citoyennes* in both France and Britain acted upon the liberating promises of the 1789 declaration of The Rights of Man. However, historians and scholars agree, the privilege of political and social self-determination continued to be reserved for a certain male elite, and women themselves, particularly in the wake of the Revolution's descent into violent self-destruction, ultimately experienced a tightening of state control over their public and private lives. Moreover, their efforts met with swift retribution from male revolutionaries, who were initially enthusiastic

about women's early participation, but who soon determined that their public exposure was a violation of virtuous republican conduct, a criticism that they couched in the language of duty and gender propriety that the doctrine of separate spheres justified. Starting with the banning of women's political clubs in 1793, at which time the convention pronounced the sex as unfit and lacking the moral and physical strength necessary for political participation, the rights that women had earned in France since 1789—presence in the galleries of the Assembly, protection from spousal abuse, increased rights in estate and property law, the right to teach in public institutions—were all revoked by 1796. Only eight years later Napoleon's Civil Code restored the husband's authority in the family, effectively repealing divorce and protection from abuse, relegating women to the status of children who could neither own property nor appear in court without their husband's permission. In Britain, in turn, where "pre-existing anxieties about women [became] still more intense [...] after the war with France broke out in 1793," Colley explains, "by marriage the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended. [...] Stripped by marriage of a separate identity and autonomous property, a woman could not by definition be a citizen and could never look to possess political rights" (259, 243). To contain her seditious reach, women's role in the revolution in France or the counter-revolution in Britain was reduced to empty allegory, as Madelyn Gutwirth, Lynn Hunt, Joan Landes, and Linda Colley have expertly shown in their studies of revolutionary-era political iconography. Their bodies made to symbolize grand ideals of liberty and reason or freedom and the British nation in tracts and patriotic images, women themselves were cast into a role of "passive sculptural projections of [...] the primary forces in play in the Revolutionary era" (Gutwirth 253) that implicitly inhibited actual women from stepping outside of this imaginary deified state to sully themselves by claiming the ideals that their figure represented.

Once again, however, the Revolutionary Heroines studied here reappropriate the language of the conflict and the philosophies that underlie it in order to recast themselves as heroines in rewritings of it. In each of the novels I will analyze, we will see a whole-hearted valorization of women's intellectual pursuits and their embrace of such revolutionary platforms as *fraternity* and *reason*, which lead to the heroines' own self-awareness and, subsequently, to a civic awareness that prompts the women to undertake acts of patriotism on various levels and in diverse domains of life. They, in turn, counter the Revolution's turn to the absolutism that it sought to vanquish by putting into practice very real acts of Enlightenment idealism, such as Delphine's social charity that comes to the aid of those who suffer when revolutionary principles go dramatically astray and Belinda's empirical approach to both her social education and to the francophobia which with the text attempts to assault her. These Revolutionary Heroines, in turn, refuse both the empty feminine iconography of the Revolution—by heroically living out its principles and, in the cases of Corinne and Nanon, being literally elevated to the status of meaningful icon—as well as the dark portraits of real women that emerged, such as the *tricoteuse*, the *Amazone*, and the *salonnière* who has abandoned her domestic duties, all while demystifying and redeeming the scourge of the *public* woman. Indeed, the journeys they undertake are fraught with meaning and the texts they inhabit are highly politically-charged, excruciatingly aware of the Revolution, even decades later. Perhaps most importantly, the women literally save lives that are symbolic of the lives lost to the guillotine in the Revolution's bloodiest years. In so doing, they refuse tired clichés of femininity of weakness of mind and body, of frivolity, of duplicity that the domesticating discourse debated, and cast themselves instead in literary and literal roles reserved for men, ultimately saving the nation from future revolutionary reverberations.

Franco-British Terror

However, women's reactions to and involvement in the Revolution obviously took very different forms in France than in Britain, where virtually anything imported from France—novels, fashions, or ideas—was inseparably associated with the centuries of animosity that characterized the relationship between the two nations. Indeed, independent of wars, invasions, and political and economic disagreements over the decades, Britain had long perceived France as an essentially effeminate culture—“subtle, intellectually devious, preoccupied with high fashion, fine cuisine and etiquette, and so obsessed with sex that boudoir politics were bound to direct it” (Colley 257)—a fact that ironically made Rousseau's doctrines of separate spheres and gender-specific education exceptionally appealing. However, as the political vogue in France became increasingly more liberal in the 1780s, culminating in the fall of the Bastille, it became necessary in Britain to purge theories of gender from their French taint. Early Bluestockings and later reformers such as Hannah More and Jane West appropriated Rousseau's writings on women's roles, translating them into the conservative feminist reform movement in Britain. These women, however, worked explicitly against the seed of rebellion contained in Rousseau's political writings which, by 1789, had come to represent the philosophical justification of the Revolution, because of the drastic restructuring of hierarchy that they suggested. Radical feminists, in turn, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, took to the philosopher's political writings while condemning his writing on women; the former includes the famous Genevois in her chapter treating “some of the writers who have rendered women objects of pity, bordering on contempt” (150) in *Vindication on the Rights of Woman*. Both approaches, however, sought to raise women from inferior status by reforming her manners and education, inscribing “themselves in the lacunae of Enlightenment ideology by indicating—and exploiting or developing—what men's

discourses about power, competition, equality, and law, men's representations of the family, and men's expectations of women, willfully or blindly, left unthought" (6), as Eve Tavor Bannet has argued. That their point of commonality was their mutual ambivalence toward Rousseau's doctrines—an attitude that we will see played out to a degree in Revolutionary Heroism as well—made it all the more important for them clarify their respective positions on the philosopher and, in the case of conservative feminists, to go to great lengths to separate their work from the foreign association. It was an especially necessary exercise for these groups of women debating about the nature and duty of British women since French women themselves, the lower- and middle-class of which poured into the streets of Paris in the early stages of the uprising to voice their opinions and join the general fray, had long been seen in polite circles in Britain as having "too much of the wrong kind of power" (Colley 256) in the form of their relative intellectual autonomy and famous political intriguing at court. As the British nation felt the growing ideological rumbling of its neighbor, then, it often had protective recourse in casting what it saw as dangerous political ideas in terms both of foreignness, specifically Frenchness, as well as of gender, since, following the publication of Rousseau's enormously popular *Emile*, Britain had invested such stock in reinforcing the functional differences between men and women as part and parcel of its national culture and identity. By the time things began to turn violent in France, then, the conjoining of gender and nationality in burgeoning anti-revolutionary discourse in Britain had become quite acute. Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was one of the founding treatises of the conservative anti-Jacobin movement, as it came to be called, too cast the threat that France's dissentient politics in terms of gender and, above all, the anarchy of gender confusion that he thought would result from the destruction of Britain's chivalric link between sex, rank, class, and political stability.

As a result, novels written at the time, particularly anti-Jacobin novels, are immersed in this fear of the French Threat and the dissolution of class and gender hierarchy that it represented. While many expressed a typical “anxiety about women wearing pseudo-masculine dress” (Colley 247), others sought to castigate inappropriate feminine behaviors that were seen to be essays in French revolutionary-ism along the lines of Wollstonecraft’s writings and lifestyle. Indeed, protecting the nation from such anatomizing contagion became the new nationalism during the revolutionary period in Britain, and it most often took the form of gross misreadings of the Revolution’s most basic principles and its most enthusiastic supporters. However, Revolutionary Heroines Belinda and Juliet channel counter-revolutionary hysteria that poses as nationalism in order to expose the ways in which such attitudes bar the nation from the natural civic evolution that their authors believed Enlightenment and revolutionary doctrines were capable of inciting. Moreover, they redirect that same hysteria and fanaticism into their critique of the absurdly contradictory expectations of feminine propriety that the fear of the French Threat had caused to intensify, as the gap between women’s real needs and the increasingly idealized image of femininity continued to widen. In so doing, they engage deeply with heavy-weight political theorists and philosophers, such as Kant, Price, Burke, and Wollstonecraft, defying, as the other heroines in this study do, Rousseau’s opinion that, “as for works of genius, they are out of [women’s] reach” (*Emile* 281). In their deconstruction of the new national myths that were cohering as Britain continued to define itself in perfect binary opposition to France and its revolution, Belinda and Juliet also show, in no uncertain terms, that their Gallic neighbor does not hold exclusive proprietorship of terror and tyranny. By exposing the systemic abuse endemic to Britain’s own hierarchy—social, sexual, and political—these Revolutionary Heroines both condemn their own nation’s absolutism as well as free the Enlightenment principles from the

taint and blood of 1793, thereby reasserting them for reconsideration independent of the events to which they had become so closely tied. Finally, all of the heroines in this study demonstrate that the excessive feminine delicacy that doctrines of propriety and separate spheres foster ultimately stunts social and economic growth at the national level. Nanon's dainty counterpoint, Louise, is unable to cultivate any kind of economic increase whatsoever, Belinda rejects Mr. Vincent's overly sentimental wastefulness for the promise of enlightened prosperity, Juliet exposes the danger of the nation's disregard for the value of women's labors, while Corinne and Delphine essentially leave the world behind them in ruins, a definitive statement on the halt of national progress and evolution that the impossible standards to which women are held represents.

In the absence, however, of the doctrines and practices that the Revolutionary Heroines expose as counterproductive, unenlightened, and xenophobic, they propose real alternatives. The rebirth of a nation, they argue, must include a reclassification and a re-evaluation of all manner of civic practices. But perhaps most important of all, they deconstruct the belief that essentially violent codes of any kind could ever possibly lead to peaceful ones. The pacifism of these novels, then, is their ultimate legacy, one that the authors do not hesitate to identify as uniquely feminine. Whether violence takes the form of actual physical abuse, of abusive love, of social bullying, or of violence to self in the name of conformity, it is continually transmuted at the hands of the Revolutionary Heroine, exposed as false, neutralized, denounced, rechanneled into good, and turned inward to reappear as what that the women propose as their sex's viable contribution to the nation.

Chapter II

Corinne and Delphine, the Revolution's *Public Women*

Despite the long tradition of French women's involvement in political events, and its subsequent and abrupt end during the later years of the Revolution, Madame de Staël's novels *Corinne, ou l'Italie* and *Delphine* do not appear, from the outset, to engage directly in the question of women's political rights or their level of overt political participation. In both works the author avoids the well-worn tropes that have dominated the lore and iconography of women's participation in the uprising: Amazonian women warriors, like Théroigne de Méricourt, wielding a sword and charging the Tuileries, and belligerent fishmongers rifling through Marie Antoinette's undergarments. And although both novels contain examples of the corrupt and manipulative aristocratic woman (à la Mme. Pompadour) whom, as we saw in chapter one, the Revolution in some degree targeted, it is only in order to advance de Staël's arguments about the attritional effect that centuries of overmastering have had on the female character.

Instead, the author approaches the question of women's rights, revolutionary doctrines, and politics in the two novels in a circumlocutory manner, one more suited to her own experience. In contrast to Madelyn Gutwirth's tendency in the last decade toward autobiographical readings of the Baroness' novels, from the point of view, for example, of divorce, breastfeeding, or father-worship, my interpretation will instead focus on her feminized approach both to politics and to the novel, a point of departure that draws less from the events of the author's own life and more upon her intellectual experience as an individual who is gendered feminine during a socio-political revolution in which gender itself is one of the identities at stake. Simone Balayé, in turn, has written extensively about de Staël's mirrors of feminine suffering and the inevitability of female victimization in her novels. And while I agree that that de Staël's

works have a strong descriptive element, that they function, in part, as a kind of negative image that, by darkening the destinies of women, exposes the injustices to which they must submit, I will insist upon a certain proactivity on the part of both heroines, one that revolutionary theories themselves make possible. Through Corinne and Delphine's actions (rather than passivity) de Staël harnesses the Rights of Man for women, and argues for a woman's rights to citizenship, to form a definable and civilly constituted half of the body politic, and to choose an artistic and intellectual career above the usual domestic destinies reserved for women.

Lori Jo Marso is the only scholar to date who has undertaken a significant study of de Staël's treatment of the Enlightenment question of citizenship, and I am indebted to her work. However, Marso does not explicitly address citizenship in terms of the French Revolution. Moreover, she frames her argument exclusively upon the women's engagement in social politics and the interpersonal politics of morality. While both of these areas of emphasis will be important to my arguments, I will also insist on the very real interactions between Corinne, Delphine, and the ruling governmental bodies in their nations. What's more, I disagree with Marso's concept of de Staël's "unmanning" of citizenship—indeed, the difference in my reading here is crucial to the thesis of this chapter. Rather than unmanning citizenship, de Staël's Revolutionary Heroines go about feminizing citizenship while unmanning men, thereby insisting upon the importance of women's influence in the national revolt and restructuring, as well as offering a pointed critique of the very traits of masculine politics that caused it to fail.

It is in these two acts specifically—feminizing citizenship and unmanning men—that the author inaugurates a Revolutionary Heroism, which unites and employs the gendered poles of reason/rationality and emotion/sensibility to effect change on a social and political level.² In so

² It its embryonic form in de Staël's texts, Revolutionary Heroism evolves in the works studied in subsequent chapters. As I move chronologically through the novels in question, the reader will see the concerns and

doing, de Staël furnishes her protagonists with alternate paths that explore the limitations imposed on a woman's expression, the curious absence of her sex's best characteristics in the neo-Republican concept of revolutionary citizenship, and the ways in which men's inability (or refusal) to extend revolutionary freedoms to her not only traps her further, but dooms the very changes that the Revolution was meant to bring about.

Delphine

In this 1802 novel that unfolds in the first years following the storming of the Bastille, de Staël promotes her vision of feminized revolutionary political action with her titular heroine, whose politico-morality is a product of her strong sense of empathy and her keen awareness of the disparate forces that influence a woman's fate beyond her control. Delphine d'Albemar's code of conduct has deeply political implications, we shall soon see, and ultimately points to the rigidly androcentric Enlightenment conceptions of equality as the source of the Revolution's failure, that is, the fact that there is no real place for women in the discourse of equality. However, the self-sacrifice that the heroine's code requires of her works to short-circuit Rousseau's imperative of masculine citizenship, offering a beneficent political model that embodies actual revolutionary and Enlightenment ideals in the place of gender exclusion. Ultimately, Delphine's version of citizenship privileges the conjoining of masculine and feminine traits—reason and sensibility—that she attempts to depolarize. In so doing, I will demonstrate, she rejects unforgiving honor and religion and the prison of motherhood, the dogmatic constructs that trap both sexes, favoring granting women the freedoms that the Revolution denied them.

reclamations of the heroine metamorphose across the decades and between France and Britain. The final novel, George Sand's *Nanon*, will offer the fullest and boldest portrait of the Revolutionary Heroine.

To begin, Delphine's revolutionary heroism originates in her role as a kind of anti-judge in Parisian society, who always seeks to relativize and explain the transgressions of others: instead of arbitrary, inflexible social maxims by which people—but women in particular—must live and be judged, Delphine argues for an indulgent and universal objectivity. The Enlightenment practice of reason, de Staël argues in *Essai sur les Fictions*, often goes to cerebral, masculine excess, with “des philosophes sévères qui condamnent toutes les émotions, et veulent que l’empire de la morale s’exerce par le seul énoncé de ses devoirs (EF 45). But by marrying the practice of reason with women's natural sense of goodness and pity, Delphine's religion counters both the absolutism of the Ancien Régime as well as the tyranny of the Terror. When she attempts to put the missteps of the social pariah Mme de R into perspective for Léonce, for instance, she inquires of her inflexible lover

Pouvons-nous savoir toutes les circonstances qui l'ont perdue? A-t-elle eu pour époux un protecteur ou un homme digne d'être aimé? Ses parents ont-ils soigné son éducation? Le premier objet de son choix a-t-il ménagé sa destinée, n'a-t-il pas flétri dans son cœur toute espérance d'amour, tout sentiment de délicatesse?

Ah! De combien de manières le sort des femmes dépend des hommes! (D, I, 180)

Each of Mme de R's choices, Delphine argues, is a function of choices that were made for her previously by others—by individuals such as her parents or husband, or by the institutions that formed her character and expectations by denying her education and forcing her into a marriage of convenience—and that have influenced her very ability to think and see clearly. The heroine's willingness to relativize the gravity of Mme de R's iniquities by weighing the effect of mitigating circumstances is just one example of her uniquely feminine breed of charity, which

revolves around one simple precept: “faire toujours du bien aux autres et jamais de mal” (D, I, 126).

De Staël’s Revolutionary Heroine resists the arbitrary, discriminatory conventions that rule women’s lives, and from which many believed that the insurrection would free them, by exercising her *liberté* to practice *fraternité* in very concrete ways: living by her revolutionary code of morality often means dismissing unwritten rules of conduct upon which a woman’s reputation is dependent, for which there are consequences. However, she always chooses to “faire du bien aux autres” rather than protecting herself. Such is the case in the scene with Mme de R: “Puisqu’encore une fois les convenances de la société sont en opposition avec la véritable volonté de mon âme,” Delphine reasons when she sees her sitting alone and weeping at her own alienation, “qu’encore une fois elles soient sacrifiées” (D, I, 177). However, it is ultimately herself that she sacrifices as she goes to sit by the castoff when no one else will, an act that her lover Léonce and the rest of Paris condemn. A kind of non-denominational altruism, then, her particular moral code uses the empathy of the Revolution’s allegedly equalizing *fraternité* to bypass judgment in favor of comprehension in the social rehabilitation of the outcast individual.

Delphine’s credo, however, operates beyond the personal level: because her acts of social charity work against attitudes that propagate gender, class, or race inequality—or simply intolerance and blatant unkindness—they work in direct opposition to the inhumane policies of both the Revolution and the counter-Revolution in 1789-1793 Paris. For example, she asserts that “il faut se dévouer quand on le peut à diminuer les malheurs sans nombre qu’entraîne une révolution” (D, I, 462). She could simply mean that one should provide emotional support and friendship to those that have suffered from the fall of the monarchy and the demonization of nobility. But the reader knows that she is speaking of concrete actions that actively thwart the

institutions and powers at war during the crisis, as de Staël herself did many times during the early 1790s.³ For example, Delphine agrees to shelter Monsieur de Valorbe who, after incautious involvement in the King's departure, "avait reçu l'avis à l'instant qu'un mandat d'arrêt était lancé contre lui, et devait s'exécuter dans quelques heures. Il venait me demander de se cacher chez moi cette nuit même." Her response to this man, whom she dislikes immensely, is immediate agreement: "un asile peut-il jamais être refusé?" (D, II, 33). Here Mme D'Albémar offers clear evidence of her significant participation in the revolutionary political realm beyond her resistance to un-*fraternel* social niceties such as those that forced Mme de R to the fringes of the crowd in a public gathering. The heroine's effort to influence those whom the government does *not* discipline (because, of course, as a pacifist Delphine would never promote capital punishment), and therefore its authority to make law, assess guilt, and extol punishment, subverts the entire scope of the Judicial branch of the revolutionary government. Moreover, the exercise of her moral code actively denounces the prejudice inherent in both revolutionary camps because she does not withhold it from her enemies and those who work against her (as Valorbe will do later in the novel).

In short, her actions are rife with political meaning because they manipulate and bargain with ruling bodies that control the mobility of people and information at a time when the inflexible socio-political realm is, in the face of revolutionary uprisings that challenge contemporary class and gender hegemony, tightening its control over the lives of its citizens. Moreover, they do so as an explicit expression of revolutionary ideals. The simple act, therefore, of befriending a social outcast like Mme. de R has political import in Delphine's world because it aligns her inseparably with radical opinions and rejects society's mainstream maxims and

³ See, for example, Part III, chapters X and XVIII of *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution Française*, in which the author relates hiding acquaintances in her Paris home in 1792 while guards searched surrounding residences.

corresponding judgments. To love Léonce, too, becomes political because it flies in the face of the marriage convention as a socio-political institution, challenges the rule of Parisian upper-class women and their economic and political machinations of wedlock, and channels the nascent Enlightenment individualism upon which the Revolution is based, but which—Delphine discovers as the novel progresses, like women in history also did—is ultimately denied to the second sex.

Delphine's revolutionary heroism, then, finds its fullest expression in the advocacy of a revised and universal citizenship that favors reasonable human goodness—"la continuité des mouvements généreux" (D, I, 299)—over the new and greater kinds of elitism and the *necessary* social cleansing that Revolutionary principles ultimately came to represent under the Terror. By consistently privileging personal morality over arbitrary convention, she discovers many opportunities to help suffering individuals while simultaneously thwarting the heartless socio-political institutions that oppress. The implications of her revolutionary relativism, in turn, are two-fold: they highlight women's ability to reason, a fact that was far from widely accepted at the time, as well as canonize their innate empathy as part of the socio-political process rather than as proof of their insufficiency for any role outside of wife- and motherhood. Based on progressive political goals in line with the revolutionary spirit of the times, such as the equalization of social worth for all individuals regardless of class or gender, companionate marriages, the right to divorce, and the call for greater mobility for women, Delphine's code, then, creates a necessary link between the successful application of revolutionary ideals and women themselves.

Through Delphine's devotion to unbiased human generosity, de Staël illustrates the political model upon which revolutionary citizenship should have been based. The union of

positive masculine- and feminine-gendered traits, Delphine's acts intimate, would free women from the exclusive exercise of self-sacrifice and pity within the domestic sphere and men from equally claustrophobic strictures of honor and duty. In effect, each time that Delphine determines to take action according to her moral code, she displays this consolidation of (masculine) reason and (feminine) empathy. Combining her "superior" rational mind and her naturally humanistic feminine instincts, she resists the magnetic pull of social norms by analyzing situations individually in order to determine the most universally moral course of action, regardless of expectations of "strict virtue," the scorn her disregard for custom will provoke, or the difficulties that her choice might bring her.

Delphine displays this resistance to the gender tyranny that the novel uses to mimic the absolutism of both the Ancien Regime and of the Terror each time she analyzes how to best succor victims of the era's revolutionary and counter-revolutionary absolutism. In deciding whether or not to offer a haven to her friend Thérèse d'Ervins and her lover, M. Serbellane, for one last union, she calls upon her democratic alliance of reason and sensibility to calculate the quantity of suffering that various courses of action would cause and to opt, ultimately, for the path that leaves the least collateral damage in its wake. While at first Delphine instinctively rejects Thérèse's request, not wishing to be the force that facilitates her friend abandoning her duties, she soon begins to perceive the ways in which those very duties, in their degree of constraint, have pushed her toward her indiscretions. Delphine first takes into account the circumstances around her friend's marriage: united at 14 with a man 25 years her senior, during the first ten years of matrimony, her husband "la retenait [...] dans la plus triste terre du monde" (D, I, 87). She also takes note of the "cruelle jouissance" that M d'Ervins takes in her suffering, how he refers to her as his "propriété," and of the "reproches les plus outrageants" and "les

menaces” with which he terrorizes her regularly. Finally, she considers her friend’s education, acknowledging that “elle n’a point reçu cette éducation cultivée qui porte à réfléchir sur soi-même; on l’a jetée dans la vie avec une éducation religieuse superstitieuse et une âme ardente; elle n’a lu, je crois, que des romans et des vies des saints; elle ne connaît que des martyrs d’amour et de dévotion” (D, I, 137). With little self-awareness and only models of fanatical self-immolation before her, Thérèse is incapable of separating herself from the tragic role in which her decisions have cast her. While ultimately Delphine understands that Thérèse must, by law and custom, remain with her husband and respect the commitment into which she has entered, after weighing the evidence against M d’Ervin and in favor of Thérèse’s somewhat faultless ignorance and lack of resolve, she determines that reason and pity combined, that is, her devotion to “la généreuse bonté: le culte de toute ma vie” (D, I, 172), require her to risk her own reputation by hosting a final meeting between the lovers.

However, Thérèse is more than a mere unfaithful wife. Indeed, de Staël tightens her alignment between Delphine’s practices and the ideals of the Revolution with the backstory of this unfortunate couple: it was Delphine herself who introduced Thérèse to M de Serbellane, who had left Italy only three months earlier, “attiré en France par la Révolution” (D, I, 88). Like women in history such as Mme Roland, who was arrested and shortly after guillotined for betraying her sex with her political activism, Thérèse has been “seduced” by revolutionary interest and has become a kind of national adulteress who mistakenly senses for a moment that her lover’s freedom to “se fixer dans le pays qui combattait pour [la liberté]” (D, I, 88) suggests her own freedom to love beyond convention. Delphine’s willingness to unite the victim of social prejudice, seduced by the seemingly liberating doctrines of the Revolution, and the man whose free choice has brought him to honor those same philosophies testifies of the Revolutionary

Heroine's mission to facilitate examples of citizenship that favor the harmonious conjoining of reason and sensibility. Moreover, her own joint exercise of these gendered poles of knowledge is an attempt to "free" Thérèse from the conventions that trap her. M d'Ervins is ultimately killed in a duel, and his wife is free to marry Serbellane and create a new life in America. However, it is Thérèse's own stunted womanhood, her inability to separate her natural freedom from the gendered-superstition of religion in which she was raised, which prevents her from embracing her release and beginning a new life. Her lover is unable to understand her decision to abandon her child and shut herself in a convent: "What expiation is required?" he wonders. "What good can come of the unhappiness she means to endure, either for the dead or the living? If she believes she has done wrong, is it not better to make up for it through active virtue?" (135). Such is Delphine's approach too, but once liberated from her chains, Thérèse, as faultless and ignorant as before, merely chooses to chain herself to a different kind of slavery.

Because of the delicate nature of Delphine's actions, their deep interference in the public sphere from which women were barred, her performances meet with more than a little resistance. However, she defies the existence of a public sphere that is gendered exclusively male, refusing phallic control over her actions even when Léonce challenges her. When she realizes, for example, that he will probably disapprove of her decision about Thérèse and Serbellane, she must face the possibility that his feelings will change. "Léonce est-il donc devenu ma conscience?" she asks herself in frustration, "Ne suis-je donc plus capable de juger par moi-même ce que la générosité et la pitié peuvent exiger de moi?" (D, I, 171). Ultimately she determines that love cannot influence her criteria for truth and right, asserting unequivocally her right to choose how and when to interfere, as a citizen, in the machinery of social customs and institutions: "Non, Léonce, vous pouvez tout sur moi; mais je ne vous sacrifierai pas la bonté" (D

74). It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of this conclusion. Despite de Staël's own admission—both in her *Lettres sur Rousseau* and in this very novel—of women's physical and intellectual dependence on men, because of all “les qualités et les défauts que cette destinée faible et dépendante peut entraîner” (D, I, 71), and the sacrifices of her own principles that she must make to love, her heroine advocates the absolute opposite: Delphine holds herself to her own criteria of truth and right, and no other, and that standard is anchored in the ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité* as she understands them.

This subjective moral autonomy is what de Staël and many other women expected from the burst of egalitarian fury at the outset of the Revolution. “Laissez chacun en paix,” Delphine initially prescribes to her cousin Mathilde early in the novel, “chercher au fond de son cœur le soutien qui convient le mieux à son caractère et à sa conscience” (D, I, 71). Her expectation, however, that a government or ruling class could and should live by that same credo in precisely the same way that she does, that is, in a manner that requires the significant upheaval of centuries-old custom and prejudice that Delphine's actions suggest, is ultimately this first Revolutionary Heroine's downfall.

Indeed, this incoherence between Rousseauian political liberty, in which men are free from arbitrary political tyranny, and de Staël's congenerous social liberty, in which men and women are free from society's arbitrary conventions, is representative of what the author sees as the failure of the Enlightenment conception of *égalité* and its conflicting discourse on freedom and gender: in short, it is the failure of the Social Contract itself, the compact that gave the Revolution its philosophical justification. De Staël and other women of the period, such as Olympe de Gouges and Théroigne de Méricourt, were keenly attuned to the unprecedented coexistence of doctrines of freedom and majority opinion. “Vous vivez, par un hasard que vous

devez bénir,” Delphine explains to Léonce, “dans une de ces époques rares où la puissance ne méprise pas les lumières” (D, II, 67), reminding him of what a privilege it is to live at a time when change is actually a political doctrine *en vogue*. But Delphine’s (and many real-life women’s) naïve trust in the principles of the Revolution, which lead her to believe that both men and women have the right to act as independent agents free of prejudice and arbitrary custom, violates this contract precisely because, as Rousseau makes clear in subsequent treatises,⁴ it does not apply to women: to stray too far from the general will is to put oneself at odds with the sovereign, and the fact that women, by long-standing common compact, have no representation whatsoever in the Contract means that they must be complicit with men or be destroyed, as both Corinne and Delphine ultimately are.

Instead, Rousseau’s conception of political virtue discussed in Chapter one has become strangely warped when the women who that are held to it have no actual power: despairing of ever experiencing political or social liberty, they have learned to work within the avenues of power at their disposal, which include mastering and manipulating social and sexual relationships with both men and other women in order to establish and maintain a degree of control over their fate. However, judgment carried out on other women becomes merely another means for women to enter the public sphere and seize alternative forms of power by participating in its politico-social process. As a didactic meditation on the failure of Rousseau’s doctrine of political virtue, as well as the allegedly universally applicable *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, de Staël’s novel offers a multitude of portraits of socially enslaved women in order to illustrate the

⁴ Rousseau’s political treatise excludes women simply, for the most part, by failing to mention them. *Émile*, in particular, however, dramatizes women’s lack of political presence and rights, via their exclusion from the public sphere, in its portrait of Sophie, in which the philosopher argues that women must, by the nature of their sex, never feel for a moment without “the most continual and the most severe restraint” (Rousseau 268).

forces that ironically closed avenues to their sex throughout the decade of the 1790's. Mme de Vernon—a kind of revolutionary-era Mme de Merteuil—is doubtless the most blatant example.

When Delphine confronts de Vernon on the subject of her falsity, she exposes the ways in which the lack of access to citizenship denatures women from the start, pushing them toward the very kind of manipulation and “boudoir politics” for which men condemn them: no one cared for her or her education as a child, and as a young girl she was brought up by a guardian who saw women “comme des jouets dans leur enfance, et dans leur jeunesse comme des maîtresses plus ou moins jolies, que l’on ne peut jamais écouter sur rien de raisonnable” (D, I, 340). Rather than being encouraged in her development, she saw that “les sentiments que j’exprimais étaient tournés en plaisanterie et que l’on faisait taire mon esprit” (340). Keenly aware that she is denied the right to reason yet expected to act with independence and virtue, she stifles her own feelings and in order to protect herself: “J’acquis de bonne heure ainsi l’art de la dissimulation, et j’étouffai la sensibilité que la nature m’avait donnée” (340). She then confesses the ways in which her duplicity became the political power that she was able to yield in order to manipulate people and events in the public sphere. She has exploited Delphine, for example, in order to assure her own dominion: “J’étudiais [votre caractère],” she relates, “pour y conformer en apparence le mien” (D, I, 344). By so doing, she identified Delphine’s weaknesses and capitalized on it: “dominée par vos qualités, la bonté, la générosité, la confiance, comme l’on est par des passions; [j’aperçus] qu’il vous était presque aussi difficile de résister à vos vertus, peut-être inconsidérées, qu’à d’autres à combattre leurs vices” (D, I, 344). De Vernon then used this instinctive trust against her. When, early in the novel, for example, Delphine tries to tell her friend that she is in love with Léonce, the man who is destined for de Vernon’s daughter Mathilde, the mother impersonates her friend’s “bonté, générosité, confiance” in order to silence

Delphine: “Ma chère Delphine, je lis dans votre cœur aussi bien que vous-même, mais je ne crois pas que ce soit encore le moment de nous parler” (D, I, 75). By insinuating that generosity is what keeps her from letting Delphine speak, de Vernon effectively forbids her from doing so, and takes control of a discourse that should be Delphine’s to manage.

With other examples of the feminine denaturalization that results from the lack of revolutionary freedoms being extended to women, such as Mme de Ternan, de Vernon’s daughter Mathilde, and Delphine’s sister-in-law Mlle d’Albémar, de Staël demonstrates that whatever the result of a woman’s forced perversion, it is women themselves who suffer the most from it: they must, first, endure the distance they are forced to take from their true selves in order to protect themselves in a world that grants them no subjecthood; and, second, they must submit to and be the victims of the policing that other women take it upon themselves to exercise in order to maintain the delicate positions of power that they have seized. The reality that the author unveils is one that philosophers and political theorists failed to foresee when promoting and supporting gender roles that relegated women to the status of children, forcing them to be forever in competition with one another “par calcul ou par goût” (D, I, 157) when there are no other avenues toward fulfillment. We see how incapable such women are of “heroicism” given that they are victims of both men and of members of their own sex. Delphine’s story proves, then, that the vast majority of women have few viable paths outside the extant power structures that obstruct their freedom, confine their destinies, and stunt their development.

Indeed, the virtuous Delphine herself is the primary victim of this system in the novel: as punishment for her overthrow of absolutist social conventions through reasoned moral action, she becomes a sacrificial victim, like so many offerings to the guillotine. Indeed, her exercise of revolutionary freedoms—what she calls her “bonté fatale”—instead of leading to greater

personal freedom, much like the vacant promises of equality for *all* in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, slowly but surely condemn her to isolation, banishment, and death. Her acts of sympathy, like allowing the meeting mentioned above between Thérèse d'Ervin and M. de Serbellane in her home, ultimately cause her to be branded as a partisan of radical ideas and a fomenter of civil unrest, a title that forces her to the periphery of society. When she shelters M. de Valorbe from the Revolutionary Tribunal, the situation also disintegrates eventually: she flees the calumny in Paris and Valorbe takes his revenge upon her by permanently destroying her reputation. In short, we see that she is the necessary sacrifice that keeps the peace in the public sphere, but which, although Delphine can stand as a model of integrity for clinging to her personal principles, serves positively no good for women themselves, nor for the nation at large.

The severe backlash to Delphine's projects confirms how rapidly such reports travel in revolutionary-era society and beyond, where there is no such thing as privacy for women. Writing in the period that Foucault has identified as the moment of transition from bodily torture to torture of the mind and spirit, de Staël observes of how the theater of public execution has been gradually giving way to the more subtle spectacle of social ostracism. As the state extricated itself from the visible role of executioner, leaving behind "the horrifying spectacle," society's elite filled in the periphery of the panopticon, the new carceral system that regulates society at large, to become the judges and executioners for social transgressions that threatened to upset the regime: "l'abominable théâtre [...]; La mécanique exemplaire de la punition [avait changé] ses rouages." (Foucault 15). "Criminals" like Delphine and Corinne, after a period of intense public humiliation (what Foucault calls *hierarchical observation*) are relegated to the prison of social solitude. In Delphine's case, she must either surrender herself to public opinion by retreating to a convent, or surrender herself to an equally bigoted private opinion by marrying

Léonce and worrying for the rest of her life if he approves of her instincts to confound social convention by succoring to those who suffer from it.

Furthermore, in *Delphine*, the heroine's comprehensive plight as a woman proves to be a microcosm for citizens at large, as the author illustrates, writing fifteen years later: "The human race," she asserts, "has exhausted itself for many centuries in useless efforts to constrain all men to the same beliefs. That end could not be attained: and the simplest idea, toleration, has been impossible" (RF 356). Indeed, the Revolution failed when it focused on wide-spread control based on new criteria (an effect of the *paraître*) rather than on wide-spread tolerance (what revolutionary doctrines suggested). And yet, de Staël argues, if other characters in the novel had managed to live by Delphine's code, the vast majority of their suffering would have been avoided. However, by surrounding her Revolutionary Heroine with examples of fanaticism, weakness, and selfishness, de Staël continues her compelling analogy for how and why the Revolution itself failed twice—once when it was unable to create a successful political regime based on its doctrines, and again when it misunderstood its own principles to the point of excluding half of the population from its legislated ameliorations. Though de Staël is no radical social leveler—in her *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française* (1818) she advocates replacing titles with peerage, for example, and admits, like her father, that some innate inequality is necessary and "productive of the movement of society" (RF 286)—she is a firm believer in the equality of potential happiness. She faults the aristocracy—particularly its emigrants—for refusing to acknowledge that "the wish of a great people ought to have influence in the choice of its government" (RF 288). Indeed, her summation of the justification and ultimate downfall of the Revolution perfectly parallels the rationality and yet ultimate failure of Delphine's own moral code: Overthrowing "absolute monarchies [and all of the] defects and

vices [to which they must] give birth” is justifiable, de Staël asserts, and “so long as we allow ourselves to do nothing immoral, we are sure of never violently thwarting the course of things” (RF 312).

