

PORTRAITISTES À LA PLUME:
WOMEN ART CRITICS IN REVOLUTIONARY AND NAPOLEONIC FRANCE

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers women writing art criticism in France, c. 1785-1815. It was at this historical juncture, wherein art criticism as an institution was in its infancy and women's place within the social order was particularly unsettled, that women began to write about art in earnest. Analysis of the literature of the period reveals that women's engagement with art was not limited to the pamphlets and periodical literature spawned by the Salon, but was also registered in myriad literary genres, including the novel, the travelogue, the memoir, and correspondence. While this dissertation focuses primarily on woman-authored criticism that appeared in the periodical literature and fictional works and was distinctly public, it argues for the necessity of a more expansive definition of nineteenth-century French art criticism.

Furthermore, this dissertation demonstrates that women found in art criticism an efficacious means to participate in the framing of post-Revolutionary culture. Analysis of the art writings by individuals such as Caroline Wuiet, Angélique Vandeul, Victoire Babois, Juliane de Krüdener, Stéphanie-Félicité Genlis, Germaine de Staël, and others, shows the various ways women used art-critical discourse and activity to assert their place within the cultural order. The dissertation not only seeks to raise consciousness regarding the specific women writing about art at this time, but also seeks to examine how woman-authored art criticism, which ranged from the aesthetic to the political, and from the personal to the social, registered shifts within the terrain of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French society.

Also, an important component of this work is its consideration of issues surrounding the female spectator's vision and visibility, and consequently, it queries how women saw art and in what contexts; how their aesthetic discourse intimated underlying sexual politics; and how the private and public spheres collapsed in the act of viewing and criticizing art. Occupying the liminal space between the *ancien régime* and modernity, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods stand as critical moments in the emergence of both new economies of female spectatorship, as well as new technologies of art criticism, and this dissertation seeks to illuminate these developments.

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France often comment upon its androcentric nature. The French Revolution itself is characterized as a historical moment in which “[t]he revolt against the father was also a revolt against women as free and equal public and private beings,”¹ and scholarship on post-Revolutionary society argues that under the notoriously chauvinistic Napoleon, women fared even worse. In 1801, Sylvain Maréchal published a pamphlet entitled *Projet d’une loi important défense d’apprendre à lire aux femmes*, in which he introduces (fictitious) legislation to prohibit women from engaging in such activities as “reading, writing, engraving, chanting, singing, painting, etc.,”² several years later, the Civil Code was passed, which severely limited women’s legal rights.³ In terms of artistic production, the most canonical paintings of the period seem to underscore this cultural phenomenon: works like Jacques-Louis David’s *Napoleon at the St. Bernard* (1800) or Antoine-Jean Gros’s *Battle at Eylau* (1808) celebrate militaristic virtue and elevate a realm that is distinctly male. Indeed, recent histories of this era—and particularly those with a feminist slant—declare

¹ Joan B. Landes, *Women and Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 158.

² Qtd. in Geneviève Fraisse, *Reason’s Muse: Sexual Difference and the Birth of Democracy*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994) 2.

³ See especially James F. McMillian, “Revolutionary Aftermath: The Reconstruction of the Gender Order,” *France and Women, 1789-1914* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 32-44; and Susan K. Grogan, *French Socialism and Sexual Difference: Women and the New Society, 1803-44* (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1992).

it as unapologetically male-centered.⁴ Much of the scholarship devoted to the culture of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France seems to corroborate this reading of its “homosocialization.”⁵ One could extrapolate from such evidence that the arenas of arts and letters were completely monopolized by men.

Or were they? I contend that traditional narratives surrounding this historical moment have lured us into adopting paradigms that eschew the possibility that women played a vital role in post-Revolutionary cultural developments.⁶ True, this society certainly privileged men’s rights and authority as actors in the public realm, whereas women’s scope of influence was significantly proscribed. Extremely persuasive arguments have been made regarding the ways in which the Revolution negatively impacted women’s status in the political realm.⁷ However, I maintain that we must be careful not to extend this argument into other aspects of women’s lives at this historical

⁴ The literature on the patriarchal nature of this period is vast; for an overview of the proscription of women in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, see Fraisse, *Reason’s Muse*; Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992); Candace E. Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (New York: Greenwood P, 1990); and Landes, *Women and Public Sphere*.

⁵ For example, see Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995); Alex Potts, “Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution,” *History Workshop Journal* 30 (Autumn 1990): 1-21.

⁶ Seminal texts of this ilk are Crow, *Emulation*; Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1987); and Walter Friedlaender, *From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974).

⁷ See footnote 4.

juncture, for women's subjectivities were neither easily defined nor captured by their political position in post-Revolutionary France. As Carla Hesse declares, "We have a plausible history of prescriptive gender roles, but not a history of female participation in the political and cultural upheavals of the late Enlightenment and Revolution."⁸ This dissertation, which examines women's writings on art and their assumption of the role of art critic in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, is part of this larger project of writing into history women's presence in the public sphere.

Recent revisionist scholarship that considers women's place in French society at this time suggests that they were able to carve a space in the cultural arena, and to play a formative role in its development. The positions women occupied in the intellectual milieu of Napoleonic France is a topic of current debate.⁹ New scholarship points to the continuation of French salon culture, and to the ways women used this institution to enhance further their positions.¹⁰ Several new texts on the Empress Josephine—who

⁸ Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) 32-33. This position resonates with that adopted by Doris Kadish, who writes that "although in the aftermath of the French Revolution women were set back in terms of political rights, they were also propelled forward culturally and symbolically as political participants. . . ." See her *Politicizing Gender: Narrative Strategies in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991) 9.

⁹ See Stephen Kale, "Ralliés and Exiles (1799-1815)," *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004) 77-104. For key women intellectuals of this period, see Alfred Marquiset, *Les bas-bleus du premier Empire* (Paris: Champion, 1914).

¹⁰ For a discussion of women and salon culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Kale, *French Salons*; Jolanta T. Pekacz, *Conservative Tradition in Pre-Revolutionary France: Parisian Salon Women* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Anne Martin-Fugier, *La vie élégante, ou la formation de Tout-Paris, 1815-1848* (Paris: Fayard, 1990); and Dena Goodman, "Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (1989): 229-50.

was a major patron of the arts—intimate a growing interest in how women engaged in the fashioning of post-Revolutionary society.¹¹ In addition, the substantial body of scholarship devoted to cultural luminary Germaine de Staël—who will be the focus of chapter 3 of this dissertation— suggests the possibilities for women of culture in post-Revolutionary France.¹²

How were women able to imagine their way into public spaces and positions at this auspicious historical moment? What the Revolution, did, I believe, was create fissures in the social structure that enabled women to see themselves as viable players in the cultural, and thus public, realm. While there were certainly shifts in the social terrain of France at this juncture—and even accelerations of certain developing phenomena related to the arts and letters—I subscribe to the position that the French Revolution created the *illusion* of radical social change rather than actually accomplishing it.¹³ Indeed, it appears that many of the practices that were well established during the pre-Revolutionary years and associated with the social ascendancy of women, including salon culture and the genre of the novel, continued to propel women into the public sphere

¹¹ For example, see Eleanor P. DeLorme, ed., *Joséphine and the Arts of the Empire* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005); Carol Solomon Kiefer, *The Empress Josephine: Art and Royal Identity*, exhibition catalogue (Amherst: Mead Art Museum, 2005); and Eleanor P. DeLorme, *Josephine: Napoleon's Incomparable Mistress* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

¹² Critical Staël texts for English readers are Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1978); and Madelyn Gutwirth, Avriel H. Goldberger, and Karyna Szmurlo, eds. *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991).

¹³ François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elbourg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981).

well after the demise of the ancien régime. Women writers of this era did build upon the foundations established by French women of culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

We must recognize that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras were crucial periods to the projects of defining women's places in the public sphere and fashioning identities of the modern French woman. To date, the narratives surrounding the uneven development of this figure have underplayed the significance of this historical moment.¹⁴ One means of entering into these complex discussions is through the examination of various cultural productions of French women—literary, artistic, musical, and so on. I contend that the post-Revolutionary era offered women unparalleled opportunities to construct identities, and that it was at this moment, when questions regarding the individual's position within the larger social order were unsettled, and when constitutive categories such as gender and class were under intense negotiation, that discursive patterns for women's roles and rights in modern society were cut. While I believe this to be a general phenomenon in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French culture, my own work focuses more narrowly on how women negotiated these issues by means of the visual arts—whether as artists, critics, patrons, or spectators. In this dissertation, I will focus particularly on how women engaged in aesthetic discourse as a

¹⁴ The phrase “uneven developments” is taken from the title of Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988), which explores the relationship between language and institutions. For a provocative discussion of the status of bourgeois identity at this time, see Sara Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003).

means of asserting their rightful place in the development of the new social order under construction during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods.

It must be emphasized that during this period, there appears to have been a sense of permeability and ambiguity as to women's place in French society. The misogynistic position regarding women's capacity to contribute to contemporary culture, as given in Pierre Cabanis's *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* (1802), is constantly reiterated in contemporary feminist scholarship on early nineteenth-century France; however, there were ardent defenders of the *femme publique*, including Gabriel Legouvé and Charles-Guillaume Thérémin.¹⁵ And rather than offer a sole definition of what constituted the proper sphere(s) for women, it seems that there were myriad constructions of "women's empire"—political, literary, scientific and so forth—in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France.¹⁶ Furthermore, it should be noted that not all women embraced the cult of domesticity that deepened during this historical period, and when they did, there were multiple reasons for adopting this position.¹⁷ While this historical moment offered up the promise of a more empowering social structure for women, surely women were also plagued with insecurities regarding the upheavals catalyzed by the French Revolution (does it not stand to reason that if there was "male trouble" brewing at this time, women were also experiencing feelings of

¹⁵ See Gabriel Legouvé, *Le mérite des femmes* (Paris, 1801); and Charles-Guillaume Thérémin, *De la condition des femmes dans les républiques* (Paris, an 7/1799).

¹⁶ See Elizabeth Colwill, "Women's Empire and the Sovereignty of Man in *La décade philosophique*, 1794-1807," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29.3 (1996): 265-89.

¹⁷ Margaret H. Darrow, "French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity, 1750-1850," *Feminist Studies* 5.1 (Spring 1979): 42.

unease and malaise as they explored the uncertain contours of the new France?).¹⁸ It is also clear that we must put pressure on the conventional characterization of this culture as one in which the doctrine of separate spheres became solidified. The notion that the Revolution proscribed a removal of women from the public eye and thus relegated them to their mandated, private roles of wife and mother is too simplistic. Indeed, recent scholarship has suggested that the private/public divide was not clear-cut in either theory or practice.¹⁹

The nature of women's engagement in Revolutionary and Napoleonic society does not correspond to this binary way of thinking, as demonstrated in this period's visual culture. For example, its art and culture yields up myriad examples of respectable, bourgeois women participating in the so-called public sphere.²⁰ Particularly germane to

¹⁸ For discussions of the relationship between the *mal du siècle* and gender, see Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble*; and Margaret Waller, *The Male Malady: Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993).

¹⁹ For discussions of the problematic construction of public versus private in relation to women, see Leonore Davidoff, "Regarding Some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist History," *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 164-194; and Joan B. Landes, "The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration," *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995) 91-116; and Carole Pateman, "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy," *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity P, 1989) 118-40. Especially relevant to discussions of this time period are Stephan D. Kale, "Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons," *French Historical Studies* 25.1 (Winter 2002): 115-48; and Lawrence E. Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions About Evidence and Analytic Procedure," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29.1 (1995): 97-109.

²⁰ For example, Jann Matlock's fascinating work on the wildly popular Invisible Woman Show of 1800 demonstrates that despite claims that the Revolution severed women's ties with the public sphere, such spectacles intimate a potential for women's political

this dissertation are the post-Revolutionary images that suggest a heightened interest in women spectators in the public space of the museum. Hubert Robert's sketch *Women Entering the Museum* (c. 1800) and painting *Project for a Gallery at the Louvre* (1798), for example, display women viewing, sketching, and discussing various artworks.

Importantly, the world of aesthetics and art criticism was viewed—and experienced—as a space for all and one that was not easily captured by the descriptors of “private” and “public,” as argued by David Marshall in his fascinating book *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815*. Marshall notes that at this time, the everyday experience became saturated with the aesthetic, and that it is through instances of private, domestic engagement with art, as found particularly in works of fiction, that we discover the place of art in this society.²¹ Women were central participants in these activities, whether as viewers, writers, or readers. Truly, the permeability of the private and public spheres is

enfranchisement in the early years of Napoleonic rule. See Jann Matlock, “The Invisible Woman and Her Secrets Unveiled” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 9.2 (1996): 175-221; and her “Reading Invisibility,” *Field Work: Sites of Literary and Cultural Studies*, eds. Marjorie Garber, Paul Franklin, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1996) 183-95. Additionally, the art of the period suggests the possibility (even if just in the public imagination) of the presence of bourgeois women in the spaces of entertainment and leisure, as fashioned in Louis-Léopold Boilly's *Game of Billiards* (1808), where well-dressed women play billiards with men in an apparently public pool hall, and *The Entrance to the Turkish Garden Café* (1812), a painting that features the intersection of street and dining institutions in a manner that intimates the potential conflation of “exterior” and “interior” worlds, and thus calls into question our expectations about women's proper spheres and activities. See Susan Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly: Modern Life in Napoleonic France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) 153.

²¹ David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of the Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005).

suggested by cultural activities—such as painting and exhibiting, as well as reading and writing—that cut across the spaces of the private and the public.²²

Of great interest is how women used their writings as a means of becoming active, visible participants in French society. Writing was fundamental to effecting the “other Enlightenment”—a development that involved women’s use of the written word and the changing publishing industry to achieve a public position.²³ There was an explosion of women in print during the Revolutionary decade (1789-1799): the number of women authors more than tripled at this time.²⁴ Although good statistical data does not exist on the number of women in print from 1800-1815, it seems plausible to maintain that women’s participation in the literary sphere remained reckonable.²⁵ We know that women writers authored a number of the most popular novels of the

²² The notion that such creative acts actually anticipate socioeconomic and political change—and thus imbricate activities of the private domain in significant ways is suggested Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987). See also Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir, and Penny Warburton, eds., *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001).

²³ Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*. See also her *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1810* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1991).

²⁴ Carla Hesse has substantiated that the number of French women in print increased dramatically from during the Revolutionary years of 1789-1800: from 1777-1788, there were 78 women who had at least one publication in print; from 1789-1800, there were 330. See her “French Women in Print, 1750-1800: An Essay in Historical Bibliography,” *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 359 (1998): 65-82. Interestingly, of these publications by women writers, 269 were on politics, thus further contesting our notions of the French Revolution as an historic defeat for women’s participation in politics.

²⁵ Statistics gathered for the number of women authors from 1811-1821 indicate only a slight decline in participation from the Revolutionary decade of 1789-1799 (from 329 women in print to 299).

Napoleonic period, and there seems to have been an increase in women's contributions to the periodical press.²⁶ The ways in which French women mobilized their roles as writers and readers at the turn of the century to create both private and public identities has generated a fascinating corpus of literature.²⁷ In this dissertation, which will consider how women used their writings on art not only to shape and define the nascent field of art criticism but also to carve out a space in the public sphere, developments related to publishing and print media deserve particular consideration.

Moreover, this was a period of unprecedented opportunities for women to participate in the visual arts. Women artists continued to reap the benefits of the increased options for training and exhibition of their work in the years leading up to the Revolution.²⁸ In terms of exhibition patterns, we know that whereas only three women had shown their work in the 1789 biennial exhibition of the Salon, fifty female artists participated in the Salon of 1806—an increase in women's participation of over 1600%

²⁶ For women's engagement with novel writing during this era, see Linda Lang-Peralta, ed., *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1999); and Joan Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993). For women's contributions to periodical publications, see Jeanne Brunereau, *Presse féminine et critique littéraire de 1800 à 1830* (Paris: Eve et son espace créatif, 2000); and Evelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France, des origines à 1848* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966).

²⁷ See, for instance, Suellen Diaconoff, *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books, and Sex in the French Enlightenment* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2005); and Mary D. Sheriff, *Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004).

²⁸ On women musicians of the period, see Jacqueline Letzter and Robert Adelson, *Women Writing Opera: Creativity and Controversy in the Age of the French Revolution* (California: U of California P, 2001). For women's position in the visual arts in pre-Revolutionary France, see Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996).

in seventeen years.²⁹ Additionally, in much of the art produced at this time, we see a move away from the emphasis on the public sphere to the private space—the undisputed domain of women; it is true that while history painting, which played such a crucial role in Revolutionary visual culture, remained the privileged genre at the turn of the century, the rise in portraiture, landscape, and genre painting in Napoleonic France is indicative of this shift in values.³⁰ As Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, the reformations to art institutions like the Académie and its Salon that were made in the early years of the Revolution benefited women artists to an extent that would not be matched until the late nineteenth century.³¹ Finally, we must consider how women used museums and exhibitions (and particularly the Salon) as sites of cultural production. Myriad literary and visual texts from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras seem to indicate the

²⁹ Margaret Oppenheimer, “Women Artists in Paris, 1791-1814,” diss., New York U, 1996, 2. For discussions of women artists of the period, also see Vivian Cameron, “Woman as Image and Image-Maker in Paris During the French Revolution,” diss., Yale U, 1983; Gen Doy, “Women and the Bourgeois Revolution of 1789: Artists, Mothers and Makers of (Art) History,” *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture*, eds. Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (New York: Manchester UP, 1994) 184-203; and her book, *Women and Visual Culture in 19th-Century France, 1800-1852* (New York: Leicester UP, 1998).

³⁰ For discussions of the variety of art produced during the Revolution, see Régis Michel, ed., *Aux armes et aux arts! Les arts de la Révolution, 1789-1799* (Paris: Adam Biro, 1988); Jean-Jacques Lévêque, *L’art et la Révolution française, 1789-1804* (Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1987); and Jean-François Heim, Claire Béraud, and Philippe Heim, *Les salons de peinture de la Révolution française, 1789-1799* (Paris: C.A.C. Sarl Édition, 1989). For recent discussions of genre and portrait painting in post-Revolutionary France, see Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly*; and Tony Halliday, *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New York: Manchester UP, 1999), respectively.

³¹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Revolution, Representation, Equality: Gender, Genre, and Emulation in the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture, 1785-93,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31.2 (1997-98): 169.

heightened interest elicited by women's presence in these spaces—spaces which, it has been argued, were formative for the elaboration of the public sphere.³² While Hesse has argued that the intellectual salon and the marketplace were important areas in which women could assert a place in the public arena in the late eighteenth century, I want to propose that we consider the art Salon as another significant venue in the construction of women as social subjects.³³

Given these developments in the literary and artistic fields, it seems reasonable to expect women to become increasingly engaged in art criticism at this time. This dissertation seeks to add its voice to the call for a reassessment of women's participation in the public sphere in the visual arts, by focusing more specifically on how women entered into the fledgling field of art criticism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France. Here, I will demonstrate how women were engaged in the formation of art criticism as an institution; how these figures were vital actors in the public arena; and how an examination of their writings reveals the ways aesthetic discourse was mobilized in the ideological molding of women in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. I will detail the significant presence of women art critics in the cultural spaces of this period, and reconstruct their positions in this culture by examining the myriad manifestations of

³² For a discussion of the role of the Salon in the creation of the French “public,” see Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985). See also Annie Becq, “Expositions, peintres et critiques: Vers l’image moderne de l’artiste,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 14 (1982): 131-49. These observations build upon Jürgen Habermas’s contention that art criticism was a central means by which public opinion found expression, as articulated in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT P, 1989), especially 40-42.

³³ Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment* 14.

women's involvement in aesthetics and art criticism. In addition to marking their activity in these areas, I hope to emphasize how some of these women writers found means through art criticism to subvert patriarchal restrictions, to question assumptions about women's capabilities, and to offer meaningful ways in which to imagine their place in the terrain of French culture. Analysis of women's writings of this period, including novels, memoirs, and travelogues, in addition to pamphlets, salon reviews and journalistic critiques, clearly illustrates the significant involvement of women as writers on art. In writing about art, women illuminated such issues as education and training, mobility within public spaces, class formations, and other subjects germane to the molding of women's identities in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary orders. This dissertation will explore how women's art criticism functioned as markers of the complexities attending women's positions at this juncture.

Surprisingly little has been written about nineteenth-century women art critics in France.³⁴ In François Benoit's *L'art français sous la Révolution et l'Empire*, there is an entire chapter devoted to the discussion of the aestheticians of the period—and not a single woman critic is mentioned.³⁵ In an even more focused survey of art criticism from the ancien régime to the Restoration, Richard Wrigley concludes that few women practiced

³⁴ Interestingly, the scholarship on Victorian women art critics is much more extensive. For an overview of this subject, see Meaghan Clarke, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain, 1880-1905* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005); Hilary Fraser, "Women and the Ends of Art History: Vision and Corporeality in Nineteenth-Century Critical Discourse," *Victorian Studies* (Autumn 1998/99): 77-100; Pamela Gerrish Nunn, "Critically Speaking," *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (New York: Manchester UP, 1995) 107-24.

³⁵ François Benoit's *L'art français sous la Révolution et l'Empire* (1897; Geneva: Slatkine-Megariotis, 1975).

art criticism in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras.³⁶ This claim is tenable only if the scope is limited to journalistic critiques, and even then, it is dubious, given that the *Bibliography of Salon Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Second Empire* (to which Wrigley contributed) cites numerous examples of woman-authored criticism.³⁷ Moreover, those few attempts to address women's participation in the field of art criticism of this period have been both scarce and superficial. For example, one anthology, *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts 1820-1979*, makes a gesture at this undertaking, but refers to only one French woman, Germaine de Staël, writing about the arts in the early nineteenth century.³⁸ In her short essay on two eighteenth-century female French art critics, Vivian Cameron notes that both Marie-Madeleine Jodin and the woman who signed herself Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S. produced critiques that offered contradictory interpretations to those drawn by their male counterparts. However, Cameron does not explore the possibility that these were more than isolated excursions into the field of art criticism and that they were rather part of a larger phenomenon of women writing about art.³⁹ And while Gen Doy devotes a chapter to the subject of the female spectator in her

³⁶ Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) 171.

³⁷ Neil McWilliam, ed., *A Bibliography of Salon Criticism in Paris from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration, 1699-1827* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991).

³⁸ Claire Richter Sherman and Adele M. Holcomb, *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820-1979* (Westport: Greenwood P, 1981).

³⁹ See Vivian P. Cameron, "Two 18th-Century French Art Critics," *Woman's Art Journal* 5.1 (Spring/Summer 1984): 8-11. Of late, Cameron has widened her purview to

survey *Women and Visual Culture in 19th-Century France, 1800-1852*, this provides only a broad overview of art-critical activity in the first half of the nineteenth century, and limits its purview to Salon criticism, thus overlooking important avenues of participation for the woman art critic.⁴⁰

While there were certainly difficulties presented to women entering into the fields of art and aesthetics at this time, several writers nonetheless seized upon this historical moment. Increasing access to art exhibitions, expansion of the art market, expanding literacy rates, the explosion of the periodical publication industry, and leisure time for the bourgeois woman to read these publications all facilitated their engagement in the fledgling institution now known as art criticism. A number of women published Salon pamphlets and reviews in the periodical press, and while many wrote anonymously or adopted pseudonyms, there were several women who boldly declared their presence in this emerging field. A tradition of incorporating art and aesthetics into novelistic discourse—dating back at least as far as Madame de Lafayette’s *La princesse de Clèves* (1678)—and women’s dominance of this genre at the turn of the century also enabled this kind of participation. Their frequent use of the medium to engage in extra-literary discourse was another important factor contributing to this development.⁴¹ Women’s

consider how women functioned as spectators during this period. A fascinating talk, “Looking at Art: The Female Spectator in the Salon in Pre-Revolutionary Paris,” delivered at the 2006 annual conference for the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS) held in Montreal, suggests a new direction in her scholarship.

⁴⁰ Doy, *Women and Visual Culture* chapter 3.

⁴¹ For additional information on the history of women and the novel in France, see Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991); and Nancy K. Miller, “Women’s Reading, Women’s Writing:

forays into non-fiction, including travelogues, instruction manuals, memoirs, and so forth, where art was frequently discussed, also allowed women to contribute to the framing of art criticism as an institution. I will argue that it was precisely because this institution was in its infancy that women were able to construct their own mode of cultural authority via their writings on art, and thereby impact the nature of nineteenth-century art criticism.⁴²

One can surmise the reasons why women's writings on art have been overlooked. First, the lack of attention given to women's writings on art can be explained in part by the unassuming formats in which these discussions appear. Instead of routinely publishing critiques for periodicals or publishing tomes on aesthetic issues, women often authored instruction manuals, advice books, biographies of artists and anthologies about artistic periods.⁴³ Secondly, women who wrote on art tended to embed their aesthetic ruminations within the pages of a novel or travel guide or political polemic rather than declare their forays as autonomous productions.⁴⁴ In addition, the informal ways in which women writers broached these topics often undermined the

Gender and the Rise of the Novel," *Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literatures in French*, ed. Joan DeJean and Nancy K. Miller (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) 37-54.

⁴² For more on this phenomenon of a woman establishing authority through her art writings, see Laurie Kane Lew, "Cultural Anxiety in Anna Jameson's Art Criticism," *Studies in English Literature* 36 (1996): 838.

⁴³ Nunn 111.

⁴⁴ Such approaches were not completely foreign to this new literary field. Men writing on art engaged of such practices; the reader is reminded of René Chateaubriand's aesthetic excursions in his novella *René* (1802).

significance of their project. Regarding women's writings on aesthetics at this time, Elizabeth Bohls notes:

The critiques of aesthetics, for the most part, are not laid out as argument, but rather emerge from the subtly or blatantly unconventional ways in which they apply the language of aesthetics. Such oblique strategies have been amply shown to be typical of early women writers. They were perhaps especially necessary when women took on a discourse as prestigious as aesthetics.⁴⁵

These various characteristics of post-Revolutionary art criticism authored by women may be construed as indicative of women's insecurity in engaging in the domain of art criticism. This "anxiety of authorship" certainly manifests itself in the writings of several of the women under consideration in this dissertation.⁴⁶

Importantly, the last two decades of the eighteenth century witnessed an explosion in art critical activity.⁴⁷ Why this growing interest? Certainly the widely held belief that art could inspire the viewer to become a more moral, virtuous citizen, as

⁴⁵ Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995) 4-5.

⁴⁶ The notion of women writers' "anxiety of authorship," or concerns over their lack of authorial lineage, plays upon Harold Bloom's notion of the male writer's "anxiety of influence," or fear that his works were too similar to his literary forefathers, as articulated in his *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973). On this "anxiety of authorship" for women, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

⁴⁷ Significantly, Diderot's *Salons* were first published in the 1790s, and the first anthology of his criticism was published in 1795.

articulated in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Lettres à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), remained extremely relevant during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras.⁴⁸ In addition, the growing awareness that the Salon was one of the key institutions in the formation of a “public” in France granted art a fundamental role in the development of culture. One means of persuading these constituents of the value of a particular position—aesthetic, cultural, political, or otherwise—was through the publication and distribution of Salon *livrets*, pamphlets and other similar material.⁴⁹ Indeed, the prologues to the 1785 and 1787 Salon reviews in the *Mémoires secrets* laud *la Critique* (“the Critic”) for generating a noteworthy self-consciousness within the public at large.⁵⁰ While the belief that the critic has a moral imperative is at the heart of much of the woman-authored art discourse of the period, we should recognize that very few, if any, of those women writing on the arts at this historical moment would declare themselves an “Art Critic;” first, this was not deemed an autonomous vocation in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, and secondly (and more importantly), most of these figures would have hesitated to assume such a presumptive title. This does not prevent us from designating these women writing on the arts as critics, for analysis of their discussions on aesthetic matters illustrates that

⁴⁸ Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986) 69.

⁴⁹ For a more extensive treatment of the social value of art in late eighteenth-century France, see James A. Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750-1799* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1965).

⁵⁰ Bernadette Fort, “The Visual Arts in a Critical Mirror,” *The Mémoires secrets and the Culture of Publicity in Eighteenth-Century France*, eds. Jeremy Popkin and Bernadette Fort (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998) 172.

these forays are captured within the designation “critic” as it was defined in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century.

Because art criticism was in its infancy at this time, there was a tremendous amount of fluidity in terms of the modes of communication, the qualifications to write authoritatively about art, and the means of expression. First, art criticism as a professionalized practice held a low degree of autonomy during this period, argues Dario Gamboni, who enumerates the difficulties in examining art criticism as a field of its own with a particular structure and individual evolution because of its frequent overlapping with other areas. He agrees with the looser categorization of nineteenth-century art criticism, stating that

in a narrow sense, 'art criticism' applies to a specific literary genre that appeared in France in the eighteenth century. . . . In a broad sense, it designates any commentary of a contemporary or past work of art, encompassing other literary genres such as poetry, fiction, essays, correspondence or diaries.⁵¹

Clearly, art criticism of this period appeared in a variety of places and not just in the journalistic publications of Salon reviews. Moreover, after reading art writings of the period, it becomes apparent that vocabulary and stylistic devices were appropriated from

⁵¹ Qtd. in Dario Gamboni, “The Relative Autonomy of Art Criticism,” *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Michael R. Orwicz (New York: Manchester UP, 1994) 186. In this piece, he also cites another critic, Jean-Paul Bouillon, who makes a provisional list of the categories of texts included in this “art literature”: the press articles and the dictionary entry, the art chronicle, the exhibition review, the museum guide, the travel account, the monograph, the historical study, the polemical text, the manifesto, the collection of aphorisms, the novel on art, the art novel, and art correspondence.

a variety of genres and that art-critical discourse ranged from the simple to the highly technical. Although a traditional language of art certainly existed and was used in discussions of art, a survey of Revolutionary and Napoleonic criticism demonstrates how this was augmented by literary, theatrical, and musical terminology and stylistic approaches.⁵² Critics also experimented with some of the formats introduced by pamphleteers in the pre-Revolutionary years.⁵³

Additionally, there were no specific qualifications to write art criticism in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Art criticism during this period was rarely more than an occasional or periodic activity; because there was no specific professional training for a critic, those who wrote criticism came from a variety of backgrounds and primary vocations.⁵⁴ Moreover, as one could not make a career solely as an art critic, criticism was produced by writers who wrote on myriad subjects, such as theater, literature, fashion, society news, music, politics and even pornography, often within the same publication.⁵⁵ While this era witnessed an increasing number of art experts, such as Touissant-Bernard Émeric-David, Charles Landon, and Etienne Delécluze, this

⁵² Bernadette Fort notes that the preponderance of Salon criticism adopted and blended forms of popular theatrical genres such as the *comédie*, the *parade*, the *vaudeville*, and others. See her “Voice of the Public: The Carnivalization of Salon Art in Pre-Revolutionary Pamphlets,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (1989): 377.

⁵³ Richard Wrigley, “Censorship and Anonymity in Eighteenth-Century French Art Criticism,” *Oxford Art Journal* 6.2 (1983): 22.

⁵⁴ Gamboni 184-5.

⁵⁵ Thomas Crow, “The *Oath of the Horatii* in 1785: Painting and Pre-Revolutionary Radicalism in France,” *Art History* 1.4 (December 1978): 434.

certainly did not preclude others from entering into discussions about art and aesthetics. Wrigley admits that, during this period, “the guise of the art critic was one which might be assumed by all-comers;” everyone from the provincial visiting the Salon for the first time to the academician had the right to play this role.⁵⁶ Truly, a major aspect of art criticism produced during this time was the widespread belief that cultural discourse should be a shared and democratically spirited enterprise that functioned as the voice of the public. While Wrigley’s text is nothing short of magisterial, in the end, his limited purview of art criticism fails to capture the diverse nature of critical production of this period, and serves to reinscribe those elitist values that were so hotly contested at the time.⁵⁷ In sum, we must acknowledge the complexity of the institutionalization of French art criticism. In the words of Adrian Rifkin: “If there is a relatively constant factor, itself historically changing, it is the highly problematic status of art criticism in the French social formation, as both within and outside of official discourses and institutions.”⁵⁸

A crucial aspect of this dissertation is to call into question conventional definitions of what constitutes art criticism in the nineteenth century—to effect a

⁵⁶ Wrigley, *Origins* 351.

⁵⁷ I believe that Wrigley's failure to acknowledge other sources for art criticism stems in part from his goal, which is to undermine the conventional view of French art criticism as only being practiced by *les gens des lettres* such as Diderot and Stendhal. Consequently, he focuses primarily on the overlooked journalistic writings of anonymous or little-known practitioners in order to arrive at what he perceives as more substantial conclusions about the development of the institution itself.

⁵⁸ Adrian Rifkin, “History, Time and the Morphology of Critical Language, or Publicola’s Choice,” *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Michael R. Orwicz (New York: Manchester UP, 1994) 31.

paradigm shift, so to speak, in the ways in which we characterize the field, so as to allow its richness and complexity to come to the fore.⁵⁹ In order to assess more accurately women's participation in art criticism we must, as Pamela Gerrish Nunn writes, "reappraise the term 'art criticism' and the figure of the art critic. . . [and recognize that] art criticism occurred in a multiplicity of forms and forums, of which the standard version—writer and/or public speaker expressing opinions in newspapers, periodicals, books and lectures—was only one."⁶⁰ While some scholars are beginning to heed Nunn's call for a more nuanced consideration of the definition of art criticism and how women contributed to this institution in the nineteenth century, I believe that this dissertation offers the first sustained response to this challenge. In this study, I will demonstrate not only the myriad forums in which women engaged in public art criticism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, but I will also offer analysis of how this discourse was in dialogue with contemporary developments in the political, social, and cultural realm. Furthermore, I will argue that it is imperative that we recognize the "polyphonic" nature of art criticism at this historical moment and thus refuse received constructions of this fledgling institution.⁶¹

⁵⁹ This questioning of paradigms via feminist art history is discussed in the introduction to Griselda Pollock's *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988). For essays on nineteenth-century art criticism as an institution, see Orwicz.

⁶⁰ Nunn 109. See also Ann Pullan, "Conversations on the Arts': Writing a Space for the Female Viewer in the *Repository of Arts*, 1809-1815," *Oxford Art Journal* 15.2 (1992): 15-26.

⁶¹ This term is used by Bernadette Fort in her "The Visual Arts in a Critical Mirror."

Discussions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women art critics must consider how their positions as viewing subjects were inflected in their writings, and how this period was germinal to notions of modern female spectatorship. Indeed, women's writings on art are caught up inextricably in questions of women as viewers and as public figures. One of the central questions this dissertation seeks to address concerns the female spectator's vision and visibility: how women saw art and in what contexts; how their aesthetic discourse intimates underlying sexual politics; and how the private and public spheres could collapse in the act of viewing and criticizing art at this particular historical moment. Occupying the liminal space between the ancien régime and modernity, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods stand as critical moments in the emergence of new economies of female spectatorship.

To be sure, the subject of women looking at art appears to have significant cultural valency in this historical period. Examples from the visual material of this period attest to this interest. For instance, a fashion plate published in an 1803 edition of the *Journal des dames et des modes* features a provocative image of a woman gazing upon a print of a female nude. This finds resonance in Henry Fuseli's dynamic sketch *Woman before the Laocoön* (c. 1800-1805), in which the reaction of the female spectator is absolutely palpable. Such artifacts participate in the construction of the modern female spectator, and demand a concomitant revisionist treatment of how we frame women's experiences before art in this "early" modern period. Truly, the early nineteenth-century in France was a critical period in the formation of the modern female spectator. As Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby notes, paintings like David's *Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799) foregrounded the female viewer and declared her an integral maker of meaning in

the visual culture of this period.⁶² Hence, we should acknowledge that women were active, visible spectators of art in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, and that visual and textual material produced in this era were formative to later discussions of the relationship among women, art, and the public.⁶³

We must complicate our discussions of female spectatorship on both a historical and theoretical level. Much of the literature devoted to this topic follows the convention that the gaze is essentially a masculinist construct.⁶⁴ Champion of this position is Luce Irigaray, who will say: “Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men.”⁶⁵ Such a characterization of the act of looking denies the possibility that women could adopt multiple positions before a work of art and have meaningful engagements with this art in ways that fall outside the ways in which female spectatorship is conventionally

⁶² See Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, “Nudity *à la grecque* in 1799,” *Art Bulletin* 80.2 (June 1998): 311-35, especially pages 327-31.

⁶³ Jann Matlock argues that it was during the July Monarchy that women were recognized as “a new audience for both art and journalism.” I maintain that the developments that she charts have firmly established roots in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France. See her “Seeing Women in the July Monarchy: Rhetorics of Visibility and the Women’s Press,” *Art Journal* 55.2 (1996): 73-84.

⁶⁴ The literature on the male gaze is vast. For groundbreaking discussions of this subject, see John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972) chapter three; and Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana U, 1982) 14-26.

⁶⁵ Luce Irigaray, as qtd. in Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 495. This position is articulated in Irigaray, “The Sex That Is Not One,” Elaine Marks and Isabel de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms* (Brighton: Harvester P, 1981).

defined.⁶⁶ While significant revisions have been made to these traditional notions vis-à-vis the subject of female spectatorship, many of these theories are either overlooked or underemployed when considering the viewership of women.⁶⁷ In the course of this dissertation, I hope to explore a number of questions related to this topic. What did it mean to look as a woman in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, to situate oneself before the work of art as a physical presence, or to conjure up the materiality of the woman viewer's presence in the textual discourse that these women art critics generated? Were there options for women art critics to circumvent androcentric patterns for approaching and discussing aesthetic matters, and did they take them? When considering women viewers of art, how did these writers respond to Teresa de Lauretis's question regarding female spectatorship: "What forms of identification are possible, what positions are available to female readers, viewers, and listeners?"⁶⁸ These

⁶⁶ Some of these same questions are broached in Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon," *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, ed. Rosemary Betterton (London: Pandora, 1987) 217-34.

⁶⁷ Critical revisions include Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Film and Feminism*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 418-37; Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984); E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?," *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Meuthen, 1983) 23-35; and Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)," *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982) 29-38.

⁶⁸ De Lauretis, 121. De Lauretis emphasizes the positionalities occupied by the female spectator, writing: "[W]e could say that the female spectator identifies with both the subject and the space of the narrative movement, with the figure of the movement and the figure of its closure, the narrative image. Both are figural identifications, and both are possible at once; more, they are concurrently borne and mutually implicated by the process of narrativity" (143). Although she is considering narrative in cinema, these

are some of the questions I seek to address in this survey of the critical discourse of women writing about the arts in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

I maintain that many—but certainly not all—of those women writing about their experiences before a work of art, were refusing positions as mere objects of the gaze or passive transmitters or carriers of (male) aesthetic discourse, and instead were intent on fashioning a place within the cultural sphere that emphasized their subjectivities at work.⁶⁹ Like many other feminist art historians, I am uncomfortable with the assumption that all women “see” similar things—i.e. that there is a single position or vantage point that captures this notion of female spectatorship. A survey of the criticism produced by women during this period attests to the diversity of positions available for women as viewing subjects at this time. Many will closely align with official ideology and cultural practices. Others will refuse to adopt such a position and instead offer more subversive reviews, thereby becoming the “resistant” viewer. Such an individual, in the words of Griselda Pollock, “opens a way to explore fissures in an official, sanctioned culture and its narratives by not participating in its games—the language of connoisseurial consumption and heterosexual masculine scopophilia that the museum consecrates from within a sexually specific economy of desire.”⁷⁰ Here, Pollock is

notions of female spectatorship are suggestive for developing theories regarding women’s engagement as viewers and critics of art.

⁶⁹The notion of woman as vessel is a potent idea in the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986).

⁷⁰ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writings of Art’s Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 135-36. Betterton defines this approach thus: “This suggests a certain ability to move between and to acknowledge different viewpoints at

describing Charlotte Brontë's famous female spectator, Lucy Snowe, whose experience before a seventeenth-century Italianate painting of a reclining nude woman has served as an important marker of the changing position of women as viewers of art in the nineteenth century.⁷¹ I want to propose that similar gestures of refusal to adopt conventional approaches to viewing and commenting upon art appeared well before the 1848 publication of Brontë's novel, *The Professor*. Whether it is Angélique Vandeuil's enchantment before Pierre-Narcisse Guérin's seductive representation of Hippolyte in the Salon of 1802; a young girl's raptures before the Apollo Belvedere, as recounted in an 1802 issue of the *Journal des dames et des modes*; or Germaine de Staël's heroine Corinne boldly contradicting her lover's opinions on art, women were troubling expectations regarding their engagement with art. It appears that this historical moment offered much to the female viewer and woman art critic. It is my hope that this project will contribute in some way to heightening recognition of female viewership in the pre-*flâneuse* era (that is, before Charles Baudelaire defined the *flâneur* in his *The Painter of Modern Life* of 1863); to date, much of the theorization on the female spectator in the so-called modern period is taken up only around mid-nineteenth century.⁷²

once, to look critically 'against the grain' while still enjoying the process itself." See Betterton 222.

⁷¹ To date, the implications of this passage for developments in women's participation in art criticism remain relatively unexplored.

⁷² For germinal discussions on the nineteenth-century female spectator, which look exclusively at post-1850 manifestations of such activities, see Pollock, *Vision and Difference*; and Janet Wolff, "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity P, 1990) 34-50, as well as her more recent consideration of this subject, "Gender and the

One of the aims of this project is to show how the writings on art by individuals such as Caroline Wuïet, Juliane de Krüdener, Victoire Babois, Germaine de Staël, and Stéphanie-Félicité Genlis, among others, articulate women's vital, viable presence within this androcentric society. Some of these critics will valorize earlier historical periods, while others will express faith in the new French Republic. A few will offer radical interpretations of artworks rather than reiterating the positions of the leading critics of the day. Occasionally, these women writers will express interest in lesser known artists and works instead of commenting on the famous masters and masterpieces of the day. The figure of the woman artist and the role of women in this society are recurring topics in the critiques of many of these writers, and thus this dissertation will explore how these woman-authored discussions were implicated in this discourse. Several of these critics will emphasize their position, and even their audience's position, as women, thus making gendered spectatorship and its attendant issues of subjectivity and desire a focal point of their discussion. Such writings give invaluable insights into the ways in which women were both imagining and inserting themselves into late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French culture.

The myriad issues surrounding women's participation in the arts as critics and viewers are raised in this dissertation, which is composed of chapters focusing on particular avenues for the publication of women's writings on art in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Chapter 1 is devoted to women-authored critiques published in the periodical press—journals, pamphlets, and polemical treatises—from c. 1785-1815.

Haunting of Cities: Or, the Retirement of the *Flâneur*," *AngloModern: Painting and Modernity in Britain and the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003) 68-85.

After discussing the nature of the publishing industry, the contours of the field of journalism, and the issues related to women's authorial position to authority, I examine how certain recurring issues—the relationship between the political and the aesthetic, the place of the woman artist in this culture, the figure of the female spectator, among others—were treated in specific acts of criticism. In the course of this chapter, I try to allow the individuality of the observations of these women to remain evident, while situating them within the broader spectrum of the aesthetic and art critical discourse of this period, and while picking out some common threads that connect their enterprises.⁷³ In chapter 2, I focus on women's contributions to art criticism in the literary genre of the novel, looking to how prominent writers such as Juliane de Krüdener and Stéphanie-Félicité, la comtesse de Genlis, made use of aesthetic discourse in their popular fiction. Their novels engage in contemporary aesthetic debates surrounding such matters of the hierarchy of genres, the function of art in the personal and social spaces, and women's participation in the creation and reception of art. The final chapter (chapter 3) takes Germaine de Staël's monumental novel-cum-travelogue, *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807) as a case study—albeit an exceptional one—for the ways in which women writers could use art criticism to perform significant cultural work. Staël's use of aesthetic discourse as a

⁷³ I believe it is important to note that most of these women have remained unacknowledged in the scholarly discourse of the period and that one of the functions of this dissertation is to raise awareness of their presence and participation. To deny this kind of attention to these figures as individual entities, or to readily accept the proclaimed “death of the author” is, in my mind, to capitulate to patriarchal strategies for submerging the woman writer. A similar questioning of the productivity of postmodern theory for feminist art historians can be found in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, Introduction, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2005) 1-25.

political weapon, along with the creation of a formidable female spectator and consummate art critic in the figure of the heroine, Corinne, are examined within the context of women writing about art in post-Revolutionary France. Finally, in the epilogue of this dissertation, I bring attention to other places in which women engaged in art criticism—some of these public, such as the memoir, and others of these private, such as diaries, letters, and other miscellany—that offer additional sites for future considerations on this subject.

In sum, I believe that this dissertation will demonstrate that in order to have a more expansive understanding of the art world of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, we must revisit traditional notions regarding the nature of the field of art criticism as well as the cultural politics of this period. This necessitates questioning conventional rubrics used to explain late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French society and embracing the multiple vantage points that coexisted therein. Seizing upon a particular historical moment conducive to achieving their projects, and using periodical literature and Salon pamphlets, novels and travelogues, and other literary genres as their forums, these women were able to express their vision and voice in Revolutionary and Napoleonic society. To continue to characterize this period as necessarily exclusionary and prohibitive for women is to perpetuate our own cultural myths. To continue to minimize women's contributions to the French art world is to act injudiciously vis-à-vis the complexities of this culture.

CHAPTER ONE
ON THE SALON: WOMAN-AUTHORED ART CRITICISM
IN THE PERIODICAL PRESS

Writings on art found in journals, *livrets*, pamphlets, and other such publications constitute the core of the seminal literature related to the collection and dissemination of post-Revolutionary art criticism.¹ To date, examinations into the presence of women art critics in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France deal almost exclusively with material related to the Salons and published in the periodical press. While this characterization of the field demands reconsideration—and indeed, this dissertation argues against such a narrow definition of art criticism—it is imperative that we attend to contributions made by women art critics in these venues. The various bibliographies on Salon criticism indicate that women were clearly minority figures in the world of art journalism (excepting the possibility that many anonymous and pseudonymous pieces were penned by women). Even with a number of additions this dissertation makes to

¹ These works include: Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993); Neil McWilliam, ed., *A Bibliography of Salon Criticism in Paris from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration, 1699-1827* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991); Hélène Zmijewksa, *La critique des Salons en France du temps de Diderot, 1759-1789* (Paris: Gazette des beaux-arts, 1970); Maurice Tourneux, *Salons et expositions d'art à Paris, 1801-1870: Essai bibliographique* (Paris: Jean Schemit, 1919); Anatole de Courde de Montaiglon, *Le livret de l'exposition de 1673, suivi d'un essai de bibliographie des livrets et critiques, 1673-1851* (Paris, 1852). The most important collection of Salon criticism for this period is a sixty-three volume set of art writings catalogued by Georges Duplessis in his *Catalogue de la collection de pieces sur les beaux-arts imprimées et manuscrites recueillie par Pierre-Jean Mariette, Charles-Nicolas Cochin et M. Deloynes, auditeur des comptes, et acquise récemment par le Département des estampes de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris, 1881). This collection of salon *livrets* and pamphlets, critiques published in the periodical press, newsletters, epistolary pieces on art, and other art writings is invariably referred to as the Deloynes Collection.

the ranks of women writing about art during this period, their presence should not be exaggerated. Salon criticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century remained the domain of men. That said, the acts of art criticism done by women in conjunction with the Salon were significant gestures. These point to the possibilities for women to enter into the framing of a nascent profession. Furthermore, their critiques enable us to see the myriad ways women used art criticism to fashion identities and to define their relationship to the public sphere.

In this chapter, I will attend to the specific contributions of women writers (or those who assumed a female pseudonym) who responded to the Salons in various venues, with particular emphasis on their writings for the periodical press. Several of these critics and their works have escaped the attention of scholars working in the fields of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century art, and hence, I hope to raise consciousness of the underexamined reviews of key artworks and central aesthetic issues broached by these women.

And while it must be stressed that the contours of woman-authored critiques during this period were variegated in terms of language, form, and content, I want to point out that there were a number of recurring issues found in this corpus of material that deserve careful consideration. For instance, questions surrounding the role of art in society, with the attending moral and political matters raised in such inquiries, along with the public function of the critic, are often addressed in their writings. Most interesting, however, is the sustained attention given in these women-authored critiques to debates surrounding women's participation in the production and reception of art. The contributions of women artists, and the growing recognition of women as consumers of

art—as spectators and as critics—were of particular interest to many of these writers. This subject will serve as the primary lens through which Salon criticism by women is examined in this chapter.

Salon criticism generated by women writers in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France offers a fascinating perspective on how women were negotiating a place in the fledgling profession of art criticism, establishing their presence in the public sphere, and complicating discussions of women as subjects at this critical historical juncture. These critiques, inspired by the public act of viewing art and issued in the public venues of periodicals and pamphlets, are important signifiers of the shifting concepts of women's place in the realms of art and society in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Moreover, their writings invite a reconsideration of women's positions as modern subject-beholders. Capitalizing on developments within the periodical press industry, the unsettled nature of French society at this time, and women's cultural literacy—particularly the ways in which the Salon could be mobilized as a site of the production of identity—these women writers found in art an efficacious means of engaging with broader political and social issues. Taken as a whole, these reviews and critiques of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Salons signal the emergence of women into the field of art criticism, and point to patterns and strategies women adopted to address gendered issues of art and culture in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

It bears emphasizing that the women writing on art for the periodical press came from diverse backgrounds, used myriad modes of communication, published on many subjects, and possessed varying degrees of confidence in their critical enterprises. Several of these figures, such as Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S. and “Anna Cléophile”

declared their training as artists, and hence, the observations on conception and execution in their critiques are often couched in sophisticated, even technical, language. Extra-aesthetic issues tied explicitly to politics motivated other authors, like Marie-Madeleine Jodin, who used the contemporary French school of painting as a testimony to the moribund state of society in 1790, and Claire Réguis, la comtesse Lenoir-Laroche, whose extended analysis of Jacques-Louis David's painting *Léonidas* was motivated by nationalistic fervor. We know that a few of these career writers, including Fanny Raoul and Marguerite-Victoire Babois, covered topics ranging from the arts and letters to society news in the periodical press, and that they also published novels, elegies and other writings as a means of supporting themselves. Whereas some of these critics were dependent upon their pen for their livelihood—the entrance of Caroline Wuïet, author of several art-related articles in 1798-1799, into journalism seems to have been born out of necessity, for example—others, such as Angélique Vandeuil, daughter of the most esteemed art critic of eighteenth-century France, Denis Diderot, were from the privileged classes and had other motivations for writing. And while a few of these women adopt a strident tenor that commands respect, there are certainly instances in which the woman art critic undermines her efforts, as found in the prefatory remarks of Mlle E. . .D's *Petit revue des tableaux* of 1814. Hence, a survey of those women writing for the periodical press, for the constituents of the Salon public, and for the greater community reveals an extraordinary richness and diversity.

An analysis of women's activities within art criticism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France must take into account the multiple forces that shaped these productions. The radical changes experienced in the publishing world at this time

definitely impacted the emergence of women art critics. Rapid growth in such venues as cultural journals, and particularly those publications deemed women's journals, encouraged women's participation in discussions on art and aesthetics. Moreover, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras were crucial moments for establishing female authorial voices, as women were negotiating a place in the social order. The discovery of these voices was a complex and uneven process, and women writers of this period found themselves negotiating between tradition and innovation in the fields of art and literature as they sought to participate in this arena of art criticism—a literary undertaking that cut across conventional literary borders. In addition, the debates connected to women in the public sphere were intense, and we must recognize that limitations and strictures—whether social or psychological—affected what women wrote regarding to art.

Undoubtedly, the changing nature of the periodical press in post-Revolutionary France had an inestimable effect on the fledgling field of art criticism.² The Revolution and the revocation of censorship laws that had characterized the realm of publishing during the ancien régime ignited an explosion of printed material. Indeed, in 1789, 140 periodicals were started in Paris.³ This proliferation of journals had enormous implications for the shaping of the public sphere. As politician and journalist Pierre-

² For an overview of the periodical press at this juncture, see Eugène Hatin, *Histoire politique et littéraire de la presse en France*, vol. 7 (Paris, 1861); André Cabanis, *La presse sous le Consulat et l'Empire* (Paris: Société des études robespierristes, 1975); Jacques Godechot, "La presse française sous la Révolution et l'Empire," *Histoire générale de la presse française*, ed. Claude Bellanger, vol.1 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969); Hugh Gough, *The Newspaper Press in the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1988); and Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799* (Durham: Duke UP, 1990).

³ Claude Labrosse and Pierre Rétat, *Naissance du journal révolutionnaire 1789* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1989) 141-42.

Louis Roederer argued in 1796, the periodical press was more influential than any other media, for they were read by all classes, were available, “every day, at the same time . . . in all public places,” and had become “the almost obligatory diet of daily conversation.”⁴ Napoleon recognized the power of the periodical press, and immediately pushed for measures that would ensure his control over the printed word in France, thus circumscribing the activities of the publishing industry.⁵ For example, in 1800, all but thirteen of the seventy-three journals published in Paris were suppressed and a team of censors was established to monitor carefully these publications. Interestingly, Napoleon’s tight rein on political journals seems to have promoted the expansion of cultural journals that focused on society life, fashion, religion and philosophy, and the arts and letters—a key development for those writing art criticism in that it heightened the demand for coverage of these areas. This explosion of cultural journals occurred, it can be argued, because the new press laws exempted any “journals devoted exclusively to the sciences, the arts, literature, commerce, or announcements and advertisements.”⁶ Of the more than sixty journals published during the Napoleonic period, less than one-third carried political news, and even the thirteen officially sanctioned political newspapers expanded their coverage to include pieces on the arts and sciences. Thus, as Susan

⁴ Pierre-Louis Roederer, qtd. in Popkin, *Revolutionary News* 3.