Indeed, de Staël records the way in which the *paraître-panopticon* society itself doomed legislative ameliorations for women and the French Revolution itself through her portrayal of the question of sexual virtue in Revolutionary-era Parisian society in *Delphine*. While philosophers like Rousseau worked during the eighteenth century, as we saw in chapter one, to redefine virtue by attaching it to political silence rather than virginity, sexual purity is not entirely off the table. Ironically, the response to this overflow of the private (Delphine’s “secret” acts of social charity) into the public (the Parisian society that becomes aware of her taboo kindness) is, in most cases, to damage the woman’s reputation at the private, that is, the sexual, level. While there is as much talk and concern in de Staël’s novels about women’s sexual purity as there was in earlier works in the century, the focus has indisputably changed: rather than hinging on whether a woman will succumb to temptation and irretrievably lose her only and most-prized possession, the intrigue revolves around the question of whether or not *other people* think she already has. Lovelace the tempter, the beguiling serpent at the base of the tree, has disappeared, and a crowd of people who speculate and make snide pronouncements about Eve has taken his place. The narrative focus has moved from the woman’s actions to society’s perception of them, while presenting the truth of the affair—did she sleep with him or not?—as a matter of relative indifference to the reader. Rather than being freed from their worth being contingent upon their virtue (as sexual purity) in the first place, Enlightenment and Revolutionary doctrines, de Staël argues with her transcription of this phenomenon, have done little more than add additional criteria with which to judge a woman’s worth (her political silence). Because the punishment for challenging political virtue is

still the same as flouting sexual virtue, consensus, then, about a women's intact hymen is still the ultimate frame of reference for her value. This failure to ultimately shift value in terms of women's bodies, in turn, parallels the failure during the Revolution to make a similar shift in terms of class- and gender-oriented prejudice.

This double bind in which the Revolutionary Heroine finds herself is the unavoidable outcome of the fact that women simply had no representation in philosophies of social equality during the Revolution. Indeed, for most thinkers of the era—Condorcet and a very few others excepted—women were not a legitimate disenfranchised group among the scores of subcultures who were seeking greater acceptance and freedom, such as minority religious or ethnic groups, or even the lower classes that had been gaining recognition in the march toward greater social equality. Rather, they were simply an inferior cog in the expansive, androcentric epistemology of the time. Catherine Larrère has argued that women's status was not a question of equality, but rather of morality and of condition. While I disagree fundamentally with her attempt in her work to exonerate Rousseau from misogyny, I do agree with her assessment of the lack of political language in which to describe women's *citizenship*: “The condition of women is not a matter of laws (and therefore not a question of rights) but of mores” (220), because, as Rousseau himself said, “Inequality is not a human institution—or, at least, it is the work not of prejudice but of reason” (Rousseau, *Émile*, qtd in Larrère 222). De Staël, however, refuses to accept *raison* as a justification for Revolution's dogged misogyny. In her *Considérations* she writes, “It is because the French did not unite liberty to religion that their revolution deviated so soon from its primitive direction.” Plenty of Catholic doctrines are incompatible with liberty, she continues, “but Christianity has in truth brought liberty upon earth; justice toward the oppressed, respect for the unfortunate; finally, equality before God, of which equality under the law is only an

imperfect image” (752). And yet, that same source of unqualified liberty holds the very doctrines that doom women, the origin of their inferiority in western society being Biblical; and there is no way for de Staël to separate humanistic charity from Christian charity while at the same time arguing that Christian charity is the missing link in Revolutionary doctrines, other than with her Revolutionary Heroine’s own dogged persistence in living by her altruistic code, even though it leads to her downfall.

The fact that Delphine actually lives by such a credo but is censured for it demonstrates dramatically de Staël’s belief that, despite the polycyspeak of the Revolution—*liberté, égalité, fraternité*—such constructs have little political value in the scheme of things, and even less credibility when practiced by a woman. Indeed, the furor caused by Delphine’s expressions of instinctive virtue (ie. goodness, pity, and human love) outside of the family circle— by that I mean human generosity exercised toward other members of society, but especially against the particularized injustice of political and social institutions—prove that society has made no place for such female generosity outside of the domestic sphere, where a woman’s total self-sacrifice to her husband and children is otherwise de rigueur.⁵ De Vernon, warning Delphine of the dangers of her unconventional behavior, insists: “Votre esprit, quelque supérieur qu’il soit, ne peut rien pour sa propre défense; la nature a voulu que tous les dons des femmes fussent destinés au bonheur des autres, et de peu d’usage pour elles-mêmes” (D, I, 86). Indeed, no matter what course Delphine takes, she finds only imprisonment: to respect prevailing opinions is to live a closeted life of self-abnegation and restraint, and yet, as de Vernon says, to kick against the

⁵ As Nancy Armstrong has shown, it is only with the increased visibility of the bourgeoisie in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, whose women defined themselves through their access to leisure time, that wide-scale charity projects began to be seen as part of women’s duties. With the financial security that allowed a household to employ a service staff responsible for the full gamut of domestic tasks, women began to organize service projects outside of the home since it was no longer appropriate for them to do so for their kin or for trade. While this transformation will eventually form the basis of the modern welfare society, Armstrong has argued, Delphine’s charity does not fall into this category because of her exclusion from the status of wife and mother and because of the interested nature of her actions, which often defy social and political mores.

pricks is to receive society's censure, which ultimately amounts to the same; in her banishment, Delphine sacrifices herself and uses her gifts to protect those that she loves. They are indeed of little use to her, and she observes: "Je n'ai pas éprouvé une seule peine dont je ne doive m'accuser. Je ne sais pas ce qui me manque pour conduire ma destinée, mais il est clair que je ne le puis. Je cède à des mouvements inconsidérés, mes qualités les meilleurs m'entraînent beaucoup trop loin" (D, II, 228). That her best qualities have led to difficulties that she cannot comprehend highlights the degree to which her impulses—which, in this moment of self-doubt, she accepts as "inconsidérés"—run against the grain of convention rather than actual morality. Her inability to see how, through her insouciance of public opinion, she has dug herself into a kind of ideological hole, testifies of an innocence that the author wishes to illuminate: woman, by nature, has excellent, useful qualities, but the world being what it is, they can only lead her to difficulties when exercised beyond the bounds of socio-political convention (foreshadowing Burney's "Female Difficulties").

And yet, in perhaps her ultimate act of radical assumption of autonomy and blatant self-liberation from gender imperatives, Delphine refuses the one role society does offer her graciously: motherhood. In so doing, she claims women's right to follow alternative paths and asserts that her capacity for citizenship is entirely independent of her capacity for biological procreation. Indeed, de Staël's one blatant, pro-feminist statement on women's issues in the novel is Delphine's rejection of this historical totem of femininity, which infuriates her eternal judges because it runs contrary to the discourse of the republican mother that was in the process of cohering, itself based on Rousseau's pronouncement that women's talents—whatever they may be—should remain in the home and be of exclusive service to her family. In *Emile* he asserts of the woman writer and intellectual that

[i]n the sublime elevation of her fine genius she disdains all the duties of woman, and always begins by making a man of herself [...], [but] away from home she is the subject of ridicule, justly criticized [...], [and] if she actually had talents, showing them off abases them[...]. [Her] dignity is a retired life, her glory is her husband's esteem, her pleasure is the happiness of her family (Rousseau 303).

Thus, Delphine's forays into public are rendered even more threatening to social mores because they depict her own neglect of her maternal potential for motherhood: Delphine expresses disinterest in remarrying and has instead chosen a married man as her "chaste" companion. The role, otherwise, is offered to her twice in the novel—first when Mme d'Ervin asks her to raise her daughter Isore, a task she initially accepts but then passes to M. de Serbellane; Mme de Celerbe raises the question a second time when trying to convince Delphine to marry M. de Valorbe in order to experience motherhood, "la récompense des sacrifices que la destinée leur impose, c'est le seul bien qui puisse les consoler de la perte de la jeunesse" (D, II, 31). Though de Staël promoted this very concept in her *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau*, lauding the philosopher for teaching women to "retrouver dans leur enfant une seconde jeunesse, dont l'espérance recommence pour elles, quand la première s'évanouit" (LR 72), roughly twenty years later, her two heroines reject it entirely. Waging treason against this exclusive notion of women's worth and fate, Delphine chooses death rather than adoptive and biological maternity, demonstrating the author's rejection of the domesticating discourse a century in the making. Celerbe's argument that, as a mother one's "existence ne se repose plus sur le succès, mais sur le devoir [dans lequel] on se sent tout à fait indépendant de [la] dépendance [des inconnus]" (D, II, 193), falls flat for the author and her heroine, who know too well that many husbands are virtual "inconnus" to their wives; the examples of controlling, abusive spouses in both novels signal de Staël's

protest against the reductive doctrine of the joys of motherhood. Indeed, if Enlightenment equality proposes private motherhood as the complement to man's citizenship—a public life and responsibilities—the author wants no part of it.

Instead, the author inaugurates Revolutionary Heroism as an alternative to what de Staël called the narrow sphere of “the most absurd mediocrity”⁶ that men have reserved for women in the wake of failed social reform. Rather than saving herself and her talents for her husband and family, as Rousseau intoned, Delphine saves others, figuratively and literally: she rescues Léonce's life from the vengeance of the revolutionary tribunal, an act that the other heroines in this study also undertake with men in their lives, and one that is fundamental to the definition of the Revolutionary Heroine as a fictional woman who refuses tired clichés of femininity. When Delphine presents herself before the president of the tribunal to plead for her lover's pardon, she has recourse to her uniquely feminine gifts. When he will not listen to reason (that Léonce is not an enlisted soldier and was merely coming to the aid of a childhood friend), she realizes that “il n'existait pour elle qu'une ressource, c'était de se livrer sans contrainte à toute l'émotion qu'elle éprouvait” (D, II, 312): she tries, therefore, to move the judge with pity—the trait that, as we have seen, the eighteenth century had already closely associated with women. Delphine, in turn, links this emotion to the spirit of the Revolution in its retrospective homage to the great republics of ancient history. Léonce is innocent, freeing him is the right thing to do, but that argument alone is not enough: “Ce n'est point une pitié commune que j'attends de vous, c'est une élévation d'âme qui suppose des vertus antiques, des vertus républicaines, qui vertus qui honoreront mille fois davantage le parti que vous défendez, que les plus illustres victoires” (D, II, 315). By so doing, she creates coherence between women's strength, the nation's subsequent

⁶ *De la Littérature*, Part II, Chapter 4.

strength, and the antique model that the Revolution itself sought to recreate, as she once again steps into the public sphere and solicits intercourse with the government as a true *citoyenne*.

Finally, Delphine's willing death, rather than a resignation, symbolizes the full exercise of moral action to which her code must lead. Consequently, she does not fight this outcome—instead she sees it as an inevitable conclusion to her crusade against arbitrary convention and its utter disregard for women's overall welfare. Though the scourge of public opinion and society's refusal to valorize her understanding of virtue condemn her to it, the sacrifice of Delphine's life itself becomes the ultimate political and moral act; her willing demise protests the treatment she has received at the same time that it reflects an earnest amenability to personal subjugation—once again, the basis of the Social Contract, and the historical hallmark of femininity, which de Staël maintains in her reformations: “Je n'hésiterai pas sur mon devoir,” proclaims Delphine. “L'opinion me persécutera, des malheurs de tout genre tomberont sur moi, je ne pourrais pas m'y dérober au présent. [...] Que mes fautes perdent mon bonheur, mais qu'elles ne causent de peines à personne!” (D, II, 132). Moreover, as Angelica Gooden has observed, the communal scene that she chooses for her death empowers her further, fashioning death into “an opening-out, an epiphany,” made all the more striking since “Delphine has chosen to go as no other heroine of the novel had gone before her: not privately like Rousseau's Julie or Charrière's Caliste, but in public space” (48). By opting for a public death at a time when the ruling body was making the experience increasingly more private in order to distance itself from it, as Foucault has shown, Delphine figurately points her finger at the persecutors who passed this sentence upon her, and who doom the reformation that she represents. The final sentence of the novel, in turn, confirms her accusation:

Léonce aurait dû braver l'opinion dans plusieurs circonstances où le bonheur et l'amour lui faisait un devoir, et Delphine, au contraire, se fiant trop à la pureté de son cœur, n'avait jamais su respecter cette puissance d'opinion à laquelle les femmes doivent se soumettre; mais la nature, mais la conscience apprend-elle cette morale instituée par la société, qui impose aux hommes et aux femmes des lois presque opposées? (D, II, 335)

De Staël's heroines are willing to die in order to confirm their ultimate respect for this power, but that does not stop them from questioning it with their every word and deed. What the author ultimately demonstrates with Delphine's story, then, is that no Revolution—nor its heroes and heroines—can succeed when its principles are based on philosophies that are anchored in the *paraître*, as Rousseau's and other philosophers' were, because it is a civic foundation in which women are institutionally targeted, policed, and offered up as sacrificial victims when society at large trembles under the volcano of its own weighty imbalances of power.

Corinne

Begun before *Delphine* but completed five years after, the Baroness' second complete novel reflects her growing weariness with exile and her increasing frustration with Napoleonic France. While the plot makes far fewer references to politics and political events than *Delphine* does, *Corinne* is nonetheless a product of profound political meditation, and continues de Staël's work of mediating Enlightenment ideals and revolutionary and post-revolutionary realities, and of challenging gender tropes by displacing the expectation of feminine presence and activity from the home onto the socio-political realm. However, Corinne is a vastly different kind of Revolutionary Heroine than Delphine. She is kind, certainly, but pity and generosity are far from

the operative elements of her heroism. Instead, she puts Delphine's *citoyenne*'s intuition into tangible practice, I will demonstrate, and sets it within a framework of worldwide citizenship, resurrecting the eighteenth century's cosmopolitan ideals promoted primarily by Voltaire, Franklin, Hume, and Kant. In so doing, she continues Delphine's work of deconstructing the paradigms of womanhood in order to demonstrate how they speak to a larger refusal of the *other* that contributed to the failure of political reform in France. Moreover, by combining Corinne's appropriation of civic rights and artistic prerogative, de Staël proposes her particular breed of revolutionary heroism as an antidote to the misogyny and bigotry of Romantic heroes, many of whom are, themselves, masculinist fictional mediations on the failure of the French Revolution. With similar expositions as Delphine on co-gendered ideals of rationality and sensibility and the subsequent deconstruction of masculine duty that follows, Corinne's more forceful politicization of her ideals critiques with greater urgency and stringency the masculine ontology that caused the Revolution to fail. Finally, in her attempt to make peace with the ways that she has suffered throughout the novel, I will argue, Corinne is the first Revolutionary Heroine in this study to paint an alternative future: spiteful of her own condemnation, she takes steps to ensure her own perpetuity and deliberately claims a narrative space for the re-writing of revolutionary outcomes, an exercise of which we will see echoes in subsequent chapters.

Like Delphine, Corinne defies the era's injunction against women in the public sphere and expresses her personal politics in the ways in which she enters and performs therein. Moreover, her very life story is predicated upon the Enlightenment's revolutionary imperative that the crisis itself ultimately denied women: if a government is unjust, its citizens have the right to "secouer le joug [...] car, recouvrant sa liberté par le même droit qui la lui a ravie, ou il est fondé à la reprendre, ou on ne l'était point à la lui ôter" (*Du Contrat Social* 45-6). Indeed,

Corinne's first choice as a citizen is the proactive decision to abandon one land and its accompanying political ideology for another, whose civil sphere she finds more hospitable to women in general and to her own artistic impulses, a move that allows her to "reprendre possession de mon imagination, de mon génie, de la *nature*" (C 385 emphasis mine). Indeed, in returning to Italy, a place where women are free from "les *anciennes* opinions sur l'obscurité qui convenait aux femmes" (C 77 emphasis mine)—that is *ancien* Régime opinions—she once again becomes *natural*, like Mme de Vernon in *Delphine*, like Edgeworth's Lady Delacour, as I will argue in Chapter 3. Chantal Bertrand-Jennings has perceptively noted that the portrayal of England in the novel represents "l'expression prudente de la France napoléonienne et de ses valeurs viriles" (Bertrand-Jennings 37). I also argue, however, that it symbolizes the origin of those same values as they took shape during the Revolution in conjunction with the brutal rejection of women from the public sphere. In forfeiting her existence in England, then, Corinne assumes a new nationality and a new patrimony, rejecting Revolutionary and Napoleonic perversions for the contrasting naturalism of women's participation. In so doing, she makes an overt statement not only about what she believes to be the ideal administration for fostering women's happiness, but also for encouraging women's right, *as citizens*, to seek personal happiness at all, and to reject one political system for another, if necessary, in order to find it.

By setting her heroine's artistic endeavors and political participation within the genealogy of masculine genius, in turn, de Staël offers women a very real alternative to both the feminized revolutionary iconography that denied women any genuine political participation as well as to the domestic imprisonment offered in its place. Indeed, Corinne's success as an artist goes beyond the mere adulation of the masses; politicians, religious leaders, royals place her upon a throne with the nation's elite: it is a senator who crowns Corinne in the midst of the rest

of the senate, the cardinals, the Academy of Letters, members of the royal family, and the most distinguished women in Italy, while the people look on. The most hallowed Roman poets chant odes and sonnets in her honor, “une agreeable réunion d’images et d’allusions à la mythologie” (C 54), that associate her talent with the long line of female poets from Sappho on. When prince Castel-Forte introduces her before the coronation, he classifies her as the union of all that is best in Italy: “nous nous plaçons à la contempler comme une admirable production de notre climat, de nos beaux-arts, comme un rejeton du passé, comme une prophétie de l’avenir” (C 57). This formal consecration of her talent as a national treasure valorizes her politically, authenticates the female artist, makes Corinne’s own artistic genius and production equivalent to that of male artists of the past and present, and thus inserts her into the masculine tradition of genius that forms the long line of the nation’s most prized literati, whose works inform its very identity.

Indeed, in her new nation, Corinne’s talent is sufficient for her canonization, and through her very public performances, de Staël’s sets her Revolutionary Heroine up not as Dickens’ *tricoteuse* Madame DeFarge, not as real-life *Amazone* Théroigne de Méricourt, not as the *salonnières* “monsters” that Clarence Hervey will meet in *Belinda*, but rather as a new queen for a new era. Crowned and enthroned in the place of Marie Antoinette, who lost her head and throne because of her perceived unfeminine (or *decidedly* feminine) machinations, de Staël’s *public woman* is poised to bridge the gap between the very notions of masculine and feminine, public and private. However, it is at this same unprecedented event that she first meets Oswald: when she turns to look at him a second time, and “ce mouvement fit tomber sa couronne” (C 68), the reader is reminded that, though the heroine has fled England, the rigid gender doctrines that it represents will continue to follow her and will lead to even greater unhappiness—the loss of her talents and her eventual death—just as the promises that the Revolution appeared to make to

women in fact lead them into deeper forms of institutionalized oppression through the acute intensification of gendered exclusion. Corinne's death, however, instead of being a sign of her submission to the destiny of the lovelorn, rejected woman represented in so many novels of the era, comes primarily as a sign of her artistic sensitivity, though threaded through with vengeance. Like iconic male Romantic predecessors and successors such as Werther, René, and Chatterton, Corinne cannot continue living after Oswald leaves her because "quand une personne de génie est douée d'une sensibilité véritable, ses chagrins se multiplient par ses facultés mêmes" (C 419); in other words, her artistry only causes her to feel pain more acutely, rather than providing a transcendent understanding of love and loss that gives comfort. Instead of suffering as a woman, then, she suffers as an artist, as a person of genius, and as such, loses the talents that define her as she withers away in despair.

Written during the initial stirrings of French *mal du siècle* Romanticism, Corinne's story appropriates a similar sense of doom and melancholy, but uses it to tell a particular feminine story that finds its arcs in the failure of Corinne's redemptive and reconciliatory cosmopolitanism. By allowing her protagonist to explore the ways in which women were unable to profit from revolutionary doctrines, de Staël proposes her Revolutionary Heroine as a challenge to the egotistical insouciance of the male Romantic hero and points to his idiosyncrasies as the source of the failed Revolution and the continued oppression of the second sex. Indeed, like the mediated concept of citizenship that de Staël proposes in *Delphine*, her portrayal of the Revolutionary Heroine in *Corinne* (as antipode to the Romantic hero) lacks the misanthropy, amorality, and ruthlessness that typify heroes in the early works of Goethe and Chateaubriand, and, contemporary to de Staël, those of Byron and Shelley. Moreover, such heroes—Oswald in particular, who embodies the alleged superiority and preeminence of

England, but also Byron's Prometheus—often symbolize and promote nationalism or nationalistic pride. In contrast, Corinne deflects and even deconstructs such agendas by advocating a cosmopolitan tolerance through her dual nationalities, her polyglotism, her diverse education and expansive studies, her proficiency in several artistic media, and her general openness to all things foreign, obscure, and mystical—that is, the other ways of being, knowing, and feeling that women represented but which granted them no influence or sway in matters of public interest.

De Staël's fictionalization of the eighteenth-century cosmopolitan ideal echoes writings on the topic throughout the century, but particularly those of Kant and in England of Richard Price, two important thinkers whose humanistic political philosophies bookended the Revolution's eruption in time and France's own borders in geography. Kant's vision of a universal civic society, "which administers law among men" (IUH⁷ 5), permeates the novel, and what he calls "hospitality," de Staël, in both novels, calls goodness and generosity. It is a universal political right, he argues in *Perpetual Peace* (1795), "that a stranger not [...] be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another" (Kant 7), a maxim that both heroines preach and practice in their interactions.⁸ Richard Price, in turn, argues in his *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789)—a justification of the French Revolution via a celebration of England's own Glorious Revolution—that nation is "community" more than it is soil, and that the love of country "does not imply any conviction of the superior value of it to other countries" (something Oswald has gravely misunderstood) and has no relation to "love of domination, a desire of

⁷ *Idea of Universal History*, 1784.

⁸ The OED records the word stranger as having the following definition as the most commonly used in the eighteenth century: "One who belongs to another country, a foreigner; chiefly (now exclusively), one who resides in or comes to a country to which he is a foreigner; an alien." "stranger, *n.*" Oxford English Dictionary Second edition, 1989; online version March 2012. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 1 May 2012 <<https://www.oed.com+191250?rskey=HI8cC2&result=1#eid>>.

conquest, and a thirst for grandeur and glory” (Price 2).⁹ He then asserts that a desire to educate is perhaps the greatest manifestation of love of country, for “ignorance is the parent of bigotry, intolerance, persecution, and slavery. Inform and instruct mankind, and these evils will be excluded” (Price 3). “Enlightenment” will certainly bring change, but to wish to improve parts of the nation that suffer from ignorance and inequality is not unpatriotic, a sentiment that Edmund Burke will later condemn in his response to Price’s speech, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

Corinne’s heterogeneity, then, becomes the point of departure for a larger argument about the *other*, which receives greater valorization and plays out on a much wider political scale than it did in *Delphine*, thanks to Corinne’s influence in the public sphere. Her conversation, “un mélange de tous les genres d’esprit, l’enthousiasme des beaux-arts et la connaissance du monde, la finesse des idées et la profondeur des sentiments” (C 75), is a constant point of entry for others characters to consider the worth of Kant’s “strangers” and “strange” ideas. The dogmatic, single-minded Oswald, once out of his native society and distracted from his melancholy, quickly falls under the charm of her captivating variety. “Où avez-vous pris,” he wonders, “tant de charmes divers *qui sembleraient devoir s’exclure*: sensibilité, gaieté, profondeur, grâce, abandon, modestie, êtes-vous une illusion?” (C 93, italics mine). The union of these seemingly opposing traits is the result of Corinne’s unique education—Price’s antidote to ignorance and intolerance—and the ideal outcome of increased egalitarian congress between nations, between sexes, and between classes.

⁹ While Oswald never considers conquering Italy militarily, his own domination of Corinne falls under this heading. He congratulates himself “quand il pouvait se flatter d’intéresser une telle femme” (C 166) and wishes her to compromise herself for him in order to subjugate her: “Il aurait souhaité qu’elle eût commis pour une grande faute selon le monde” (C 207). Later, he is “fier d’emmener sa conquête” (C 283) when he rides off with Corinne to Naples, though her close friends have tried to talk her out of it, knowing that traveling alone with a man, even in Italy, pushes the bounds of propriety too far.

In other words, it is the ideal outcome of what the Revolution itself could have been. As we listen to Castle-Forte on the day of her coronation, we understand that, through him, de Staël is speaking of the failed rebirth of the nation and the failed reformation and political integration of woman; Corinne, *ou l'Italie*, symbolizes both: “Regardez-la, c’est l’image de notre belle Italie; elle est ce que nous serions sans l’ignorance, l’envie, la discorde, et l’indolence auxquelles notre sort nous a condamnés” (C 57). When her interlocutors, in turn, protest the mongrelization of culture that her life seems to suggest, wondering, for example, as the Count d’Erfeuil does, “que deviendrait le goût, l’élégance du style français après un tel mélange?” the prince Castel-Forte, Corinne’s ally, asserts that a man who knows four languages is four men. If more people opened themselves to foreign influence, as Corinne has, rather than rejecting it, nations “conserveraient ce qui les distingue, et découvriraient ainsi quelquefois ce qui peut leur manquer” (C 177). After the Revolution, however, cosmopolitan ideals backfired in the same way that increased rights for women did. Yet de Staël persists in channeling cosmopolitanism through her extraordinary Revolutionary Heroines because, as women, they continue to be the fundamental expression of the *other*, whose alternative way of thinking, seeing, and being has been historically devalued. In short, many of the principles that de Staël introduces on the microcosmic level of society in *Delphine*, such as goodness and tolerance guided by the union of rationality and sensibility (Kant’s “hospitality,” in short) find a macrocosmic—that is, an inter- and intra-national—expression in *Corinne*.

However, de Staël not only fictionalizes the vestigial Enlightenment and revolutionary philosophies that she wishes to see played out further, she also transcribes the bilious rejection of them that followed the Revolution’s descent into violence and Napoleon’s ascension to power. Michael Scrivener has argued that while eighteenth-century doctrines lead to “strenuous efforts

to know the ‘other’” in the form of “Orientalist writing, [conducted under the assumption of a single humanity], that idealized places like Persia and China in order to criticize the failings of Europe,” post-revolutionary “nationalism force[d] its decline and eventual marginalization” (Scrivener 8-9). The hyperbolic representations of national prejudice in *Corinne*, seen in characters such as Lady Edgermond and the Count d’Erfeuil, embody that vituperous nationalism and serve, narratively, to limit Corinne and Oswald’s options, continually reminding the hero and heroine of the disapproval that the parochial world will bestow upon their ill-advised union, specifically because of the way it flies against the instinctive tightening of borders and classes that followed in the wake of the Revolution’s violence. Undertaking practices that promote alterity (such as Corinne does with her art and her lifestyle)—as opposed to striving to conform to the status quo (the fate to which she was condemned in England)—can erase the enmity between city and country, between rich and poor, and between one nation and another, and “semble promettre une manière nouvelle de sentir et de juger” (C 39), the doorway to the tolerance that the Revolution ultimately proved to be lacking.

In her challenge to Oswald’s dogmatic absolutism in terms of the superiority of his nation, his reverence for his father and for the patriarchal model, and his attachment to traditional gender roles for men and women, that is, his belief that “la première destination des femmes et même des hommes n’était pas l’exercice des facultés intellectuelles, mais l’accomplissement des devoirs particuliers à chacun” (C 343), Corinne instructs Oswald in the feminine language of tolerance. Indeed, the emphasis on imagination and emotion that underscores this tutelage is part of the particular legacy of the Revolutionary Heroine, who, here continuing the work of Delphine, reifies it in more concrete political terms. Corinne undertakes the task of curing Oswald of many of his flaws of Romantic heroism that prevent him from seeing Italy’s value and

which stand in the way of their union. The narrator tells us that Oswald “ne pénétrait pas le mystère de cette nation [...] qu’il faut comprendre par l’imagination plutôt que par l’esprit de jugement [...]. Il était bien loin de penser que ce pays [...] serait bientôt pour lui la source de tant d’idées et de jouissances nouvelles” (C 48). His lack of exposure to the exercise of imagination—“il n’avait vécu qu’en France, où la société est tout, et à Londres, où les intérêts politiques absorbent presque tous les autres” (C 46), the reader learns of him—renders him particularly unfit to understand the nation, its people, and even the landscape. Corinne’s goal is to teach him to appreciate the great works of art, architecture, and ruins, “qui nous apprennent l’histoire par l’imagination et le sentiment” (C 91).

Because she has mastered both masculine and feminine forms of knowledge and expression, the Revolutionary Heroine is the only character in the novel who can offer Oswald this unique tutelage that aims to cure him of his dogmatism. Independent of politics or society’s diversions, this is Oswald’s sentimental education: “All culture, art which adorns mankind,” Kant wrote, “[...] develop[s] the natural seeds to perfection” (*IUH* 5). Like Delphine’s attempts to bring Léonce back to a kind of masculine natural that can act independent of the conventions of duty and honor, Corinne draws upon art and the grand movements of culture in order to ease Oswald away from judgment, away from the distaste that he instinctively feels for women’s liberty and independence. While he “cherchait partout un sentiment moral” (C 116), she encourages him to let the surroundings rather than his moral judgments educate his senses while contemplating the value of the monuments that they visit. Through her enlightened *exposés*, she reveals to him “la grandeur morale des premiers temps,” which causes him to revise his opinions day by day as she contextualizes Italian art, music, literature, architecture, and religion through the conduit of her genius. “Vous me révélez les pensées et les émotions que les objets extérieurs

peuvent faire naître” he realizes. “Je ne vivais que dans mon cœur, vous avez réveillé mon imagination” (C 141).

Through Corinne’s and Oswald’s artistic wanderings, de Staël exposes the ways in which women have suffered from the dramatic about-face in legislation following the Revolution through her Revolutionary Heroine’s ideal consensus between opposing gendered poles of Enlightenment thought and action—that is imagination and feeling (feminine) versus judgment and reason (masculine)—that would have saved her sex from further imprisonment. Through their conversations on religion, in which both characters reveal the degree to which their ideologies, from the underlying philosophy to the daily practice, embody these gendered acts, de Staël criticizes the absolutist emotional asceticism of Oswald’s religion which, for her, embodies the set of principles that led to the failure of revolutionary doctrines.

Oswald’s attacks on Italian Catholicism demonstrate his fear of the very kind of knowledge in which Corinne is trying to indoctrinate him, because he associates it with the corrupt power of Ancien Régime women, exemplified in the novel by Mme d’Arbigny, who held the hero captive in Paris with her sexual wiles and duplicity during his father’s illness. Italian Catholicism, he asserts, is rife with paganism, superstition, and a general lack of law, and its penitent devotees rely on regular, repetitive rituals that, by their completion, supposedly preserve their subjects from divine reprisal for sins committed out of passion, which are rampant in Italy: “[leur] habitude est d’attacher plus d’importance aux pratiques religieuses qu’aux devoirs” which he likens to “des rapports de courtisan mis à la place du respect qu’inspire le créateur” (C 270-1). The pagan model has long been associated with feminine knowledge and power, and when Oswald alludes to it, he is launching an unconcealed attack on the aspects of religion in Italy that most resemble this dangerous variety of scheming, aristocratic female (whom Madelyn Gutwirth

has called “social woman”), such as Mme d’Arbigny and Mme de Vernon in *Delphine*. In Oswald’s analogy, religious rituals stand in for the woman’s social performances—the regular acts and speeches that offer a façade of virtue but that are empty of genuine sentiment and that in fact hide deeply immoral lives. Such women are, essentially, God’s “courtesans,” in the language of his analogy, because they follow a virtuous formula to protect their reputations while otherwise delivering themselves to the orgy of pleasures that their master offers. Corinne, in turn, argues for the conjoining of reasoned morality and “les sentiments du coeur” (C 271), both in judging the *other* in whatever form, and in pursuing individual, social, and global peace, because “c’est le culte de sentiment et d’indulgence qui favorise si bien l’essor de l’âme vers le ciel” (C 271). The women that Oswald attacks—or the religion that he distrusts, in this case—are not the problem, Corinne argues with her valorization of “l’enthousiasme religieux,” “les beaux-arts, les grands monuments,” “la pompe” and even “l’inutile” (C 272-3) of Italian Catholicism’s demonstrative adoration of divinity, but rather a social system and an austere religious morality that prevents people from following their natural, generous impulses, as the author notes in her criticism of English Protestantism.

In contrast to the more flexible position that the Revolutionary Heroine holds, Oswald favors an absolutist religious asceticism which stands in for the principles that, in de Staël’s opinion, caused the failure of revolutionary doctrines. De Staël herself was a protestant, a fact that makes it all the more clear that these scenes are meant to be read analogically. Rather than criticizing British Protestantism itself, then, she uses religion in these conversations as an ideological construct in order to show how revolutionary and counter-revolutionary dogma took on the same power and sway of religion during the crisis. Indeed, by portraying the minority religion in France, the one that has suffered historically as the object, for example, of violent

majority fury during the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres in 1572, de Staël disconnects the state of oppression from the automatic right to retaliatory violence, an act that we will see repeated in *Nanon*. The pursuit of revolutionary ideals at all costs—the same belief that torments the Jacobin Costejoux in Sand's novel, that is, his fervent belief that “la fin justifie le moyen” (Sand 281)—merely reproduces this absolutist ideology instead of replacing it with the active practice of the tenets of Christian humanism that the grand ideals of the Revolution originally represented. For Corinne, English Protestantism suffers from this same unwillingness to consider individuals above principles: “[Votre religion] est sévère et sérieuse, la nôtre est vive et tendre” (C 269); the first recalls the Reign of Terror, the second, the utopian goals that all of society's disenfranchised glimpsed upon reading the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. In Italy, she counters, where religion speaks of love, devotion is woven into the most treasured aspects of life—“[elle] anime les arts, inspire les poètes” (C 269); in England, in turn, where reason reigns over imagination and where religion preaches only duty, “[elle] a pris un caractère d'austérité morale” (C 269). Because of this tendency to favor magnanimous feeling over a fixed set of principles, de Staël's Italy remains free from “l'empire de la société” (C 82) that Corinne found so alienating in England, that drove Delphine to her death, and that allowed revolutionary and counter-revolutionary factions to foment to the breaking point post-1789.

The nations of Great Britain and Italy, so intimately tied to Oswald and Corinne themselves as well as to the religions practiced there, stand as embodiments of contemporary gender constructions that the author critiques as having contributed to the failure of Enlightenment and revolutionary ideals. In England, Oswald demonstrates, men are defined by their active pursuits and rigid ways of thinking. In necessary opposition to man's active life, private submission is the logical destiny of women: “Il faut, pour que la nature et l'ordre social

se montrent dans toute leur beauté, que l'homme soit le protecteur de la femme protégée, mais que ce protecteur adore la faiblesse qu'il défend, [qui est] la divinité sans pouvoir [qui] porte bonheur à sa maison" (C 156-7). Here he again evokes the pagan model of the female deity, man's *porte-bonheur*. However, he effectively renders her powerless by enclosing her in the domestic space of the *protégée* and by reducing her destiny to a limited scope of service-oriented tasks, or as Lady Edgermond describes it: "La femme [est] faite pour soigner le ménage de son mari et la santé de ses enfants; [...] toutes les autres prétentions ne [font] que du mal" (C 365). Oswald fetishizes the modesty and virtue that this kind of limited domestic education cultivates in young women in England, but the Revolutionary Heroine identifies it as the very construct that breeds the women he despises, whose appearance of surface inactivity, or of private virtue, in fact hides a busy and nefarious mind: "la réserve pleine de vertu des femmes anglaises, et l'art plein de grâce des femmes françaises, servent souvent à cacher, croyez-moi, la moitié de ce qui se passé dans l'âme des unes et des autres" (C 159). While aspects of Italy terrify him and threaten his masculinity, in fact, it is the women that he idolizes who suffer from these same flaws because of a society that offers their minds and bodies little more than "un rassemblement de commérages, une collection d'ennuis tout à la fois divers et monotones" (C 367). What makes Corinne unique and irresistible to Oswald is "un naturel sans contrainte qui laisse voir" (C 159). Absolute transparency in the place of obscurity and deception is the lifestyle that Corinne advocates and that de Staël sees as natural to women when social institutions and forces protect rather than destroy her natural goodness, as Delphine demonstrated. Though Mary Wollstonecraft was far from de Staël's greatest fan, censuring her adulation of Rousseau's misogynistic remarks on women,¹⁰ even she might appreciate the author's penetration in

¹⁰ See her *Vindication on the Rights of Women*, chapter V, "Animadversion on writers who have rendered women an object of pity, bordering on contempt," in which she criticizes de Staël's adulation of Rousseau and his summation

deconstructing Oswald's analogy: Like Delphine's objective analysis of Mme de R's situation, Corinne begs Oswald to exercise a little perspective when forming his judgments on her nation (and on women themselves): Italy has had moments of greatness in history, she reminds him: "D'où vient donc que cette nation a été sous les Romains la plus militaire de toutes, la plus jalouse de sa liberté dans les républiques du moyen âge, et dans le seizième siècle la plus illustrée par les lettres, les sciences et les arts? N'a-t-elle pas poursuivi la gloire dans toutes ses formes!" If the nation and its women are weak now, "pourquoi n'en accuseriez-vous pas sa situation politique, puisque dans d'autres circonstances elle s'est montrée si différente de ce qu'elle est maintenant?" (C 160). Clearly, Corinne argues, her current faults are the result of political oppression, and not of the natural indolence of which Oswald accuses her. In other words, woman is not as she is because she was born that way—because she has clearly shined in moments of history—but because her lack of subjecthood, of basic rights, and of education (a state of being that the revolutionary turn of events merely exacerbated)—have given her few directions in which to grow and develop. Though de Staël has not received much credit in the history of feminism,¹¹ she has, in this passage, unequivocally identified gender inequality as, in part, a social and political rather than a biological construct.

Ultimately the reader finds consensus between the points of ideological friction in the novel's bold dénouement: that Corinne and Lucile, both sisters and competitors for Oswald's affection, rekindle their love and friendship, despite their shared object of desire, mitigates the damage that Oswald's adamant attachment to his father's vision of Britishness has had on his

of woman as an assemblage of "charms, weaknesses and errors" (179).

¹¹ It was only in the 1970s that feminist scholars such as Noreen J. Swallow and Madelyn Gutwirth begin studying the Baroness' texts from a feminist perspective. Prior to that point, Swallow has indicated, scholarly criticism had characterized her novels as, at worst, "hysterical retaliation and posturing self-pity," (65), or, at best, as an interesting example of the female artist. However, "to concentrate attention on *Corinne* as the portrait of an exceptional female," Swallow asserts, "is to disregard Mme de Staël's concerned interest in problems common to all women" (66). Within the intervening decades, the idea that de Staël's novels offered a contribution to the resistance against patriarchal hegemony gradually became relatively commonplace.

marriage to Lucile. Indeed, once their relationship is reconstructed, Corinne instructs Lucile on her duties as Oswald's wife—not on her moral duties, with which she is all too familiar, thanks to her education in England—but on her responsibility to continue to cultivate his imagination and sensibility, as Corinne would have done had she married him: “Il faut que vous soyez vous et moi à la fois,” she counsels her. Oswald needs “une confiance spontanée [...], plus d'intérêt [...] et de la gaîté” (C 578) to combat his melancholy and discouragement. In so doing, however, she ensures the continuation of her own legacy, the propagation of the specifically feminine way of seeing and feeling that the author valorizes in both novels. Passing her principles on to the couple's daughter as well as forming Lucile in her own image, the Revolutionary Heroine in effect opens the narrative space for future Revolutionary Heroines who will offer alternative versions of the history that failed both Corinne and Delphine. “Mon seul désir personnel,” Corinne explains to Lucile, “est encore qu'Oswald retrouve dans vous et dans sa fille quelques traces de mon influence, et que jamais du moins il ne puisse avoir une jouissance de sentiment sans se rappeler Corinne” (C 579). By continuing to exert her influence from beyond the grave, she condemns both Oswald's and the Revolution's idiosyncratic tendency to resist true justice when it runs contrary to established patterns of behavior in the fatherland. In effect, Corinne has taught Oswald to feel pleasure and pain outside of his alternating patriarchal joy and melancholy, and his inseparable association of both with the Revolutionary Heroine will ensure that women's influence will never again be discounted. The narrator, in turn, reveals that despite the vast deception of the Napoleonic promise and the devastating effects of exile, the author's underlying doctrine of civic kindness has not changed since *Delphine*; “Faites du bien aux hommes,” a priest once exclaimed while comforting the mourners of loved ones lost to war, “pour que Dieu cicatrise dans votre coeur la blessure de la douleur” (C 276). There is duty to country, to family,

and to the cause of freedom, this phrase suggests, and it must be respected. But in the interim, foster tolerance and mutual understanding by doing good everywhere and to everyone, in hopes that no one will have to exercise “duty” to the detriment of another, as both Léonce and Oswald feel compelled to do in *Delphine* and *Corinne*.

Léonce and Oswald

Through both Revolutionary Heroines, de Staël identifies men’s unwillingness and inability to embrace the feminine syntheses that they propose as the source of the Revolution’s failure. Though both heroes give tactic consent to the justice of the heroines’ approach to citizenship, love, and gender, they are ultimately unable to integrate these new tenets into their respective codes of conduct. In fact, in many cases—and this is a theme we will see repeated in subsequent chapters—the men end up using the women’s own virtues against them, which further illustrates de Staël’s assessment that there will never be any kind of equality or balance of powers in society until the world begins to valorize the historically devalued feminine ontology. At the start of their relationship, for example, Léonce is perpetually begging Delphine to moderate her principles—which “réveillent tant de passions haineuses, et contre lesquelles, peut-être avec raison, les personnes de votre classe ont un si grand éloignement” (D, I, 148)—as part of their commitment to one another. And yet, when he sees that the same public opinion against which the heroine fights is beginning to truncate his own destiny, he calls upon her to exercise those same principles for *his* benefit and to the increasing detriment of *her* reputation: “Ce n’est pas Delphine dont l’esprit supérieur s’affranchit à son gré de l’opinion du monde?” (D, I, 374). By twisting her allegiance to generosity to serve him exclusively as a function of his proprietary love for her, he alienates her from her own convictions, which further isolates her in society.

Delphine is not one to reject “l’amour par un timide respect pour les jugements des hommes. Ton véritable devoir, c’est de m’aimer,” he commands her: “Ne suis-je pas ton premier choix ?” (D, I, 374).

Indeed, like the Revolution itself, both men follow Enlightenment with an abrupt about-face: despite the moments of understanding and approval that they experienced in contrasting their masculine ontology with the feminine versions that the women attempted to teach them, in their trials, they inevitably return to the superiority of their own ideas—“[ce] dont [leur] existence s’était composée jusqu’alors” (C 447)—and no longer credit what they formerly respected because of the *violence* (in the Revolutionary sense as well) that they feel that it inflicts upon their character and their dogmatically-gendered world. Léonce, for example, troubled about whether to fight for the French army or the emigrant army, refuses Delphine’s enlightened credo, which intones that one’s loving impulses should dictate one’s actions. In the case of the former, the revolution has the stronger party, and Léonce does not want to be “soupçonné de céder à la force” (D, I, 467), whereas the latter, while he is not “réelement enthousiaste” for the cause, might cause him to be accused “d’être déterminé par votre intérêt personnel, en défendant les privileges de la noblesse” (D, I, 467). Since he is incapable of making a decision independent of public opinion, which “s’efforc[e] toujours de ternir l’éclat de nos sentiments les plus purs” (D, I, 245), Delphine attempts to cure him of his moral turpitude by counseling him to opt out political action all together. “Votre devoir, dans votre manière de penser,” she insists, “c’est l’inaction politique” (D, I, 468). By encouraging him to behave as a woman and willingly choose political inactivity, Delphine denies the legitimacy of Léonce’s ability to act as a man by honoring his obligations, insinuating that masculine “duty” is in fact a construct of moral cowardice. Indeed, it is precisely *because* Léonce is a slave to public opinion, because he is unable to temper his

obsession with honor with rationality and sensibility, that he must not act. De Staël explicitly links Léonce's unmanly refusal to decide on his own terms with revolutionary failure: to resist the tide of change that is fueled by the desire to share freedom with all of mankind is, as M de Lebensei explains to Léonce, "courir le risque de prêter son secours à des événements qui étoufferaient toutes les idées, que depuis quatre siècles les esprits éclairés ont travaillé à recueillir" (D, II, 188), that is, to impede the rolling forth of the centuries-long culmination and fruition of socio-political thought.

Oswald's *volte-face*, in turn, parallels the devastating post-Revolution intensification of separate-sphere gender roles in France that de Staël's two novels condemn. Though he leaves Italy swearing his fidelity to Corinne, once in the bosom of his patrimony, where "la réalité d'un ordre social [...] domineur" (C 397) effaces his memory of "le vague enivrant des beaux-arts et de l'Italie" and of Corinne herself, "il reprenait une sorte de fixité dans les idées" (C 447). Only able to look upon his former lover with horror for her notoriety, he contrasts her endlessly with Lucile, the embodiment of "la pureté céleste d'une jeune fille qui ne s'est jamais éloignée de sa mère, et ne connaît de la vie que la tendresse filiale (C 450). In his country, where "le bonheur domestique est le lien du bonheur public" (C 447), Oswald abandons the undomestic, *masculine woman* Corinne for the promise of manly occupations and silently *feminine* women like her half-sister, whose "timid, innocent" English heart is the very personification of British insularism and its accompanying Angel in the House view on the second sex. While Lucile exudes angelic innocence, Corinne exhales worldly knowledge, which includes an awareness of love—"Vous avez beaucoup réfléchi [à l'amour]!" (C 94), Oswald observes accusatorily—which dirties her in the eyes of those who believe that adamic knowledge is necessarily incompatible with domestic bliss. A relative of Lucile's, M. Edgermond, cuts to the heart of the problem with Corinne when

he cites Walpole while inquiring of Oswald, “*que fait-on de cela à la maison? Et la maison,*” he continues, “est tout chez nous, vous le savez, pour les femmes, au moins” (C 204). The “*cela*” is, of course, especially illuminating in its refusal of Corinne’s gender and subjecthood. However, the verb “faire” is also a revealing choice, for it expresses the idea this thing, this *cela*, exists only to have something *done* with it. In other words, in England, and Edgermond recognizes this and laments it to some degree, Corinne could not exist on her own terms, but only according to what men there would determine as her use-potential. Because of her knowledge of love and her public, performative lifestyle—which Edgermond admires in the context of Italy (“Je la voudrais sur le trône d’Angleterre—” he insists)—English discourse ungenders and unpersons the heroine, because a woman has no value outside of the home, and her most prominent value therein is her exclusive sexual devotion to her husband and her maternity. Hence the completion of Edgermond’s perverse breed of praise: “—non pas sous mon humble toit” (C 204). When the heroine, with her improvisational poetry, her art, her theatrical performances and her music, *creates* both outside of procreation and outside of the home, she becomes a kind of dangerous chimera, precisely because *cela*, her alternative to biological procreation, cannot be contained *à la maison*. Oswald’s own father feared the effect that a woman like Corinne would have on his son, that of mollifying his instinct for masculine displays of vainglory and effacing the specter of xenophobia that his education had instilled in him. If Oswald marries Corinne, his father writes in a letter, he will lose his national character, that which makes “notre nation un corps;” and he would probably move to Italy, which “lui ravirait l’honneur de servir son pays” (467), in itself a primordial emblem of manhood. In short, her independence would swallow both his nationality (without which he has no civic presence) and his masculinity, and he would be left, in simplified terms: a woman. For Corinne, however this is no bad thing, since the tempering of excessive

nationalism and inflexible codes of honor is the very gender revolution that she is trying to bring about.

The heroes' ultimate refusal of compromise echoes the nation's inability to find a non-violent middle-ground between the partisan civil war that rocked the nation in the early 1790s and that eventually settled into the tyranny of the Terror. Bertrand-Jennings has made a similar assessment, that if "le 'mal' des héros masculins, Léonce de *Delphine* et Oswald de *Corinne*, procède de leur écartèlement entre les modes de sensibilité 'masculin' et 'féminin,' le 'mal' des héroïnes provient, lui, de ce que les héros n'ont pu se convertir totalement au 'féminin' dans leur sensibilité et leurs choix de vie" (Bertrand-Jennings 43). I think the argument needs to be taken further, however. The men not only suffer from their inability to compromise, but they refuse to see how their masculine prerogative does harm both to the women they love and to themselves. They, in effect, betray their own idea of honor when they make promises that they become unwilling to keep, which condemns them to, if not death, at least eternal melancholy. Indeed, at the same time that the men's ultimate rejection of feminine knowledge and being exemplifies the rejection of women in society at large, the heroes' implacable regret parallels the downward spiral of both revolution and social progress. When Corinne levies her curse on Oswald, "qu'il ne puisse avoir une jouissance de sentiment sans se rappeler Corinne" (C 579), she predicts the very *male malady* that will characterize the conflicted, ambivalent, and unruly masculinity that trails in the shadow of the Revolution and dominates early nineteenth century literature and art.

Indeed, it is the men's dramatic philosophical backpedaling and return to their former reductive notions about women that both condemns the women to death and that allows the author to further emphasize her prescriptive deconstruction of Enlightenment gender tropes: if self-sacrifice is feminine—if it is, indeed, the very essence of womanhood—it offers proof of a

superior moral capacity, in the author's opinion, because of the negotiation, the compromise, between reason and sentiment that it requires. As we see with Delphine, who more than once offers "de quitter Paris, d'aller m'enfermer dans une retraite pour le reste de mes jours, afin d'y conserver sans crime le souvenir de Léonce" (D, I, 158), what the women embody is the revolutionary imperative of sacrificing one's principles for love, rather than the staid maxim to which both the men and the Revolution itself ultimately return, that of sacrificing love to principle.¹²

And as I have suggested, women were not the only ones to suffer: de Staël fictionalizes the way that men, too, were victims of their own dogmatic thinking both inside and outside of revolutionary doctrines. In *Delphine*, Valorbe evades a duel, and his fellow soldiers torment him nearly to the point of death when they discover that he dodged this necessary ritual of machismo. However, perfect honor required of him both that he defend himself *and* that he protect a woman by not defending himself, by which de Staël reveals the inherent incongruence in the idea of masculine devoir that is unwilling to sacrifice principle for the human generosity that would lead to relativized judgment. Léonce, too, feels bound by a similar dilemma: is the most honorable undertaking to avenge himself for the gross offense of a marriage of chicanery, or to respect his conjugal vows and stifle his masculine prerogative in order remain with the wife that he does not love? Indeed, he suffers a number of humiliating blows to his masculinity throughout the novel, being tricked into a sham marriage and "renfermé dans ma maison" (D, I, 383) with a woman he doesn't love—both literary truisms of the feminine experience in the eighteenth century. That Léonce and Oswald promise to make sacrifices—ideological and physical—that will challenge the hegemonic rule of masculine honor and duty, and then are unable or unwilling to follow

¹² In *Nanon*, George Sand will also identify this unfortunate reversal as one of the primary causes of the failure of the Revolution, particularly through the character of Costejoux.

through, is therefore a transparent criticism of a system that defines masculinity in terms of inflexible principles (honor) and physical violence (dueling and warfare). Indeed, when Oswald returns to England, he revels in the rediscovery of these totems of manhood: “il rentrait dans l’existence qui convenait aux hommes, l’action avec un but” (C 448) Neither course of “action” that the heroes undertake, however, can lead to happiness, because both ultimately refuse the humanistic maxim that Corinne and Delphine spend the span of the novels trying to teach to their lovers: that “il n’est pas donné à notre esprit de se convaincre sur un tel sujet par des raisonnements positifs; mais la sensibilité nous apprend tout ce qu’il importe de savoir” (D, II, 421). Even the reasonable words of M de Lebensei, who states this same axiom in concrete terms specific to the masculine experience, cannot sway Léonce: “L’homme fier,” he argues, “l’homme vertueux ne doit obéir qu’à la morale universelle; que signifie ces devoirs qui tiennent aux circonstances, qui dépendent du caprice des lois, ou de la volonté des prêtres, et soumettent la conscience de l’homme à la décision d’autres hommes, asservis depuis longtemps sous le joug des mêmes préjugés et surtout les mêmes intérêts?” (D, II, 282-3). Recreating the self-same arbitrary and absolutist power structures in the place of those that were torn down at the start the Revolution is in part what doomed it to fail. And by the same token, because the new versions of masculine and feminine virtue that de Staël proposes seem to represent a rejection of traditional masculinity, both heroes ultimately prefer to return to the *caprice des lois ou la volonté des prêtres* rather than embrace the compromise and sacrifice that the possibility of true personal freedom would require.

Conclusion

Both *Corinne* and *Delphine*, as I have shown, seek to combine the two gendered poles of Enlightenment thought: emotion and sensibility versus reason and rationality. Both are entirely insouciant of public opinion, of tradition, and of conventional moral codes, structures that they identify as arbitrary because they run contrary to what reason, feeling, and experience tells them is in men and women's best interest. In both novels, a feminized model of behavior, love, and intellectual inquiry overturns the reigning masculine tropes—traditionalism (the exclusionary conservatism of the Ancien Régime) and Romanticism (the destructive rebellion of the Revolution). That their reforms ultimately meet with a certain degree of failure, which includes the heroines' deaths, suggests that de Staël herself perhaps had no larger goal than to exhibit the period's intolerance and suppression of alterity. Indeed, scholars such as Simone Balayé have argued precisely from that point of view. She calls the author's fictional works descriptive rather than prescriptive: "Mme de Staël," she asserts, "qui a tant souffert de sa condition de femme, ne pouvait que créer des femmes incomprises, détruites par les préjugés. [...] Ses romans sont plutôt des constats: les femmes sont malheureuses et la société ne les admet que si elles se soumettent" (Balayé 23). In other words, they observe the unfortunate state of womanhood without purporting to propose a solution or to seek reparations from the individuals or institutions that might be responsible. Yet, as I have demonstrated above, both novels present an outright challenge to political inequality and make bold statements about women's underappreciated talents and strengths that the nation has historically disregarded. While *Corinne* and *Delphine* may appear on the surface to be mere love stories exploring the way in which society preys upon the tragic flaws of women—or worse, simple *romans à clef*—the actions that her heroines undertake indicate more proactive intentions. And we must credit de Staël with even

more subtlety than that: her revolutionary protagonists, as I have proven, resurrect and rethink Enlightenment ideals of equality and deconstruct gender paradigms by engaging their heroes intellectually, and by inserting themselves into the burgeoning Romantic aesthetic, playing roles and moving in and out of literary tropes—such as the suffering artist or the social outcast—that are typically reserved for men. While both heroines appear to sustain universal stereotypes of female infirmity and sentimentality, they subvert these assumptions by experiencing weakness and emotion as an artistic or philosophical imperative, not as a necessary aspect of femininity—that is, like Revolutionary Heroines rather than as women.

In her exploration of gender roles and gendered traits, de Staël necessarily addresses the masculine and feminine forms of knowledge that played such a large role in Enlightenment philosophies, which themselves appeared poised to offer citizenship to society at large. In her fictional explorations, as I have demonstrated, the author slowly but surely hones in on the fact that excluding women from taking political action through the use of their particular traits of love, pity and sensibility, as well as their capacity to create unity with their very real intellectual and artistic powers, leads inevitably to social disintegration, since reason alone—historically masculine knowledge—can only breed dogmatism and intolerance. In her plea for a co-gendered model of citizenship, she calls upon Kant, a philosopher to whom she devoted many pages in her *De l'Allemagne*, whose cosmopolitan ideal underlies her every gesture of *ouverture* and *inclusion*: “Lorsqu’on veut se servir du raisonnement seul pour établir les vérités religieuses,” she writes of his theories, “c’est un instrument pliable en tous sens, qui peut également les défendre et les attaquer. [...]. C’est au sentiment que [Kant] appelle pour faire pencher la balance [parce qu’il] a reconnu le raisonnement pour insuffisant et pour contradictoire” (DA 450-51). Extraordinary women such as Corinne, Delphine, and Germaine de Staël herself, cannot flourish

in the domestic role alone because of its lack of access to a public world which gives richness and meaning to private life; on the other hand, ordinary women, such as Thérèse d'Ervin in *Delphine*, lack the education, life skills, and basic sensitivity to be receptive to the domestic life's tender charms. "De quel secours me serait un esprit que celui de Thérèse? Delphine wonders. "La passion fait tourner toutes nos forces contre nous-mêmes" (D, I, 137-8). Without some kind of legitimized public role for women, de Staël has shown with the slow death of her two heroines, society will continue to experience tremors (the revolutionary echoes of 1830, 1848, and 1871).

Indeed, in an eerie variation on a theme beloved to de Staël, *Corinne* takes *Delphine's* dilemma to metaphysical levels: while her earlier heroine wonders how others can know a woman's heart and character when she is prohibited from proactivity, Corinne inquires how a woman can know herself, when even in political liberty she remains a slave to the antipathetic need to love and be loved by another. "Chaque jour plus subjuguée par son amour pour Oswald" (C 438), she compares her impending death to that of a political prisoner: as Oswald's departure for England approaches, "elle frémit de tous ses membres; et sûrement l'approche de l'échafaud ne lui aurait pas causé plus d'effroi" (C 440); and when she learns that he will marry Lucile, she is "une personne condamnée à la mort, mais qui ne sait pas encore quand sa sentence sera exécutée" (C 507). This gradual build-up to death—nothing like the sudden, cold, and mercifully brief slicing of the guillotine—mirrors women's lengthy struggle for equality in the sense of civic recognition and value outside of sexual and biological criteria. That, in de Staël's world, they go willingly and on their own terms to these interminable gallows testifies of their determination to seize create control of their fate—as the Revolutionary Heroines in subsequent

chapters will also do—despite what power structures, institutions, and social bodies try to force them into conformity.

Chapter III

Belinda and the French Threat: the decent drapery of *raison*

Maria Edgeworth was an advocate of women's education and the regeneration of the nation via the shoring up of the family unit. Some of her most influential non-fiction works, in which she lays out her ideas on women in the public sphere, family organization, and education include *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), a plea for reform in women's education, *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), a collection of didactic tales for children, and *Practical Education* (1798). Also the author of novels, plays, and treatises on a variety of contentious social questions, Edgeworth created heroines who too find themselves at the ideological intersection of the revolutionary period's most profound debates. Though never an outspoken feminist like Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Hays, nor an especially avid supporter of the French Revolution, the author nonetheless falls to the liberal side of the political dissension in Britain at the time, with her proactive intervention into education (for women and children) and her consistent discouragement in her writing of extreme performances of feminine delicacy and weakness. It follows from this, then, that much of the scholarship on *Belinda* (1801) has addressed similar topics, and has focused mainly on post-colonial readings of a scene, later withdrawn, of interracial marriage in the novel; on the status of Edgeworth's feminist position; and on the text as an expression of Edgeworth's pedagogical theories¹³.

This chapter adds substantially to these conversations by arguing that that there is an unavoidable question that has yet to be asked about this novel. What is the cultural, pedagogical, and feminist significance of the proliferation of references to the French language, French culture

¹³ *Practical Education* combines philosophies of knowledge from Locke and Rousseau with contemporary educational theories from Godwin, Macaulay and others, and favors a tactile, exploratory, and empirical education for the two sexes.

and French literature in the novel? This question also turns our attention specifically to Harriet Freke, the Frenchified “man-woman” in *Belinda*. What do they, together, tell us about Edgeworth’s intellectual relationship with the French Revolution and its doctrines? Perhaps many do not realize it (because it is not revealed until chapter 26 of 31, and even then, only briefly), but the novel takes place during the early stages of the overthrow, when the conflict between extremists on both sides of the political spectrum was reaching its peak in Britain. One year before meeting Belinda, the narrator discloses, Clarence Hervey had been in France “just before the Revolution, when luxury and dissipation were at their height in Paris, and when a universal spirit of licentious gallantry prevailed” (362).¹⁴ It is no secret that the majority opinion in Britain expressed distaste for the ideals of the French Revolution, especially when they degenerated into the violence of the Terror, and therefore, with this backdrop in mind, we must read the characters’ conflicts—Harriet Freke and her vulgar “Rights of Women” assaults included—as part of the dialogue on both the pro- and anti-revolutionary platforms in Britain and the internal self-reflections that they provoked, despite the fact not a single revolutionary event is recorded or commented upon by the novel’s characters.

The significance of French allusions in this novel leads us inevitably to the role that the Revolutionary Heroine—Belinda herself—plays in this text. If there is one consistent strain in scholarly work on the novel it is that virtually no one focuses their argument on the titular character herself. Indeed, *Belinda* has long been seen as a playful literary frolic centered around the dissipated socialite Lady Delacour, who must eventually succumb to the regenerative

¹⁴ If “just before” means late-1788 or early- to mid-1789, prior to the storming of the Bastille, the novel must unfold during late 1789 (following the July storming of the Bastille), or in early- to mid-1790—probably after the women’s march on Versailles, which included the ransacking of the royal apartments and the “half-naked” fleeing of the queen (in Burke’s description), possibly after the seizing of church and noble properties, but most definitively before the September massacres, the execution of the king, and the civil war between Girondins and Jacobins, events that prompted the conclusive severing of the majority of British support for the Revolution’s goals and methods.

machinations of the initially colorless, passionless eponymous heroine. Heather MacFadyen has called Belinda “a tiresome distraction from the...irrepressibly witty woman of fashion, Lady Delacour” (424). Jordana Rosenberg, in a like manner, accuses the novel of “tediously beat[ing] down the fun of Lady Delacour in the name of an Enlightenment project” (583), a surmise with which Beth Kowaleski-Wallace agrees, arguing further that “Belinda seems condemned to her very tameness by the didactic purpose of the novel, a purpose which demands her unyielding perfection,” and which “precludes no real moral growth for the heroine” (242). While even Edgeworth herself admitted to having drawn “that stick or stone Belinda” (qtd in Montweiler 347) as perhaps too steady for genuine likability, through this boring philosophical ambassador she has, in fact, crafted a Revolutionary Heroine, I will argue, who represents a cogent and strikingly liberal treatise on rationality and the necessary reformation of female manners, which defuses the fear of the French threat that so many anti-Jacobin novels of the era were continuing to foment. What’s more, Edgeworth’s treatise is much closer to Wollstonecraft’s version than anyone has yet to admit, and Belinda is as much at the center of the reformation as the rakish Lady Delacour.

I will demonstrate, then, that within the pages of *Belinda*, Edgeworth attempts to counterbalance the virulent backlash to revolutionary events that took the form of a xenophobic nationalism, the condemnation of iconoclastic Enlightenment philosophies and the excessive reason and rationality that Britons saw as the origin of the revolutionary violence, and the increasingly narrow definitions of feminine propriety and destiny that followed—a topic I will pursue further in Chapter 4 on *The Wanderer*. Indeed, because of the *Belinda*’s implicit awareness of Revolution, the fear of contagion is a palpable theme in the novel and takes the form of threatening and thinly-veiled references to French revolutionary philosophies and

ideologies. However, Edgeworth addresses the concern about contamination in the first pages and promptly counteracts it: when young and socially inexperienced Belinda is sent to live with the debauched aristocrat Lady Delacour, it is not long before she observes the unhappiness into which her patron's lifestyle and life choices have plunged her. Rather than allowing herself to be swept away by the blinding spectacle of Lady Delacour's wit and the dizzying variety of her company, she makes the conscious choice to avoid contamination and "to profit by her bad example" (70), without, however, cutting off her intercourse with her. Instead, this Revolutionary Heroine eventually aids in Lady Delacour's reformation through her good example and rational advice.

This determination on the heroine's part informs every other resolution in the novel, as the author continually calls into question existing conventions (such as female delicacy) and their radical revisions ("masculine women"). In each case her examples obscure thinly veiled ideological and political references to the threats that the Revolution allegedly posed to the British nation. Indeed, the points of ideological friction that the novel confronts exist primarily around the overturning of gender roles that revolutionary doctrines seemed to suggest. Edgeworth addresses both the fear of the manly woman (the sacrifice of feminine "softness" and docility to the boorish quest for sexual equality) and the womanly man (the dilution of masculine strength and prerogative by effeminate aristocratic foppery, a behavior typically associated with the French aristocracy.)¹⁵ She also considers the figure of the unnatural mother who abandons her children for worldly or self-aggrandizing pleasures, and the puerile theories of natural education that sentimental advocates of feminine submission proposed as her antidote.

¹⁵ In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau identifies wealth and the pursuit of frivolous luxuries—a byproduct of civilization itself—as a source of effeminacy in men. In his *Lettre à d'Alembert* he contrasts the effeminate Parisians with the robust, manly Genevois, due to women's effeminizing influence and empire in the theater. In *Emile*, in turn, he argues that "The exaggeration of feminine delicacy leads to effeminacy in men" (263)

Edgeworth's Revolutionary Heroine, in turn, effectively neutralizes transnational discord in each situation by orchestrating the (re)union of estranged couples and effacing threatening binary oppositions in the text, each with its implicit reference to France or to perilous French ideas.

By debunking the domestic panic, then, that the French Revolution prompted, *Belinda* dismantles, piece by piece, long-standing misconceptions about the effect that revolutionary doctrines might have on the British character and traditional gender roles, themselves an important component of cohering national identity. In offering a vital response to the relevant political and philosophical questions of the era, *Belinda* makes great strides in reconciling opposing poles of political and social response to the Revolution. In so doing, she answers the primary proponents of both sides of the debate: the conservative Edmund Burke and the xenophobic strokes of burgeoning British nationalism in his galvanizing treatise, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the text that definitively wedded revolutionary principles to potential moral and economic decay in Britain, and the liberal Mary Wollstonecraft, who called for wholesale social change modeled on French ideals of equality in her two *Vindications*.

However, by preserving the idea of separate spheres for men and women, which she nonetheless modernizes, Edgeworth helps to construct a new domestic woman who bridges the gap between conservative and liberal ideologies, and who shows, as *Belinda* does, that it is possible for humans to improve and progress, and, indeed, that a woman may improve herself and become more autonomous, while maintaining hierarchical relationships and social institutions that are profoundly British. At the heart of her reconciliation is the idea of rehabilitation, not only of the individual characters, whose strengths and weaknesses stand in for both traditional and unconventional class and gender behaviors under debate during the author's lifetime, but a rehabilitation, I will demonstrate, of French-tainted reason and philosophy

themselves. When all is said and done, Edgeworth has, through her Revolutionary Heroine, reformed her characters, reunited estranged families and revised the marriage contract, reinterpreted masculine duty, and legitimized the female philosopher, all while keeping her characters swathed in a decent drapery all their own.

Cross dressers and gender transformations

At the time of the Revolution, native and foreign thinkers alike had long identified effeminacy—what John Brown, in his 1757 *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, called “a gigantic French plot” (qtd in Newman 80)—as a slow French poison that was a source of national weakness and a scourge to masculinity in Britain. At the same time, the manly woman was cohering into a trope of revolutionary revolt, thanks to lower-class women’s participation in public marches, rallies and strikes, and upper class women’s discursive insurgency into subversive salon and theater cultures. Rousseau had condemned both phenomena years earlier, citing in *Emile* the pernicious effects of civilization in general as the cause of the first, and calling the second—the loathsome hybrid of a woman attempting to act as a man—a creature who “fall[s] short of [her] own possibilities without attaining ours” (268). Both specters haunted the British imagination in the early stages of the uprising in France, and eventually came to be personified by its fervent supporters. Indeed, any woman who dared endorse revolutionary principles in word or deed risked public humiliation at the hands of satirists, who skewered her allegedly masculine qualities when she left the domestic role to enter public debates. Mary Wollstonecraft, “whom no decorum checks” (Polwhele 61), probably more than any other feminist writer of the era, was mocked and parodied in literature and popular publications for her presumed departure from traditional femininity and for her gender-defiant iconoclasm, which the

public read as intimately wedded to French revolutionary platforms. It is no surprise, then, to find characters in novels of the revolutionary period like Edgeworth's Harriet Freke—transvestite rabble rouser, philosophizing rake, archrival of convention, enemy of female delicacy—that allow the authors to experiment with theories on gendered behaviors and the political debates that accompanied them in the 1790s.

Those who have analyzed *Belinda* from a feminist point of view have been divided about the author's degree of complicity with or resistance to patriarchal structures. Julia Douthwaite, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, and Kathryn Kirkpatrick, for example, have called Edgeworth's attempts to assert women's capacity for reason and self-regulation within the domestic framework as inherently conservative, whereas Claudia Johnson has characterized her as a mild reformer unwilling to confront patriarchal hegemony head-on. Harriet Freke—the novel's raunchy advocate of women's rights and *porte-parole* of French revolutionary ideas—is clearly at the heart of this debate about Edgeworth's gender politics. Is she or is she not a parody of Mary Wollstonecraft? Scholars have almost unanimously answered in the affirmative, excepting Deborah Weiss, who reads the character as a deconstruction of the British nation's *fear* of persons like Wollstonecraft, who threaten the status quo with their unorthodox theories and lifestyle. While I side with Weiss on her reading of Freke, I diverge from her and from other scholars in my interpretation of the character's significance within Edgeworth's larger project. Weiss identifies this anti-heroine as part of "an attempted reform of the prevailing understanding of differences between men and women" (449). In my analysis, however, she forms a part of Edgeworth's wider goal to decontaminate French revolutionary ideologies from their threatening properties.

Indeed, in my reading it is Edgeworth's Revolutionary Heroine Belinda, not Freke—the self-proclaimed “champion for the Rights of Women” (229)—who lives according the revolutionary individualist doctrines that liberal feminists like Wollstonecraft lauded, such as self-sufficiency, self-education, and self-control, without, however, falling into the “plot of revolution” or the “anarchic private sensibility” (Bannet 13) to which conservative feminists claimed that Enlightenment doctrines would lead. Indeed, upon a careful reading of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, it becomes obvious just how little Freke embodies the feminist author's principles. For example, though Wollstonecraft lacked formal education, she read constantly in an attempt to bridge the lacunae in her understanding and was a great advocate of the importance of autodidacticism through study. Freke, on the other hand, disdains reading, and has abandoned it in order to think “independently.” “Books only spoil the originality of genius,” she insists. “Very well for those who can't think for themselves—but when one has made up one's opinions, there is no use in reading” (227). What's more, despite her claims to philosophy, and even Lady Delacour's belief in her “masculine” understanding, Freke exhibits a far more stereotypically feminine mind than Belinda, whom she tries to free from the prison of feminine delicacy. Despite her manly clothing and pursuits, Freke's ability to reason is, “in period terms,” as Deborah Weiss has observed, “entirely ‘feminine.’ She is illogical and irrational, capricious and emotional, vain and vainglorious (448). Freke's attempts to *contaminate* Belinda with any of her seditious, allegedly Wollstonecraftian beliefs fails for this very reason, that is, her inability to follow through with rational argumentation.