⁵ For a discussion of censorship in Napoleonic France, see especially Victor Coffin, “Censorship and Literature Under Napoleon I,” *The American Historical Review* 22.2 (January 1917): 288-308; and Carla Hesse, *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1780-1810* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1991).

⁶ “Actes du gouvernement: Arrêté du 27 nivôse [17 janvier 1800],” *Journal de Paris* (30 nivôse, an 8/20 January 1800): 540.

Siegfried has argued persuasively, the cultural realm was proclaimed distinctly non-political—and thus criticism was a mode of presentation that could be effectively used to cloak subversive political and social views.⁷ This development was exploited by some of the women writing about art in post-Revolutionary France.

These cultural journals were an effective venue for diffusing the political into the commonplace conversations on art and letters, theater and music. In the end, such publications—and other literary and cultural means—may have done more to define women’s place within Napoleonic society than the narrowly defined political acts.⁸ The explosion of women’s journals, which almost always published both artworks and writings on art, marks the widespread interest in women’s participation in the arts, and is thus of interest in this investigation into women as critic-actors in the public sphere.⁹

The pages of women’s journals of this period, such as the *Journal des dames et des modes*,

⁷ The “non-political” elements of these newspapers were often placed in a separate section, called the *feuilleton*. The *feuilleton*, which provided coverage of cultural topics, commonly ran along the bottom of the page and often in smaller typeset and thus was carefully differentiated from the political and military news; in some instances, this *feuilleton* could actually be cut away from the main body of the newspaper, and sold separately. Susan Siegfried, “The Politicization of Art Criticism in the Post-Revolutionary Press,” *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Michael R. Orwicz (New York: Manchester UP, 1994) 11-12. For a discussion on the relationship between the aesthetic and the political, see Francis Haskell, “Art and the Language of Politics,” *Journal of European Studies* 4 (1974): 215-32.

⁸ For a discussion of the importance of cultural journals for defining women’s roles and spheres, see Elizabeth Colwill, “Women’s Empire and the Sovereignty of Man in *La décade philosophique*, 1794-1807,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29.3 (1996): 265-89.

⁹ See Jeanne Brunereau, *Presse féminine et critique littéraire de 1800 à 1830* (Paris: Eve et son espace créatif, 2000); Suzan van Dijk, *Traces des femmes, Présence féminine dans le journalisme français du 18e siècle* (Amsterdam: APA-Holland UP, 1988); and Evelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France, des origines à 1848* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966).

were filled with articles on artists, Salon reviews, letters to the editor regarding matters of art education, and so forth, and thus signal the significant intersections between women, art, and culture.¹⁰ In one 1802 edition of the *Petit magasin des dames*, it included an excerpt from art minister Vivant Denon's exegesis on the Venus of the Louvre, an anonymous piece titled "Traite de genérosité envers la famille de l'artiste," and an extensive biographical sketch on Madame Vincent.¹¹ The extensive coverage given to the arts in these publications is suggestive for the ways in which cultural criticism could be used as a means of asserting one's place in both the discursive and public spaces of post-Revolutionary France. The increasing numbers of art-related items in these journals also intimates that this society valued a woman's knowledge of the visual arts. Indeed, this heightened attention speaks to how the arts were inextricably connected to contemporary definitions of the cultured woman.

In addition to newspapers and journals, the pamphlet format for art criticism, popularized in the decades leading up to the Revolution, enjoyed continued viability into the early nineteenth century and presented another venue for women writing about art. La Font de Saint-Yenne's 159-page brochure on the Salon of 1747, which he published anonymously, ushered in the use of this venue for discussing art, and it was a well-established mode of disseminating views by 1789. During the Revolutionary era, political polemicists particularly favored the pamphlet for the dissemination of their views, and this tradition surely inflected the creation and reception of the brochures

¹⁰ See my "The *Journal des dames et des modes*: Fashioning Women in the Arts, c. 1800-1815," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 5.1 (March 2006) [http://www.19thcartworldwide.org/spring_06/articles/jens.html].

¹¹ *Le petit magasin de dames* (Paris, 1802).

produced in conjunction with the Salons. Generally speaking, Salon pamphlets were published anonymously, and contained more provocative material than the reviews published in the periodical press.¹²

In the years following the Revolution, the pamphlet continued to function as a key venue for Salon criticism. These pamphlets were sold in bookstores and souvenir shops, by street vendors, and even on the stairs leading up to the entrance of the Salon. And while art-related pamphlets were distributed at other times, there was a proliferation of these publications when the Salon was in session. When discussing the availability of this material, Louis-Sébastien Mercier speaks of the “deluge of pamphlets” that were, he declared, written for “the envious, the ignorant, and the amateur.”¹³ While it is difficult to ascertain the number of Salon-related pamphlets that typically appeared, we do know that in 1800, there were eleven of these in circulation. These brochures were affordable (they sold for around 10-20 *sous*), and thus accessible for much of the populace.¹⁴ The

¹² Bernadette Fort, “The Visual Arts in a Critical Mirror,” *The Mémoires secrets and the Culture of Publicity in Eighteenth-Century France*, eds. Jeremy Popkin and Bernadette Fort (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998) 142-74. For a discussion of the ways in which popular pamphlets illuminate the political climate of late eighteenth-century France, see Popkin, *Revolutionary News*; and Robert Darnton, “The High Enlightenment and the Low-life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France,” *Past and Present* 51 (1970): 81-115.

¹³ “Pendant l’ouverture du salon, il paraît une multitude de brochures que tracent tour à tour l’envieux, l’ignorant et l’amateur. Chacun alors à la manie de se connaître en peinture, et les gens de lettres en général ne s’y connaissent pas, quoiqu’ils affectent aujourd’hui de faire entrer dans leur style beaucoup de termes de cet art. Ce déluge de pamphlets n’empêche pas la foule de se porter aux tableaux critiqués ; et l’enfant qui sourit à la peinture parlante, détruit toutes les objections de l’écrivain prévenu ou difficile.” Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Paris le jour, Paris la nuit: Tableau de Paris, le nouveau Paris*, ed. Michel Delon (1782; Paris: Robert Laffront, 1990) 195.

¹⁴ Wrigley, *Origins* 155-56.

tenor of these pamphlets varied: while some drew upon the characters, plots, and discursive formats found in contemporary theater, others followed the rhetorical strategies of the polemical or political treatise; and while some of these brochures functioned as condensed versions of the official Salon *livret*, still others ventured into more imaginative territories. Despite the ephemeral nature of these publications, as well as the scornful attitude of some toward these publications, we must recognize their significance. Collectors of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French criticism did indeed seek after this ephemera for their archives, and these pamphlets are frequently cited in art-historical scholarship devoted to this period. In the end, it appears that the rich, varied, and largely unregulated post-Revolutionary industry of cultural pamphlets held out much promise for women venturing into the arena of art criticism.

In terms of women's position within the sphere of journalism, it should be noted that whereas few women were attracted to the developing profession of journalism during the ancien régime, there was a marked increase in women's participation in the periodical press in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras.¹⁵ Factors such as the deregulation of the press during the Revolution, along with the economic realities that forced women into finding a means of support in its aftermath, certainly had the effect of drawing more women into the field by the early nineteenth century.¹⁶ However, I

¹⁵ For additional information on women journalists in the ancien régime, see Van Dijk, *Traces des femmes*; and Nina Ratner Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le journal des dames* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1987).

¹⁶ For an overview of women's participation in publishing at this time, see Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton UP,

would argue that we should not underestimate how the explosion of cultural journals in particular impacted women's participation in journalistic enterprises. In the eighteenth century, women were viewed as arbiters of taste and cultural refinement; women of the nobility and aspiring *bourgeoises* were educated and trained in the matters of art, literature, music, and the like, and thus, were well prepared to write on such subjects.¹⁷ Thus, while an editor may have hedged on assigning a female journalist to cover political news, he most likely would have found such a figure capable of reviewing the latest play or novel.¹⁸ And while traditional narratives on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century aesthetics would have us believe that this realm was reserved for the elite (read: male aristocrat) and envisioned as an activity for the disinterested connoisseur, recent scholarship is persuasive in demonstrating that art criticism was not necessarily viewed in that light during this era.¹⁹ As stated in the introduction, I believe that it was precisely because this institution was in its formative stages, without rigid expectations for a critic's education and training and without specific forms and language for these critiques to follow, that women were able to publish their writings on art at this time.

2001); and her earlier article, "French Women in Print, 1750-1800: An Essay in Historical Bibliography," *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 359 (1998): 65-82.

¹⁷ Consideration of women in the arts in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain is given in Ann Bermingham's "The Aesthetics of Ignorance: The Accomplished Woman in the Culture of Connoisseurship," *Oxford Art Journal* 16.2 (1993): 3-20.

¹⁸ "Journalism . . . as a relatively new genre less subject to rules of evidence and to formal constraints, was neither so insistent on a putative objectivity nor so exclusively male or upper-class in practice [as scientific or scholarly writing.]" Margaret Waller, "Disembodiment as Masquerade: Fashion Journalists and Other 'Realist' Observers in Directory Paris," *L'esprit createur* 37.1 (Spring 1997): 44-54.

¹⁹ For example, see Wrigley, *Origins*; and David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005).

The pervasiveness of anonymity in the periodical press of this time renders it impossible to quantify the number of women who authored art criticism in journals, pamphlets, and other similar venues in post-Revolutionary France. The vast majority of criticism in periodicals published at this time was anonymous. Anonymity had been widely adopted by eighteenth-century art critics for several reasons, including the belief that such a mode of discourse would prove that altruism rather than egoism motivated the critic, and that it would focus the attention on the critique itself rather than on the personality of the critic. Also, we should be mindful that authors' need for protection from the consequences of governmental censorship continued well into the nineteenth century.²⁰ Additionally, the common practice of signing articles with initials and the frequent use of multiple pseudonyms present further difficulties in attributing journalistic pieces to women. In the periodical press, critics' signatures were often in the form of initials, which would intimate to the reading public that these were opinion pieces. For example, Caroline Wuiet—who will be considered at length momentarily—signed many of her articles “C.W.,” but she is known to have published her music under the name of her husband, Monsieur Auffdiener. In contemporary literature, we find that this figure was variously referred to as “Mademoiselle Caroline,” “Madame Auffdiener” (her married name), and also “Caroline Elléart.” To complicate matters, there are a number of alternative spellings of Wuiet, including “Vuiet,” “Wuyet,” “Vuyet,” “Vuiel,” “Vuet,”

²⁰ Richard Wrigley, “Censorship and Anonymity in Eighteenth-Century French Art Criticism,” *Oxford Art Journal* 6.2 (1983): 17-28. See also Roger Bellet, “Masculin et féminin dans les pseudonyms des femmes de lettres au 19e siècle,” *Femmes de lettres au 19ième siècle: Autour de Louise Colet*, ed. Roger Bellet (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1982) 249-81.

and “Wuier.”²¹ Of the thirteen women writers considered in this chapter, seven of these figures published anonymously, pseudonymously, or with the assignation of initials only. While both male and female writers of this period assumed multiple authorial masks, women may have had additional motivations for obscuring their identities. For example, because women in France lacked legal rights to their literary production, some appear to have resorted to the use of a male pseudonym as a means of controlling the publication of their work.²² And because the male authorial voice was viewed as more authoritative, surely some of the women writers of the period found it advantageous to sign their works with male pseudonyms.

In addition, there were other strictures placed upon those writing for the periodical press that had an effect on those writing criticism. For example, the critic worked under editorial constraints and government control, and hence, we find that the tenor of journalistic reviews and articles on the arts was often much less inflammatory than that found in pamphlets or other ephemera.²³ Also, critics were not necessarily at liberty to choose the focus of their review and had to be continually mindful of the public’s desires. Even when these writers served as editors of journals, and thus would ostensibly have had more autonomy in selecting subjects for discussion (two women who authored art criticism functioned as the editor and main contributor to their

²¹ See Calvert Johnson, “Caroline Wuier: Eighteenth-Century French Composer, Journalist, and Novelist,” *Woman of Note Quarterly* 2 (1994): 20-27. Wrigley refers to her as “Caroline Wuier.”

²² Carla Hesse, “Reading Signatures: Female Authorship and Revolutionary Law in France, 1750-1850,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22.3 (1989): 469-87.

²³ Wrigley, “Censorship” 22.

journals— Caroline Wuiet and Fanny Raoul), it is impossible to know if their topics reflect personal preferences or, rather, were aimed at engaging a wider audience for their publications. Pragmatism and economic realities inevitably played a role in how and what women approached in their critiques on art.

To these limitations, we must add the insecurities these women must have experienced as they entered into the male-dominated fields of journalism and art criticism. With a limited heritage upon which to draw—excepting the existence of the influential *Journal des dames* of the 1770s and 1780s—these women writers were forging new paths. Rather than experiencing the “anxiety of influence” felt by male authors, who worried about differentiating themselves from their predecessors, these women were faced with the “anxiety of authorship” or lack of antecedents upon which to draw. We should not be surprised to see women writers take refuge in the conventional rubrics of the male author or deferring to their authoritative positions (Mlle E. . . D’s *Petit revue des tableaux*, which commences with Michel de Montaigne’s famous dictum, “I give my opinion, not as a good one, but as my own,” comes to mind).²⁴ Nor should we find fault with the tentative and sometimes ambivalent nature of much of this woman-authored discourse. While this arena held great promise for women entering into the fray of cultural politics, it was also a field riddled with uncertainties for such individuals. It is to be expected that women writers wrote with varying degrees of confidence during this

²⁴ “Je donne mon avis, non comme bon, mais comme mien—Mont[aigne],” Mademoiselle E . . . D [Erard], *Petit revue des tableaux: Salon of 1814* (Paris, 1815) 1.

unsettled time in which there were major reframings of the relationship among women, art, and society.

One development that encouraged women to engage in art criticism was the increased presence of the woman viewer-cum-critic in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Salon pamphlets and critiques. I maintain that the practice of women writing about art for the public via periodical literature was normalized, to an extent, by these publications. From *La bourgeoise au sallon* [sic] (1787) to *Madame Angot au muséum* (1801) and *Revue de tableaux au musée par M. et Mme Denis et Benjamin, leur fils* (1808), fictionalized female protagonists maintained a noteworthy presence in Salon criticism throughout this period.²⁵ Indeed, the significant number of Revolutionary and Napoleonic pamphlets of Salon reviews that featured women as participants attests to a growing recognition of women as spectators of art and as members of the broader public sphere. Frequently, these pamphlets featured female characters derived from theatrical productions or popular literature. Stock characters such as Madame Angot, a fishwife with aspirations above her station, and Fanchon, a musician, guided viewers through the Salons and offered humorous interpretations of the art they encountered. While on the surface pamphlets featuring such characters may have seemed superficial and aimed at the uneducated masses, analysis reveals that such “carnivalization” of criticism was an effective strategy for writers wanting to make serious political

²⁵ See *La bourgeoise au sallon* (London and Paris, 1787); *Madame Angot au muséum, premiere visite* (Paris, 1801); *Revue de tableaux au musée par M. et Mme Denis et Benjamin, leur fils* (Paris, 1808).

statements without drawing the attention of government censors.²⁶ As one contemporary critic wrote in the *Journal des arts* in 1800, “A saying from Harlequin, a blunder from Scaramouche, a moral thought from a doctor in a café, have a greater effect and spread more of the universally held ideas than the sermons of Massillon, than the moral of Nicole, than the thoughts of La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Labruyère.”²⁷ Also, women may have felt more comfortable writing in a humorous fashion and in using common vernacular; a flight into the comedic could indicate insecurities, to be sure. Hence, we cannot dismiss the use of these jocular female character-critics as necessarily demeaning or inconsequential in the assertion of women’s place within the cultural sphere. To my mind, the frequent use of fictionalized women as viewing subjects in such publications is an important indicator of women’s increasing visibility in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic art world.

There were over a dozen women (or at least writers who assumed a female authorial voice) who wrote on art for the periodical press or published polemical pieces during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. Certainly there were more women engaged in such activities who wrote anonymously or pseudonymously, and this dissertation represents only a first effort at recovering some of these authors and their

²⁶ See Bernadette Fort, “Voice of the Public: The Carnivalization of Salon Art in Pre-Revolutionary Pamphlets,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (1989): 368-94.

²⁷ “Un bon mot d’Arlequin, une balourdise de Scaramouche, une pensée morale d’un docteur au café, font plus d’effet, répandent plus d’idées chez le commun des hommes que les sermons de Massillon, que la morale de Nicole, que les pensées de La Rochefoucauld, de Pascal et de Labruyère.” *Journal des arts* 83 (25 fructidor, an 8/12 septembre 1800): 171-73. For a discussion of the traditional uses of popular characters and terminology in eighteenth-century polemical literature, see Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism*.

critiques. In the pages that follow, I will examine instances of woman-authored Salon art criticism, as published in newspapers, journals, pamphlets, political treatises and even correspondence, that are suggestive for the ways in which such acts performed the cultural work of articulating and defining women's place within the art world and larger cultural sphere.

Women Art Critics and the Matter of Their Sex

While it appears that there were few women writing about art in the periodical press during the pre-Revolutionary era, it is worth noting that one of the most recognized pieces of art criticism of this period was the pamphlet *Avis important d'une femme sur le Sallon de 1785, par Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S.*²⁸ In this critique, which was declared by a contemporary as the best pamphlet published on that Salon,²⁹ the author foregrounds her sex. While we cannot state unequivocally that Madame E...S. was a woman, as male writers would occasionally assume a female authorial persona, the pamphlet's title, preface, and commentary suggests that it was penned by a woman. In her prefatory remarks, she stridently proclaims:

I am a Woman, a French woman, and a Painter; I have the right to your confidence, to your welcome, and to that of the public; but I accept

²⁸ Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., *Avis important d'une femme sur le Sallon de 1785, par Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S: Dédié aux femmes* (Paris, 1785). It has been suggested that Madame E. . .S. was an aristocratic woman who trained under Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, and that this pseudonym is actually an anagram. See Vivian Cameron, "Two 18th-Century French Art Critics," *Women's Art Journal* 5.1 (1984): 11, note 2.

²⁹ J.G. Wille sent a copy of the pamphlet *Avis important d'une femme sur le sallon de 1785* to the Baron de Sandoz-Rollin, along with the declaration that this was the one of greatest merit published that year. This anecdote is reported in Wrigley, *Origins* 158-59.

neither yours nor its, I want to merit it. And if this frivolous Work does not obtain me this, my attempts, my multiple efforts, the vivacity, the indefatigability of my ardor, will wrest it from you to all my Contemporaries. I shall persuade decidedly this haughty sex, which still doubts the moral capabilities of women, that we have been able, that we are able, that we shall always be able to march proudly as their equals in the career[s] of the Arts and Sciences.³⁰

This statement is remarkable on several fronts, most notably for how it articulates a woman's entitlement to express her views on art in a public manner. It is also a powerful expression of how women have earned the right to be viewed and treated as equals as they entered into liberal arts professions. Interestingly, in her discussion of Joseph-Marie Vien's *Return of Hector* (1783), Madame E...S. argues that it is precisely her position as a woman that enables her to engage meaningfully with certain artworks. She recounts how one author, described as "a witty man but one who only thinks *à la mode*," disparaged those who responded emotionally to a work of art—a comment that elicited the following retort from Madame E...S.: "I, a woman, and consequently

³⁰ "Je suis Femme, Françoise, et Peintre; j'ai droit à votre confiance, à votre accueil, à celui du Public; mais je n'accepte ni le vôtre, ne le sien: je veux le mériter. Et si ce frivole Ouvrage ne me les obtient pas, mes essais, mes efforts multipliés, la vivacité, l'infatigabilité de mon ardeur, les arracheront à vous à tous mes Contemporains. Je convaincrâi décidément ce sexe hautain, qui doute encore des puissances morales des Femmes, que nous avons pu, que nous pouvons, que nous pourrons toujours, dans la carrière des Arts & des Sciences, marcher fièrement ces égales." Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., preface. In this dissertation, I have retained the original capitalization and spelling in all quotations of primary source material. Because of the numerous mechanical and grammatical errors, it would be distracting to continually indicate these errors by means of [sic].

accommodating and feeble, have the good fortune to be touched merely by thinking of the death of a great man, defender of his country and victim of his love for it . . .”³¹

Here, the woman author argues that both her sensitivity or *sensibilité* as well as her moral superiority is an advantageous quality for an art critic. Other women writers on art of the period seem to share this belief in women’s more evolved notion of virtue.³²

Using the same sarcastic tone adopted by Madame E...S in her pamphlet on the Salon of 1785, Marie-Madeleine Jodin (1741-90) condemns male philosophers, politicians, and artists alike in her polemical piece, *Vues legislatives pour les femmes adressées à l’Assemblée nationale* of 1790. As mentioned earlier, women’s forays into art criticism in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France have gone largely unnoticed in part because these critiques were often embedded within other texts. Such is the case with this polemic, in which Jodin obliquely discusses works of the modern school of French painting in her address delivered to the National Assembly in 1790.³³ That this political activist would use art as a means of argumentation is not surprising, given that she was the ward of the

³¹ “[U]n homme d’esprit, mais qui pense à la mode,” and “Moi, Femme, conséquemment compatissante & foible, j’ai la bonhomie de m’attendrir par la seule pensée de la mort d’un grande Homme, défenseur de sa Patrie & victime de son amour pour elle; j’imagine même que je ne suis pas seule affectée par cette image, je me persuade que ce sujet intéressera toujours, quant il sera traite dans la vérité, dans les passions & dans les convenances.” Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., 7.

³² The literature on the concept of virtue in Revolutionary France is vast. For an introduction to this concept as it relates to women, see Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986).

³³ Mademoiselle [Marie-Madeleine] Jodin, *Vues legislatives pour les femmes adressées à l’Assemblée nationale* (Angers, 1790). Jodin is one of the two art critics discussed in Cameron’s “Two 18th-Century French Women Art Critics.”

great art critic Denis Diderot.³⁴ Like her benefactor, Jodin was also concerned with the immorality of contemporary art, although her denunciations fell on David and his colleagues rather than his Rococo predecessors.³⁵ According to Jodin, women have a superior morality that prevents them from embracing questionable virtues, like those espoused by Roman philosophers and leaders and championed in contemporary French paintings:

We have this advantage over you, Messieurs, in that our women of letters have never dipped their plume in Satyr's gall. . . . It would not be difficult, through a misuse of wit, to wilt your laurels by analyzing the acts of heroism which have immortalized the heroes whose names have resounded until our time. This action of Horace, for example, so vaunted in history, ought only be considered as the action of an able and fortunate soldier who owed his triumph to the confidence of his adversaries, and to their negligence rather than his courage. A Brutus and a Manlius, who, contrary to the opinion of the Senators and in spite of the prayers of the people, have their children killed, appear more like barbarians than ardent citizens.³⁶

³⁴ For additional information on Jodin, see Felicia Gordon, "The Accursed Child: The Early Years of Marie Madeleine Jodin (1741-90), Actress, *Philosophe*, and Feminist," *Women's History Review* 10.2 (2001): 229-48.

³⁵ Cameron 8.

³⁶ "Nous avons cet avantage sur vous, Messieurs, que nos femmes de lettres, n'ont jamais trempé leur plume, dans le fiel de la Satyre. . . . Il ne feroit pas difficile, par l'abus de l'esprit, de fétrir vos lauriers, en analysant les actes d'héroïsme, qui ont immortalisé les héros, dont les noms ont retenti jusqu'à nous. Cette action d'Horace, par exemple, si

Jodin's commentary is unique in that it suggests that paintings such as David's *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* (1789) or his *Oath of the Horatii* (1784-85), along with Jean-Simon Berthélemy's *Manlius Torquatus Condemning His Son to Death* (1785) were indecent and amoral. Her declaration that French women writers had not stooped to defend barbarous acts of the so-called heroes of antiquity is subversive; it also points to how women of this era purposefully highlighted their sex as a means of articulating their right, and even responsibility, to engage in the discursive framing of art and culture in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

Another instance of a female critic who believed that she could use her position as a woman to court favor with readers is Claire Régis, la comtesse Lenoir-Laroche (1762-1821).³⁷ In 1815, she published a small book, titled *La Grèce et la France, ou réflexions sur le tableau de Léonidas de M. David, adressées aux défenseurs de la patrie, par une française; suivies de la correspondance d'un officier d'artillerie, pendant la campagne de 1814, et de différentes pièces relatives cette époque*, which focused largely on Jacques-Louis David's painting *Léonidas at Thermopylae* (1814). Throughout *Le Grèce et la France*, Lenoir-Laroche is careful to stress both her sex and her love of country; this marriage should be viewed as a strategy to justify her boldness in conducting such a sustained analysis of a masterpiece. She

vantée dans l'histoire, ne seroit considérée, que comme l'action d'un soldat adroit & fortuné, qui dût plutôt son triomphe à la confiance de ses adversaires à leur négligence, qu'à son courage. Un Brutus & un Manlius, qui font mourir leurs enfans, contre l'avis des Sénateurs, & malgré les prières du peuple, paroïtroient plutôt barbares, que d'ardens citoyens. . . ." Jodin 17-18.

³⁷ For additional information on this figure, see Robert Amadou, "Le calvaire des lauriers de Madame Lenoir-Laroche," *Trésor martiniste* (Paris: Villain et Belhomme, 1969) 185-228.

declares that her motivations for writing this piece were altruistic and born from a woman's suffering heart. Lenoir-Laroche writes:

For me, I have rediscovered in my heart the sentiment of admiration for the Warriors of France; in concerning myself with them, I have naturally arrived at the principles of beauty, I will address to them the melancholic meditations of a profoundly afflicted woman. The Painting of Leonidas strikes me, by the painful sentiment that had hit me, more than any other; the dedication of the Spartans reminds me of the memory of our Heroes.³⁸

This "profoundly afflicted woman" sees her position as one that can be capitalized on, for she reminds the reader of her sex throughout this piece of polemical writing. For example, she asks her readers, the French soldiers, to excuse her confidence. Lenoir-Laroche states: "While addressing you on the considerations of the Painting of Léonidas, I do not pretend to own you: who am I to speak worthily of you? but it must be allowed a woman, who has devoted her life to the threshold for the fatherland, to soothe her pain by remembering your glory!"³⁹ True, upright citizens of France will grant Lenoir-

³⁸ "Pour moi, j'ai retrouvé dans mon coeur le sentiment de l'admiration pour les Guerriers français; en m'occupant d'eux, je suis arrivée naturellement aux principes du beau, je leur adresserai les méditations mélancoliques d'une femme profondément affligée. Le Tableau de Léonidas m'a frappé plus qu'un autre, par le sentiment douloureux dont j'étois pénétrée ; le dévouement des Spartiates me rappeloit le souvenir des nos Héros." Réguis 8.

³⁹ "En vous adressant les considérations sur le Tableau de Léonidas, je ne prétends pas vous louer: qui sui-je pour parler dignement de vous? mais il doit être permis à une femme, qui a dévoué sa vie au seuil pour la patrie, d'adoucir sa douleur par le souvenir de votre gloire!" Réguis 10.

Laroche the right to speak about David's painting; to do otherwise would be unfeeling and unpatriotic.

Few women art critics publishing in the periodical press during the post-Revolutionary era emphasized their sex to the extent of Caroline Wuiet (1766-1835), who published numerous articles on art after the Revolution. An ambitious woman whose enterprises extended into the literary, musical, and theatrical realms as well as into the aesthetic, Caroline Wuiet was in many ways an exceptional woman who keenly felt her position.⁴⁰ Her sensitivity to issues of gender, which will imbue her various productions, was cultivated in her youth. She writes:

My father, learned and open-minded, taught me not only his Art, but also the things men have to learn; he guided my education, shaped my sensibility, and gave me a principled and strong character; he developed in my soul the brave desire for glory. I felt that my sex could aspire to it, forgetting for a long time that it was born to please and to love.⁴¹

Caroline Wuiet certainly had an unusual upbringing and colorful life. As a young girl from Vienna, Wuiet's extraordinary musical gifts came to the attention of Marie-Antoinette, who arranged to have Wuiet study music with André-Ernst-Modeste Grétry,

⁴⁰ For biographical information on Caroline Wuiet, see Emile Souvestre, "Souvenirs de la République: Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris, une femme célèbre," *Le siècle* (9-15 avril 1841): 1-3; entry on Wuiet in *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, vol. 45 (Paris, 1843) 110; Calvert Johnson, "Caroline Wuiet: Eighteenth-Century French Composer, Journalist, and Novelist," *Woman of Note Quarterly*, vol. 2 (1994): 20-27; Jeremy D. Popkin, *The Right-Wing Press in France, 1792-1800* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980); and Sullerot, *Histoire* 76-77.

⁴¹ Qtd. in Jacqueline Letzer and Robert Adelson, *Women Writing Opera: Creativity and Controversy in the Age of the French Revolution* (California: U of California P, 2001) 54.

drama with Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, and painting with Jean-Baptiste Greuze. In the late 1770s and 1780s, Wuiet distinguished herself as a playwright and composer, becoming one of the first individuals to write both the words and music for her operas.⁴² She was elected to several learned academies, including the Académie des Arcades in Rome. Exiled during the Revolution, Wuiet traveled to England and Germany before returning to France around 1797.⁴³ Her activities during the Directory included the formation of a woman's club and her participation in the fashionable salon of Madame Tallien, where Wuiet earned the title "lioness of the Directory."⁴⁴ An eccentric figure, Wuiet received permission to wear men's clothing, perhaps as a means of facilitating her work as a journalist. In 1798, she began publishing several short-lived newspapers, which she herself edited. Wuiet's periodical underwent several transformations; beginning in February 1798, she launched *Le Cercle*, which was banned in December 1798. Her next endeavors were *Le Papillon*, which was started in July of 1798, and then *Le Phénix, journal politique et littéraire*, which began publication in

⁴² Letzer and Adelson 28.

⁴³ There are several discrepancies in the biographical information one finds on Wuiet. For example, Sullerot states that Wuiet returned to France during the Terror, while Johnson, following the information provided by Souvestre, dates her return to 1797. And while Sullerot characterizes Wuiet's woman's club as a charitable organization, Johnson refers to this as a social club concerned with more superficial matters.

⁴⁴ J.-M. Quérard, *La France littéraire, ou dictionnaire bibliographique des savants, historiens et gens de lettres de la France, ainsi que des littératures étrangères qui ont écrit en français, plus particulièrement pendant les 18^e et 19^e siècles*, vol. 10 (1827-39; Paris: Joseph Floch, 1964) 538-39.

September 1798 and was banned in December 1798.⁴⁵ Wuiet's final production as publisher and editor appears to have been *La Mouche* in September 1799.

These newspapers contain a number of art critiques authored by Wuiet, who frequently signed her articles with the provocative moniker "C.W. . . . académicienne," and thereby flaunted her status as a woman and an intellectual. To date, Caroline Wuiet's forays into art criticism have received only cursory attention.⁴⁶ While scholars have cited the six reviews of this Salon that were published in *Le Papillon*,⁴⁷ several other critiques written by Wuiet on both the 1798 Salon and other artistic matters printed in *Le Phénix* have gone without notice.⁴⁸ These critiques emphasize her position as a learned

⁴⁵ These bans are documented in Popkin, *The Right-Wing Press* 191, note 92.

⁴⁶ Deeming her "an exceptional example of a female journal reviewer" (171) of this period, Richard Wrigley's *Origins of French Art Criticism* cites a few of Wuiet's critiques of the Salon of 1798 that were published in *Le Papillon*, but does not discuss their content. In Gen Doy's work on female spectators in early nineteenth-century France, she attends more closely to Wuiet's short articles on this Salon, which included a laudatory paragraph on contemporary women artists and a highly-charged discussion of the eroticism in Gérard's show-stopping painting, *Cupid and Psyche*. See Doy, *Women and Visual Culture* 147-50; and her "What Do You Say When You're Looking? Gen Doy Looks at Women as Makers and Viewers of Painting in Early Modern France," *Women's Art Magazine* 70 (June/July 1996): 10-15.

⁴⁷ See McWilliam, *Bibliography of Salon Criticism*, entry 0540, and references cited above in Wrigley and Doy.

⁴⁸ Overlooked art critiques by Wuiet include: C. W. . . . , rédacteur, "Ma huitième promenade au Musée des arts," *Le Phénix* 10 (2 vendémiaire, an 7/23 septembre 1798): 4; [Unsigned], "Greuze," *Le Phénix* 11 (3 vendémiaire, an 7/24 septembre 1798) 3-4; C. W. . . . académicienne, "Ma neuvième promenade au Musée des arts," *Le Phénix* 15 (7 vendémiaire, an 7/28 septembre 1798): 3; C.W. "Deuxième édition revue et corrigée de la sixième promenade au Musée," *Le Phénix* 20 (13 vendémiaire, an 7/4 octobre 1798) 2; C.W. "La statue et non pas le portrait de Gille," *Le Phénix* 35 (27 vendémiaire, an 7/18 octobre 1798) 3. A work which comments on Jacques-Louis David's *Sabines* may also be

woman when she appends her contributions with the byline of “C.W., académicienne.” To my mind, such a signature signals an awareness of the instability of constitutive categories such as gender and class in post-Revolutionary culture, and thus the opportunity for an individual such as Wuïet to assume a meaningful place in the emerging social order.⁴⁹

Some of the women who penned articles, pamphlets, and other periodical material on art did not draw attention to their sex themselves—it was their editors who elected to do so. Such is the case with a short letter submitted to the editor of the *Journal des arts* in 1802, signed “V.L.G.,” which analyzed Pierre-Narcisse Guérin’s *Phaedra and Hippolytus*.⁵⁰ Interestingly, it seems that the author’s gender was what actually motivated its publication, for in the first footnote of the printed piece, it reads: “We would not return to this painting, of which we have already spoken at length, if this article had not

authored by Wuïet [C.J.B.L. . .R. . .], “Arts: Peinture,” *Le Phénix* 39 (1 brumaire, an 7/22 octobre 1798) 3].

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the instability of French society at this time, see especially Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, “Nudity à la grecque in 1799,” *Art Bulletin* 80.2 (June 1998): 311-35; Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Margaret Waller, *The Male Malady: Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993); and Doris Y. Kadish, *Politicizing Gender: Narrative Strategies in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991).

⁵⁰ V.L.G., “Tableau de Guérin: Article envoyé par une dame au *Journal des arts*,” ms. 29.785, Collection Deloynes, Département des estampes et de la photographie, Bibliothèque nationale de France. While this text is mentioned in the bibliographic literature on French art criticism, no one has remarked upon the fact that the author is a woman. In the handwritten copy of this letter in the Collection Deloynes; the submission is titled, “Guérin’s painting, article sent by a woman to the *Journal des arts*.” This is also noted in Duplessis’s index.

been by a woman.”⁵¹ One has to wonder why the editors felt it necessary to publish this piece (and let their readers know of this circumstance): were they impressed with the fact that a woman could write persuasively about art, or was it so unusual that a woman write a letter to the editor regarding the Salon that they felt compelled to print it? The body of this critique, which serves as the lead article for this edition of the *Journal des arts*, does not mention V.L.G.’s sex. The fact that this observer was a woman is never mentioned by the author herself; in fact, the confident tone and concise yet eloquent descriptions almost read as intentional devices employed by the author to undermine the perception, propagated in the popular press, that female Salongoers were uninformed Madame Angots or fanciful *merveilleuses*.

There were also instances in which women writers boldly declared their right to pen art criticism without drawing attention to their gender. Such is the case of Fanny Raoul (1772-after 1814), of whom little is known. Her most popular work was her strident pamphlet, *D’opinion d’une femme sur les femmes* (1801), an apology for women’s involvement in the cultural sphere that was incited by Maréchal’s misogynistic pamphlet (*Projet d’une loi important defense d’apprendre à lire aux femmes*) of that same year.⁵² Raoul also

⁵¹ “Nous ne reviendrions pas sur ce Tableau, dont nous avons déjà parlé convenablement, si cet article ne nous avait pas été par une Dame.” V.L.G., “Peinture: Aux rédacteurs du *Journal des arts* sur le tableau de Guérin,” *Journal des arts, des sciences, et de littérature* 238 (20 brumaire an 11/11 novembre 1802): 241-242.

⁵² Fanny Raoul, *Opinion d’une femme sur les femmes* (Paris, 1801).

edited and authored *Le Véridique*, a short-lived cultural journal.⁵³ While this woman writer contributed a number of articles—if not all—to this publication, it is her critiques on the art of Girodet that are of interest here. In a series of articles devoted to the Salon of 1814, signed “M.M.” (Raoul is assigned authorship in the only bibliographic reference to this work), and published in *Le Véridique*, there is little sense of the invocation of a female authorial voice.⁵⁴

Raoul begins her discussion by establishing her right to engage in art criticism and acknowledging the dangers of such activity. She declares:

All the world sees [and] all the world judges; but it is rare to see well, and even rarer again to judge well. Among the small number of those who ought to see, many are blindfolded; others are blinded by hatred and jealousy; others cave in to the enthusiasm of friendship; indeed it would be difficult to name all the sentiments, all the passions which can obscure aesthetic judgment; and that which will seem paradoxical, nevertheless, is only true; that is, for comparing and assuming a position on paintings at an exhibition, it is no less important to have integrity and passion than accuracy of taste.⁵⁵

⁵³ Mlle [Fanny] Raoul, *Le Véridique* (Paris, 1814): preface. For biographical information, see J.-M. Quérard, vol. 7, 452. Surprisingly little has been written about Raoul. The most extensive treatment of this figure is in Fraisse.

⁵⁴ See McWilliam, entry 1110.

⁵⁵ “Tout le monde voit, tout le monde juge; mais il est rare de bien voir, plus rare encore de bien juger. Parmi le petit nombre de ceux qui sauraient regarder, beaucoup ont devant les yeux le bandeau de la prévention; d’autres sont aveuglés par la haine et la jalousie; d’autres s’abandonnent à l’enthousiasme de l’amitié; enfin il serait difficile de

Raoul appears quite knowledgeable about the various accusations launched against those engaged in discussions of art in the periodical press. With the emphasis on art and aesthetics in post-Revolutionary discourse, and the right for all subjects to participate in *le public*, came the legitimization of the rights of all to participate in cultural conversations. This development, lamented by most art specialists, provoked critics like Pierre Chaussard to comment sarcastically that the contemporary critic was now expected to give “observations” rather than “critiques,” and that these untrained critics would be the ruination of art, as they are unable to comprehend either the “secrets of genius or the exercise of art.”⁵⁶ The concern over the ways in which the public has been misinformed by “unqualified” art critics is further echoed in the *avertissement* of Girodet’s *La critique des critiques du Sallon de 1806: Étrennes aux connaisseurs*.⁵⁷

Despite the dismay felt by artists and specialists over the influx of amateurs undertaking criticism, a major aspect of the discussions on art produced during this time

nommer tous les sentimens, toutes les passions qui peuvent égarer le jugement sur les arts; et ce qui semblera paradoxal, et n’est cependant que vrai, c’est que, pour comparer et mettre à leur place les tableaux d’une exposition, il ne faut pas moins d’intégrité et de force d’âme, que de justesse de goût.” Fanny Raoul, “Salon de 1814,” *Le Véristique* 10 (29 novembre 1814): 161.

⁵⁶ “[S]ecrets du génie ou de l’exercice [d’art].” Pierre Chaussard, *Essai philosophique sur la dignité des arts* (1798), qtd. in Annie Becq, “Expositions, peintres et critiques: Vers l’image moderne de l’artiste,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 14 (1982): 148.

⁵⁷ “Beaucoup de gens aujourd’hui s’affichent pour connaisseurs dans les Beaux-Arts: mais peu d’entre eux ont assez de lumières pour en bien parler. Dans le nombre de ceux qui en écrivent et en raisonnent mal, il est juste encore de distinguez ceux qui se trompent de bonne foi, et sans intention maligne, de ceux chez lesquels l’ignorance se trouve réunie à l’esprit de parti. C’est à ces derniers seulement que ce discours s’adresse; il ne les corrigera pas, mais il éclairera le public, à qui il est bon de dire quelquefois la vérité.” Anne-Louis Trioson-Girodet, *La critique des critiques du Sallon de 1806: Étrennes aux connaisseurs* (Paris, 1807).

was the widespread belief that cultural discourse should be a shared and democratically-spirited enterprise. Such a conviction surely bolstered the position of the woman art critic as an actor in the realm of aesthetics. Raoul's declaration of her upright character, her careful reflection, and her sincerity of purpose seems intent on appealing to this notion of *le public* in post-Revolutionary France. The Salon, it should be emphasized, was a pivotal space in the articulation of women's place in this rapidly-changing society, and such critiques highlight how women were entitled to fashion a position in the public sphere.

From Confidence to Self-Deprecation: The Voices of Women Art Critics

Many of the women who published on art in the periodical press asserted their abilities to critique artworks, and delved into issues of *vraisemblance*, style, and technique in their reviews. For example, in her *Avis important d'une femme sur le Sallon de 1785*, Madame E. . . S. not only attacks artists on issues regarding narrative plausibility and emotiveness; she also condemns poor execution in the works of some painters, and thereby spans the gulf that often separated the *gens de lettres* from the artistically trained critic in late eighteenth-century France. For example, in her discussion of Joseph Benoît Suvée's *Aeneas in the Middle of the Ruins of Troy* (1785), Madame E...S condemns the artist's handling of the protagonist:

I have said that Aeneas has a cold, immobile and useless physiognomy, and this is true. It is extremely difficult to divine the thoughts that cross his features, as these are placed forcibly side by side, but that is all. Moreover, the air of his head is not noble, and this part is poorly attached to the shoulders; his left leg is drawn too large and in front, and by the

value of the light is surely too distant from the right [leg]; the right arm raised—this is not necessary and becomes cold. This figure is in general badly posed; the color is equally bad, and without effect, and shadows are sparingly used.⁵⁸

In her later discussion of Alexandre Roslin's painting of a woman at her toilette, Madame E. . .S will go so far as to admonish: "It is necessary to be exact, Monsieur!"⁵⁹ Such reviews demonstrate a woman critic's capability to approach art on the terms of artists and experts alike; these items also suggest that the cultural criticism was construed as a relatively "safe" place for women to assert their opinions.

Not all women art critics wrote with such confidence. Despite the many instances in which assertiveness characterizes Wuiet's approach to art, attenuated statements pepper her writings. Indeed, there are passages within her Salon reviews that seem to indicate her insecurities as a critic—a position undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that she was entering into the male-dominated field of aesthetics. Wuiet's tendency to equivocate is demonstrated in her critique of Jacques-Augustin Pajou *fil's*' painting *Orpheus Losing his Eurydice for the Second Time*. She comments on the painting as follows:

I do not know if the expression of the young husband is natural to love. . .

⁵⁸ "J'ai dit qu'Enée a une physionomie froide, immobile, nulle, cela est vrai. Il est extrêmement difficile de deviner quelle est la pensée qui mobilise ses traits, il rapproche les fourcils, voilà tout. D'ailleurs son air de tête n'est pas noble, cette partie est mal attachée sur les épaules; sa jambe gauche d'un dessin assez grossier est trop en avant, & par la valeur des lumières est sûrement trop distante de la droite; le bras droit levé, l'est sans nécessité & devient froide. Cette figure en général est mal posée; sa couleur est égale and sans effets, les ombres en sont ménagées & rares." Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., 17.

⁵⁹ "Il faut être exact, Monsieur!" Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., 21.

his face does not show enough grief, it resembles that of the Apollo Belvedere . . . [and] the landscape does not entirely satisfy the imagination; but the painting joins great beauties with small faults; it is an heavenly image.⁶⁰

Rather than declaring that the expression of Eurydice was false, she introduces her qualms by stating, “I do not know,” and then ends this rather harsh critique of the painting with the lame declaration that, all in all, “it is an heavenly image.” She follows this pattern throughout this critique, where she writes at length about the faults of several submissions—only to recant her position in the last lines. We would do well to keep in mind that the modes of ambivalence and equivocation that characterize a portion of Wuiet’s art criticism may not necessarily be an articulation of insecurity; these features may also signal a reluctance to risk isolating her readers by condemning outright an artist and thereby jeopardizing the success of her journalistic enterprises. We must keep in mind that Wuiet’s lifelong position of needing to please her patrons in order to maintain not only her place in society, but also to provide some financial security, certainly played into her decisions as an art critic.

Another writer whose criticism is riddled with contradictions vis-à-vis women’s position as art critic is Angélique Vandeuil, née Diderot (1753-1824), who penned a letter

⁶⁰ Je ne sais si l’expression du jeune époux est naturelle à l’amour . . . sa tête n’a pas assez de douleur, elle ressemble à celle de l’Apollon de belvédère. . . . [et] le paysage ne satisfait pas entièrement l’imagination; mais ce tableau joint de grande beautés à de petits défauts ; c’est un image dans le ciel. C. W. . . . , rédacteur [Caroline Wuiet], “Ma huitième promenade au Musée des arts” *Le Phénix* 10 (2 vendémiaire, an 7/23 septembre 1798): 4. Emphasis mine.

on the Salon of 1802 to Jacques-Henri Meister, secretary to Grimm.⁶¹ Such a letter was of a public nature, given that such correspondence was shared amongst the German intelligentsia of this period. At several points, this letter betrays Vandeuil's trepidation over assuming the role of art critic. For instance, when it came to speaking of controversial paintings shown at the Salon of 1802, Angélique Vandeuil defers to the opinions of male artist-friends or journalistic critiques as a means of maintaining her sense of decorum as a female viewer and critic. Of Robert Lefèvre's painting *Greek Beauties* (1802), she relates that "Pajou told me that this picture was mediocre, but so remarkably indecent that, upon the outcry of the public and the papers, it was removed."⁶² In her discussion of this erotically-charged painting, she also cites a review published in the *Décade philosophique* and most likely authored by a male critic.⁶³ By

⁶¹ See Maurice Tourneux, "Lettre de Mme de Vandeuil, née Diderot, sur le Salon de l'an 10," *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire de l'art français* (1912): 124-40. On the life and work of Angélique Vandeuil, and especially on her relationship with Meister, see Jean Massiet du Biest, *La fille de Diderot: Extraits de sa correspondance inédite avec son mari et avec Jacques-Henri Meister de Zurich* (Tours: Chez l'auteur, 1949) and *Angélique Diderot: Témoignes nouveaux principalement d'après les lettres inédites adressées à celle-ci par J.H. Meister de Zurich* (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1960). Vandeuil corresponded with Grimm on various artistic and literary matters: we know that she penned a critique on Staël's novel *Delphine* (1802), which was reproduced in the *Correspondance littéraire* in 1803. An extract of this letter is published in Jeanne Carriat's "Delphine lue par Meister," *Cahiers staëliens* 26-27 (1979): 131-32.

⁶² "Pajou m'a dit que ce tableau était médiocre, mais si remarquablement indécent que, sur les plaintes de public et des journaux, on l'avait ôté." Vandeuil 131-32. It should be noted that the sculptor Jacques-Augustin Pajou was a close friend of this critic, and the only artist within Vandeuil's social milieu, according to her biographer. Jean Massiet du Biest 121.

⁶³ "[A] young man judges the beauty of the figures of two sisters, and has such a noted enthusiasm for this that he awards the prize, saying that he will erect a temple for her and espouse her so as to not have the appearance of an debauched old man who looks in the myriad attractions for something to satisfy his eyes and reanimate his dull sensations.

inserting the judgments of male colleagues into her own act of art criticism, Vandeuil not only reminds the reader of her acquaintance with various experts in the field, and thus lends greater credibility to her project; but also, she is able to sidestep the problems attached to having a woman discuss indelicate subjects in art.

Women Art Critics on Women Artists

Whether boldly discussed or defended with temerity, women artists figured prominently in female-authored criticism. Truly, issues surrounding the production of women artists and their position within the broad framework of post-Revolutionary France were of paramount concern to many of these critics. In Madame E. . .S.'s *Avis important d'une femme sur le Sallon de 1785*, she intimates that women artists were gaining ground in the visual arts in the waning years of the ancien régime. In her description of Adelaide Labille-Guiard's work, this critic takes up the accusation that this female Academician's art was "masculine" and scoffs at these misogynistic declarations, writing:

It's a man, that woman there! I hear that incessantly in my ear. What firmness in her handling, what resolution in her tones, and what knowledge in the effects, the perspective of the bodies, the play of the group and finally in all aspects of her art. It's a man, there is something underneath it; it's a man. As if my sex was eternally condemned to

Is the artist deceived in the manner in which he treats such a subject, or rather, is it that such a subject can be treated decently?" ["[U]n jeune homme juge de la beauté des formes de deux soeurs, et qui a un tel enthousiasme pour celle à qui il décerne le prix qu'il lui élèvera un temple et l'épousera, ne doit pas avoir l'expression que l'on donnerait à un vieux débauché qui chercherait dans la multiplicité des attraits dont il veut rassasier ses yeux à ranimer des sensations éteintes. L'artiste ne s'est-il pas trompé dans la manière de traiter un tel sujet, ou bien un tel sujet peut-il être traité décemment?"] Vandeuil 132.

mediocrity and their works to carry forevermore the stamp of their weakness and their ancient ignorance.⁶⁴

Of interest is the handwritten note on the top of one of the original copies of this pamphlet: “Critic who was present on the day of September 24 and defended [these women artists] for the next 25 months.”⁶⁵ The particular care she uses to defend women artists in this critique may be related to Madame E. . .S.’s own position as a woman artist who resented the defamatory charges that had been levied against the artists Anne Vallayer-Coster, Labille-Guiard, and Vigée-Lebrun in a brochure published clandestinely in 1783.

Caroline Wuïet broaches the subject of women artists with extraordinary brashness in her third promenade through the Salon of 1798. In the introductory paragraph of this review, she comments on the high caliber of the artworks exhibited by women that year, and says condescendingly to her male audience: “[Y]ou would like, incredulous Sirs, to be their creators; but without you, and in spite of you, these pretty

⁶⁴ “C’est un homme que cette femme-là, entends-je dire sans cesse mon oreille. Quelle fermeté dans son faire, quelle décision dans son ton & quelles connaissances des effets, de la perspective des corps, du jeu des groupes & enfin de toutes les parties de son art. C’est un homme, il y a quelque chose là-dessous; c’est un homme. Comme si mon sexe toit éternellement condamne à la médiocrité, & ses ouvrages à porter toujours le cachet de sa débilité & de son antique ignorance.” Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., 28.

⁶⁵ “Critique qui a été au jour le 24 septembre et défendue le lendemain 25 dudit mois.” J.-J. Guiffrey suggests this connection in his *Table générale des artistes ayant exposé aux salons du 18e siècle, suivi d’une table de la bibliographie des Salons précédée de notes sur les anciennes expositions et d’une liste raisonnée des Salons de 1801 à 1873* (1873; Paris: Jacques Laget, 1990) 53.

children will enter posterity named after their mothers.”⁶⁶ By deeming these paintings as progeny, Wuiet opens up the possibility that women were giving birth autogenously—and not to children but to works of art. Given the emphasis placed on motherhood in post-Revolutionary rhetoric, born out of concern for the regeneration of France, surely this passage generated unease.⁶⁷ An 1812 editorial in the *Journal des dames et des modes* alludes to a similar conflation of maternal and artistic creative powers, although this later piece is devoid of the edge found in Wuiet’s commentary.⁶⁸

There are several post-Revolutionary reviews in which women artists (or writers assuming this persona, at the very least), engaged in art criticism in the periodical press.

In the same year that Wuiet’s Salon critiques were published, a letter to the editor of the

⁶⁶ “[V]ous voudriez bien, messieurs les incroyables, en être les créateurs; mais sans vous, et malgré vous, ces jolis enfans passeront à la postérité avec le nom de leur mère. J’en aurais encore d’autres à nommer, qui rivalisent avec nos génies; mais ce n’est pas savoir louer que d’intimider la modestie.” Wuiet, “Ma troisième promenade au salon de peinture,” 37.

⁶⁷ For information on the notion of Republican motherhood, see Candace E. Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (New York: Greenwood P, 1990); James F. McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Linda Zerilli, “Motionless Idols and Virtuous Mothers: Women, Art, and Politics in France 1789-1848,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 27 (1982): 89-126.

⁶⁸ “Drawing, on the contrary, and painting are the softest and strongest chain that can tie a woman to the heart of her home, from which she will only distance herself with regret when decorum requires it. How she provokes interest when with her palette in one hand and her brushes in the other, she smiles at the objects that are born of her colors! She is complete within this creative space; distractions fatigue her, visits inconvenience her—Paris is nothing to her.” [“Le dessin, au contraire, et la peinture sont la plus douce et la plus forte chaîne qui puisse retenir une femme au sein de ses foyers, d’où elle ne s’éloigne qu’à regret, quand les bienséances lui en font un devoir. Quelle est intéressante, lorsque sa palette dans une main et ses pinceaux dans l’autre, elle sourit aux objets qui naissent des ses couleurs! Tout entière à cette espèce de création, les distractions la fatiguent, les visites l’importunent, Paris n’est rien pour elle.”] Anonymous [signed: —], “Le dessin et la peinture préférables à la musique sous la rapport de l’éducation des demoiselles,” *Journal des dames et des modes* 18 (31 mars 1812) 142.