Indeed, when she at last has an opportunity to display her allegedly masculine understanding in an intellectual spar with Belinda and Mr. Percival, she proves to be lacking the necessary coherence of thought to carry an argument through to a convincing *quod erat*

demonstrandum. When Belinda attempts to engage her, challenging her assessment that “books are full of nonsense” (228) with the inquiry as to whether or not conversation, too, is not sometimes full of nonsense, Freke evades the question by feigning interest, precisely, in Belinda’s reading. She then determines to draw Mr. Percival into an argument to display her genius, but fails at every turn. When she calls “all our politeness hypocrisy,” Percival answers that only she can know whether it’s true, because, naturally, only the person practicing politeness can know the degree of sincerity of his or her gestures. Rather than try to justify her view, however, she simply moves on to a larger, bolder statement: “all virtue is hypocrisy” (229). Mutually exclusive terms, Percival counters. After her next *coup de pointe*, “shame is always the cause of the vices of women” (229), Percival tries to qualify his answer, but she denies him the right by exclaiming incoherently “plump assertion or plump denial for me” (229). Her insistence on a binary view of morality only further distances her both from Wollstonecraft and from Edgeworth’s own complex ideas on the value of such practices as female delicacy, which Percival attempts to complicate for Freke, but is once again cut off: “I hate slavery! *Vive la liberté!* I’m a champion for the Rights of Women” (229), she cries in response. We could note here that though Freke is clearly alluding to Wollstonecraft’s treatise, Edgeworth has misspelled the title (Rights of “Women” for Rights of “Woman”) as a way of signifying that Harriet hasn’t even read the bible she supposedly quotes from. That is, even for an alleged disciple, Wollstonecraft has been so thoroughly lampooned that corrupted phrases from her work are now simply *raccourcis* for inappropriate female pretensions. “A jumble of undigested phrases” as Kathryn Kirkpatrick has called her discourse, Freke—like the knee-jerk anti-Jacobin fear of what would arise were women able to stray from their proper sphere—merely provokes with terrorizing assertions rather than engaging in any real debate.

Though her enthusiastic talk of the rights of women seems to justify scholars who have read her as a parody of Wollstonecraft, Freke's objection to female delicacy is based on her understanding of it as hypocrisy (a fact she fails to prove, though Belinda and Percival challenge her several times to do so), which is, however, not the reason why Wollstonecraft condemns it in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Rather than a source of hypocrisy, female delicacy poses an obstacle to those who would develop any positive virtues: "If women," she writes, "are in general feeble both in body and mind, it arises less from nature than from education. We encourage a vicious indolence and inactivity, which we falsely call delicacy; instead of hardening their minds by the severer principles of reason and philosophy, we breed them to useless arts, which terminate in vanity and sensuality (108). Fostering negative traits and rendering positive virtue impossible, delicacy is little more than a weakness that has become inevitable (and that appears "natural") because "women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue" (84). Moreover, because it is based in physical, mental, and moral weakness, Wollstonecraft argues, delicacy causes them to believe that they are unworthy or incapable of achieving intellectual independence, a state to which Freke believes she has ascended with her ability to "[haul] good people's opinions out of their musty drawers and [see] how they look when they're all pulled to pieces before their faces" (231), but which her philosophical misapprehensions prove otherwise; Belinda, who reads that she "may think" for herself (227), offers a stark contrast with this ill-informed, somewhat illiterate embodiment of gender terrorism.

While Harriet Freke spouts revolutionary doctrines, Belinda and Percival have made it clear that she is not their representative. Indeed, it is primarily Freke who, of all the women in the text, is the most lacking in Wollstonecraft's positive virtues; she may have shunned the

negative ones—the docility, meekness, servitude, and delicacy that radical feminists condemned—but without adopting a shred of character that would allow her to transform into one of the rational beings that the *Vindication* advocates that women become, that is, “prudent mothers and useful members of society” (24). Indeed, her transvestism only further distances her from any notion of virtue, masculine or feminine: rather than a conduit for behaviors that, while unbecoming to a lady at the time, were nonetheless honorable and decent for a man, Freke’s disguises merely allow her to imitate varieties of masculine debauchery, such as playing “the character of the young rake with such spirit and *truth*, that I am sure no common conjurer could have discovered anything feminine about her” (47). Harriet Freke, then, veers dramatically from the portrait that Wollstonecraft draws of a self-actualized woman who has reclaimed her rights, and is the antithesis of where the writer’s ideas were meant to lead; the ephemeral menace of the Rights of Woman (themselves an organic culmination of the Rights of Man that had been brewing since early in the century and that found their ultimate expression in the onset of the French Revolution) thus evaporates when the reader understands that it is the laudable heroine who embodies them, rather than the antagonist. Freke, then, proves to be a chimera that even Wollstonecraft condemned, a portrait of divisive, anti-Jacobin hysteria itself: “From every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women, but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry,” she professes, implicitly condemning characters such as Freke. She then continues by explaining her understanding of manly virtues which, the reader cannot deny, could stand in as an admirable description of Edgeworth’s Revolutionary Heroine:

[B]ut if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennoble the

human character, and which raises females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind, all those who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine. (72)

In contrast, Belinda takes a reasonable approach to love in refusing to sacrifice herself to feminine weakness in order to impress a man or to martyr herself to the magnetic pull of society's base amusements. This Revolutionary Heroine, through her own experimentation and under the tutelage of Lady Percival, "as a most uncommon example" of "the calm, philosophic temper" (Edgeworth 425), consistently proves her devotion to the sensible, rational, intelligent femininity that Wollstonecraft envisions.

In order to challenge further the concept of masculine understanding (defined as the ability to reason and the Lockean capacity to become more virtuous through enlarging one's mind) Edgeworth follows Wollstonecraft's lead in purposefully divorcing gendered behaviors (both physical and intellectual) from their usual hosts, and then allowing Belinda to play a role in reassigning them in configurations that defuse the fear of transnational and transgender contamination. Scholars have contended that within *Belinda's* pages exists a serious critique of essentialized gender that aims to disconnect female-coded behaviors and habits from feminine "nature." Katherine Montwieler, for example, has argued that events of the novel debunk a variety of typical turn-of-the-century assumptions about women's "nature," such as the belief that femininity itself a natural condition; the stories of the individual women in the novel, she asserts, prove instead that they are acting roles rather than behaving "naturally." Deborah Weiss, in turn, identifies Edgeworth's philosophical pragmatism as the underlying motor of the author's "attack on her culture's debilitating gender codes[...], [in which she uses] theory to identify the

precise causes of social problems while at the same time employing the generic resources of the novel to put those theories into practice” (443). My argument, however, is that the novel embraces what were seen as Wollstonecraft’s radical “French” tendencies insofar as Edgeworth suggests which aspects of traditional masculinity and femininity ought to be democratically reclassified into the feminist’s category of genderless ideals of virtue, and which ought to be purged, once again, always in a cadre of potential French contagion.

Lady Delacour represents the most powerful neutralization of gendered heterodoxy: at the start of the novel, she appears to have the imbibed accounts of Amazonian women and preoccupied *salonnières* that floated across the Channel into Britain during the revolutionary decade, which painted the portrait of a nation of children abandoned by their politically and socially engaged mothers. From the stoic war of pride that the heiress wages against her acquaintances at the expense of her health, to her diseased breast that she contemplates having surgically removed (a sign of her own belief that it is necessary to divest herself of a certain natural part of her femininity to survive in the world), her perceived Amazonian qualities override her feminine instincts; she is accused throughout the novel of affronting accepted codes of womanly behavior because of her friendship with Freke and the dubious antics they undertake, as well as her vain attachment to worldly pleasures and universal acclaim, both of which distract her from her duties as a wife and mother. Indeed, Lady Delacour’s exterior, unlike Freke’s, exudes a gratuitous concern for beauty and the usual degree of self-obsession for a woman of her class and means—she is beautiful, graceful, ornately dressed, appropriately made-up, and most often en route to or from an event of unmitigated dissipation. However, as the novel advances, her façade of coquettish behaviors reveals a multitude of cracks, within which the reader discovers a variety of masculine gestures. Without her make-up—one of her many

varieties of gender-specific “drapery”— “her eyes were sunk, her cheeks hollow—no trace of youth or beauty remained on her deathlike countenance, which formed a horrid contrast with her gay fantastic dress” (31). Rather than an embellishment, her make-up has become a mask, which must be constantly “repaired” when what is underneath it is no longer identifiably feminine. Furthermore, under her ostentatious costumery lies the diseased breast which, since it can neither be fondled nor suckled, and because it is poised to be removed altogether, becomes an unmatched symbol of the undesirable masculinity that has invaded her existence in conjunction with her seemingly Jacobinistic refusal of traditional wife- and motherhood.

For her admirers, such as Hervey, she is a species of rare and wild fauna (rather than a rational domestic woman), to be ogled for its captivating beauty and mesmerizing habits, but one about whom Walpole would surely have said, as Mr. Edgermond did of Corinne, “*que fait-on de cela à la maison?*” (Corinne 202). Indeed, according to Mary Wollstonecraft, women like Lady Delacour are precisely the result of the sex being barred from the education that would develop their reason and encourage a rational approach to their duties and from the rights that would allow them to see those duties as a civic responsibility rather than a tiresome slavery. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a plea to M. Tallyrand to extend revolutionary freedoms to women in the form of education and civic rights, she describes the path that ignorant members of her sex often take: “Seldom occupied by serious business, the pursuit of pleasure gives that insignificancy to [women’s] character which renders the society of the *great* so insipid. The [...]want of firmness [...]forces them [...] to fly from themselves to noisy pleasures, and artificial passions, till vanity takes place of every social affection, and the characteristics of humanity can scarcely be discerned” (120). However, Lady Delacour’s departure does not mark a successful contamination by the French Threat, but rather exposes the way in which fear of that

threat proved to be more socially disruptive than the hypothetical fruits of the alleged threat could ever be.

Indeed, Clarence's unwitting rapprochement between Lady Delacour's *life-threatening* performances and women's lack of education demonstrates that it is the absence of rational instruction and civic rights which threatens social stability, and not the other way around. This becomes abundantly clear when Hervey first meets the Percival family, the representatives of sensible education for women and men, to whom he first makes this animalic link between women, civic valorization, and society at large. During dinner with this model family, Hervey entertains the children with tales of exotic animals, scarcely realizing that he is speaking, in metaphoric code, of his friend Lady Delacour. Very much like the fish admired by Romans "for exhibiting a succession of beautiful colours whilst it is dying" Lady Delacour, too, with her self-destructive and prideful pursuit of continued admiration, has allowed herself to become a kind of sacrificial offering, and is "suffered to die in the presence of the guests, as part of the entertainment." The Roman aviaries that he describes to the children, which keep from the sight of the prisoner "the fields, woods, and every object which might remind them of their former liberty" (100), also echo the prison that Lady Delacour has built around herself. When he strays into accounts of apocryphal animals, such as unicorn and, later, the "unfeeling mother" that Lady Delacour is taken to be in some circles, Clarence upsets the stability of the small group with which he is dining. Excusing himself, he explains, "my head was so full of the mammoth, that I blundered on without seeing what I was about before it was too late" (102). Britain's fear, then, of the apocryphal masculine women has kept it from evolving in conjunction with emerging humanistic doctrines. Lady Delacour's exposure to the reason, rationality, and philosophy that

Belinda and Percivals embody all predict her, and the nation's, rehabilitation: "the period of enchantment will soon be at an end, and she will return to her natural character" (105).

Lady Delacour's emotional cross-dressing—ininitely more seditious, since no one can actually see it—leads the reader to even bolder conclusions about the worth of foreign doctrines. Though her dress conforms to exterior signs of femininity, she gradually unveils her ambivalent departures from normative gender behaviors to Belinda when the heroine is finally admitted into Lady Delacour's strange somatic boudoir. By accident or design, she has gradually alienated herself from mainstream femininity, despite her superficial conformity. Unhappy in her marriage, she rapidly became the female counterpart to the absent husband who drowns his sorrows in drink and gambling. "I endeavored," she explains to Belinda, "to console myself for my misery at home, by gayety abroad. After a series of devastating personal losses, in turn, she descended into a macho, pride-fueled game of chicken—a kind of emotional blinking contest (feigning indifference to her mother in law to avoid giving her the "satisfaction" of seeing Lady Delacour's true emotions, dueling with "the odious Luttridge," parading gaiety in public while suffering in sadness and remorse at home)—in which she continues to pit herself and her ability to mask her pain against the world and its alternating expectation of her gayness and its marked scorn of her refusal to submit to the *natural* feminine duty of acute feeling. Indeed, she reveals to Belinda the struggles and self-doubt that followed the stillborn birth of her first child, the early death of her second (after an unsuccessful attempt at breast feeding), and her eventual conclusion that she was unable to care for children, unable to mother; because of her inability to nurse, "[I was determined], *à plus forte raison*, not to undertake [a child's] education" (42). While Lady Delacour frequently peppers her speech with French phrases such as the above; here, in the context of her maternal failure and refusal, the sudden linguistic switch symbolizes her desire to

emotionally disconnect herself from painful memories. Rather than truly feeling her failed maternity, she erects an alternate identity: the witty, cosmopolitan society lady, whose mask she wears when she wishes to conceal her own pain, and which is merely another example of her departure from what the world sees as *natural* feminine emotionality. Her use of the word “raison,” however, resonates with political significance. Almost fatally tainted by the blood spilled in its behalf during the Revolution, *raison* underlies Lady Delacour’s decision to pass her daughter’s education to someone else, namely Lady Percival, the novel’s portrait of enlightened wife- and motherhood and Belinda’s own mentor. In effect, the exercise of her reason has lead Lady Delacour to have her daughter educated in the completely opposite tradition from her own, that is, in the very manner that Edgeworth’s own pedagogical writings espoused. That she, once reformed through Belinda’s encouragement and influence, takes over Helena’s enlightened education herself proves that *raison* in fact never led her astray at all, and that it is, instead, the necessary counterpart to emotion, as de Staël’s heroines also argued.

As the only male character in the novel to don the apparel of the opposite sex, Clarence Hervey, in turn, also proves to the reader that the fear of revolutionary doctrines tainting native gender codes is unfounded. He proves, above all, that a real man will always be a man, and that with a lesson in levelheaded reflection on his place in society, he can be a better man than any would have expected. His foray into transvestism takes place in Lady Delacour’s salon, when he bets her fifty guineas that, with his deft managing of a hoop skirt, he can fool the blind and aged Lady Boucher into believing that he is a woman. Edgeworth implicitly links this fear of confused gender traits to Gallic influence by giving her hero in drag the persona of a French emigrée by the name of the Countess de Pomenars: both a representation of foreign influence parading as domestic ingenuity and of bourgeois arrival passing for aristocratic birthright, the Countess

materializes at the narrative intersection of Britain's greatest social and economic fears in the revolutionary decade. In the same manner that Belinda's disarming of Harriet Freke's "dangerous" discourse proved her ideas and acts to be harmless, Edgeworth will also deconstruct, with the blatant nonsuccess of Hervey's female impersonation, the alleged effeminate threat to masculinity that French ideas pose. While at first Hervey appears to have mastered both male and female gestures, effortlessly fooling the old dowager by managing his hoop "with such skill and dexterity, that he well deserved the praise of being a universal genius" (75), Lady Delacour quickly undermines his fragile virtuosity in feminine prowess. Taking a comb from Belinda's hair and allowing her incomparable locks to tumble freely down her shoulders, Lady Delacour seeks purposefully to unhinge Hervey's masculine desire, thus exposing the degree of sway that his innate biology has over his "civilized" mind. It works, rendering him speechless when faced with this erotic totem of femininity: "the Countess de Pomenars was so much struck at the sight, that she was incapable of paying the necessary compliments." When Lady Delacour then artfully drops the comb, Hervey's disguise is wholly undone; he bends chivalrously and unthinkingly to pick it up, "totally forgetting his hoop and his character" (76), knocking over the music stand in the process and thus declaring his sex. Hervey's inability to pass for a (French) woman, despite his "universal genius" and natural talent for mimicry blatantly lampoons the fear that French effeminacy could be capable of poisoning the British upper class. Indeed, it shows that the effeminacy is neither specifically French, nor does it necessarily oppose what Edgeworth sees as the biological momentum of sex. A certain masculine physicality, Hervey's hoop skirt episode confirms, will always betray his gender truth.

What's more, the scene also allows Edgeworth to comment upon the accoutrements of femininity that, while they are seen as necessary hallmarks of the sex, in fact play no role in

determining its attributes. No matter how forcefully women are encouraged to cling to them, in order to protect themselves from the threat of masculine femininity that revolutionary ideals seem to suggest, they simply cannot replace biology. Upon winning the bet, Lady Delacour immediately begins chaffing Hervey for his inevitable failure by quoting Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, insisting that his performance deserves a lock of Belinda's fine hair. Her plan is forestalled, however, for lack of a "glittering forfex" with which to cut a lock, "as fine ladies do not now, as in former times, carry any such useless implements about them" (76). The irony, of course, is that the hoop is the new useless implement that women must carry.¹⁶ And yet, while it belongs exclusively to women and apparently cannot be successfully appropriated by men, it has no inherent link, Edgeworth argues with her joke, to what truly makes a woman, since Clarence is only able to perfectly mimic a woman's management of it until the Revolutionary Heroine's innate desirability causes him to betray himself. Over the course of the novel, the author suggests that a rational pursuit of complimentary duties ought to win out in the definition of gender, ahead of the useless implements that the world has required woman to carry and that it has used to denote her gender in public and private.

The reader discovers, however, that beyond his sole cross-dressing escapade, Clarence is hardly a model of enlightened manhood—by ancient or modern standards—and must, like both Lord and Lady Delacour, like Léonce and Oswald in de Staël's texts, undergo a kind of transformation at the hands of the Revolutionary heroine, wherein he discovers which of his society's masculine behaviors and attitudes are being rendered obsolete as his nation evolves in

¹⁶ Historians of fashion do not agree on precisely when the hoop skirt traveled from France, where it was a fixture in the court of Louis XIV, to England; however, most accounts place it around 1718, a few years after the French monarch's 1715 death. W. B. Lord has found evidence of its appearance as early as 1713 in a letter to *The Guardian*, in which the author, a certain Tom Pain, condemned the hoop for "hurting men's knees" and being the cause of "many other disasters" (qtd in Lord 110). Pope's poem was written in 1712 and was based on an incident that took place in 1711. It is therefore safe to assume that Belinda did not, in fact, wear a hoop, and that Edgeworth is satirizing the changing feminine accoutrements that continue to be so closely associated with a woman's gender.

conjunction with humanistic doctrines emerging across the Channel. The difference from the heroes in chapter two, however, is that this time the Revolutionary Heroine's corrections will stick. Prone to boasting and contests of strength, Hervey and his entourage personify the idling upper classes that focus their efforts on self-amusement and self-puffery instead of purpose and utility. Betting his friends on who is the better inebriated walker, racing turkeys against pigs to incense some local farmers, or trying to prove that simply reading a treatise on swimming is sufficient to have mastered the skill, Hervey is "perpetually taking the lead in those trifles which were beneath his ambition, and exactly suited to engage the attention of his associates" (91). He begins to reevaluate his own understanding of men's roles in society in conjunction with his exposure to Belinda, an uncommon woman who "judges and acts for herself" (111), and who does so with great approval from both the men and women around her, as well as to that of the Percivals, whose "expression of happiness" he finds so contagious. Together they introduce him to a mediated version of masculinity that hinges on the necessity of channeling desire and talent into personally and publicly useful enterprises.

The supposedly incendiary "French" teachings of Wollstonecraft, once incorporated by Edgeworth, allows the author to employ this same discourse of public utility in order to usher Lady Delacour into a life of useful domestic prosperity. Dr. X wonders why Clarence would "choose to be nothing—should waste upon petty objects powers suited to the greatest," content to be "the evanescent amusement of a drawing-room?" (116). Shortly after, Lady Delacour begins to lament her own wastefulness when she realizes the degree to which her pursuit of "petty objects" has kept her from joy, honor, and success in her realm. However, the "contest[s] of frivolous superiority" in which the two engage, and which keep them from "honorable pre-eminence" (116) among the first of their sexes in Britain, are a result of the gendered power

cycles which they both perpetuate—the same that Enlightenment doctrines sought to eradicate, but which Britain, so perpetually, so hysterically anti-Gallic, refuses to heed. It is Lady Delacour's aunt who first diagnoses the problem: "If there were no Clarence Herveys," she asserts, "there would be no Lady Delacours" (101), and vice versa, surely. Expectations of class and gender, as they currently stand, breed a certain kind of man, one who flocks to a certain kind of woman, whose power and interest are fed by the man's attention, and who, in turn, becomes a force to create more of such men who are drawn in by her power and influence. These men gain their entry into her world through flattery, and thus continue to advertise space for such women to come into being whenever they complement a pretty young girl.

In identifying this baneful cycle of mutually destructive frivolity, Edgeworth has once again opened the debate of the French Revolution and its willful razing of social hierarchy that was so threatening to British political and social tradition. By setting up discourses, however, through the novel's morally and philosophically superior characters, the author demonstrates that it is possible to find inspiration in another nation's rebellions determinations, because, at their root, they have humanistic impulses with the potential to improve many lives and, therefore, to strengthen any nation. Much like the Prince Castel-Forte's estimation in *Corinne* that intellectual congress with other nations can only operate to their mutual benefit, because they "conserveraient ce qui les distingue, et découvrirait ainsi quelquefois ce qui peut leur manquer" (C 177), Edgeworth consistently points to the value of revolutionary ideas and philosophies that have been rejected out of knee-jerk xenophobia. Indeed, she exposes Clarence Hervey to Lady Delacour's "Amazonian" dissipation, to Phillip Baddley's macho chest-thumping exercises, to Belinda's burgeoning rational sensibility, and to the Percivals' enlightened domesticity. However it is ultimately the Revolutionary Heroine's consistent

correction that leads the hero to develop into a hybridized representative of Edgeworth's socio-political credo: Britain is and will remain a hierarchical society that culls its leaders from the upper classes. The credo comes with a clause, however--the nation still ought be the object of Enlightenment social and moral reform. In other words, Hervey's story proves that, rather than overturning the hierarchy, it is more important to ensure that the social order's leaders actually deserve the homage that their class automatically affords them, hence the bold and extensive reformation of Hervey and Lady Delacour via scenes, language, and images that make explicit reference to France, such as the mystery of her secret *boudoir*, the Frenchified womb where her gender transformations gestate, and his failed experiments in French theories of natural education.

Belinda, in turn, has learned by the end of the novel to complement her agreeably feminine exterior with a virago-like spirit in the form of Wollstonecraft's "manly virtues," which both men and women, Wollstonecraft *and* Edgeworth agree, should strive to cultivate, despite anti-Jacobin fears of gender anarchy. This virtuous female spirit advertises the rational humanism that the feminist author espoused, at the same time that it proves not only the harmlessness but the undeniable advantage of the female philosopher figure that anti-Jacobin texts lampooned. Thanks to her reliance on rationality, Belinda has become the perfect blend of the most admirable masculine and feminine gendered behaviors, and yet she remains faithful to codes of feminine propriety. Her eventual dissolution of her engagement to Mr. Vincent, an act that apparently was perceived by readers as somewhat scandalous, is recuperated by the joint exercise of reason and sensibility that lies behind the decision, and which the novels of Revolutionary Heroism in this study valorize. Convinced, upon reflection, that the general prejudice which pressures women into marrying their first loves—for which the only criteria is

“fancy,” since “men have it in their power to assume the appearance of everything that is amiable and estimable, and women have scarcely any opportunities of detecting the counterfeit” (240)—does “not add to the happiness of society (255), Belinda’s refusal of Vincent becomes an act of heroic rationality rather than fickleness, coquetry, or inconstancy.

The conclusion that we must draw from all of these characters’ experiments in cross-gendered behavior is that, while the weight of biology will override ambient discursive threats to it, the combination of biology and social inertia has not always produced the most laudable forms of masculinity or femininity. Indeed, Edgeworth places a new emphasis on cultivating usefulness in both sexes and the role that reason and rationality play in accomplishing that goal, as they allow an individual to preserve what is most desirable in his heritage while adopting from foreign sources—particularly from French doctrines of equality—what is lacking therein. That she advocates this same creed to men and women—to be lived to the fullest in their separate but conjoined spheres—is her ultimate homage to Mary Wollstonecraft’s vision.

Undressing and re-dressing

Clothing—whether it is transgendered, giving way (such as Harriet Freke’s upcoming unreliable fastenings), or being purposefully adjusted—plays an important role in revolutionary gender politics in the novel. However, Edgeworth also uses her cross dressers and their explorations of habiliment as a point of entry into a much deeper debate on the function of tradition and hierarchy in the evolving British state, in an attempt to signal the benignity of foreign influence and the malignancy of hysterical insularism. She borrows her vestimentary analogy from Edmund Burke who, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, was the first to refer to social institutions and national beliefs, customs, and prejudices as a necessary *drapery* to

civil society, that is, the social hierarchy and its accompanying attitudes toward so-called natural imbalances of power. Regarding the threat of French revolutionary principles fundamentally altering his nation's culture, he wrote

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions which made power gentle and obedience liberal [...] are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which [...] the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature [...], are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion. (87)

European manners resulting from the effects of chivalry have grown in conjunction with the history of European superiority, Burke argues. While he recognizes that they are illusory, he argues for their maintenance because such drapery “ennobled whatever it touched, and under [it,] vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness” (87). In other words, it masks human carnality, which threatens civil stability if able to flourish unrestrained. Mary Wollstonecraft, in turn, piquantly responds to Burke in her *Vindication on the Rights of Man*, in which she argues that the drapery to which he refers above is not only a mirage, but serves primarily to conceal systemic abuse and inequality; it is little more, she insists, than “sentimental emotionality as the language of the powerful about the powerless” (xxvii). She likens his principles to a gorgeous garment whose finery distracts the onlooker from the hideous truth that it “enwraps,” very much like the gay dress that disguises Lady Delacour's wounded breast and the heavy make-up and feigned delight that obscure her internal torment in *Belinda*. Edgeworth, joining Austen and Charlotte Smith as one of the many authors to address the debate between custom and novelty in

the revolutionary period, ultimately stakes out a middle ground between the conservative preservation of tradition at all costs and the liberal abandonment of it. Rather than tearing the beloved illusion away and leaving her fellow characters naked and full of defects, the Revolutionary Heroine gradually denudes them of a drapery that is self-destructive and socially harmful, and subsequently reclothes them in robes of rationality and reason trimmed with tradition. As she re-dresses the players in her tale, she also redresses the various wrongs that they have perpetrated and sets them on the path to a very real rehabilitation.

Neutralizing and redressing the wrongs of Harriet Freke's fraudulent actions requires stripping her—quite literally—to the bone, in order to expose the fallacy of her allegedly *revolutionary* reasoning. At the close of her argument with Belinda and Mr. Percival, wherein she proposes “tearing away what has been called the decent drapery of life,” she stands and stretches herself so violently “that some part of her habiliments gave way” (230). Indeed, the character who takes such delight in “demolishing and unrigging” people's prudent opinions is the only one in the novel who is ultimately publicly “unrigged.” Like other wayward characters in the text, it is Belinda who sets her to rights. Later, after Freke has made several failed attempts to interfere in Lady Delacour's business and poison her reputation, she follows her former friend and Belinda to Twickenham in order to spy on her, in hopes of discovering some compromising information. Instead this serpent in the garden is caught in a *mantrap* set by the gardener—a thoroughly appropriate reprimand for an impersonator of “masculine understanding”—and soon finds herself undressed by the surgeon, who must regretfully inform her that “the beauty of her legs would be spoiled, and that she would never more be able to appear to advantage in man's apparel” (312). Twice exposed to the reader, therefore, as a failed threat of revolutionary sedition and a feeble embodiment of the usurpation of masculine prerogative, Freke disappears from the

narrative once her lack of substance is unmasked. Only able to haunt the gullible, Freke, like the threat of French ideas of equality, can only exist when able to feed on irrational fear and panic.

Both Lady Delacour's mind and body, in turn, eventually become narrative sites where Edgeworth may unmask the fallacy of masculine understanding and of determinate gender codes in general, as well as the fear that French revolutionary dogma, by encouraging women to unfeminine displays of equality and by offering them political and intellectual pursuits in the place of domestic ones, denudes women of their maternal instincts. Following Edgeworth's vestimentary metaphor, then, Lady Delacour's rehabilitation rests upon a very real disrobing: she must open l'espace français—her secretive *boudoir*—to her husband and show him the state of her injured bosom. From this moment, the bond is rekindled between them and they gradually make peace with the ways in which they must submit to each other for their collective happiness. Edgeworth's redresses continue after Belinda has convinced lady Delacour to let Dr. X examine her diseased breast. When she is eventually disrobed, the doctor discovers that the breast—the symbol of her maternal refusal and the radical defiance of domesticity that her aristocratic negligence suggests—is, in fact, not cancerous at all. Moreover, her treatment is internal, spiritual, emotional—she must be cured of her drug addiction, of the wild habits that weaken her constitution, and of the hysteria-inducing reading that has proved detrimental to her mental state; it is neither an amputation nor the razing of a foundation that she and, in the political sphere, opponents to the Revolution feared. Belinda's support, encouragement, and continual insistence on a rational approach to all of life's complications acts as the final push toward Lady Delacour's reformation from dissipation, a lifestyle which, not unlike Mme de Vernon's learned duplicity in *Delphine*, “she had followed from habit, and into which she had first been driven by a mixture of vanity and despair” (Edgeworth 322). Indeed, preceding the operation she mistakenly believed

that she needed, she promised Belinda: “If I survive *this business*, it is my firm intention to appear in a new character, or rather, to assert my real character. I will break through the spell of dissipation—[...] I will, in one word, go with you, my dear Belinda! To Mr. Percival’s!” (292), that is, to the bastion of rational, egalitarian domesticity that she fears because it points to all of her failings as a wife and mother. The physicality of the verb “appear” reinforces the analogy of appearance that Edgeworth’s has constructed to respond to Burke’s fear of national nakedness—Lady Delacour, thanks to her ability to equilibrate feminine sensibility and masculine reason will now dress her mind and body in rationality (symbolized by the Percival household, a fountain of reason where Belinda has made many discoveries about her own mind), and will redress the wrongs done to her abandoned daughter who currently resides there.

In short, it is underneath Harriet’s dress, not Lady Delacour’s, that Burke’s fear is realized: beneath the layers of historical cultural precedent the reader finds the potential grossness of human interactions and behaviors in the form of Freke’s stubborn ignorance, her malevolent spite, and the ultimate inconsequentiality of her social disruptions. That the other characters in the novel quickly see through her, while rooting for the preservation of Lady Delacour’s particular brand of irreverent vivacity, proves Edgeworth’s belief that Britain has survived the revolutionary decade—despite continued congress with France and its literature, customs, and culture—unscathed, while remaining thoroughly, uniquely British. Though Lady Delacour eventually gives up her public role, for example, she is still at the center of the novel, and still as incorrigibly kinetic as ever. “I have been won by kindness,” she insists of her reformation—“*won*, not *tamed*!” Still thoroughly recognizable as the vivacious wit she always was, despite the drastic change in her lifestyle, she remarks to the dowager Boucher, who is surprised by the lack of physical change in the allegedly reformed Lady Delacour:

And what alteration, my good lady Boucher, did you expect to see? Did you think, that, by way of being exemplarily virtuous [...] I should [...] let my sentences come out of my mouth only at the rate of a word a minute? [...] Or did you expect that, in hopes of being a pattern for the rising generation, I should hold my features in penance? (353)

By gradually transforming this significant character into an individual who personifies both autonomy *and* self-sacrifice, Edgeworth pacified liberal and conservative readers in matters of traditional gender roles and their proposed reformation. At the same time, she “denounced the aristocratic woman’s social intrigues as destructive to domestic happiness,” thus agreeing with revolutionary-minded social reformers, and “affirmed the independent spirit her great resources made possible” (Kirkpatrick xviii), thus defending the value of social hierarchy. In short, Edgeworth admits of social deformity, whether natural or adopted, with her characters’ various flaws, but assures her readers that it is not beyond correction, contrary to what representatives of either side of the debate on social reform would have them believe. Indeed, Belinda strikes a balance between the two camps when, refusing to be terrorized by Harriet Freke’s threat to kidnap her from the Percivals’ for her own good, she assures her assertive suitor that “she was neither a prisoner, nor a distressed damsel” (226). Thus, women and men, she maintains, are neither as denatured and oppressed as thinkers like Wollstonecraft, Paine, and Rousseau would paint them, nor as docile, helpless, and impressionable as Burke and conduct book writers would argue.

Philosophy, reason, and “French” ideas

Edgeworth begins her recovery of reason, rationality, and philosophy from their post-revolutionary tarnish with the Revolutionary Heroine’s philosophical approach to individual, familial, and social transfiguration, itself based on the eighteenth-century belief that the family is a microcosm of greater government, or “the private origin of the public good” (Bannet). Unlike Burke, who relied on chivalric gender roles, rigid class structures, and inheritance laws that protected property holdings, Edgeworth believed that the key to a healthy and robust nation was a strong familial structure underlying the management and care of individual citizens, from the spousal relationship to the education of the children, from the administration of finances to the distribution of work and resources. Such management would be impossible without mother who was at least a bit of the female philosopher that Edgeworth has been advocating through Belinda’s personal transformation in the novel and of which Lady Anne Percival offers the most complete portrait. Indeed, the Percival family in *Belinda* embodies the intersection of enlightenment political ideals that, distilled into a set of domestic bylaws, take the form of a balance of parental powers and a wide educational berth for the children. The marriage between the Percivals reflects not only a respect for each parent’s sphere of influence and responsibility, but a union of interests and of intellects. Because of his wife’s vast and “accurate knowledge” and her “taste for literature” (216), and an ability to philosophize that equals her husband’s, Mr. Percival “was not obliged to reserve his conversation for friends of his own sex, nor was he forced to seclude himself in the pursuit of any branch of knowledge; the partner of his warmest affections was also the partner of his most serious occupations” (216). By setting up Lady Anne as a woman who has her own interests, pursuits, and passions and, therefore, as a mother who bequeaths such traits in the education of her children, Edgeworth echoes Mary Wollstonecraft’s

portrait of rational motherhood, which, in stark contrast to Rousseau's pronouncements on women's education in *Emile*, enjoins egalitarian marital partnerships but insists also upon a woman's right to independent thought and enjoyment outside of her domestic duties.

We initially observe this textual rapprochement when Clarence Hervey visits the Percival family for the first time. Both Wollstonecraft's portrait and Edgeworth's depiction of the Percival children focus on intelligence and health—children brought up to use their capacities for reason and judgment will be intellectually active, and those allowed to pursue their interests and exercise their bodies will be physically robust. Wollstonecraft writes of such children that “[t]he intelligent eye meets [their mother's], whilst health and innocence smile on their chubby cheeks, and as they grow up the cares of life are lessened by her grateful attention” (119). Upon entering the Percival home for the first time the reader witnesses a strikingly similar scene: “They found Lady Anne Percival in the midst of her children, who all turned their healthy, rosy, intelligent faces towards the door the moment [they arrived]” (98). The perceivable rapport of intelligence that exists between mother and child is the defining element of these domestic tableaux. What's more, her ability to clearly *perceive* or *percevoir* the value of her duties but also her own innate civic worth is embedded in her very name, Percival.

Beth Kowaleski-Wallace has called this model—based on reason, cooperation between sexes, and the non-coercive exercise of authority—“new-style patriarchy.” In it, she argues, Edgeworth imagines “a particular domestic world which depends for its stability on the ideal performance of a ‘perfect mother,’ or a woman who lives exclusively for and through her children and who finds fulfillment in the very act of forming her children into certain kinds of individuals” (244). In my estimation, however, Kowaleski-Wallace's terminology does not take account of Edgeworth's insistence upon a woman's education being just as much for her own

enlightenment as for her ability to raise her children as well-rounded individuals. As the Revolutionary Heroine, Belinda, in turn, becomes the spokesperson for this domestic New Deal many times in the novel, but perhaps with the most inflammatory effect when she, in her rational self-assuredness, inquires of Lady Delacour: “Surely your ladyship does not think, that a wife is a being whose actions are necessarily governed by a husband” (121). Wollstonecraft’s own account seeks, in particular, to directly counter Rousseau’s education reserved for girls.¹⁷ A Sophie, Wollstonecraft argues, will never be reproached for being masculine, like Freke, “or turning out of her sphere” (117); people will call her a “good kind of woman,” but she will be unable to fulfill her duties in educating her children. Seeing her daughters as rivals, she will only be able to make copy-cat coquettes of them. The rational mother, in turn, is reasonable and well-educated to begin with, and her children absorb these traits during their tutelage. Since few homes actually existed in Britain that successfully imitated such incarnations of domestic felicity,¹⁸ it is therefore of undeniable importance to recognize that Edgeworth, writing in 1801 with almost a decade of perspective on how revolutionary ideology affected both France and Britain, continues to promote political and domestic patterns that run contrary to much of the reigning political discourse in her native land.

Edgeworth’s rehabilitation of reason and philosophy, however, goes beyond the public’s wariness of French doctrines of equality to dig deeper into the long-standing distrust of transnational influence. Gerald Newman has argued that in the eighteenth century “to be truly English was to live up to a stereotype generated in anti-Frenchness” (124), the basis of which

¹⁷ Edgeworth will attack this same subject directly in the Virginia St. Pierre episode discussed below, but in the meantime is content to shadow Wollstonecraft in her promotion of the ideal educator-mother.

¹⁸ Eve Tavor Bannet has argued that, while the 1790s has always been seen as decade of material upheaval and reform, in practice little changed in homes across the country until the second or third decade of the nineteenth century, when the “cult of domesticity [began to] become normative [...] for the middle classes” (Bannet 15). Many novels of the revolutionary period advocated benevolence and the pleasure of domesticity, but statistics from the period show abuse, neglect, unhappiness, and spousal desertion.

was rooted, in part, in Britain's ambivalent relationship with French literature and its pervasive presence in British culture. Though translations of French romances dominated the British popular literary market for most of the eighteenth-century, more erudite readers complained of the "literary levity" of the French model. Indeed, Newman continues, "the resistance to French fiction in some British writings was largely based on the perceived immorality of the French novel, so that *Frenchness* was just as much a name for worldliness and urban cosmopolitanism as it was for national character" (124).

One cannot, however, overestimate the importance of increased anti-French sentiment in the 1790s. The Revolution's potential influence was such a polarizing social debate, in fact, that most novels necessarily fell on one side or the other of the dissension. Edgeworth, for her part, tackles the question of anti-French sentiment with *Belinda's* curious blend of francophobia and francophilia. British citizens are drawn to the glamour or apparent superiority of foreign ideas, she observes, and the novel's aristocratic characters display this interest with their almost non-stop insertion of French words and phrases into their conversation. Repulsion for French ideas, in turn, also permeates the pages of the book, but, as I have argued, in each case the threat proves to be hollow, as Edgeworth consistently defuses the fear that cosmopolitan interest and philosophical penchants transform women into Amazons, emasculate men, and lead mothers away from their families, and as she tirelessly nullifies French-infused characters like Freke and Lord Delacour's French valet Champfort.

But *Belinda* is particular in its response to the threat of Gallic culture, with its allegedly hazardous philosophies and immoral romances, in that Edgeworth undertakes a meta-criticism of the French novel itself within a book that deals with anti-Frenchness. With Hervey's Virginia St. Pierre experiment Edgeworth constructs a realm where French ideas—in particular, the literary

intersection of ideals of philosophy and pedagogy—can be played out in a British space, with a British subject, in an attempt to see what kind of hybrid result will be born from the cross-breeding of cultural knowledge, and to determine, indeed, if the ideas are as pernicious as some have made them seem. As this experiment unfolds, Edgeworth is able to comment implicitly on the perceived licentiousness of not only the French novel, but of the influence of French ideas in general.

The origin of Hervey's Virginia St. Pierre experiment lies in tangled reactions to French culture itself: the monstrous women that he meets in pre-revolutionary Paris, "full of vanity, affectation, and artifice, whose tastes were perverted, and whose feelings were depraved," coupled with his subsequent admiration for a partner like Rousseau's docile, innocent Sophie, cause him to conceive "the romantic project of educating a wife for himself" (362). Indeed, his confidence—or rather his masculine hubris—in the almost alchemistic potential for transforming raw female material into something of value fools him into thinking that he might, like some kind of deity, pluck an ignorant and impecunious woman from her humble surroundings and insert her in a luxurious pedagogical sphere of his own fantasy, in order to beget his ideal companion. To undertake this project is to make a direct graft of revolutionary scions onto British seedlings: his subject is meant to be a child of nature such as St. Pierre envisioned his Virginia, a being Hervey will in turn educate as Rousseau did Sophie. Having found an innocent creature—not merely one ignorant of history, arithmetic, or science, but, more importantly, one entirely unaware of the power of her sex—he seizes on the opportunity to conduct his own educational experiment. Free of knowledge that as Rousseau saw as breeding vanity and duplicity outside of the domestic sphere,¹⁹ this young woman is poised to become Sophie, the

¹⁹ This belief is woven throughout Rousseau's oeuvre, but we see a few particularly piquant examples of it in *Emile*, including one in which he tells the story of a little girl who abandoned the useful task of learning to write upon

ideal companion to Rousseau's own revolutionary offspring, Emile. When Hervey finds Rachel at her grandmother's cottage—a tidy, cultivated homestead amidst “the wildness of the surrounding scene” (363)—he discovers what he thinks is a blank canvas in the form of a woman, one who might be brought up entirely according to Rousseau's pedagogical plan, one who had already been formed by St. Pierre's vision of nature as first teacher. He comes upon her in that “terrestrial paradise” like a hubristic Adam discovering his Eve—he even seizes the prerogative of naming her—when she has scarcely ever seen a man, let alone been exposed to narratives of romance and love. She is, consequently, thoroughly unaware of the effect that her beauty might produce. When her grandmother dies, Hervey whisks her away to Windsor, where he sets her up in relative luxury with an older woman as her caretaker, guardian and educator, but where she is, otherwise, “secluded from all intercourse with the world” (370). Like Sophie's instruction, Rachel's education on this strange island is simple, almost non-existent. Indeed, Hervey's plan seems to consist of merely sheltering her from the outside world and its knowledge, thus ensuring that she never develops a capacity for rationality. When she expresses a desire to read, he sees little harm in allowing her to practice by reading romances, as they exude “a spirit favorable to female virtue, exal[t] the respect for chastity, and inspire[e] enthusiastic admiration of honour, generosity, truth, and all the noble qualities which dignify human nature” (380), the very attributes that, through her rebuttal to Burke, Edgeworth has proven to be insufficient for women's (and society's) happiness and productivity.

Indeed, Hervey quickly discovers that Rousseau's pedagogical plan, one which relies on the cultivation of “negative virtues,” as Wollstonecraft calls them, and which consists of

catching “a glimpse of herself in the mirror [...] and thinking that the cramped attitude was not pretty,” after which she abandons any further writing. Her awareness of her ability to please has created a vanity that prevents her from being able to undertake useful work, and Rousseau purposefully makes a distinction between her brother's response to the same activity in order to underscore this result as a specifically feminine problem: he “was no fonder of writing, but what he disliked was the constraint, not the look of the thing” (268).

withholding information while giving only a bare minimum of practical knowledge bolstered by a long list of *don'ts*, is an educational approach that leads to bewilderment and dependence rather than any kind of noble innocence. For example, while at first Hervey is moved by Virginia's indifference to riches, he soon discovers that her upbringing has not made her free of avarice, just ignorant of economy. Having no context for the value of the diamonds he shows her, she finds them as useless to her "as guineas were to Robinson Crusoe, on his desert island" (372). In fact, the more he stunts her education, the more she appears to resemble the women he claims to disdain, for even Lady Delacour, unique and heterodoxical as she is to mainstream femininity, has been accused of being ignorant of economy, a verity that allowed her husband to steal her fortune out from under her.

This point of comparison between women of vastly different means serves to support Edgeworth's thesis that what most makes a woman a woman in Britain is her lack of relevant education. "I should be glad that my wife were ignorant of what *every body knows*," Hervey says when first impressed with Virginia's lack of understanding. "Nothing is so tiresome to a man of any taste or abilities, as *what every body knows*. I am rather desirous to have a wife who has an uncommon, than a common understanding" (373). In the end, however, Virginia proves to be ignorant of what both men and women know—that is, of both what *everyone* knows and what *no one* knows. A curious foil to women like Belinda and Lady Delacour, who adopt behaviors (positive and negative) associated with both genders, Virginia seems destined to adopt neither: she is too innocent to coquet, too ignorant to reason. This realization opens Hervey's own mind to what he believes a woman is and ought to be, and to what he most desires in the woman that he will eventually marry: "In conversing with Lady Delacour, his faculties were always called into full play; in talking to Virginia, his understanding was passive; he perceived that a large

proportion of his intellectual powers and of his knowledge was absolutely useless to him in her company, and this did not raise her either in his love or esteem.”

When contrasted with the Revolutionary Heroine, Virginia seems insipid and childlike, a creature who could never be more than “his pupil, or his plaything” (379)—indeed, the very words that Wollstonecraft uses to describe the state in which the typical woman finds herself after her “education.” In Book V of *Emile*, Rousseau lays out his complete plan for female education, in which women are to be formed “to please [men], to be useful to them, [...]and to make life agreeable and sweet to them” (263), are taught to “conquer all their whims, in order to subject them to the wills of others” (268), and, “as they are not in a condition to judge for themselves,” to defer judgment to “fathers and husbands” (276). All of her reflections, he writes, “ought to be directed to the study of men and to that pleasure-giving knowledge,” since works of genius are “out of their reach” (281). Mary Wollstonecraft, however, targets such objects of education as worthy of “a seraglio” (95), not of a marriage between two rational, consenting adults. However, Hervey’s approach has all but guaranteed that Virginia will become just such a woman, which explains why she is willing to “defer” her happiness to Hervey rather than tell him about the object of her romantic hallucinations, that is, about the man she once saw a portrait of, whose face she has inserted onto the bodies of the heroes in her novel reading. When he presses her to explain her confusion, the lack of education that would have developed her ability to reason, which would in turn allow her both to understand her emotions and order her discourse, leaves her, quite literally, speechless: “‘I think, sincerity is not always, in our sex, consistent with—I mean—I don’t know what I mean—what I say—or what I ought to say;’ cried Virginia, and she sunk down on the sofa in extreme confusion” (400). Hervey finally concludes that “the virtues of Virginia sprang from sentiment; those of Belinda, from reason” (379). Reason

and philosophy, Edgeworth has shown, do not make for masculine women, nor absent, disobedient wives, but for the enlightened man's ideal companion.

Indeed, the very idea of "natural education" proves to be an oxymoron, and Hervey's cosmopolitan project once again unmask the fear of French ideas as a source of resistance to national evolution rather than a threat to national hegemony. For a time, Virginia's romantic and sexual awakening threatens to unravel the novel's apparent ideological project: Clarence, increasingly in love with Belinda, can see no honorable way to disengage himself from her. However, such a marriage, Edgeworth and her readers know, would be a failure on many levels—Hervey could never be happy with a wife so unprepared to live in the society that he frequents, and little good would come from so thoroughly upsetting the obligations that he has to his class. Although the text is incredibly democratic, and Edgeworth clearly advocates a certain reordering of the social hierarchy when she writes, for example, of interracial marriage between acquaintances of the Percivals, she pointedly does not advocate disrupting hierarchy in a situation where no possible common good can come from it.

And this is her exact application of French Revolutionary ideals in the novel: she encourages British citizens to be open to embracing foreign ideas and applying them, with the clause that, like Belinda's and Percival's determination of female delicacy, they "must be judged by the test of utility" (255). For Hervey to marry an uneducated, impoverished woman whom he stumbled upon in the woods (and whom the rest of the world believes has been his mistress for some time) would surely jeopardize the realization of his future ambitions as much as it would his happiness. At the same time, however, Hervey has come to understand, through his experiments with Virginia, that while the prerogative of his birth has always whispered to him that he should be master—of people and of things—his moral research and self-reflection unveil

a greater desire: he no longer wishes for a wife who will offer innocence (which he now understands is merely a synonym for ignorance) and reverence for and obedience to his masculine authority, but one that will offer true intellectual companionship. Indeed, Edgeworth seems to be making a winking reference to Rousseau's own unhappy partnership with Thérèse Le Vasseur, a barely literate seamstress, a union of such vastly different intellects, that while romantically libertarian in theory, led to the abandonment of five children to the state.

That Lady Delacour ends up discovering Virginia's mystery man, who, having spied on her day after day in the forest without knowing that she possessed his portrait, and that Hervey is ultimately able to arrange her marriage to him and his own to Belinda, is further proof that Edgeworth simply does not believe in the threat of foreign ideas tainting British culture and life: Hervey's experiment merely succeeded in proving the lunacy, by British standards, both of educating a woman in total isolation and of marriage so far below one's own intellectual and educational echelon. Moreover, by creating subtle links between Virginia and other British women, Edgeworth is able to point out the fact that the native system for educating women and arranging marriages is already predicated on a certain irredeemable madness, and that there is more to be learned than feared from ideas filtering in from *extra muros*.

Finally, by inserting the novel *Paul and Virginia*—one that contains the pedagogical model for creating and maintaining innocence—into a work dealing with the fear of contagious French immorality, Edgeworth offers an ironic commentary on the fear of foreign ideas: in the same way that a system of education meant to keep a woman illiterate (in literal or figurative terms) will not stop her from falling in love and forming romantic fantasies, a system of government meant to keep a nation ignorant of foreign ideas will not prevent its citizens from developing their own weak determinations.

Conclusion

By the novel's close, Edgeworth has succeeded in proving to her readers that the fear of foreign ideas—particularly doctrines that have emerged from French revolutionary politics—are based on little more than “superstitious terror” (222). Like Vincent's manservant Juba who falls ill when, night after night, he witnesses a frightening, glowing figure in his room, the public need only be shown that the threat that they have imagined consists merely of images drawn in figurative phosphorous. “Familiarized by degrees with the object of [its] secret horror” (222), the British nation, too, will swiftly recover its sense of self, discovering in the process that the menacing specter of the powerful woman—Juba's Obeah-woman who, he believes, exercises sorcery over him—vanishes in the light of reason. In the place of her nation's fear of powerful, masculine women, through Belinda, her Revolutionary Heroine, Edgeworth proposes a Wollstoncraftian revision of female manners that encourages women to exercise their minds in choosing which strictures of femininity have genuine import for their success and happiness in the world; without the test of utility, “we should run into romance, and error, and misery, if we did not constantly refer to this standard” (255), Belinda learns. Edgeworth joins with this new criterion of judgment in matters of feminine behavior an unrepentant critique of the ways in which the nation has adopted a circular means of reinforcing feminine helplessness and excessive sensibility. Novels, she argues, promote the image of such women who make for interesting heroines, but, Percival wonders, “would any man of sense or feeling choose to be troubled with such a wife?” (256). At the same time that men and women absorb such models from their reading, they act them out, and therefore continue to cause them to be transcribed and refined in fiction writing.

Edgeworth's Revolutionary Heroine, however—in stark contrast to Virginia's insipid romantics—makes a definitive break with such novelistic paradigms of ideal womanhood with her continued and impenitent refusal to “[use] any of the terms in the heroine's dictionary” (452), to “condescend to act like almost all other heroines, that is to say, without common sense” (133), and with her determination to open her eyes, “which heroines make it a principle never to do—or else there would be an end of the novel” (83). Balking at the necessity, as novels teach, of “tumb[ing] into a river to make herself interesting,” Belinda systematically purges herself of any typically “heroic” mentalities, which she replaces, in turn, with the exercise of reason and philosophy that the novel valorizes. When Vincent encourages her to engage with Freke, who is threatening her from afar, she retorts, “I will not run into danger on purpose to give you the pleasure of defending me” (250). Indeed, Belinda's unwillingness to lose her head in matters of love marks Edgeworth's caution to her nation that “nothing is more unlike a novel than real life” (36). When women take to envisioning themselves as heroines of their own love adventure in the wake of reading too many romances, such as Virginia did under Hervey's tutelage, they distort the experience of reality. It is a lesson that even the independent-minded Lady Delacour must learn as she perpetually casts herself at the center of opium-hazed melancholic reveries inspired by her own “dangerous” reading.

Belinda instead proves that a woman can “make herself interesting” (250), as a woman and a literary heroine, without any reference whatsoever to a man, by becoming a Revolutionary Heroine who chooses integrity and autonomy over the romantic flattery of love. Like Wollstonecraft's pragmatic approach to love, which advocates the use of reason over passion in the choice of a partner,²⁰ Belinda's, too, recognizes the sensation of passion as impermanent and

²⁰ She writes in the *Vindication* against the bombast of romantic love, arguing that women must “endeavor to restrain this tumultuous passion, and [not let it] dethrone superior powers, or usurp the scepter which the

the social institution that buttresses it as ill-formed for women's long-term happiness. In the past, love was woman's only prerogative; Edgeworth replaces it, like Wollstonecraft does, with not only the possibility of self-respect and self-actualization independent of the marriage state, but with a certain level of newfound autonomy in matrimony, meager as it may seem to modern readers. Once she has made this realization, Belinda becomes convinced that "matches of interest, convenience, and vanity [...] diminished, instead of increasing happiness" (138), and that nothing could ever tempt her "to marry from any of the common views of interest or ambition" (213).

Indeed, Edgeworth has used Belinda to distinguish clearly between reason and romance in the role that women play in love relationships which, she believes, the public has confused, a state of affairs that is continually perpetuated when women remain uneducated and under the severe restraint that Rousseau recommends. When Belinda refuses to marry Philip Baddely, and her aunt Stanhope accuses her of "mak[ing] childish or romantic difficulties" (201) with her denial of his 15,000£ a year, the reader understands categorically that it is actually intelligent conduct to refuse a partnership that promises certain misery, and romantic difficulty, on the other hand, to marry a wholly unsuitable individual solely for his money and for the privilege of being able to say, as Lydia Bennet does in *Pride and Prejudice*, "Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman." For Edgeworth and her heroine, and indeed, for Mary Wollstonecraft, love must find its origin in esteem, which cannot exist, as Hervey's experiment and Belinda's short engagement to Mr. Vincent prove, between two individuals of radically different educations, temperaments, and moral inclinations.

understanding should ever coolly wield" (93). While she advocates marriage in the form of long-term partnerships based on mutual respect and admiration, she finds that passion is disruptive, temporary, and unstable. "[Women]", she concludes "ought not to indulge in those emotions which disturb the order of society, and engross thoughts that should be otherwise employed" (96).

Belinda's approach to marriage marks Revolutionary Heroism as having a particular connection to Edgeworth's thesis about nationalism, domesticity, and economics, a theme that will also be important in Fanny Burney's *The Wanderer*, which I will discuss in Chapter 4. Indeed, Belinda's clear-headed choice of a husband is a decision that holds economic weight because of the manner in which she chooses to dispose of the value that her future domestic contribution represents in her choice of a partner. Part of her transformation in the novel—and it is one that we will see in forthcoming chapters as well—is her path as a woman from commodity to consumer. While her body, that is, her marriageability, and her potential as a spouse, mother, and childbearer has value early in the novel, after she has been “hawked about everywhere,” by her matchmaking aunt Stanhope at Bath, “as well-advertised as Packwood's razor strops” (25), she soon comes to realize that her selection might affect her community as well as herself. Her choice of the West Indian Mr. Vincent makes a statement, firstly, about her capacity to disrupt the flow of property through English patriarchs in favor of her personal happiness, and, secondly, about her ability and willingness to displace the tangible value of her future from the English economy to the West Indian one in her choice of life partner. The reader, however, soon learns that such a marriage would likely have represented a financial loss, given that Vincent has gambled away the entirety of his fortune. When she ultimately rejects Vincent for Hervey, she places a better bet, this time on a man who will play a respectful and admirable role in the social and political sphere in the decades following their marriage. In doing so, Belinda endorses a potential for social evolution in the man that she has determined to support with her domestic production, a decision that she could only make in conjunction with the intellectual, philosophical, and political awakening that she has had over the course of the novel.

Indeed, the path of discovery the Belinda follows through the novel is one of refinement that Edgeworth wishes to see realized at the level of the nation, and which she links to Enlightenment theories of knowledge: as her heroine moves from object—“a puppet in the hands of others” (10)— to subject—a being who “judges and acts for herself” (110)—she personifies both the potential for women’s rationality and the ability of a nation’s citizens to adequately judge for themselves what worth foreign ideas might have for them. In both cases, it is the value of tradition that is under scrutiny. How far, Edgeworth has asked through her heroine, ought we to trust the systems in place merely because they have, thus far, stood the test of time? And what role should reason and rationality play when one chooses to reject given models? When Belinda arrived at Lady Delacour’s home, she was positioned to follow the path that numberless concourses of women before her had followed: an introduction to the fashionable world by a veteran coquette who would train her up in the ways of husband-hunting and introduce her to an admirable pool of bachelors, eventually allowing her, through toying manipulation and much financial negotiation, to secure a marriage for herself. But Belinda, almost childlike in her unfamiliarity with the world, chooses instead to rely on her Lockean ability to observe her surroundings and, using her capacity to reason, to distill from the data collected a revised code of conduct that takes into account the very real dangers of the path that her class and gender suggested, nearly irrevocably, to her. It is a skill that she continues to refine from her moment of realization at the bad examples set before her to the very last page of the book.

When Harriet Freke, for example, persecutes Belinda for her good sense and respect for reasonable propriety, she finds that even though she answered her inquisitor with the confidence of one who defends honest beliefs, it was necessary to deeply examine “the habits and principles

which guided her conduct. She had a general feeling that they were right and necessary; but now, with the assistance of lady Anne and Mr. Percival, she established in her own understanding the exact boundaries between right and wrong” (232). She also must, in her trajectory toward self-sustaining rationality, battle her aunt Stanhope—intent upon forming her according to accepted patterns, as she had Belinda’s cousins—as well as the prejudices of those around her who assume, as Clarence Hervey initially did, that she has as little sense and as few independent ideas and desires as other young women in her position are taught to have. She first realizes the effect of her cumulative reasoning when she chooses to skip a coveted opportunity to appear at court, and finds that she doesn’t regret it in the slightest:

Is it possible, that I have spent three hours by myself in a library, without being tired of my existence? How different are my feelings now, to what they would have been in the same circumstances six months ago! I should then have thought the loss of the birthnight ball a mighty trial of temper. It is singular, that my having spent a winter with one of the most dissipated women in England should have sobered my mind so completely. [...] Now I can judge from my own experience, and I am convinced that the life of a fine lady would never make me happy (126).

Rather than the life of a fine lady, Belinda has chosen the life of a fine philosopher. In short, boring though she may be, “cool” though her ruminations on love might appear, Belinda emerges strikingly triumphant from the various tests of character to which the novel subjects her, as an advocate of women’s capacity for reason and judgment, of the reformation of female manners and the marriage contract, of the potential fruitfulness of new ideas and foreign interests, and

with a ringing and truly heroic portrait by the novel's most beloved character, Lady Delacour, who says of her:

She has saved my life. She has made my life worth saving. She has made me feel my own value. She has made me know my own happiness. She has reconciled me to my husband. She has united me with my child. She has been my guardian angel. (335)

Once again, the Revolutionary Heroine has saved a life, despite expectations of women's flighty frivolity and weakness of mind and body. Her magnificent rehabilitation of the much-maligned *raison* has proved to be the salve for all women.

Chapter IV

Juliet among the anti-Jacobins: propriety, economy, nationality

In her final and much anticipated (though ultimately much maligned) novel, *The Wanderer: Or, Female Difficulties*, Fanny Burney joins the chorus of responses to Enlightenment and revolutionary definitions and redefinitions of gender and class, with roughly two decades of perspective on the failings of both. Written over approximately fifteen years and published at last in 1814, this momentous tale of a Revolutionary Heroine who dons “a [...] disguise, from virtuous motives” (Burney qtd in Doody xvi) unfolds during “the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre” (Burney 11) but appeared in public during the fruitful initial stirrings of Britain’s capitalist commercial transformation. One of the greatest obstacles to the novel’s success was what the reading public perceived as its untimely appearance on the literary scene. After decades of on-again-off-again war with France between 1689 and 1815, Napoleon had finally been defeated, and the last thing the celebratory British population was seeking was criticism of its great nation coupled with sympathy with the long-standing enemy across the water, which summarizes, in very short hand, the bulk of Burney’s wondrous novel. Her story of the virtuous Wanderer, Juliet, not only deconstructs with a bold hand, just as Belinda did in Edgeworth’s novel, the long-held belief in the “French Threat” to British hegemony, but also unmasks the anxiety as symptomatic of the governing doctrines of anti-Jacobin politics—“engaged in the process of establishing new middle-class values [and attempting] to review the limits of gender propriety” (Grenby 3)—having come to represent mainstream political views in Britain. Skeptical of the *other* in the form of all foreigners, members of the lower classes, women, and, indeed, any individual who deviated from total conformity to upper class social

convention, reigning political doctrines represented, for Burney, a kind of Terror that was merely the opposite side of the coin of the one in France from twenty years earlier.

Unsurprisingly then, criticism of Burney's novel has, since the 1980s, tended to focus on the author's attempt to expose or figuratively disempower various patriarchal structures inside and outside of literature. Suzie Park and Patricia Meyer Spacks argue, for example, that *The Wanderer* challenges prescriptions of privacy for women, both within the male-dominated Romantic tradition and in the conduct book literature meant to educate women on their roles in society. Julia Epstein, Tamara Wagner, and Pam Perkins focus their readings on Burney's skepticism of anti-Jacobin platforms and Burkean reactions to the French Revolution. Others have taken more explicitly feminist approaches to the novel, such as Nora Nachumi and Kristina Straub, who examine gendered power relationships and definitions of femininity to prove Burney's radicalism, while Claudia Johnson, on the other hand, does the same to show the very opposite, arguing that "Burney takes back with one hand what she gives with the other," and that the female characters' "excess of submission" thwarts any possible feminist reading (169). Scholars who read the author as politically ambivalent, such as Darryl Jones and Stephanie Russo and A. D. Cousins, in turn, still assert her relative sympathy to radical ideologies through her portrayal of a violent world "far removed from Edmund Burke's grossly sentimental depiction of a chivalric social order" (Russo & Cousins 86).

The overarching theme of criticism that identifies Burney as a radical sympathizer, however, is expository, and by that I mean that it grants Burney's heroine little agency and relies instead on the author's expositions of injustice that surround Juliet in order to argue for her disapproval of it; Elinor's rights-of-man discourses (which Burney refused to temper in subsequent editions), these scholars concur, fill in the ideological holes of what the author herself

cannot or will not say. While I have interpreted many of the narrative elements of *The Wanderer* with a similar feminocentric approach, my reading departs from the above critics in that I insist on recognizing the significance of Juliet's individual action, which often takes the form of deliberate and meditated *inaction*, as essential to the novel's ideological project. Indeed, Burney's Revolutionary Heroine is not merely an inert canvas, despite her silence and reticence. I will demonstrate in this chapter that her action takes the form of an ironic passivity that strikes at the very core of the illusory, yet shared, values of anti-Jacobin social prescriptions in which the nation had been reveling since the Terror's onset in 1793: grace and modesty as natural to women, the chivalric sexual roles that had historically served to protect and preserve women and the nation itself, and the superiority of Britain's modern political system, which Edmund Burke canonized in his 1792 work *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, to everything that French revolutionary doctrines had to offer.

From this jumping off point of irony, Burney is able to closely analyze the effect of around twenty years of conservative post-revolutionary legislation and cultural inscription of women's roles, criticizing the contemporary doctrines of propriety that found their justification in anti-French platforms. They have become so exaggerated, she argues, that they are in a state of perpetual backfire, and it is not only women who suffer from the doublespeak of doctrines of feminine delicacy: the nation as a whole experiences a kind of economic self-sabotage, I will demonstrate, when women are so far removed from the world of material production. Inserted into the economic sphere, Burney's Revolutionary Heroine discovers the degree to which the work that women do has been denuded of economic value as the women themselves have seen their representation in the politico-economic realm shrink, a topic that George Sand will resurrect and rewrite in *Nanon* and that I will discuss in chapter 5. Finally, interwoven within these

critiques Burney stages a reevaluation of many of the revolutionary ideas and theories that the virulent backlash condemned, both through her anti-heroine Elinor Joddrel and her Revolutionary Heroine Juliet. On the whole, despite the protagonist's apparent passivity—or rather *through* her purposeful passivity—I will show that Burney calls for a return to women's agency and a resurrection of doctrines of Enlightenment social equality that would close the gap between Britain's antagonistic class relationships.

Proper Appearances

The story of Juliet—a truly infuriating heroine for her apparent unwillingness to speak or take action against her tormentors—offers the reader an ironic look at female submission and delicacy that explicitly deconstructs anti-Jacobin prescriptions of femininity. As Mary Poovey has observed, the plot structure of many novels written by women around the turn of the century duplicates for the reader the claustrophobic situation of the heroine in society.

Forbidden by convention to declare their desires, the heroines must struggle, often ineffectually, to communicate by indirection or even deceit, and the interest of the plot lies in the nuances of frustration and achievement that mark their efforts.

(Poovey 43)

Frances Burney indeed reconstructs this sense of imprisonment in *The Wanderer*, but uses the literary device of irony to give it far deeper meaning than a simple condemnation of a restrictive social hierarchy. Her Revolutionary Heroine, a woman whose experience with claustrophobia takes very real forms as she is frequently immured in closets, in chambers, and behind screens, is not only unable to declare her desire, but even chooses not to utter her own name, and in that sense, she differs from the heroines that Poovey describes above: rather than struggling to

communicate, she exposes how a woman's very survival hangs in the balance when she refuses to communicate. Deliberately going overboard in her adherence to the conduct book injunction that women stay out of the public eye and "avoid all behavior that would call attention to themselves," displaying their chastity "only indirectly or—even more precisely—negatively by *not* speaking, by *not* betraying the least consciousness of her essential sexuality" (Poovey 21, 23-4), this "timid deer" (Burney 772) Juliet is self-effacing to the point of becoming virtually invisible; she begins the novel, after all, as a disembodied voice, crying out in distress, "Oh, hear me! For the love of Heaven, hear me!" (11); later, because her physical presence has been so elusive, Riley recognizes her as the demoiselle from the boat only because he "caught the sound of her voice" (252). In turn, when she responds to the vast majority of the interrogatories launched at her in the novel, she merely "blushed, but was silent" (57); and to most offers of aid, particularly those made by men, she answers, "it is impossible I should accept" (66). Indeed, her silence, "impelled by necessity" (75), precludes even the smallest degree of transparency in her person.

Selflessness and privacy are *the* preeminent qualities of the retiring domestic woman in the discourse of the Angel in the House, the social doctrine that anti-Jacobin proponents embraced in order to control women's supposedly exaggerated appetites—seen to be ever increasing with the feminized violence of the Terror's *tricoteuses* and *Amazones*—via a narrow domestic sphere of action and influence. However, Juliet's extreme devotion to it—her radical propriety—while in exile from all forms of domesticity instead demonstrates Burney's desire to parody the doctrine itself by showing how little it conduces to the feminine transparency that anti-Jacobin politics called for: rendered identity-less by both her modesty and her devotion to feminine self-sacrifice, Juliet appears to the other characters to be able to adopt any identity that

she pleases, theoretically for her own gain. What then, separates her, in the eyes of the world, from a woman such as Laclos' Madame de Merteuil, who also hid her machinations behind a virtuous façade, and who was the very object of feminized horror that the Revolution sought, in part, to destroy?

Indeed, perceived initially as a French woman, Juliet's gradual but nonetheless drastic changes in appearance early in the novel demonstrate how those around her interpret her hyperbolic conformity to gender doctrines—her tendency to “display no vanity, no passion, no assertive ‘self’ at all” (21), as Mary Poovey has written of the idealized “angel”—as revolutionary subterfuge rather than virtue. Mrs. Ireton, marveling at the still nameless heroine's transformation from “the blackest, dirtiest, raggedest wretch I ever beheld” into “quite a belle” (43), inquires what other “metamorphos[es]” she has in store, wondering “what they are to *exhibit*” (44 emphasis mine). While the heroine's situation is extremely unorthodox, she has not, thus far, transgressed a single boundary of feminine conduct, since nowhere is it explicitly written, in eighteenth-century conduct books, for example, that a woman must necessarily have a name and a story. That Mrs. Ireton interprets her changing exterior as an *exhibit*, then, the very thing from which the anti-Jacobin discourse claims that modesty and retirement will protect women, marks the beginning of Burney's deconstruction of the value of defining women's nature by a social construct, one, moreover, that is based almost exclusively in the rejection of French revolutionary principles. When Mrs. Ireton continues by asking “how many coats of white and red you were obliged to lay on, before you could cover all the black” (44), she spares Burney the work of building an explicit argument against the paradoxes of British feminine rules of appearance: the “coats” of color—whether clothing, manners, self-abnegation, or feigned virtue or ignorance—serve to cover a “black” nature, which, in itself, proves that a woman's true

character is other than what she necessarily presents to those around her. Moreover, Burney allows the choleric old woman to defuse the fear of what woman's biological nature might be when, as the heroine's facial bandages fall one by one, she discovers that "neither wound, nor scar, nor injury of any sort occasioned the patch to have been worn," and that all Juliet's "features" were in fact "free from any cause for having been bound up" (44, 45). Rather than the perceived "near anarchy" (Gutwirth 244) bubbling under the surface of Paris' revolutionary women, Juliet reveals with her gradual jettison of disguise that the "collection of bandages and patches [...] and of black and white outsides" (45) merely represent the ways that women have been forced into "maiming or defacing" (45) themselves in order to conform to social expectations of gendered behavior and appearance. The author then entirely confounds the question for her readers when the elderly lady, leaning on her interpretation of feminine disguise as a material euphemism for both criminality and sexual depravity, sarcastically excuses herself for "diving too deeply into the secrets of your trade" (46). Unqualified as the word is here, "trade" necessarily refers to prostitution. Juliet's radical modesty, which translates as a refusal to *reveal* herself—to give a name and a story that would insert her into the social hierarchy and allow others to identify just *what kind* of woman she is—ultimately points out the most blatant inconsistencies in anti-Jacobin doctrines of propriety: first, women's "nature" as the domesticating discourse teaches it is in fact an amalgam of "coats" that she must apply, and therefore not natural at all; indeed, it is no more natural than Mme de Vernon's feigned love for Delphine or Mme de Merteuil's false sexual virtue. The second and subsequent inconsistency in Britain's prescriptions of femininity that Juliet unmasks in this scene with the silent "resolution, not awe" (46) with which she actively bares Mrs. Ireton's insinuations, is that a woman with disguises (that is, every woman who follows feminine dictates, as we have determined) uses

them as part of her “trade” and is therefore necessarily a woman of ill repute who specializes in—whether for a husband’s wealth and the security of married life or simply to secure her daily bread—“man hunting.” Juliet’s refusal to reveal herself actively shatters the fragile glass of propriety itself, demonstrating that it immures women in performances of virtue that in fact identify them as dissimulators, the very aspect of femininity that the anti-Jacobin discourse on women sought to eradicate in response to the same women of Paris that Clarence Hervey saw on the eve of the Revolution, who were “full of vanity, affectation, and artifice, whose tastes were perverted, and whose feelings were depraved” (Edgeworth 362). Juliet’s dissimulations, then, become especially significant because they spring both from modesty and from revolutionary heroism, insofar as she hides her identity in order to preserve the life of her guardian; “I give no false coloring,” she explains, continuing Burney’s chromatic analogy, “I am only not open” (340), exactly as a woman should be in the presence of strangers, according to contemporary expectations. But the dramatic absence of identifiable signifiers instead makes her actions seem blatantly performative, leading others to take gross liberties with her because of the era’s typical association of performance with sexual levity.