Journal des Paris was submitted by an “Anna Cléophile.” This figure took issue with comments printed in this popular journal by esteemed artist and critic Charles Landon regarding the 1798 exhibition. The name is assumed pseudonymous, as there are no traces of an individual by this name in any contemporary records.⁶⁹ In this piece, Cléophile responds to Landon’s diatribe regarding the influx of women artists showing in the Salon, a phenomenon he attributes to the increasing accessibility to the study of live, nude models by these women. Suggesting that women’s physical and moral disposition makes them ill-suited for this mode of study, Landon argues that women should pursue flower painting instead and implores fathers to keep their daughters from overreaching in their artistic ambitions.⁷⁰

A reply, attributed to a “femme artiste” who signs herself as Anna Cléophile, is provocative in that it indicates the incendiary nature of this issue, as well as gives voice to a possible position for the woman artist to assume on this subject. Here, “Anna Cléophile” immediately assures her readers of “[t]he rapidity of progress that several young artists have made since they began taking the picturesque anatomy course, established at the Louvre [and] started for married women and mothers *whose mores are very austere*, to give acquaintance to their wives and daughters the precious means of

⁶⁹ Richard Wrigley and Margaret Oppenheimer both assume that the name is pseudonymous, thus opening up the possibility that it is not a woman, but a man posing as a woman, who responded to Landon’s piece. I think it significant that it was signed as authored by a woman, and the tone certainly suggests someone sympathetic with women artists’ attempts to receive equal training. My hunch is that a woman artist did indeed write this editorial, but hid her true identity as a matter of professional prudence—Landon was certainly a force to be reckoned with in the Napoleonic art world.

⁷⁰ Charles Landon, “Beaux-arts: Aux auteurs de Journal,” *Journal de Paris* 145 (25 pluviôse, an 7/13 fevrier 1799) 639.

instruction that they supposed existed exclusively for men.”⁷¹ As a means of bolstering her position, Cléophile argues that contemporary women artists are merely recognizing the need to gain the kind of proper training that luminaries Elisabeth Sirani, Rosalba Carriera, and Elisabeth-Vigée-Lebrun received early in their careers. She continues:

In fact, in general, one is better able to explain the effects when one knows the causes; one can more faithfully render nature when one sees how it behaves under the veil which covers it, and that the more a painter is instructed in anatomy, the more this veil is transparent to him.

Women artists, animated by a zeal courageous enough to take this course, merit encouragement rather than sarcasms—for criticism is easy and art is difficult.⁷²

Cléophile’s brief, incisive response provoked a lengthy retort by Landon, who undoubtedly resented her quip that “criticism is easy and art is difficult”—a quote taken

⁷¹ “La rapidité de progrès que plusieurs jeunes artistes ont fait depuis qu’ils suivent le cours d’anatomie pittoresque, établi au Louvre, a engagé des maris & des mères, dont les mœurs sont très-austères, à faire connoître à leurs femmes & filles le précieux moyen d’instruction qu’ils n’avoient pas dû supposer n’exister uniquement que pour les hommes.” Emphasis mine. Anna Cléophile, “Réponse d’une femme artiste aux deux articles du citoyen Landon, peintre, insérés dans le *Journal de Paris*, les 25 pluviôse et 11 germinal an 7,” *Journal de Paris* 218 (8 floréal, an 7/27 avril 1799): 959.

⁷² “Il fait, qu’en général, on exprime beaucoup mieux les effets lorsqu’on en connoit les causes; qu’on rend plus fidèlement la nature lorsqu’on la voit agir sous le voile dont elle se couvre, & que plus un peintre est instruit de l’anatomie, plus ce voile est transparent pour lui. Les femmes artistes, animées d’un zèle assez courage pour suivre ce cours, méritent donc plutôt des encouragemens que des sarcasmes; car la critique est aisée, mais l’art est difficile.” Cléophile 959.

from the popular theatrical production of that year, *Le déménagement au Sallon*.⁷³ In the course of this retort, which was published in two separate editions of the *Journal de Paris*, the male critic adopts a mocking, derogatory tone and condemns those women who do choose to attend these courses, writing: “In a word, I repeat it: there is nothing more revolting, nothing more capable of dulling this gentle sensibility, which constitutes the most precious charm of women, than the practice of coldly contemplating a horribly mutilated cadaver, which only offers, in all its subjects, the fetid and bloody image of destruction.”⁷⁴ Is it surprising that Anna Cléophile did not reply in turn to this condemnatory remark? Clearly, a woman’s assumption of the role of art critic was not without its risks.

It should be recognized that not all women art critics wrote favorably about women painters and sculptors. In a review of the Salon of 1802, Angélique Vandeuil granted extensive space to the contributions of women artists to that exhibition, and even praised works by the likes of Marguerite Gérard and Marie-Guillemine Benoist, her assessments of some female practitioners were sometimes harsh. However, Vandeuil criticizes Angélique Mongez’s *Astyanax Torn from His Mother* (1802) and repeats the

⁷³ Leger, Chazet, Dupaty, Desfougerais, *Le déménagement du Sallon ou le portrait de Gilles, comédie-parade en un acte et en vaudevilles, représenté pour la première fois, sur le theater du vaudeville, le 25 vendémiaire, an 7 [16 octobre 1798]* (Paris: an 7/1798). Interestingly, Caroline Wuïet uses this same quote (“la critique est aisé et l’art est difficile”) in her review of the play, which she published in her *Le Phénix* 35 (27 vendémiaire, an 7/18 octobre 1798): 3. Could “Anna Cléophile” be pseudonymous for Caroline Wuïet?

⁷⁴ “Enfin, je le répète, il n’est rien de plus révoltant, rien de plus capable d’émousser cette douce sensibilité, qui fait le charme le plus précieux des femmes, que l’habitude de contempler froidement un cadavre horriblement mutilé, qui n’offre, dans toutes ses parties, que l’image fétide & sanglante de la destruction.” Charles Landon, “Réponse à un article d’une femme artiste, inséré dans la f.ille [feuille] du 8 floréal [27 avril 1799],” *Journal de Paris* 230 (20 floréal, an 7/9 mai 1799): 1012.

accusation that this woman artist had received assistance from her master, the inimitable Jacques-Louis David: “It is said that David had a hand in this picture; the coloring is rather weak; the mother is comedic, for she looks at something other than her son; however, the clothing is shortened; in spite of this, one is amazed that a woman has conceived such a *grand machine*.”⁷⁵ The incredulity voiced by Vandeuil suggests that she is hardly convinced of the painting’s completely autographic nature—she seems to support the popular notion that David had some hand in its conception, at the very least—and thus it becomes apparent that not all women critics of this period would support their sister artists without reservation. Indeed, Vandeuil’s commentary could be construed as an indicator of how these women writers were keen to judge on matters of artistic ability rather than on matters of the maker’s sex.

And while Mademoiselle E. .D’s pamphlet *Petit revue des tableaux: Salon de 1814* is of interest in that it gives more extensive attention to women artists’ production than most critiques of this period, it must be said that she was more willing to condemn their works than those of male artists.⁷⁶ Regarding the submission of Sophie Bertaud, she says dismissively: “Your Agar, Miss, appears to me to be younger than her son—which I find

⁷⁵ “On dit que David s’est un peu mêlé de ce tableau; il est pourtant d’un coloris bien faible; la mère joue la comédie, car elle regarde autre chose que son fils; les vêtements sont écourtés; malgré cela, on est étonné qu’une femme ait conçu une aussi grande machine.” Vandeuil 135.

⁷⁶ Of the sixty-four artists mentioned in her pamphlet, ten of them are women. See Mademoiselle E. .D [Erard], *Petit revue des tableaux: Salon de 1814* (Paris, 1815) 1. According to McWilliam, the attribution of this pamphlet to a Mademoiselle Erard was given by a “Barbier.” To date, I have not been able to find a more extensive bibliographic reference to this author.

poorly drawn.”⁷⁷ Of Constance-Marie Charpentier’s *First Healing of a Doctor* (1812), a painting that had evidently been reworked since its last exhibition, Mademoiselle E. .D declares that it does not appear to her much improved.⁷⁸ The critic’s entry on Marie-Julie-Victoire Phlipault’s portrait of the Duchess of Angoulême goes so far as to despair: “How can one treat a beautiful subject so badly?”⁷⁹ Mademoiselle E. .D’s willingness to criticize women artists probably stemmed from the culture’s generally dismissive treatment of the abilities of these female practitioners, and in this regard, she merely reiterated conventional approaches to the woman artist in her *Petit revue des tableaux*. Perhaps she felt emboldened to condemn women artists—but not their male counterparts, whom she generally praised—believing that the adoption of a more laudatory tone may have hampered the success of her critique amongst the general public, and thus her future in the male-dominated art world. We must consider how reviewers competed for a share in the market of Salon pamphlets, and how women writers were in an especially precarious position to articulate unorthodox opinions on artistic subjects.

A series of letters by a Madame Honorine **** to the editor of the *Journal de Paris* on the Salon of 1812 demonstrates the highly contested nature of the figure of woman artist in Napoleonic France, and how women critics entered into the fray of these

⁷⁷ “Votre Agar, mademoiselle, me paraît pour le moins aussi jeune que son fils, que je trouve mal dessiné.” Mademoiselle E. .D, 3.

⁷⁸ “Ce petit tableau, quoique *retouché*, ne me paraît pas meilleur.” Mademoiselle E. .D, 4.

⁷⁹ “Peut on traiter si mal un aussi beau sujet?” Mademoiselle E. .D, 11.

sometimes tense conversations.⁸⁰ As with several aforementioned critics who used pseudonyms, the sex of this critic cannot be assigned absolutely, as male authors sometimes used this approach as a means of furthering their own ends. Another complication in this matter is the ambivalence of the opinions expressed toward women artists in this series of letters.⁸¹ One of the most problematic aspects of the discussion surrounding “Honorine ****” to date is the assumption that a male critic would deride women artists, while a female critic would champion their cause. We should not make such hasty delineations, for women often adopted misogynistic positions—and certainly there were men in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France who advocated for women’s rights. Regardless of the true sex of the writer who took the pseudonym “Honorine ****,” these articles indicate the charged issue of women’s participation in the arts at this time.

While this critic is purportedly intent upon giving the women artists who participated in the Salon of 1812 greater attention, in her initial letter, titled “Letter of a Woman Painter to the Editor,” she only briefly touches upon these figures. Although

⁸⁰ “Lettre d’une dame peintre au rédacteur,” *Journal de Paris, politique, commercial et littéraire* 325 (20 novembre 1812): 1-3; “Deuxième lettre de madame Honorine**** au rédacteur,” *Journal de Paris, politique, commercial et littéraire* 22 (22 janvier 1813): 3; “Troisième lettre madame Honorine**** au rédacteur,” *Journal de Paris, politique, commercial et littéraire* 65 (6 mars 1813): 2-4.

⁸¹ In Gen Doy’s *Women and Visual Culture*, she adopts the position that Honorine****, whom she believes is a woman, is genuinely interested in promoting women artists. She disagrees with Margaret Oppenheimer’s interpretation of the passage in the first of these articles, which is that Honorinne**** is satirizing the woman artist, and in particular Angélique Mongez (see Doy 147-48, especially note 55). I find Doy’s suggestion that these satirical comments “could just as well have been intended as criticism of male artists’ practices, with the implication that men can do the same,” improbable.

she proceeds to discuss three works created by women, she fails to name these artists, giving only painting titles and entry numbers. To my mind, this failure to name the producers of art has the same damning effect for women artists as the common practice, followed by the male critic of the *Journal de Paris*, of merely listing their names. Furthermore, “Honorine****” becomes even more ambiguous in her position on the woman artist when she comments on the appropriate genres for women painters. She remarks:

We women are reproached unceasingly because of our claim to paint like men, but this is then necessary when there are so many men who paint like women; they adopt a genre, a style that seems to be reserved exclusively for us; they seize upon certain subjects, affect a certain coloration, and will dwell at length on certain details that demand more delicacy and lightness than nerve and fervor, more patience than invention.⁸²

The facetious tone adopted by “Honorine****” demonstrates a refusal to take seriously the constraints on appropriate subject matter and genres given to women artists in Napoleonic France. However, she perpetuates the stereotypes of gendered style by suggesting that impetuosity, affectation, and delicate handling were essential features of

⁸² “On nous reproche sans cesse à nous autres femmes la prétention de peindre comme les hommes; mais il le faut bien lorsqu’il y a tant d’hommes qui peignent comme des femmes; ils adoptent un genre, un style qui semblent nous être exclusivement réservés; ils s’emparent de certains sujets, affectent un certain coloris, s’appesantissent sur certains détails qui demandent plus de délicatesse et de légèreté que de nerf et de chaleur, plus de patience que d’invention.” Honorine ****, “Deuxième lettre,” *Journal de Paris* 3.

art produced by women.⁸³ While one could read sarcasm into this work, and thus a kind of defense of the woman artist, I find the tone flippant and thus in the end derogatory toward women.

In general, this critic's acrimonious approach to women artists becomes increasingly apparent after perusing her satire of a particular female painter who is incapable of executing a work without the assistance of her master. It is possible to read within this critique an oblique reference to the slanderous rumor, circulated in 1783, that esteemed history painter Ménageot had helped Vigée-Lebrun in the execution of her Salon entries. It may also be targeting Marie-Jeanne-Angélique Mongez, a contemporary history painter who was frequently accused of having her master, David, touch up her work. This interpretation is supported by the contents of Honorine ****'s second letter, where I see a strong connection between the critic's own (fictive) work and that of Angélique Mongez. Known for her paintings whose subjects were drawn from antiquity and that often featured war imagery, as seen in works such as her *Theseus and Pyrothus Purging the Land of Robbers* (1804) and *Oath of the Seven Against the Thebes* (1806), Mongez stood as an exceptional woman painter. In this second letter, "Honorine ****" talks of the grand history painting with which she has been occupied—a painting she titles *The Battle of the Amazon and the Gorgons near Lake Tritonide*. Here the subject is imagined to be a fight between monstrous women, which is a highly suggestive detail that has gone unnoted in the discussion of this critic's position on woman artists. By creating a

⁸³ On this phenomenon, see Tamar Garb, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism," *Readings in Nineteenth-Century Art*, ed Janis Tomlinson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1996) 230-45.

painting that features aberrant women often characterized as masculine because of their physiques and their engagement in violence and destruction, “Honorine ****” seems to be positing a link between the represented monstrous women and their creator. This charge was frequently levied against prominent women—whether artists, writers, or political activists—of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.⁸⁴

In the end, both “Honorine ****” and the editor (who could be one in the same) raise doubts in the reader’s mind as to both the authenticity of women’s art and of women’s authorship of their critical discourse. Indeed, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes*, undermines women’s forays into art criticism when he responds to the critic’s proposal that she write several articles that discuss women in art by querying: “Will Madame Honorine create her article in the same fashion as she did her painting?”⁸⁵ Aspersion is cast on both the figures of the woman artist as well as the critic, thus intimating just how unsettling their increasing presence in the cultural sphere was to some.

Women Art Critics and Spectatorship

In addition to engaging in debates regarding women artists, these writers expressed a keen interest in women’s roles as spectators of art, a development that seems to signal the changing economies of female spectatorship. A consideration of women

⁸⁴ For a discussion of how famous women artists and writers of the period were characterized as monstrous, see Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth-Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996); and Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Chicago: U of Illinois, 1978).

⁸⁵ “Mme Honorine fera-t-elle son article comme elle a fait son tableau?” Honorine ****, “Deuxième lettre,” *Journal de Paris*, 3.

critics necessitates a concomitant exploration of how their positions as women inflected their observations on art. Both literary and visual representations of women viewers at the Salon abounded during this period, thus suggesting a preoccupation with (or at the very least, acknowledgement of) this figure. In the pages that follow, I will cite various representations of women viewing art in public spaces, and explore the questions generated by their activities.⁸⁶

Representations of the woman viewer in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France were not always favorable, even in critiques ostensibly written by women. Such is the case with an 1808 letter to the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes*, in which the issue of women's visibility in the Salon setting and, ultimately, in the larger public sphere, is raised. In this letter, "Fanny Tatillon" (the appellation is surely a pseudonym, given that the verb "tatillonner," which means "to meddle," was a popular descriptor for a busybody) presents the female spectator as a narcissistic and superficial figure.⁸⁷ In her discussion of women artists, "Fanny Tatillon" prattles on nonsensically,

⁸⁶ While still in its preliminary stages, I believe that my work on this subject is suggestive for the relatively unexplored terrain of the emerging modern female spectator.

⁸⁷ Clearly, this descriptor had cultural relevancy, as an entry titled "Tatillonnage" was published only a few years earlier in this same journal. "Ce n'est point par le défaut d'idées que les femmes penchant ordinairement; c'est plutôt par la multiplicité de leurs pensées dont la succession rapide leur cause nécessairement un peu d'embarras et de confusion. De la ces discours vivement commencés et subitement interrompus; cette activité puérilement infatigable, qui voltigeant sur tous les détails, ne s'arrête jamais à l'ensemble; qui tourbillonne autour du but sans l'atteindre, qui parle de tout, ne dit rien; regarde tout, voit rien; arrange tout, ne met ordre à rien; commence tout, ne finit rien; qui va, revient, retouche, brouille, brise, boulevers; delà un mot, ce que vulgairement on appelle *tatillonnage*." [Unsigned], "Tatillonnage," *Journal des dames et des modes* 60 (30 messidor, an 12/19 juillet 1804): 480. The definition of "tatillonnage" can be found in

deriding such esteemed artists as Jeanne-Elisabeth Chaudet, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, and Marie-Guillemine Benoist:

I am a woman: in matters of art, it is to my sex that I must give my first homage. Where are you, charming *Chaudet*, you who are known for your *education of a dog*; but what do I see? your pug hasn't made progress, I liked it better when he spelled with so much grace; and you, divine *Lebrun*, alas! *your genius* is a little wilted, one scarcely finds its traces in the figure of Madame Catalani! Madame *Benoît*, your paintbrush is as severe as that of a man; Monsieur *Laurent*, your touch is as insipid as that of a woman.⁸⁸

This fictitious writer devalues the activities of those women artists and viewers who were visiting the Salon in increasing numbers in the early nineteenth century; Hubert Robert's

Dictionnaire de l'Académie française: Revu, corrigé et augmenté par l'Académie elle-même. 5th edition. Vol. 2. Paris, 1798.

Interestingly, this kind of rhetoric regarding women is found in Cabanis's 1805 work, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, where he writes: "In general, erudite women know nothing well. They confuse and mingle all objects, all ideas. . . . Incapable of fixing their attention long enough on one thing, they cannot feel the lively and profound pleasures of a deep meditation. They are incapable of this. They go rapidly from one subject to another and retain only partial, incomplete notions that almost always form the strangest combinations in their heads." Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis, *On the Relations between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, trans. Margaret Saidi, ed. George Mora, intro. Sergio Moravia and George Mora, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981) 242.

⁸⁸ Tatillon, "Au rédacteur," *Journal des dames et des modes* 61 (5 novembre 1808): 482. "Je suis femme: en fait d'arts, c'est à mon sexe que je dois mon premier hommage. Où êtes vous, charmante *Chaudet*, vous si connue par *l'éducation d'un chien*; mais que vois-je? votre carlin n'a pas fait de progrès, je l'aimois mieux quand il épeloit avec tant de grâces; et vous divine *Lebrun*, hélas! *voire génie* est un peu étient, à peine en retrouve-t-on quelques traces dans la figure de Mme Catalani! Madame *Benoît*, votre pinceau est sévère comme celui d'un homme; M. *Laurent*, voire touche est fade comme celle d'une femme."

early nineteenth-century sketch *Women Entering the Museum* may be viewed as a marker of this development. Women's visibility was a central question in conversations on their place in the post-Revolutionary social order, and this concern is marked in several of the art critiques published in the periodical press. In her letter, "Fanny Tatillon" states that the Salon is a place where "I like very much to see, [but] I prefer perhaps more to be seen."⁸⁹ She conjures up an image of this space as undeniably social:

I only go at noon, because this is the hour of the beautiful people; at ten o'clock, booklet in hand, opera glasses poised, you meet only connoisseurs there who, with fixed gaze [and] pensive air, take in, compare, and judge; they are cold and passive beings whose only enthusiasm is confined to the fine arts, and the sight of the prettiest woman does not divert for a moment the attention that they give to the masterpieces.⁹⁰

When "Fanny Tatillon" presents the Salon as a public spectacle rather than a place where one goes to become edified and culturally enriched, "she" reinforces stereotypical images of the female viewer as caught up in issues of self-display and sociability rather than as

⁸⁹ Fanny Tatillon, "Au rédacteur," *Journal des dames et des modes* 61 (5 novembre 1808): 481: "J'aime beaucoup à voir, je préfère peut-être encore être vue."

⁹⁰ Tatillon, "Au rédacteur," *Journal des dames et des modes* 61 (5 novembre 1808): 481–82: "Je ne m'y rends qu'à midi, parce que c'est l'heure de beau monde; à dix heures, le livret en main, la lorgnette braquée, vous ne rencontrez la que des connoisseurs qui, le regard fixe, l'air pensif, apprient, comparent et jugent; ce sont des êtres froids et passif dont le seul enthousiasme se borne aux beaux-arts, et que la vue de la plus jolie femme ne détourneroit pas un seul moment de l'attentions qu'ils donnent aux chefs-d'œuvre."

genuinely interested in art. In the end, this piece minimizes the possibility that women could engage with art and aesthetics in a judicious and meaningful manner.

I believe that “Fanny Tatillon” was a fictitious construct by the journal’s editor, Pierre de La Mésangère.⁹¹ That La Mésangère felt compelled to create such a figure as “Fanny Tatillon” is indicative of the anxieties elicited by the women producers and consumers of art in the Napoleonic period. If Fanny Tatillon is indeed a man, this begs the question of why he would adopt a female persona to articulate his position. As Roger Bellet has demonstrated, there are known instances in early nineteenth-century France where men published under a female pseudonym.⁹² In the realm of art criticism, it does not appear particularly uncommon for male writers to ventriloquize women artists, spectators, and critics.⁹³ There are several possible explanations for this

⁹¹ In her *Women and Visual Culture*, Gen Doy cites this piece as an example of a ploy in which a woman assumes the guise of a reader who approaches the editor with a request to write about the Salon (146). However, it seems highly unlikely that a serious woman journalist would have accepted the moniker “Tatillon,” given the connotations of this term. In a recent conversation at the 2005 ASECS conference in Las Vegas, Denise Z. Davidson and I found that our research on the *Journal des dames et des modes* had led us to draw similar conclusions: that the letters to the editor, which were most often signed with women’s names, were fictitious constructs. Whereas Davidson allows for the possibility that these were penned by staff members, I tend to believe that the largely female staff of this periodical (among whom were noted feminists) would have protested against such demeaning representations of women, and that it was La Mésangère who created these letters as a means of pontificating on subjects of his choosing without appearing too heavyhanded. I thank Davidson for her generosity in discussing her work on this periodical.

⁹² See Roger Bellet, “Masculin et féminin dans les pseudonyms des femmes de lettres au 19e siècle,” *Femmes de lettres au 19ième siècle: Autour de Louise Colet* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1982) 249-81.

⁹³ Take, for instance, the Don Quixote figure in Mlle Lenormand’s publication *Le Mot à oreille, ou le nouveau Don Quichotte des dames journal républicaine*, who seems to be a woman in disguise. See Waller, “Disembodiment as Masquerade” 49-51.

development. First, this adoption of a female persona can be construed as a strategy to convince readers that women, as well as men, had serious doubts regarding the viability of women's participation in the arts. By suggesting that women *and* men shared concerns over the proper roles and spheres of influence for women, these male writers attempt to overcome objections that such rhetoric merely masked masculinist machinations to keep women powerless. It is an insidious means of cloaking androcentric ideologies. Secondly, this phenomenon can be seen as yet another means for men to colonize the feminine, a trend that had extended into the realm of Napoleonic visual culture by means of valorizing the ephobic male in art and fashion.⁹⁴ Lastly, this phenomenon may also indicate the ways in which men were challenging conventional views on gender in an historical era where questions of identity—whether it be in terms of class, gender, or other constitutive markers—were of paramount concern. Judith Butler speaks of the ways in which gender is an accumulation of performances rather than an essential construct, using drag, or the dressing up as a member of the opposite sex, as a means of suggesting how individuals have subverted gender norms. Perhaps these male writers who assume the guise of a woman are

⁹⁴ The idea of the colonization of the feminine in post-Revolutionary culture is explored in Doris Y. Kadish, *Politicizing Gender: Narrative Strategies in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991). For art historians who examine this phenomenon, see Grigsby, "Nudity *à la grecque* in 1799"; and Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble*.

challenging the “constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity.”⁹⁵

In sum, the male writer who, I argue, assumed the guise of “Fanny Tatillon” may have used such impersonation as a means of persuading female readers of the virtue of his patriarchal position on women in the arts, or to capitalize on the seemingly fashionable trend toward effeminacy in post-Revolutionary culture. This act may also serve as a kind of unconscious signal of the crisis in masculinity that ostensibly racked early nineteenth-century France.⁹⁶ Although we cannot know necessarily the motivations behind men writing as women, clearly this kind of impersonation was perceived as an efficacious strategy for promoting one’s agenda.⁹⁷ One wonders how often this kind of ruse was employed in other presentations of the woman artist, viewer, critic, and connoisseur in the course of the nineteenth century.

In what may be another instance of this ventriloquism, the *Journal des dames et des modes* published a piece in 1807, signed “Madame . . . , témoin oculaire,” that considered the subject of women viewing the male nude. In this riveting account, titled “La Provençale devant l’Apollon du Belvédère, au Musée Napoléon,” and purportedly translated from a German journal and then published in this periodical, women readers

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) 34.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of this development, see especially Solomon-Godeau’s *Male Trouble*; and Margaret Waller, *The Male Malady: Fictions of Impotence in the French Romantic Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993).

⁹⁷ The ventriloquism at play in male-authored critiques published under a female pseudonym is a fascinating development of this period that deserves further consideration.

were warned against the dangers of becoming enchanted before the quintessential Greek sculpture. This extraordinary piece deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

I saw her; she was a tall woman, svelte, with all the attractions of early youth. Drawn in, despite myself, by her charms, my eyes followed all her movements. Arriving before the Apollo, she quivered and stopped as if struck by thunder. Little by little her eyes, a brilliant fire sparkled in her eyes, which before had been clear and steady; all her being was animated as if by electricity; one could see that she was experiencing a singular metamorphosis.

After having thus contemplated [the statue] for some time, she began to express, with pleasant confusion, what she was feeling. It would be impossible to repeat more than the sense of these words, which were as follows: 'I dare not lift my eyes to this god; I dare not lower my eyes in front of he whose appearance makes me so happy. Is this the work of man or a divine creation? Is its model on the earth or in the heavens? You say that this is Apollo of Belvedere; but what I see is not made of marble, it is a god resplendent in his glory. Leave me, you others, leave me to satisfy myself with its beauty; leave me to gaze and to die.'

At last her companion, her older sister, succeeded in wrenching her away with the help of caresses and supplications; she left in tears.

One day, some months afterwards, I returned to the salon; the guard, of whom I had demanded news of the girl from Provence, told me: "The poor little thing, it would have been better for her had she never seen the statues. Not long ago, she was seated and was looking at Apollo with clasped hands; if no one were around, she would fall to her knees and cry. Other times, she would bring flowers and place them on the pedestal. One morning when she had entered in secret, we found her inside the enclosure, on the pedestal, exhausted from crying and in a faint; the entire room was perfumed with flowers; a large veil of Indian muslin, edged in gold, tastefully draped the statue. Out of respect for the lamentable state in which this young person found herself, the public was cleared out until her parents arrived to take her home. They struggled to wrest her away. In her delirium, she declared herself a priestess of the god, and wanted to stay and serve him. We have not seen her since, but she provoked too much interest to be so soon forgotten."⁹⁸

⁹⁸ "Je l'ai vue; c'étoit une grande femme, svelte, parée de tous les agrès de la première jeunesse. Entraînée malgré moi par ses charmes, mes yeux suivirent tous ses mouvemens. Parvenue devant l'Apollon, elle frémit et s'arrêta comme frappée du tonnerre. Peu-à-peu un feu brillant étincela de ses yeux, qui d'abord avoient été clairs et fixes; tout con être fut anime comme électriquement; on voyoit se passer en elle la plus singulière métamorphose...Après avoir ainsi contemplé long-tems, elle se mit à exprimer avec une agréable confusion ce qu'elle sentoit. Il seroit impossible de répéter plus que le sens de ses paroles, et la voix: 'Je n'ose pas lever mes yeux vers le dieu; je n'ose pas baisser les yeux devant celui dont l'aspect me rend si heureuse. Est-ce un ouvrage humain, ou une création divine? Le modèle en est-il sur la terre ou au ciel? Vous dites que c'est là l'Apollon du Belvédere; mais ce que je vois n'est pas du marbre, c'est le dieu resplendissant de gloire. Laissez-moi, vous autres, laissez-moi me rassasier de sa beauté; laissez-moi le regarder et mourir. . . ' Enfin sa compagne, sa sœur aînée, parvint à l'en arracher à force de caresses et de prières; elle s'en alla en pleurant. Un jour, quelques

This description of a woman overcome by this representation of divine beauty is highly provocative and speaks to concerns over the place of the female spectator in Napoleonic culture.⁹⁹ The inclusion of this tale in the *Journal des dames et des modes* can be read as a means of frightening young women into circumscribing their viewing activities, for the clear message is that looking at art can send women into an irreversible state of delirium. Moreover, the tale seems intent upon emphasizing that the woman's adoption of the position of viewer can make her senseless to the fact that she—and not just the artwork—become the spectacle, and hence, the woman spectator risks personal health and the loss of decorum in the eyes of the public. Women's visibility, whether as artists, subjects, or consumers is of paramount concern to cultural critics throughout the nineteenth century. Contemplation of art, and particularly representations of the male

mois après, je revins au salon; le gardien, auquel j'avois demandé des nouvelles de la Provençale, me dit: 'La pauvre petite, elle auroit mieux fait de ne jamais venir voir les statues. Tantôt assise, elle regardoit Apollon les mains jointes; s'il n'y avoit personne, elle se mettoit à genoux et pleuroit. D'autres fois, elle apportoit des fleurs et les plaçoit sur le piédestal. Un matin qu'elle étoit entrée clandestinement, nous la trouvâmes en dedans du grillage, sur le piédestal, épuisée de larmes et évanouie; toute la salle étoit parfumée de fleurs; un grand voile de mousseliné des Indes, bordé d'or, drapoit avec goût la statue. Par respect pour l'état déplorable où se trouvoit cette jeune personne, ou écarta le public jusqu'à ce que ses parens fussent arrivés pour la chercher. Ils eurent de la peine à l'emmener. Dans son délire, elle se déclaroit prêtresse de dieu, et vouloit rester pour le servir. Depuis nous ne l'avons plus revue; mais elle étoit trop-intéressant pour être de sitôt oubliée.'” Madame . . . , témoin oculaire, “La provençale devant l'Apollon du Belvédère, au Musée Napoléon,” *Journal des dames et des modes* 26 (10 mai 1807), 207–8. The origins of this tale are unknown. Later in the century, the British actress and writer Fanny Kemble, in front of the Vatican Apollo, will write: “I could believe the legend of the girl who died for love of it; for myself, my eyes swam in tears and my knees knocked together, and I could hardly draw my breath while I stood before it.” Frances Anne Kemble, *A Year of Consolation*, vol. 2 (London, 1847) 11–12.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the ambivalence engendered by eighteenth-century women looking at antique sculpture, see Chloe Chard, “Effeminacy, Pleasure and the Classical Body,” *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture*, ed. Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (New York: Manchester UP, 2004) 142–61.

nude, can be personally and socially compromising. Medical discourse and other literature of the period bolstered this position. For example, in his *Des maladies des femmes* (1784), Nicolas Chambon de Montaux suggested that the over-stimulation of women's imagination, as might be induced by such activities as the reading of novels or viewing of spectacles, could permanently damage their nervous system.¹⁰⁰ While the male artist/viewer was not impervious to lovesickness elicited by the representation of the (female) nude—the proliferation of art and literature devoted to the Pygmalion theme in the nineteenth century attests to the belief in such occurrences—the alternative relationship of the desiring woman spectator produced a particular charge of its own, given contemporary gender ideologies, that demands investigation.¹⁰¹

Additionally, this tale of a young, impressionable woman who becomes lovesick after beholding the Apollo Belvedere clearly intimates the cultural concerns over intersections between women, art, and desire that captivated post-Revolutionary culture and would permeate the rest of the nineteenth century. Anxiety over the exposure of women and children to the male nudes in David's *Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799) may have forced the artist to pen a defense of his use of nudity in the painting—and thus, as Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby has argued, emphasized the presence of the female

¹⁰⁰ See Nicolas Chambon de Montaux, *Des maladies des femmes*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1784).

¹⁰¹ For an overview of the currency of this myth, see Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac, and the Myth of Pygmalion in Post-Revolutionary France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). One example of this found late in the century is the 1883 novella *L'Avengle*, in which a male nude model ultimately seduces a female painter. For a discussion of this novella and its implications for women artists/spectators, see Tamar Garb, "The Forbidden Gaze," *Art in America* 79 (1991): 146–52.

viewer.¹⁰² Henry Fuseli's dynamic sketch of a woman before the Laocoön (c. 1800-05), wherein the stiffened arms and clenched fists of the female viewer display the appropriate reaction of shock before this virile sculpture, is yet another manifestation of this heightened interest in women looking at male nudity in art. Paintings such as Hubert Robert's *Apollo Belvedere Room* (1803-04), where several women flock around the famed sculpture, including a woman artist who crouches before the work and sketches intently, necessitate a renewed consideration of women as spectators in the modern era. Furthermore, in the account of this provincial girl's experience before the Apollo Belvedere, the line “[l]eave me, you others, leave me to satisfy myself with its beauty; leave me to gaze and to die” forcefully voices a woman spectator's position as one who can gain her own pleasure in looking.¹⁰³ This encounter with the male nude in representation, which caused the girl to “quiver” and to become “animated as if by electricity,” certainly did contain a sexual element. In sum, the heterosexual responses to these beloved works from antiquity undermine—and ideologically diffuse—Winckelmann's famous homoerotic readings of both the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoön, thereby suggesting that we must reconsider how spectatorship of this period has been framed.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See Grigsby, “Nudity à la grecque,” especially pages 327–31.

¹⁰³ That this is a “provincial” girl is significant, as the writer thus introduces issues of class and regionalism into the question of female spectatorship.

¹⁰⁴ For Winckelmann's homoerotic readings of the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoön, I refer the reader to Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994).

An extraordinary fashion plate published in this same journal (the *Journal des dames et des modes*) not only marks the increasing visibility of women viewers, but also allows for the possibility that such a figure could function in an autonomous way within the post-Revolutionary art world. Here, a model has pulled from a portfolio a print of a reclining female nude and gazes upon it. Albeit a female nude, and thus a more appropriate object of the model's regard than a representation of male nudity, it remains a provocative image vis-à-vis questions of how gender inflected early nineteenth-century spectatorship. This work can be read as an iteration of masculinist notions regarding a woman's position as an object. Here, there is a doubling over of the objectifying gaze—the (woman) reader of the *Journal* stares at the model, who in turn views the representation of the female nude. The engraving may function as part of the stratagem for using a woman subject to articulate androcentric positions; here, it is the idea that women condone and even welcome the male gaze. Alternatively, this fashion plate could be interpreted as an empowering gesture for the female connoisseur whose purview is not limited to banal subjects. There is even the possibility that this image proposes that women can be pleased by looking at representations of the female nude. There are certainly paintings of women as viewers of art during this period—the various representations of women in studios by Louis-Léopold Boilly, such as *The Artist's Wife in His Studio* (c. 1795-1800), come to mind. However, these do not stretch the limits of propriety like this fashion plate—or the painting that this work may be modeled after, Étienne Charles Le Guay's *Portrait of Marie-Victoire Jaquotot* (c. 1800), which shows the young miniaturist rifling through a portfolio of prints. Significantly, one of these prints features a reclining female nude that is strikingly similar to the one shown in the image

published in the *Journal des dames et des modes*. In the end, this fashion plate is not only suggestive of the growing recognition of women as consumers of art; but also, it yields a kind of *frisson* that provokes questions regarding female spectatorship.

Such *frisson* is achieved in Caroline Wuiet's various art-related articles and reviews that were published in *Le Papillon* and *Le Phénix*. Her discussion of François Gérard's *Cupid and Psyche* (1798) offers yet another fascinating perspective on female spectatorship. In her critique of this work, Wuiet declares:

*[W]omen find the look of Psyche meaningless; it is that of surprised innocence; she reflects on the pleasure that she afflicts, on the voluptuous pressure of the two caressing arms; she indulges in nothing yet, she ponders. She would be angry that the veil that covers her is taken off, for it appears that the graces that she conceals would evaporate; I do not know, but *this Psyche must resemble to women one who is experienced in love*, as one who must rediscover in her lover some of those features of that one which one dares not name.¹⁰⁵*

Significantly, most of this critique focuses on the reaction of women viewers to this sensational painting. Wuiet matter-of-factly states that women viewers are not

¹⁰⁵ “[L]es femmes trouvent le regard de Psiché plus qu’insignifiant, c’est celui de l’innocence étonnée; elle réfléchi au plaisir qu’elle éprouve, a la pression voluptueuse de deux bras caressans; elle ne se livre point encore, elle s’interroge. Que le voile qui la couvre est aérien: ou serait fâché qu’il pût se détacher, il semble que les graces qu’il recèle pourraient s’évaporer; je ne sais, mais cette psiché doit ressembler à la femme qu’on a le mieux aimée, comme on doit retrouver dans son amant quelques-uns des traits de celui qu’on n’ose nommer.” Wuiet, “Première promenade au Sallon de peinture,” *Le Papillon, journal des arts et des plaisirs* 1 (7 thermidor, an 6/25 juillet 1798): 5-6. Emphasis mine.

convinced by this young girl's virginal airs, that her gaze is "meaningless" and that she believes Psyche "resembles one who is experienced in love." This critic even maintains that Psyche "would be angry that the veil that covers her is taken off," thus asserting a woman's prerogative to determine the presentation of her body. By foregrounding the female spectator and her observations, and privileging women for their insights into this painted narrative, Wuiet lays a notable claim for women as viewers in the spaces of the post-Revolutionary art world. Critiques such as these, which are so firmly rooted in the corporeal experience of the reviewer, also demonstrate how a woman journalist could refuse the typical disembodied stance adopted in the Directory periodical press.¹⁰⁶

The question of women's desire repeatedly surfaces in the criticism produced by women at this time. For example, in her discussion of Nicolas-André Monsiau's *Socrates and Alcibiades at the Home of Aspasia* (1798), Wuiet chastises the highly regarded artist for the *invraisemblance* of the interaction between the two protagonists, and for his inability to capture the true character of Aspasia. Not only does she reprimand Monsiau—she also goes so far as to give directives to the artist on how his treatment of this Aspasia could be improved. Wuiet tells Monsiau what she desires to see in this painting, writing: "Thus *I would want* that Aspasia was situated in an environment full of Athenian luxury, that her head, partially veiled, was covered with African treasures, that the draperies that were attached to her ivory shoulder by an exotic fastener; *I would want* more expression in her

¹⁰⁶ See Waller, "Disembodiment as Masquerade" 49.

features, more graces in all her forms. . . .”¹⁰⁷ The phrase “I would want” appears twice, thus reiterating the individual female critic’s desire, or what would give her pleasure in looking.¹⁰⁸ Wuiet then creates an imaginary letter written by Alcibiades, Pericles’ ward, to this exceptional woman. This fictitious epistle, in which the young man rhapsodizes about Aspasia, serves as a creative means of delivering a critique while at the same time underscoring one of Wuiet’s primary projects, the elevation of the female genius.

It is not surprising that this painting appealed to Wuiet, for it highlights an exceptional woman in Greek history, Aspasia, the consort of Pericles, whose unorthodox behavior and desire to be treated as an equal shocked ancient Athens.¹⁰⁹ By critiquing this figure in such a manner, Wuiet not only gives sustained attention to this female protagonist, but also proclaims her right as a learned woman to frame more successfully the story than the male artist Monsiau. This is a significant demonstration of her pro-female position in that it privileges a woman’s perspective in matters of representation of her sex. Moreover, it is possible to view the act of elevating Aspasia, a woman of beauty

¹⁰⁷ “J’aurais donc voulu qu’Aspasie fut environnée de tout le luxe athénien, que sa tête, à moitié voile, fut couverte des trésors de l’Afrique, que ses draperies eussent été attachée sur son épaule d’ivoire, par une agraffe [sic] sentillante: j’aurais voulu plus d’expression dans ses traits, plus de grace dans toutes ses formes. . . .” Wuiet, “Sixième promenade au Musée des arts,” *Le Phénix* 32 (8 fructidor an 7/25 août 1799): 253.

¹⁰⁸ On the issue of scopophilia and the female spectator, see Teresa de Lauretis, “Desire in Narrative,” *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 103-57.

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, the Salon catalogue describes Aspasia as “cette célèbre courtisane” whose “talens pour la politique la firent rechercher et admirer par les Athéniens les plus recommandables de son tems.” Wuiet does not emphasize her ambivalent role (some historians have characterized her as a courtesan, others a muse), but rather, focuses on her power over men. See *Explication des ouvrages de peinture et dessins, sculpture, architecture et gravure, exposés au Musée central des arts d’après l’arrêté du Ministre de l’intérieur, le 1er thermidor, an 6 [19 juillet 1798] de la République française* (Paris, 1798) 53.

and intellect, as a political gesture on the part of Wuiet. Given the cultural valorization of ancient Athens in Directory France, this championing of an exceptional Athenian woman should be seen as an attempt to create a new role model for the post-Revolutionary woman. Thus, Wuiet's critique of Monsiau's *Alcibiades and Aspasia* not only continues her program for the elevation of women in the arts as subjects, producers and consumers; it also promotes a public, politically engaged female figure as worthy of emulation.¹¹⁰ This critique is yet another example of how cultural critiques published in Napoleonic France could effectively enrobe political criticism.

Angélique Vandeul's review of the Salon of 1802 contains a sustained critique of Pierre-Narcisse Guérin's *Phaedra and Hippolytus* (1802) that, while following the general contours of contemporary criticism on this sensational painting, diverges from this path when attending to matters of scopophilia.¹¹¹ She describes the male figures in the painting thusly:

Theseus is dressed in a white tunic which exposes his neck, all of his collarbone, and his left shoulder. His green cloak has half-fallen off; one of his legs is completely uncovered. Hippolytus is opposite him . . . His tunic allows us to see his lower thighs and his entire legs . . . *nothing excites,*

¹¹⁰ Wuiet clearly saw this critique as one of her best, as she published a second "reviewed and corrected" version in her next venture, *Le Phénix, journal politique et littéraire*. See Caroline Wuiet, "Deuxième édition revue et corrigée de la sixième promenade au Musée," *Le Phénix* 21 (13 vendémiaire, an 7/4 août 1798): 2.

¹¹¹ For a discussion of the critical reception of Guérin's *Phaedra and Hippolytus*, see James H. Rubin's "Guérin's Painting of *Phèdre* and the Post-Revolutionary Revival of Racine," *Art Bulletin* 59 (1977): 601-18.

*as you can imagine, the general attention—and especially that of women—as Hippolytus.*¹¹²

Doy connects this commentary to a specifically female pleasure in looking.¹¹³ Certainly Vandeul's discussion of the male figures in Guèrin's painting could be read as intended titillation for heterosexual female viewers (although we must bear in mind that the initial intended recipient of this letter was a man, such communications were understood as public expressions that would be circulated). The ways in which Vandeul inserts a woman's perspective into the art-critical discourse suggest a shifting away from an assumed male audience to one that concedes the presence of women as viewers and actors in public arenas. Nonetheless, we should also entertain the possibility that this writer is intentionally appealing to the male homosexual (or homosocialized) viewer. If we accept the interpretation of Revolutionary culture as one that was intensely homosocial and caught up in representations of the male nude, such criticism can be construed as aimed at a male audience.¹¹⁴ With such texts, it becomes clear just how female viewers and critics often vacillate between the established, i.e. androcentric,

¹¹² “Thésée est vetu d’une tunique blanche qui laisse voir le col, toute la clavicule et l’épaule gauche. Son manteau vert est aussi à moitié tombé; une de ses jambes entièrement découverte. Hippolyte est en face de lui . . . Sa tunique laisse voir le bas des cuisses et les jambes entièrement . . . rien n’excite, comme vous pouvez croire, l’attention générale et surtout celle des femmes, comme Hippolyte.” Vandeul 137-39. Emphasis mine.

¹¹³ See Doy, *Women and Visual Culture* 150-52.

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of the homosocialization of this culture, see Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble*; and Crow, *Emulation*.

spaces of visual economy and the oppositional territories of spectatorship.¹¹⁵ In the end, Vandeul's description speaks to the visual pleasure such representations of the idealized male body could give both male and female viewers, and points to the complexities of framing the reception of art.

The ways in which desire played into the observations of these female spectator-critics was complex and even contradictory. There are several instances in which, on the surface, these women seem to be assuming the male gaze and pandering to what they perceived as the demands of their readership. For example, in Caroline Wuiet's discussion of Gérard's *Cupid and Psyché*, she asks:

Who is this young adolescent who caresses a young virgin? It is Cupid.
Do you not see the voluptuousness which courses through his features,
the malicious gaze that distinguishes him from the other gods? How the
eye skims over her rounded forms! How it is brought back to the
smooth contours of her delicate limbs! He desires and dares not desire;
see these thin fingers, as they brush against this shoulder of alabaster! He
is embarrassed of being happy, he is fearful of frightening away modesty.

. . .¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ The notion of "oppositional desire" in spectatorship is explored in Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988).

¹¹⁶ "Quel est ce jeune adolescent qui caresse une jeune vierge? C'est L'Amour. Ne voyez-vous pas à travers la volupté qui parcourt ses traits, ce malicieux regard qui le distingue des autres dieux? Comme l'œil fait sur ses formes arrondies! comme il est ramené dans les contours moelleux de ses membres délicat!, il désire et n'ose désirer: voyez ces doigts légers, comme ils effleurent cette épaule d'albâtre! il est embarrassé d'être heureux, il craint d'effaroucher la pudeur. . . ." Wuiet, "Première promenade au

Wuiet's provocative description of Psyche's beauty may be construed as an adoption of patriarchal modes of art criticism; however, we must also allow for the possibility that Wuiet recognized and spoke to women viewers as subjects.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, these spectator-beholders could adopt the scopophilic position of the heterosexual male beholder or could enjoy these erotic descriptions on their own terms. Indeed, we should not foreclose the possibility that Wuiet attempts to draw in the homosexual female viewer with her provocative descriptions.¹¹⁸ Here, the female spectator is revealed as "the site of an oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position, invoking the metaphor of the transvestite," in the words of Mary Ann Doane.¹¹⁹ Readers are reminded that Wuiet frequently dressed as a man to facilitate her work as a journalist; perhaps the transvestism of her attire encouraged Wuiet to explore a variety of subject positions vis-à-vis pleasure in looking.

The female body and the attending issues of desire offered by such representations are also discussed in a poem by Marguerite-Victoire Babois on the *Burial of Atala* (1808) by Anne-Louis Girodet. Babois (1760-1839) authored several elegies, including *Elégies maternelles* (1792) and *Elégies nationales* (1815), and enjoyed some success

Sallon de peinture," *Le Papillon, journal des arts et des plaisirs* 1 (7 thermidor, an 6/25 juillet 1798): 5.

¹¹⁷ The consideration of a female erotic gaze is given in Joan DeJean, "Looking Like a Woman: The Female Gaze in Sappho and Lafayette," *L'esprit créateur* 78.4 (Winter 1988): 34-44.

¹¹⁸ I believe that cultural evidence points to the development of a homoerotic environment for women in Directory France and is a subject worthy of further inquiry.

¹¹⁹ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Film and Feminism*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 425.

as one of the *bas-bleu* (Bluestockings) of Napoleonic France.¹²⁰ Poetry was not an unusual genre for art criticism; in that same year, a Madame Azaïs published *L'ombre du peintre Lebrun au Salon de 1808*, a poem in which she imagines the great seventeenth-century master Charles Le Brun's return from the dead to assess the offerings of the modern French school.¹²¹ Worth contemplating is how Babois's "Verse on the painting of the Entombment of Atala by Girodet," which was originally published in the *Mercur de France*, seems to delight in evoking the sexual tension of Girodet's painting. Here, she begins:

Atala, tender and pure virgin,
Gentle treasure of beauty who recaptured nature,
What, already you are no longer! For so young attractions
Under a shroud, alas! Are hidden forever and always.¹²²

¹²⁰ Quérard tells us that in addition to various elegies, including one on the death of the artist M. Ducis, Madame Babois was the author of several novels. See Quérard, vol.1, 146. For additional information on this writer, see Alfred Marquiset, "Madame Babois," *Les Bas-bleus du premier Empire* (Paris: Champion, 1914) 161-76. Evidently, she led a tragic life; Babois had poor health, was unhappily married, and her only child was brutally murdered in 1792. See *Élégies* de Victoire Babois (Nice: Éditions de Centaure, 1973).

¹²¹ Mme Azaïs, *L'ombre du peintre Lebrun au Salon de 1808* (Paris, 1808). It should be pointed out that the use of a deceased old master as guide was not particularly uncommon in art criticism of the day. See, for example, *Rubens au Museum: Critique des tableaux de Salon en vaudevilles* (Paris: an 9).

¹²² "Atala, vierge tendre et pure, / Doux trésor de beauté qu'a repris la nature, / Quoi, déjà tu n'es plus! de si jeunes attrait / Sous un linceul, hélas! sont cachés pour jamais." Mme Victoire Babois, "Vers sur le tableau d'Atala au Tombeau, de M. Girodet," *Le Mercur de France*, 34.385 (3 décembre 1808): 435-36. Rpt. in *Élégies et poésies diverses, par Madame Victoire Babois* (Paris: Le Normant, 1810) 72-73. See Appendix 1 for this poem in its entirety.

As Babois notes, the diaphanous shroud that covers the tragic heroine, *Atala*, draws attention to her supple breasts and the curvaceous contours of her youthful body, thus intimating her “attractions.” Babois will reiterate the erotic nature of the painting when she again refers to “the linen that covers [Atala’s] charms” later in the poem.¹²³ This female critic’s delight in the sensuality of the painting may be viewed as an attempt to titillate both female and male viewers. I propose that we ought to consider how these discussions of idealized bodies in art speak to the visual pleasure of both male and female viewers. To my mind, the writings of Wuïet and Babois may surprise readers who expect a more circumspect approach to art; indeed, these writings signal how a woman art critic could write candidly about pleasure in looking in an era that ostensibly curtailed such activity for the fair sex.

In my opinion, what is especially remarkable about many of these woman-authored writings on art is that they draw attention to the embodied nature of the critic. In many of these critiques, the acts of travelling to the Louvre, milling about the galleries, and standing before the works of art—and thus becoming visible participants in the public sphere—are frequently highlighted. For example, Caroline Wuïet titles her reviews of the Salon of 1798 and subsequent visits to the Louvre as “promenades,” thus stressing the physical activity that her critical enterprise necessitates.¹²⁴ In her poem about Girodet’s *Atala*, Babois emphasizes her personal experience before the painting,

¹²³ “Sur le lin qui couvre tes charmes.” Babois 435-36.

¹²⁴ For an exploration of the relationship between art, modernity, and the peripatetic, see Nancy Forgiione, “Everyday Life in Motion: The Art of Walking in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Art Bulletin* 87.4 (December 2005): 664-87.

and the visceral effects of her viewing experience. Upon looking at the tragic Chactas, she recounts:

Of his tormented silence I feel complete horror;
The trait that rips one apart has passed through my heart:
I tremble, I want to run away, and I remain astonished.
What god of the tomb holds my soul captive?¹²⁵

Like the woman from Provençal who is paralyzed before the *Apollo Belvedere*, Babois has a similar reaction before Girodet's masterpiece. Caught up in sublime rapture, she declares herself overcome by this painting. She "tremble[s]" and "wants to run away" and is yet held captive by the virile god of the underworld. In her review of the Salon of 1814, Fanny Raoul records being transfixed before Girodet's *Sleep of Endymion* (1791). She rehearses her rapturous experience before the painting: "I see it for the first time and I cannot detach my eyes; it seems like the freshest, the most seductive of dreams"¹²⁶ This physical nature of this experience before an artwork is also recounted by Claire Réguis, la comtesse Lenoir-Laroche in her *La Grèce et la France*, in which she emphasizes her engagement with David's *Léonidas*:

At first sight, one notices only Léonidas; each spectator remains transfixed by admiration in the presence of the beautiful rendered with sensitivity by the power of the most magnificent talent. . . . The special

¹²⁵ "De ses muets tourments je sens toute l'horreur; / Le trait qui le déchire est passé dans mon cœur: / Je frémis, je veux fuir, et je reste étonnée. / Quel dieu sur ce tombeau tient mon ame enchaînée?" Babois 436.

¹²⁶ "Je le vois pour la première fois, et n'en puis détacher mes yeux ; il semble que les songes les plus frais, les plus séduisants . . ." Raoul, "Salon de 1813: M. Girodet," *Le Véristique* 16 (9 janvier 1814): 256.

character of the beautiful excites this admiring silence, which suspends all movement, all reflection; it is the effect to which I have always been witness, in the numerous and long sojourns that I have spent before this admirable picture.¹²⁷

This captive state is a recurring trope in the woman-authored discourse of this period. So too are the corporeal experiences these women have before works of art. Indeed, all of the above-mentioned women critics emphasize that their observations were not disembodied acts, and therefore, that the body was the site of production for subsequent acts of criticism.¹²⁸ That they did this freely and frequently suggests that the phenomenon of women looking at art—and discussing the responses that painting, sculptures, and so forth would elicit—was widely recognized. Paintings from the period, including Hubert Robert’s *Grand Gallery at the Louvre* (1798) or his early nineteenth-century sketch of *Women Entering the Museum* suggest that women had a notable presence in the Salon spaces.

For too long, we have viewed art criticism as a disembodied act, one which privileges the ocular over the corporeal. We need to muse over how women’s presence at the Salon was a significant aspect of post-Revolutionary sociability, and consider the

¹²⁷ “ [À] la première vue, on n’aperçoit que Léonidas; chaque spectateur reste fixé par l’admiration en présence du beau rendu sensible par la puissance du plus grand talent. . . . Le caractère particulier du beau est d’exciter ce silence admiratif, qui suspend tout mouvement, toute réflexion; c’est l’effet dont j’ai toujours été témoin, dans les nombreuses et longues séances que j’ai faites devant cet admirable tableau.” Réguis 30-31.

¹²⁸ For discussion of the significance of the body as a site of production, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994).

implications of such practices when determining women's positions in the broader cultural sphere. By rooting the viewing and speaking subject in the body, and declaring that their observations were inextricably bound to their experiences before art in the shared spaces of consumption, these women critics staked a claim for their place in the public sphere.

Clearly, women were participating in the discussion of art and aesthetics in the periodical press of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France in engaging and multifaceted ways. Women writers from various backgrounds and with myriad motivations engaged in art criticism by penning Salon pamphlets, publishing letters to the editor on art, and dedicating poems and accolades to particular artworks. Attuned to contemporary aesthetic debates and modes of presentation, these critics provided important insights into broader issues, particularly those pertaining to women in this society. Matters such as women's public roles and responsibilities, their right to education and training, and their contribution to the new social order were of central concern in these woman-authored writings on art. Indeed, critiques published in the periodical press illuminate the ways in which gender was negotiated through aesthetic discourse. These pieces provide new material for the debates surrounding the female viewer and her position as a subject-beholder, and even point to the emergence of an alternative economy of spectatorship for women. In the end, this material suggests that women were highly involved as consumers of art at this historical juncture, and subsequently, it is imperative that we reassess our characterization of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic art worlds as undeniably androcentric.

CHAPTER TWO

TENTATIVE EXCURSIONS: ART CRITICISM IN THE NOVELS OF JULIANE DE KRÜDENER AND STÉPHANIE-FÉLICITÉ DE GENLIS

Some of the most popular novels of the period, such as Germaine de Staël's *Delphine* (1802) or *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), Juliane de Krüdener's *Valérie, ou lettres de Gustave de Linaur à Ernest de G* (1804), and Stéphanie-Félicité, comtesse de Genlis's *Veillées du château, ou cours de morale à l'usage des enfants* (1784) and pendant novels *Sainclair, ou la victime des sciences et des arts* (1808) and *Hortense, ou la victime des novels et des voyages* (1808), signal the various ways women used fiction as a means to articulate their positions on art and aesthetics. While women's writings of this period have been of increasing interest to contemporary literary scholars, art historians have neglected such texts in their investigations into the art world of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. However, if we are to broaden our understanding of nineteenth-century art criticism, which was not defined in the narrow terms embraced by twentieth- (and twenty-first) century scholars, we must acknowledge that such activity was registered in places like fiction.¹ Thus, the woman-authored novels under discussion in this chapter were veritable instances of art criticism and provide insights into the constitutive issues, ideas, and institutions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French art.

¹ The reader is reminded of the provisional list of sites for art-critical production in the nineteenth-century, which includes the novel on art and the art novel. For this gloss, see Dario Gamboni, "The Relative Autonomy of Art Criticism," *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Michael R. Orwicz (New York: Manchester UP, 1994) 182.

While the subjects of art and aesthetics played a formative role in the *œuvre* of other women writers of this period, this is especially true of the two novelists who will be considered in this chapter, Juliane de Krüdener and Stéphanie-Félicité, comtesse de Genlis. Analysis of the writings of these understudied authors will show how women authors used the novel as a forum for their views on art. Their novels mark how women writers saw themselves performing the cultural work of educating the masses on aesthetic subjects, engaging in key artistic debates, and recognizing how cultural criticism could cloak subversive political views and even attempt to effect social change. These fictional works also illuminate how social class—a highly contested issue in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France—informed critical production. Furthermore, analysis of these novels reveals that the subject of women’s participation in art, whether as spectators, patrons, artists, critics, or represented subjects, was a key matter of concern for Krüdener and Genlis. Of particular interest is how these female novelists approached women of/in art, for their texts suggest the negotiations such figures made as they became increasingly visible and viable actors in the spaces of art.

In this chapter, I will argue that the novels of Krüdener and Genlis function as significant instances of art criticism and even participate in defining this fledgling institution. Furthermore, I will show that the various narrative devices and strategies employed in the art discourse of Krüdener and Genlis’s novels illuminate how women were staking a claim in art criticism, a development which, as a significant component of the emerging public sphere of late eighteenth-century France, had important

ramifications for women's involvement in the redefining of the social order.² Indeed, there seems to have been a growing awareness of the transformative intersections between art criticism, the spaces of art such as the Salon, and the consolidation of *le public*.³ Fiction enters into such discussions in significant ways at this historical juncture, and in this chapter I will consider these connections. As Laurie Kane Lew, who examines the emergence of women art critics in Victorian England, rightly notes: "Much like the novel in the eighteenth century, art writing [became] a generically transgressive and ambivalently gendered medium for working out the relations between the public sphere and the private one, between a public culture and personal cultivation."⁴ I will argue that the "novelistic" art criticism of this period occupied a liminal space that was especially conducive to the imagining of solutions to the lived realities of women in the sites of Revolutionary and Napoleonic art. These texts not only contributed to the development of art criticism as an institution, but also to how women could imagine and even secure subject positions in the emerging terrain of modern art. Given that art and its criticism were considered constitutive elements of French culture at this time, and

² For discussions of art criticism's integral role in the articulation of the public sphere in late eighteenth-century France, see Jürgen Habermas's seminal text, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT P, 1989), especially 40-42.

³ The relationship between the institution of art criticism and the Salon, which functions as a constitutive, if not solitary, site in critical production, is elaborated upon in Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985); and François Benoit, *L'art français sous la Révolution et l'Empire* (Geneva: Slatkine-Megariotis, 1975), 131-44. See also Annie Becq, "Expositions, peintres et critiques: Vers l'image moderne de l'artiste," *Dix-huitième siècle* 14 (1982): 131-49.

⁴ Laurie Kane Lew, "Cultural Anxiety in Anna Jameson's Art Criticism," *Studies in English Literature* 36.4 (Fall 1996): 830.

that these cultural fields participated in the (re)formulations of the social order, the writings on art by Krüdener and Genlis should be characterized as addressing concerns regarding women as players in the art world, but also as social subjects.⁵

While aesthetic discussions were ensconced in the pages of these novels rather than published in pamphlet form or in the periodical press, and were not necessarily spurred by the Salons, the art-related writings of these women stand as remarkable critical gestures. In the following pages, I will examine how these two women writers used art to further their narrative purposes, which were ultimately centered on the claim that women should be viewed as active agents in defining the fields of art. As two of the most popular novelists of this period, these women were well positioned to make such declarations. Their fiction adds yet another fascinating layer to woman-authored criticism of this period.

Women novelists of this period recognized the power of fiction to educate the masses on all kinds of topics, including art. Scholars have made persuasive arguments regarding the didactic function of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel, particularly in terms of gender and class formation.⁶ This seems to be true particularly of the authors under discussion in this chapter. Indeed, Gabriel de Broglie, Stéphanie-

⁵ François Benoit argues that there was a veritable explosion of interest in art, and more particularly art writing, in late eighteenth-century France. See his *L'art français* 9. For an extensive treatment of the social value of art in late eighteenth-century France, see James A. Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750-1799* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1965).

⁶ For considerations of how fiction shapes the ideological terrain, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990); and Suellen Diaconoff, *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books, and Sex in the French Enlightenment* (New York: State U of New York P, 2005).

Félicité de Genlis's recent biographer, declares emphatically that Genlis's primary motivation for writing revolved around the instruction and edification of her readers. Broglie argues: "For Madame de Genlis, creation, whether literary or artistic, was justified not by intention or aesthetic success, but only by a moral absolute and a didactic usefulness."⁷ Hence, I propose that we consider that the art criticism penned by French women novelists of this period may have been motivated, at least in part, by a desire to educate readers on aesthetic matters.

It should be emphasized that the works of the women writers under discussion were exceptionally popular.⁸ Juliane de Krüdener's novel took Paris by storm when it was first published in December 1803, thereby encouraging women to fashion themselves *à la Valérie*. A critique published in the *Mercure de France* compared the novel to Virgil's *Aeneid* and Goethe's *Werther*, and Bernardin Saint-Pierre declared that in Krüdener's work, "all subjects are painted with naïve, melancholic colors that are sometimes brilliant [and] worthy of the brushes of Sterne and Young."⁹ Krüdener would

⁷ "[P]our Mme de Genlis, la création, qu'elle fût littéraire ou artistique, se justifiait, non par une intention ou une réussite esthétique, mais seulement par une finalité morale et une utilité didactique." Gabriel de Broglie, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Perrin, 1985) 373. For another consideration of Genlis's didacticism, see Joan Hinde Stewart, "Morals: Sophie Cottin and Félicité de Genlis," *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993) 187-98.

⁸ For a discussion of popular literature in this period, see Martyn Lyons, "Les best-sellers," *Le triomphe du livre: Une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du 19e siècle* (Paris: Promodis, 1987) 77-104.

⁹ "[T]ous ses sujets sont peints avec des couleurs naïves, mélancholiques et quelquefois brûlantes, qui auraient fait honneur au pinceau de Sterne et d'Young." On the reception of Krüdener's *Valérie*, see Francis Ley, *Madame de Krüdener et son temps* (Paris: Plon, 1962)

report to the German writer Jean-Paul Richter that women stood in bookshops weeping silently as they read the novel, and that mothers were naming their sons Gustave, after the hero of *Valérie*. Apparently, cups and plates decorated with scenes from the novel became *en vogue*.¹⁰ Krüdener put much effort into the marketing of her novel. Charles Eynard, Krüdener's nineteenth-century biographer, recounts how this author went from shop to shop in Paris requesting various articles—hats, ribbons, scarves, and so forth—that were reminiscent of those described in *Valérie*, thus generating interest in the novel amongst the shop girls and customers.¹¹ In 1804, numerous editions of *Valérie* were published: four French, three German, one English, and one Dutch; the novel was even translated into Russian in 1807.¹² There is little question as to this novel's widespread dissemination and appeal.

As for Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, who was forced to write as a means of supporting herself after the Revolution, an extraordinary literary output defined her career. Her corpus of publications ranged from novels and instruction manuals to philosophical essays and treatises on politics (her *Œuvres* comprises eighty-four volumes),

232-33; and K. Wesley Lacy, Jr., "A Forgotten Best-Seller: Madame de Krüdener's *Valérie*," *Romance Notes* (1978): 362-67.

¹⁰ Ernest John Knappton, *The Lady of the Holy Alliance: The Life of Julie de Krüdener* (New York: Columbia UP, 1939) 67.

¹¹ Charles Eynard, *La vie de Madame de Krüdener*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1849) 134-35. Krüdener seemed keenly aware of the necessity for unabashed self-promotion in the realm of popular literature. Of her antics, she writes to a friend, "It is not important what one says: the world is stupid; this is the charlatanism which proves it" ["N'importe ce qu'on dira; le monde est si bête; c'est le charlatanisme qui met en évidence!"] Qtd. in Lin Connut, "Baronne de Krüdener (1764-1824)," *Les contemporains* 403 (1 juillet 1900): 406.

¹² Ley, *Madame de Krüdener et son temps* 234.

making her one of the most prodigious writers of the age.¹³ Many of her writings were bestsellers. For instance, the first run of Genlis's novel, *Veillées du château, ou cours de morale à l'usage des enfants* (1784) sold out in eight days, was immediately translated into a number of languages, and went through at least sixty printings in Europe before the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ The publisher Maradan was quick to sign a contract with Genlis after the Revolution, recognizing her versatility and popular appeal, and this author continued to garner success as a writer until her death in 1830. Regarding Genlis's popularity, Michael Polowetsky declares: "The most prolific and possibly the most widely read French author of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods was neither Chateaubriand nor Staël, but rather Mme de Genlis."¹⁵ In the end, Genlis's impressive political and social connections, as will be outlined later in the chapter, coupled with her straightforward prose made her a beloved—if not always critically acclaimed—writer of the people.¹⁶ Clearly her works were positioned to influence readers in matters of fashion and taste.

Does it not seem plausible that these art-related novels by Krüdener and Genlis validated and even promoted women's increasing presence in the field of art criticism?

¹³ See her *Œuvres complètes*, 84 vols. (Paris, 1825-26). The *Œuvres* of Genlis is not complete, as it was published before her death; this collection is also exceedingly rare.

¹⁴ See Anne L. Schroder, "Going Public Against the Academy in 1784: Mme de Genlis Speaks Out on Gender Bias," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.3 (1999): 377.

¹⁵ Michael Polowetsky, *A Bond Never Broken: The Relations between Napoleon and the Authors of France* (Toronto: Associated UP, 1993) 142-43.

¹⁶ For a discussion of Genlis's contentious position within her own cultural milieu, see Marie-Emanuelle Plagnol-Diéval, "Aimer ou hair Madame de Genlis," *Études sur le 18e siècle: Portraits de femmes*, eds. Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin 28 (1974): 89-98.

Both women wrote from positions of privilege, both educationally and socially. Not only were these women well-read, but also, they had cultivated personal relationships with members of the French intelligentsia and were even highly visible participants in the formation of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French culture, via the institution of the salon.¹⁷ Moreover, Krüdener and Genlis were well-traveled, had visited the major museums and monuments on the Continent and had access to many private art collections. In addition, it should be noted that both published their works with their aristocratic names, thus signaling a kind of authority to comment on matters related to art and society.¹⁸ By attaching their titles (Juliane de Krüdener, Stéphanie-Félicité, comtesse de Genlis) to their novels, these authors seem to subscribe to the belief that their nobility bolstered their credibility as women to write on aesthetic matters. Even after the Revolution, which had certainly problematized the position of the aristocrat in French society, there was a sense that aristocratic women were keepers of the cultural flame. As Laure Junot, duchesse d'Abrantès, would declare in her *Histoire des salons de Paris* of the 1830s, the returning women *émigrés* desired nothing more than the reinstatement of the salon, which she characterized as “a gathering place for the arts and

¹⁷ There are a number of publications on women and salon culture. Works that serve as an overview of this institution include Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le paradis des femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976); Dena Goodman, “Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (1989): 329-50; and Jolanta Pekacz, *Conservative Tradition in Pre-Revolutionary France: Parisian Salon Women* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

¹⁸ I do not agree with Jolanta Pekacz’s contention that “eighteenth-century Parisian salonnières [were] ousted from aesthetic arbitration” by the *philosophes*, and maintain that in the imagination of the general public, these “aristocratic” salonnières occupied positions of authority on cultural matters in early nineteenth-century France.

muses.”¹⁹ I maintain that the writings on art by women with connections to nobility, such as Krüdener and Genlis, were an extension of the discussions held in these salons, and that these novels worked to extend further women’s presence as art critics-cum-public actors.

The Novel as Social Field

Truly, the early nineteenth-century publishing industry in France offered women unprecedented opportunities, and this was particularly true for female novelists. Women writers were able to capitalize on the heightened demand for fiction in the years immediately following the Revolution.²⁰ In 1801, annalist Pujoux would describe this phenomenon: “First it was a rage, then it became an addiction, now it is nothing short of a mania. . . They are translated, composed, recopied, old ones are reprinted; and in spite of this, the demand for them can barely be satisfied.”²¹ This demand may be explained in part by the lack of novels written and published during the Revolution, and hence, the increased desire for such texts. This development may also be indicative of the public’s interest in trading a focus on political realities to one geared towards personal escapism. Significantly, novel reading cut across social boundaries: men, women, and children

¹⁹ Abrantès, as quoted in Stephen Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004) 75.

²⁰ See appendix 5 in Carla Hesse, *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1810* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1991) 257-59.

²¹ J.-B. Pujoux, *Paris à la fin du 18e siècle* (Paris, 1801) 26, as qtd. in Hesse 201. Martin Hall states that between 1751 and 1800, novel production quadrupled. See his “Gender and Reading in the Late Eighteenth Century: The *Bibliothèque universelle des romans*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 14.3-4 (April-July 2002): 771.

from all levels of society read these texts. We know that Napoleon was an avid novel reader and even dabbled in fictional writing himself.²² Rising literacy rates (it is estimated that in 1786, approximately 35% of the French population had some degree of literacy; by 1816, the number had risen to about 43%) meant that such material was more accessible to a broader constituency.²³ The novel genre was an effective place for disseminating ideas.

Historically, the novel genre was associated with women, both as writers and readers, and this development was a hotly contested one, for questions abounded regarding the novel's effects on the social order. Many feared the dangerous intersections of gender, class, and romance found in these writings.²⁴ We should not underestimate the importance of women's ascendancy in this arena, for in many ways, it enabled them to exert substantial power in the field of arts and letters. Of this phenomenon Charlotte Daniels comments:

²² See Polowetzsky 90-91.

²³ For a chart estimating literacy rates in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, see Lyons, *Le triomphe du livre* 28. Further discussion of changing patterns in literacy and readership is given in his *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants* (London: Palgrave, 2001).

²⁴ For a discussion of women's involvement in the rise of the novel, see Linda Lang-Peralta, ed., *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1999); Nancy K. Miller, "Women's Reading, Women's Writing: Gender and the Rise of the Novel," *Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literatures in French*, eds. Joan DeJean and Nancy K. Miller (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) 37-54; and Georges May, "Féminisme et roman," *Le dilemme du roman au 18e siècle* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963). Representations of women reading novels abounded in late eighteenth-century France, thus suggesting that the subject had some cultural valency. On visual representations of women reading novels, see Mary D. Sheriff, *Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004) especially chapter three.

[t]he early forms of the public, far from excluding women from any access to a public voice, provided women novelists an astonishing and unprecedented means to shape the mental terrain of France. In fact, during this time of ‘new definitions in which nothing firmly was defined,’ the public sphere provided women writers with a forum for participating in negotiations on just what the new collective private life could be and on what it would mean in terms of who would hold what position in the structures opening up in society.²⁵

Clearly, the novel was well positioned to perform cultural work, and its female practitioners were involved in an enterprise with wide-ranging implications for the framing of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century art world and women’s place within it. While this position was advantageous at times, the place of prominence held by women in fiction was not without its problems. Concern over how such texts influenced social mores in general, but more particularly how they affected the women who read these, characterizes the discussions held on the novel throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.²⁶ During the Napoleonic era, the increased readership of novels was bemoaned by various political leaders as disruptive to

²⁵ Charlotte Daniels, *Subverting the Family Romance: Women Writers, Kinship Structures, and the Early French Novel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2000) 14. The quotation, “new definitions in which nothing was firmly defined,” is taken by Daniels from Dena Goodman, “Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime,” *History and Theory* 21 (1992): 14.

²⁶ In his 1755 book on the status of the novel, Abbé Armand-Pierre Jacquin condemns the novel as a threat to society, writing that “novels make [women] the tyrant of men. . . .” Abbé Armand-Pierre Jacquin, as qtd. in Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 180.

traditional gender and class structures of France and they deemed this phenomenon in need of close monitoring.²⁷

The charged discussions surrounding the novel in France certainly suggest that the genre was recognized for its potential subversions of traditional ideologies, and hence, we would do well to consider how the novels of Krüdener and Genlis contain inflections of difference from conventional modes of approaching art and culture. The undermining of these androcentric values and ideas is not always readily apparent, however. In her consideration of French women novelists in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, Joan Hinde Stewart stresses that although

the conditions under which eighteenth-century women lived and wrote are not immediately evident in their novels, it should be remembered that protest in the novel is masked and mediated. We must therefore look beyond the stylized formulas and apparent moral conservatism to appreciate the varied and sometimes subversive use to which women put the novel²⁸

On the surface, the novels of Krüdener and Genlis do appear somewhat staid and formulaic, which may explain in part why these two women writers have failed to achieve the scholarly attention their works deserve. Upon closer examination, however,

²⁷ Publisher Louis Ravier wrote that “novels render those who read them soft and effeminate. . . Novels pass from the hands of [women and young men] into those of their children, and from there into servants' quarters, and from there into the kitchen; they bring all the diverse classes of society together, . . .by seeding passion in every heart they seduce them by the same principles of weakness or exaltation.” Louis Ravier, as qtd. in Hesse 201, 203.

²⁸ Stewart 6.

their fiction, and especially the ways that art figures into their narratives, demonstrates greater complexities than previously acknowledged. For instance, while initially Krüdener seems to champion the status quo, analysis of her *Valérie* indicates that she subscribed to positions on appropriate subjects, modes of exhibition, and the social roles performed by art that were contrary to those adopted in the official French art circles. And while Genlis's denigration of the *femme artiste* reads not only as conservative, but even reactionary at times, a consideration of the myriad motivations at work in this discursive practice, or textual ploy, is suggestive for the negotiations being made by all public women, whether writers, artists, or otherwise. Furthermore, we must be careful not to dismiss immediately texts that seem to conform to mainstream thinking. As Elaine Showalter wisely noted, feminist scholars must be concerned with "what women actually write, not in relation to a theoretical, political, metaphoric, or visionary ideal of what women ought to write."²⁹ Indeed, the notion of difference must accommodate the myriad voices and visions proffered from within this circle of women writers from Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. The heterogeneous nature of their work should be celebrated rather than denied.

In the following pages, I will argue that the art-related novels of Krüdener and Genlis participated in the development of contemporary approaches to the ideas, issues, and institutions of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French art world. Both novelists displayed a keen interest in women's positions within this arena, and performed the cultural work of imagining and constructing a place for women as

²⁹ Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (Winter 1981): 205.

viewers, patrons, and critics. A sustained consideration of how art and aesthetics functioned in these understudied novels can enable us to put pressure on received notions regarding women's level of engagement with the visual arts of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France and to further nuance our characterization of this rich historical moment.

Krüdener's *Valérie* as Cultural Criticism

Juliana von Vietinghof (1764-1818) was born into a privileged and respected family from Latvia with significant interest in art.³⁰ From an early age, Krüdener felt a keen connection to the visual arts in particular, a passion that was encouraged by her father, who shared this affinity. In her *Journaux d'enfance*, written late in life, she recalls her childhood home, where she was surrounded by paintings and sculptures: "The art masterpieces made one dream of the country that they had left, just as in the middle of our long winters, the Medici Venus and the Graces looked to unite the myrtle of Asia, the laurel of Greece, and the perfume of the orange tree. . . ."³¹ Krüdener remembers the austere garden house on her father's estate in Riga where she spent her youth as a house "without any luxury save some beautiful paintings, which already exposed me to

³⁰ For a brief sketch of this figure's life and works, see Lucy M. Schwartz, "Juliane von Krüdener (1764-1824)," *French Women Writers*, eds. Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynn Zimmermann (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1994) 253-61.

³¹ "Les chefs-d'œuvres des arts faisaient rêver à la patrie qu'ils avaient quittée, même au milieu de nos longs hivers, la Vénus de Médicis et les Grâces ses compagnes voyaient s'unir le myrthe [sic] de l'Asie au laurier de la Grèce, du parfum de l'oranger. . . ." Krüdener, "Souvenirs de l'enfance: Notice sur la Baronne de Krüdener par une de ses petites-filles la Baronne d'Oppell," Fonds Ley, ms., A.1.3.19, Archives de la ville de Genève.

Italy, and thrust into my soul the first thoughts of the arts that I have loved so much.”³²

Other evidence of her involvement with the visual arts exists, including a recently discovered manuscript for an unpublished novel, *Algithe*, in which Krüdener sketches a heroine whose childhood home was habitually filled by great artists and whose education included artistic training.³³ This tale bears a strong resemblance to the author’s own circumstances as a youth, thus suggesting that art played a formative role in her development. Finally, in an intriguing anecdote recorded in her *Journaux d’enfance*, Krüdener recalls her introduction to the painter Greuze on her first trip to Paris, when she was about ten or eleven years old:

The fair of Saint-Germain had begun. My mother had taken me; it was evening, one can imagine how the activity of this spectacle amused me. The circle that surrounded my mother suddenly disappeared: apparently I had stopped to look at the shops. I wanted to run to rejoin her, when suddenly a well-dressed man, whom I still have imprinted in my mind, grabbed me and tried to take me away. ‘Leave me,’ I told him vivaciously, ‘I don’t want to follow you!’ I was ready to cry when a

³² “[U]ne maison sans autre luxe que quelques beaux tableaux qui, déjà, m’ouvrirent l’Italie, et jetèrent dans mon âme les premières pensées des arts que j’ai tant aimés.” Krüdener, “Souvenirs de l’enfance,” A.1.3.21.

³³ “Je dessinais avec des artistes qui se plaisaient à faire valoir ma figure en la retraçant à mon père de la manière la plus avantageuse et la plus agréable. Ainsi tout semblait se réunir pour m’inspirer la passion la plus dangereuse et la plus facile à donner aux femmes: la vanité.” An excerpt of this manuscript, discovered in Russia by Elena Gretchanaïa, is published as an appendix in Francis Ley, “Madame de Krüdener (1764-1824)” 70-72.

young man from the Russian embassy, who had accompanied my mother and who was looking for me, found me and demanded an explanation from this gentleman, telling him who I was. Making excuses, he said laughingly that he was the painter Greuze, and that he could not resist the desire to paint me.³⁴

Regrettably, the proposed portrait was never executed.

In 1782, Juliane was married to Burchard Alexis Constantine, Baron von Krüdener, a diplomat twice her age, and began to expand her circle of acquaintances among the European intelligentsia as she accompanied her husband on various missions throughout Europe. Juliane de Krüdener continued her itinerant lifestyle after separating from her husband in 1789 and gradually made her way into the most elite literary circles in Europe. Krüdener was in Paris from 1802 to 1804, where in her weekly salons she entertained luminaries such as Benjamin Constant, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and Germaine de Staël.³⁵ A letter written by Krüdener's daughter indicates that both she and her mother accompanied René de Chateaubriand, the author of the sensational novella

³⁴ “La faire de Saint-Germain avait commencé. Ma mère m’y mena; c’était le soir; on peut se figurer si le mouvement de cette foule m’amusait. Le cercle qui environnait ma mère disparut tout à coup: je m’étais apparemment arrêtée à regarder les boutiques. Je voulus courir pour la rejoindre, quand tout à coup un homme bien mis, que j’ai encore présent à la mémoire, se saisit de moi et voulut à toute force m’emmener. ‘Laissez-moi,’ lui disais-je avec vivacité, ‘je ne vous suivrai pas!’ J’étais prête à pleurer, quand un jeune homme de l’ambassade de Russie, qui avait accompagné ma mère et qui me cherchait, me trouva et demanda raison à cet homme de son procédé, lui disant qui j’étais. Sur quoi l’autre, en lui faisant des excuses, lui dit en riant qu’il était le peintre Greuze, et qu’il n’avait pu résister à l’envie de me peindre.” Krüdener, “Souvenirs de l’enfance,” A.1.3.26-7.

³⁵ See Francis Ley, “Madame de Krüdener a Paris (1802-04),” *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France* 99.1 (1999): 99-108.

Atala (1800), to see Claude Gautherot's painted interpretation of the text, thus testifying to Krüdener's activity within the Parisian art world.³⁶ Several of the entries in her *Maximes et pensées* lauded the arts.³⁷

Today, Juliane de Krüdener is an essentially unknown figure—even to many specialists in nineteenth-century French literature—and yet her novel *Valérie* affords us an engaging vantage point from which to survey the terrain of woman-authored art criticism. Although she penned one of the most popular novels of the Napoleonic era, had a significant presence in the premiere intellectual group of the period, known as the “circle of Coppet,” and converted such figures as Alexander I, tsar of Russia, to the

³⁶ “Nous avons été voir avec lui et Madame de Beaumont le tableau d'*Atala* dont Gay [medecin et ami de Saint-Pierre] nous a parlé et qui est vraiment très beau. La tête de Chactas est superbe, elle porte si bien l'expression de la douleur mêlée de passion. Mais je trouve qu'*Atala* n'a pas assez d'abandon, la position est gênée; la tête de père Aubry est belle, mais Chateaubriand voudrait qu'elle eût l'expression de cette joie céleste qu'on voit briller dans celle de quelques saints. Je trouve son observation fausse car, outre sa douleur, il a celle de Chactas, et d'ailleurs ce n'est point sa mort à lui.” Juliette de Krüdener, “Le salon de Mme de Krüdener à Paris en 1802-03—d'après le journal inédit de sa fille,” *Rencontres stendhaliennes franco-russes* (Paris: Solibel France, 1995) 186-87. The example of art criticism, as given by Krüdener's daughter, shows how women entered into aesthetic discourse in the private domain. Instances of women writing about art in letters, diaries, and other private venues are outside the purview of this dissertation; however, it should be noted that this is a significant phenomenon that deserves further attention.

³⁷ “Of all the pleasures that embellish social life, there is little which offers man purer pleasures than that which is born of the arts! They act so forcefully on elevated souls that the degree of enthusiasm they inspire is perhaps the barometer of the degree of superiority that proves it. This demonstrates the most beautiful faculties of man, now attesting to the ability of genius, now flattering his sensibility by the images that pass through him via passionate situations or by honorable emotions—that the arts exercise an empire so stirring.” For these maxims and thoughts—a number of which were published in the *Mercur de France*, see Paul LaCroix, *Madame de Kriudener: Ses lettres et ses ouvrages inédits* (Paris, 1880) 237-57.

religious sect of the Moravian Brethren, the reputation of Krüdener has fallen into obscurity. Krüdener's *Valérie* has elicited little scholarship, despite its bestseller status, and when the novel is discussed, it is usually in terms of the author's opportunism or the book's similarities to contemporary works of the same ilk.³⁸ We should acknowledge that Krüdener's *Valérie* both engages with contemporary literary practices as well as anticipates future directions for the "touristic" novels (a descriptor I use to designate texts that possess qualities of travel and tourism literature), with their emphasis on art and aesthetics, that were published in early nineteenth-century France.

Set primarily in Italy, Krüdener's *Valérie, ou lettres de Gustave de Linar à Ernest de G.*, is an epistolary novel that details a young man's education in art and love during the early Napoleonic era. Ostensibly, the tale is based upon the author's encounter with one of her husband's secretaries in the first years of her marriage.³⁹ In this narrative, Gustave, a young Swede who goes to Italy to work for his father's best friend, Count of B., falls madly in love with the Count's young wife Valerie, from whom he tries to hide his feelings. Gustave constructs an idealized image of Valerie, who becomes a modern-day

³⁸ Pierre Kohler, *Valérie, ou maîtres et imitateurs de Mme de Krüdener* (Geneva: Imprimerie centrale, 1922).

³⁹ It is widely accepted that this book was autobiographical in nature. Juliane de Krüdener inspired a similar passion in one of her husband's secretaries, Alexander Stakiev, who associated with the Krüdeners while they served a diplomatic mission in Denmark in the mid-1780s. In a letter addressed to the Baron de Krüdener, this young secretary had confessed this love for the Baron's young wife, who, although unhappy in her marriage, did not accept his advances. This affair obviously made a marked impression on Juliane de Krüdener, who would spin the event into a tale of sentimentalized and unrequited passion. The autobiographical nature of this text makes the connections between the author's opinions and those of her characters especially plausible. That said, authorial voice functions in complex ways in this novel, for Krüdener's "trace" is found in the discourse of various characters within *Valérie*.

Madonna like those painted by the great Renaissance masters; the conflation of the two is strengthened by this heroine's own maternity. Tragically, Valerie's newborn son only lives for a few hours. As Gustave's obsession grows (and this development remains the major focus of *Valérie*), he becomes increasingly unwell. He confesses his love for Valerie to the Count of B., who remains nonplussed by the admission, and to Valerie, whose ambivalent reaction intensifies his ill health. Ultimately, Gustave retreats to a monastery, where he dies.

This novel participates in the tradition of epistolary fiction, popularized in eighteenth-century works such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Werther* (1774). Krüdener's *Valérie*, synthesizes trends in early French Romantic (sometimes termed *preromantisme*) literature. This text certainly offers some innovations, however. For example, Krüdener opposes the Mediterranean and Nordic cultures in ways that antecede the more acclaimed work of Germaine de Staël and Charles Victor de Bonstetten, thus suggesting Krüdener's contribution to this field.⁴⁰ As Michel Mercier, who authored the invaluable critical edition of *Valérie*, remarks, the originality of this novel lies in its ability to wed French

⁴⁰ Biographer Kohler will even go so far as to claim that Staël's discussions on art plagiarized Krüdener's work: "Le roman de Mme de Staël est un guide à travers les arts classiques, une fresque descriptive de la terre des ruines, des basiliques et des musées. Cette partie pittoresque, qui serait contraire au talent naturel de son auteur si elle n'était didactique plus encore qu'artistique, a son modèle non seulement dans de nombreux récits de voyage en Italie, mais dans un épisode de *Valérie*" (25). Kohler is referring to Valerie's letter to Gustave in which she describes the various artworks she and her husband are encountering on their trip throughout Italy. Scholars continue to argue over the place of *Valérie* in the conception of Staël's *Corinne*, as there are striking similarities.

pre-Romanticism with the ideas of the first German Romantics.⁴¹ Furthermore, we should acknowledge that Krüdener's novel was formative to the "style Empire," with its allusions to antiquity, Correggio and Raphael, and even Shakespeare.⁴²

In addition to its connection to the male practitioners of the epistolary novel, *Valérie* also manifests ties to such fiction as Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) and Germaine de Staël's *Delphine* (1802).⁴³ Written in what one scholar deems the twilight of women's epistolary texts, Krüdener's *Valérie* may be viewed as conservative, even moribund, in its format.⁴⁴ Why would this author take such an approach? I would suggest that by electing to write in this vein, Krüdener may be attempting both to connect her work to her foremothers in the French literary world, as well as to mask inflammatory content within a traditional form. Furthermore, the epistolary approach was also popular in contemporary travel literature, and perhaps this author felt it an authentic mode for her "touristic" novel. Krüdener's *Valérie* seems to

⁴¹ Michel Mercier, introduction, *Valérie*, by Juliane de Krüdener (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974) 13.

⁴² Kohler 19. Kohler singles out the passage where Valerie performs her shawl dance, with "la manière antique," "le shall si antique," "la figure dessinée par le Corrège, la Vénus pudique, Raphaël," and so forth, which clearly informs Staël's *Corinne*.

⁴³ Beatrice Guenther suggests that *Valérie* is published on the eve of the "atrophy of epistolary fiction," a phenomenon that she attributes to the ways in which its confining formal strictures were at odds with an "evolving female-gendered consciousness." See her "Letters Exchanged Across Borders: Mme de Staël's *Delphine* and the Epistolary Novels of Juliane von Krüdener and Sophie Moreau," *The Comparatist* 22 (1998): 78-90.

⁴⁴ Joan DeJean argues that the post-Revolutionary period signaled the demise of the epistolary fiction for women because society no longer privileged the "oral female verb" (the world of conversations, the improvisations of salon culture, and so forth) associated with this tradition. See her "Staël's *Corinne*: The Novel's Other Dilemma," *Stanford French Review* 11 (Spring 1987): 77-87.

follow Charles de Brosse's *Voyage en Italie* (1739), which was perhaps the best-known and most formative eighteenth-century travel account published in France. In this travelogue, the author combined anecdotes and observations of Italian culture in the format of a series of letters.⁴⁵ A similar technique is found in Goethe's *Letters from Italy*, a travel diary written in 1786 but published some twenty-five years later. Hence, while Krüdener's novel is clearly connected to the genre of epistolary fiction, it also seems plausible that Krüdener's novel was informed as well by contemporary modes of travel literature.

A careful reading of Krüdener's epistolary novel reveals that art and aesthetics occupy a significant position. Importantly, art has multiple narrative functions in this text, as conversations about art and even art objects themselves are used for plot and character development. Additionally, discussions of these paintings and sculptures occasionally serve as a vehicle for cultural criticism. While many of the art-oriented passages seem innocuous at first glance, the artistic exchanges within this text cloak alternative—if not completely subversive—ideologies to the aesthetics and cultural policies espoused by the Napoleonic government. Krüdener's disapproval of Napoleonic policies, most notably his transportation of Italian artifacts to museums in France, is one such position. In addition, repeated references to Italian Renaissance art and long passages regarding the virtues of religious art within the pages of *Valérie* indicate a keen interest in styles of art and aesthetic theory that stood outside the staid

⁴⁵ Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 73.

Neoclassicism embraced by the French art institutions. The ways in which Krüdener engages in art-related matters is suggestive for issues such as a woman's place in the public, androcentric field of art criticism. The tentative nature of Krüdener's approach to art reflects the difficulties that women writers perceived as actors in this arena. These gestures, which are frequently fragmented, disjointed, and all but hidden, serve as reckonable signifiers of the woman art critic's unstable position in post-Revolutionary France.

A recurring narrative strategy in Krüdener's novel is to present the character of Valerie as an amalgam of artworks—a move that could be construed as emblematic of women's positions as aesthetic creatures. While the objectification of women was not new to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French culture by any means, Krüdener's text suggests the valency of such critical activities at this particular historical moment. Indeed, many of the descriptions of Valerie turn upon allusions to masterpieces of art. In Gustave's letters to Ernst, Valerie is often compared to women in classical art, "like one of those gracious and pure figures designed for us by the Greeks."⁴⁶ The most oft-cited passage in the book—the famous scene of the shawl dance—describes Valerie as "this pure and gentle figure who seemed to have been designed by Correggio," and as the one who was "in the thoughts of the artist who gave

⁴⁶ "[C]omme une de ces figures gracieuses et pures, dont les Grecs nous dessinèrent les formes . . ." Krüdener, *Valérie* 33.

us the Venus *prudica*, and in the paintbrush of Raphael.”⁴⁷ We should recall that in this society, women fashioned themselves after antique sculptures and created *tableaux vivants* after famous Old Master paintings.⁴⁸ This treatment of women as abstractions was, of course, especially prevalent during the Revolution.⁴⁹ By defining Valerie in relation to something else—indeed, as a timeless object of beauty to behold, and as an abstraction rather than an individualized, corporeal being—Krüdener seems to be intimating how women fell prey to aestheticization (effected by themselves as well as by others in this patriarchal society) during this period.

Art occupies a place of importance in the novel from its inception, and indeed, Krüdener’s *Valérie* participates in this tradition of using artworks for narrative purposes. More specifically, this author uses portraiture as a potent indicator of the issues of desire that saturate this novel. Perhaps the most famous instance of the portrait’s use in French literature is found in *La princesse de Clèves*, a novel penned by Madame de Lafayette (Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne) in 1678. In this novel, the heroine

⁴⁷ “[C]ette figure douce et pure, sembloient avoir été dessinés par le Corrège” and “c'est elle qui étoit dans la pensée de l'artiste qui nous donna la Vénus pudique, et dans le pinceau de Raphaël.” Krüdener, *Valérie* 65-66.

⁴⁸ Emma (Hart) Hamilton and her performances after various representations of women (“attitudes”) exemplify this practice. On the assumption of these guises, see Chloe Chard, “Spectator and Spectacle: The Feminine and the Antique” *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography, 1600-1830* (New York: Manchester UP, 1999) 126-55.

⁴⁹ Excellent discussions concerning women as allegory can be found in Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001); and Madelyn Gutwirth, “Goddesses and Allegories” *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992) 252-84.

becomes obsessed with a portrait that included the visage of her forbidden lover, the Duc de Nemours, and this object subsequently functions as a means of articulating the princesse de Clèves's desire.⁵⁰ Such experiences with portraits are found in the epistolary works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse* and the British novel it inspired, Henry Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné* (1771). Krüdener is clearly indebted to these antecedents in her use of the portrait in her novel *Valérie*.

However, Krüdener builds upon these traditions of the portrait in the novel in significant ways. The description of a portrait of Valerie that she has forwarded to her besotted lover Gustave, who remained in Venice while she and her husband toured Italy, presides as one of the most innovative passages on art in this novel. In this letter, Valerie refers to a painting done by "the famous Angelica," or Angelica Kauffmann, with whom the Krüdeners had become acquainted while in Rome. Of note is that Kauffman had painted a portrait of Julie de Krüdener with her young son Paul in 1786; this canvas bears only general similarities to the fictional painting as it is described.⁵¹ Before

⁵⁰ For a consideration of the role of this portrait in the narrative development of *La princesse de Clèves*, see Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988): 25-46; and Joan DeJean, "Looking Like a Woman: The Female Gaze in Sappho and Lafayette," *L'esprit createur* 28.4 (Winter 1988): 34-45.

⁵¹ This painting, given to the state in 1860, currently hangs in the eighteenth-century section of the Musée de Louvre. For a discussion of this painting, see Philippe de Chennevières, "Le portrait de Mme de Krüdener et de sa fille par Angelica Kauffmann," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 3.17 (1897) 297-300. The author erroneously identifies the child as Krüdener's daughter Juliette. A brief comparison between the Kauffmann painting and the fictitious portrait shows that both works share compositional elements of a rock and tree (in fact, both clearly include a weeping willow)—and both feature a mother and son. Moreover, there is something melancholic about both the description of this fictional painting and the Kauffmann portrait that may allude to this attraction between

detailing this artwork, Valerie rhapsodizes over a genre painting that influences the ultimate design of her portrait. She writes Gustave of her experience in one of the art galleries she visited:

I saw . . . a painting by a little-known master; there was a cradle, and a young woman seated next to it. Suddenly I began to cry, and I thought of my son and the gentle blisses of which I had dreamed so often: I recalled this cradle where I only laid him twice; this cradle that was to me so deliciously painted, illuminated by the first ray of sun and by my sleeping child: myself, sitting in the sun, murmuring to him gentle words to put him to sleep; and I said to myself: ‘Oh my young Adolphe ! . . .’⁵²

Importantly, such representations of maternity, which had been popular in pre-Revolutionary France, experienced a revival around 1800.⁵³ Images such as Marguerite Gérard’s *Maternity* (c. 1805) and Louis-Léopold Boilly’s *Motherly Love* (c. 1803), exemplify

Valerie/Juliane and Gustav/Alexander. In his discussion of Kauffmann’s painting, Francis Ley suggests that it actually copies the story of Venus disarming Cupid. He wonders: “Est-ce une allusion voilée aux préoccupations du moment, ou simplement l’effet d’une inspiration de l’artiste? Nul ne sait, mais la physionomie de Julie, quoique ‘piquante’, est étrangement mélancolique!” Ley, *Madame de Krüdener et son temps* 36. To my mind, it seems plausible that Krüdener had this portrait in mind as she wrote *Valérie*, but then altered the description for narrative purposes.

⁵² “J’ai vu, non loin d’elle, un tableau d’un maître peu connu; c’était un berceau, et une jeune femme assise à côté. Soudain je me suis prise à pleurer, et j’ai pensé à mon fils et aux douces félicités que j’avois rêvées si souvent: je me suis retracé ce berceau où je ne l’ai couché que deux fois; ce berceau que je m’étois si délicieusement peint, tantôt éclairé par le premier rayon du soleil, et mon enfant dormant: tantôt moi-même, m’arrachant au sommeil, murmurant sur lui de douces paroles pour l’endormir; et je me disois: ‘O mon jeune Adolphe! . . .’” Krüdener, *Valérie* 105.

⁵³ A germinal discussion on maternal images of this period can be found in Carol Duncan, “Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art,” *Art Bulletin* 55 (1973): 470-83.

this development. Krüdener's valorization of motherhood in art can be seen as an instance of nostalgia for the genre paintings of the waning years of the ancien régime (we should keep in mind that *Valérie* was set in this period). Alternatively, this move can be viewed as a promotion of this subject's revitalization in post-Revolutionary art.

Regardless of its motivation, Krüdener's championing of maternal images should be approached as a means of (re)instituting the feminine presence in art.⁵⁴

This maternal image inspired Valerie to propose a portrait that met her vision of how she wanted to be represented—a significant gesture of a woman's self-fashioning through artistic means. Of this fictional painting, Krüdener's heroine writes: "My husband has long desired to have my portrait done by the famous Angelica, and I thought that in such a painting, I could bring together our two projects. My thought has been realized marvelously; judge it for yourself."⁵⁵ Here, the tone is almost exultant as she describes how consonant various aspects of this painting were with her own

⁵⁴ I am of the opinion that contemporary scholarship has exaggerated the homosocial aspect of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic art world, with texts such as Thomas Crow's *Emulation: The Making of Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995); and Abigail Solomon-Godeau's *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997). For alternative histories that recognize women's participation, see Gen Doy's *Women and Visual Culture in 19th-Century France, 1800-1852* (New York: Leicester UP, 1998); and Margaret Oppenheimer, "Women Artists in Paris, 1791-1814," diss., New York U, 1996.

⁵⁵ "Mon mari désiroit depuis longtemps avoir mon portrait, fait par la fameuse Angelica, et j'ai pensé qu'un tableau tel que j'en avois l'idée pouvait réunir nos deux projets. Ma pensée a merveilleusement réussi; jugez-en vous-même." Krüdener, *Valérie* 106.

experiences and emotions. With this description, we see how the heroine warms to the role of patron and suggests its empowering potential for women.⁵⁶ Valerie continues:

Is it not Valerie, like she was seated so often by the Lido, the ocean breaking in the distance, as on the coast where I played as a child; the vaporous sky, the rosy evening clouds, in which I believed to see the young soul of my son; this stone which covers its charming outlines; now, alas! decomposed; and the willow tree so sad, bowing as if it sensed my grief; and the grapes of the laburnum, which carress the sloping stone of death; and in the background, this old abbey where saintly young girls who will never be mothers live, of which the voice appears to us as the music of angels? Is this not a faithful painting of a scene of touching grief?⁵⁷

The rhapsodic quality to Krüdener's prose intimates the sense of joy (even *jouissance*) that this painting, whose contours were largely determined by Valerie, inspired. The author

⁵⁶ The art patronage of women in post-Revolutionary France has only recently come under the consideration it deserves. The Bonaparte women were especially active in this arena, as demonstrated in Carol Solomon Kiefer, *The Empress Joséphine: Art and Royal Identity*, exhibition catalogue (Amherst: Mead Art Museum, 2005); and Carol Ockman, "A Woman's Pleasure: The *Grande Odalisque*," *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies: Retracing the Serpentine Line* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) 32-65.

⁵⁷ "N'est-ce pas Valérie, telle qu'elle étoit assise si souvent à Lido, la mer se brisant dans le lointain, comme sur la côte où je jouais dans mon enfance; le ciel vapoureux; les nuages roses du soir, dans lesquels je croyais voir la jeune âme de mon fils; cette pierre qui couvre ses formes charmantes, maintenant, hélas! décomposées; et ce saule si triste, inclinant sa tête, comme s'il sentait ma douleur; et ces grappes de cytise, qui caressent en tombant la pierre de la mort; et dans le fond, cette antique abbaye où vivent de saintes filles, qui ne seront jamais mères, dont la voix nous paroissoit la musique des anges?— N'est-ce pas le tableau fidèle de cette scène d'attendrissante douleur?" Krüdener, *Valérie* 106.

suggests that it is this kind of art that gives women pleasure in looking. Here, the subject that embodies desire is not an image of the nude, as is typically associated with male scopophilia, but is rather a representation of maternal mourning. Such a shift in the representational field is suggestive of how such objects could attempt to mitigate a bereaved mother's feelings of loss or longing.⁵⁸ Consequently, desire seems to be functioning in entirely new ways for the female spectator/patron. Implicit in this description is that its primary viewer was Valerie herself, and thus, that a woman's perspective as spectator must be conceded. Indeed, this articulation of what a woman wants constitutes a fascinating rupture in a novel that seems to focus more on male desire, with the plot turning upon Gustave's infatuation, than on female desire.

The portrait that Valerie orchestrated, this "scene of touching grief" participates in the fashion for melancholic, *mal du siècle* art in the post-Revolutionary period.⁵⁹ Valerie envisions a painting in which she sits next to her son's grave, surrounded by markers of nature's sympathy for a grieving mother. This description seems reminiscent of Constance-Marie Charpentier's *Melancholy* (1801) and Constance Mayer's *The Unhappy Mother* (1810), two paintings that feature despondent women mourning in a landscape setting. However, Valerie's (fictional) portrait is noteworthy in that it effectively combined landscape, genre, and portraiture for familial representations. The advocacy

⁵⁸ I can only raise the possibility of the intersections between subject of maternity, mourning, and female scopophilia here. Sigmund Freud's work on *Melancholy and Mourning* (1917) and Julia Kristeva's theories on longing for choric plenitude are touchstones for such analysis.

⁵⁹ Marie-Constance Charpentier's *Melancholy* (1800) illustrates this fashion. For an excellent treatment of the cult of sensibility, see the exhibition catalogue *L'invention du sentiment aux sources de romantisme* (Paris: Musée de la musique, 2002).

of this approach places her in the artistic vanguard of early nineteenth-century France. A taste for such works was growing amongst contemporary art patrons; Boilly's 1803 pendant portraits of Monsieur Oberkampf and his wife, who are shown with their children and out-of-doors, are suggestive for this development. Hence, while we should see the portrait motif in Krüdener's *Valérie* as connected to this novelistic heritage of using artworks to further narrative aims, we might also consider its inclusion—and particularly the very nature of its form and content—as an indicator of Krüdener's desire to be seen as *au courant* vis-à-vis the contemporary French art scene.⁶⁰

To be sure, Valerie's description of her portrait exemplifies some of the “double-voiced discourse” endemic to women writers of this period, and thus serves as a point of reference in the discussion of woman-authored art criticism.⁶¹ In this letter on the portrait, Valerie begins with a somewhat coy reference to her portrait (“I know that my portrait will move you. . .”),⁶² shifts into an apology for her lack of knowledge about the arts, and then transitions into a carefully-crafted discussion of key artistic issues in

⁶⁰ For additional information on the rise of portraiture in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, see Philippe Bordes, *Portraiture in Paris Around 1800: Cooper Penrose by Jacques-Louis David*, exhibition catalogue (San Diego: Timken Museum of Art, 2003); Tony Halliday, *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (New York: Manchester UP, 1999); and Susan Siegfried, “Portraiture and Identity,” *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly: Modern Life in Napoleonic France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) 95-132.

⁶¹ The term “double-voiced discourse” is borrowed from Susan Lanser and Evelyn Beck, “[Why] Are There No Great Women Critics? And What Differences Does It Make?,” *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*, eds. Julia A. Sherman and Evelyn Torton Beck (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1979) 86.

⁶² “ [J]e savois que mon portrait vous en feroit. . . .” Krüdener, *Valérie* 104.

Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. This epistle both illuminates the unconventional ways in which women critics approached their work, as well as gives voice to the ambivalent tenor that characterizes much of their fledgling forays into aesthetics. The adoption of narrative strategies that minimize a woman's excursions into this field intimates the tenuous status of the woman art critic during this period. First, the author safely sheaths her art criticism in a letter-within-a-letter, a literary strategy frequently used as a distancing device. Secondly, Krüdener's Valerie proffers flirtatious prefatory remarks on the portrait, a move that we might construe as an attempt to trivialize the material that follows or to divert her male reader from considering the implications of her critique. Thirdly, Krüdener's heroine offers a mea culpa from the outset of the letter regarding her ignorance on artistic matters, thus excusing herself from any inadequacies in her discussion that her readers might perceive. Indeed, she apologizes: "Only I have not, like you or my husband, studied history and the arts, for you speak more eloquently of all that I see! But I am only an ignorant [one]; and if I have felt, it is not because I know how to think, it is because there are some things so beautiful that they transport you, and they seem to awaken in you a faculty that tells you that it is beauty that is there."⁶³ While Valerie foregrounds her lack of formal education, we should remark that she implicitly declares a woman's capacity for aesthetic appreciation by referring to that sleeping "faculty" within her. The ability to recognize beauty involves feeling, or the

⁶³ "Que n'ai-je, comme vous ou comme mon mari, étudié l'histoire et les art, pour vous parler plus dignement de tout ce que je vois! Mais je ne suis qu'une ignorante; et si j'ai senti, ce n'est pas parce que je sais penser, c'est parce qu'il y a des choses si belles qu'elles vous transportent, et qu'elles semblent éveiller en vous une faculté qui vous avertit que c'est là la beauté." Krüdener, *Valérie* 105.

fashionable *sensibilité*, and Krüdener capitalizes on this cultural privileging of emotion and binds it closely to the female.