Indeed, Burney’s establishment of propriety as an impossible and self-destructive code of conduct based on a circular argument sets a pattern that further conflictual encounters between the Revolutionary Heroine and other characters in the novel will follow: Juliet’s surfeit of modesty, which takes the form of silence and self-denial, rather than ensuring the her protection that nationalist doctrines promise her, exposes her to harassment and near harm. However, the men and women in the novel respond to her radical modesty differently, which gives the author the opportunity to dig deeply into the machinery of doctrines of propriety in order to expose the way in which they reflect both a misunderstanding of French ideals of equality as well as the

harm they do at all levels of society: men's responses, we shall see, expose the failure of the chivalric sexual roles that Edmund Burke lauds in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, a revelation that exonerates women from the accusations of social disorder that the anti-Jacobin discourses of propriety sought to contain, while women's reactions expose the class prejudice and economic disinterest inherent in dictates of feminine delicacy, renewing revolutionary arguments of the *Rights of Man*.

From the departure point of the breakdown of "natural" feminine propriety, Burney debunks the national myth of chivalric gender roles, thereby unraveling the Knight-Damsel cultural fantasy of sexual relations that anti-Jacobin assertions claimed would protect the nation from the taint of revolutionary upheaval. She introduces the theme of Burkean chivalry within the first pages of the novel, when Elinor Joddrel, fascinated but also irritated by Harleigh's interest in the bandaged Incognita, insinuates that he experienced hallucinations when he insisted they bring this "tattered dulcinea" aboard. "You are such a complete knight-errant," Elinor chaffs him, "that you would just as willingly find her a tawny hottentot as a fair Circassian" (12). Indeed, as the novel progresses, Harleigh's visions continue as he weighs others' assumptions of her—"You must resign your demoiselle [...] for a heroine; [...] Her dress is not merely shabby, 'tis vulgar. [...] She can be nothing above a house-maid" (17)—against his own observations of "her language, her air, and her manner," all of which convince him "that she had lived the life of a gentlewoman" (75). Though the general opinion is against him, the quixotic hero spends the rest of the novel trying to save her, as any honorable British man naturally would, since, as the Admiral, the embodiment of English traditionalism, explains, "an unprotected female, provided she's of good behavior, has always a claim to a man's care, whether she be born amongst our friends or foes" (32).

However, by taking to extremes conservative injunctions to remain unseen, Juliet demonstrates that not only do the sexual politics of concealing by negation fail to protect her, they expose her to unwanted male attention that is very nearly as gross, ruthless, and dangerous as that of the French commissary, the illegitimate husband that the Terror has foisted upon her. Indeed, respecting “the long-beaten path of female timidity” (343) exposes Juliette to even greater danger, for the attention that the heroine’s *distress* (that is, her namelessness and poverty) attracts, rather than “saving” her, proves to be consistently fatal to her reputation and hazardous to her person.

This is most powerfully evident in her attempts to repel the libertine Sir Lyell Sycamore, whose attentions reveal that, rather than freeing the nation from the contamination of foreign ideas, the conservative doctrines of propriety to which Juliet adheres merely increase the degree to which domestic women are forced into “sexual bondage, [into] slavery to their reproductive lives, [and the] unfreedom to act” (243), as Madelyn Gutwirth has described the women of Paris who had the courage to claim *égalité* in response to their own low condition. Seeing “her modest mien, and evident embarrassment” at the blind Welsh harper’s concert, Sycamore finds her predictably irresistible and begins to pursue her around the room. In return for all the attention he pays her, “she sought to employ her own [attention] another way” (242-3); however, without a friendly face in the room (none of the women condescends to acknowledge her), there is, indeed, nothing upon which she might “employ” it, which forces her to withdraw her own consciousness—her attention—further and further from the scene. In short, the “unfreedom to act” that Gutwirth describes, endemic to a creature whose whole existence is defined in sexual terms, merely increases. Each time Sycamore corners her, she sits back down again, stripping herself of any action that would appear to her pursuer as an invitation, thus making herself,

consequently, more and more irresistible both to Sir Lyell and to other men in the room. In effect, the merchant Mr. Tedman soon comes to engage her with a handful of cakes. Though no sexual predator, he is unable to perceive how suspicious it is for a young single woman to be sitting alone with not one but two men attending her. In a desperate attempt to fight being boxed in by male attention, she exercises her freedom to *be* less and less, endeavoring “to avoid looking either to the right or the left” (245). And yet, moments later, “an elderly gentleman, who was walking up and down the room, now bowed to her” (245). Her silence and immobility are starting to draw quite a crowd, and the scene ultimately ends, not with the salvation that anti-Jacobin tenets promise, but with the spiteful women present unmasking her for the demoiselle in the boat, effectively ruining any chance she had of supporting herself as a harp teacher to the daughters of the quality. Indeed, the more she attempts to pass unnoticed, the more the heroine’s *exhibition* of worth increases; the tighter she adheres to strictures of propriety, Burney ironically shows, the more others take advantage of her “dainty delicacy” (509) to violate her privacy and threaten her safety, because she appears to be “asking for it” with the very act of, essentially, playing dead, that is, with the most hyperbolic manifestation possible of a sexual object’s willing “unfreedom to act.”

Harleigh is perhaps the grossest offender in this trend, and his reactions to the heroine’s hyperbolic adherence to feminine delicacy unmask the cruelest side effect of the chivalric sexual roles that the nation is trying to preserve in the face of perceived gender anarchy across the pond: the same men who so deeply value her self-effacement and modesty, citing it as the definitive sign, despite her poverty and mystery, of her high birth and her undeniable education, end up mocking her for her devotion to it and relentlessly pushing her to abandon it. He is the only man, for example, to actually seize her in the frenzy of his desire. After several hundred pages of

examples of Juliet's same "unfreedom to act"—that is, her inability to reveal her name and story and her refusal to give him any sign of returning his affection—Harleigh finally confronts the Wanderer in her small apartment in order to dissuade her from performing in the public concert that would finally ease her pecuniary distress. Encouraged by her blush upon his arrival, he seizes her hand, and she attempts, like in the scene analyzed above, to retreat: "Mr. Harleigh, forbear! Or I must quit the room!" (335). Her attempt to physically remove herself, however, only further encourages him, because "the blushes which still tingled, still dyed her cheeks, betrayed," he believes, "that all within was not chilled, however all without might seem cold" (336). The more she displays this "impenetrable [...] incomprehensible" (337) femininity, the more violent and wild his advances become: "'You distract me! You distract me!' He caught her gown, but, upon her stopping, instantly let it go" (339). In the wake of this menacing physical gesture, Juliette finally cries, "persecute me no longer!" (341), linking Harleigh's tyrannical persistence to the French commissary's very pursuit of her, which she attempted to escape in her flight to England.

Such words ("impenetrable," "incomprehensible") to describe the actions that Harleigh cannot understand, but which are completely in line with the behavior that contemporary conservatism required of women, make pointed reference to Britain's own grave misreading of revolutionary doctrines. Propriety is supposed to protect women and, in the larger sense, the nation, from the so-called French threat, but instead it merely turns aggressive xenophobia inward, on the domestic other, as woman's increasingly polarized displays of gender have made her alien to her male counterparts.

Harleigh's continued renewals, in turn, merely serve to alienate Juliet doubly, after he undertakes, *as a friend*, to remind her of her feminine duty, thereby using her own propriety

against her as a weapon with which to battle what he perceives as her Jacobin *illegibility*. Is it not true, he inquires, “that your accomplishments should be reserved for the resources of your leisure, and the happiness of your friends, at your own time, and your own choice [...] in accordance with that word, which your own every action, every speech, every look bring perpetually to mind, propriety?” (338). In the typical vein of jealous literary heroes, with their “if I can’t have you, no one can!” attitude, Harleigh, in the above quotation, rather than saving the damsel Juliet, turns her own modesty against her, simultaneously cutting her off from intercourse with the rest of the world (since she has no friends for whom to reserve her accomplishments) and condemning her to starvation by turning the only scheme that would remedy her pecuniary distress into a matter of sexual purity, all in the name of “that word...propriety.”

The final blow that Burney deals to Burke’s paradoxical chivalric gender roles finds root in the male characters’ own unwillingness to believe that Juliet’s circumstances are truly as grave as she paints them. Indeed, even when Harleigh, Lord Melbury, and Sir Jaspar finally learn her story in its entirety, the three men call her prudence and scruples “chimerical,” “exaggerated,” “false,” and “of fancied refinement,” despite the genuine threats to the Wanderer of physical harm, of attempted rape, and of such life-threatening danger that before fleeing France she was forced to hide for a week in a closet so tiny that she could not sit down. And all of this independent of her guardian, the bishop, whose life she is trying to protect with her silence. This disavowal of her narrative credibility clearly renders the gentlemen unfit knights errant, for how can they come to her aid when they do not even believe in the dangers that threaten her, when the menace, to them, is merely “some right, stretched, by false reasoning, or undue influence, nearly to wrong” (348), as Harleigh sees it? But this is very definition of knight errant and damsel in distress which Burney is working to deconstruct in the first place: that women, by definition,

experience illusions of danger from which men must rescue them, and that, if these roles “should ever be totally extinguished, the loss I fear will be great” (Burke 87). The dangers are real, Burney argues through Juliet’s sufferings, and they stem from the very “homage paid to the fair sex” (87) that Burke lauds, and that the men in *The Wanderer* insist on pursuing, even when they are unable to even understand from whence the threat comes.

Male reviewers of the novel at its publication fell into the very same misreading of Burney’s heroine and her situation as the men in the pages, thus perfectly echoing for the author the very point that she intended to make: a national identity anchored almost exclusively in aggressive anti-Frenchness does little more than refine pre-existing national flaws into nearly pathological hyperbole. “The difficulties in which [Burney] involves her heroines,” William Hazlitt acerbically wrote, “are indeed ‘Female Difficulties;’—they are difficulties created out of nothing” (qtd in Johnson 170). Both Hazlitt and Juliet’s narrative cohorts, then, equate feminine scruples with hallucination and non-entity, that is, the creation of something (fear, spectacle, theatrics, even value) out of nothing (the woman herself, a negative being). Their assessment of her scrupulosity as the byproduct of hallucination plays right into Burney’s hand, however, for if the men inside and outside of the novel think that Juliet’s fears of her criminal husband’s “French revenge” are “of fancied refinement,” then surely Britain’s own fears of the same are as well.

Burney reiterates, in turn, how one need not look to France for the only example of tyranny and terror when Juliet, in a rare moment of categorical speech that frees her from her perceived hallucinosis and that definitively exorcises Harleigh’s influence from her life says, “You must let me pursue the path that my affairs, that my own perceptions, that my necessities point out to me, without interference, and without expecting from me the smallest reference to

your opinions, or feelings” (337). Harleigh, in turn, can only respond by attacking both her rationality and her sense of justice: “I must now practice the hardest lesson to the stubborn mind of man, *submission to undefined and what appears to be unnecessary evil*” (emphasis mine). There is scarcely a more accurate definition of tyranny than the one that Harleigh has attributed here to Juliet’s compunction, and by relating her femininity, her perceived irrationality, and her sexual domination to the Revolution that he sees as a political charade and an affront to history, honor, and religion, Harleigh, Juliet’s knight in shining armor, effectively identifies woman as vessel of illusion, madness, and instability that threatens to deconstruct men’s empire, but one to which he is bound in respect and service by the chivalric obedience of which he, as a man, is the very creator. A product of the sexual roles that Burney has already exposed as illogical and counterproductive because they are based on a definition of femininity that is both false and self-destructive, feminine delusion evaporates in Juliet’s unwavering declaration of independence with “no reference” to Harleigh’s wishes, a position that she holds “to be completely understood; and to be definitive” (346). If her knight respects her wishes after this conversation in the novel, however, it is only to go behind her back later, effectively undermining the chivalry that he lauds, in order to uncover her identity without her permission and forcefully “save” her, as he must do in order to reinstate the balance of sexual powers; ultimately he rescues her from little more than the dreadful scourge of the French antipatriarchalism that her revolutionary namelessness seems to espouse while, in the process, merely increasing the danger of her situation by making inquiries that expose her to those that hunt her.

That Juliet, then, is ultimately widely perceived as a hysteric confirms Burney argument that without freedom from the impossible propriety to which women are enslaved, and in which men have cast themselves in the constantly alternating roles of predator and savior, woman’s

ability to develop independence and fortitude will be forever stymied. The nation's fate, in a similar fashion, bound to its exclusive identity as all that is not France, will stagnate if it cannot find a way to incorporate mediated versions of the same *extra muros* socio-political doctrines that proved to be so valuable to the establishment of peace and prosperity in *Belinda*. Juliet's ironic parody of these anti-Jacobin doctrines, in turn, works to constantly to expose these very truths about woman and the British nation as a whole. Indeed, Burney's Revolutionary Heroine will continue her iconoclastic performances of feminine delicacy all the way to the end of the novel, fleeing "towards the beach to secure her safety by joining her uncle" (853) when all has been resolved and there is literally no danger left, and ultimately fleeing the terror of female submission in Britain for the apparently less terrifying climate of revolutionary France at the peak of the Terror.

Proper economics

The response of the women of Brighthelmstone to Juliet's silent submission, however, reveal the degree to which the French threat is an economic as well as social bogie. Though her demureness and reserve reflect textbook (or conduct book, rather) examples of womanhood, the local female elite quickly teaches the heroine that in Britain such feminine behavior is a privilege of class rather than an imperative or an essential manifestation of gender, and that notions of propriety themselves are inextricably interwoven with the social hierarchy that Britain fears to see disrupted by the revolutionary rumblings of its neighbor. For example, when Juliet displays typical expressions of delicacy, such as protesting that she needs rest or that she is unable to receive company, the rich women around her swiftly brand the act as "airs," a shocking performance from "a person nobody knew any thing of" who acts "just as if she were a fine

lady” (352). Indeed, any act that falls outside of what the women imagine as the Wanderer’s narrow sphere of action, the one suited to unwanted foreigners and “people that have their living to get, and that a’n’t worth a farthing” (384), represents an economic assault to their class by a *pseudo-parvenue*.

Such reactions to Juliet’s behavior made by the ladies of Brighthelmstone serve to show the degree to which, in Burney’s observation, the reinforcement of femininity itself as a class-contingent ontology reflects the irrational fear of Jacobin calls for class equality that supporters of the French Revolution advocated for Britain in the early 1790s. Indeed, counter-revolutionary responses that explicitly linked class and gender found much of their justification in Burke’s *Reflections*, in which he argued that French revolutionary principles of *égalité* would corrode England’s economy because trade and manufacture “too [...] may decay with [the death of chivalry]” (90). The terror that the Brighthelmstone women experience when Juliet appears to be acting “the fine lady” that they are sure she is not highlights this anxiety over the mixing of social classes, which were historically defined by manners and appearance, but which were losing their distinctiveness thanks to the gradual bourgeoisification of Europe as a whole. That gender might also go the way of class was a favorite anti-Jacobin subject of hysteria, and was especially apparent in the condemnation of radical “unsex’d” women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, “whom no decorum checks” (Polwhele 61).

In response to the perceived economic insurgency that Juliet’s gendered manners represent, then, women rely upon the anti-Jacobin conjoining of gender, class, and economics to respond to the threat of Wanderer’s inscrutable existence with appellations that degender the usurper and reinforce her socio-economic inferiority, while highlighting her dangerous French connection. In an attempt to shore up what they see as the necessary hierarchization of class and

gender, itself based on, in Burke's words, "the generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart" (86), which he canonized as the source of British cultural and economic wealth, the women of Brighthelmstone fall into the most dehumanizing and defeminizing epithets possible when naming Burney's Revolutionary Heroine: thing; this body; that grim thing; the vagabond; that black insect; a stranger; a nobody, if not worse; a mere nothing; the mystical; an adventurer; the Frenchified or the illegitimate stroller; a poor straggling pauper. When Mrs. Ireton, in turn, treats this *nobody* as her "vanquished vassal" (513), she attempts to revive a feudal model that was struggling, even in Britain, for self-justification after the Revolution. Indeed, a heroine who not only keeps her speech, the details of her life story, and many of her opinions to herself, but also her very name, the most basic level of codification that would insert her into the fabric of social life, who is a *signified* with no *signifier*, represents an unheard of dilemma in Burney's time, one that speaks particularly to Burke's accusation of the French Revolution as an assault on language. A nameless heroine whose race, religion, nationality, and parentage cannot be identified presents a challenge to the feudal nomenclature that Burke strives to preserve, and which relies on strict classification based on exterior signs. That these signs fail in respect to the Revolutionary Heroine, who beneath her nameless wanderings is impeccably honest and virtuous, deconstructs the very associations that Burke puts forth, and upon which Britain's growing national identity depends.

The nation of Great Britain proudly countered the French Revolution with its own capitalist boom, but Juliet's attempts to maintain her dignity while surviving her lack of socio-economic signifiers in fact expose the national economic disadvantage of twenty-plus years of the radical, anti-revolutionary domestication of women. Leading up to, but especially in the years

follow the crisis in France, the sex's own economic value had been displaced from its potential material production onto its signifiers of class, "as literal bearers of their husbands' or fathers' wealth" (Poovey 11). This shift replaced middle-class women's material economic contribution with "the conspicuous consumption practiced by middle- and upper-class women" and the "sympathetic, non-judgmental affection" that they were to offer their husbands, helping "offset the frustrations and strains a man suffered in his workplace," and therefore "renew[ing] his energies" (Poovey 11, 10), both of which allegedly stimulated the British economy by creating higher individual production and consumption. However, exempt from the security of family and matrimony, Juliet's necessary, yet extraordinary, exertions toward acquiring "that sort of independence, that belongs, physically, to sustaining life by her own means" (Burney 146) instead demonstrate to what bad economic policy the anti-Jacobin radical domestication of women has lead: any attempt to produce on the part of her heroine results instead in others' attempts to buy *her*, thwarting any chance of material increase on either side. As Jill Heydt-Stevenson has observed, "novels have long been associated with consumer culture and the escalation of a middle-class female readership. Much of the recent work tends to critique [...] female characters' material profligacy" (52), a critical assessment that she complicates significantly with her study on women's both complicit and subversive uses of headdress in Burney's novel. Indeed, it is no secret that novels composed during the rise of European capitalism tended to put the emphasis on women's consumption rather than production, but Burney criticizes this trend by firstly creating a heroine who is destitute and therefore cannot consume, and secondly by demonstrating, through her subsequent attempts to support herself, that even women who need or who wish to work can no longer realistically do so because of the increasingly narrow sphere which they are meant to inhabit. Even though Juliet's "many

accomplishments invited her industry, and promised its success,” bringing them “into use” (146) and earning a living from them proves to be nearly impossible, primarily because of others (but women especially) refusing to recognize the economic value of her labors.

This breakdown in counter-revolutionary economic policy is nowhere more clear than when the heroine attempts to teach harp lessons and discovers that she cannot do so without a kind of *procurer*, whom she finds in the form of the tyrannical Miss Arbe. The disquieting relationship between the two women, in which Arbe capitalizes on Juliet’s talents, pushing her further and further into performances that risk branding her forever as a public woman, begins to resemble more and more the one between a Madame and one of her prostitutes. She first forces Juliet to “look” the part when she says that “this little hole will never do: you must take the drawing room,” though she knows full well that Juliet has not a dime. “And then you must buy immediately, or at least hire, a very fine instrument. [...] You must dress, too, a little... like other people, you know” (223). Brighthelmstone’s musical pimp usurps the money that Aurora Granville loaned the heroine, adds her own and Miss Bydel’s, putting the harp mistress, who is “paid to give pleasure” (320), deeply into debt before she’s even begun to work. And since Juliet earns only “the very moderate price at which Miss Arbe, for the purpose of obliging her own various friends, had fixed her instructions” (233), her handler has essentially ensured that she will never be able to escape this business arrangement, which comes with the added perk of regular “freebies” (harp lessons, or “musical regales,” as Arbe euphemistically calls them) for the Madame.

Once again, anti-Jacobin gender strategies have not resulted in women’s protection and preservation, but rather in their further ostracism as the definition of woman itself has narrowed; the particular suggestion of prostitution, which we have now thrice seen embedded in the novel’s

exchanges, further reinforces Burney's argument that neither women, the nation, nor, in this particular scene, Juliet and Miss Arbe, are able to profit from the bizarre economic enslavement of the second sex. Further purchases are made on Juliet's behalf, a concert is arranged (which Elinor spoils, which means that Juliet owes the attendees the price of their tickets as well), and though all of the money spent is eventually reimbursed when Juliet's fortune is restored at the end of the novel, the simple fact remains that not a single lady in Brighthelmstone ever pays Juliet for the lessons she has given, effectively signaling that women's own notions of acceptable feminine behavior and gendered economics sabotage both themselves and their community by prohibiting the flow of money rather than encouraging it. Indeed, the reasons the women give for refusing to remunerate the harp mistress—that “one should not pay folks who follow such light callings, as one pays people that are useful” (324)—show just how deeply counter-revolutionary doctrines of propriety affect the economic health of society at large, not just women who dare to step outside of prescribed roles.

But it is not only British women and the nation as a whole, Burney argues, who suffer from the ideals that we have been analyzing in this chapter: certain segments of the male population, too, rather than becoming more masculine with the increasingly polarized gender taxonomy, find themselves emasculated when they undertake certain kinds of work. Unlike the noble *feminizing* that Corinne and Delphine attempt to exercise over their heroes, with the goal of freeing them from dogmatic constructs of duty and honor, male artists and performers in *The Wanderer* are shut out of the male totem of financial increase. Indeed, since society places women outside of the economy, any activity that they undertake falls automatically under the rubric of “leisure pursuit,” even if it requires great skill and has the potential to be lucrative (meaning, at the very least, that there is a demand for it). The areas in which women theoretically

excel, thanks to their education—art, music, and dance—consequently are stripped of economic value, even when men perform them. In other words, when women undertake pursuits that have become codified as feminine leisure and therefore as a sign of anti-production, no one is willing to pay for them, even if they have already consumed the product; and when men attempt them, even though they bring pleasure and amusement, they receive the appellation of “lazy dancers, and players, and painters; who think of no one thing but idleness, and outward shew, and diversion” (324) (as the ladies of Brighthelmstone have christened them). Such a description coincides all too well with the conduct book models of femininity that ill prepare women for domestic life and that counter-revolutionary gender discourse lauds, as Mary Wollstonecraft and other feminist writers of the era observed²¹.

Juliet’s essays, however, at working at a greater distance from so-called feminine leisure pursuits further proves the degree to which women’s de facto small sphere sabotages the nation’s own economic growth while in fact increasing interest and fascination with forbidden doctrines, in this case, France, the very source of the alleged threat. In the milliner’s and mantua maker’s shops, Burney tellingly reveals, the newest French fashions, Juliet herself, “one of [the] young ladies just come over from France” (429), and the choice of a ribbon or the set of a cap all “appeared of higher importance [than] *the good of a nation*, the interest of society, the welfare of a family” (426 emphasis mine). Indeed, the doctrines that the author critiques in her final novel have created an economic system that panders to frivolity—itself a French import, “a sign of corrupt foreign taste [that] threatens to disrupt the gender balance” (Perkins 79)—at the expense of the nation’s health, while refusing to acknowledge the economic value of that same “frivolity,” creating, in essence, new categories of slaves: those who produce frivolity without

²¹ She writes in the introduction to her *Vindication on the Rights of Women* that their education “tends to render them vain and helpless, and the unfolding mind is not strengthened by the practice of those duties which dignify the human character. They live only to amuse themselves” (73).

proper remuneration, and those whose “conspicuous consumption” has become an inextricable part of their gender identity. Juliet’s ontological diaspora in the country around Salisbury, in turn, confirms Burney’s thesis by exposing what a small percentage of the British population is truly a part of the nation’s capitalist transformation. Both men and women there “struggle but to eat and sleep, may be saved from solicitude, but cannot be elevated to prosperity (699). The fatal misconstruction of rural happiness that Burney deconstructs through that whole section of the novel brings her economic argument back to the Rights of Man, whose echoes permeate discussions of the value of labor, masculine or feminine. Shut out from both varieties, the Wanderer can do little more than voice her creator’s contempt for “the total absence of feeling and equity, in the dissipated and idle, for the indigent and laborious” (427), a sentence that echoes the very origins of the Revolution itself.

Finally, the fact that the arcs of Juliet’s story are punctuated by the regular loss of her money—first at Dover, then through uncollected payments, and finally at the inn near Fairfield—highlight the ironic failure of anti-Jacobin doctrines of propriety that alienate women from the nation’s means of production. Channeling Edmund Burke’s famous vestimentary analogy analyzed in *Belinda* in Chapter three, Sir Jaspar attributes Juliet’s exasperating and continual misplacement of funds to the over ornamentation of

modern female drapery; which prefers continual inconvenience, innumerable privations, and the most distressing untidiness, to the antique habit of modesty and good housewifery, which, erst left the public display of the human figure to the statuary; deeming that to support the female character was more essential than to exhibit the female form. (762)

Ancient styles of women's habiliments, he argues, see to the body's needs with convenient and practical drapery, rather than to its exhibition potential; by favoring such clothing—and the values associated with it, that is, modesty and good housewifery—a woman and her body will be protected (“supported”) from various kinds of loss and privation, just as, in Burke's analogy, the cultural drapery of time-tested institutions and prejudices will protect the body of the nation from the cultural and economic dislocation of the French Revolution's iconoclastic, exhibitionist principles. But there is a fundamental problem with Sir Jaspar's association: Juliet has not lost the money within the folds of her enormous gowns. She is no Pamela, after all, who stashed a novel's worth of letters in her bottomless skirt pockets and amongst her petticoats. Rather, it is her *workbag* that she has twice lost, and her *work* wages that have been denied. Moreover, the very idea that she would lose her means of living within the folds, essentially, of her own body, is problematic. Indeed, Jaspar's misinterpretation reveals the cultural belief that the woman's body itself is incompatible with work and with money, because, despite the disconnect between Juliet's body, dress, and the actual cause of her lost money, even if the old baronet were able to categorize her dress as “antique,” it is clear that the “tattered old garments” in which she spends much of the novel have in no uncertain terms exposed her to harm rather than protected her. By confounding the simple associations between ancient and modern, self-display and self-concealment, and economic loss and economic, if not gain, stability, at least, Burney condemns the anti-Jacobin romance with a chivalric, hierarchical tradition that, ultimately, has made it more difficult for women to survive by prescribing them doctrines that, rather than “supporting the female character,” compromise it via wide-spread socio-economic exile.

Proper revolutions

Like in Edgeworth's *Belinda*, France and French ideas are ultimately redeemed in Burney's novel, for as Harleigh says confidently of Juliet when he first meets her disguised as a bandaged, penurious Creole on the coast of France, "the whole, the all-together, carries with it an indescribable, but irresistible *vindication*" (30, emphasis mine). The references to Wollstonecraft and later to Burke are no coincidence; the novel is deeply steeped in both the ideology and the feeling of the revolutionary period. Burney scholar Margaret Doody has argued that for a novel set during the Terror there is surprisingly little outward reference to revolutionary dates or executions, and "no King Louis's head haunting the pages" (xiv). And yet, the feeling of terror, as we have seen, positively permeates the *The Wanderer*. Indeed, references to the Revolution's violent machine, the guillotine, abound, such as with the vicious commissary who gets his just deserts, losing his head as the illegitimate "head" of his forced marriage with Juliet, and Juliet herself who, after spending the novel protecting her head under her headdress, finds herself in the power of that same commissary, who "rudely lifts up her bonnet, to examine her face" (726) and "publicly vow[s] that [she] should be made over to the guillotine [...] for an example" (742). Moreover, the rabid francophobes—indeed, xenophobes—such as the libertine Mr. Ireton, the two-faced Selina, the unbending and suspicious Mrs. Howel, the choleric Mrs. Ireton, and the uncharitable overlord Mrs. Maple find themselves positively exiled from the Wanderer's eventual home, as they exiled her from the larger sense of *home* upon her return to her native land. In most of its forms, in short, tyranny is squelched.

In the interstices of these examples revolutionary claustrophobia, however, Burney executes a reassessment of the appellations of *terror* and *tyranny* themselves by resurrecting revolutionary platforms at the same time that she disconnects them from the violent events to

which history has thus far bound them. She instead reassigns them a role in the destiny to which women seem inevitably condemned, through the perpetual markers of her characters' "misreading," from the misconstruction of Juliet's "double face" to the compulsive mispronunciation of Robespierre's name. As "Mr. Robertspiere," "Signor Robespierre," "Mr. Robert Speer," "Mounseer Robert Speer," and simply "Bob Speer," the "demon of an attorney, that now rules the roast in France (257) becomes a parody of himself, much like Juliet's exaggerated "scruples" parody the nation's dramatic overcorrection in its rejection of Robespierre's policies. A jaunty executioner who "mow[s] down his hundreds, like as to grass in a hay-field" (93), Bob Speer is a kind of Punch and Judy distillation of the Terror. Both the manifold names given to the Wanderer and the imprecision of Robespierre's own name in the mouths of local folk demonstrate their own gravely mistaken assessment of terror as a uniquely French phenomenon, and of the doctrines that led to it as irremediably terrifying in themselves.

It is through Elinor Joddrel, a disciple of "that light nation," that Burney crafts her most potent reanimation of revolutionary ideologies—but not for the reason that one might think. Indeed, like Edgeworth, Burney resuscitates Mary Wollstonecraft in the figure of her anti-heroine, but we must ask to what end, since, though the outspoken rebel claims to be Juliet's advocate and shows occasional sympathy for her plight, she actively works against the Wanderer in many ways. For example, it is clear from the first pages that Elinor has grossly misinterpreted Enlightenment and revolutionary philosophies of natural equality. As an advocate of the Rights of Women, she has little sympathy for the actual material sufferings of her fellow sisters: when the boat crew first encounter Juliet on the coast of France, Elinor declines helping this woman in need. Moreover, she is the very one who initially opens the floor for the contemptuous conversation that fixes Juliet as the object of "the vivifying food of conjecture" (12-13) for the

rest of the passage across the Channel and, indeed, the rest of the novel. All too ready to side against the desperate Juliet, the alleged advocate of women's emancipation calls Harleigh's sympathy for her "fine sayings," and immediately agrees with the others that, due to her traveling "so strangely alone [and] so oddly without resource" (30), she is surely female fortune hunter. When she finally consents to help the Wanderer, it is, like many other of Elinor's apparently "revolutionary" undertakings, only to vex her hyper-conservative aunt, Mrs. Maple, or other members of her narrow-minded community that, even "if the whole world were revolutionized, [could never] conceive a new idea" (153).

Even in her own tyrannical attempts to control others, she ironically misreads the revolutionary effect of her own undertakings. When she determines to produce a version of John Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Husband*, for example, she gives various parts in the play to local servants, stewards, and footmen, "for the pleasure of giving a lesson of democracy to Aunt Maple" (70). And yet she is entirely blind to the opportunity of extending democracy by helping Juliet, and instead, and in truly ironic form, forces her, through the tyrannical stranglehold of that same immovable Aunt Maple, to perform the lead part in her "revolutionary" play. At the same time, however she fails to realize that she has in fact cast a revolutionary heroine (both a survivor of the Revolution and its favorite daughter for her iconoclastic refusal of categorization by the dreaded aristocratic imperatives of name, family, and class) in the lead role of her allegedly insurrectionary play. In fact, she is so caught up in her own performance that she does not even observe the degree to which Juliet's talent succeeds in democratically closing the gap between namelessness and innate value with those of the spectators who know how she came to be with Elinor's family.

Elinor's misreading of the revolutionary platforms of *égalité* and *fraternité*, as well as Wollstonecraft's call for a revision in female manners, makes explicit Burney's bold disassociation of French revolutionary ideals and violence. Having mistaken Wollstonecraft's female ideal of autonomy for the reclamation of the right to usurp masculine courtship rituals, Elinor constantly casts herself in her exchanges with Harleigh as the heroine subject to love's tyranny in a sentimental novel. Indeed, her determination to "speak and act, as well as think and feel for myself!" (154) merely succumbs to the powerful sway of other received ideas, and instead involves falling into the most threadbare platitudes of heterosexual love rituals; Harleigh, who is critical of Elinor's actions because of their association with French revolutionary ideals, should look to her reading instead: "Elinor gently sunk upon her chair," after exhausting her frame in passionate declarations, "yet let him full possession of her hand" (175-6). Her letter to him offers Burney's most powerful reassignment of terror to the same chivalric sexual roles analyzed above, rather than to the ideologies embodied in the French threat. In it, Elinor abandons the principles of individual liberty that she previously lauded, all for a love that she believes liberates merely because she has the courage to declare it: "To you, my free soul, my liberated mind, my new-born ideas, all yield, willing *slaves*, to what I conceive to be your counsel. [...] How *sovereign* is your power! More absolute than the *tyranny* of the controlling world; more arbitrary than prescription; more invincible than the *prejudices* of the ages!—You, I cannot resist!" (190 emphasis mine). Love has essentially resurrected all of the forces that the Revolution itself fought to destroy, and which Elinor herself claims to abhor. Her choice of romantic hallucination over reason, then, reveals the fact that the real tyranny here, the one to which she falls prey, is the narrow sphere of existence that is available to women in the wake of anti-Jacobin radical domestication. The French commissary, in contrast, the one tangible

representative of the Revolution itself and of its violence, does not terrorize via what Britains would have been able to label as Jacobin ideals, but rather out of pure avarice: he forces Juliet to marry him in order to secure the 6000£ that her uncle has promised to her future husband; and Burney has already amply displayed her skepticism of the popular view of capitalist growth as nationalistic proof that Britain promotes neither tyranny nor terror of its own. Finally, though we cannot know for sure whether or not Burney read de Staël's novels, the Revolutionary Heroine, an evolving construct in the political, social, and literary ripples of meaning that followed the Revolution, has spurred an evolution in female characters in general that offers a definitive answer to Corinne and Delphine: that Elinor survives her suicide attempts and "moderate[s] her passions," while "her eccentricities [...] ceas[e] to absorb her whole being" (873) confirms for women at large that unrequited love is not really worth dying for in the first place. Burney's anti-heroine, despite her initial misreadings, ultimately draws a more apt conclusion from Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* than either de Staëlien heroine was able to do.

The answer, then, to the question of Burney's goal in presenting a Wollstonecraftian figure with, however, highly ambiguous implications and what appear to be a host of mixed messages lies in the fact that while Elinor is unorthodox, she is not really a threat, and, therefore, neither is the nation whose ideologies she so imperfectly represents. Similar to Edgeworth's anti-heroine, Harriet Freke, Elinor's her perpetual misreading both of Rights of Man doctrines and of the novels that have filled her mind with romantic shibboleths consistently neutralize any actual social disruption or hierarchical overturn that she might have caused. Like Freke's provocative stunts, Elinor's self-serving displays present a portrait of Britain's collective fears of the Wollstonecraftian figure rather than of the ideas contained in her writings or of the feminist herself.