This seeming acceptance of women's inadequacies when writing about a subject as lofty as aesthetics is a strategy of accommodation, as delimited by Mary Poovey, who argues that women writers frequently and effectively deployed this ruse as a means of enabling self-expression within the restrictive ideological order that governed both their lives and their art.⁶⁴ Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, whose art-critical activity will be discussed at length later in this chapter, resorts to similar approaches in her art writings when she makes self-deprecatory comments and gestures at feminine modesty. For example, in her preface to *Les monumens religieux* (1805), a kind of dictionary of European religious art and architecture, a treatise on the supremacy of Catholic art, and a travelogue, Genlis immediately declares her book "imperfect."⁶⁵ Moreover, she is quick to point out that only occasionally do the opinions expressed in this text deviate from those of the greatest artists, stating, "I have often dared to give my personal opinion, but

⁶⁴ Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology of Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 242.

⁶⁵ Stéphanie de Genlis, *Les monumens religieux, ou description critique et détaillée des monumens religieux, tableaux et statues des grands maîtres; gravures sur pierres et sur métaux, ouvrages d'orfèvrerie, églises de toutes les sectes de la religion chrétienne, tombeaux, monastères, cimetières, grottes hermitages remarquables, etc., qui se trouvent maintenant en Europe et dans les autres parties du monde. Ouvrage fait pour les jeunes artistes, pour les voyageurs, et pour servir à l'éducation de la jeunesse* (Paris, 1805). Significantly, Genlis's *Les monumens religieux* works to the same end as Krüdener's *Valérie*: it lauds art that focuses on the maternal, and heralds religious art over the pervasive Neoclassicism of early nineteenth-century France. This text, which stands outside the scope of this dissertation, has yet to receive any scholarly attention, to my knowledge. An examination of this book, and research into other woman-authored travel guides of this period that may be extant, would further enhance our understanding of how women functioned as art critics during this period.

only on those things which everyone with good sense and some superficial knowledge of the fine arts can judge.”⁶⁶ The similarities between Krüdener and Genlis’s apologies for their excursions into the realm of art and aesthetics, in terms of both form and content, suggests that women writers experienced anxiety over the endeavors—or at least felt compelled to feign such sentiments.

Significantly, this description of Valerie’s portrait is couched in the only letter in the novel penned by the female protagonist. To my mind, this signals the centrality of art to Krüdener’s enterprise, and perhaps even indicates a level of authenticity to this discourse that is not matched elsewhere in the novel. This letter contains the most sustained attention to art in the entire text. In this “art letter,” Valerie not only discusses the portrait that she has commissioned and designed, but also touches upon the treasures she and her husband have encountered in their travels to Florence and Rome:

Here lives the Venus and the young Apollo as well; one can truly say that they live; they are so pure, so young, so pleasing! Knowing nothing to say *myself*, it is necessary that I tell you what my husband says: that the Venus is beautiful, and that one senses that there was a woman like this one [and] that the other could only be jealous of her. She has such an air of innocence, of being astonished by herself! [For] her modesty, a veil;

⁶⁶ “[J]’ai souvent osé donner mon avis particulier, mais seulement sur des choses dont tout le monde peut juger avec du bon sens et quelques connaissances superficielles des beaux arts.” Genlis, *Les monumens religieux* préface.

some celestial thing to cover her figure; and she intimidates one in appearing to ask for this indulgence.⁶⁷

Valerie appears to delight in the sensuousness of the Medici Venus, leading one to wonder if her discussion of this modest goddess's enchanting forms is not only a means of validating Krüdener's position as a viable art critic (this Hellenistic work figures prominently in travelogues and aesthetic writings of the period), but also a way of titillating the lovesick Gustave. Here, art performs the narrative function of heightening the erotic tension between these two characters. Also, Valerie's comments on this antique sculpture seem to pander to her readership's conventional approaches to representations of women as objects of the (male) gaze. The connection between the inanimate stone and the breathing woman—and thus the aestheticization of woman—is made sure by the observation offered ostensibly by Valerie's husband, the Count of B. . . , that "one senses that there was a woman like this one [and] that the other could only be jealous of her." Moreover, her ruminations that Venus has "such an air of innocence, of being astonished by herself" is consonant with Caroline Wuiet's discussion of François Gérard's *Psyche and Cupid* (1798), which characterizes the expression of that

⁶⁷ "C'est ici aussi que vivent la Vénus et le jeune Apollon; on peut réellement dire qu'ils vivent; ils sont si purs, si jeunes, si aimables! Ne sachant rien dire moi-même, il faut que je vous rende ce que disoit mon mari: que la Vénus est belle; et l'on sent pourtant que s'il y avoit une femme comme celle-là, les autres n'en pourroient être jalouses. Elle a si bien l'air de s'ignorer, d'être étonnée d'elle-même! Sa pudeur la voile; quelque chose de céleste couvre ses formes; et elle intimide en paroissant demander de l'indulgence." Krüdener, *Valérie* 105.

young maiden, yet another example of *la femme pudique*, as “that of surprised innocence.”⁶⁸

By attributing these insights on the Medici Venus to her husband, Valerie adopts a common strategy employed by women to protect them from criticism. One should recall that from the outset of this novel, Krüdener essentially denies responsibility for the ideas presented in this text by writing in the novel's preface that she is merely publishing letters given to her while traveling in Denmark. Additionally, in this very passage on the Medici Venus, she prefaces her remarks by stating that “[knowing] nothing *myself*, it is necessary that I tell you what my husband says” (the emphasis is Krüdener's).⁶⁹ Like Angélique Vandeul, née Diderot, who deferred to the assessments of male artist-friends or journalists when discussing provocative works, here the character Valerie refuses to engage in acts of criticism that might be construed as improper for a genteel woman.⁷⁰ She also plays the simple, uneducated girl, which can be construed as a ruse to attract the chauvinistic Gustave. This approach may reveal either Krüdener's insecurities at penning art criticism or her concern over the protagonist Valerie's abilities to perform persuasively in the capacity of critic. In the end, this deferral to male authority—a practice that was exceedingly common in the early years of women's involvement in art

⁶⁸ “[L]’innocence étonnée.” Caroline Wuiet, “Première promenade au Sallon de peinture,” *Le Papillon, journal des arts et des plaisirs* 1 (7 thermidor, an 6/25 juillet 1798): 5.

⁶⁹ It is worth noting that Juliane's husband, Baron Alexis de Krüdener, kept a travelogue while in Italy, and that she may have accessed this work (only recently published) while writing her novel. See Baron Alexis de Krüdener, *Voyage en Italie en 1786: Notes sur l'Italie, la Savoie, Lyon et la Suisse*, trans., ed. Francis Ley (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1983).

⁷⁰ The reader is referred to page 51, note 63, of this dissertation for a discussion of how Angélique Vandeul uses a similar ploy.

criticism (as established in chapter one of this dissertation) results in the minimizing of women's contributions to this field. The desire to assert one's position on aesthetic issues, along with the perceived need to defer to social conventions, traditional authority, and the like is constantly held in tension in Krüdener's *Valérie* and in other women's writings. The ambivalent nature of this discourse says much about the difficulties attending art-critical enterprises in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

Despite its temerity, this letter on art does allow the female authorial voice to surface, and it should not be dismissed as amateurish and inconsequential vis-à-vis contemporary art critical practices. In his analysis of Valerie's discussions of art, Michel Mercier suggests that this character's approach to art indicates that she is outside the literary tradition of the travelogue, for Valerie's references to art objects and picturesque sites were always motivated by romantic connections, and thus, according to Mercier, highly suspect. Furthermore, this scholar contends, Krüdener's choice to have her protagonist discuss a genre painting by "a little-known master" shows that Krüdener was not aligning herself with the more earnest cataloguers of Italian art and culture (like the Count of B. . . , whose letter 35 illustrates this mode).⁷¹ I find this interpretation highly problematic in that it discounts aesthetic discourse that is interwoven with other narrative threads—an approach taken by many women writers of this time when broaching a realm traditionally monopolized by men. It also does not allow for the possibility that Krüdener is promoting new subjects and directions for French art, rather than reaffirming the status quo. In this novel, Valerie is acknowledging the reckonable

⁷¹ Mercier, Notes et commentaires, *Valérie* 207.

shift at work in the field of painting, in which genre paintings and portraiture, with their focus on *sensibilité* and the private sphere, were beginning to garner critical attention and greater market value.⁷² In sum, the significance of Valerie's performance as a critic should not be lost. Indeed, it is a travesty to dismiss the cultural work enacted by Valerie's art criticism in such a manner. While it is true that Krüdener's protagonist converses on art in an unconfident manner at times, we must recognize that narrative acts such as self-effacement and understatement map sexual difference within textual practices.⁷³ By admitting to these divergences from the patriarchal norms in art criticism in women's writing, we are better enabled to nuance discussions of women's positions in this ostensibly androcentric culture.

While one might characterize the deference to male authority as a sign of weakness, I view Krüdener's decision to have her male protagonists voice the more subversive views on art as an efficacious strategy. In one of the most substantial discussions on art in *Valérie*, Krüdener has the Count of B. . . write a long letter on Florentine art to Gustave, in which he delineates aesthetic views that are decidedly contentious. First, the Count not only articulates the connection between ancient Roman civilization and patriarchy, but he also undermines this culture as a model for contemporary society. The Count proposes that classical antiquity and the values it

⁷² Many of the publications on the major male artists of the period highlight how the demands of the bourgeois market functioned as a critical aspect of their post-Revolutionary production. See, for instance, Sylvain Bellenger, *Girodet: 1767-1824*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); and Philippe Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David: Empire to Exile*, exhibition catalogue (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005).

⁷³ For a discussion on the connections between narrative, desire and social formations, see Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

espoused are dead, writing: “Time has devoured those generations who amaze us: the noble thoughts, the male virtues of ancient Rome and its barbaric grandeur, all have disappeared.”⁷⁴ This remark is significant in that it articulates the belief that antiquity’s majesty is forever lost; such a declaration opposes the mainstream rhetoric that espoused remodeling France in terms of the classical world.⁷⁵ Furthermore, by foregrounding the gendered nature of this antique paradigm, Krüdener aligns herself with other women art critics of this period, such as Marie-Madeleine Jodin and Germaine de Staël, who also questioned the viability of this model.⁷⁶

Secondly, the Count offers outspoken criticism for Napoleon’s cultural program (one could even say pogrom) that resulted in the removal of art objects from Italy. When Krüdener launches into a lengthy diatribe concerning the removal of art objects from their original site, she gives a less than oblique critique of Napoleon's practices. In his letter to Gustave, the Count of B. . . relentlessly harps upon this issue:

But you, masterpieces that my enchanted senses often contemplate,
residing among men who do not admire you enough, you can leave the

⁷⁴ “Le temps a dévoré ces générations qui nous étonnèrent: les fortes pensées, les mâles vertus de l'antique Rome, et sa barbare grandeur, tout a disparu. . .” Krüdener, *Valérie* 115.

⁷⁵ The literature on the connections between Revolutionary and Napoleonic France and Neoclassicism is vast. For an introduction to how these connections were made in the cultural sphere, see Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); and Crow, *Emulation*.

⁷⁶ Both Jodin and Staël commented on the cruel and barbaric nature of ancient Rome, and questioned the wisdom of using this society as a model. See chapters 1 and 3 of this dissertation for specific critiques of France’s espousal of Neoclassicism.

sky as some captives taken far from their native country; a new Alexander can astonish the universe and enrich his triumph with your superb remains; happy then is he who has seen these works here, where you have been inspired by religion, and where religion could surround you with her majesty! Happy is he who has seen you in these temples, where one could prostrate oneself before you in humble and errant devotion, and in proud and superb power!⁷⁷

Here, Krüdener criticizes the French public by suggesting that they do not appreciate the artworks “taken far from their native country” and placed in the Musée Napoléon for their perusal.⁷⁸ By means of the Count, the author also rebukes the First Consul, or the “new Alexander,” for taking these masterpieces out of the original context.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “Mais vous, chefs-d'œuvres que mes sens enchantés contemplant souvent, où vivent encore des hommes que nous n'admirons pas assez, vous pouvez quitter ce ciel, comme des captifs emmenés loin de leur pays natal; un nouvel Alexandre peut étonner l'univers, et enrichir son triomphe de vos superbes dépouilles: heureux alors celui qui vous aura vus ici, ici, où vous fûtes inspirés par la religion, et où la religion vous entoura de ses pompes! Heureux qui vous aura vus dans ces temples où se prosterna devant vous la dévotion humble et errant, et la puissance orgueilleuse et superbe!” Krüdener, *Valérie* 117.

⁷⁸ For discussions of the Musée Napoléon, see Ferdinand Boyer, *Le monde des beaux-arts en Italie et la France de la Révolution et de l'Empire* (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1970); Cecil Gould, *Trophy of Conquest: The Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965); and Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994).

⁷⁹ While it appears that this author viewed Napoleon as a hero of sorts, she seemed to believe that his majesty held a malevolent element. In a journal entry penned at the beginning of May 1803, Krüdener commented on the First Consul's official abode: “The palace of the Tuileries is beautiful. One could find it too grand, but glory needs its place, and Rome was not vast enough for Caesar!” Qtd. in Ley, *Madame de Krüdener et son temps* 235-36.

Importantly, this idealized context is characterized as distinctly religious. Such an observation implies that the new habitat of this art (Napoleonic France) lacked the spiritual ambience necessary to comprehend its meaning and majesty. In light of the signing of the Concordat and other official gestures at restoring religion in France, this commentary offers a sharp critique of the current culture, which seemed to spurn religious art. Religion, as we shall see, occupied a central role in the aesthetics of Krüdener, and thus, the secularism of France was one of its most notable flaws from the author's perspective. The diatribe against Napoleonic practices continues through the voice of the Count, who rails against the injustice of the removal of art treasures from Italy, and queries these works:

Will you hide your effronteries under the thick murals and in the milieu of a foreign land? You, Nymphs, dispersed in these woods, will you survive next to chained brooks? And you also, Graces, who have never been clothed [and] who cannot ever be, what will you do in rigorous climates?⁸⁰

The artworks repeatedly mentioned in *Valérie* are the very objects taken by Napoleon to France: the Medici Venus, the Vatican Apollo, Raphael's *Transfiguration* and *Saint Cecilia* occupy a noteworthy place in the novel. And while the works are discussed as if located in Italy, and the novel itself is set in the pre-Revolutionary era, it should be noted that

⁸⁰ “Irez-vous cacher vos fronts sous d'épaisses murailles et au milieu d'une terre étrangère? Vous, Nymphes, dispersées dans ces bocages, vivrez-vous auprès des ruisseaux enchaînés? Et vous aussi, Grâces, qui n'êtes point vêtues, qui ne pouvez point l'être, que feriez-vous dans des climats rigoureux?” Krüdener, *Valérie* 117.

several of these paintings and sculptures had arrived in Paris in early 1803, just months before *Valérie* was published. This event was much discussed in the periodical press, and generated several images of the transportation of these objects.⁸¹ As one of the most popular novels published that year, Krüdener's text, with its repeated notices of these activities, was a constitutive part of that discourse. Hence, *Valérie* stands as a text that should be plumbed for its insights into such contemporary artistic issues.

By criticizing Napoleon's view of art as the rightful spoils of war, Krüdener participated in the important conversation on cultural patrimony being held throughout early nineteenth-century Europe. Other writers and artists were vocalizing their disapproval of Napoleon's cultural practices. In a series of letters published by the esteemed art critic and philosopher Quatremère de Quincy, he expressed his opposition to the First Consul's transportation of art works to France.⁸² Artist Jacques-Louis David also weighed in on this matter; in a conversation with Etienne Delécleuze, the eminent artist reportedly said of this phenomenon:

Bear in mind, dear Etienne. . . that the arts are not naturally loved in France; the taste for them is artificial. You can be sure that, in spite of all the enthusiasm which we see these days, the masterworks from Italy will soon be regarded only as curiosities. The site of a work of art, the

⁸¹ Although the Count's criticism of the removal of art from its original environment was not overtly aimed at Napoleon, given that he is "speaking" before the Napoleonic pillaging of art, I maintain that Krüdener voiced her objections to the French leader's actions through the Count's letter. On the plundering of European art treasures, see Ferdinand Boyer, "Quelques considerations sur les conquêtes artistiques de Napoléon," *Rivista italiana di studi napoleonici* 21/VII.3 (ottobre 1968): 190-204.

⁸² Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres sur le projet d'enlever les monuments de l'Italie* (Paris, 1796).

distance one must travel to see it contribute singularly to our notion of its worth. This is particularly true of the paintings which one hung in churches. They will lose much of their beauty and effect when they are no longer seen in the places for which they were made. The sight of these masterpieces will perhaps produce scholars, men like Winckelmann, but artists—no!⁸³

While Krüdener's opposition to this cultural pogrom echoed the oppositions of fellow members of the French intelligentsia, what is particularly interesting about this author's critique is that she attacked these activities on unusual grounds. In this novel, the author suggests that by ripping these artworks out of the original context and subsequently exhibiting secular and sacred works within the same space, as was done in the Musée Napoléon, public (and more particularly, female) morality was compromised. The Count's letter to Gustave warns of the deleterious effects of moving religious imagery

⁸³ “Sachez bien, mon cher Etienne, lui dit-il, que l'on n'aime pas naturellement les arts en France; c'est un goût factice. Soyez certain, malgré le vif enthousiasme que l'on témoigne ces jours-ci, que les chefs-d'œuvre apportés d'Italie ne seront bientôt considérés que comme des richesses curieuses. La place qu'occupe un ouvrage, la distance que l'on parcourt pour l'aller admirer, contribuent singulièrement à faire valoir leur mérite, et les tableaux en particulier, qui étaient l'ornement des églises, perdront une grande partie de leur charme et de leur effet quand ils ne seront plus à la place pour laquelle ils ont été faits. La vue de ces chefs-d'œuvre dormera peut-être des savants, des Winkelmann, mais des artistes—non!” Etienne Delécluze, *Louis David, son école et son temps*, préface et notes Jean-Pierre Mouilleseaux (1855; Paris: Macula, 1983) 209. The translation follows that given in Lorenz Eitner, *Neoclassicism and Romanticism 1750-1850, Sources and Documents*, vol. 2 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 9. David was not the only artist who protested; in 1810, the sculptor Antonio Canova purportedly said to the Emperor, in relation to the continued transportation of art out of Italy, “Have mercy, Sir; leave these things in Italy. . . .” [“De grâce, Sire, laissez ces choses en Italie. . . .”]. Qtd. in Ferdinand Boyer, “Napoléon et les collection d'antiques en Italie,” *L'information historique* 21.1 (janvier-février 1959): 25.

into the secular sphere, where young, innocent devotees seeking solace in such representations would be forced to see these juxtaposed with pagan and erotic art. The Count wonders:

In removing from here the *Transfiguration*, *Saint Cecilia*, *The Last Supper* of Dominichino —where will these be placed? No matter what magnificent palace, or structure for which they are destined, their effect will be destroyed. This is the collection of a convent; when full of terror and fear, it is necessary to see a Saint Bruno, and not side by side a crown of roses. And these Virgins so pure who possess divine attributes and souls that know only the heavens, will they see these without sadness next to [representations of] profane and immodest love?⁸⁴

Here, Krüdener expresses conservatism with respect to women viewers of art. Her sentiments echo those of the critic Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who in 1797 expressed his concern over women’s exposure to “indecent” art shown in the public galleries and gardens of France.⁸⁵ Krüdener thus adds her voice to the conversation about women’s

⁸⁴ “En ôtant d’ici la *Transfiguration*, la *Sainte-Cécile*, la *Sainte-Cène*, du *Dominicain*, où les placera-t-on? Quel que soit le palais magnifique, ou l’édifice qui leur est destiné, leur effet sera détruit. C’est au fond d’une *Chartreuse*; c’est, rempli de terreur et d’effroi, qu’il faut voir un *Saint-Bruno*, et non auprès d’un front couronné de roses. Et ces *Vierges* si pures, qui ont apporté des traits divins et des âmes qui ne connoissent que le ciel, les verra-t-on sans tristesse à côte de profanes et d’impudiques amours?” Krüdener, *Valérie* 117.

⁸⁵ “One does not have the right to represent to the eyes of a mother of a family that which one would not dare make audible to her ears; her young daughter walking at her sides should not raise her eyes below the lily, symbol of her innocence, to contemplate nude the rounded buttocks of a Bacchus in the spring of his life; and whose amorous visage indicates that he feels the movement of voluptuousness spring up.” Mercier, as

full participation in the public sphere and expresses this concern over the female spectator's access to provocative images. In a rather clever fashion, this author suggests that by taking the art out of its context and thrusting these devotional works into the realm of the worldly Napoleon is promoting a kind of impropriety that counters the gender ideology of separate spheres he embraced. We may also read an implicit critique in some of the methods of display that were being explored in France with the formation of new state museums. Such methods included the desacralization of religious artworks by foregrounding their formal technique and denying their spiritual content.⁸⁶

Perhaps Krüdener had the Count vocalize these objections as a means to diffusing the charged nature of such arguments. It may be that the author felt that such a critique would be better received by a voice that was both male and aristocratic. With the Count, the values of the ancien régime are embodied. This device could have two effects: either it would lend credence to this position in that it was advocated by an educated, genteel individual; or, conversely, the subversive aspect of this argument could be diffused by seeing the Count as an antiquated figure under the meritorious social structure established by Napoleon, and thus a more easily dismissed opponent. Certainly the aristocrat occupied an ambiguous place in post-Revolutionary France.⁸⁷ Both the art

qtd. in Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Nudity à la grecque in 1799," *Art Bulletin* 80.2 (June 1998): 328-29.

⁸⁶ An excellent treatment of the transformations in exhibition practices that occurred at this historical juncture can be found in McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*.

⁸⁷ Recent explorations of the Revolution's impact on identity include Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005); and Sara Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003).

as well as the literature of this period attest to the fascination with these former members of the Second Estate.⁸⁸ In the end, the Count propounds the most inflammatory aspects of Krüdener's aesthetic positions. It is a move that may be construed as both pragmatic as well as imaginative for this woman writer.

Lastly, the Count champions art motivated by religious fervor and aimed towards the creation of a more desirable social state. In one passage in this letter, the Count details the ways in which religious art can soothe the viewer, whereas the ruins of the ancients fail to sustain one's interest:

The traveler thus likes to dream of the world's ruins; but, tired of examining the debris of the conquerors . . . he searches, in the tranquil groves, or near a consoling monument elevated by religion, he searches for the remains of those men who, in the century of the Medici, gave to Italy a new splendor, who spoke to their brothers in a simple and celestial language. We believe they saw the arts as consecrated to the elevation of the soul, to the realization of the purest happiness. . . .⁸⁹

⁸⁸ For an overview of the place of the aristocrat in Revolutionary France, see Patrice Higonnet, *Class, Ideology, and the Rights of Noble* (New York: Oxford UP, 1981); and Martyn Lyons, "L'image de la société post-révolutionnaire dans la fiction populaire, 1800-1840," *Le triomphe du livre* 28. On the *émigré* in art of the period, see Stefan Germer, "In Search of a Beholder: On the Relation between Art, Audiences, and Social Spheres in Post-Thermidor France," *Art Bulletin* 74 (March 1992): 19-36; and James Henry Rubin, "Oedipus, Antigone and Exiles in Post-Revolutionary French Painting," *Art Quarterly* (Autumn 1973): 141-71.

⁸⁹ "Le voyageur alors aime à rêver sur les ruines du monde; mais, fatigué d'interroger la poussière des conquérans . . . il cherche, dans des bosquets tranquilles, ou près d'un monument consolateur élevé par la religion, il cherche les restes de ces hommes qui,

In this letter, the spiritual in art and superiority of the Renaissance era are asserted. According to Krüdener, the arts were “consecrated” to a higher purpose during the Quattrocento. This was a time when painting, sculpture, and architecture “dedicated themselves to a purified, austere, but consoling religion, which gave men virtues that ensured their happiness.”⁹⁰ Moreover, in this passage, holy women and the art they inspire are valorized. In one of Gustave’s darkest moments, he seeks solace in one of Francisco Solimena’s painted Madonnas. Of this experience, Gustave writes: “I sighed profoundly, I gazed upon the Madonna; it seemed to me that a celestial gaze, pure as the sky, at once sublime and tender, had descended upon my heart; it seemed to me that there was something of Valerie in this gaze.”⁹¹ We must recognize that this author’s appropriation of holy women in general, and the Madonna figure specifically, had resonance in her society that should not be dismissed as distinctly patriarchal. Rather,

dans le siècle des Médicis, donnèrent a l’Italie une nouvelle splendeur, qui parlèrent a leurs frères un langage simple et céleste. Nous croyons les voir consacrer les arts à élever l’âme, à la rapprocher d’un bonheur plus pur. . . .” Krüdener, *Valérie* 115.

⁹⁰ “[S]e vouèrent a une religion épurée, austère, mais consolante, et qui donna aux hommes les vertus qui font leur bonheur.” Krüdener, *Valérie* 115.

⁹¹ “Je soupiris profondément, je regardois la Madone; il me sembloit qu’un regard céleste, pur comme le ciel, sublime et tendre à la fois, descendoit dans mon cœur; il me sembloit qu’il y avoit dans ce regard quelque chose de Valérie.” Krüdener, *Valérie* 87. The only Solimena (1657-1757) paintings that I can connect to Venice are two scenes of Rebecca and Abraham at the Accademia. According to Marie-Louise Blumer, no Solimena paintings entered France during this time, and hence it does not appear that Krüdener is referring to a work that might have been part of Napoleon’s war booty. See her “Catalogue des peintures transportées d’Italie en France de 1796 à 1814,” *Bulletin de la société de l’histoire de l’art français* 12 (1936): 244-348.

this Marianism may intimate an innovative strategy for women to embed themselves into the cultural landscape of early nineteenth-century France.⁹²

Truly, the primacy of religion in *Valérie*, with its concomitant focus on Christian subjects in art, is one of the most significant aspects of Krüdener's aesthetics. This championing of religious art at a time when secular works dominated the landscape of the Salons and monopolized the interests of Napoleon and his entourage was truly a significant gesture. Remarkably, Genlis also promotes the cultivation of religious art in her travel guide, *Les monumens religieux*, where she declares that “[R]eligion, the benefactress of humankind, has not only had the most powerful and happiest influence on the arts—it has regenerated and perfected them.”⁹³ This viewpoint certainly counters the contemporary trends in patronage in early nineteenth-century France, where artists relied on the bourgeoisie and government for commissions.

Of significance is how the “Romantic” qualities of early Italian, German, and Netherlandish art, with their preponderance of Christian subjects, and subsequent denigration of contemporary Neoclassicism, followed cultural trends in Germany rather

⁹² For a discussion of nineteenth-century Marianism, see Barbara Corrado Pope, “Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century,” *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, eds. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston: Beacon, 1985) 173-200. Indeed, the confluence of Marianism and the ideology of republican motherhood had significant ramifications for women in the public sphere that have yet to be fully explored.

⁹³ “Il résulte de ces réflexions que la Religion bienfaitrice du genre humain, a non seulement eu sur les arts l’influence la plus puissante et la plus heureuse, mais qu’elle les a régénérés et perfectionnés.” Genlis, *Les monumens religieux* 13-14.

than France.⁹⁴ Texts such as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar* (1797) and Ludwig Tieck's *Fantasies on Art* (1799) mark this German fascination with a more pious age, and with the relationship of art to the divine.⁹⁵ Indeed, notions regarding religious art expressed in Krüdener's novel were similar to ones propagated by German Romantic philosophers such as Novalis (Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenburg) and Jean-Paul Richter, with whom she corresponded.⁹⁶ When Krüdener's protagonists speak of the paintings of Correggio, Botticelli, and Raphael, they are lauding the most beloved artists of these German Romantics.

While one would surmise that Napoleon's declaration of the Concordat in 1801 encouraged a renewed interest in Christian art and culture, his regime remained adamantly secular. Post-Revolutionary texts such as Germaine de Staël's *De la littérature* (1800) and René de Chateaubriand's *Le génie du Christianité* (1802) had worked to promote a revival of religious sentiment in France. This fervor did not extend into the official French art world, however, which remained firmly committed to fostering art dedicated

⁹⁴ The Schlegel brothers' writings were particularly engaged in this revaluation of religious art. August and Friedrich Schlegel edited *Athenaeum*, a collection of writings on art and literature, in 1798 [see their *Athenaeum eine Zeitschrift* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960).] In 1803, Friedrich Schlegel published numerous articles on art in the periodical *Europa* [see his *Europa eine Zeitschrift*, ed. Ernst Behler (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963).] Both are deemed highly influential publications on the articulation of German Romantic aesthetics. Several of these items have been recently republished in French. See Friedrich Schlegel, *Descriptions de tableaux*, ed. Bénédicte Savoy (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2001).

⁹⁵ In 1823, Tieck authored a riveting tale, *Die Gemälde* [*The Pictures*], in which art— and particularly the portrait—is the dominant narrative motif. Ludwig Tieck, *Die Gemälde*, trans. Connop Thirwall (London, 1825).

⁹⁶ Michel Mercier, introduction, *Valérie*, by Krüdener 9.

to the state. The strong antagonism toward religious art during the Revolution, as well as the concurrent embrace of secular history painting, had set the stage for art under Napoleon.⁹⁷ At this time, the works of David replaced Raphael as the prime inspiration for government-sponsored tapestries, and many of the Italian master's works—which were largely of sacred subject matter—were deemed unacceptable by the Académie (or Institut, as this institution would become during the Revolution).⁹⁸ Religious art was not promoted in official French art circles until the Restoration.⁹⁹ Krüdener's laudatory approach to religious art, which so closely mirrored the Romantics, went against the contemporary art culture. Given Napoleon's agenda of championing France in both the artistic as well as the political sphere, coupled with the strong anti-French sentiments held by the intelligentsia of Germany, Krüdener's embrace of German aesthetic positions may be seen as a political gesture.

Furthermore, in its articulation of nascent German Romantic aesthetics to the French reading public, *Valérie* seeks to establish women as contributing members to the cultural sphere. Several scholars have suggested that German Romanticism promoted women's participation in art and literature to a greater extent than found in the more

⁹⁷ For treatment of religious art in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, see Philip Conisbee, *Painting in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981); and Donald A. Rosenthal, *La grande manière: Historical and Religious Painting in France, 1700-1800*, exhibition catalogue (Rochester: Memorial Art Gallery, 1987).

⁹⁸ Martin Rosenberg, *Raphael and France: The Artist as Paradigm and Symbol* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1995) 147.

⁹⁹ A good survey on this subject is Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1992).

patriarchal cultures of France and England.¹⁰⁰ For instance, in Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* (1799), the female protagonist assumes the positions of artist, priestess, and redeemer.¹⁰¹ In addition, women were accorded a place as valued art critics in the aesthetic discussions of the German Romantics. In the summer of 1798, the Schlegels, Schelling, Novalis, and others gathered in Dresden and spent many hours in the galleries talking about painting and sculpture, and developing what we now recognize as Romantic art theory. Their conversations extol the exploration of the imagination, place primacy on feeling, and valorize religious subjects in art—all central components of this nascent German Romantic aesthetics and of Krüdener's *Valérie*.¹⁰² Remarkably, August Schlegel's wife, Caroline, and his sister, Charlotte Ernst, were active participants in these discussions.¹⁰³ In comparison to her German counterparts, Krüdener makes a similar, if

¹⁰⁰ See Ute Frevert, *Women in German History from Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (New York: St. Martin's P, 1989); and Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993) for discussions on the roles of women in German Romantic thought.

¹⁰¹ Friedrich von Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans., ed. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971). It is Lucinde who teaches her lover Julius how to create true art; indeed, he looks to her painted landscapes, which display a wholeness of vision and cohesion of pictorial elements, as exemplary models. In commenting on *Lucinde*, Maurice Cranston declares that "Schlegel's ideal woman was as emancipated and cultured as a man." See his *The Romantic Movement* (New York: Blackwell, 1994) 34.

¹⁰² Some excellent sources on German Romantic aesthetics include David Simpson, *The Origins of Modern Critical Thought: German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism from Lessing to Hegel* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1988); Richard Critchfield and Wulf Koepke, eds., *Eighteenth-Century German Authors and their Aesthetic Theories: Literature and the Other Arts* (South Carolina: Camden House, 1988); and Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994).

¹⁰³ Out of this conference came the dialogue "The Paintings," written jointly by August and Caroline Schlegel and published in the *Athenaeum* in 1799. In chapter three of this

less strident, argument for women's place within the field of art criticism. Her *Valérie* represents an advocacy for women as arbiters of taste and as actors in the public arenas of art and literature in France.

Given the multiple attacks *Valérie* launched at Napoleonic cultural practices, it is somewhat surprising that the novel was not censored.¹⁰⁴ We do know, however, that the appearance of this novel irritated the First Consul. One of his advisors, Barbier, relayed Napoleon's reaction to Krüdener's novel as follows: "It appears that the baroness de Staël has found her double: after Delphine, Valerie! They are one in the same: the same pathos, the same chatter. Women swoon easily to read these sentimental extravagances. . . . [let us] be delivered from this insupportable literature."¹⁰⁵ One is left to wonder if the underlying cause for his acrimony towards this novel was connected to its criticisms

dissertation, I will argue that this dialogue served as the prototype for the art conversations between Staël's Corinne and Oswald.

¹⁰⁴ The question of whether or not oppositional material, embedded within ostensibly benign publications on the arts, escaped the vigilance of Napoleon's censors is debatable. In her excellent survey on the press in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, Carla Hesse argues that nothing escaped Fouché and his Division of the Freedom of the Press, citing their acerbic critiques of Staël's novel *Corinne*, close examination of travel literature, and careful cross-referencing of the *Dictionnaire universel de la langue française*. She admits, however, that the enormity of this project posed difficulties for the administration, and its enforcement was "arbitrary and corrupt." Surviving archival records indicate that of the average 1600 works per year deposited at a government station created for the surveillance of publications, only about 60-100 were inspected. Her research thus suggests that the censors looked for subversive material in a variety of literary genres, but that their surveillance only extended to a small percentage of material published in the first decade of Napoleon's rule. See Hesse, *Publishing* 226-28.

¹⁰⁵ "Il paraît que la baronne de Staël a trouvé son sosie: après Delphine, Valérie! L'une vaut l'autre: même pathos, même bavardage. Les femmes se pâmeront d'aise à lire ces extravagances sentimentales. . . délivrés de cette insupportable littérature." Rept. in Lacroix 32.

of various cultural practices, including Napoleon's acquisition, transportation, and exhibition of these foreign artworks and the repudiation of Germanic Romantic aesthetics.

While both enormously popular and influential for later Romantic novels, Krüdener's *Valérie* did not inspire the author to other literary ambitions. By 1810, Krüdener had converted into a devout Christian, repudiating her worldly ways and gathering believers as she preached throughout the continent. It is surmised that she was instrumental in the creation of the Treaty of the Holy Alliance, an agreement signed by the rulers of Austria, Prussia, and Russia that bound them to conduct befitting Christian nation. She died in 1824, far removed from the glittering lifestyle she relished in her youth and from the literary culture that fostered and fêted her *Valérie*.

We must acknowledge that Krüdener's novel makes noteworthy, albeit tentative incursions into the male-dominated landscape of art criticism. In this novel, the author heralds new developments in genre and portrait paintings, and advocates a position of primacy for women as subjects and even patrons of these artworks. She also effectively interlaces critiques of Napoleonic cultural practices with intelligent exegeses on art. The ways in which Krüdener deploys art for character and narrative development intimate larger sociocultural trends in post-Revolutionary France (such as the aestheticization of women and the religious revivalism that accompanied the Concordat). Furthermore, the valorization of religious art within this text promotes nascent German Romantic aesthetics to a French audience. In terms of the approach to aesthetics in *Valérie*, the subtle and sometimes unsure ways in which Krüdener employs aesthetic discourse is highly suggestive for the difficulties a woman faced when treading down aesthetic paths.

As a popular novel that was positioned to instruct and to persuade on artistic matters, *Valérie* is a germinal text for later women writers—particularly Germaine de Staël, who will continue to use fiction as a forum for the shaping of the emerging female art critic. The Art Novels of Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, or, The Woman Artist Undone

Another woman writing in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, Stéphanie-Félicité, la comtesse de Genlis (1746-1830), showed a marked interest in art and aesthetics. Born and married into nobility, Genlis quickly became a favorite of the Chartres family, where she first served as a lady-in-waiting and then as *gouverneur* to the Orléans princes. Genlis became so esteemed in intellectual circles that several luminaries, including Jean le Rond d'Alembert, proposed this woman writer's induction into the Académie française as its first female member.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, Genlis associated with the most privileged members of pre-Revolutionary French society. In the 1770s, she began writing on education and henceforth extended her purview to almost every other branch of knowledge. Although she was a vocal supporter of governmental reform in the early Revolution, her royalist connections ensured her exile for nearly a decade, which she spent in England and Northern Europe. During his reign, Napoleon granted Genlis lodging in the Arsenal and an annuity in exchange for biweekly letters on a variety of subjects.¹⁰⁷ After 1815, this author was granted even greater

¹⁰⁶ See Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de la Madame la comtesse de Genlis sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution française depuis 1756 jusqu'à nos jours*, 2nd edition, vol. 3 (Paris, 1825) 102-04.

¹⁰⁷ Folger Collective on Early Women Critics, "Stéphanie-Félicité Ducrest, comtesse de Genlis (1746-1830)," *Women Critics, 1660-1820: An Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 207.

privileges by the restored Bourbon monarchy. One of the major projects of her final years was the production of her ten-volume *Mémoires*.¹⁰⁸

Although Genlis wrote on a variety of subjects, to be sure, her corpus of publications displays a marked interest in the arts. In 1784, she published *Veillées du château, ou cours de morale à l'usage des enfants*, which contains a fascinating exegesis on the subject of women as artists, along with an appendix tracing the lineage of women painters and sculptors in Western culture. This topic held some importance to Genlis, who was an amateur painter herself. In 1810, she published an anthology of fifty-two mythological arabesques based on her own watercolor drawings (she subsequently gave the originals to the queen of Naples).¹⁰⁹ She also illustrated her own *La botanique historique et littéraire* (1811), and during this period, she compiled several albums of her artwork and gave them as gifts or sold them to various European dignitaries.¹¹⁰ Her popular *Nouvelle méthode d'enseignement pour la première enfance* (1801) included a section on teaching children how to paint and draw. In the late 1790s, Genlis contributed her own interpretation of the Pygmalion myth in her *Pygmalion et Galatée ou la statue animé depuis*

¹⁰⁸ For an overview of her life and work, see Marie Naudin, “Stéphanie-Félicité, comtesse de Genlis,” *French Women Writers*, eds. Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1994) 178-87.

¹⁰⁹ Her interest in creating these arabesques may have been piqued by the book of hours of Queen Blanche, housed in the library at Saint-Victor, a book she describes as “very curious, with paintings in arabesques, of a bizarre and grotesque taste, representing some extraordinary figures, animals, monkeys, etc.” Genlis, *Les monumens religieux* 111.

¹¹⁰ See Broglie 361-62. Broglie indicates that several of these albums are now conserved in the archives of the comte de Bryas.

vingt-quatre heures.¹¹¹ At some point during the Empire, she composed *Essai sur les arts*, an unpublished manuscript ornamented with her own gouache miniatures.¹¹² In the meantime, she published *Les monumens religieux* (1805), a guide to devotional artworks in Europe that capitalized on the growing interest in religion in the post-Concordat era. Genlis also authored several novels that center around issues of art, including *Les tableaux de M. le comte de Forbin, ou La mort de Plin l'ancien, et Inès de Castro* (1817), two tales inspired by the works of illustrious history painter and director of the royal museums, the Comte de Forbin. Perhaps most salient to this dissertation are her novels *Les fleurs, ou les artistes* (1810), in which the hierarchy of the genres and the status of the artist are considered, and *Sainclair, ou la victime des sciences et des arts* (1808) and its pendant, *Hortense, ou la victime des romans et des voyages* (1808), which suggest the threat posed by the woman artist in early nineteenth-century France. These novels testify to the contested nature of women's involvement in the arts and signal that an important aspect to woman-authored criticism was the consideration of women artists in the public sphere.

Amazingly, there has been little written about these works, even by Genlis specialists, let alone by scholars of Napoleonic art and culture.¹¹³ These texts are

¹¹¹ See Joseph G. Reish, "Myth in the Age of Reason: Mme de Genlis and the Pygmalion Theme," *Papers in Romance* 2.3 (Spring 1980): 172-81.

¹¹² This manuscript is preserved in the Bibliothèque de Nancy. See Broglie 360, note 5.

¹¹³ Broglie's *Madame de Genlis* provides a scholarly overview of her life and work, although there are significant omissions. For example, he does not list *Hortense, ou la victime des romans et des voyages* under the bibliography of Genlis's works and states that Genlis abandoned fiction in 1810; however, Genlis's novella *Les fleurs, ou les artistes*, which is not mentioned at all in the literature on Genlis, was published as part of her *La botanique historique et littéraire* in that year—and there are several other fictional works published after that date. Other useful texts that survey this writer's *œuvre* include Alice M.

significant for the ways in which they speak to the framing and discussing of key aesthetic issues in popular literature. Not only do Genlis's various writings on art deserve recognition for the ways in which they communicated with the masses; but they also participate in the conversations about art held by both Krüdener and Staël in their widely read novels. Of particular interest are Genlis's contributions to the contemporary discourse surrounding the position of women who both produced and viewed art. This author's noticeable turn to writing about art in the early nineteenth century is worth considering, for Genlis was keenly attuned to demands of the reading public. She obviously found works concerning the visual arts marketable at this particular historical juncture, and produced accordingly. Most of Genlis's art-related writings were published during Napoleon's reign, thus substantiating my claim that this period was especially conducive to women's entering into the fray of art and art criticism.

In 1784, Stéphanie-Félicité, la comtesse de Genlis penned the final volume of her most popular novel, *Veillées du château, ou cours de morale à l'usage des enfants*, which included a tale focused largely on the figure of the woman artist. This topic is broached when Madame de Clémire takes her children to visit several art sites in Paris, including the biannual Salon. The very premise of this excursion stems from Genlis's didactic impulse, for her mother-critic character is at pains to instruct her children on matters of aesthetics, such as art history, criticism, spectatorship, and technique. At the beginning of this tale, we are informed that these children "had already acquired a love of the Arts, and the Saloon [sic] of the Louvre gave them great pleasure; so that they spoke only of

Laborde, *L'œuvre de Madame de Genlis* (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1966) and Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval, *Bibliographie des écrivains français: Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Memini, 1996).

Pictures and Paintings the rest of the day.”¹¹⁴ Later in this story, they visit the Luxembourg gallery. Clearly there was cultural valency to the activities of visiting the Salon and discussing art, and Genlis’s novel further embeds the importance of such enterprises into the public imagination that was fed by such literature.

Genlis immediately orients the discussion in this “art tale” towards women artists in general, and to the contemporary artist Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun specifically. The first paintings the children happen upon are those by this celebrated woman, and her works amaze and delight them. An excerpt of this conversation enables us to see how this woman writer address key issues concerning women in art and their place in the broader culture:

[Children]: It is very glorious for a woman to gain an honourable place among the greatest Masters.

[Mother]: Yes; but it is very dangerous.

[Children]: Men cannot be jealous of a woman.

[Mother]: They sometimes disdain not to do us that honour; and when they have once began [sic], their animosity knows no bounds. They imagine that they alone have a right to struggle for fame; they are willing enough to flatter us, and even to be led by us, but they disdain to wonder at us.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ See Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Veillées du château, ou cours de morale à l’usage des enfants*, published as *Tales of the Castle: Stories of Instruction and Delight*, trans. Thomas Holcroft, vol. 4 (London: 1785): 61.

¹¹⁵ Genlis, *Veillées* 62.

As Ann Schroder points out, while this discussion is ostensibly about Vigée-Lebrun, the acerbic commentary made by Madame de Clémire (who vocalizes Genlis's views) must be seen in relation to the professional and personal criticisms launched against Genlis in the early 1780s and to the denial to her in 1783 of the prestigious Montyon medal—a literary award that so many felt Genlis richly deserved for her novel *Adèle et Théodore*.¹¹⁶ Readers are reminded that Vigée-Lebrun had undergone similar difficulties that year, with the slanderous rumors of her relationship to painter François-Guillaume Ménageot and the denial of her rank as history painter in the Académie.¹¹⁷ This discussion about women artists in *Veillées* echoes sentiments expressed in the Salon pamphlet, *avis important d'une femme sur le Sallon de 1785*, where this (purportedly) female critic stridently proclaimed the reckonable abilities of women in the arts.¹¹⁸ The question of the woman artist drew in several women writers in the pre-Revolutionary era, and their texts function as a noteworthy aspect of this nascent field of art criticism.

Whereas this novel's engagement with debates regarding contemporary women artists is treated in Schroder's aforementioned article, what has not been emphasized is how Genlis's popular novel *Veillées du château* functions as one of the first "her-stories" of art history. This text deserves to be recognized as such. Regarding women artists,

¹¹⁶ See Schroder 376-379.

¹¹⁷ The controversy surrounding Vigée-Lebrun in the Salon of 1783 is examined at length in Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996). Also see Emma Barker, "Women Artists and the French Academy: Vigée-Lebrun in the 1780s," *Gender and Art*, ed. Gill Perry (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999) 108-27.

¹¹⁸ See chapter 1, page 39, note 30 of this dissertation.

Madame de Clémire declares that “[i]t would require a large volume to speak of them all; and it is the effect of prejudice that the number is not equal to that of the men who have been eminent Painters, which judges us incapable of works where genius is required.”¹¹⁹ Genlis’s protagonist explores the question of why women have not figured more prominently into the artistic landscape, and offers explanations that pre-date by almost 200 years Linda Nochlin’s groundbreaking essay on this subject.¹²⁰ For example, Genlis also sees women’s lack of education as a key reason for their low status in the arts.

Madame de Clémire notes:

When men condescend, which is very rare, to employ themselves a little on our education, they wish only to give us vague notions, consequently often false, superficial knowledge, and frivolous talents. . . . Does a Painter intend to instruct his daughter in his art [sic], he never conceives the project of making her a Painter of History, but will continually repeat that she should pretend only to paint Portraits, Miniatures, or Flower-Pieces. Thus is she discouraged, and thus is the fire stifled: she paints Roses; she was born, perhaps, to paint Heroes.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Genlis, *Veillées* 67.

¹²⁰ I am referring, of course, to Linda Nochlin’s “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *Women, Art, and Power, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988) 145-78.

¹²¹ Genlis, *Tales* 67. Echoes of this passage are heard in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Harcourt, 1929), where she creates the fictional character of Judith Shakespeare, or Shakespeare’s sister, as a conceit to demonstrate that women’s native abilities were often denied opportunity due to patriarchal social pressures.

In addition to revealing the patriarchal practices that prevent women from discovering their true vocations and competing with male artists, Genlis also appends to this novel a highly detailed encyclopedia of women artists from antiquity to the present. She attaches this genealogy as an appendix to the tale, which spans several pages and offers an alternative art history to the androcentric ones of the eighteenth century.¹²² This text signals Genlis's belief that a woman such as herself could effect change within the cultural sphere; here, her enterprise seems to be the ideological molding of the woman artist. With her *Veillées*, Genlis seems to be using her position as a widely read writer to propose a revisioning of the art-historical canon as it stood at that time.

Also worthy of consideration is how Genlis's novel promotes the idea that the public has the right to converse on art. Such notions were articulated in works such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Lettres à d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), which promoted the belief that art could inspire the viewer to become a more moral, virtuous citizen, and hence, the discussions of ennobling art could engender such developments.¹²³ The prologues to the reviews of the 1785 and 1787 Salons, as published in the *Mémoires secrets*, lauded "the Critic" for generating a noteworthy self-consciousness within the public at large, and seemingly promoted more widespread participation in discussions on art.¹²⁴ Genlis expresses complete confidence in the public's taste in her novel when her

¹²² For these entries on women artists, see Genlis, *Veillées* 233-37.

¹²³ For a discussion of this text, see Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986).

¹²⁴ Fort, "The Visual Arts in a Critical Mirror," *The Mémoires secrets and the Culture of Publicity in Eighteenth-Century France*, eds. Jeremy Popkin and Bernadette Fort (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998) 172.

character Madame de Clémire states: “The Public are just, and cannot be prevented from praising whatever pleases, and whatever strikes”¹²⁵ and that while “[t]he public admire none but superior faculties, or useful labors . . . ; [the academicians] protect the Weak, and praise the Poor in ability”¹²⁶ According to this author, the general populace makes sincere assessments and lacks the ulterior motives that frequently cloud the observations of the more elite viewers of art. Thus, the public should be accorded respect, and the criticism penned by amateurs and art lovers should be considered as the legitimate “voice of the public.”¹²⁷ While this belief was held by many in the general public, post-Revolutionary art specialists lamented this development. The concern over the ways the public has been misinformed by so-called unqualified art critics is underscored in the *avertissement* of artist Anne-Louis Girodet’s *La critique des critiques du Salon de 1806*, where he writes: “Lots of people today fashion themselves as connoisseurs of the Fine Arts; but there are few between them who are enlightened enough to speak well of such matters.”¹²⁸ Obviously, the rights of the general public to comment on art was a charged subject in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

¹²⁵ Genlis, *Veillées* 62.

¹²⁶ Genlis, *Veillées* 63.

¹²⁷ This phrase is borrowed from Bernadette Fort, “Voice of the Public: The Carnivalization of Salon Art in Pre-revolutionary Pamphlets,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (1989): 368-94.

¹²⁸ “Beaucoup de gens aujourd’hui s’affichent pour connoisseurs dans les Beaux-Arts: mais peu d’entre eux ont assez de lumières pour en bien parler.” Anne-Louis Trioson-Girodet, *La critique des critiques du Sallon de 1806: Étrennes aux connoisseurs* (Paris, 1807). Another instance of this voicing of concern over creeping amateurism is found in a

Genlis's egalitarian approach to art criticism deserves mention, for it works against defining this domain as socially exclusive and distinctly male. Genlis's championing of the abilities of her readers could be construed as a gesture of flattery to them, for her status as a beloved writer of the people depended upon such abilities. Yet I am convinced that she truly viewed art as a shared, communal institution, particularly in these pre-Revolutionary years. Especially interesting is how this novel declares not only the right, but also the responsibility for women and children—those traditionally placed outside the purview of aesthetics—to be educated on such matters.¹²⁹

Didacticism remained central to Genlis's projects, we must recall.

Some twenty-five years later, Genlis took up the subject of the woman artist yet again. Several of her novels from the Napoleonic era are centered on this figure: in 1808, she published her pendant novels, *Sainclair, ou la victime des arts et des sciences*, and *Hortense, ou la victime des romans et des voyages*, and in 1810, she produced a novel *Les fleurs, ou les artistes*. However, rather than laud her sister artists as she had done in her *Veillées* of 1784, she castigated artistically ambitious women in her post-Revolutionary novels involving the woman of art. In the text *Sainclair*, the protagonist barely escapes the clutches of Clotilde, an aspiring *femme artiste* whose immorality and immodesty are without bounds. Its pendant, *Hortense*, is a satire of the quintessential woman artist as

pamphlet titled, "Appel au public sur le formation d'un jury pour juger les ouvrages des Artistes par un peintre dont les tableaux n'ont point été réjettés." (Paris, 1798).

¹²⁹ A similar strategy of using women and children to model engagement in the public sphere seems to be at work in the paintings of eighteenth-century English artist Joseph Wright of Derby, an argument posited by Susan Siegfried in her "Engaging the Audience: Sexual Economies of Vision in Joseph Wright," *Representations* 68 (Fall 1999): 34-58.

genius, the protagonist of Germaine de Staël's recently published novel, *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807). Another of Genlis's novels from this period, *Les fleurs, ou les artistes* (1810), praises the miniaturist Rose, whose interest in art remains circumscribed within this diminutive genre. In sum, while Genlis's art-critical endeavors reveal a sustained interest in the woman artist, her position on this figure changed dramatically during the Revolution.

Given the strident defense and promotion of women artists delivered in her 1784 novel *Veillées* this development is rather puzzling. What motivated this shift from the celebratory to the demeaning in Genlis's treatment of the woman artist? While ambiguity and contradiction mark this author's *œuvre*—particularly those works that explore women's place within the public sphere—this does not provide a satisfactory explanation.¹³⁰ Certainly, we cannot discount the impact of the Revolution on Genlis's writings. The Enlightenment optimism that characterized her pre-1789 production eroded in the works she published during the Napoleonic era, and gave way to a general cynicism toward the new social order.¹³¹ Moreover, we should recognize that necessity dictated that Genlis distance herself somewhat from the ancien régime and the position she held in this elite society. Indeed, in the post-Revolutionary period, Genlis's very survival depended upon her ability to write works that appealed to both the general

¹³⁰ Explorations of this tendency in Genlis's writings can be found in Bonnie Arden Robb, "Célestin/Célestine: Ambiguities of Identity chez Genlis," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12.4 (July 2000): 549-64; Renee Winegarten, "Woman and Politics: Madame de Genlis," *New Criterion* 15.1 (September 1996): 50-58; and Plagnol-Diéval.

¹³¹ For a consideration of this shift, see Lesley H. Walker, "Producing Feminine Virtue: Strategies of Terror in Writings by Madame de Genlis," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* (Fall 2004): 213-36.

public as well as to Napoleon himself. This author's own precarious place within the shifting spaces of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French society definitely influenced her approach to such charged subjects as woman's position in the public arena. Thus, in order to comprehend the denigration of the *femme artiste* in Genlis's novels of this period, we must examine how cultural debates regarding women's participation in the arts framed her discourse.

When Genlis first introduced the subject of the woman artist in *Veillées du château*, figures such as Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, and Angelica Kauffmann, were making significant inroads into the androcentric world of art. Despite detractors who refused to embrace women's ascension into the academies in France and England and into the hearts of the general public—and Genlis's defense of Vigée-Lebrun in *Veillées* is offered in response to these critiques—clearly such women were demonstrating the possibilities for women artists.¹³² The 1780s witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of women exhibiting their work in public venues; for example, the number of women exhibitors at the Exposition de la Jeunesse increased threefold between the years 1783 and 1791.¹³³ As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, there was an explosion of women's participation in the Salons between 1789 and 1806; while only three women showed on the eve of the Revolution, there were over fifty women whose

¹³² On the increased opportunities for women artists, see Doy, *Women and Visual Culture*, and Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*.

¹³³ Oppenheimer 9.

art was featured in the Salon of 1806. This means that there was an increase of over 1600% of those displaying their art in less than twenty years.¹³⁴

One cannot deny that the subject of women's involvement in the arts had a strong degree of currency in post-Revolutionary French culture—or refute that this topic was extremely contentious.¹³⁵ Some lauded the increased opportunities for women artists, recognizing the economic value of a woman trained in the arts.¹³⁶ Such was the case with the Marquis de Condorcet, who in his final days penned a will in which he wrote the following advice to his daughter: “In addition to women’s work, I would like my daughter to learn to draw, to paint, and to engrave, well enough to earn a living without too much difficulty and distaste.”¹³⁷ In the early nineteenth century, the government began granting awards and pensions to women artists, thus suggesting an increased respect for those pursuing artistic careers.¹³⁸ While there was substantial support for women’s increased participation in the arts, there was a vocal constituency who opposed this development. Maréchal’s pamphlet of 1801 that proposed the passage

¹³⁴ Oppenheimer 2. For discussions of women artists of the period, also see Vivian Cameron, “Woman as Image and Image-Maker in Paris During the French Revolution,” diss., Yale U, 1983; and Gen Doy, “Women and the Bourgeois Revolution of 1789: Artists, Mothers and Makers of (Art) History,” *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture*, eds. Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (New York: Manchester UP, 1994) 184-203.

¹³⁵ A more extensive discussion of this phenomenon is given in chapter one of this dissertation.

¹³⁶ See F. Mulot, “Quelques vus sur les moyens industriels qui peuvent faire partie de l’éducation des jeunes personnes,” *Petit magasin de dames* (Paris, 1804): 158-76.

¹³⁷ Condorcet, as qtd. in Fraisse 67-68.

¹³⁸ Doy, *Women and Visual Culture* 28.

of a law forbidding women's education and involvement in culture seems to mark this opposition. And when the art critic Pierre Chaussard reviewed the Salon of 1806, he expressed bewilderment over the legions of women artists exhibiting that year: "The salon booklet offers no less than fifty women or young women painters, some more and others less distinguished by their talent; never have there been so many displayed all at once, and I do not know if it be well to wish for their sex, for society in general, and for Art, that this influence be held up."¹³⁹

This was the context in which Stéphanie-Félicité, comtesse de Genlis, recommenced her engagement with the subject of the woman artist. In her 1808 novels, which have escaped scholarly attention heretofore, Genlis addresses those same issues taken up in the periodical press and in other cultural modes of discourse: the propriety of a woman artist exhibiting in public, the appropriate genres of painting for women, and the ramifications, both personal and cultural, of the ambitious *femme artiste*. What these novels articulate is a suspicion of women entering into the art world in increasing numbers. There are a variety of possible explanations for this shift. One cannot help but wonder if this shift was motivated, at least in part, by the fact that women were entering into the field of art, whether as artists, critics, spectators, patrons, or teachers, in unprecedented numbers, thus threatening to eradicate the role of "exceptional woman"

¹³⁹ "Le livret du salon n'offre pas moins de cinquante dames ou demoiselles peintres, les unes plus, les autres moins distinguées par leur talent; c'est plus qu'il n'en avait jamais paru à-la-fois, et je ne sais s'il est fort à désirer pour leur sexe, pour la société en général, et pour les Arts, que cette affluence se soutienne." Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Chaussard, *Le Pausanias français. . . Salon de 1806* (Paris, 1806). For an extended contemporary treatment of the woman artist, see St. L. . . (M.) "Dialogue sur les ouvrages des dames au Salon de peinture," *Le petit magasin de dames* (Paris, 1807): 155-79.

that Genlis had occupied for so many years.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps Genlis viewed this figure as embodying the *parvenu* society that developed under the reign of Napoleon and that she so virulently detested—hence, the woman artist could be seen as an emblem of the bourgeois’s usurpation of power in the cultural sphere. It should be noted that Genlis was married to a nobleman and was lover to the duc de Chartres, both of whom were guillotined, and hence, this woman writer surely identified with an aristocratic perspective. Regarding the post-Revolutionary outlook of the returned *émigrés*, Stephen Kale comments: “Members of the old aristocracy insistently maintained attitudes and habits expressing nostalgia for all they had lost and were easily vexed by the behavior of the nouveaux riches, which they piteously ridiculed as neither clumsy or vain, faults they attributed to profound insecurity.”¹⁴¹ As a mode of self-preservation, Genlis was forced to disavow her allegiances to the nobility and the ancien régime (at least publicly) once Napoleon came to power.

There are other motivations at work that may explain Genlis’s changed attitude vis-à-vis women artists in the early nineteenth century. The acrimony Genlis expresses toward the ambitious woman artist, as displayed in the novels under consideration, may be construed as a means to distance herself from Napoleon’s nemesis and from her greatest literary rival, Germaine de Staël, who had valorized the woman artist as genius in

¹⁴⁰ For considerations of “the exceptional woman” in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, see Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman*; and Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1978).

¹⁴¹ Kale 79.

her novel *Corinne*.¹⁴² On a psychological level, perhaps Genlis was seeking a way to set herself apart from the inimitable Staël and her Corinne—the woman artist *par excellence*. I contend that Genlis’s novels on the woman artist must be viewed as a direct response to this sensational heroine. Lastly, I want to suggest that Genlis’s circumscription of the woman artist may have been born out of the difficulties she experienced as a woman of distinction in the cultural arena. In the 1780s, there was a poem published in the *Correspondance littéraire* that declared her an hermaphrodite, and there was a production of Molière’s play *Les femmes savantes* that incited a public display of contempt toward Genlis.¹⁴³ Such events may have dampened her enthusiasm to promote this position for other women.

Regardless of the motivation behind these novels, the art discussions within these texts were significant instances of criticism in that they framed and filtered some of the issues of the woman artist in post-Revolutionary France. Ensnared with the pages of popular fiction (a genre that had elicited some consternation for the ways it disrupted—or held the potential to disrupt—the status quo), conversations on art held in *Sainclair*, *Hortense*, and *Les fleurs* contributed to the ideological fashioning of this figure. All three of these novels give insight into the issues surrounding the woman artist in post-Revolutionary France, which included a woman’s visibility in the public art world and the attending concerns over modesty and propriety. I maintain that Genlis’s

¹⁴² Genlis derided Staël in her letters to Napoleon, in which she declared that Staël promoted immorality in her works and was involved in plots to overthrow him. See Jean Harmand, *Madame de Genlis: Sa vie intime et politique, 1746-1830* (Paris: Perrin, 1912) 402.

¹⁴³ See Schroder for a gloss of these incidents.

populist fiction was both reflective and formative of the public's views of the woman artist and her place in society. While statistics do not exist regarding the publication history of these particular art-related novels, given Genlis's track record and contractual stipulations, it seems safe to say that these novels were well-placed to facilitate a consideration of women's place in art.

In *Sainclair, ou la victime des arts et des sciences*, the tale of a young man's search for a suitable wife becomes a vehicle for criticizing the woman artist as a dangerous woman.

In Sainclair's pursuit, he encounters the enchanting Clotilde, who intrigues him, and yet,

he knew that Clotilde had a passionate taste, which gave him much uneasiness. His love interest was a painter, and one of much ambition: she did not amuse herself in painting flowers, she composed in *demi-nature*, mythological subjects in oil-colors, and pretended to rival in that way the most celebrated women.¹⁴⁴

Here, aspersions are cast on the woman who aims to paint history scenes—an ironic position, given Genlis's promotion of such aims for women in her *Veillées* of 1784.

Sainclair is wary of Clotilde's commitment to her art, commenting:

[I]t is not the arts which I condemn; what displeases me is the importance which amateurs attach to trifling successes and insignificant talents; it is that immoderate self love which perverts to such a degree the

¹⁴⁴ Genlis, *Sainclair* 67. All citations of this novel follow the English translation of *Sainclair*. See *Sainclair, or Victim of the Arts and Sciences, and, Hortense, or the Victim of Novels and Travels, a Novel in two Volumes by Madame de Genlis*, trans. Archibald Haralson (Georgetown [D.C.], 1813). To date, I have been unable to locate a French version.

sensible soul of women, that it renders them capable of sacrificing the most dear affections.¹⁴⁵

Genlis's position is clear: such women transgress the bounds of female decorum, and their mania for art perverts a woman's dedication to that which is "natural" (i.e. the family and home). In sum, the arts portend corruption for women. This objection to the woman artist echoes the sentiments expressed by one of the leading art critics in post-Revolutionary France, Charles Landon, who bemoaned the influx of women artists showing in the Salon and declared it a sure sign of the decline of the French school in a letter to the editor of *Journal de Paris*. In this piece, Landon concluded that a "reputation of mediocrity [is] less desirable than a perfect obscurity"¹⁴⁶—an opinion Genlis certainly reiterates in this novel.

One of the foremost concerns elicited by the early nineteenth-century French woman as artist was that of public display, and Genlis's novel *Sainclair* gives voice to this charged topic. For example, when Sainclair attempts to defend the dangerous Clotilde to his friend Duval, protesting that "painting is but an amusement for her," Duval quickly retorts: "it must then be through humility that she exposes her paintings to the eyes of the public, by the side of those of the greatest masters."¹⁴⁷ In this novel, Genlis's male characters (and indeed, it must be emphasized that she, like Krüdener, capitalizes on—

¹⁴⁵ Genlis, *Sainclair* 68.

¹⁴⁶ "[M]édiocrité de réputation moins désirable qu'une parfaite obscurité." Charles Landon, "Beaux-arts: Aux auteurs du journal," *Journal de Paris* 145 (25 pluviôse, an 7/13 fevrier 1799): 639.

¹⁴⁷ Genlis, *Sainclair* 69.

and even colonizes—the authoritative position of the male voice in the art-related fiction discussed in this chapter) are quick to mock the society women who had their portraits shown at the Salons. In discussing women’s celebrity within society, the hero’s friend Duval notes that “when they are handsome, their portraits are suspended *au salon*, and even their figures may be subjected to a new examination through a very thin drapery. . .,”¹⁴⁸ thus suggesting Genlis’s disapproval of such public displays of women. This echoes the sentiment expressed in *Arlequin au Muséum, ou les tableaux en vaudevilles*, a piece of post-Revolutionary Salon criticism that registers concern over the ways in which women’s participation in the art world invited the public gaze. The writer of this anonymous pamphlet queries:

At this salon, how many women
 Have dared to show their paintings.
 With regret I say to these ladies,
 Can one find beauty in both?
 Secretly, I like to see them paint;
 But I say to them in all candor
 That a woman must fear at all times
 Of being too much exposed in *public*.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Genlis, *Sainclair* 35.

¹⁴⁹ “A ce salon combien de femmes, / Ont osé placer leurs tableaux. / A regret je dis à ces dames, / Sur ceut en voit-on deux de beaux ? / En secret j’aime à les voir peindre; / Mais je leur dis sans alambic / Qu’une femme en tout temps doit craindre / De trop se montrer en *public*.” *Arlequin au Muséum, ou les tableaux en vaudevilles* (Paris, 1799): 25.

In addition, Genlis's treatment of the woman artist in *Sainclair* seems to propose that women whose aims extend beyond the bounds of propriety are duplicitous creatures, even going so far as to present their male masters' work as their own. The narrator notes that Clotilde had already exhibited some works at the Salon, due to the "protection of a great painter,"¹⁵⁰ thus suggesting that perhaps she had "called in the aid of foreign assistance"¹⁵¹—and that such favors were procured through the sacrifice of virtue. In the course of the novel, Sainclair discovers Clotilde's servant, dressed as Zephyr and poised to model for his mistress, who unwittingly exposes his mistress as an imposter. Upon questioning, this young boy confesses, "It is true. . . that M[onsieur] G*** commences and finishes, all the paintings of madame."¹⁵² As discussed in chapter one, such charges had been levied against several contemporary French women artists, including Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Angélique Mongez in pamphlets, the periodical press, and even in the theater of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France.

By characterizing the woman artist as a deviant and false creature, Genlis's *Sainclair* participates in the denigration of the woman artist, thereby undermining the possibility for her to act as an able, autonomous individual. Readers should rest assured, knowing that Sainclair ultimately escapes the clutches of the dangerous Clotilde, and marries an accomplished woman, but one who is modest and retiring. Thus, Genlis writes: "Sainclair, after having been, during his youth, a victim to the arts and sciences,

¹⁵⁰ Genlis, *Sainclair* 68.

¹⁵¹ Genlis, *Sainclair* 71.

¹⁵² Genlis, *Sainclair* 79.

became the most fortunate of husbands and fathers.”¹⁵³ Clotilde, on the other hand, is denied such bliss. In the novel’s sequel, *Hortense, ou la victime des romans et des voyages*, it is reported that Clotilde lost all her renown after quarreling with Mr. G*** and thus, “The poor woman, constrained to be contented with a robust appearance, and to renounce nervous attacks, as well as exhibitions *au salon*, passes in the country a domestic life, deprived of every other power except that of provoking her husband and worrying her curate.”¹⁵⁴ In the end, the woman artist is punished for her ambitions.

In the sequel to *Sainclair*, Genlis further demeans the figure of the woman artist by harshly satirizing the heroine in Staël’s *Corinne, ou l’Italie*, which had been published a year earlier.¹⁵⁵ Here, we see the wealthy spinster Hortense, who spends her days devouring second-rate novels and fantasizing about their sensational heroines. After reading an unnamed novel (the reader recognizes the allusion to Staël’s sensationally popular novel, of course), Hortense decides to fashion herself as Staël’s protagonist and travel to Italy, where she is determined to find both love and fame. This anti-heroine’s engagement with the arts is superficial at best. Hortense rushes through Florence, bypassing famous art sites with such comments as “I ought to see the Gallery, only when I am fast verging to a termination of my mortal career,”¹⁵⁶ and takes up residence in a tavern, stating that while she “would have liked to make of it a museum, a temple, to

¹⁵³ Genlis, *Sainclair* 95.

¹⁵⁴ Genlis, *Hortense* 103.

¹⁵⁵ This novel is treated in detail in chapter three of this dissertation.

¹⁵⁶ Genlis, *Hortense* 122.

adorn it with statues, and to receive much of the world,”¹⁵⁷ this all required too much time, as she was intent upon finding her lover. When she finds a permanent home, she decorates it with copies and fakes:

Antiques, dispatched from the cabinet and from under the chisels of some young starving artists, were placed in profusion at each flight of stairs and in every corner. They purchased, from [a] Cadez, the paintings of Guido and Correggio, which it was much more certain he had made himself. . . .¹⁵⁸

Furthermore, Hortense cavorts about Rome with a *valet du place* who ostensibly served as a tour guide—but who is presented as a male escort in the modern sense of the descriptor—visiting all of the monuments and galleries mentioned in Staël’s novel and yet appreciating or understanding nothing.

Moreover, the character Hortense’s credibility as an art critic and connoisseur is severely questioned in this novel, thus suggesting that a (bourgeois) woman’s expertise in matters of art was suspect. For example, she recites erroneous information to her lover, Lord Robinson, with remarks on Roman monuments such as St. Peter’s (“the finest monument remaining of the age of Augustus Caesar”) and the Pantheon (“the work of Leo X”).¹⁵⁹ Hortense does not care if they have not visited the important art sites or met with the well-known artists in Rome. Indeed, she insists upon leaving Naples, despite

¹⁵⁷ Genlis, *Hortense* 125.

¹⁵⁸ Genlis, *Hortense* 128.

¹⁵⁹ Genlis, *Hortense* 152.

Lord Robinson's protestations that they had not yet seen its wonders, including the Farnese Hercules, Titian's *Danaë*, and various collections, as she is impatient to advance the romance and sees the art exegeses as completely divorced from this development.¹⁶⁰ Significantly, it is the male aristocrat who shows the genuine knowledge and interest in art and aesthetics in *Hortense, ou la victime des romans et des voyages*, much like Count B. . . in Krüdener's *Valérie*. Lord Robinson, who is portrayed as established, educated, and authoritative, stands in contradistinction to Hortense, who is portrayed as flighty, uneducated, and completely lacking in credibility. In all aspects, Genlis's character Hortense possesses a facile connection to art. Like "Fanny Tatillon," the Salon-going woman satirized in the pages of the *Journal des dames et des modes* in 1808 (the same year in which this novel was published), Hortense is a self-absorbed and frivolous creature who is more interested in love than art. Furthermore, Genlis's character is shown as oblivious to how her conduct breached female modesty and decorum. Given Genlis's harsh treatment of this figure, the reader is not surprised to learn of the fate of Hortense, who discovered (too late, of course) that con artists had obtained her fortune by exploiting her romantic imagination. In this novel, Genlis makes a mockery of women's involvement with art, and ultimately, *Hortense, ou la victime des romans et des voyages* reads as a complete denigration of the aspiring woman of culture.

Why did Genlis pursue the figure of the overreaching woman artist with such a vengeance? As mentioned earlier, this writer harbored a deep-seated animosity toward

¹⁶⁰ Genlis, *Hortense* 172. Interestingly, the Farnese Hercules was never transported to Rome due to political circumstances; reportedly Napoleon felt that its absence was the most important gap in the collection. As rept. in Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) 229.

Staël, the creator of the *femme artiste extraordinaire*, Corinne, upon whom Hortense was modeled. Genlis's *La femme philosophe* (1804) was a clear demonstration of her disdain for Staël.¹⁶¹ Genlis's condemnation of Staël's heroine may be viewed as a gesture of fidelity to Napoleon, who had declared the figure of the public woman *persona non grata* when he exiled Staël from Paris. Genlis certainly occupied a place of subservience under the Emperor and could not have wished for the same fate; hence, the tempering of the "feminist" discourse that is interwoven throughout her pre-Revolutionary texts was perhaps born out of pragmatism.¹⁶²

While the ambitious woman artist could not occupy a respectable place in the larger artistic sphere, according to Genlis, women who recognized their rightful (read: lesser) place within the art world could find love and happiness. Genlis's novel *Les fleurs, ou les artistes* expresses the possibility for a woman to pursue painting, but only in the most diminutive of genres, the miniature. While the novel seems to be primarily

¹⁶¹ Genlis's animosity toward Staël deserves some comment. She opposed both her rival's philosophy and style, as articulated in critiques scattered throughout her works. Toward the end of her career, Genlis writes: "J'ai été utile aussi à Mme de Staël sous le rapport du style. Il est certain que depuis la publication de *La femme philosophe* il y a eu beaucoup moins d'affection dans sa manière d'écrire. Néanmoins, dans son ouvrage sur l'Allemagne, il y a plusieurs phrases et même quelques paragraphes qui sont incompréhensibles par les idées, l'assemblage des mots qui ne doivent jamais se trouver ensemble et le sens que l'auteur même n'a certainement pu comprendre." Genlis, as qtd. in Broglie 371. While two of Genlis's works, *La femme philosophe* and *Hortense* caricature Staël's work, another publication by Genlis, *Athénais, ou le château de Coppet* (1807), published posthumously in 1832, is less acerbic.

¹⁶² Indeed, one can distill an increasing antagonism to the public woman in Genlis's later works. For a discussion of Genlis's relationship to women's issues, see Mary Trouille, "Eighteenth-Century Amazons of the Pen: Stéphanie de Genlis and Olympe de Gouges," *Femmes savants et femmes d'esprit: Women Intellectuals of the French Eighteenth Century*, eds. Roland Bonnel and Catherine Rubinger (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 341-70.

concerned with the defense of the hierarchy of genres in art (indeed, Genlis's protagonist Lindal, a flower painter, is forced by the esteemed history painter Mélidor to find a means to allegorize his floral paintings—or fail to win the hand of his daughter), a secondary emphasis is placed on the proper artistic expressions for women. In her *Les fleurs*, Genlis contrasts Lindal with Rose, a fellow flower painter who does not aspire to use her talents to create historical tableaux. The reader is told that Rose “painted miniature flowers to the highest degree of perfection” and was concerned only with using her abilities to benefit family members (in the course of the novel, we are told that “[Rose] invented something to give a new price to the small paintings she made for her mother. . .”).¹⁶³ Hence, a woman artist should channel her artistic impulses appropriately; her art was meant to enhance familial harmony and beautify the domestic space. In this novel, Rose is presented as the ideal woman artist in that she does not harbor unseemly desires to paint grand history paintings.

In this novel, Genlis underscores the modest aims of her female protagonist by contrasting her activities to those of her lover, Lindal. *Les fleurs* turns upon this question of gendered propriety in respect to one's art. Upon seeing Lindal's beautiful still-life paintings for the first time, Mélidor (Rose's father) responds: “[Y]ou paint perfectly, you have observed nature well enough, you render it with fidelity, this is enough, without a doubt, to be a distinguished painter, but I will only give my daughter to an artist of the

¹⁶³ “[E]lle peignoit les fleurs en miniature dans le plus haut point de perfection. . . [Elle] inventa une chose qui donna un nouveau prix aux petits tableaux qu'elle faisoit pour sa mère. . . .” Genlis, *Les fleurs, ou les artistes*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1810) 196.

first order, an artist eminent in his genre, and I do not see this in your painting.”¹⁶⁴ The narrative of this novel pivots around this issue, thus intimating its importance to Genlis. Happily, inspiration strikes when Lindal sees his beloved kneeling in a chapel, holding a bouquet of flowers, and he is inspired to create a painting on the theme of the metamorphosis of Daphne. Genlis’s novel is unrelenting in its insistence upon maintaining the prescribed roles for men and women in the arts: the male artist should channel his energies into history painting, whereas a woman should limit her artistic enterprises to creating miniatures for the amusement of loved ones, and view her role as model and muse as far more significant than that of artist.

In the end, we should consider that perhaps Genlis’s pessimism toward the *femme artiste* was connected in part to issues of class, or more specifically, to her own desire to reassert the presence of the refined and rightful proprietors of the cultural domain: the *émigrés*. This call for a return to the social paradigms of the ancien régime required complex strategies and careful negotiations, as Jennifer Birkett discusses in her examination of Genlis’s other post-Revolutionary novels.¹⁶⁵ In both *Sainclair* and *Hortense*, it is a contemptible female character that symbolizes the bourgeoisie. Shallow, indecorous and false, among other unsavory traits: this is how that amorphous—and perhaps mythic?—sector of the bourgeoisie is defined by means of Genlis’s

¹⁶⁴ “[V]ous peignez parfaitement, vous avez bien observé la nature, vous la rendez avec fidélité, c’en est assez, sans doute, pour être un peintre distingué; mais je ne donnerai ma fille qu’à un artiste du premier ordre, un artiste éminent dans son genre, et je ne le vois pas dans ce tableau.” Genlis, *Les fleurs, ou les artistes* 152-53.

¹⁶⁵ Jennifer Birkett, “Madame de Genlis: The New Men and the Old Eve,” *French Studies* 42.2 (1988): 150-64.

representations of the woman artist.¹⁶⁶ Significantly, this author's treatment of the modern woman artist is consonant with the ways in which so-called conservative critics such as Charles Landon or Jean-Baptiste Boutard approached this figure. The unstable class structure of early nineteenth-century France certainly played into the debates surrounding women's involvement in the arts. In an 1805 review of the theatrical production *L'Athénée des femmes*, the critic wondered:

It is suitable, is it right to want to engage in making fun of women who cultivate the arts and literature? One should not attempt to resolve the posed question in an absolute manner. If these women are that which one called in the past the petite bourgeois without fortune, who neglect their domestic duties to chase after wit and only reach the ridiculous, it is well to try to encourage them to return to their housework and for them to put down the pen and to take back the needle and spindle. If we are discussing one with affluence and a woman of wit and leisure, it will be confessed that it is better that she work on one or the other of some agreeable work than to gossip or to play.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ I am referring to the recent reconsideration of this category of "the bourgeoisie" in Maza's *The Myth of the Bourgeoisie*.

¹⁶⁷ "Est-il convenable, est-il juste de vouloir livrer à la risée les femmes qui cultivent les arts et la littérature? On ne saurait bien résoudre la question posée ainsi d'une manière absolue. Si ces femmes sont ce qu'on appelait autrefois de petites bourgeois sans fortune, qui négligent leurs devoirs domestiques pour courir après le bel esprit et n'atteindre que le ridicule, il est bien de tâcher de les rendre à leur ménage, et de leur faire quitter la plume pour reprendre l'aiguille et le fuseau. Si, avec beaucoup d'aisance, une femme a de l'esprit et du loisir, on avouera qu'il vaut autant qu'elle emploie l'un et l'autre à quelque ouvrage agréable qu'à médire ou à jouer." Anonymous, "Théâtre du

According to this reviewer, women's participation in the public sphere was contingent upon their social class. Those of the *petites bourgeoises* should not pursue artistic or literary endeavors; their activities were dangerous to the very fabric of post-Revolutionary France because it meant that they neglected their appropriate spheres of influence.

Clearly, the moral of all three of Genlis's post-Revolutionary "art" novels, *Sainclair, ou la victime des arts et des sciences*; *Hortense, ou la victime des voyages et des romans*; and *Les fleurs, ou les artistes* is that women must acknowledge their rightful place in the artistic realm. Genlis's novels give fascinating insight into the issues surrounding the woman artist in Napoleonic France. This populist fiction both responded to as well as shaped the public's views of this figure and to her place in the larger social order. And in the end, we must be mindful that the denigration of the woman in Genlis's novels was caught up in both the personal as well as the political, and inextricably connected to issues of gender and class, as these constitutive categories were under intense negotiation in the post-Revolutionary years. It was also a temporary position. In her *Mémoires*, published in 1824-25, Genlis returns to a more laudatory position vis-à-vis women artists, declaring that not since the golden age of Louis XIV have there been so many skilled female practitioners who excel in a variety of genres—there is even a female architect and sculptor, she notes with emphasis—thus attempting to effect the ambitious woman artist's rightful restoration into the annals of art history.¹⁶⁸

vaudeville: *L'Athénée des femmes*," *Mercur de France* 250 (20 floréal, an 13/11 mai 1805): 371.

¹⁶⁸ Genlis, *Mémoires inédits*, vol. 8, 107-08.

We cannot deny that women writers found meaningful ways to enter into art criticism and aesthetic discourse by means of the novel. Both Juliane de Krüdener and Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis used their writings on art to engage in contemporary aesthetic debates. Indeed, their texts entertained significant questions regarding cultural patrimony, the hierarchy of genres in painting, sources of inspiration for art, and exhibiting practices, to name a few. Moreover, texts such as Krüdener's *Valérie* and Genlis's *Veillées du château*, *Sainclair*, *Hortense*, and *Les fleurs* asked the readers to consider women's places as artists, spectators, critics, patrons, and even as subjects in representation in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. These novels are highly suggestive for the contested nature of these myriad discussions and point to the ways popular culture was involved in the processing of the competing beliefs regarding the woman of art.

The novel was a powerful medium for the dissemination of information and ideologies, particularly at this historical juncture in which novel-reading seemed to reach a fevered pitch. I daresay that more people read Krüdener's *Valérie* or Genlis's *Veillées du château* than the Salon pamphlets or journalistic art reviews of the periodical press, which were, we must acknowledge, largely viewed as ephemera. I also contend that such novels were better positioned to fashion identities and to form taste than their non-fictional counterparts. Indeed we should consider how characters such as Valerie, Clotilde, Hortense, and Rose functioned as models—or anti-models, in some cases—for women entering into the spaces of art. If we are truly seeking to understand nineteenth-century art criticism, we must recognize that fiction was a significant site of production for such discourse. The novels by Krüdener and Genlis discussed in this chapter by no means

exhaust the field of fictional writings on art generated by women in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. However, they stand as excellent case studies in how the novel served as an effective forum for women art critics to write on a number of topics, which ranged from the aesthetic to the political and from the personal to the social.

The works of Juliane de Krüdener and Stéphanie-Félicité Genlis can be viewed as framing devices for Staël's touristic novel, *Corinne, ou l'Italie*, which will be examined in the next chapter of this dissertation. It will become apparent that Staël's text consolidated many of the artistic issues and questions raised in the writings of Krüdener and Genlis. As we will see, Staël created the most enduring characterization of the woman artist, viewer, and critic in nineteenth-century literature in her heroine, Corinne.

CHAPTER THREE

GERMAINE DE STAËL'S CORINNE:

THE QUINTESSENTIAL WOMAN ART CRITIC

To date, few scholars have recognized how Germaine de Staël, the most prominent woman writer of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era, participated in the framing of early nineteenth-century art criticism. A few scholars have proffered encouraging assessments of the significance of her most popular novel, *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), for women in the arts. For example, Ellen Moers declares that this text was critical for women's entrance into the art world, writing: "The major fashion set by Corinne as tour guide was the opening of the field of art history to women in the days when there were no academic or curatorial posts available to them."¹ In a similar vein, Madelyn Gutwirth posits that with *Corinne*, Staël did nothing less than "[seize] the occasion to posit a counter-patriarchal, feminine cult of transcendence through art."² While such statements are highly suggestive for the importance of Staël and her novel vis-à-vis women's participation in art, these notions have not received due consideration, particularly in light of contemporary debates and developments within the European art world and within the framework of the fledgling institutions of nineteenth-century art history and criticism. Consequently, this chapter seeks to deepen our understanding of

¹ Ellen Moers, "Performing Heroism: The Myth of Corinne," *Literary Women* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977) 187-88. It should be noted that Staël is the only early nineteenth-century woman art critic in the anthology written by Claire Richter Sherman and Adele H. Holcomb, *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820-1979* (Westport: Greenwood P, 1981).

² Gutwirth, "Seeing *Corinne* Afresh," *The Novel's Seductions: Staël's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999) 31.

Staël's position on art and aesthetics, as articulated in her novel *Corinne*, and to assert her place within the institution of nineteenth-century art criticism.

Indeed, I will characterize the conversations on art in Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* as acts of art criticism, and contextualize the aesthetic discourse in this novel within the rubrics of early nineteenth-century European art. To date, discussions of Staël's forays into art in *Corinne* remain tied to literary and philosophical concerns. In this chapter, I want to speak more specifically to how Staël's discussions of art were related to the contemporary art scene. Moreover, in the course of this chapter, I will suggest that this text was formative to subsequent developments in the fields of nineteenth-century art, history, and criticism. I find it telling that a passage from *Corinne* is included in the new art history reader, *Art in Theory, 1648-1815*.³ Such inclusions attest to the growing recognition of Staël's place in the early nineteenth-century art world; it is my hope that my work on this topic will further encourage art historians to recognize Staël's contributions to this landscape.

In her novel *Corinne*, Staël fashions a work strongly committed to art, thereby staking a claim for her place in the early nineteenth-century realm of aesthetics and art criticism. My analysis will show that Staël's characters conversed on issues that were of central concern in artistic circles, including the role of art in society, Napoleon's transportation of European art objects to Paris, the status of contemporary French painting, and women's roles in the spheres of art. Ensclosed within the pages of this novel are condemnations of the Emperor's artistic and political practices, along with

³ Paul Wood and Charles Harrison, *Art in Theory, 1648-1815* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 989-91.

celebrations of philosophies and practices that were distinctly un-French. German Romantic aesthetics, with its championing of religious art of the Italian Renaissance, is proclaimed superior to the Neoclassical model espoused in the fatherland of France. A significant component of this valorization of German Romanticism is Staël's belief that religious art promotes compassion and interconnectedness, as opposed to art dedicated to the sacralization of the state and the eradication of the individual in the face of abstract principles. The artistic discourse in *Corinne* also testifies to Staël's commitment to effecting change in Napoleonic society, and her recognition of the role cultural criticism in fiction could play in that process.

Furthermore, with *Corinne*, Staël argues against the patriarchal confines of Napoleonic art and culture, and in turn, heralds those spaces (geographical, historical, psychological) outside of France that ultimately reify the female presence in the public sphere of art. Through her art conversations, Staël argues that cultural regeneration is impossible without the dismantling of patriarchy and the concomitant reconstruction of a society in which women are viewed as valuable contributors. In addition, this novel fashions the quintessential woman of art: Corinne is a creator, she moves confidently in and out of the public spaces of art, she has collected masterpieces of art from various historical periods and places that are exhibited in innovative ways, and she possesses tremendous powers of persuasion (in the course of their art tours, her lover Oswald is frequently given over to silence in the face of the eloquence and erudition of this heroine). Indeed, Staël's extraordinary heroine, an acclaimed artist, collector, and connoisseur, functions as the authoritative interlocutor on the arts in this novel. By means of this enormously popular novel, which was published in more than forty

editions (in French alone) between 1807 and 1872,⁴ Staël thrust woman as artist, patron, viewer and critic upon the reading public and thereby declared her a reckonable force in the visual arts. To my mind, this novel did more to further women's positions in the art world than any other text of its time.⁵

Why have Staël's contributions to the nineteenth-century art world gone largely unnoticed by art historians? One of the unfortunate outcomes of the recent trend to take analyses of French art criticism beyond the typical *gens de lettres*—Diderot, Stendhal, Zola, and so forth—and into critics writing for the periodical press is that consequently, the art writings of *femmes de lettres* have been bypassed.⁶ This, along with the general tendency to overlook women's contributions to the institution of art criticism in general, and the failure to recognize the myriad venues in which this activity transpired, has worked to obscure the importance of Staël's work.

Almost exclusively, it is literary scholars who have addressed the issue of Staël's engagement with art, and subsequently, most of these discussions have pursued issues

⁴ This statistic is given in Gutwirth, "Seeing *Corinne* Afresh" 26. In statistics on bestsellers of this period, Staël's work is consistently mentioned. See Martyn Lyons, *Le triomphe du livre: Une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du 19e siècle* (Paris: Promodis, 1987).

⁵ A shortened version of this chapter will be published in *Women Against Napoleon: Historical and Fictional Responses*, eds. Waltraud Maierhofer and Gertrud Roesch with Caroline Bland (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007).

⁶ With its sole focus on art criticism centered around the Salons and as published in the periodical press, Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) works against this idea of the heterogeneity of nineteenth-century art criticism. A text which stresses the contributions of the *gens de lettres* is Anita Brookner, *The Genius of the Future: Diderot, Stendhal, Baudelaire, Zola, the Brothers Goncourt, Huysmans. Studies in French Art Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988).

that lie outside of art historical inquiry. The subject of Staël and the visual arts has garnered uneven interest. For example, early literary scholars took dismissive remarks regarding Staël's interest in art, as made by a few contemporaries, at face value.⁷ This encouraged a rather narrowminded vision of this writer's connection to art and aesthetics until the second half of the twentieth century. Geneviève Gennari's study of Staël's first trip to Italy has ushered in an era of more nuanced approaches to this woman author's writings on art. Although this treatment of Staël's engagement with art is flawed, this text, along with other recent studies, has certainly heightened awareness of the place of the arts in *Corinne*.⁸ The undisputed *doyenne* of Staël studies, Simone Balayé, has made significant contributions to our understanding of this author's engagement

⁷ Figures such as Karl Viktor von Bonstetten, who wrote that "she has no artistic sensibility at all," and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who wondered if Staël's trip to Italy sparked within her "a greater attraction for the arts" than previously held, were initially skeptical about her artistic interests. "Elle n'a point de sentiment artistique," (Bonstetten) and "Mme de Staël est en Italie, cette absence du sens de formes, qui était passionnée chez elle, se précisera-t-elle pendant ce séjour ou bien aura-t-elle à son retour une plus grande attirance pour les arts, c'est ce que le temps nous apprendra" (Goethe). Both of these quotes are given in Geneviève Gennari, *Le premier voyage de Madame de Staël en Italie et la genèse de Corinne* (Paris: Boivin, 1947) 163, and translated from German to French by that author.

⁸ For example, in the final summation of Staël's forays into painting, Gennari writes: "Trop femme pour considérer l'art sous un angle résolument objectif, elle ne remédie pas à cette inferiorité de nature par l'instinct tout puissant qui la guide, par exemple, en littérature. Goethe, qui déclare hautement ne pas être un spécialiste, et Chateaubriand, qui n'est pas extrêmement sensible aux beaux-arts, témoignent pourtant d'un goût plus sûr; et souvent leurs jugements rapides et pénétrants, écrits d'une plume alerte, révèlent une sensibilité de connoisseurs." Gennari 179. Also, see Jean Ménard, "Mme de Staël et la peinture," *Madame de Staël et l'Europe*, Proc. de colloque de Coppet, 18-24 juillet 1966 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970) 253-264; Laura Lepschy, "Madame de Staël's Views on Art in *Corinne*," *Studi francesi* 14 (1970): 481-89.

with art.⁹ Of late, considerations of the narrative purposes (such as plot and character development) served by art in this novel have generated a deepened interest in Staël's involvement with aesthetics.¹⁰ The work of these literary historians and critics is invaluable, and while I will take issue with some of their conclusions, my work on this subject is indebted to their scholarship.

Art mattered to Staël, and upon close examination, it becomes clear that it figured into this author's life and writings in many ways. Notations about art fill Staël's journals and notebooks from her Italian voyages, and we know that she carefully researched the sites and monuments of that country.¹¹ Aesthetic discourse and critiques of individual artworks abound in her texts. Although her true involvement with the visual arts is not clearly manifest in her fictional works until the publication of *Corinne*,

⁹ In 1966 Simone Balayé's fascinating exhibition introduced important visual elements into the discussion of the so-called "Coppet Circle." See her *Madame de Staël et l'Europe* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1966). See also Balayé's "Du sens romanesques de quelques œuvres d'art dans *Corinne*," *Littératures, mélanges offerts à M.A. Monchoux* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1979) 345-364.

¹⁰ See Margaret Cohen, "Melancholia, Mania, and the Reproduction of the Dead Father," *The Novel's Seductions: Staël's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999) 95-113; and Marie-Hélène Girard, "Corinne collectionneur, ou le musée imaginaire de Madame de Staël," *Art et littérature, actes du congrès de la société française de littérature générale et comparée, 24-25-26 septembre 1986, Aix-en-Provence* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1988) 241-61.

¹¹ See Germaine de Staël, *Les carnets de voyage de Madame de Staël*, ed. Simone Balayé (Geneva: Droz, 1971); and Enrico Bruschini and Alba Amoia, "Rome's Monuments and Artistic Treasures in Mme de Staël's *Corinne* (1807): Then and Now," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 22.3/4 (Spring-Summer 1994): 311-47.

her novel *Delphine* (1802) contains intimations of this budding interest.¹² An entire chapter is devoted to the fine arts in Staël's magisterial *De l'Allemagne* (1810), and in one of her last works, a little-known play called *Le Mannequin* (1811), she fashions the protagonist into a noble young German artist maltreated by the French. The latter work is certainly suggestive for the confluence of art and Germany in Staël's aesthetic vision, as well as of her desire to articulate the damage suffered under Napoleon's despotic rule of the Continent. Furthermore, we know that this author was personally acquainted with many artists, including Antonio Canova, François Gérard, and Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun.¹³ In her summative work, *Dix années d'exil* (1818), Staël mentions the importance of the visual arts repeatedly.¹⁴ Clearly, Staël was connected to the world of art.

¹² For example, at a crucial stage in the budding relationship of the two protagonists, Delphine and Léonce, Staël inserts a scene that features Pierre-Narcissus Guérin's *The Return of Marcus Sextus* (1799). Staël intimates the power of this painting over the viewer in *Delphine*, where she describes her protagonist's encounter with this showpiece: "And so I went to the Louvre this morning; but before I went to the studio of M. de Serbellane's portraitist, I stopped in the gallery where paintings are hung. One, just completed by a young artist, so struck me that the moment I saw it, my eyes were bathed in tears." Excerpted from Germaine de Staël, *Delphine*, trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1995) 118. For excellent discussions of this painting, see Stefan Germer, "In Search of a Beholder: On the Relation between Art, Audiences, and Social Spheres in Post-Thermidor France," *Art Bulletin* 74 (March 1992): 19-36; and James H. Rubin, "Oedipus, Antigone and Exiles in Post-Revolutionary Painting," *Art Quarterly* (Autumn 1973): 141-71.

¹³ In a study of the various paintings and drawings of Madame de Staël, Yvonne Bézard establishes the author's connections with a number of artists. See her *Madame de Staël d'après ses portraits* (Paris: Victor Attinger, 1938). Indeed, Vigée-Lebrun visited the author in Coppet, where she painted *Mme de Staël as Corinne* (1808), and Gérard would execute a portrait of Staël as Corinne in *Corinne at Cape Miseno* (1818) in the year after the author's death.

¹⁴ For example, in her *Dix années d'exil*, she states: "La jouissance des beaux-arts m'était aussi singulièrement nécessaire: la musique, la peinture, la poésie dramatique exerçaient depuis que j'étais née un tel empire sur moi que je me croyais dans le desert de l'âme en

The importance of Germaine de Staël (1766-1817) to early nineteenth-century thought is indisputable. An unusual upbringing, which included rigorous study, a strict moral education, and participation in salon life at a young age, worked to create this formidable writer. At age 22, she began a publishing career that included monumental works in literary criticism, as found in *De la littérature* (1800), cultural philosophy in texts like her *De l'Allemagne*, and political theory, such as her *Considérations sur les principaux événemens de la Révolution française* (1818). Intimidated by her intellectual abilities, vast social connections, and outspoken antipathy toward the First Consul and his policies, Napoleon exiled her from France after the appearance of her 1802 novel, *Delphine*.¹⁵ However, he proved ineffectual in silencing Staël, who continued to publish incendiary works such as *Corinne, ou l'Italie*.

n'entendant guère parler que des choses positives de la vie." Germaine de Staël, *Dix années d'exil*, eds. Simone Balayé and Mariella Vianello Bonifacio (Paris: Fayard, 1996) 337. In the second version of her manuscript for *Dix années d'exil*, she reduces her statement to a statement that she defied the order of exile so that she might see her friends and "occasionally go to the theater and the Museum." See Germaine de Staël, *Ten Years of Exile*, trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 2000) 69.

¹⁵ The animosity between Napoleon and Staël began soon after his ascension to power. The following excerpts from Gretchen Rous Besser's *Germaine de Staël Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1994) capture their acrimonious relationship: When Bonaparte dismissed the Tribunal in January 1802, she referred to him as an "ideophobe;" infuriated by this, Napoleon told his brothers to "warn that woman not to try to bar my way or I will smash her, I will crush her" (12). Staël continued to publish veiled attacks against the Emperor in places like her novels *Delphine* (he responded with a harsh condemnation of the work in the *Moniteur*) and *Corinne*, which assured that her exiled status would remain unchanged while he was in power. She returned briefly to Paris in 1814, and then again in 1816 (after Napoleon's deposition), but ill health necessitated that she return to Switzerland, where she died in 1817. In her book *Dix années d'exil*, she summed up her feeling for Napoleon, saying: "He came to exchange their [The French] tranquility, independence, language, laws, blood, and children for the misery and shame of being destroyed as nations and despised as men" (132).

The high praise given to Staël by various luminaries of nineteenth-century art and culture, including Eugène Delacroix and Augustin Saint-Beuve, is suggestive for the role she played therein. An 1824 entry in the diary of Delacroix records the profound impact of this writer's thoughts, where he writes: "I rightly recognize in Madame de Staël the development of my idea on painting."¹⁶ Indeed, in her *Corinne*, Staël anticipates the debates taken up by Delacroix and Théophile Gautier regarding the use of literary subjects in painting and the notion of art for art's sake.¹⁷ Saint-Beuve, one of the primary critics of the century, divided the Romantics into two camps—the descendants of Staël (the *Globistes*), who were concerned with the conception of an artwork and with its content, and the progeny of André de Chénier (the *Cénacle*), who were more interested in matters of form, style, and technique.¹⁸ Additionally, in the course of the nineteenth century, *Corinne* came to epitomize the female artist of genius for writers such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Margaret Fuller, Anna Jameson, Kate Chopin, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, to name a few, who used this heroine as a model for their own fictional characters.¹⁹

¹⁶ "Je retrouve justement dans Mme de Staël le développement de mon idée sur la peinture." Eugène Delacroix, *Journal de Eugène Delacroix*, ed. Paul Delacroix, vol. 1 (Paris: 1893) 59.

¹⁷ As noted in Gennari 171.

¹⁸ Marguerite Iknayan, *The Concave Mirror: From Imitation to Expression in French Esthetic Theory, 1800-1830* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1983) 168. Staël is discussed repeatedly in this text, thus further attesting to her place in early nineteenth-century French art criticism.

¹⁹ For discussions of the "Corinne effect" on nineteenth-century women, see Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Corinne Complex: Gender, Genius, and National Character," *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (New York: Manchester UP,

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Corinne, ou l'Italie, staged between 1794-1803, centers around the ill-fated romance between the handsome and sensitive Englishman Oswald, Lord Nelvil, who, while grieving over his father's recent death, is touring Italy; and Corinne, the most illustrious woman in Italy.²⁰ While in Rome, Oswald sees Corinne being honored as a woman of genius at the Capitol and he is immediately smitten with her, as she is with him. The two soon become lovers. Importantly, Corinne is endowed with extraordinary artistic abilities. In addition to her inimitable talents as an *improvatrice*, this character is also a superlative poet, actor, dancer, and painter.²¹ She also takes it upon herself to acquaint Oswald with the customs and culture of Italy, and so Corinne serves as an interlocutor—even educator—for the better part of the novel's first section. The climax of their excursions is reached in Book VIII, "Statues and Paintings," the section in which

1995) 89-106; and Moers, "Performing Heroinism," Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet, "Corinne and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning," *The Novel's Seductions: Staël's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999), 204-21; and Katherine Rodier, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Marble Faun*: Textual and Contextual Reflections of *Corinne*," *The Novel's Seductions*, 221-42.

²⁰ It is widely accepted that Staël envisioned herself as her heroine, Corinne, and that she used this character to voice her own positions on a variety of subjects, including issues of cultural patrimony and women's role in the public sphere. It often becomes impossible to separate the voice of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist in the novel. For a discussion of how Staël, her contemporaries, and recent scholars connected the author to her protagonist, see especially Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1978). Carla Peterson discusses how the narrator's voice frequently "replaces" Corinne's voice, thus engendering an ambivalence regarding voice. See Peterson, *The Determined Reader: Gender and Culture in the Novel from Napoleon to Victoria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986) 60.

²¹ For a discussion of the characterization of Corinne as genius, including her abilities to deliver poems, speeches, and such extemporaneously, see Claire L. Dehon, "Corinne: Une artiste heroine de roman," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 9 (1980-81): 1-9.

Corinne invites Oswald to accompany her on a tour of the art and architecture of Rome, a pivotal moment in both establishing the nature of the protagonists' relationship and revealing Staël's aesthetic agenda. Together, they will see the ancient statues and Renaissance masterpieces of the Vatican and other art sites, and even visit Canova's studio by torchlight. This excursion ends with the tour of Corinne's private gallery at Tivoli. It is at this point in the novel that Staël engages her reader in a sustained consideration on the status of contemporary art and aesthetics and shows her audience her heroine's expertise on such matters. The exegesis on art given while Corinne and Oswald tour this gallery stands as the defining moment in the expression of Staël's emerging aesthetic program, her desire to instruct her audience on art and culture, and her sincere belief in the regenerative powers of women, art and religion in the public sphere.

On the surface, the art discussions between Corinne and Oswald involve nothing more than a conversation on the merits of a handful of paintings, or what Staël deems a "pleasant stratagem" or "innocent ploy" intended merely as a diversion for her troubled lover.²² The insistence upon the insignificance of this activity may reveal Staël's anxiety of authorship; it may also be a strategy for preventing the subversive elements of her cultural criticism from garnering attention.²³ I also think we should consider how this

²² Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991) 141, which follows the authoritative edition *Corinne, ou l'Italie*, ed. Simone Balayé (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). All citations from this novel are taken from this English edition, unless otherwise noted.

²³ See the introduction, page 114, note 46 on the notion of a woman's "anxiety of authorship."

author recognizes the nature of her reading public, who may have needed to be drawn gently into the realms of “Art and Aesthetics” as conventionally defined. After the narrator remarks that Corinne’s words were “inconsequential,”²⁴ the heroine goes on to demonstrate a substantial knowledge of the arts, both ancient and modern, and an unparalleled ability to speak passionately about such subjects. Her protestations of inconsequentiality are belied by the eloquent prose and carefully crafted arguments regarding developments in the history of art and aesthetics presented in this novel.

Corinne and Oswald’s trip to the Vatican sets the stage for Staël’s incisive criticism of Napoleonic society, in which androcentric values dominate the cultural landscape. While wandering through the halls of the Vatican, they encounter sculptures from antiquity, including the *Laocoön*, *Niobe*, the *Medici Venus*, and the *Dying Gladiator*.²⁵ While considering these works, Corinne muses on the unapproachable perfection of the ancients. Here, Staël reveals her yearning for a return to this idyllic time, and yet makes it clear that she finds Napoleonic France inimical to the realization of a classical reorientation. The narrator explains:

In our modern day, society is so cold and oppressive that suffering is man’s noblest aspect, and any man who has not suffered has neither felt nor thought. But in earlier times, there was something nobler than pain;

²⁴ Staël, *Corinne* 153.

²⁵ Importantly, all of these works were on display in the Muséum central des arts in 1803; while it is possible that Staël saw several of these works in Paris prior to her exile in 1802, it is certain that the works this author viewed on her trip to Italy in 1804 were merely plaster casts created by Canova.

it was heroic equanimity, the sense of strength that could develop among unequivocally free institutions.²⁶

Thus, according to the author, contemporary institutions—the state and its enterprises under Napoleon—limit the freedom of the individual. The narrator continues in this vein, writing: “Encouragement, emulation: these were the principles of the arts as of politics; there was room for all virtues as for all talents.”²⁷ Staël implies that under Napoleon, there is not room for such laudatory qualities. Given the author’s combative relationship with the Emperor, who seemed intent on squelching Staël’s every ambition, the remark seems pointed.

Assuredly, Staël was interested in demeaning Napoleon’s actions in the art world. The chapter “Statues and Paintings” begins with a statement aimed at reminding her audience of Napoleon’s recent pillaging of Italian art, where it is declared: “The masterpieces of painting were collected in Rome *at the time*, and in this respect, she was vastly more wealthy than the rest of the world.”²⁸ Given that the novel is set in the mid-1790s, this was a true statement indeed; however, Napoleon’s armies had impoverished Italy of its art treasures by 1807, the year in which *Corinne* was published, and the works had become part of the Musée Napoleon (formerly the Musée central des arts from 1793-1803).²⁹ As with Juliane de Krüdener’s *Valérie*, this novel alludes to these widely

²⁶ Staël, *Corinne* 142.

²⁷ Staël, *Corinne* 143.

²⁸ Staël, *Corinne* 146. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ For discussions of the Musée Napoléon, see Cecil Gould, *Trophy of Conquest: The Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965); and Ferdinand

publicized acts and condemns them. We should recognize that the observations made in both novels regarding this blatant disregard for cultural patrimony constitute acts of criticism. Napoleon's unflagging efforts to dominate the landscape of European art clearly rankled the cultural intelligentsia, and although his trafficking in art had slowed considerably by the time Staël penned *Corinne*, it appears that this author felt it efficacious to remind readers of the Emperor's past transgressions. Staël's intent to expose the anemia of Napoleon's cultural program led her to reopen such issues in this novel.

Staël's approach of cloaking subversive notions under the guise of art criticism followed conventions established before the Revolution and maintained throughout the Napoleonic period. With a public well-accustomed to reading politicized art criticism, writers could condemn state-sponsored art in aesthetic terms, thereby covertly undermining Napoleonic policies.³⁰ This phenomenon also occurs in the literature penned by members of the Coppet circle (Staël and her entourage), where the debates over classical and Romantic models in literature masked an indictment of Napoleon's regime: in these writings, Neoclassicism is framed as a sterile vehicle for despotism,

Boyer, *Le monde des beaux-arts en Italie et la France de la Révolution et de l'Empire* (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1970).

³⁰ For the subversive uses of art criticism during this period, see Susan Siegfried, "The Politicization of Art Criticism in the Post-Revolutionary Press," *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Michael R. Orwicz (New York: Manchester UP, 1994) 9-28; and Bernadette Fort, "Voice of the Public: The Carnivalization of Salon Art in Pre-revolutionary Pamphlets," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (1989): 368-94.

whereas Romanticism is fashioned as a vital means of emancipation.³¹ Staël knew well the necessity of masking anti-Napoleonic critiques, for she was exiled in 1802 by the French leader and condemned to live outside of Paris for more than ten years afterward. Cultural criticism was perhaps the safest way to publicly protest against the current status of both French art and society.