And similar to Edgeworth's valorization of Belinda, Burney deflects Wollstonecraft's philosophical agency onto her Revolutionary Heroine who, as we have seen, forces similar feminist conclusions about the ruse of feminine delicacy as a set of behaviors meant to protect women that in fact weaken and expose them to harm, and which has far deeper political significance than the mere question of women's behavior or role inside and outside of the home. Indeed, it is Juliet, not her outspoken foil, who truly defies convention, taking genuine risks in the name of her sex. For despite her gender and her high birth, she works and receives money, she attempts to live independently, and, alienated from the mainstream existence that she observes around her, she purposefully withdraws from society in the same manner that male wanderers before her have done, which makes her actions vastly more subversive than Elinor's because of the deep challenges that they pose to men's economic, political, and literary hegemony. Moreover, like Revolutionary Heroines before and after her, she too, through her diaspora and exile, saves the life of a man, her guardian the bishop, and her language of noble self-sacrifice is utterly categorical on this point: "No hardships of adversity [...] nor even any temptation to happiness [...] no consideration that this world can offer" could possibly tempt her to abandon her promise to preserve her guardian at all costs. While Elinor makes no real sacrifice for her principles, offering instead farcical expositions and empty gestures of romantic formulae calculated to illicit pity and eventually love, Juliet lowers herself to the level of the poorest and the most despicable in society, even making an attempt at genuine vagabondage, in order to remain faithful to her ideal of honesty, integrity, and propriety, thereby exposing the paradoxes within counter-revolutionary expectations of feminine conduct and gendered economics. Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, Juliet refuses love as a refuge, thereby thwarting the trap of tyranny and terror in which Elinor found herself caught, that, as Pam Perkins has argued,

“women might be strong, rich, and intelligent, but they still will risk all for love” (70). Juliet, in what is surely the greatest coup executed in the name of her silence and her scrupulosity, turns this paradigm on its head. Surrounded by admirable men who offer to save her honorably by taking on her burdens through matrimony, Juliet never once considers love as an escape from her torments, even though her own virtuous arguments on the sanctity of marriage “were insufficient to convince her that her [forced] marriage was valid” (845). Indeed, she entirely avoids the centuries-old assumption that the feminine body exists solely for and by male adoration by being consistently (and realistically, thankfully) unconcerned about holding the interest of potentially acceptable suitors while on the lam.

And yet, Burney’s anti-heroine is a much fuller character than Harriet Freke, and unlike Edgeworth’s boorish “man-woman,” Elinor’s Rights of Man speeches include “a striking degree of rigor, coherence, and theoretically enlightened optimism” (Mack 44); we must remember, not a single voice in the novel attempts to confute the logic or objective justice of her propos, even if the characters are critical of the actions she takes on their behalf. Burney’s intent then, is different than Edgeworth’s: while *Belinda* neutralizes Freke and nearly the entirety of her irrational and unsupported discourse, in *The Wanderer*, Elinor’s viable speeches serve to articulate Juliet’s experience in the political language that the narrative denies the heroine because, as Victoria Kortes Papp has observed, “Had [Juliet] been outspoken, she would not have been a very viable heroine, her delicacy being too deeply valued by all” (103),²² the 1814 reader

²² And indeed, how could Burney have done otherwise? If Juliet had a criminal interior to match her duplicitous exterior, or an angelic exterior that mirrored her exemplary interior, if she had, moreover, no secrets, no contingencies, nothing to cause those around her to question her worth, how could the author possibly expose the paradox of propriety, a doctrine entirely based on binary dictates? As Jill Heydt-Stevenson has indicated, “the only identity that exists for any woman who lives outside the context of family and marital security,” such as Juliet clearly does at the start of the novel, “is that of the criminal adventurer or prostitute” (59). As such, Juliet would have met with a criminal’s or a prostitute’s fate, while as a model of womanhood, the heroine may have had Romanesque struggles and trials, but without misconception of her virtue, no one would ever have questioned her value as a woman. Indeed, presenting the paradox of propriety

included. By disconnecting Elinor's speeches from her actions, of which the anti-heroine's blatant inability to live by her own precepts is powerful proof, Burney successfully defuses Elinor's "revolutionary" threat by eventually reigning in the character while still valorizing the ideologies that she preaches, and leaving the Rights of Man (and Woman) discourse perfectly intact for her readers to absorb. Indeed, we can scarcely say that the novel makes no political statement through Elinor, or through any other character, for in the totality of the words and deeds therein, a harsh portrait of the author's native land emerges, one that calls for reform on many levels. And though Burney lived quietly, she was fiercely protective of her work and of the ideas contained therein. When preparing revisions for a new edition of *The Wanderer* which was ultimately never published, the author refused to attenuate the radicalism contained in Elinor's speeches, which she called "of deep interest [...], on the whole excellent [...], altogether the best" (qtd in Mack 45); despite major amputations and rewrites to the rest of the novel, she left almost the entirety of Elinor's passage therein untouched.

However, Elinor's misreading of equality and fraternity is meant to parallel the nation's own erroneous belief that tyranny is necessarily a French phenomenon, one that could contaminate British liberty. The author echoes Maria Edgeworth's conclusions on this matter, that, quite simply, French ideas are no more dangerous than British ones, and that the categorical condemnation of foreign philosophies only causes domestic politics to veer dangerously into extremism, as Burney displays both with Juliet's ironic self-mummification in the name of propriety and Elinor's madness in the name of "revolutionary" love. Indeed, Burney's Revolutionary heroine has made great strides in fusing the feminist and cosmopolitan doctrines that we have seen so far in *Corinne*, *Delphine*, and *Belinda*. I agree with Scott J Juengal, that

with its own paradox—a woman who appears depraved but who is actually a paragon of innocence—is the only way to short-circuit the anti-Jacobin dogma of delicacy. Putting Elinor's revolutionary speeches in Juliet's mouth would have entirely undermined Burney's quest in writing *The Wanderer*.

“there is something of a Kantian novel tucked within the sprawling narrative of Burney’s *The Wanderer*” (66). The infuriating portraits of xenophobes—parodies of anti-Jacobin literary patriots—who take such pleasure in their *terrifying* attempts to short-circuit Juliet’s alterity, find a peaceful resolution in the scene where the Admiral discovers his friendship for the French bishop, a startling surprise for a man whose “creed is to look upon your nation as little better than a cluster of rogues” (858). Upon being reunited with his charge and striking up a friendship with the old sea captain, the Bishop exults in “Thanksgiving [...], thanksgiving and prayers for “UNIVERSAL PEACE” (857), seemingly a call for the *universal hospitality* and *perpetual peace* that Kant espoused in his political writings and that were so fundamental to the growth of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion

The author’s frequent allusions to the dueling representatives of French revolutionary debate—Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft—reveals that, for her, the conversation is not over; indeed, using the hyperbole of Juliet’s femininity, the complex responses that it provokes, and the novel-wide misconstruction of much of French revolutionary ideologies, Burney resurrects Enlightenment issues of class and gender equality and demonstrates that they are more relevant than ever, even if the 1814 British population is unwilling to return to 1790s political concerns. Patricia Meyer Spacks reads the constant tug of war between Juliet’s stubborn silence and flight and the other characters’ pertinacious interrogatories and pursuits as Burney’s claim for “the urgency for women of preserving some intact inner realm as a vital preliminary to any sense of control or autonomy” (526). While I agree that this is true, I also see the juxtaposition of these acts as a comparison that the author courageously draws between social politics in her

native country and the two back-to-back periods of despotism that shook its neighbor across the Channel. The military dictatorship under which Burney lived in France for ten years and the revolutionary period which she observed closely with her French husband Alexandre d'Arblay shared the quality of state intervention into citizens' private lives taken to the extreme. Both included bloody suppression of dissension and secret or mock trials and executions. And, of course, we mustn't forget the infamous *lettres de cachet* from the Ancien Régime through the early 1790s that had characterized France as a bastion of tyranny before the Revolution even began. But life is scarcely better in Britain, Burney demonstrates, for someone who does not in every way conform to upper class social convention. When Mrs. Howel, after imprisoning Juliet in Arundel castle, assures her that "You will be properly watched" (571), and when Lord Denmeath later promises that if the Wanderer does not return to France willingly, "You may else make the voyage less pleasantly!" (616), the threats that the heroine faced in Revolutionary France no longer seem extraordinary, nor foreign, and Britain begins to resemble the near-fascist state from which it worked so hard throughout the 1790s to differentiate itself. In effect, the men and women of Brighthelmstone who hunt her, and who offer the reader "portrait[s] of English insularity and meanness [distilled to] near pathological intensity" (Mack 22), cling so compulsively to their narrow vision of Britishness that they become indisputable proof that England's insular breed of anti-Jacobin nationalism is, at bottom, not so different from Robespierre's hyperpatriotic suppression of political alterity, nor from Napoleon's own jingoistic nation building campaigns.

Peppered throughout the novel, however, and within the interstices of the Revolutionary Heroine's "excess of timidity" (776), are moments when she steps outside of her ironic role to reclaim the liberty that her performances reveal as otherwise inaccessible to women, such as

when she forcefully recovers her right to subjecthood from Mrs. Ireton after months of degrading and dehumanizing working conditions: “Who told you to go?” Ireton screeches when she begins to leave: “A person, Madam, who has not the honor to be known to you,--myself!” (526). It is telling that when she finally determines to quit Mrs. Ireton because of her abuse, it is to her own power as a subject that she assigns the task of liberating her nameless body in a supreme act of radical, subjective privacy, the very state of being that anti-Jacobin discourse feared because it promulgated “a notion of exquisite individual sensibility which, although called into play by the outside world, was essentially self-authorizing rather than produced through subjection to any social structure” (Watson 24). Such a moment in the novel offers more explicit proof of Burney’s identification of the Revolution as a source of civil rationality, despite the fact that it spiraled into epic bloodshed and civil war. Through Juliet’s friend Gabriella she links it to the potential for change in the way that the upper classes evaluate goods and services—including women themselves—and in the way they view the work done by their supposed inferiors: “The French Revolution has opened our eyes,” Gabriella explains to Jaspar Harrington, “to a species of equality more rational, because more feasible, than that of lands or of rank; an equality not alone of mental sufferings, but of manual exertions” (639). Harleigh makes a surprising and similar justification of the Revolution when he attempts to convince the Admiral and Lord Melbury that, despite the bloody outcome, beneficent reformatations have also resulted, and have been responsible, in part, for creating the woman that they have all come to love: Juliet. “[Its] observant and suffering witnesses, have been formed by it to fortitude, prudence, and philosophy; it has taught them to strengthen the mind with the body; it has animated the exercise of reason, the exertion of the faculties, activity in labor, resignation in endurance, and cheerfulness under every privation” (870). These summaries have little to do with the “dreadful

synthesis of assaults on queens, killings of kings, of priests hanging from lamp-posts, streets deluged in blood, and of cannibalism, incest, and unrestrained sexual license” (Grenby 7) into which anti-Jacobin portraits of revolution—which still had heavy circulation and mighty influence in Britain well into the 1800s—had cohered. Indeed, that Juliet’s own half-brother Lord Melbury propositions her early in the novel only further proves the irrationality of such portraits as well as the deliberate blindness of the extremist nationalism that they obscure.

What is left, then, in addition to the kaleidoscope-pastiche of radical rumblings, is a vaguely disturbing reminiscence of Juliet’s experiences of persecution and constraint, two substantives that, because the novel takes place on British soil, make the appellation of anti-Jacobin impossible to assign here. The private, domestic femininity that anti-Jacobin texts laud is forbidden to Burney’s heroine, and what she witnesses of domesticity during her passage through both aristocratic homes and those on the periphery of society is enough to convince anyone of the failure of family reform in Britain. Though her eventual marriage to Harleigh reinserts her into the socio-sexual hierarchy, she and her husband leave England precipitously for the dreaded revolutionary France, where they spend the next few years before the birth of their first child. We can only assume that, given her dual nationalities and languages and her many ties to the land of England’s sworn enemy, that Juliette and her family will continue their intimate congress with France, thus subverting anti-Jacobin nationalist agendas and fictions of national relations.

In conclusion, then, while some feminist scholars discount Burney for what they see as her criticism of women at every level of the novel, I have argued that the root of the problem lies, in each case, in the exigencies of an increasingly patriarchal society that was closing them further and further into the hermetically sealed domestic realm in order to fend off the attack on “Christianity, and natural religion, [on] monarchy, [on] order, subordination, property and

justice” (Robert Bisset qtd in Grenby 8) that their revolutionary liberation from the natural yokes of their sex appeared to represent. As I have shown, Burney condemns this reality with the ironic and sometimes hyperbolic displays of her heroine’s propriety. In other words, her portrait is not an example of prescriptive mimesis, as Claudia Johnson reads it, but satirical mimesis which, through its subversive irony, becomes reformatory. Perhaps the most disruptive sentence in the novel, the secret thesis with which Burney declares the paradox inherent to the conception of woman, is spoken by Elinor: “This Woman, whom they estimate thus below, they elevate above themselves. They require from her, in defiance of their examples!—in defiance of their lures!—angelical perfection. [...] She must always be guided by reason, though they deny her understanding!” (399-400). In it, the author challenges not only the double standard both of reason and of sexual purity for women, but also the impossible juxtaposition of femininity and divinity in the increasingly influential portrait of the Angel in the House. In the privacy of their radical subjecthood, both Juliet and Burney ultimately denounce obligatory duplicity and dissimulation, dependency, weakness, selfishness, submission and ornamentality for women, while freeing rationalism, reason, equality, and democracy from the tainted grip of French revolutionary doctrines.

Chapter V

“Ni un homme, ni une femme”: Nanon and the women’s Revolution

George Sand’s *Nanon* may seem an unusual choice for a study that, so far, has focused on turn-of-the-century novels of the French Revolution because, while the narrative unfolds during the Terror, Sand wrote the book in 1871, nearly one hundred years after the storming of the Bastille. And yet, it is the ideal way to close this discussion of feminism and femininity, citizenship, and nationalism for the very reason that makes it seem out of synch with the other novels analyzed here: Sand’s generation had the privilege of being close enough to the 1789 revolution to be keenly aware of its ideals, accomplishments, and shortcomings, and yet was young enough to witness the full scope of the revolutionary struggle as France stumbled into modern statehood through successive uprisings in 1830, 1848, and 1871. The last of those conflicts, the Paris Commune, had a profound influence on the composition of *Nanon*, and encouraged the drafting of this, her most pacifistic novel. With nearly a century’s perspective, then, on the quest for *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, Sand is able to undertake a powerful rewriting of the story of 1789, demonstrating that one of the primary failings of each revolutionary manifestation was the continued systematic neglect of women’s education and the institutionalized underestimation of their potential as citizens. In so doing, she returns time and time again to the same arguments put forth by de Staël, Edgeworth, and Burney, analyzed in the three previous chapters, which aim to deconstruct pre- and post-revolutionary conceptions of woman, gender, and citizenship and their relationship to the nation. In each case, however, both Sand’s historical perspective and her particular literary approach allow her to reconcile the true revolutionary turn of events (bloodshed and increased oppression) with a successful playing out of pro-women theses through the miraculous local successes that Nanon and her friends

experience. Indeed, the novel answers and neutralizes every concern that authors in the previous chapters have voiced, realizing every hope for female betterment, gender equality, and education, despite the chaos and violence of the Terror that surround the characters.

As one of Sand's lesser-known and lesser-read novels, *Nanon* has not received the scholarly attention of classics such as *Indiana* or *Consuelo*. However, those that have treated the novel have tended to congregate around a fairly consistent series of themes: universal citizenship and the confounding of social hierarchy, economic growth based on non-collectivist agrarian reform, woman as a source of social regeneration after the disorientation of the Revolution, and the valorization of women's alternative forms of knowledge, primarily visual, topographical, and geographical. My arguments will necessarily take a slightly different direction since I will be reading these same themes, as well as others, through the lens of the Revolutionary Heroine. But my analysis will also differ in significant ways: Nicole Savy treats the question of citizenship, for example, but argues that the heroine seeks it in order to make herself an eligible marriage partner for Émilien. In my reading, however, Nanon's awakening to civic awareness long precedes her awareness of love—in fact, it is dependent upon her initial indifference to romantic love. Moreover, while many critics such as Nancy Rogers, Simone Bernard-Griffiths, and Françoise Massardier-Kennedy have highlighted the heroine's atypical femininity in her economic and academic pursuits, none has studied them explicitly in the context of the long eighteenth-century's prescriptions for women's roles and domesticity, nor, moreover, in relation to how those long-standing assumptions about women's capacities and duties played out in revolutionary iconography, which *Nanon*, I will argue, purposefully counters. Claire Lise-Tondeur, in turn, has called Nanon an avatar of Rousseau's Julie because of her virtue, her 'honnêteté intransigeante et [a]ltruisme généreux' (45) an understandable comparison, since

Sand's novel attempts to bridge the gap between the Revolution's philosophical jumping off point with the first stirrings of the Rights of Man discourse—of which Julie, like other women in literature, was unable to benefit significantly—and its bloody final destination, the Terror. However I disagree with Tondeur's comparison in that, unlike Julie, Nanon commits no great transgression that must be overcome, and while she creates and inhabits various forms of the paradisiacal domesticity of Julie's and Wolmar's Clarens, she carries no seed of rebellion in her breast as Rousseau's heroine does with her continued love for St. Preux. The only transgression that could possibly be attributed to her is the same assumption detailed above of so-called "masculine" skills, which lead her to become "ni une femme ni un homme" (272) but rather a happy amalgam of the two; however, the novel completely valorizes this androgyny that in pre-revolutionary times Rousseau might have condemned according to his assessment of masculine women in *Emile*, that she is "worth more as a woman, but less as a man; [...] wherever she attempts to usurp ou[r] [rights] she remains inferior to us" (262). However, Sand's Revolutionary Heroine proves her superiority in everything that she undertakes, and her story of "une mutation économique spectaculaire orchestrée par une femme" (Mozet 75) both concretizes the development of Wollstonecraft's *manly virtues*²³ in women as well as proves the absolute necessity of less strictly delineated gendered spheres for the reformation at the national level that Nanon inspires and coordinates at the domestic level. As the novel's capitalist and philanthropic vigilante, then, Sand's Revolutionary Heroine necessarily counters the portrait of femininity that the domesticating discourse prescribed, and which has been at stake in the three previous chapters. Contrasted with her foil, Louise de Franqueville, who is "une vraie femme, avec toutes les séductions et toutes les fantaisies de la faiblesse" (272), Nanon rejects the passivity, duplicity,

²³ Her manly virtues are "those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennoble the human character, and which raises females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind" (Wollstonecraft 72)

and frivolity characteristic of other fictional women. Finally, though Tondeur has argued that Sand “remet en question les modèles romanesques féminins qui se trouve dans les romans historiques, rustiques, ou les récits d’aventure, trois genres auxquels appartient ce roman” (50), I will argue that the very real revolutions that Nanon brings about in those around her allow her to become a vehicle for Sand’s rewrite of the Bildungsroman genre, which the author considers in the scope of the nation’s own coming-of-age-story as it emerged from the failed Revolution. Reimagining a version of the Revolution that could have succeeded if it had been able to avoid violence and sought the source of its regeneration both in its own past and in the neglected half of its citizenry, *Nanon* poses women, as we will see, as the only beings capable, because of their innate gifts of pity, sensibility à la Delphine, as well as their capacity for production of all kinds, of bringing prosperity to the family and the nation.

The development of the Revolutionary Heroine who is able to spearhead this non-violent revision hangs upon several unorthodox events that presage her refusal of violence and her keen economic insight, both of which are key to the success of her mission. To start, when her uncle first has it in his mind to encourage her independence, he sits her on his knee and gives her “une bonne claque sur la joue” (3) before beginning his speech on responsibility. That a young girl’s life in this era would be punctuated by violence is a surprise neither to the modern-day nor to the nineteenth-century reader, but Sand transforms this fact of life, which her uncle carries out “pour votre bien” (3) into the catalyst for Nanon’s entrance into self-awareness and the origin of her agency: it is after this wake-up slap that he explains his plan to buy her a sheep, the grain of her eventual “fortune assez considerable [...] dont elle se plaisait à dire qu’elle [...] avait commencée avec un [seul] mouton” (352). In so doing, her uncle perpetrates the notion that woman must accept what seem like inevitable acts of violence against her; Nanon, however,

rather than succumb\ing to this display of force rechannels it into the author's quest to "redo the Terror," by instead transforming violence into the material production that Rosette will spur and the philanthropy that she will practice with the fruits, an act that will eventually thwart exterior violence, as Delphine also demonstrated. Nanon will soon after adapt this theory to Émilien in matters of abuse between social classes, and together they will symbolize pacifism at the national level. Nanon's refusal to accept violence as a function of a necessary feminine subjugation—and later class subjugation—further parallels Sand's denial of love-potential as what qualifies a woman first and foremost as such, because it is not when Nanon meets her future husband Émilien, but rather when she receives her first piece of property and her first responsibility of "maternité" (8)—the sheep Rosette—that "je sentis que j'étais quelqu'un. Je distinguais ma personne de celle des autres" (8), thereby promoting economic awareness and the capacity to care for the helpless as an alternative to the ability to arouse desire for the basis of a woman's identity. And like any other ideal Republican mother, the model that she proposes for social reform, of which her stewardship and cultivation of Rosette is a mere microcosm, rests not on violence toward others to achieve one's goals, but violence to one's self for the good of others: "je me mis les mains en sang dans les épines," she says of her ardent search for feed for Rosette, "mais je ne sentais rien et je n'avais peur de rien" (7). Her devotion to this creature that represents her identity, her self-awareness, and her subsequent ability as a woman to love and to sacrifice while still being deeply immersed in the machinery of capitalism, gives birth to the guiding principle of her life, one that Sand wishes to see realized at all levels of society:

Si vous le faites bien manger, si vous ne le perdez pas, si vous tenez bien sa
bergerie, il deviendra beau, et, avec l'argent qu'il me revaudra l'an qui vient, je
vous en achèterai deux, et l'année suivante, quatre; alors vous commencerez à être

fière de marcher de pair avec les autres jeunesses qui ont de la raison et qui font du profit à leur famille (3).

Nanon's uncle's directions to her about caring for her property stand in as an analogy that the novel advocates for the value of work and education in elevating society at large: a person, a family, or a nation can profit from the same regime of care and cultivation, can "devenir beau" and walk proudly in equality with others. Indeed, Sand takes purposeful steps away from the brewing Marxist sentiments in 1871 France,²⁴ away from collectivism, back to the equal access to private property that the ideals of the Revolution itself seemed to promote with the sale of church and noble properties beginning in 1791. Of course, we see the gap between reality and ideal insofar as this liquidation in fact served to fill the nation's empty coffers, while few peasants could raise the money to acquire these properties; the sale did not, therefore, lead to the emancipation from class hierarchy that was expected. Indeed, in the novel it is the bourgeois Costejoux who initially purchases the most significant piece of property in the Valcreux, the moutier. As Sand's rewrite of the revolution continues, however, the peasants band together to buy a single piece of property for Nanon to govern: this, together with Rosette, becomes the financial foundation that allows her later to buy the moutier from Costejoux. Sand's Revolutionary Heroine, with her blossoming education and financial savvy, eventually demonstrates that agrarian reform rather than either collectivism or monarchism could spur on the establishment of true civic equality, according to which, the fruit of one's work and good deeds is a greater social leveler than one's birth or wealth. Following this pattern, Nanon's thirst

²⁴ The 1871 Paris Commune prompted a reevaluation of the various branches of collectivist reform that had been coalescing over the previous decades, from Saint-simonion socialism to Marxism. Despairing of the bourgeoisie or the working class ever being able to lead genuine, nation-wide reforms, Sand was convinced only the agrarian class—"la France matérielle, invincible"—in possession of "propriété achetée et non reçue" (Mozet 46) is capable of revitalizing the nation. For the author, the collectivism of Marxism undermines the necessary education and responsibility that comes from true proprietorship.

for education grows as the novel progresses, and her concomitant skills and knowledge, ability to teach and help others, and economic and agricultural successes all become the criteria that set her apart from other men and women, who ultimately declare her to be “une personne supérieure” (324).

Since education is the primary means that this Revolutionary Heroine uses to elevate herself from poverty and peasantry to wealth and citizenship, and since she is, at the start of the novel, living in the basest degree of poverty, the realization of this transformation at the level of the nation, the novel illustrates, requires a necessary collaboration between rich and poor, of which Nanon and Émilien’s symbiotic relationship is symbolic, and which the Revolution itself failed to realize. Though he is of noble birth, because he is the youngest child with no right to the family fortune, his parents have abandoned him to a monastery. His class, however, gives him access to materials that Nanon could never acquire, but which he scorns and refuses out of frustration and disdain for his situation: “À quoi cela me servirait-il? Je ne dois jamais rien avoir!” (35), he insists. Because of his impending monastic vows, he has determined “[de ne pas] me donner mal pour des bien périssables” (19). But Nanon understands the word “avoir” differently, more as a potentially rich state of being than a potentially rich way of possessing: “C’est une honte que de rester simple quand on peut devenir savant” she chides him. “Moi, si j’avais le moyen, je voudrais tout apprendre” (35). She presses Émilien to share his “moyens,” and he begins to teach her the little that he knows, his own knowledge increasing as he does so. This remonstrance acts as the slap in the face—the pacifistic alternative to violence that the Revolutionary Heroine champions—that wakes him from his own stupor: from that day forward, he too devotes himself to study and self-improvement. As Émilien benefits from teaching Nanon and beginning his own studies, he experiences a similar awakening and initiation into self-

awareness: “Il me semble que je commence à exister,” he tells her. “Et quand je veux parler, je viens à bout maintenant de dire quelque chose: c’est que j’ai quelque chose dans la tête. Je ne sais pas encore ce que c’est, mais mon cœur me dit que ce sera quelque chose de bon et d’humain” (69-70). Nanon’s consciousness, too, has evolved from simple self-awareness to a complex understanding of her place in society, of the duties that accompany it, and of her potential. She sees that she is part of a larger whole to which she has some responsibility, and which prompts her philanthropy: “Elle a beaucoup d’esprit et elle apprend vite et bien tout ce qu’elle peut apprendre,” Émilien says of her at La Fête de la Fédération. “Ce qu’elle sait, elle ne le garde pas pour elle, elle est pressée de l’enseigner [...], elle donne autant de soins aux plus pauvres qu’aux plus riches” (63). Indeed, after her very first lesson with Émilien, in which she learns the alphabet, Nanon prophetically declares: “L’envie de savoir me mena très-loin” (47), foreshadowing for the reader not only the breadth of knowledge that she will acquire, but also the travels that she will undertake, which will expose her to new ideas and new ways of living, but also to dangerous people and parts of the landscape, even leading her to the foot of the guillotine.

If there is a temptation to which Nanon falls prey (as an avatar of Julie, as Tondeur has suggested), it is the reading of “forbidden” books as part of her self-education, specifically *Histoire des Hommes*, “un ouvrage nouveau en ce temps-là” that the monks forbid Émilien from reading but which he and Nanon study together. This handbook of revolutionary justification “ne cachait pas la vérité sur les superstitions et les injustices de ce monde” (114). Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the couple acquires knowledge of socio-political good and evil upon tasting this forbidden fruit, becoming keenly aware of the inequity and intolerance that exist outside of their small community and that has driven the history of the world thus far. However,

rather than banishment and divine disenfranchisement,²⁵ their transgression provokes “un tas d’idées [...] à propos de tout” (115) and marks, tellingly, the break between parts one and two of the novel, a moment of transition at which Nanon, because of her quest for knowledge and the empirical economic experiments that she has tested, realizes that “je n’étais plus paysanne que par l’habit et the travail” (115). Her transformation—the fruit of the knowledge that she could never have acquired without Émilien (and vice versa)—proves Sand’s thesis that the necessary collaboration between classes and genders, such as the union of his aristocratic resources and her peasant work ethic, is the key to progression. Indeed, the various arts in which the hero and heroine instruct one another, and which they always find occasion to draw upon to increase their domestic and economic production, frequently save them from the multitude of threats that the era places before them. Their practice, in turn, sees wider play in the novel as a whole as Nanon (a peasant), Émilien (an aristocrat), the lawyer Costejoux (a bourgeois) and Dumont (of the servant class) together pool their skills, money, and savoir-faire in order to cultivate prosperity.

Both Nanon’s and Émilien’s trajectories—in education and in love—illustrate Sand’s desire to reshape the classic *bildungsroman*, thereby proposing feminine/feminist alternatives to this classic genre and creating a literary vehicle capable of containing politics, love, adventure, history, and economics with a woman at its head. Thus, although Émilien, like other *bildungs* heroes, increases in wisdom and intellect throughout the novel, in Sand’s feminist rethinking of the genre, he actually chooses to move *down* the social scale, and ultimately renounces his nobility, an act that is made possible exclusively by Nanon’s catalytic influence over him. That a

²⁵ This, for me, is the problem with Tondeur’s comparison: if we can consider Nanon’s reading, education, and “masculine” pursuits as a giving into temptation as Julie did, such transgressions elevate her to the status of heroine and gain her a noble title, as well as the admiration of nearly every other character in the novel. While Julie is not “punished” in the traditional sense for her carnal sin, she is instead “banished” from love as Eve was banished from the garden. She cultivates the desert of Clarens and causes it to fructify, but always carries the paradisiacal vision of St. Preux with her.

woman's actions and influence spur him to renounce his superior position in the social hierarchy in his journey from *noble* to *Français* fulfills the political ideals of 1789 while running counter to expectations of male dominance in marriage. That is, in previous literary models, men married socially inferior women, whom they elevated to their own status; or, if not, they, at the very least, did not suffer for their choice. In Sand's version, however, the upper echelon of social worth is utterly valueless compared to the ability to enjoy the fruits of one's mind and body that comes with an honest agrarian existence and that reflects the couple's eventual citizen's imperative: "la sobriété, le travail des bras et l'honnêteté ne suffisent pas pour assurer l'indépendance, sans l'épargne qui permet la réflexion, le travail de l'esprit, l'usage de l'intelligence" (337). By "épargne," Émilien is referring to the stores of character that only education and reflection can provide; it is no mistake, however, that this resource is couched in financial terms, as Sand continues to associate personal amelioration with regional and national growth.

The classic *bildungsroman* plot "entails the submission of human beings to the influence of [...] the outside world on their growth" (Summerfield and Downward 2), which often manifests itself as a reconciliation of private desires and social expectations. That Émilien, as a noble, is initially prepared to "m'engager comme soldat" (88) to support the aristocratic cause when civil war breaks out is therefore not surprising. However, there are several factors at work that complicate the very idea of private versus public expectations in the novel, which Sand uses to displace *bildung* resolution from society at large to individual integrity. For one, since Émilien was pawned off on country folk at a young age, "pour l'empêcher de prétendre au premier rang" (27) that belonged to his older brother, he has little connection to his mother and father, whom "[il] ne connaî[t] presque pas" (18). Bound to the duties of his class more by convention than by love, then, Émilien's situation evokes that of other heroes that we have seen in this study, such as

Léonce and Oswald, who struggle to reconcile duties of the heart with duties of rank and class. Moreover, abandoned as he was, he grew up amongst peasants, is “un paysan plus qu’un monsieur” (26), having spent his early years poaching birds and rabbits on his own family’s land and learning to climb trees and to work like a common laborer. Furthermore, at the outset of the Revolution, the nation was entirely polarized, and one’s social class was not necessarily the determining factor of one’s political views. Such is the case with Nanon’s great-uncle who, poor and dependent as he is, condemns the uprising for the utter lawlessness that it will provoke: “Mes enfants, cette chose-là, c’est la fin des fins. Quand on n’a plus de maîtres, on ne peut plus vivre” (52). Others in the same position, however, are overjoyed to have “une seule et même loi pour toute la France” (58) and to become “maîtres de ces épis, de ces fruits, de ces animaux, de tous ces produits de la terre” (61) that they formerly cultivated in “esclavage” (61), without ownership of the means or their fruits. What’s more, as the novel advances, Émilien becomes aware of the corruption and sloth of the monks, with whom he is supposed to spend his life, as well as “leur mauvaise volonté pour le bonheur de ces pauvres dont ils se disent les pères et les tuteurs” (69). To which class, therefore, Émilien actually owes loyalty is entirely unclear, and which political discourse, in turn, he is supposed to heed, which courant of thought represents the “social expectations” that apply to his situation, has become entirely confounded. In this manner, Sand displaces *bildung* action from the growth and maturity that comes from self-sacrifice in reconciliation with powerful social discourses to the transformation that arises from the eventual rapprochement of individual desire and one’s contrasting individual potential. Spurred on by Nanon’s remonstrance, her shock that, with such resources at his disposal, he would choose to be a “fainéant,” Émilien has “résolu de me changer moi-même [...]. J’ai travaillé, oui, petite j’ai beaucoup appris tout seul” (69). When the crucial moment arrives in which he must decide to

which cause he has responsibility, he ultimately seeks the one that will best foster accord between his own desires and his developing self-awareness. When he finally hears from his father, who has been silent since Émilien entered the monastery years before, the letter is addressed not to the son but to the father's paymaster, with orders that Émilien join him in the emigrant army. The Marquis de Franqueville warns that if his son refuses to obey, "déclarez-lui que je l'abandonne et ne le considère plus comme étant de la famille" (125). As a footnote to his own already evident insensitivity, he closes the letter by casually mentioning the death of Émilien's mother.

The utter lack of paternal tenderness from a figure who "ne le jugeait pas digne de recevoir une lettre de lui" (125), and who sends such vital information through M. Prémel his paymaster, as though his son were simply paid help, seals Émilien's departure from the class to which he was born:

Qu'[il] m'abandonne donc! [...] Avec quelque peu de tendresse, j'aurais tout sacrifié, non pas ma conscience, mais mon honneur et ma vie; [j'étais] résolu, le cas échéant, à courir me jeter sur les baïonnettes française [...] les bras et les yeux levés vers le ciel témoin de mon innocence. (127)

In effect, fighting for his family's cause—which M. Prémel wholly predicts that he will do, and which other aristocrats might legitimately expect from him—rather than departure from his father's wishes has come to represent a sacrifice of honor. In Sand's complex exploration of the *bildung* genre, then, honor (duty of sex and rank) has taken second place to conscience (duty to self, to one's own integrity), a responsibility of which he becomes aware only at Nanon's encouragement; this transmutation of duty has essentially freed the characters from social hierarchy, a state of being that they bring about themselves with their self-sacrifice, with

Émilien, as Nanon explains, “souffrant beaucoup pour votre pays et pour sa liberté, moi [...] en faisant tout ce qui m’était possible pour vous et pour votre liberté personnelle” (337). And yet, with a little paternal tenderness, the opposite choice could have just as easily been acceptable, which confirms that with these self-sacrificial acts of patriotic and personal love, Sand has also displaced the bonds that foster duty to others from socio-economic factors to, essentially, love, a theme that strongly echoes de Staël’s novels.

Tellingly, although Émilien chooses to forfeit his nobility—a determination that his own sister condemns, arguing that “le monde ne lui en saura point de gré” (315) for his choice—while he moves down the social scale in class, he moves up in civic recognition: “Je ne suis plus un noble, je suis un paysan, un Français!” (128). He differs, then, from the men of his family who, since they have emigrated, have become traitors and all eventually die outside of the country; they can no longer, therefore, make claims to such an appellation of civic belonging. Indeed, this scene in which he receives his father’s letter is the first time that Émilien calls himself “un Français,” and his determined reclamation of such a title in exchange for that of *Monsieur de*—and eventually *Marquis de Franqueville* marks a sharp contrast with his choice to become “le fils de personne quand il s’agit de trahir la France” (128). In Sand’s reconsideration of the genre, the only traitors are those who locate their duty in institutional dogma—revolutionary or royalist—rather than in a personal conscience that develops from education and the joint exercise of reason and unbiased love. Costejoux walks a fine line between these two poles throughout the novel, and finds himself, at the end, a tormented, unhappy being, a result of “le vide dans son âme à l’endroit du vrai bonheur et de la vraie tendresse” (351) that would have resulted had he favored love over principle, as all of the Revolutionary Heroines in the study have advocated.