Furthermore, like other women writers of the period (most notably, Juliane de Krüdener and Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis), Staël recognized that the novel genre was an effectual means of communicating one's positions on a variety of subjects. In writing *Corinne*, Staël tapped into women's ascendancy in fiction and the acknowledged potential of the novel for positing subversive ideologies.³² Staël's *Essai sur les fictions* (1795) voices her belief in the powers of the novel. In this essay, Staël suggests that the novel had three distinct advantages over historical works: 1) it reached into the lives of ordinary people and touched private sentiments outside of the realm of public affairs, 2) unlike history writing of her time, it permitted a close imitation of life that gave readers a sense of reality and a portrayal of intimate feelings, and 3) it could point to the morality of human events better than could the writing of history.³³ Hence, we see this author's commitment to instructing, edifying, and moving her readers, and that she found fiction best suited to these tasks. With *Corinne*, Staël uses the novel as a platform for articulating

³¹ See Susan Tenenbaum, "The Coppet Circle: Literary Criticism as Political Discourse," *History of Political Thought* 1.3 (Autumn, December 1980): 453-73.

³² For an amplification of how the novel genre relates to women's art criticism of this period, the reader is referred to chapter two of this dissertation.

³³ This essay is nicely summarized in Monroe Berger's introduction to *Madame de Staël on Politics, Literature, and National Character*, ed., trans., and intro. Monroe Berger (New York: Doubleday, 1964) 72.

her stances on myriad matters, including the philosophical, the political, and the aesthetic—realms that are collapsed and folded into one another throughout the novel, particularly when it comes to this author’s art critical activity.

The most pivotal act of this art criticism in Staël’s *Corinne* is undoubtedly the tour of the heroine’s private gallery in Tivoli. Filled with both original works of art and copies of modern masters’ work, this collection is carefully crafted not only to further Staël’s narrative goals within the novel, but also to enter into germane aesthetic discussions. In many ways, this section of the novel works as a kind of “permanent verbal museum.”³⁴ The selection process for the art works in this gallery was neither arbitrary nor facile. While I agree with Simone Balayé, who asserts that the primary motivation for the author’s choice of artworks had to do with the relationship between these objects and Staël’s aesthetic principles, I do not think Balayé explored the full implications of these selections. We need to emphasize that Staël found in art criticism the opportunity to undermine Napoleon’s cultural policies. Moreover, in this section, Staël essentially deems the Musée Napoléon, which was built on haphazard and coercive collecting strategies, as a false and even dangerous enterprise, and criticizes Napoleon’s art program, which constituted the consecration of secular history paintings by the modern French school. With her own thoughtfully composed gallery, which offered paintings by artists from various nations and time periods, Corinne offers a counter-

³⁴ Fort uses this phrase to describe the function of the art critiques published in the 1770s and 1780s and part of the *Mémoires secrets*. See Bernadette Fort, “The Visual Arts in a Critical Mirror,” *The Mémoires secrets and the Culture of Publicity in Eighteenth-Century France*, eds. Jeremy Popkin and Bernadette Fort (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998) 150.

institution to Napoleon's museum and an antidote to what she sees as the stultified nature of the contemporary French art scene. Furthermore, this narrative construct affords Staël the opportunity to offer her readers an alternative aesthetic and cultural paradigm—one that acknowledged the place for women in the constitution of society.

I maintain that Staël selected artworks for inclusion in *Corinne* with her French reading public in mind. Significantly, many of the key works discussed in this section were among the spoils of Napoleon's Italian conquest that were relocated to Paris at the turn of the century and were still on display in the Musée Napoléon when the novel was published in 1807.³⁵ First, the inclusion of these works should be viewed in light of Staël's desire to condemn Napoleon's plundering of Europe of its greatest art treasures. By referring specifically to these well-known paintings and sculptures, Staël encourages the specter of this cultural rape to haunt her readers' imaginations. Second, these works were currently available to many of her French reading public, and thus, given Staël's interest in enlightening others on matters such as art and aesthetics, it seems plausible that this author selected familiar and accessible works. Many of these works were reproduced in contemporary publications, and I want to raise the possibility that Staël looked to sources from both high and popular culture to assure the accessibility of her art conversations to her reading audience. For example, the majority of works featured in her gallery were also reproduced, with commentary, in the annals of the magisterial

³⁵ Given that Staël lived in Paris when the art booty from Napoleon's conquests was entering the city—and that she was considered one of the premiere cultural luminaries of the era, there is little doubt that this writer spent time in the halls of the Louvre viewing these works.

publication *Galérie du Musée Napoléon* (1804).³⁶ Perhaps even more interestingly, editions of the *Almanach des dames* that were published between 1804 and 1807 featured engravings of many of the artworks that Corinne “held” in her gallery.³⁷ For instance, two works included in Corinne’s fictive gallery, Pierre-Narcisse Guérin’s *Phaedra* (1802) and Dominichino’s *Communion of St. Jerome* (1614), were reproduced in the *Almanach des dames* of 1804, and another work included in the novel, Raphael’s *St. Cecilia* (1514), was reproduced in the 1807 edition. In this almanac for women, the calendar sections would include Italian Renaissance images of religious saints, as was typical of pre-Revolutionary almanacs, along with contemporary French art focusing on heroes from classical antiquity, an approach popularized during the Revolution.³⁸ The “blending” of old and new art in these almanacs was consonant with Staël’s own reconciliatory approach to aesthetics and culture—a feature of this author’s world view that will be elaborated upon later in this chapter. Whether or not Staël was aware of these sources is not especially important; rather, what is worth noting is that she selected works that had currency with her readers. This further evidences the didactic motivations of her art criticism.

Indeed, the form of Staël’s critiques in “Statues and Paintings,” which follows a dialogue format, reflects this author’s commitment to the dialectical task of educating the

³⁶ Joseph Lavallée, *Galérie du Musée Napoleon*, vols. 1-11 (Paris, 1804-1828).

³⁷ Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate several of the editions of the *Almanach des dames* printed before Staël’s *Corinne*: the 1805 and 1806 copies owned by the Bibliothèque nationale have been lost.

³⁸ See Lise Andries, “Almanacs: Revolutionizing a Traditional Genre,” *Revolution in Print: The Press in France 1775-1800*, eds. Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1989) 206-210.

public. The exchange between Corinne and Oswald in this section follows conventions in art-critical discourse that were established in the late eighteenth century and continued well into the nineteenth century. Denis Diderot frequently wrote in a conversational mode, as he espoused the notion that criticism should reflect the myriad issues and voices involved in the creation of the emerging public art sphere.³⁹ Salon pamphlets of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods abound in examples of the dialogue format.⁴⁰ This kind of conversational approach is also used in both Friedrich Schlegel's *Europa*, to which Staël referred in her notes in *Corinne*, as well as in the dialogue, "The Paintings," which was published in Friedrich and August Schlegel's *Athenaeum*. The novelist's stratagem of organizing her tour through the gallery as a debate exemplifies the recognition of the obligation of the art critic to educate the public on various issues associated with a particular topic or artwork.⁴¹ That the novelist wishes to instruct her readers is suggested in the note she provides within this section on the specific artists and artworks that figure into Corinne's gallery. She writes:

³⁹ Thomas Crow, introduction, *Diderot on Art: The Salon of 1767*, ed. and trans., John Goodman, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) xiii.

⁴⁰ One unstudied critique fashioned in this manner (and one that is particularly interesting for the insights it gives into women's place in the post-Revolutionary art world) is "A l'auteur du journal: Salon de 1796" and "Suite de l'entretien sur le Salon de 1796, entre un père et sa fille," *Journal general de France* 32 (2 brumaire, an 5/23 octobre 1796): 131-32; 35 (5 brumaire, an 5/26 octobre 1796): 143; 38 (8 brumaire, an 5/29 octobre 1796): 155-56; 41 (11 brumaire, an 5/1 novembre 1796): 166-67; 46 (16 brumaire, an 5/6 novembre 1796): 187-88; 47 (17 brumaire, an 5/7 novembre 1796): 191; 51 (21 brumaire, an 5/11 novembre 1796): 207; 54 (24 brumaire, an 5/14 novembre 1796): 218-19; 61 (1 frimaire, an 5/21 novembre 1796): 246-47.

⁴¹ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Boston: MIT P, 1996) 40-42.

The historical paintings that make up Corinne’s gallery are copies or originals of David’s *Brutus*, Drouet’s [sic] *Marius*, Gérard’s *Belisarius*. Among the other paintings cited, *Dido* is by M. Rehberg, the German artist; *Clorinda* is in the gallery in Florence; *Macbeth* is in the English collection of paintings for Shakespeare, and *Phaedra* is by Guérin; the two landscapes showing Cincinnatus and Ossian, done by the English artist M. Wallis, are in Rome.⁴²

By providing the reader with such concrete information, Staël shows her commitment to educating her readers on matters of art and perhaps even encouraging excursions to the galleries, museums, and sites that house this art. That art education was a reckonable aspect of her work is demonstrated in her *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française*, where she laments: “Ah! just sky! Of what do they think, these young people raised under Bonaparte’s regime—only of going into battle, without any instruction, any interest for literature and the fine arts?”⁴³

In keeping with this didactic aim, we can envision Staël’s imaginary gallery as a sort of laboratory for the examination of the central aesthetic issue in early nineteenth-century France: what was the current state of the nation’s art? This was a critical issue in

⁴² Staël, *Corinne* 428, note 11.

⁴³ “Eh! juste ciel! À quoi donc penseront-ils, ces jeunes gens élevés sous le régime de Bonaparte, seulement pour aller se battre, sans aucune instruction, sans aucun intérêt pour la littérature et les beaux-arts?” Germaine de Staël, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 14 (Bruxelles, 1830) 255.

the post-Revolutionary era, and one that lent itself to political readings.⁴⁴ Essentially, what emerges from the conversation between Corinne and Oswald is a declaration of the inability of contemporary, Neoclassical French painting, and the ideologies these promote, to engender true cultural progress. Instead, what Staël valorizes are Italian Renaissance religious paintings. The adoption and articulation of this position is a definite means of protest against the Napoleonic regime. In this section, Staël spurns imitative Neoclassicism, as promoted by Napoleon, as it is used to inculcate an ideology that places duty to the state above all others and reduces the freedom of the individual. In Napoleon's attempt to establish legitimacy and to reaffirm patriarchal ideals, he had appropriated the ancient Roman republic as a model for French society. His unabashed exploitation of art executed in the Neoclassical style in part explains Staël's disdain for the *école de David* that Napoleon so fervently supported.

In *Corinne*, Staël issues a resounding declamation of the modern French school. Corinne owns three examples from this genre: Jacques-Louis David's *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789), Jean-Germain Drouais's *Marius at Minturnae* (1786), and François Gérard's *Belisarius* (1795). Most definitely, we should not characterize their inclusion as an indication of approval of the style or subject matter exemplified in these works.⁴⁵ Indeed, I contend that Staël included these well-known

⁴⁴ See especially Alex Potts, "Political Attitudes and the Rise of Historicism in Art Theory," *Art History* 1 (June 1976): 191-215; and Siegfried, "The Politicization of Art Criticism."

⁴⁵ While Marie-Hélène Girard thinks it would be imprudent to deduce a complete embrace of the Davidian aesthetic based upon the contemporary French works Corinne discusses, she suggests that it does seem to suggest a predilection for it. I disagree.

works from the contemporary French school for pedagogical purposes: she intended to reveal to her reading audience the inadequacies of those paintings placed in the service of a corrupt regime. All three of these paintings deal with the subject of civic virtue, a key issue in Revolutionary and Napoleonic debates concerning the nature and role of the citizen in the new French state. That the vast majority of the historical works produced during this period were androcentric is abundantly evident.⁴⁶

David's *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons*, the first historical painting Corinne discusses, is perhaps the quintessential example of French Neoclassicism. Corinne owns a copy of this work, which was executed in Rome but exhibited in Paris in the Salon of 1789. This acclaimed painting, which represents the Roman leader Brutus and his family in the aftermath of his sons' executions (which he ordered), has been the object of numerous analyses, many of which comment on how it constructs gender ideology.⁴⁷ Indeed, such a work was readily identified with not only

Fundamental to Staël's enterprise is a critique of the regime that embraces this style, and the inclusion of these works is didactically motivated. See Girard 246.

⁴⁶ For scholarship detailing the androcentric nature of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century art, see Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995); Alex Potts, "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution," *History Workshop Journal* 30 (Autumn 1990): 1-21; Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001); Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "David's *Sabine Women*: Body, Gender and Republican Culture Under the Directory," *Art History* 14.3 (September 1991): 397-430; Erica Rand, "Depoliticizing Women: Female Agency, the French Revolution, and the Art of Boucher and David," *Genders* 7 (Spring 1990): 47-68; and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

⁴⁷ The following sources give excellent discussion of the gender implications of David's *Brutus*: Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992) 204-10; Norman Bryson,

the political issues of the day, but also with the valorization of the law of the fathers. The vocabulary used to describe the *Brutus* canvas in the 1789 Salon indicates that contemporary critics saw its gendered character as well; it was hailed as "male, severe, terrifying."⁴⁸ Staël recognizes the public/domestic dichotomy David has set up within the painting, noting that the stoicism of the Roman leader Brutus and the slaves who are carrying away his sons' bodies is in sharp contrast to "the other side of the painting, [where] the mothers and sisters give way to despair: fortunately, women are not bound to the courage that makes people sacrifice the affections of the heart. . . ."⁴⁹ In regards to Corinne's selection of this canvas, she explains, "I have chosen this subject because it recalls the most fearful act ever inspired by love for the land of one's fathers."⁵⁰ This comment illustrates Staël's antagonism toward a political system that relegates all personal feelings to public duty—a morality that Dorinda Outram characterizes as distinctly male.⁵¹ It is important to remember that images such as Brutus were used as

Tradition and Desire from David to Delacroix (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984); Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985); and Carol Duncan, "Fallen Fathers: Images of Authority in Pre-Revolutionary French Art," *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993) 27-56.

⁴⁸ As excerpted by Paul Mattick, Jr., "Beautiful and Sublime: 'Gender Totemism,'" *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, eds. Peggy Zeglin and Carolyn Korsmeyer (University Park: Penn State UP, 1995) 35. For Salon critiques of David's *Brutus*, see especially Robert L. Herbert, *David, Voltaire, Brutus, and the French Revolution: An Essay in Art and Politics* (New York: Viking P, 1973).

⁴⁹ Staël, *Corinne* 153.

⁵⁰ Staël, *Corinne* 154.

⁵¹ See Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class, and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 46-48.

political propaganda during the French Revolution and that Napoleonic art reflected similar sentiments regarding the sanctity of those male virtues of civic duty, as well as the marginalization of women in French society.⁵² Interestingly, Jean-Baptiste Boutard, an art critic who voiced his conservative politics through aesthetic discourse, said of the character Brutus in 1801: “We have well seen the misfortunes which will be viewed as heroic actions by our posterity. We have become more troubled, less enthusiastic than our fathers over the feats of past centuries.”⁵³ Staël shares in this concern over such characterizations of virtue.

Corinne also criticizes the subject matter of David's *Brutus* on the grounds of its incompatibility with meaningful visual representation. Her comment that “events drawn from history or poetry were rarely pictorial” clearly illustrates her position.⁵⁴ She finds the accessory details of the allegorical statue of Rome and the city off in the distance helpful, but she objects to the painting on the basis, “you could have seen it without guessing the subject. And that ambiguity is almost always found in historical paintings. Does it not mix the tension of a riddle with the pleasures of the arts which are meant to

⁵² Interestingly, in the first two drafts of *Corinne*, Staël did not include the *Brutus*, but instead referred to another painting, *Régulus disant adieu à sa famille*, which cannot be identified. See Balayé, “Du sens romanesque” 125. For a recent discussion of the Brutus motif in art of this period, see Denise Amy Baxter, “Two Brutuses: Violence, Virtue, and Politics in the Visual Culture of the French Revolution,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30.3 (Fall 2006): 51-77.

⁵³ “Nous avons bien vu de mauvaises qui seront de grandes actions aux yeux de la postérité. Nous sommes devenus plus difficiles, moins enthousiastes que ne l'étaient nos pères, pour les hauts-faits des siècles passés.” Jean-Baptiste Boutard, “Beaux-arts: Salon de l'an 9,” *Journal des débats* (27 fructidor, an 9/14 septembre 1801), as qtd. in Rubin 157.

⁵⁴ Staël, *Corinne* 146.

be so easy and so clear?”⁵⁵ As Thomas Crow points out, the belief that “painting, alone among all the arts, could and therefore should offer itself to immediate, instantaneous apprehension by any viewer whatever represents an idealization of what goes on in the public exhibition space . . . [is reiterated] over and over in the criticism and aesthetic theory of the period.”⁵⁶ Corinne’s condemnation of ambiguity—one that she views as inherent in history paintings in general and in this painting specifically—reflects Staël’s awareness of key principles in post-Revolutionary French aesthetics. It also displays this author’s courage to question the status quo in French art, for David was certainly the indisputable leader of the modern school of painting.

Corinne continues this line of thought in the second work she critiques, Jean-Germain Drouais’s *Marius at Minturnae*, a painting whose subject, although taken from Roman history, clearly resonates with Staël. Exiled for his political beliefs, Marius is forced to wander alone, an abject figure cast out by the society he had sought to defend his whole life. Drouais’s representation highlights how Marius was ultimately spared execution. As Balayé has noted, the parallels to both Staël’s current situation, and that of her father Jacques Necker, former Minister of Finance to Louis XVI, who was also exiled and never recompensed for his loss of status and property, are suggestive of why she selected this work for Corinne’s gallery.⁵⁷ This subject is taken from the later Roman Republican period, when, as Corinne emphasizes, “there were no longer any laws, but

⁵⁵ Staël, *Corinne* 153-54.

⁵⁶ Crow, “The *Oath of the Horatii* in 1785: Painting and Pre-Revolutionary Radicalism in France,” *Art History* 1.4 (December 1978): 450.

⁵⁷ This observation is made by Balayé in “Du sens romanesques” 126.

genius still held great influence over events. In the following period, talent and glory attracted nothing but insult and misfortune.⁵⁸ Using cultural criticism to mask political subversion, Staël suggests that the current imperial regime, which has followed a period of republicanism, also fails to reward genius such as hers.⁵⁹

The last historical painting that Corinne describes to Oswald is François Gérard's *Belisarius*, a work that underscores the heroine's contention that historical subjects are not the most conducive for pictorial representation. This figure from Roman history—yet another exile—was a popular topic in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French theatrical productions, texts, and artworks.⁶⁰ In this painting, the major success of the Salon of 1795 and one shown amid acclaim in the Salon of 1802 as well, the now blind Belisarius is carrying his poisoned guide. Corinne clearly admires Gérard's artistic abilities; she proclaims: “That face of Belisarius is splendid, and since the days of antiquity, scarcely any so beautiful have been done.”⁶¹ However, Corinne questions the

⁵⁸ Staël, *Corinne* 154.

⁵⁹ It also bears mentioning that the action in this painting, in which the compliance of the younger male to a type of paternal authority is figured, recalls Oswald's situation of subservience to the memory of his father and thus suggests yet another rationale for its inclusion.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the Belisarius theme in contemporary art, see Albert Boime, “Marmontel's *Bélisaire* and the Pre-Revolutionary Progressivism of David,” *Art History* 3.1 (March 1980): 81-101. Other discussions of this painting are in Crow, *Emulation*. It is worth noting that Pierre Peyron exhibited *Bélisaire recevant hospitalité d'un paysan qui avait servi sous lui* in the Salon of 1796.

⁶¹ Staël, *Corinne* 154. Staël was personally acquainted with the artist, whom she encountered during her first Italian journey at Vesuvius and visited in Paris in 1814-15. The possibility of the Vesuvius encounter is cited in Balayé's publication of Staël's *Carnets* 118-23. A note from 1814/15 from Staël to Gérard requesting a visit to the

efficacy of treating such subjects in painting, asking: “But who tells us that Belisarius is the subject? To bring that fact to the mind, must not the painter be faithful to history, and if he is, will his work be sufficiently faithful to the aesthetic of painting?”⁶²

According to Wrigley, critics of the period emphasized the “importance of selecting a subject genuinely appropriate to the resources of painting, and avoiding the imposition of subjects that might in themselves be stirring, but whose essential emphasis was not. . . in the realm of the visual.”⁶³ For Staël, paintings that are based on historical events are not easily recognizable and are thus not accessible to the viewer. If one of Staël’s purposes is to encourage a more active participation of the French reader in his or her culture, one can see why she demands this accessibility.

Corinne concludes her exegesis on these key works of the modern French school by reiterating the fundamental flaw of approaching historical subjects pictorially. Indeed, she thinks “the expressions of modern painters, generally speaking, are often theatrical”⁶⁴ and claims that “those who did not know how to portray character compensate with incidental embellishments, combining all the prestige of a splendid object with rich

artist’s studio is found in *Correspondance de François Gérard*, ed. Henri Gérard (Paris, 1867) 327. Gérard also executed portraits of several of the author’s family members.

⁶² Staël, *Corinne* 154.

⁶³ Wrigley, *Origins* 325.

⁶⁴ “[L]’expression des peintres modernes, en général, était souvent théâtrale,” See Balayé’s edition of *Corinne* 222. This is my translation—Goldberger’s translation that “modern painting is often theatrical” does not quite capture the essence of this critique, in my mind.

costumes and striking poses.”⁶⁵ Her remarks seem aimed at the modern-day followers of David, against whom such criticisms were levied.⁶⁶ Truly, the charge of theatricality was a serious one in early nineteenth-century France, where, as Michael Fried compellingly argues, the aesthetic of absorption—of completely losing oneself in the work and thereby losing sense of one’s position as a beholder—was so highly prized.⁶⁷ Apparently, by the late 1790s, David himself rued the theatrical nature of his earlier history paintings.⁶⁸

However, Corinne’s qualms with these secular history paintings clearly transcend the aesthetic and move into the political. She sums up these three paintings in derogatory terms, stating “. . . [I]n Brutus, these pictures show virtues that are the very image of the crime; in Marius, glory as the source of misfortune; in Belisarius, service

⁶⁵ Staël, *Corinne* 147.

⁶⁶ For example, David was reproached for the lack of authenticity of his representation of the tomb [sépulture] in *Brutus* in *Lettres analytiques, critiques et philosophiques sur les tableaux de Sallon* (Paris, 1791) 54-58.

⁶⁷ See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painter and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988), in which he characterizes the development of late eighteenth-century art and criticism as imbricated in these two issues. Toril Moi uses Fried’s conceit as a means of exploring other issues in her “A Woman’s Desire to Be Known: Expressivity and Silence in *Corinne*,” *Bucknell Review* 45.2 (2002): 143-75. Moi pictures the crowning of Corinne at the Capitol as one of “the 1780s masterpieces of David, which are usually said to inaugurate modern painting.” Moi continues, “The contrast between Greuze and David is repeated in the contrast between Lucile and Corinne. Corinne embodies an aesthetics of dramatic expressivity which was radically modern in 1807, and which also turned out to point to the future of Western painting” (154). Given the aspersions Staël casts on Davidian Neoclassicism in her “Statues and Paintings,” I doubt she would embrace such a comparison.

⁶⁸ This is presented in Michael Fried, “Thomas Couture and the Theatricalization of Action in 19th-Century French Painting,” *Artforum* 8.10 (1970): 41-42.

paid for by the foulest persecution—in a word, all the woes of human destiny with each recounted by history in its own way.”⁶⁹ Indeed, all three paintings highlight individuals who have, in one way or another, been victimized by the state. Staël’s discussion poses an important question: If art’s primary function is to inspire greater morality, as most contemporary critics contended, can the current French school of art encourage the nation’s true progress? It is on this issue that this debate ultimately turns. Toril Moi is right to point out that in *Corinne*, aesthetics and ethics are inextricably connected.⁷⁰ Clearly, Staël conceives of morality in terms of the personal responsibility to individuals rather than in terms of one’s duty to the state. Indeed, one of Corinne’s chief contentions against history painting is that it reflects and engenders a morality divorced of all compassion; in the works she critiques, one’s obligation to society supersedes all else.⁷¹ Staël’s analysis of these paintings, as voiced by her heroine, proposes that such an ideology is not only restrictive, but also ultimately unethical. When writing *Corinne*, Staël was firmly committed to the belief that art’s chief function is to encourage the moral development of society.⁷² It is significant that both protagonists in this novel believe in

⁶⁹ Staël, *Corinne* 154.

⁷⁰ See Moi 144.

⁷¹ For theoretical discussions on women and morality, see Nancy Chodorow, “The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender,” *Modern Feminisms*, ed. Maggie Humm (New York: Columbia UP, 1992) 277-83; and Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982).

⁷² In *De l’Allemagne*, Staël amends this position, writing: “In separating the beautiful from the useful, Kant clearly proves that it is not in the nature of the fine arts to give lessons. Undoubtedly, every thing that is beautiful ought to give birth to generous sentiments and these sentiments excite to virtue; but when the object is to put in proof of a precept of

art's obligation to uphold moral virtue—they just disagree on what constitutes this virtue, and what is the most promising means to achieve this end.

Ultimately, the heroine's eloquent expressions of aversion to history painting, and its championing of patriarchal ideals, demean the position taken by her lover Oswald, deride the practices of contemporary French painting, and deny the validity of androcentric values. In this exegesis, Staël exposes the shallow nature of the art that Napoleon promotes for his own selfish purposes.⁷³ By focusing on artists who were closely associated with Napoleon—David was knighted by Napoleon in 1803 and appointed First Painter by the Emperor in 1804; Gérard was appointed First Painter to the Empress Josephine in 1806—Staël boldly stakes a subversive position. As Jean Ménard points out, “In severely judging the history painting that was valued at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Corinne shows herself to be a bit of an innovator.”⁷⁴

morality, the free impression produced by masterpieces of art is necessarily destroyed; for the object aimed at, whatever it may be, when it is known, limits and confines the imagination. . . . [the fine arts] ought to elevate the soul, and not to indoctrinate it.” Madame the Baroness de Staël-Holstein, *Germany*, trans. O.W. Wight, vol. 3 (Boston, 1887) 207.

⁷³ In a memo to an administrator, Napoleon declared: “I want you to know that I intend to direct the arts particularly toward those subjects which will help to perpetuate the memory of the events of the past 15 years.” Letter from Napoleon to Pierre Daru, Intendant-General of the Imperial Household, qtd. in Lorenz Eitner, *Neoclassicism and Romanticism, 1750-1850. Sources and Documents*, vol. 2 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 15.

⁷⁴ “En jugéant sévèrement la peinture historique que l'on prisait tant au début du 19e siècle, Corinne se montre assez novatrice.” Ménard 258.

Alternative Visions

A key aspect of Staël's philosophy involves her vision of a pan-European community in which diverse cultural expressions are recognized as necessary and invigorating. In what could be construed as an anti-Napoleonic gesture, Staël promotes this ideal in Corinne's gallery in Tivoli by foregrounding art produced outside of Italy and France, the bastions of art. For example, Corinne displays a painting by contemporary German artist Friedrich Rehberg, *Aeneas Encountering Dido in the Underworld*,⁷⁵ and an "English" painting of Shakespeare's Macbeth.⁷⁶ Also presented in this gallery are two literary paintings by the Scotchman Georg Wallis, a historical landscape known as *Cincinnatus* and a representation of the Ossianic tale of Caïrbar

⁷⁵ This painting has never been located. Staël became acquainted with Rehberg (1758-1835) in Frankfurt in 1803, where she enjoyed several conversations on painting with the artist, who would also paint her portrait. In Staël's travel notebooks, she recorded her personal response to the *Aeneas*: "M. Rechtberg [sic] m'a montré un dessin, d'après un tableau de lui, qui représente Didon dans les Enfers refusant d'écouter Enée. Il se proposoit d'ajouter à l'effet de ce tableau en peignant Didon avec des couleurs légères, et couverte d'un voile, pour mieux examiner l'idée confuse et nuageuse que nous nous faisons des ombres. Il me semble que cela doit faire beaucoup d'effet. Je n'ai vu qu'en Angleterre des gravures et des tableaux qui représentoient des ombres, et il m'a semblé qu'on en recevoit toujours beaucoup d'impressions." Qtd. in Staël, *Carnets* 43.

⁷⁶ This work is variously attributed to Henry Fuseli or Joshua Reynolds; I believe that Staël may have had in mind the *Macbeth and the Witches* painting (1765) by Francesco Zuccarelli, R.A., a wildly popular artist in late eighteenth-century England. Interestingly, in the first draft of the novel, Staël included the painting *Le roi Lear portant Cordélia morte dans ses bras*, a work that may be the Fuseli's *Death of Cordelia*, which was shown in the famous Boydell Gallery in late eighteenth-century England. Of this painting, she wrote: "Quand la poésie se saisit des douleurs de la vieillesse, quand elles sont assez nobles pour que les beaux-arts les imitent, elles remuent l'âme d'une façon toute nouvelle; l'amour et la beauté répandent sur les souffrances de la jeunesse comme une rosée du ciel." Qtd. in Balayé, "De sens romanesques" 129.

sleeping on the tomb of his father.⁷⁷ The inclusion of these painters' works may be ascribed to their Northern European connections, as Staël was intent to illuminate these cultures to her French readers. Also, these serve as examples of paintings outside of the history genre and are thus conducive to the author's aesthetic enterprise of expansiveness.

Although Staël seeks to broaden the canon of art by means of her fictive gallery, she is critical of paintings based on literature. In the discussion of the Macbeth painting, Corinne wonders: "how much of the beauty of the poet's style has inevitably been forsaken! Ultimately, contrast, struggle, event, belong to the dramatic art. Sequence is not easily rendered in painting—a medium where neither time nor movement exists."⁷⁸ In this section, mention is also given to an anonymous painting drawn from Tasso's poem *Jerusalem Delivered*, in which the problems Corinne perceives with literary painting are exemplified. She remarks:

When painting is devoted to subjects treated by great poets, it is necessarily subordinated to poetry, for the impression left by the words obliterates everything, and the situations they have chosen almost always draw their greatest strength from the eloquent development of passion. Most pictorial effects, however, are born of serene beauty, simplicity of

⁷⁷ Both of these works are known today only through contemporary travelogues.

⁷⁸ Staël, *Corinne* 155-56.

expression, a noble attitude: in sum, a moment of repose worthy of enduring indefinitely, without the eye ever tiring of it.⁷⁹

Her statements regarding sequence in painting and the “serene beauty, simplicity of expression, a noble attitude” as most conducive to pictorial representation are clearly informed by Germanic aesthetic theory, particularly that of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johann Winckelmann.⁸⁰ The declarative statements on the above-mentioned issues not only demonstrate her acquaintance with contemporary concerns in art and aesthetics; they also serve as digestible words of instruction for her readers.

It is necessary to interject that Staël’s emphasis on philosophical rather than technical issues in her discussions of art in *Corinne* is typical of modern aesthetic discourse and reflects a consideration of her audience. We should remain mindful that in art criticism of this period, the use of vocational terminology and commentary on execution were definitely subordinated to the ability to write insightfully about the *vraisemblance* of the subject matter and to convey the emotional, intellectual, and moral meaning of a work of art.⁸¹ Furthermore, her conscious choice to discuss content rather

⁷⁹ Staël, *Corinne* 155. This painting, which Staël indicated was in the Uffizi, cannot be definitively identified. However, Girard proposes that this may be the *Baptism of Clorinda*, attributed to the school of Matteo Rosselli, which may have been on temporary display in Florence during Staël’s sojourn.

⁸⁰ We know that Staël owned a copy of Lessing’s *Laocöon*. We should not view the incorporation of these key components of late eighteenth-century Neoclassicism as problematic. Rather, Staël’s aesthetic position attempted to embrace both the Classicism and Romanticism, as argued later in this chapter.

⁸¹ Wrigley, *Origins* 275. This focus on the general appearance rather than the technical details was typical for critics during the Napoleonic era. As Martin Rosenberg points out, Joseph Lavallée, author of the ten-volume catalogue *Galerie du Napoléon*, emphasized

than form, and to focus her discussion on the more philosophical, rather than practical, aspects of art, was part of her overarching aims as a writer. Indeed, one of Staël's goals was to empower the viewer to reconstruct the object herself.⁸² Extensive detailing of such matters as color palette, application of paint, use of perspective and so forth could prevent the reader from this creative activity—and thus discourage the lay reader from engaging with the artwork under discussion.

Corinne also has several examples of landscapes in her gallery, which can be read as an indication of Staël's desire to heighten awareness of non-French developments in this genre in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe. In this section, the heroine discusses a painting by seventeenth-century landscapist Salvator Rosa in which the “absence of man in the midst of nature provokes deep reflection.”⁸³ Rosa captured the imaginations of the early Romantics, particularly in Germany and England, where

issues such as unity of time and propriety of subjects instead of formal concerns. See Martin Rosenberg, *Raphael and France: The Artist as Paradigm and Symbol* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1995) 151.

⁸² This is suggested in Marie-Claire Vallois's *Fictions féminines: Mme de Staël et les voix de la Sibylle* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1987), where she cites August Schlegel, who writes that the art descriptions in *Corinne* were not intended to “rendre une idée exacte” but that she wanted to recreate “l'essence des formes” (135). That said, it is important to keep in mind that Staël did posit Corinne as a highly esteemed artist, whose work figures throughout the novel; consequently, this renders Corinne's judgment more authoritative, as artists of the period were more receptive to criticism by their peers than by mere theoreticians. Corinne's own paintings play a role in the novel as well. Balayé notes that in the first two manuscripts of this novel, the protagonist Corinne paints a scene from Chateaubriand's *René* and includes this in her gallery. This painting, which was most likely modeled after an 1805 engraving by Le Barbier, is excluded in the final draft. See Balayé, “Du sens romanesques” 132.

⁸³ Staël, *Corinne* 157. I cannot locate a painting firmly attributed to Rosa that is without any human presence. For examples of Rosa's work, see Luigi Salerno, *Salvator Rosa* (Florence: G. Barbera, 1963).

young artists and writers saw in his work intimations of their interest in the expressive landscape. The Wallis landscapes also function as works that ennoble Northern European painting.⁸⁴ Significantly, in her travel notebooks, Staël characterizes the Wallis paintings as emblematic of two different cultures, and seeks ways to reconcile these entities via aesthetics. She writes:

Two paintings of Wallis that give the sensation of the South and of the North: Cincinnatus and, in Ossian, the man who sleeps three days and three nights on the grave of his father. The specter of his father who appears, the bard who arrives to celebrate the deaths, [the] color of the countryside during the night. There are in sum these two strains for man, the South and the North, the day and the night, Catholicism and paganism.⁸⁵

Here, we see how Staël compares and contrasts artworks created in diverse historical periods and cultures as a means of recognizing the differences within the European

⁸⁴ Writing in 1802, the German writer C. L. Fernow compared Wallis's landscapes to those of Salvator Rosa. See Klaus Graf v. Baudiffin, *Georg August Wallis: Maler aus Schottland, 1768-1847, auf Geitenpsaden der deutschen kunstgeschichte mit einem Gerzeichnis. Ossian in der bildenden Kunst* (Heidelberg: Verlag Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1924). *Cinnatus* is an example of *paysage historique* that represents an anecdote from Roman history. The other Wallis painting in Corinne's collection purportedly featured the Ossianic tale of Cäirbar sleeping on the tomb of his father, who has not yet received proper burial rites. As Margaret Cohen has argued, while the subject matter of Wallis's painting clearly relates to Oswald's own mourning of the recent loss of his father, it can also be tied to the execution of King Louis XVI and the sense of loss this engendered. See her "Melancholy" 107.

⁸⁵ "Deux tableaux de Wallis qui donnent la sensation du midi et du Nord: Cincinnatus et, dans l'Ossian, l'homme qui dort trois jours et trois nuits sur le tombeau de son père. L'ombre du père qui apparaît, le barde qui arrive pour célébrer les morts, couleur du paysage pendant la nuit. Il y a en tout ces deux cordes pour l'homme, le Midi et le Nord, le jour et la nuit, la catholicisme et la paganisme." Staël, *Carnets* 247.

community. She has placed these two paintings in Corinne's gallery as a means of articulating her desire to see the development of a more holistic European culture in which differences are recognized, celebrated, and then integrated so as to form a space conducive to the realization of individual potential. This philosophic position is one of the guiding principles in the conception and organization of Corinne's gallery.

Staël's criticism offers an alternative vision for art that will engender the recuperation of the post-Revolutionary France, and this involved the intersection between women, religion, and art. While she embraces art from diverse cultures and varying genres, she privileges Italian Renaissance religious paintings above all pictorial representations. Paintings that draw inspiration from religion evoke "pure ideas" and "emotion. . . [that] is never exhausted," Corinne tells us.⁸⁶ When we compare Staël's aesthetic ideas and critiques of history paintings to those she expounds in relation to religious paintings, it is evident that she prefers spiritual subjects in art because of their timelessness, their ability to evoke powerful emotions, and their non-exclusionary approach to women. In the course of her conversation with Oswald, Corinne makes a powerful case for the superiority of religious works of the Italian Renaissance—and those heralded by the German Romantics—to those history paintings currently in vogue in France. The author reminds us:

Ultimately, in Corinne's view, nothing could replace the benefit of religious painting for the soul. In her judgment, they suggested a holy enthusiasm in the artist, that, blending with genius, renews and quickens,

⁸⁶ Staël, *Corinne* 154 and 155, respectively.

and alone has the power to sustain genius in the face of life's discouragements and man's injustice.⁸⁷

Here Staël offers religious painting as a balm for the suffering individual, but surely we can read in this statement a solution to the social malaise that plagued early nineteenth-century France.

It becomes apparent that Staël sees religion as necessary to the health of the nation and as an enabling space for women. Corinne argues that it is “religion that has comforted the *ravaged* and *enslaved* universe, the religion that provided the depths of the heart with life *when everything outside was nothing but oppression and silence.*”⁸⁸ The terminology used is rich with meaning, as it participates in the rhetoric surrounding women's subjugation in androcentric societies. Later, in *De l'Allemagne*, Staël will more clearly state the connection between religion and women, when she writes:

Christianity has drawn women out of a state that resembled slavery. Equality, in the sight of God, being the basis of this wonderful religion, it has a tendency towards maintaining the equality of rights upon earth; divine justice, the only perfect justice, admits no kind of privilege, and, above all, refuses that of force.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Staël, *Corinne* 147.

⁸⁸ Staël, *Corinne* 154. Emphasis mine.

⁸⁹ “Le christianisme a tiré les femmes d’un état qui ressemblait à l’esclavage. L’égalité devant Dieu étant la base de cette admirable religion, elle tend à maintenir l’égalité des droits sur la terre; la justice divine, la seule parfaite, n’admet aucun genre de privilèges, et celui de la force moins qu’aucun autre.” Staël, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 11, 269.

Staël felt that it was only through Christianity that cultural union could be achieved, for it offered a moral code and a firm philosophy on which to base the laws of a free and productive society.⁹⁰ Significantly, she did not believe that she was introducing a new element into French society. The religious renaissance that Staël hoped to advance in such works as *Corinne* or *De l'Allemagne* was indigenous to her country. As Maurice Cranston points out, in Staël's writings, she tried to show

that she was not advocating anything foreign to France, but was simply appealing to an older tradition which the French had once shared with the Germanic nations, to a world the French had lost, the medieval world of Christianity. . . Romantic art, she pointed out, took its standards from that world, just as classical art took its standards from the ancient world. . . It was Classicism, she protested, which was the alien presence in a France that belonged to Christian Europe.⁹¹

Although Staël found in Romanticism a validation of her own agenda, she also had a strong conviction that it was her duty to encourage the progress of French culture and that this could be accomplished only by obedience to Christian codes. The aesthetics and art criticism in *Corinne* express that commitment to promulgating these values in popular literature.

It is significant that the specific paintings Staël lauds in the exchange between Corinne and Oswald are not those executed by French artists; rather, she champions

⁹⁰ Michael Polowetzsky, *A Bond Never Broken: The Relations between Napoleon and the Authors of France* (Toronto: Associated UP, 1993) 40.

⁹¹ Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (New York: Blackwell, 1994) 80.

those created by Italian masters, for in *Corinne*, Italy is associated with art, the female, and plenitude. It was here that Staël's heroine was allowed to explore her intellectual and artistic potential. In her last address, Corinne sings of the freedom she found in Italy:

You have allowed me glory: you, the liberal nation that does not banish women from its temple, you who do not sacrifice immortal talents to fleeting spite, you who always applaud the soaring flight of genius: that victor of the vanquished, that conqueror without the spoils, who draws on eternity to enrich the domain of time.⁹²

By heralding the works of Italian masters, the novelist declares the superiority of a nation that validates powerful women via art and their public presence (think of Corinne's coronation at the Capitol in Rome) over those that oppress women of genius. The allusion to Staël's exile at the hands of the tyrannical Napoleon surely was not lost on the readers of this novel. Additionally, this embrace of the spiritual in art was contrary to the state-sponsored cultural production in Napoleonic France. Although religion experienced a rebirth of sorts in France during the early years of Napoleon's reign, this did not carry over into art. Religious painting had been largely replaced by secular art in the Salons of late eighteenth-century France, and by the mid-1790s (the time frame for the novels under discussion), there was a noticeable decline in the production of sacred art.⁹³

⁹² Staël, *Corinne* 416.

⁹³ See Philip Conisbee, *Painting in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 108.

Staël especially admires the “artless composition of Raphael’s painting, particularly his early manner,” which she sees in his *Mass at Bolsena* (1512) and *Saint Cecilia* (1513-14).⁹⁴ According to Corinne, religious paintings do not need embellishments, rich costuming, and striking poses, as frequently relied upon in modern painting, for a

simple virgin holding her child in her arms, an attentive old man at the Mass of Bolsena. . .[and] Saint Cecilia looking up to heaven made a far deeper impression through the expression of their eyes and countenances alone. This natural beauty is revealed more fully with each day, but for ostentatious paintings, the first glance is always the most striking.⁹⁵

Here, the author refers to works by Raphael, whose reputation in France had waned during the Revolution. Under Napoleon, French critics such as Eméric-David, Lavallée, and Landon dutifully praised the Raphael paintings confiscated by Napoleon in terms of their Academic qualities; however, they tended to view Raphael through the lens of French aesthetics and the auspices of the Academy.⁹⁶ It was the German Romantics, such as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Friedrich Schlegel, who introduced the Romantic qualities of Raphael, and these were the aspects that drew Staël to his works. Perhaps this author felt the French embrace of Raphael an artificial one, as their version

⁹⁴ Staël, *Corinne* 147. Admittedly, the works Staël characterizes as “early” for Raphael are now deemed part of his late period.

⁹⁵ Staël, *Corinne* 147.

⁹⁶ Rosenberg 185.

of the artist had been polluted over several centuries, and that her readers needed to be re-educated on the merits of this painter.

Two of Corinne's most prized possessions are religious paintings "of the old school," which she characterizes as artworks that "soothe the depressed soul."⁹⁷ The first is a work by "Francesco Albani" (but probably Cristofano Allori) from the seventeenth-century Florentine school titled *Christ Sleeping on the Cross* (n.d.). The second work is Bartolomé Estaban Murillo's *Christ Carrying the Cross* (c. 1665-75), which was then attributed to Titian. Of the first painting, which stood in sharp contrast stylistically and thematically to contemporary French art, Corinne rhapsodizes: "See how meek the face is, how serene!"⁹⁸ The Murillo painting perhaps best exemplifies Staël's ideal of virtue. Commenting on Mary's reaction to seeing her son's suffering, as represented in this painting, Corinne exclaims:

How splendid a mother's respect for her son's misfortunes and heavenly virtues! What an expression there is on the face of Christ! What divine resignation and yet what suffering; and through that suffering, what compassion for the heart of man! Of all my paintings, this is surely the

⁹⁷ Staël, *Corinne* 154. Interestingly, this is the same descriptor ("the old school") used frequently by Friedrich Schlegel, whose essays on art have recently been published in French for the first time. See his *Descriptions de tableaux*, ed. Bénédicte Savoy (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 2001).

⁹⁸ Staël, *Corinne* 154.

most beautiful. It is the one my eyes always go back to, and yet the emotion it brings is never exhausted.⁹⁹

One cannot ignore the focus on Mary and the love she conveys for her son; contrast this to Brutus's condemnation of his sons to death. Mary's devotion is to her son, not to the Roman state that ordered his crucifixion, thus underscoring Staël's alternative views on virtue and morality. Analysis of Corinne's responses to various works suggests not just an aesthetics of sensibility, but one in which empathy, even pity, plays a primary function. Lori Jo Marso has suggested that it is through pity—through the ability to see the subjectivity of other individuals—that Staël creates an alternative politics in her post-Revolutionary writings.¹⁰⁰ And, as Karyna Szmurlo notes, the aesthetic experience always remained closely aligned to the religious experience for Staël.¹⁰¹ Staël's decision to include works outside of the contemporary framework was not born out of the author's inability to remain focused on one subject, as suggested by Gennari,¹⁰² but rather, was motivated by desires to create a more pan-European aesthetic that was rooted in liberalism and to assert the autonomy of the individual. For this woman writer, Italian Renaissance religious art offered superior abilities to achieve this goal.

⁹⁹ Staël, *Corinne* 154-55.

¹⁰⁰ See Lori Jo Marso, *(Un) Manly Citizens: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Germaine de Staël's Subversive Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999).

¹⁰¹ "L'expérience esthétique reste en relation étroite avec l'expérience religieuse La religiosité staëlienne, en raison de sa source et de son but définitif, est avant tout l'affirmation de la liberté et naît d'un mouvement spontané de coeur." Karyna Maria Szmurlo, "Le désir d'expansivité dans l'esthétique de Madame de Staël," diss. Rutgers U, 1981, 34.

¹⁰² Gennari 172.

The “Romantic” Aesthetics in *Corinne, or Italy*

Although Staël lauds the accomplishments of Italian Renaissance painters in her novel, the aesthetic that she is championing here is essentially Romantic, as defined by her German colleagues.¹⁰³ By privileging feeling and enthusiasm above all else, as she does in her discussion of these religious painters, she expresses the primacy of emotion in this nascent aesthetic. When Staël declares that the disagreements over artistic matters “had to do with differences in nations, climates, and religions,”¹⁰⁴ she introduces a relativism into aesthetic issues that was distinctly Romantic. Staël also embraces the notion of art as a vehicle for personal expression, which countered the classical privileging of imitation. An indication of her aesthetic predilections is the declaration, given by Corinne, that

it is impossible for us to create the way [the ancients] did, to invent ideas in what might be called their territory. They can be imitated by dint of study, but how could genius soar where memory and erudition are so vital! The situation is different for subjects belonging to our own history or to our own religions: painters can tap into their own personal inspiration, feeling what they paint, painting what they have seen.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Romanticism proper did not develop in France until some years after the publication of Staël’s *Corinne*. *Preromantisme* is the rather unhelpful descriptor for art, literature and philosophy of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France that manifests Romantic impulses.

¹⁰⁴ Staël, *Corinne* 146.

¹⁰⁵ Staël, *Corinne* 147.

As many scholars have noted, Staël's involvement with German Romanticism was invaluable to her education in aesthetics. Indeed, when planning her first trip to Italy, Staël would record that "the Germans pressed upon me that I [should], at all costs, keep alive their love for the fine arts."¹⁰⁶ Moreover, in the author's notes on the "Statues and Paintings" section in *Corinne*, Staël herself points to the significant influence exercised by modern German philosophy on the development of her aesthetic positions. Her acquaintance with the Schlegel brothers was extremely formative to her engagement with the visual arts. The repudiation of ancient art in favor of the works created by those modern masters of the Italian Renaissance (who were characterized as "Romantic") by Friedrich Schlegel, signaled a monumental shift in the direction of aesthetic theory at the turn of the century.¹⁰⁷ In her *Corinne*, Staël credits Friedrich Schlegel as germinal to her own thinking, remarking in a note that

[i]n a journal entitled *Europa*, remarks full of depth and wisdom can be found on subjects suitable for painting: I have drawn from it several of the reflections that have just been noted. Mr. Friedrich Schlegel is the author: what an inexhaustible mine this writer is! And the same is true of German thinkers in general.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ "[D]ont les Allemands me faisoient sentir tout le prix en m'entretenant de leur amour pour les beaux-arts." Staël, *Carnets* 59.

¹⁰⁷ Trips to Paris in 1802-1805 enabled Friedrich Schlegel to study the masterpieces of fifteenth and sixteenth-century European painting held captive by Napoleon, and with the publication of his five essays titled "Descriptions of paintings" in the periodical *Europa* from 1803-05, Schlegel introduced progressive thinkers such as Staël to this aesthetic.

¹⁰⁸ Staël, *Corinne* 428, note 8.

Additionally, Staël's close relationship with Friedrich's brother, August, certainly impacted her burgeoning interest in the visual arts. August Schlegel accompanied Staël to Italy in 1804, serving as a tour guide and tutor to her children, and remained her constant companion (with only brief interruptions) for the rest of her life.¹⁰⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling's aesthetics certainly exercised some influence on her own thought: Corinne's declaration that sculpture was the art of the ancients and painting the art of the moderns—and the perfect vehicle for Christian religious subjects—matches the beliefs of this German philosopher, with whom she had been well-acquainted while in exile in Germany.¹¹⁰

I maintain that there is an extremely important—and overlooked—Germanic source in the conception of Corinne as an art critic, and in particular in the section of the novel, "Statues and Paintings." This is the art conversation titled "Paintings" published in the *Athenaeum*, the short-lived but highly influential periodical produced by the Schlegels.¹¹¹ There are striking similarities between the two pieces. In the summer of

¹⁰⁹ Literature specific to the relationship between Mme de Staël and the Schlegels includes George Solovieff, "Mme de Staël, les Schlegels et les beaux-arts en Allemagne," *Studi francesi* 29.1 (1985): 28-43; and George Solovieff, "Mme de Staël et August Wilhelm Schlegel: Nature complémentaires et/ou antinomiques?," *Cahiers staëliens* 37 (avril 1986): 97-110. Solovieff points out that the philosophical positions of these two figures frequently diverged.

¹¹⁰ For discussions of the connections between Staël and Schelling, see Jean Gibelin, *L'esthétique de Schelling et l'Allemagne de Mme de Staël* (Paris: Champion, 1934); and Margaret H. Higonnet, "Madame de Staël and Schelling," *Comparative Literature* 38 (Spring 1986): 159-80.

¹¹¹ We know that Staël owned a copy of the anthologized *Athenaeum, eine Zeitschrift*, and it is surmised that this was a gift from Schlegel himself. Staël's copy of *Athenaeum* was shown in the 1966 exhibition, *Madame de Staël et l'Europe*. Mme Jean de Pange believes

1798, the Schlegels, Schelling, Novalis and others gathered in Dresden, and spent many hours in the galleries conversing about the fine arts. Out of this conference came the dialogue, “The Paintings,” written jointly by A.W. and Caroline Schlegel and published in 1799.¹¹² In this piece, the fictional characters Waller and Louise (who are later joined by the artist Reinhold) converse on the very same aesthetic issues, and in the very same format, as found in Staël’s *Corinne*. Like *Corinne*, it is Louise who dictates the direction of the conversation, and offers the most significant observations on art. Many of the same artists are discussed; both the Schlegels’ “The Paintings” and Staël’s “Statues and Paintings” highlight the work of Salvator Rosa, for example. Moreover, these two characters embrace similar positions on the social function of art: Louise declares that “community and social exchange are the essential thing” in art—a position adopted by *Corinne* and absolutely consonant with Staël’s own aesthetic views.¹¹³ Similarities abound, and are deserving of extended analysis that exceeds the limits of this dissertation.

Of particular interest is how Staël found in contemporary German aesthetic theories a paradigm sympathetic to women, and particularly to their participation in the

that Staël had not read the *Athenaeum* prior to 1803, when August Schlegel accompanied her from Germany to Coppet; Schlegel most likely made a present of these volumes. See Comtesse Jean de Pange, *Auguste-Guillaume Schlegel et Madame de Staël* (Paris: Albert, 1938) 72.

¹¹² Caroline collaborated with her husband on several articles, and in this later writings, he acknowledged “the help of a witty woman whose ambition was not focused on that.” Qtd. in Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Theory* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993) 40.

¹¹³ “. . . Gemeinschaft unde gesellige Wechselbërhrung ist die hauptsache.” August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel, “Die Gemälde,” *Athenaeum Einr Zeitschrift* (Berlin: Bei Henrich Frölich, 1799). I would like to thank Lore Schultheiss for her assistance with the translation of this document.

arts. In a letter to her mother, Staël had confided that in Germany, “they sense a thousandfold more what I may be worth,”¹¹⁴ and that in this country, they “consulted their women as oracles . . . [and] looked to women’s impressions as their moral compass.”¹¹⁵ In her *De l’Allemagne*, Staël notes how German women were well-acquainted with the language of poetry and fine arts.¹¹⁶ Indeed, August Schlegel’s sister, Charlotte Ernst, and his wife, Caroline, were active participants in aesthetic debates at the turn of the century.¹¹⁷ German art novels (*Malerroman*), such as Friedrich Schlegel’s novel *Lucinde* (1799), which features a woman artist endowed with greater artistic powers than her lover Julius, emphasized the viability of women in the aesthetic sphere.¹¹⁸ Later in this chapter, we will see how Staël fashions a space for the artistic woman that builds, at least in part, upon this perceived empathy for women in German culture.

¹¹⁴ “[O]n y sent un million de fois plus ce que je puis valoir.” Georges Solovieff, ed., Letter 201, *Madame de Staël, ses amis, ses correspondants: Choix de lettres, 1778-1817* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970) 250.

¹¹⁵ Qtd. in Susen Tenenbaum, “Liberating Exchanges: Mme de Staël and the Uses of Comparison,” *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. Catherine Montfort (Birmingham: U of Alabama P, 1994) 227.

¹¹⁶ “[L]a langue de la poésie et des beaux-arts leur est connue.” Staël, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 10, 38.

¹¹⁷ Reportedly, it was Caroline who encouraged August Schlegel to read begin reading French literature, including the works of the young Madame de Staël. See Pange 69-70.

¹¹⁸ This heroine, significantly, appears to have been inspired by both Caroline Schlegel (Auguste’s wife) and Dorothea Veit (who would later marry Friedrich Schlegel), women who were intimately involved in the birth of German Romantic aesthetics. The similar role that Corinne assumes as both artist and erudite critic in Staël’s novel deserves consideration. Pange notes that an original edition of *Lucinde* exists in the family library, and that undoubtedly, the author himself presented Staël with this novel. See Pange 71, note 1.

Staël's aesthetics, as developed in her novel *Corinne*, are also informed by contemporary French theory and practice. Certainly, Staël was influenced by the ideas of Denis Diderot, who had frequented the brilliant *salon* of Staël's mother, Suzanne Necker, in the 1760s and 1770s, and who had purportedly submitted his Salon critiques to his hostess before publication.¹¹⁹ The young Germaine's participation in these evenings is well-documented, and thus, although his famous Salon critiques were available only to a limited number of subscribers in the eighteenth century, her close familiarity with Diderot's theories is almost certain. Key aspects of Diderot's aesthetic philosophy were the importance of morality in art and the ability of art to transform society.¹²⁰ This, as discussed earlier, is a major component to Staël's philosophy of art. Like Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (and to a lesser extent, Juliane de Krüdener), she believes ardently that the ultimate end of art is to inspire virtue.¹²¹ Furthermore, Staël also shares Diderot's predilection for what would later be deemed Romantic. Although he remained a defender of the classical tradition, in many ways, Diderot anticipated the theories of

¹¹⁹ Michael Fried cites a letter written in 1794 from Mme Necker to Grimm, in which she writes: "I am enchanted by his *Salons*. I had never seen in painting anything but flat and lifeless colors. His imagination has given them depth and life for me. It is almost a new sense that I owe to his genius." Qtd. in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* 231, note 60.

¹²⁰ Francis X. J. Coleman, *The Aesthetic Thought of the French Enlightenment* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1971) 133.

¹²¹ "Virtue" was one of the most contested terms in Revolutionary France, and I use this term advisely, recognizing its myriad definitions. While Genlis and Krüdener's idea of virtue is replete with traditional religious morality, I daresay Staël's conception of this term would emphasize the individual's agency.

expressivity in Romanticism.¹²² In sum, Staël's positions on art show remarkable congruity with those of Diderot, and we would do well to consider the connections between the aesthetics of the two.

Undoubtedly, Staël drew from the rich source of German Romanticism and contemporary French aesthetics in creating her own position on matters related to art; however, Staël was no mere imitator.¹²³ Analysis of the aesthetic discourse in *Corinne* displays the author's ability to assimilate these various ideas and then reformulate them in a way that resonated with her general holistic philosophy. In regards to Staël's connection to the German Romantics, I concur with Gutwirth's conclusion that this author's interactions with these men "gave her the impulse to reassess and select anew from among the views she already held; it had the effect of making her harden and deepen her thinking."¹²⁴ This is also true of her engagement with other European philosophers and critics. The novel *Corinne* indicates how Staël was developing an aesthetic program that was unique to her perspective and position. One of Staël's crowning achievements was her ability to think independently and then to popularize her ideas. It has been argued persuasively that this author's *De l'Allemagne* declared her the

¹²² In his *Essai sur la peinture* (1766), Diderot writes: "The arts of imitation need something wild, primitive, striking, monstrous. . . First of all move me, surprise me, rend my heart; make me tremble, weep, shudder, outrage me; delight my ideas after if you can." Qtd. in Brookner 21.

¹²³ As Margaret Higonnet argues, "a study of [Staël's] sources shows that she deliberately transcribed, transformed, and then elided her. . . materials. . . ." See Higonnet 162-3.

¹²⁴ Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist* 155.

progenitor of European Romanticism—a construct that transcended national boundaries and interests.¹²⁵

A central enterprise of Staël's *œuvre*, which concerned the eradication of boundaries that confined the individual, is reiterated in the aesthetics and art criticism in *Corinne, ou l'Italie*. As the title indicates, this text is about both Corinne and Italy, about the personal and social. Moreover, this novel is not just a romance, but also reads as a history. This text is at once a novel and a travelogue, fiction and non-fiction.¹²⁶ The blending of forms in the text speaks of the author's desire for a discourse that is not binary in nature.¹²⁷ Moreover, by emphasizing Corinne's dual heritage, as her father was

¹²⁵ See John Clairborne Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism: Truth and Propaganda in Staël's De l'Allemagne, 1810-1813* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994).

¹²⁶ Staël's discourse on art in *Corinne* is also inflected by the popular travelogues of the period. One such source is the guidebook penned by Abbé Antonio Guattani, who served as a tour guide to Staël while in Rome. She is known to have scrawled notes in the margin of her copy of Guattani's *Roma descritta ed illustrata* (1805). See Staël, *Carnets*, note 205. His *Memorie enciclopediche romane sulle belle arti* (Rome, 1806), although published after Staël's visit to Rome, is useful in understanding the nature of their excursions. Her experiences with art in Italy were probably influenced by Joseph-Jérôme le Français de Lalande's *Voyage en Italie*, a popular travel guide used by Staël. See Joseph-Jérôme le Français de Lalande, *Voyage en Italie, contenant l'histoire et les anecdotes les plus singulières de l'Italie, et sa description; les usages, le gouvernement, le commerce, la littérature, les arts, l'histoire naturelle, et les antiquités; avec des jugemens sur les ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et architecture, et les plans de toutes les grands villes d'Italie*, 2nd edition (Paris, 1786). This guidebook was originally published anonymously in 1769, and went through several editions. Observations on art in a travelogue penned by Charles-Marguerite-Jean-Baptiste-Mercier Dupaty, a dear friend of Staël's father, Jacques Necker, appear to have informed *Corinne* as well. See Charles-Marguerite-Jean-Baptiste-Mercier Dupaty, *Lettres sur l'Italie en 1785*, 2nd edition (Paris, 1792). For a discussion of the influence of Dupaty's art descriptions on those in *Corinne*, see Carlo Pellegrini, *Madame de Staël et il gruppo di Coppelletti*, 2nd edition (Bologna: Pàtron, 1974) 57-63.

¹²⁷ For examples of the ways in which Staël sought to transcend stultifying categories, see English Showalter, "Corinne as Autonomous Heroine," *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the*

English and her mother from Italy, Staël attempts to merge the patriarchal and the maternal (as the spaces of these countries are imagined) in order to allow for a richer subjectivity. One of the key aspects of her aesthetic was a valorization of oscillation and fluidity between poles of thought, beyond traditional parameters.¹²⁸

What critics have failed to recognize in *Corinne* is that the author's conciliatory approach in philosophy and literature is articulated in her discussions on art as well. Thus, the ambiguities and even contradictions within Staël's aesthetics should be viewed as pointing to an expansiveness and even complexity of thought. In the most recent scholarship on the function of art in Staël's *Corinne*, Marie-Hélène Girard writes:

The taste of Corinne, one sees, is impure. This mélange of Neoclassical architecture, half-formed mannerism and pre-Romanticism threatens to derail the twentieth-century reader; it is also ready to admit this host of historical subjects, religious compositions, of "dramatic paintings" and landscapes arranged before all in a manner that presents to us the mirror of a personality.¹²⁹

While Girard is right to point out that Staël's approach to art is personality driven, she

Borders, eds. Madelyn Gutwirth, Avriel H. Goldberger, and Karyna Szmurlo (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991) 188-92; Jennifer Birkett, "Speech in Action: Language, Society, and Subject in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7.4 (July 1995): 393-408.

¹²⁸ See Karyna Maria Szmurlo, "Le désir d'expansivité."

¹²⁹ "Le gout de Corinne, on le voit, est impur. Ce mélange d'archéologie néo-classique, de parti pris maniériste et de préromantisme avoué a de quoi dérouter le lecteur de 20ème siècle, meme s'il est prêt à admettre que cette suite de sujets historiques, de compositions religieuses, de 'tableaux dramatiques' et de paysages est disposée avant tout de manière à nous presenter le miroir d'une personnalité." Girard 248-49.

does not explore the possibility that the pastiche of art objects in *Corinne* emblemizes a considered aesthetic program. Careful examination of this novel demonstrates that rather than subscribing wholeheartedly to either a Neoclassical or Romantic paradigm, Staël considers their merits and invites the reader to do the same.¹³⁰ This author, along with other German Romantics, found something very appealing about the Italian Renaissance artists who attempted “to fuse the Romantic spirit and classical form in most beautiful harmony.”¹³¹ In fact, I would argue that Staël did not object to Classicism per se, but to its appropriation by Napoleon. What this writer found offensive was *Neoclassicism* as it was mobilized in post-Revolutionary France. Indeed, Staël’s aesthetic discourse in *Corinne* seems to indicate an advocacy of the genuine classical ideals adopted by Italian Renaissance artists and then transformed under the lens of Catholicism.

In the end, it becomes impossible—and ultimately meaningless—to declare Staël’s aesthetics as categorically “Neoclassical” or “Romantic,” or to assign individual characters in *Corinne* to concrete positions within these camps. Rather than declare

¹³⁰ I do not agree with Lepschy’s assertion that “[a]lthough she claims that religious subjects are more pictorial than historical or literary ones her actual descriptions of the pictures often belie the theories she is putting forward, and the impression that emerges from her discussion on art in *Corinne* is that the Neoclassical world strongly appealed to her taste although intellectually she was siding with the Romantics.” Her condemnation of history paintings is strong, and there is a noted strain of anti-Neoclassicism in the discourse. I hope I have demonstrated that Staël’s aesthetics were an amalgam of various theories on the arts in early nineteenth-century Europe. See Lepschy 481.

¹³¹ This characterization was given by Friedrich Schegel in his discussion of Italian Renaissance writers in *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park: Penn State UP, 1968) 101.

Corinne “incapable of a synthetic vision and an objective judgment,”¹³² we must do away with easy categories, and thus allow the richness of this author’s approach to art to come forward.¹³³ That Staël herself embraced plurality is indicated in her statement: “Art should not regress but combine, if possible, the diverse qualities which the human mind has developed in different periods.”¹³⁴

The Powers of Women in/of Art: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic

One of the most notable aspects of Staël’s art criticism is how it promoted art that was liberating to the individual, and subsequently undermined post-Revolutionary gender ideology, as it was defined under the misogynistic Napoleon. Corinne expounds upon her belief in the reconciliation of the sexes by means of discussing ancient sculpture while guiding Oswald through the Vatican. Here, Corinne argues that in order to achieve perfection, “to raise beauty to the sublime, [these artists from antiquity] combined in their statues of men and women—in the warrior Minerva and the Apollo Musagetes—the charm of the two sexes: strength with gentleness, gentleness with strength, a felicitous blending of two opposite qualities, each of which would be

¹³² “[I]ncapable d’une vision synthétique et d’un jugement objectif.” Gennari 177.

¹³³ Artist Eugène Delacroix once responded to the declaration that he was the quintessential Romantic by saying “Je suis pur classique.” Staël’s belief that Romanticism was a manifestation of the classical spirit illuminates Delacroix’s statement. I contend that more attention ought to be placed on the influence that Staël exerted upon Delacroix (see footnote 16).

¹³⁴ “Il ne s’agit pas de faire reculer l’art, mais de réunir autant qu’on le peut les qualités diverses développées dans l’esprit humain à différentes époques.” Staël, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 11, 100. This translation follows that given in Besser 100.

imperfect in isolation.”¹³⁵ The advocacy of the merging of the sexes counters the strident rhetoric surrounding the separation of the roles and spheres of men and women that was promoted by Napoleon’s retinue. It is consonant, however, with contemporary German Romantic philosophy, and particularly with its aesthetics. It should be noted that Johann Winckelmann expressed this conception of perfection in Greek sculpture in his *History of Ancient Art* (1764), which had been translated into French and published in Paris in 1790 amid much acclaim. The unification of the sexes was also a fundamental aspect of the German Romanticism; as Ute Frevert argues, their “notion of femininity . . . sought to moderate, if not completely neutralize, the polarity of sexual characteristics and press ‘the perfection of masculinity and femininity into humanity as a whole’ (Friedrich Schlegel).”¹³⁶ Consequently, we can see how the author of *Corinne* formulated her discussion of ancient sculpture as a means to advocate the eradication of binary thinking, a principle that was a cornerstone to Staëlian philosophy.

A component of this dismantling of gender ideology relates to the place of esteem Staël accords women as subjects and critics of art. In *Corinne*, Staël holds up representations of women in historical artworks, thus countering the virulent androcentrism of Napoleonic history painting. Moreover, she fashions her heroine as the undisputable authority on art in this novel. Corinne’s expertise as art connoisseur

¹³⁵ Staël, *Corinne* 143.

¹³⁶ Ute Frevert, *Women in German History from Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1989) 58. Another expression of this holistic vision is found in Friedrich Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1793-95), where he yearns for “the absolute, unchangeable unity of being.” For a discussion of how this belief translated into the valorization of the androgyne, see Sara Friedrichsmeyer, *The Androgyne in Early German Romanticism: Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and the Metaphysics of Love* (New York: Peter Lang, 1983).

and critic is highlighted dramatically as she guides Oswald through her personal gallery of paintings. Furthermore, in this formative stage for institutions such as the museum and art criticism, Staël's creation of an imaginary collection—owned and explicated by Corinne, the female spectator *par excellence*—empowers the female viewer in significant ways. Although cloaked within a fictive framework and enmeshed within narrative strands of travel, romance, and leisure, the conversations on art, which are dominated by Corinne, take up issues central to the fields of aesthetics and art criticism. These art discussions also exemplify how a woman writer could do battle with words, for they offer a harsh condemnation of Emperor Napoleon.

In terms of subject matter, the valorization of holy women in art, as articulated in Staël's *Corinne*, stands in sharp contrast to the ennobling of male civic leaders in Napoleonic art, and thus serves as a gesture of defiance to the Emperor's notorious chauvinism. Her travel books testify to Staël's fascination with various manifestations of spiritually powerful women. While in Italy, Staël became quite attracted to the Cult of the Virgin, seeing it as "united in some way to all that is purest and most affecting in our affection for women."¹³⁷ Marianism certainly enjoyed a resurgence in popularity during the nineteenth century, a phenomenon which some have perceived as a reassertion of the female principle in religion and even society.¹³⁸ Corinne's many references to paintings of the Madonna attest to this attraction. In addition, Staël elevates the figure

¹³⁷ As qtd. in Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël* 245.

¹³⁸ Barbara Corrado Pope, "Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century." *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, eds. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanen, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston: Beacon, 1985) 173-200.

of the sibyl, who was a priestess publicly worshipped in pre-Hellenic times. In this novel, the author holds up both the Virgin Mary and the sibyl as viable models for women.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Near the end of *Corinne*, Staël draws a comparison between two paintings, Domenichino's *Sibyl* (1616-17) and Correggio's *Madonna della Scala* (1524), which depict spiritually powerful women and her two female characters, Corinne and Lucile, Corinne's half sister. Such a move seems to emphasize her contention that the religious realm grants a meaningful space for women. Significantly, each painting represents a unique aspect of the spiritual world in which Corinne and Lucile partake. Staël's use of this contrast effectively demonstrates that although the nature of this realm is multifaceted, this arena provides a space for meaning and authenticity for both women. Correggio's *Madonna della Scala*, which shows Mary holding Christ as a child, mirrors Lucile's type of spiritual power:

When the curtain covering it was drawn, Lucile took Juliette in her arms to help her see the painting better, and by chance, at that moment, the aspect of the mother and child was almost the same as that of the Virgin and her son. Lucile's face had so much of the ideal modesty and grace Correggio painted that Oswald turned his gaze back and forth from the fresco to Lucile and from Lucile to the fresco. Aware of it, Lucile lowered her eyes, and the resemblance grew more striking still, for Correggio is perhaps the only painter who knows how to give lowered eyes as searching an expression as if they were raised toward heaven. (Staël, *Corinne* 397-98).

Here, the downcast eyes of the Madonna contrast the upward gaze of the Sibyl—or even Raphael's *St. Cecilia*, for that matter—and thematize the issues of vision that are so central to the novel. See Michel Delon, "Corinne ou l'école du regard," *Op.Cit.: Littératures française et comparée* 13 (1999): 153-59.

This work is contrasted with Domenichino's *Sibyl* (1616-17), who clearly embodies Corinne's spiritual powers. The differences between these women are made apparent in the conversation held by Oswald and his wife, Lucile, in the final pages of the novel:

Lucile noticed the interest stimulated by this painting, and seeing that he had drifted far away as he gazed at it, she dared approach at last, timidly asking if Domenichino's Sibyl spoke more to his heart than Correggio's Madonna. Oswald understood Lucile. Suddenly he was astonished by her meaningful remark and looked at her for some time without answering. Then he said: 'The Sibyl no longer gives oracles; her genius, her talent are all finished now. But Correggio's angelic face has lost none of its charm, and the unhappy man who hurt the one so badly will never betray the other.' (Staël, *Corinne* 400).

Importantly, Corinne's abilities were often compared to those of a sibyl. Like these ancient priestesses, Corinne was associated with divine inspiration, oral forms of communication, and the ability to interpret the past and to prophesy the future.¹⁴⁰ Our first glimpse of this character reveals a woman "dressed like Domenichino's Sibyl" who seemed "a priestess of Apollo."¹⁴¹ We know that Domenichino's celebrated painting did indeed inspire Staël.¹⁴² Throughout the novel, this painting is used to symbolize Corinne and her spiritual abilities. This sibyl is surrounded by musical instruments and is engaged in writing—Corinne's mastery of music and literature is emphasized in the novel—and hence, the parallels to Corinne are abundantly clear. Staël's interest in the sibyl is a sustained one. Delphine, the heroine in Staël's first novel, is connected to the oracle of Delphi through her name; Corinne is modeled after the Erythraean Sibyl, who supposedly brought the Sibylline books of prophecy to Italy.¹⁴³ In appropriating the sibyl to represent the inspired woman of genius, Staël was building upon a tradition in France, initiated by the seventeenth-century *précieuses*.¹⁴⁴ The *précieuses*, it must be remarked, were

¹⁴⁰ For discussions of these sybilline connections, see Vallois's *Fictions féminines*.

¹⁴¹ Staël, *Corinne* 21.

¹⁴² Balayé, "Du sens romanesques" 184. For a discussion of Staël's engagement with the two versions of this painting, see Simone Balayé and Esther Renfrew, "Madame de Staël et la Sibylle du Dominiquin," *Cahiers staëliens* (janvier 1964): 34-36. It is also possible that Staël saw Vigée-Lebrun's famous painting *Emma Hamilton as Sibyl* when it was shown in the Salon of 1798 or in Vienna, where the two became well acquainted; this work may have inflected her own creation of Corinne as inspired prophetess.

¹⁴³ This is pointed out by Vallois.

¹⁴⁴ Helen Borowitz makes a strong case for the connection between Staël's work and the *précieuse* movement in her "The Unconfessed *Précieuse*: Madame de Staël's Debt to

identified with the ascendancy of women in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, and were therefore highly suspect in the patriarchal orders of the Revolution and Napoleon. And, as noted by Marie-Claire Vallois, Staël's decision to compare Corinne with such women was an act of provocation in Napoleonic France, for it was Roman gods and patriarchs who were praised in this society and not their female counterparts.¹⁴⁵

By endowing Corinne with the divine powers of a sibyl, Staël sanctifies the figure of the woman art critic. In *Corinne*, the protagonist is the interlocutor charged with transmitting not only Italian, but also English and German cultural values to her European audience. However, unlike the Virgin Mary, who is the bearer of the Word, Corinne is certainly not a mere receptacle or carrier of meaning, but rather, functions as an active participant in the making of that meaning.¹⁴⁶ Thus characterized as a priestess of art, Corinne becomes the quintessential woman of art who not only emblemizes the potent relationship between religion and aesthetics, but also suggests that women are privy to inspiration in their role as art critic.

Of significance is that the sibyl's powers are intimately connected with oral communication rather than the written word, just as Corinne's abilities as an art critic are made manifest through conversation and presentation rather than a penned exegesis. Corinne's preference for oral modes of expression reflects a reliance on both the

Mademoiselle de Scudéry," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 11.1-2 (Fall/Winter 1982-83): 32-59.

¹⁴⁵ Vallois 83.

¹⁴⁶ For a discussion of how women are often characterized in this way, see Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986).

Homeric tradition as well as the emphasis on such modes in the emerging Romanticism.¹⁴⁷ They also suggest a desire to maintain the *précieuse* and salon traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as these valorized the art of speaking and carved out a significant space for women in the public sphere.¹⁴⁸ The primacy given to speech over writing in *Corinne* is noteworthy: improvisations, lectures, conversations abound throughout the text, and can be linked to the feminist value of immediacy over the patriarchal value of mediation, as privileged in forms of written communication.¹⁴⁹ Nancy K. Miller thrills to the suggestion that Staël's valorization of voice's originary power, as a "living source engendering a female model of authority," undermines Derridean privileging of the written word.¹⁵⁰ The fact that Staël's aesthetic views are expressed in a conversational mode, and thus framed in terms of the oral tradition, is highly suggestive of this author's search for a feminine poetics on art.

In Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, she surmises that there is a "purer" source for language than the symbolic, and that this is found in the aesthetic realm. She writes: "the arts are superior to thought: their language is color, forms, or sounds. If we could form an

¹⁴⁷ Peterson 47.

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of these traditions, see Carolyn Lougee, *La paradis des femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976) and Borowitz.

¹⁴⁹ See Ellen Peel, "Corinne's Shift to Patriarchal Mediation: Rebirth or Regression?" *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders* 102-03. Another article by Peel continues in this vein: "He Reads, She Speaks: How Narrative Form Conveys Conflicting Values in *Corinne, or Italy*," *Reader* 40 (Fall 1998): 28-51.

¹⁵⁰ Nancy K. Miller, "Politics, Feminism, and Patriarchy: Rereading *Corinne*," *Germaine de Staël: Crossing the Borders* 197.

imagination of the expressions of which our souls would be susceptible without the knowledge of words, we should have a more just idea of the effect to be produced by painting and music.”¹⁵¹ This notion of Staël’s shares affinities with Julia Kristeva’s concept of the pre-Oedipal, mother-centered language, wherein the subject draws from *le sémiotique* in order to participate more meaningfully in the symbolic.¹⁵² As Kristeva argues, it is with oral forms of communication that the individual can come closest to reunion with the mother’s body, the site where authentic language originates, and hence participate in the plenitude abounding there. In this novel, a search for authentic female voice appears to be one of Staël’s primary concerns.¹⁵³

Furthermore, Staël emphatically declares Corinne the expert in matters of art *vis-à-vis* Oswald, who, as a highly educated man of noble birth, would typically be accorded this position. This is a significant intervention on the part of this woman writer in that it boldly interrupts the androcentric hegemony in the practice of art criticism. In general, Staël renders her heroine’s lover speechless before the inspired critic, Corinne. Indeed, Oswald meets most of Corinne’s ideas with silence and sighs rather than with arguments; in the gallery, she “paused from time to time, hoping he would speak. But not one word

¹⁵¹ “[L]es arts sont au-dessus de la pensée: leur langage, ce sont les couleurs, ou les formes, ou les sons, serait susceptible, avant qu’elle connût la parole, on concevrait mieux l’effet de la peinture et de la musique.” Staël, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 11, 113.

¹⁵² For further elaboration on Kristeva’s ideas, see *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia UP, 1986); and her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980).

¹⁵³ For discussions on the topic of female authorial voice in *Corinne*, see Doris Kadish, “Allegorizing Women: *Corinne* and *The Last Man*,” *Politicizing Gender* 15-36; Joan DeJean, “Staël’s *Corinne*: The Novel’s Other Dilemma,” *Stanford French Review* 11 (Spring 1987): 77-88; and Vallois, *Fictions féminines*.

betrayed the secret of his wounded soul, except that which each sensitive idea she expressed, he would sigh and turn his head away. . . .”¹⁵⁴ Staël excuses his inarticulateness in aesthetic matters, which, earlier in the text, she had explained as a byproduct of his residing in stifling patriarchal societies: “Having lived only in France where society is all-important, and in London where political concerns absorb almost all others, he did not yet delight in the wonders of nature nor great works of art.”¹⁵⁵ Hence, Staël finds yet another means of attacking those nations that did not, in her opinion, cultivate a genuine interest in or connection to art and aesthetics.

Another remarkable aspect to Staël’s creation of Corinne as the woman art critic *par excellence* is, as Nancy K. Miller argues, that this figure takes her place in the public sphere as an active subject rather than as an object of the gaze. Throughout the novel, Staël fashions Corinne as “the producing *subject* of a gaze” rather than its object; subsequently, this novel “engages the possibility of an authoritative vision within femininity that refuses the legitimacy of a permanent patriarchal construction.”¹⁵⁶ Because Oswald cannot imagine another economy of spectatorship, he leaves Corinne, and both suffer for his narrow-mindedness. Ultimately, Oswald marries Corinne’s half-sister Lucile, the model of feminine propriety as patriarchally defined, and this abandonment leaves Corinne so bereft that her creative powers dwindle and she dies for love.

¹⁵⁴ Staël, *Corinne* 156.

¹⁵⁵ Staël, *Corinne* 17.

¹⁵⁶ See Nancy K. Miller, “Performances of the Gaze: Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy*,” *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 165.

I have argued that art is central to the development of Staël's narrative throughout the novel, and this is especially true in the final pages of *Corinne*, where the author emphatically promotes the powers of art. In fact, a surprisingly understudied aspect of the novel's ending is the use of portraiture. Three portraits are introduced in the final pages of *Corinne*. The first two are pendants: one of Corinne at the height of her artistic powers and romantic happiness, and the other a recently painted portrait of the heroine. Staël describes Oswald's experience before these paintings:

First, he saw the portrait of Corinne just as she had looked in the first act of *Romeo and Juliet* on that day of days when he had felt most swept away by her. All of her features were animated with an air of confidence and assurance. . . . [the other was] Corinne as she had insisted on being painted that very year in a black dress adapted from the garb she had worn ever since her return from England. . . . But what struck him most of all was the unimaginable change in Corinne's face. She was there before him pale as death, her eyes half closed, her long eyelids veiling her gaze and casting a shadow over colorless cheeks. Across the bottom of the portrait was written this life from *The Faithful Shepherd*: 'Scarcely can one say: she was a rose.'¹⁵⁷

These artworks serve as concrete and permanent reminders of how Oswald's betrayal of Corinne, motivated by his allegiance to a patriarchal society's dictates, destroyed his lover. While Staël was drawing upon a longstanding tradition of using portraiture in the

¹⁵⁷ Staël, *Corinne* 404-05.

novel to further plot and character, Staël's employment of this device is particularly pointed. I think it deserves to be noted that Corinne used art to communicate to Oswald his transgressions against her as a woman artist of genius. With these objects, she ensured that her personal and professional martyrdom would remain vivid in perpetuity. Staël again returns to art in the deathbed scene, where she uses the portrait as a symbol of the freeing of Corinne from the shackles of her tragic love. Here, Corinne commands the priest to take Oswald's portrait from her, and "lay on my heart the image of the One who came down to earth, not for power, not for genius, but for suffering and death. . ."¹⁵⁸ Thus, Corinne dismisses her unworthy earthly lover and takes Christ as her bridegroom. As the reader puts down the book, she is left with the image of this extraordinary woman of holding fast to her heart a token of her calling as a priestess of art. In the end, art is sanctified and romantic love rendered insignificant.

The implications of this novel's ending have generated much scholarly discussion, with some arguing that Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* underscores the impossibility for women to reconcile love and genius, and with others noting that the shallowness of Oswald's soul is so exposed that he is proved unequal to Corinne's affection—and that she is able to get revenge by teaching his wife and daughter her artful ways and thus find a way to torment his tortured soul with her memory forevermore.¹⁵⁹ The fact that

¹⁵⁸ Staël, *Corinne* 418-19.

¹⁵⁹ For discussions of the novel's ending as it pertains to women's desires, see Armine Kotin Mortimer, "Male and Female Plots in Staël's *Corinne*," *Correspondances: Studies in Literature, History, and the Arts in 19th-Century France* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992): 149-55; and Deborah Heller, "Tragedy, Sisterhood, and Revenge in *Corinne*," *Papers on Language*

Corinne could not find complete happiness begs the question of this heroine's place as a role model for her readers. Without a doubt, Corinne was an extraordinary woman (fashioned after Staël, who was the most exceptional woman of her time) and I believe that her readers acknowledged this; I also think that the demands of the Romantic novel were such that no compelling heroine was allowed to live happily—if at all. The possibilities of a woman possessing artistic talents, finding opportunities to cultivate her abilities, and then achieving public status as an artist (and patron, viewer, and critic) were so intoxicatingly expressed in the course of Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* that surely it offered encouragement to readers as to the potential for women's successes in the arts. To be sure, Staël presents the difficulties that might confront the artistic woman who dares to challenge societal dictates—but she also offers a tantalizing avenue for a woman's exploration of self and accomplishment within the spheres of art.

In considering the expanding opportunities for women of all classes to exhibit their work, to have access to major art collections, and to publish their responses to these works, this novel capitalizes on larger cultural trends that facilitated women's increasing presence in the art world. Staël's *Corinne* not only asserts the presence of women in this realm, but also advocates women's active engagement in these conversations on aesthetics and demonstrates the possibility for their meaningful contributions to this field. We should recognize the significant work performed by Staël in fashioning this gallery, an experimental space in which issues—aesthetic, political, and

and Literature 26.2 (Spring 1990): 212-32; and especially Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, Novelist*, which offers the most extensive and nuanced treatment of this question.

cultural—are entertained with erudition and enthusiasm. The art discussions in *Corinne* demonstrate this author’s engagement with contemporary French and German aesthetic theory while simultaneously proposing the consideration of innovative approaches to matters of art. This includes the advocacy of a pan-Europeanism in art and recognition of genres of art outside of history painting. Staël also privileges Italian religious art, and particularly those works that feature holy women, in her aesthetic program. This philosophy is motivated by her desire to assert the individual’s autonomy through the eradication of boundaries and limitations that work against this freedom. To that end, Staël deployed cultural criticism in *Corinne, ou l’Italie*. This novel offers a strong critique of the art Napoleon commissioned and of the artificial, stultified, and misogynistic culture this promulgated, and thus declares the Emperor incapable of engendering the regeneration of France in the aftermath of the Revolution. Staël gives earnest directives to her readers on what would effect that change.

Could women occupy a reckonable place in the landscape of post-Revolutionary French art criticism? Staël’s *Corinne, ou l’Italie* demonstrates how a woman writer could interject her disruptive ideologies into the public imaginary by means of cultural criticism. Indeed, the author used these seemingly innocuous conversations on art as a diversionary tactic, which was meant to disarm the censors but ultimately to disable the cultural regime of Napoleon. One of the subversive aspects of Staël’s aesthetics and art criticism is certainly the creation of a woman art critic whose expertise and ebullience offered a viable, even seductive, alternative to the drone of male voices that reverberated throughout art criticism of this period. If one concurs with Frederic Jameson’s conclusion that “the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an

ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to irresolvable social contradictions,"¹⁶⁰ it necessarily follows that the treatment of the woman art critic within this novel contributed in some fashion to the discourse surrounding the women's entrance into this male-dominated field. In this wildly popular novel, the possibilities for the nineteenth-century woman art critic are given abundant expression in the figure of Corinne.

¹⁶⁰ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 79. See also Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Autumn 1980): 8-9.

EPILOGUE

This dissertation does not exhaust the subject of woman-authored art criticism in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century France. In addition to the pieces published in pamphlets, journals, newspapers, novels, and other venues discussed in earlier chapters, women also conducted conversations on art in forms such as the memoir, as well as in private correspondence and diaries not intended for publication. Such critiques constitute important instances of women entering into the fields of aesthetics and art criticism and negotiating a place within the discursive framework of Revolutionary and Napoleonic French culture. However, given that these art writings were not intended for publication, or, as in the case of the memoir, not published until after 1815, these texts stand outside of the scope of this dissertation. In this epilogue, I want to point to a few examples of these acts as a means of demonstrating the vitality of art discussions within these venues.

Memoirs penned by women such as Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun or Sophie de Bawr—both notable figures in the cultural landscape of this period—indicate another aspect of women's involvement in art criticism. For example, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's *Souvenirs* (1835-37) not only provides readers with a fascinating perspective on European culture during this period (exiled during the Revolution, she traveled throughout Europe painting the portraits of various nobility), but it also gives observations on individual artists and artworks, and illuminates contemporary issues and practices, including the marketing of art, developments in portraiture, and the position of a woman artist at this

time. Therefore, Vigée-Lebrun's memoirs should be viewed as an art-critical text.¹ Although this work is most often read "merely" as autobiography rather than as a commentary on developments in the European art world, Vigée-Lebrun's *Souvenirs* functions as an important gesture of art criticism and ought to be approached as such.² Another instance of such activity is found in Alexandrine Sophie Goury de Champgrand, baronne de Bawr's *Souvenirs* (1853). Bawr was an important figure in Napoleonic culture; indeed, she was involved in myriad musical and literary projects (including the editing of Vigée-Lebrun's memoirs, interestingly).³ In her memoirs, Bawr provides portraits of artists like Vigée-Lebrun, whose talent "was placed among the first rank painters who preceded the school of David,"⁴ and Pierre-Narcisse Guérin, who purportedly offered to Bawr the following commentary regarding the school of David:

¹ I refer readers to the English translation of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's *Souvenirs: The Memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Member of the Royal Academy of Paris, Rouen, Saint-Luke of Rome, Parma, Bologna, Saint-Petersburg, Berlin, Geneva, and Avignon*, trans. Siân Evans (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989).

² For analyses of Vigée-Lebrun's *Souvenirs*, see Servanne Woodward, "Les *Souvenirs* de Vigée-Lebrun," *Dalhousie French Studies* 47 (1999): 75-85; Margot Irvine, "Problèmes de genre(s): le récit de vocation et le récit de voyage au féminin dans les *Souvenirs* d'Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun," *Itinéraires du 19e siècle (en hommage à Joseph Sable)*, eds. Paul Perron, Roland Le Huénen, and Stéphane Vachon (Toronto: Centre d'études romantiques Joseph Sable, 1996) 75-86; and Jean Owens Schaeffer, "The *Souvenirs* of Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun: The Self-Imaging of the Artist and the Woman," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 4 (1980): 35-49.

³ For an overview of Sophie Bawr's life and work, see Jacqueline Letzter and Robert Adelson, *Women Writing Opera: Creativity and Controversy in the Age of the French Revolution* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2001).

⁴ Alexandrine Sophie Goury de Champgrand, baronne de Bawr, *Mes souvenirs* (Paris, 1853) 64.

Girodet . . . draws marvelously, his color is good, but he carries further than the others the defect of the school [of David]—this is the painting of the statue. The drawing and color of Gérard are not beyond reproach, but are sufficient because he weds them with exquisite taste. Gros is the truest *painter* of them, in the true meaning of the word; he possesses the grandiosity of art.⁵

Such observations further nuance our understanding of the art scene of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. A survey of the numerous woman-authored autobiographies and memoirs of these eras attests to women’s interest in the visual arts.⁶ These should be mined for insights they give into this arena, for they offer vantage points of the Other (here defined as woman, working class, and/or non-French) that have remained underprivileged in the scholarship devoted to nineteenth-century art criticism.⁷ Such texts indicate that art held some interest for a number of women, for their memoirs are

⁵ “Girodet . . . dessine à merveille; sa couleur est bonne; mais il porte plus loin que les autres le défaut de l’école, celui de peindre la statue. Le dessin et la couleur de Gérard ne sont point irréprochables, mais ils suffisent, parce qu’il y joint un goût exquis. Gros est plus *peintre* qu’eux, dans la véritable acception du mot; il a le grandiose de l’art.” Bawr 222-23.

⁶ Another woman-authored text of this period that contains art criticism is *Mémoires de Madame de Chastenay, 1771-1815*, intro. Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret (1896; Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1987).

⁷ A helpful bibliography for researching this subject is Jean Tulard’s *Nouvelle bibliographie critique des mémoires sur l’époque napoléonienne écrits ou traduits en français* (Geneva: Droz, 1991). Some of these memoirs were penned by servants of the Bonapartes or employee-associates of the nobility, thus offering unique perspectives in terms of both gender and class.

filled with accounts of visits to the Louvre or with stories detailing their associations with various artists.

Stéphanie-Félicité, la comtesse de Genlis's *Mémoires* contain myriad references to art and artists and weigh in on aesthetic issues as well. Indeed, the art discussions in these memoirs are far more candid than those found in the "art novels" discussed in this dissertation. For example, in an anecdote related in her *Mémoires*, she candidly assesses a newly acquired statue of Venus at the Louvre:

Much was said, at this time, of an ancient marble Venus that M. de Rivière brought from Greece and placed in the superb Louvre museum. Horace Vernet urged me to go see it, telling me that it was admirable and more beautiful than the Medici Venus. Everyone was saying the same thing. Lord Bristol came to take me one morning to see this marvel, which he had already contemplated and of which he was enthusiastic. Thus I saw this statue; but, to my great astonishment, *I found it ugly*; she had the eyes of a villain, and a villainous nose which was not at all Greek, a disagreeable mouth, a dreadful throat; her head and neck were stretched forward and indicating well enough the movement of someone who looks with curiosity on something that she wants to discover; she had no arms, her head and the rest of her body were conserved well enough, [but] she had such little beauty, in my opinion, that I could not believe this to be an ideal figure; I imagine that this was only a portrait from antiquity. Here is my opinion on this figure that created such clamor; I

am deceived, perhaps, but I can only see and judge what is before my own eyes.⁸

Genlis then vindicates her assessment by footnoting this remark, in which she writes: “Today I think that this judgment was sound, since no foreigner asks to see this statue which has fallen into a profound oblivion.”⁹ In her analysis of Bernini’s *St. Teresa*, she does not adopt the position of many commentators on this work, who voice concern over its erotic undertones; instead, her critique quibbles about the treatment of the saint’s clothing. She comments: “This is the statue of St. Teresa, wounded by the genius of divine love. The face of the saint has the most touching and sublime expression, but

⁸ “On parlait beaucoup, dans ce moment, de la Vénus antique en marbre que M. de Rivière venoit de rapporter de la Grèce, et qui est placée au superbe Musée du Louvre. Horace Vernet me pressa de l’aller voir, en me disant qu’elle étoit admirable et plus belle que la Vénus de Médicis. Tout le monde s’accordoit à dire la même chose. Lord Bristol vint me prendre un matin pour me mener voir cette merveille, qu’il avoit déjà contemplée, et dont il étoit enthousiasmé. Je vis donc cette statue; mais, à mon grand étonnement, *je la trouvai laide*; elle a de vilains yeux, un vilain nez, qui n’est point du tout grec, une bouche désagréable, une gorge affreuse; sa tête et son cou sont allongés en avant et indiquent assez bien le mouvement d’une personne qui regarde avec curiosité quelque chose qu’elle veut découvrir; elle n’a point de bras, sa tête et tout le reste du corps sont assez bien conservés, elle a si peu de beauté, à mon avis, que je ne crois pas que ce soit une figure idéale: j’imagine que ce n’est qu’un portrait antique. Voilà mon opinion sur cette figure qui faisoit tant de bruit; je me trompe peut-être, mais je ne puis voir et juger que d’après mes propres yeux.” Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de Madame la comtesse de Genlis, sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution française, depuis 1756 jusqu’à nos jours*, vol. 7 (Paris, 1825) 185-86.

⁹ “Je pense aujourd’hui que ce jugement étoit bon, puisque nul étranger ne demande à voir cette statue qui est tombée dans un profond oubli.” Genlis, author’s note, *Mémoires inédits*, vol. 7, 186.

its drapery is unworthy—it is much too full of little folds.”¹⁰ Although generally subscribing to conservative outlooks on aesthetic matters, Genlis occasionally surprises her reader by adopting more liberal and individualistic positions. The more forthright tenor of Genlis’s *Mémoires* suggests the need to carefully examine the forces (personal, editorial, and otherwise) that shape women’s art criticism as a means of determining how private versus public discursive expectations shape their writings.¹¹

While this dissertation focuses on the public expressions of art criticism of women during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic years, there are many instances of such activities recorded in the intimate spaces of diaries and correspondence that demand attention. As Pamela Gerrish Nunn notes:

Many women, through a personal interest in cultural matters, carried on a private discussion of art, such as is to be found in correspondence, memoirs, auto/biography and oral recollections. This was an important part of certain—educated, privileged—women’s discourse, but falls outside the term ‘art criticism’ as patriarchally defined.¹²

Indeed, in order to gain a deeper appreciation for women’s contributions to the aesthetic discourse of this period, we must examine the commentaries on art that were

¹⁰ “C’est la statue de sainte Thérèse, blessée par la génie de l’amour divin. Le visage de la sainte a l’expression la plus touchante et la plus sublime: mais sa draperie ne vaut rien; elle est beaucoup trop chargée de petits plis.” Genlis, *Les monumens religieux* 29.

¹¹ For an overview of autobiographical writing in France during this period, see Philippe Lejeune, *L’autobiographie en France* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1971). A more recent and theoretically-oriented treatment of the subject is Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires, Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993).

¹² Pamela Gerrish Nunn, “Critically Speaking,” *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (New York: Manchester UP, 1995) 109.

likely written without view toward publication and yet give further dimension to our understanding of the early nineteenth-century art world. These writings proffer unique perspectives on how art entered into daily life, how art became a constitutive element of the accomplished woman, and how art was caught up in issues of sociability.

References to the contemporary art world pepper the diaries of several significant women of this historical milieu. Unlike memoirs, which were intended for publication and were thus highly mediated texts, private journals mark how women conversed unpretentiously about art. Adelaide-Marie-Anne Castellat Moitte, wife of the famous sculptor Jean-Guillaume Moitte, kept a journal from 1805-07 that gives interesting insights into the art world of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France.¹³ As a participant in the famed gesture in which eleven women artists and wives of artists offered their jewels to the National Assembly to help stave off bankruptcy during the Revolution, Madame Moitte actively engaged in art throughout her life. In her journal, edited and published by her son after her death, Moitte records making four visits to the Salon of 1806. In her assessments of major and minor artists of post-Revolutionary France, Moitte did not hesitate to respond openly. Of Antoine-Jean Gros's *Battle of Aboukir* (1806), she declares: "This painting is very beautiful, but I do not care for the genre. It nearly puts me to sleep."¹⁴

¹³ *Journal inédit de Madame Moitte, femme de Jean-Guillaume Moitte, statuaire membre de l'Académie des beaux-arts, 1805-07*, ed. Paul Cottin, 5th edition (Paris, 1832).

¹⁴ "Ce tableau est fort beau, mais je n'aime pas ce genre. Je m'y suis presque endormie." Moitte 222.

Additionally, in private correspondence of various individuals writing during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, discussions on art abound. In her *The Republic of Letters*, historian Dena Goodman shows how letters extended salon conversations and actually served as a model for printed discourse that ranged from pamphlets to novels. Thus, private correspondence had important implications for the reading public.¹⁵ Although the majority of these letters were published posthumously by individuals other than the authors, and therefore probably not intended for public consumption, they do indicate women's involvement in the arts during this germinal period. For example, in a letter to another intimate of Napoleon's court, Claire-E.J. Gravier de Vergennes, comtesse de Rémusat, who was a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Josephine, praised Gros's *Napoleon Visiting the Pesthouse at Jaffa* (1804) immediately after seeing it at the salon. Rémusat comments: "I have been this morning to the Salon, where I have seen some beautiful things. The most beautiful painting there, without question, is the one that represents the Emperor's visit to the plagued in Egypt [sic], by Gros. The drawing, the color, everything is well treated. David crowned it on the spot, and it was well deserved."¹⁶ Like Angélique Vandeul, who penned the semi-public letter on the previous Salon to Meister, Rémusat even advised on works worthy of purchase, suggesting that

¹⁵ See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994) chapter 4.

¹⁶ "J'ai été ce matin au Salon, où j'ai vu d'assez belles choses. Le plus beau tableau qui y soit, sans aucune contradiction, est celui que représente la visite de l'empereur aux pestiférés d'Égypte, par Gros. Le dessin, la composition, la couleur, tout y est très soigné. David l'a couronné sur-le-champ, et il l'a bien mérité." *Lettres de Madame de Rémusat, 1804-1814*, ed. Paul de Rémusat, vol. 1 (Paris, 1881) 56.

the court purchase Fleury Richard's painting of François I.¹⁷ Yet another important instance of the ways in which women conducted art criticism via personal correspondence is found in a series of letters written by the Danish poet, Frederika Brun, to her daughter, Ida.¹⁸ Brun associated with the Coppet Circle in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and had important connections throughout the world of the European intelligentsia. These letters refer frequently to various classical and modern artworks and point to the ways in which art criticism could occur as a kind of dialogue via correspondence.

From the letters and notes exchanged between the artist Anne-Louis Girodet and two of his dearest friends, Julie Candaille and Constance de Salm-Reifferschied-Dyck (la princesse), significant discussions on art emerge. A growing body of literature points to the rich and complex nature of the relationship between Girodet and Candaille, who carried on an intensive correspondence over some twenty years.¹⁹ This material is only now being plumbed, and to date, Candaille functions as muse rather than an

¹⁷ “Enfin, un joli petit tableau de ce Richard qui a fait la Valentine de Milan, qui représente François I, et que les connaisseurs mettent à côté des Gérard Dow. Vous devriez engager l'impératrice à l'acheter.” Rémusat 57.

¹⁸ The Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève contains the manuscripts of these letters, which, to my knowledge, are unpublished.

¹⁹ In Thomas Crow's *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 257, note 17, he states that “there are several hundred surviving letters” from Candaille to Girodet, located in the Bibliothèque de Durzy, Musée de Girodet, Montargis, dossiers Candaille.

individual with invaluable insights into the terrain of post-Revolutionary art.²⁰ And in the correspondence of Constance de Salm (née Pipelet), a significant figure in the Napoleonic cultural sphere, there are a number of serious aesthetic conversations held by Girodet and Salm.²¹ Clearly Girodet valued the opinions of this great *salonnière*. In an 1813 letter written by the artist to Salm, Girodet implores:

Dear friend, I have finished the full-length portrait of the Emperor. Would you be so kind as to find a moment to come with Monsieur Martini and give it a look? You know that your opinion is for me the most essential (*primordial*); you will be the first to judge. . . .²²

²⁰ The magisterial exhibition catalogue, *Girodet: 1767-1824*, ed. Sylvain Bellenger (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), which draws the dossier Candeille into Girodet scholarship even more tightly, still fails to nuance Candeille's role in the artist's life and œuvre.

²¹ The complete *Épître aux femmes*, originally published in 1797, can be found in *Œuvres complètes de Madame la princesse Constance de Salm*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1841) 5-20. The Salm documents, held by the Société des amis du vieux Toulon, are a largely undiscovered treasure trove for scholars of Napoleonic French culture.

²² "Adorable amie, je viens de terminer le portrait en pied de l'empereur. Serez-vous assez bonne pour trouver le moment de venir avec Monsieur Martini donner un coup d'oeil? Vous savez que votre avis est pour moi primordial; vous serez la première à en juger. . . ." Qtd. in Robert Bied, "Le rôle d'un salon littéraire au début du 19e siècle: Les amis de Constance de Salm," *Revue de l'Institut Napoléon* 133 (1977): 127, note 24. The original *billet* from Girodet to Salm, dated January 13, 1813, is located in the Fonds Salm, Société des amis du vieux Toulon, France. The scholarship on Salm (who is also widely known as Constance Pipelet), is growing. Good discussions of her work are included in Geneviève Fraisse, *Reason's Muse: Sexual Difference and the Birth of Democracy*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994); and Letzer and Adelson, *Women Writing Opera: Creativity and Controversy in the Age of the French Revolution*, California: U of California P, 2001. See also Elizabeth Colwill, "Epistolary Passions: Friendship and the Literary Public of Constance de Salm, 1767-1845," *Journal of Women's History* 12.3 (Autumn 2000): 39-68; and her "Laws of Nature/Rights of Genius: The *Drame* of Constance de Salm," *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995) 224-42.

The artist's death in 1824 had a tremendous effect on Salm, who never failed to mention her great sense of loss in her letters to mutual acquaintances, and in the following year, she penned the elegiac and widely published "Verses on the Death of Girodet."

What the abovementioned instances affirm is that women had much to say about the developments of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European art world, and that these discussions occurred across both the public terrain and also within the private domain. Clearly, women were active participants in the emerging institution of art criticism in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. A better picture of this field can be obtained only when scholars begin to recognize that the narrow parameters in which contemporary historians have confined art criticism has distorted our understanding of that institution. In addition to the more readily recognized forums of pamphlets and the periodical press, nineteenth-century art criticism manifested itself in a variety of literary sources, including novels, travelogues, memoirs, and private correspondence. These critiques participated in the framing of issues that ranged from the aesthetic to the political and from the personal to the public. In sum, women writers of this period made noteworthy contributions to the nascent institution of art criticism, and particularly to the ways in which women could imagine themselves into the landscape of Revolutionary and Napoleonic art world.

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APPENDIX 1

VICTOIRE BABOIS, "VERS SUR LE TABLEAU *D'ATALA AU TOMBEAU*,

DE M. GIRODET

Atala, tender and pure virgin,
Gentle treasure of beauty who recaptured nature,
What, already you are no longer! For so young attractions
Under a shroud, alas! Are hidden for ever and ever.
An old man, in his arms
Under this obscure rock,
Holds you in the tomb; he carries without murmur
In his own meditations of his pious grief.

On the linen which cover your charms,
I do not see the flow of his tears;
But looking at it I feel my tears flow.

It is him, it is his touching pity,
That brings back the peace in your innocent soul,
Of the last of your days it was a serene day,
And I believe I see a sleeping angel in your countenance.

Alas! In this solitary path,
What hands have dug this sad monument?

What mortal will return to the earth
These adored remains, this head leaned over:

The light of his eyes extinguished, his brow clouded over with pallor.

Ah! Atala is buried in the tomb in vain:

From Chactas, Atala cannot be torn away.

He will take her, he yields to the weight of his grief;

And, losing all at once his life and his passion,

On your feet that he embraces he will leave his soul.

Of his tormented silence I feel complete horror;

The trait that rips one apart passed through my heart:

I tremble, I want to run away, and I remain astonished.

What god of the tomb holds my soul captive?

He of the effortlessly admirable art!

Inspired masterpiece, happy choice of genius

Which deflates the rage associated with Envy!

You charm all eyes; all hearts are in agreement

To applaud your learned hand

Which placed, with love, on the eloquent canvas

Beauty, virtue, grief, and morality.¹

¹ Atala, vierge tendre et pure,
Doux trésor de beauté qu'a repris la nature,
Quoi, déjà tu n'es plus! de si jeunes attraits
Sous un linceul, hélas! sont cachés pour jamais.
Un vieillard, dans ses bras,
Sous cette roche obscure,
Te soutient sur la tombe ; il porte sans murmure
Dans son sein recueilli ses pieuses douleurs.
Sur le lin qui couvre tes charmes,
Je ne vois point couler ses larmes;

Mais en le regardant je sens couler mes pleurs.

C'est lui, c'est sa pitié touchante,
Qui ramenant la paix dans ton ame innocente,
Du dernier de tes jours a fait un jour serein,
Et je crois voir un ange endormi sur son sien.

Hélas ! dans ce lieu solitaire,
Quelles mains ont creusé ce triste monument?

Quel mortel va rendre à la terre
Ces restes adorés, cette tête s'est penchée:
Son œil s'éteint, son front se couvre de pâleur.
Ah ! dans la tombe en vain Atala s'est cachée:
A Chactas, Atala ne peut être arrachée.
Il va te suivre, il cède au poids de sa douleur;
Et, perdant à la fois et sa vie et sa flamme,
Sur tes pieds qu'il embrasse il va laisser son ame.
De ses muets tourments je sens toute l'horreur;
Le trait qui le déchire est passé dans mon cœur:
Je frémis, je veux fuir, et je reste étonnée.
Quel dieu sur ce tombeau tient mon ame enchaînée?

I1 de l'art admirable effort!
Chef-d'œuvre inspirateur, heureux choix de génie,
Qu'en expirant de rage a regardé l'Envie!
Tu charmes tous les yeux; tous les cœurs sont d'accord
Pour applaudir la main savante
Qui mit, avec l'amour, sur la toile éloquente,
La beauté, la vertu, la douleur et la more.

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