Though everything in the novel points toward Émilien choosing a life of work and growth over one of idleness and privilege, it is especially telling that his choice to reject the patriarchal model is cast in terms of “expiation” (332) of his nobility—an atonement for the civic sin of his arbitrary high birth—which he achieves with the time that he serves in the republican army and the arm that he sacrifices to the cause. In so doing, he “breaks” the line of honor, birth, and wealth between father and son, and reassigns his notion of honor and civic belonging to his country and to the goal of equality that the Revolution represents, because he understands intuitively that the models of father-king and father-priest are merely further examples of the paternal betrayal of man’s natural liberties that the Marquis’ callousness represents. His choice to sacrifice a part of himself in disentangling his fate from a social institution that symbolizes centuries of systematic abuse is the primary act that seals his worth as a citizen, as it replaces “son identité sociale et familiale, liée à sa naissance, par une identité nationale qui représente un choix politique” (Mozet 78). Like Belinda, whose choice of marriage partners—Misters Baddy, Vincent, and Hervey—empowers her to place her stock in her country’s future with men of different social-political aspirations and beliefs, Émilien has elected to place his investment firmly in the hands of everything that is frankly capitalist and anti-monarchical: “Eh bien, il me plaît de choisir le travail des bras et la fidélité à mon pays” (128). Here the author picks up the theme common to *mal du siècle* literature in the masculine tradition, in which distressed family relationships and absent parents leave “le champ libre [aux] hommes nouveaux en quête de leur identité sociale et sexuelle” (Mozet 78), and in which men fill that void, as Flaubert’s Frédéric Moreau does, with a default political impotence. In the absence of the fallen patriarchal authorities, many scholars have observed in the era’s literature that the children-citizens must find their own way in the wake of the violence and disappointment. I argue in contrast that Sand

proposes a feminine resolution to this Romantic quandary. That Émilien regularly refers to Nanon as his *mère* reflects the Revolution's brief turn to matriarchal fascination, except that in Sand's idealized version, rather than devouring her children, the Nanon-Maman works arduously for their benefit, educates them, loves them, gives herself to them entirely, and saves them from a life of brutish ignorance and despair, or, in Émilien's case, from the guillotine itself.

With this deliberately maternal portrayal of Nanon, Sand's enters the debate on domesticity and maternity that has been so important in the three preceding chapters. By setting up her Revolutionary Heroine as the catalyst, essentially, of the private revolution in Valcreux, where she reforms Émilien and inspires scores of others through her unparalleled ability to "tirer partie de tout" (323) in matters of agriculture, animal husbandry, and home economics, Sand positions women and a productive domestic realm as necessary elements of the Revolution's resolution in her imagined reinscription, and thus, as the answer to its continued reverberations in France nearly one hundred years later. "La chronologie d'un roman," Nicole Mozet has said, "est un moyen privilégié de produire de subtiles coïncidences entre la sphère du privé—avec ses naissances, ses mariages et ses crises—et la scène de l'Histoire, présente à l'esprit de tous les lecteurs" (73). And this is Sand's very tactic: she aligns Nanon's formative moments with key events of the Revolution in order to link her heroine's civic awakening with revolutionary doctrines and the ways that they failed or succeeded in practice. The abolition of feudal law coincides with Nanon's elevation to deity-figure in Valcreux's Fête de la Fédération, where she becomes the region's first property owner, the first true escapee from feudal slavery; the invalidation of monastic vows, in turn, intersects the heroine's first act of economic autonomy and altruism, when she buys clothes for "impoverished aristocrat" Émilien when he leaves the monastery, thus demonstrating both Sand's thesis about the essential collaboration between

classes and her belief in the necessary valorization of the *petit paysan-propriétaire*; finally, the execution of the queen synchronizes with Nanon's diaspora in Crevant, where the feminocentric history of the region encourages the gradual perfection of her extraordinary domestic skills and marks a stark contrast with the frivolity and inutility that the body of the queen represented.

By underpinning her vision of domesticity with political examples, then, Sand demonstrates the necessity of women's contributions to the nation's reformation, and vice versa. Indeed, the authors that I addressed in the previous chapters use domestic settings as a coded means of talking about exterior politics, thus remaining faithful to the well-advertised interdiction on women in the public sphere. Decades later, however, Sand uses politics to talk about domesticity, which in turn informs her vision of politics since, in her estimation, it is the conjoining of the two—the entrance of women into the political sphere and the recognition of domestic work as playing a profound role in the nation's development—that is necessary to socio-political rejuvenation. However, Sand's version of domesticity in *Nanon* differs significantly from that which was preached in France and Britain during and leading up to the 1790s, one which posited a tractable “Angel in the House” and her passive family devotion as an antidote to eighteenth-century excess. It is impossible to imagine, for example, Nanon agreeing with conservative British author Laetitia Matilda Hawkins (1759-1835), that “The whole world might be at war, and yet not the rumor of it reach the ear of an English woman—empires might be lost, and states overthrown, and still she might pursue the peaceful occupations of her home” (qtd in Craciun 7). On the contrary, awareness and engagement are the guiding principles that often take Nanon out of the home and into the world, where she manages equations of injustice such as Émilien's arrest under false pretenses—a miscalculation that she resolves by breaking him out of prison. Sand's portrait, in turn, of Nanon as unconditional in her care for others, as

someone who “secourut ceux qui étaient tombés dans la détresse” (352), represents a valorization of women’s roles—of wife and motherhood—that is nevertheless dependent upon the equal and willing contribution of her partner, as well as the freedom of the woman herself. And, of course, by freedom, Sand implicitly means everything that the authors in previous chapters demanded: freedom of movement (Nanon’s forays from the Valcreux to Limoges to Châteauroux to Crevant and beyond), the right to work (beginning with Rosette and ending with a vast financial empire), the valorization of women’s work (Dumont’s insistence that her work “à nous procurer la nourriture et le gîte” (259) in Crevant was worth as much as the labor that he and Émilien did in the fields), the rights and privileges of citizenship (with both Nanon and Émilien eventually determining that they have earned the title of *Française/Français*), including education, and, of course, the separation of innate worth and sexuality (Nanon’s value being located in her “force de sagesse et de bonté” (352)) and of gender and biology (her highly-valued “ouvrages de garçon” (202) and ability, for example, to “faire la journée de marche d’un homme” (145)). Unlike her counterpart in Sandian heroism, la petite Fadette, this Revolutionary Heroine’s rise to greatness is not strictly personal and apolitical. As we saw in *Delphine*, because Nanon’s code has such a tremendous influence on those around her, and because she exercises her new-found knowledge and skills in the public sphere, the personal becomes political as she makes the political personal. That is, as she becomes French and unites a heterogeneous family of equally-becoming citizens into a small national family, ancient Gaul embarks upon the journey of becoming modern France.

Sand evokes France’s coming-of-age story, one which resists the revolutionary violence that had just made another appearance in the 1871 Paris Commune episode to which Sand was witness, during the couple’s exile in Crevant. There, the author is able to allegorize the turn from

ancient to modern belief systems and notions of class and duty with the couple's personal transmutation among the vestiges of druidic history. The name, which could be translated as "the dying place" or "the exhausting land," leads the reader to expect great suffering and deprivation. And, indeed, the terrain is deep and impenetrable, an "oasis de granit et de verdure, un labyrinthe où tout était refuge et mystère" (198). Huge stones and cliffs frame the sky, and tiny, rocky paths and rivers traverse the brush and sand, while heavy vegetation covers every surface. The massive roots of giant chestnut trees, thick bushes, and wild pear trees, Nanon observes, run over the land, "[trainant] comme des serpents monstrueux" (198). Though the region is savage, sparsely populated, and tainted with fantastical myth, Nanon, Émilien, and Dumont have their most profitable and happiest period of existence in this wilderness that echoes the nation's past. Like Robinson Crusoe's castaway genius and island economy, their panoply of artisanal survival skills—from woodworking to cheese making to viticulture—allows them, much to their own surprise, to live comfortably, thanks to Nanon's masterful domesticity, which proves to be the source of their wealth here as it later is in Valcreux. On the other hand, the region's poverty, they discover, is a result of the inhabitants' ignorance in agricultural matters, relative laziness, and dogged attachment to ancient superstitions: "Ils sont restés Celtes sans le savoir," Nanon observes, "puisque leur dévotion d'aujourd'hui ne les empêche pas de trembler devant les anciens dieux de la Gaule" (230). However, the unusual family finds several occasions to reconcile the ancient reverence for omens that flourishes in the landscape with the pragmatism and common-sense economy that they represent, and of which Sand's Revolutionary Heroine is emblematic. When a local sorceress comes to invoke the devil near their dwelling on Christmas night, the Christian hymn they are singing frightens her off. In the morning they discover on their doorstep "une peau d'anguille contenant sept gros clous" which the old woman "avait laissée

tomber en entendant le Noël.” Dumont “fit de la peau d’anguille une bourse, et mit à profit les clous” (212). In effect, superstition gets “laissée tomber” (on more occasions than one in Crevant) when it comes in contact with this group, and the members transform its vestiges into “une bourse,” or a material manifestation of the possible financial increase that can come from integrating ancient belief systems into modern existence. Indeed, the reconciliation that Sand proposes is one that is meant to temper modern barbarism—“la facilité avec laquelle on fait tomber les têtes [...] dans un siècle de philosophie et de lumières comme le nôtre” (216)—by showing that ancient *savages* are scarcely more savage than modern ones.

In their encounters with Crevant’s ancient druidic world, however, this group, led by their Revolutionary Heroine, reveals Sand’s central thesis about both the Revolution’s failure and the subsequent further immurement of women: by favoring erasure of the past—embodied by Costejoux’s insistence that “le passé n’est plus” (151) and that the *nouvel ordre* cannot emerge without this definitive break—over integration of the past into the changing present and hoped-for future, the Revolution condemned its own project. This Saussurean rupture with history, while it doomed the nation to playing a series of fabricated roles in the utterly non-sequitur imitation of a neo-Greco-Roman republic, also categorically devalued women’s historical contribution to the nation by cutting the cord that linked France to Gaul. As Nanon and Émilien find themselves lost in the “fôret enchantée” (232) of Celtic monuments and ancient stones and trees, they realize that they are submersed in “un specimen de la Gaule primitive dans son intégralité” (232). They observe that “depuis le règne [des dieux Celtiques],” “le pays n’a pas change; ce sont les mêmes arbres qui ont caché la retraite sacrée des mystérieuses druidesses; ces tapis d’herbes sauvages se sont renouvelés d’année en année”(230). Such repetitions both of duration and of continual renewal link the past to the present through Émilien and Nanon with

both their skillful management of local superstition as well as their ability to see the value of the ancient land, which they call “plus imposant et plus beau que tout ce que nous avons pu voir ailleurs” (230). In their “bois merveilleux,” in turn, chestnut trees have enveloped massive stones, which they “portaient fièrement dans leur ventre ouvert, montrant cet oeuf monstrueux avec orgueil” (232). This organic “oeuf,” the source of creation, stands as a monument of the past’s fertility that the three Crusoes carry away with them when they leave Crevant in the form of a proud nationalism that looks backward as much as forward.

Émilien and his Revolutionary Heroine maintain this necessity of historical coherence in their joint identity, as one of their first conversations when he returns from the war is to look back on their own personal revolution:

Te souviens-tu, dit-il, que c’est ici que nous nous sommes vus pour la première fois, il y a sept ans? Tu possédais un mouton et ce devait être le commencement de ta fortune; moi, je ne possédais et ne devais jamais rien posséder. Sans toi, je serais devenu un idiot ou un vagabond, au milieu de cette révolution que m’eût jeté sur les chemins, sans notions de la vie et de la société, ou avec des notions insensées, funestes peut-être! Tu m’as sauvé de l’abjection, comme, plus tard, tu m’as sauvé de l’échafaud et de la proscription: je t’appartiens, je n’ai qu’un mérite, c’est de l’avoir compris. (338)

Émilien’s recognition of his deep debt to Nanon brings the imagery in Crevant full circle: the hut that they inhabited there, which she transformed into home with her “inventions délicates pour nous cacher notre dénuement” (226), is itself a Celtic monument, a dolmen “qu’on appelait *le trou aux fades*, [autrefois occupée] par les *femmes sauvages*,” or “des mystérieuses druidesses (207, 232). We see, then, that the Revolutionary Heroine reconnects past and present by

rehabilitating this ancient monument of superstition with her “soins” and her “dévouement immense” (226), at the same time that the druidic region’s matriarchal, feminocentric past confirms for her the value of women’s historical contribution to the nation. The same “oeuf” entangled in the forest womb—the immortal roots of a chestnut tree whose fruit comprises the majority of the family’s sustenance in Crevant—while it overtly signals the ancient Gallic origin of the modern French nation, also implicitly points to the necessary and enduring maternity that precedes it. The unbending nationalism of the French Revolution, in which men “mettaient la Révolution au-dessus de tout et de leur propre conscience [...] en persécutant les modérés [et en disant] ‘C’est pour le salut de la cause’” (122), succumbs under the weight of feminocentric history in Crévant. The fertile root systems, keepers of the nation’s historical ova—that is, its source of duration and continual renewal—designate the woman as the site of genesis, a condition that makes her a de facto necessary and equal participant in the nation’s original cohesion as well as a rightful agent of its contemporary and future wealth, industry, and innovation. Sand illustrates the nation’s socio-political regeneration—that is, the reconciliation of the “femmes sauvages,” the wild terrain and the seemingly savage history that it protects, and the dream of an egalitarian modern France—as dependent upon a certain degree of female empowerment: it is Nanon’s small band alone, armed with her particular feminine savoir, that is finally able to make the *space* of the ancient Gallic land produce in the *age* of modern France (they survive on the chestnuts that the locals lack the savoir-faire to prepare and preserve, and have a tremendous grain harvest where the inhabitants’ ignorance and superstitious fear kept them from planting). Nanon’s sublime contemplation of the primitive landscape, where “la nature est bien au-dessus de l’homme,” and her mental fructification there, in which “beaucoup

d'idées me [sont venues] en tête" (231), mark Crevant and its druidic past as symbolic of a specifically feminine source of lost wealth for the budding nation.

This identification is especially important for Sand's critique of revolutionary allegory, which took the form of neoclassic feminine figures standing in for broad ideals such as *Liberté* and *Raison* (see figures 1 and 2 below), and which I will analyze in detail below. Since, as Madelyn Gutwirth explains, the events of the Revolution were "out of all historical context [...], a fresh 'mythic present' had to be invented, to which the nation might give its consent" (253). The neoclassic template provided the necessary break from the Ancien Régime past, offering the appearance of having created a new way to represent the Revolution's untried ideas, at the same time that it vindicated the revolt by linking it to the historical authoritative credit held by past democracies admired by the entire western world. However, Sand is not the only one to criticize this false parentage created by the Greco-Roman images of republican consent and justification: the very women who spoke out against the anti-woman course that the Revolution was taking and against the empty images of feminine *Liberté* and *Égalité*, asserted that "among the ancient Gauls women had a deliberative voice in the assemblies and things went no worse" (Gutwirth 286). With her return to France's druidic past in the Crevant scenes analyzed above, Sand echoes revolutionary feminists' assessment that the "mythic present" that the Revolutionaries sought to create should have found its roots in France's own fabled history, not in an imaginary Greco-Roman resurrection. In the author's national *Bildungsroman* then, the nation comes of age in Crevant, reaching an equilibrated accord between its savage past and the its savage present through Nanon, who is "pas une machine," unlike the unbending perpetrators of violence, but rather "un esprit très-prompt, très-étonnant, très-cultivé déjà et capable de tout comprendre" (226).

As if to mark a counterpoint in her symbolic resurrection of ancient woman and the richness that she represents, however, Sand simultaneously points to the death of modern woman by having her characters learn of Marie Antoinette's execution during their diaspora in Crevant. "Pourquoi faire mourir un femme?" Nanon wonders incredulously. "Quel mal peut-elle avoir fait? N'était-ce pas à elle d'obéir à son mari et de penser comme lui?" (215). The Queen, whose already imperfect reputation nose-dived at the onset of the Revolution, became an object of scorn for the debauchery and excess that she represented, which the media translated into sexual depravity: "People only spoke of her wantonness," L.S. Mercier insists (qtd in Gutworth 229). While Sand does her the favor, through Émilien's critique, of leaving out the accusations of sexual perversion, she does not hesitate to fault the queen for her role, and does not, despite Antoinette's slightly rehabilitated image by 1871, excuse the woman nor the practices that she represents when she states that "La reine a bien su ce qu'elle faisait et ce qu'elle voulait" (216). Her extermination represents the willful smothering of the pernicious femininity that authors had railed against for two centuries, and which Louise, Émilien's younger sister, personifies in the novel: "Les femmes de cette race nous subjuguent" (348), her lover Costejoux says of her bitterly. A misappropriation of power, the sexual manipulation that the queen personified throughout the crisis was the hallmark of the feminine presence in private and public politics and in literary portrayals of the sex. The news of her death arriving in the characters' primeval desert serves to mark the disjunction between past, present, and future—in terms of feminine policy—from which the French Revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have suffered: just as one cannot "[bâti]r une nouvelle église avec ce qui a fait écrouler l'ancienne" (123), one cannot expect a reformed femininity to rise from the violent decimation of the original. The "dying place," then, is not a reference to the land, Crevant, but to all of the assassinated forms of

femininity: the ancient feminine force that Nanon imbibes in her druidic paradise, but which the nation cannot embrace, and the attempted snuffing out of the modern feminine force via the execution of Marie Antoinette, which is only fanned into greater flames with the continued anti-woman legislation that made the nineteenth century one of the darkest times in the history of women.

In the space left by a martyred portrait of dangerous femininity, Sand proposes an alternative in the form of her Revolutionary Heroine Nanon, who builds her feminine identity from the ground up since she has had “devant les yeux aucun modèle à qui elle pourrait s’identifier et [aucun] discours, implicite ou non, sur sa féminité” (Mozet 78). Surrounded by masculine models and feminine counter-models, such as Louise, Nanon’s conception of a woman, her strengths and weaknesses, and her duties, coalesces slowly as she becomes literate and begins to participate in her community. Her role in *La Fête de la Fédération* is especially formative for her conjoining of work, education, and creation (cultivation, beautification, procreation) as women’s path to self-actualization and citizenship, and the nation’s attendant path to regeneration. At the same time, her participation in the symbolic festival presents a challenge to the empty feminine iconography of the Revolution.

Madelyn Gutwirth has researched this issue at length, though not in relationship to *Nanon*. She argues that the Revolution’s leaders put these hollow signifiers into place in order to contain the sex’s very real reclamations of rights in the early years of political upheaval. Speaking of reactions to the female-lead 1789 march on Versailles, Gutwirth explains

The women’s formation of a crowd—a body—seemed to embolden them to articulate their own needs and desires. This could not be tolerated. The wind in the women’s sails had to be calmed. One of the ways of achieving this was,

ironically, to set them up as *figures de proue*, goddesses on the prow of the ship of the Revolution, heading into the winds. (245)

In the nation's haste to discard the iconic representation of royalty that had prevailed for centuries, the revolutionary leaders turned to a repertory of allegorized, abstract bodies (see figures 1 and 2) to represent their ideals, and woman, as the definitive vessel of otherness, represented a kind of void in the male world and therefore was able to embody just about anything: positive attributes such as Innocence and Virtue, or negative ones, such as Sloth or Superstition. These female figures served several ideological projects, such as filling in the void left by the destruction of Ancien Régime iconography, as well as providing a living link to the French language (which played a vibrant role in during the crisis), since most of the abstract nouns for which they stood are gendered feminine. However, the images had no relationship to any particular traits that the woman were believed or encouraged to possess, as Mr. Scope so aptly observed in Burney's novel,²⁶ nor to any attribute of femininity that the organizers wished for the onlookers of these images to adapt. Instead, the female body, as a neo-classical statue and little more, was reduced to a noble and deified bystander, her body holding the place of meaningful ideals rather than in motion as an actual participant in or recipient of pro-democracy legislation. Devoid of any ideological connection between the woman's body and the idea that it represented, then, women's iconographic role in revolutionary festivals represents the pinnacle of the irony of Rights of Man discourses because their bodies stand in for

²⁶ "I should like to enquire, what good they expect to accrue by [...] making a new [religion] by the figure of a woman. [...] And as so many females being called Goddesses of Reason [...] one don't very well see what that means; the ladies in general,--I speak without offence, as it's out of their line,--not being particularly famous for their reason" (Burney 269).

reformatory, idealistic principles and ideals which they are forbidden to exercise, such as *Raison*, and from which they will never benefit, such as *Liberté*.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 1: Liberty armed with the scepter of Reason strikes down Ignorance and Fanaticism, 1793.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 2: Liberty, with help from Reason, protects Innocence and crowns Virtue, 1793.

With her treatment of revolutionary festivals and her tracing of the true source of French regeneration back to the nation's Gallic past in Crevant, Sand has clearly made the same observation that Gutwirth puts forth about the hollow association of women's bodies and abstract principles. When Nanon witnesses a revolutionary festival in Chateauroux, for example, she comments on the absurdity not of women as objects of homage, but of this blatant ideological breach between the near deification of her sex and the extant attitudes that keep its members from becoming productive individuals. When she sees the local "goddess of liberty" (played by the cobbler's daughter), at whose feet the people "fit un discours, [...] chanta je ne sais quoi," force a suspected royalist to come act as her footstool as she dismounts her horse, the heroine calls it "une scène plus significative" (182) than any other that she has seen in the strange procession. Rather than encouraging and demonstrating positive feminine traits—or any identifiably "republican" traits at all—the goddess perpetuates her lower class vulgarity, the upper class imperiousness that she is aping, and the manipulation and abuse of lovesick men for which aristocratic women were famous. When Nanon calls the scene "significant," she means that she is getting a glimpse of where the Revolution is inevitably heading: her prediction that "la haine de nobles et des prêtres contre la Révolution, la haine des révolutionnaires contre les prêtres et les nobles [vont faire que] notre pauvre France agricole [va] être écrasée entre ces deux avalanches" (118) is beginning to come true. Instead of using public forums to encourage positive, patriotic values, these empty icons merely serve to foment hatred between classes and political groups by reanimating the very social power struggles the Revolution was in theory trying to extinguish. Nanon laments that the participants aren't out working their land instead of being captivated by this meaningless "fête burlesque" (183): "J'assistai à cette chose insensée

comme si je faisais un rêve, et je crois bien que personne n'était plus avancé que moi. Ces fêtes republicaines étaient de pure fantaisie" (182). In historical reality, as Nanon suggests, then, the allegories between women's bodies and abstract ideals often failed—especially in live festive performances like the above, in which the women were chosen to embody revolutionary allegory according to their beauty and their highly-valued connection to lower class professions. Ultimately, the images had little practical value outside of the page.

But Sand's Revolutionary Heroine subverts this paradigm of unmeaning and contradictory allegory when her extraordinary characteristics are the reason for her own elevation to the status of icon during Valcreux's Fête de la Fédération. Rather than appearing as an empty vessel at the base of the "autel de la patrie," a rustic monument composed from the fruits, vegetables, grains, and tools of which the people of Valcreux are now the masters, Nanon takes her place as "un ange en prière" (62), and exudes genuine, identifiable meaning: because of the traits that she has already displayed, "le courage, la douceur, le respect pour les parents and la grande amitié du coeur" (63), and because of the ways in which she has already transformed herself with all that she has learned, and the fact that she is "pressée de l'enseigner" (63), she becomes a flesh and blood symbol of the quantifiable capacities to which all members of the nation should aspire; rather than indicative of an empty allegory, Nanon's elevation to the status of revolutionary icon is at once dependent upon her capacity to bring wealth to the community (with her unbiased instruction in literacy, which "rendr[a] de grands services" (63), helping all members of the community to exploit their new-found proprietorship and freedom from servitude) as well as upon her feminine "tendresse" and "soins" (the fact that "elle a pleuré son grand-père avec une tendresse au dessus de son âge" and that "elle donne autant de soins aux plus pauvres qu'au plus riches" (63)). Unlike the specious images of allegorical women that

alienated real women from revolutionary action, Nanon's transformation into an avatar of national potential leads to actual material increase for the woman herself: moved by Nanon's humility and the promise of prosperity that she represents, the crowd determines to buy her land from the church holdings and make her the sole proprietor. She becomes the "*essaye*," or the experiment of giving rights and property to women, which the Revolution never did, but which, in Sand's correction, proves to be not only a success, but an eventual source of enormous wealth to a large number of people.

The Revolutionary Heroine's precipitous journey from peasant to "la première acquéreuse" effectively rewrites the fable of Eve that has surfaced several times in this study. The original mother, whose unforgivable transgression in the Garden of Eden—her reclamation of knowledge—has fueled the misogyny that has characterized women's history for millennia, is exonerated and reinstalled as the very origin of multiplication itself. Because of Nanon's thirst for knowledge, this modern Eve is praised for her foresight rather than punished for her presumption to "masculine" knowledge. Valorized and admired, she becomes the inaugurator—the mother, in a sense—of a new age of gender and class equality. Indeed, her own reflections confirm this to her. Uneasy about her governing the property that townsfolk have bought for her, she remembers her great-uncle telling her that "le devoir de la pauvreté est de sortir de la misère pour plaire à Dieu qui aime le travail et le bon courage" (66). This realization of her divinely-sanctioned agency reconciles her to both ownership and to capitalist potential not only as opportunities, but as moral obligations for men and women. Once her identity has become rooted to this notion that God himself advocates her prosperity, she begins to make plans for the "bâtisse" that she will add to Rosette's hovel, the "deux ou trois poules" and "un petit chevreau" that she will add to her budding empire in the next year. Indeed, with these realizations and this

first confirmation of her value, she is on the path to becoming the woman that she will be at the end of the novel, one who locates her complete sense of purpose and duty in the domestic cares that support her loved ones, beautify her space, advance her understanding of the world, and reclaim the right and the means for her to interact with that world. In Crevant she begins to glimpse this destiny, and says of her moment of discovery: “Je me voyais utile à des personnes que j’aimais plus que tout, et je trouvais dans mon activité et dans ma force de corps et de volonté, une gaîté que je n’avais jamais connue” (103).

In the end, the impression that the Revolutionary Heroine has left on those around her—as an icon and as a woman of flesh and blood—is one of “revolution” in the sense of a complete and total reformation of philosophy and lifestyle, with Émilien being the primary object of her influence. A foolhardy and careless youth at their first meeting, under Nanon’s tutelage he quickly recognizes the extent of his wastefulness. Citing her little chastisements, her accurate judgments, her desire to learn, her agency, her will, and her absolute devotion, he identifies her as the being that “m’[a] renouvelé...m’[a] reveille d’un triste et lâche sommeil. Dans les plus petites choses,” he continues, “tu m’as rendu aux instincts que l’homme doit avoir” (225-6). Using her encouragement and her example alone, Nanon effectuates a gendered reformation to his behavior (much like Belinda did for Clarence Hervey and Lord Delacour, and as Corinne tried to do for Oswald), removing him from a path of masculine lethargy and pushing him toward the actions that would eventually earn him the right to citizenship in the new nation. Calling her his “bienfaitrice,” she continues to support him financially and emotionally until the end of his life. From the first clothes that she buys him with her teaching money when he leaves the monastery to the fortune that she is able to present to him when he returns from the war,

Nanon has superior business acumen from which Émilien benefits, and for which he ultimately casts his love to her in terms of debt: “Je te devrai la vie de l’âme, [...] je t’appartiens” (337).

She has similarly prompted a transformation for the female gender as well with her refusal of many of the stereotypes of the literary heroines of all types that preceded her. When she learns that Émilien has been imprisoned, for example, she assures the reader: “Je ne dirai pas mes angoisses, j’irai vite au fait” (174), overturning the belief that women, creatures of instinct and emotion, only exist by constantly verbalizing their emotional state, while rarely, if at all, getting to the point, a fault criticized at length by characters like the Admiral and Mr. Scope in Burney’s novel. Later, when she discovers that Émilien loves her, she acknowledges that her concern for him while he is at war will cause her added anxiety. And yet, she reveals, “Je ne m’accordai pas le droit d’être faible et de faire l’amoureuse qui souffre et se plaint” (Sand 259). Again, this is extraordinary behavior for the heroine of a novel. Her breed of heroinism, like that of Belinda, entails the refusal of the tired platitudes of womanhood, such as excessive emotion and blind coquetry as well as the assumption of the virtuous “masculine” qualities that Mary Wollstonecraft admired. It is this conjoining of gendered virtues that causes Costejoux to declare that she is “ni un homme, ni une femme,” but rather “l’un et l’autre avec les meilleures qualités des deux sexes” (272). It seems that Sand has finally found resolution with her life-long battle against socially-constructed gender roles. It is lamentable that another heroine of hers—Gabrielle (1839), a woman disguised as a man for most of her life in order to preserve her inheritance—was unable to find a partner who appreciated her alchemistic gender fusion as Émilien does with Nanon. While Gabrielle ultimately dies of grief for her inability to find a place in the world, Sand’s Revolutionary Heroine becomes the head of an empire, a marquise, and the mother of a large and very happy family. And, of course, she is, like the other Revolutionary Heroines

studied here a heroine in another sense of the word, if we consider the word to be the direct ideological counterpart to the mythical, courageous “hero.” By this I mean that Nanon—perhaps more than Delphine, Corinne, Belinda, and Juliette put together—braves dangers and risks her life, despite the alleged constraints of her gender, to physically save the life of another human being, in this case, Émilien. During her extended rescue mission she walks the distance of a man in one day, sleeps on the ground in the forest, thwarts robbers, undertakes complex recon operations, forges a passport, dons a variety of disguises—in short, has a brief stint as a Scarlett Pimpernel-esque secret agent. Though none of this is unique for Nanon herself, who “as toujours eu l’idée du courage,” Émilien insists, “puisque c’est toi la première qui me l’as donnée” (71).

The couple—the perfected and actively domestic Nanon and the newly-baptized *Français* Émilien—ultimately reunites after the war and continues to build the empire that Nanon began. Their mutual esteem and love as well as their continued commitment to the unrealized revolutionary ideals of work and education ordain their successes. The new French state, of which they are a microcosm, represents Sand’s “croyance inébranlable en la libération de l’individu, homme ou femme, par le travail, une foi profonde en l’instruction des masses comme base sine qua non de la démocratie, un appel à la tolérance et à la liberté d’esprit” (Witkin 42). It is the combination of Nanon and Émilien’s best traits, sanctified by their mutual sacrifice to the new nation, that make this utopia, small-scale as it is, possible. And the author wishes to draw a clear distinction between willing individual self-sacrifice and forced sacrifice at the level of the nation. The guillotine doesn’t just kill people, the prieur reminds her: “elle tue le sens humain! on cherche à persuader au peuple qu’il doit sacrifier une partie de lui-même déclarée mauvaise, pour sauver une autre partie réputée bonne” (222). The only way that the nation could have successfully navigated the revolutionary period and emerged stronger would have been to

“combattre avec des armes qui ne blessent point [...]. C’est la discussion libre qui éclaire les esprits, la force de l’opinion qui déjoue les complots fratricides, la sagesse et la justice qui règnent au fond du cœur de l’homme et qu’une bonne éducation développerait, tandis que l’ignorance et la passion les étouffent” (223). In the end, Sand cherishes the same opinions that Madame de Staël put forth about the Revolution in *Delphine*. That woman has a special capacity to foster this pacifistic ideal of social reform, the two great authoresses seem to agree.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this study to delineate a specific kind of fictional character that came forth in a wholly unique period of time, thanks to an unimaginable set of events. The Revolutionary Heroine, in her many incarnations, is a representative and a product of an era of acute epistemological inquiry, and it is likely that she could not have been born at any other point in history. The ontological rupture that took place, the severing of history itself in France, the obsessive recovery of it in Britain, created a fertile ground for the reexamination of Pope's assertion that "Whatever is, is right," which Edgeworth's Harriet Freke zealously reassesses: "Whatever is, is wrong" (230).^S The Renaissance and early Enlightenment saw the rise of literacy and the economic power of the middle-class coupled with the simultaneous decrease in the practical authority of princes and popes that made such examples of categorical reformism as Harriet Freke's even possible, and continues to make them so today. Indeed, the intellectual and philosophical legacy of the Revolution in the modern state and the mind of modern man cannot be overstated.

And yet, as I have slowly pored over these texts, studied the cultural context that surrounded them, and meditated on the metatext and subtext of each of these authors' projects, I have been continually struck at how very relevant all of these questions—of gender, of nation, of economy, of violence—continue to be. Nevermind that women still earn less than men for equal work in most countries; nevermind that the economic value of their domestic labor often still goes unrecognized, and often by other women themselves, as Democratic strategist Hilary Rosen made clear in her recent remarks about Ann Romney having "never worked a day in her life."²⁷ Indeed, these unfortunate facts begin to seem relatively unsurprising when it becomes glaringly

²⁷ <http://www.npr.org/2012/04/17/150803660/rosens-words-about-ann-romney-fuel-mommy-wars>

clear that the nature and so-called duties of woman herself are still the object of furious political debate. We have yet to resolve, for example, the place of women's sexuality as human beings in civil society, as the recent debate on birth control in Congress has demonstrated: the fear that a woman would have rampant sex and that her actions might have economic consequences on other citizens or cause moral decay in society at large merely goes to show that the sex's "unbounded appetites" (Poovey 20) still pose a threat to phallic hegemony that manifests itself in a very real economic hysteria; moreover, it proves that the belief that "every appearance of vice in a woman is something more disgusting than in a man" (qtd in Poovey 8), as eighteenth-century Gothic novelist Clara Reeve argued, is a still deeply-ingrained truism of western civilization's conception of gender normativity. The media's treatment, in turn, of our own century's *public women* who have left the home to play a role in the nation's political future receive, paradoxically, the opposite criticism: condemned for their manly pantsuits, for not being "satisfactorily feminine,"²⁸ for aging badly (and therefore unfemininely), and for not being real advocates for women's issues, those who have broken through the proverbial glass ceiling quickly find that the view from above is not very pretty.

The fear of foreign contamination, in turn, continues to plague the modern psyche, as I discovered when I recently began watching the PBS series *Downton Abbey*, which portrays the intrigues and scandals of an aristocratic English family during the first decades of the twentieth century. The Dowager Countess, matriarch of the clan, makes no fewer than three references to the French Revolution in the first season alone, defending herself from the appellation of Jacobinism, fearing the return of the guillotine when she hears even a whisper of reform, and cautioning her to daughter to avoid resembling Robespierre lopping off the head of Marie Antoinette in her zeal to break up an undesirable partnership. Indeed, as my viewings proved, the

²⁸ <http://www.journalism.org/node/6755>

timelessness of the French Threat in Britain is truly astonishing. However, the continued fear of a more general other—whether it is women perseveringly claiming a place for themselves in masculine-dominated spheres or foreigners expanding their footprint on the native soil of nations far and wide—is a cultural paradigm that simply will not recede, and that persists in its curious ability to unite citizens around chimerical fantasies of nationalism. The modern French state, for example, is not alone in its inquietude of foreign threats that seem capable of fundamentally altering the cultural landscape of the nation: most developed countries around the world are grappling with the cultural ramifications of recent waves of immigration that have, otherwise, been so instrumental to the growth of their national economies. At the same time, nations of vastly diverse circumstances face what appears to be the threat of America's own well-disseminated commercial-cultural contagion. The much commented and thoroughly promoted US War on Terror is no exception to the *us against them* mentality that arises when a foreign menace appears to imperil deeply-held practices and totems of cultural and national identity. In each of these cases, the tendency is, as it was in the novels studied here, to rally around increasingly narrow ideals of acceptable versions of citizenship in order to purify the public sphere of contamination.

How can it be that so little has changed, despite the fact that so very much has changed? And who is working, as the Revolutionary Heroine did, against these perennial forms of prejudice that so often lead to violence? Perhaps we should take a lesson from these very heroines and reconsider what it means to truly conjoin reason and sensibility in our modern, secular world where the rule of law reigns. For if there is one thing that they have taught us, it's that there is no harm in being an armchair cultural critic and no danger in opening one's eyes to the ways in which one's own nation might benefit from the cross-cultural intercourse. Such was

the Enlightenment's legacy, in part, and such is the potential of its soaring resurgence in contemporary movements of globalism.

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