

# Figurations of the Feminine

in the Early French Women's Press,  
1758–1848

Siobhán McIlvanney



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1758–1848*

Siobhán McIlvanney

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*For Alan*



# Introduction

THE PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE of this book is a simple one. Through an examination of the most important early women's journals in France and the evolving female roles and aspirations they portray, it seeks to highlight the political and social significance of this literary medium produced for, and typically by, women.<sup>1</sup> Its overriding focus is on the textual representations of women – the figurations of the feminine – promoted by the early French women's press, a medium whose social influence and interest have been ignored by the majority of critical and literary analyses of the period. The political potential of the periodical press is particularly relevant during the period under study, when journals were often more accessible to the public – in terms of both format and availability – than were, for example, the texts of the *philosophes*. Jean Sgard, in an article entitled 'La Multiplication des périodiques' (1984), remarks that periodicals could be viewed as more pivotal to the proliferation of Enlightenment ideas and the establishment of the eighteenth-century reading market generally than more 'heavyweight' literary and philosophical texts. The periodical medium is one that, more

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1 In order to provide any meaningful assessment of the women's press, this study takes as its constant the projected readership of such a press. To include publications written by female journalists or that have a feminist content is to move away from the prime subject matter of this book, which is the early manifestations of a press in France principally destined for women readers, but which can, of course, also be read – and produced – by men. It is also worth stipulating that, during the period in question, the term 'journalist' frequently extended beyond the scope of today's usage, and could refer to the owner, editor or writer of a journal – or all three.

than any other, fuses the extra-textual reality and experiences of its readers with their textual representation, giving the impression of a writer–reader relationship that exists in the ‘real’ world. As Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston write in their Introduction to *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (2003: 5): ‘The periodical press, offering a liminal space between public and private domains, was a critical mediating agent between these two worlds.’ The early women’s press thus represented an important means of allowing women to access and contribute to the key cultural, intellectual and political debates that dominated French society at the time and which directly influenced their position within it.

Despite being one of the most popular forms of written textual production consumed by female readers, women’s magazines have been a much-neglected subject of academic criticism in French.<sup>2</sup> This academic reluctance to study the women’s journalistic press partly originates in a misogynous snobbery that considers women’s magazines vapid frivolities whose principal function is to *plaire* through escapism rather than *instruire* through any ‘meaningful’ content. While women’s journals and magazines have long embraced a variety of different forms and covered an extensive spectrum of divergent topics – a journalistic miscellany which surely accounts for their enduring popularity – they continue to be defined by the same simplistic generalisations as they themselves are accused of promoting.<sup>3</sup> Such disparagement is nothing new and was apparent in the earliest descriptions of the French press and its putatively nefarious influence, as illustrated in the *Encyclopédie* (1751–72) of the *philosophes*, whose entries under ‘gazette’, ‘hebdomadaire’, ‘journal’, ‘journaliste’ and so

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2 Fortunately, the same cannot be said for the Anglo-American women’s press, which has long enjoyed academic attention. The following study has benefited from various seminal critical studies of the women’s press in English, including *Women’s Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine* (1991) by Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron, and Marjorie Ferguson’s *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (1983).

3 While the term ‘journal’ is generally employed to designate a cheaper publication on newsprint and ‘magazine’ a higher-quality, longer-lasting publication comprising graphics as well as text, my use of these terms is principally historical, rather than substantive. In this study, ‘periodical’ is used synonymously with ‘journal’ when referring to publications that appeared at regular intervals, and which are typically characterised by the inclusion of lengthy articles or essays. In *Women in Print*, Alison Adburgham (1972: 79) comments on the first appearance of the term ‘magazine’ in England, a term whose original definition is further reflected in the etymologically similar *magasin*: ‘The term “magazine”, applied to the periodical, did not come into use until the third decade of the eighteenth century. It was the happy thought of a bookseller named Edward Cave to use it in the sense of a storehouse of miscellaneous writings.’

on make clear their view of journals as a parasitical, uncreative medium consumed by the unintelligent and easily influenced.<sup>4</sup> If such critical neglect is more surprising in our current academic 'post/modernity', which, following the writings of critics such as Roland Barthes and Frederic Jameson, embraces both high and popular culture, the 'ordinary' French female subject – in both senses of the term – has long suffered an absence of critical attention. Peter McPhee, in his work *A Social History of France, 1780–1880* (1992: 4), attributes the relative paucity of research into women's social evolution to 'a certain urban and male bias in research in social history', with the result that 'the largest single social group, the working women of the countryside, is that which we know least about'. While recent decades have witnessed a significant increase in the scholarly attention accorded French women during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,<sup>5</sup> the French women's press constitutes a pivotal, yet remarkably unmined, seam of the general discursive field in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century textuality, providing a uniquely 'factual' perspective on the predominant constructions of femininity throughout this turbulent historical period.

The 'nauseously' predictable content of women's magazines, their focus on the *déjà-dit*, accounts for much of their historical critical dismissal from both formal and thematic perspectives.<sup>6</sup> Women's journals, it is argued, have a Sisyphean-like repetitiveness, in which the same articles are rehashed indefinitely and little ideological advancement takes place. At the same time, they are often viewed as exerting a dangerously powerful influence on female readers, in that they encourage an unthinking espousal of feminine stereotypes and the socialisation of the female reader into highly retrograde gender roles. In *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships* (2003: 7), Anna Gough-Yates describes this dissemination of reactionary feminine stereotypes that the women's press is accused of

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4 Diderot's entry under 'Hebdomadaire' could hardly be more scathing: 'Tous ces papiers sont la pâture des ignorans, la ressource de ceux qui veulent parler & juger sans lire, & le fléau & le dégoût de ceux qui travaillent' (Enc. t. VIII, p. 75). This negative perception of the world of journalism was further fuelled by the press's own negative accounts of many of the works of the *philosophes*.

5 See, for example, *Women, Gender and the Enlightenment* (2005), edited by Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, or *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France* (2015), edited by Daryl M. Hafter and Nina Kushner.

6 An article from *Les Temps modernes* (Claudine 1974: 1770) exemplifies this view of the women's press as little more than a misogynous puppet mimicking and shoring up patriarchal attitudes: 'Chaque mois chaque jour nous femmes égarons notre regard sur des pages d'une civilisation patriarcale en déconfiture. La presse si joliment qualifiée de "féminine" en est un exemple flagrant.' The author 'Claudine' goes on to add 'et nous femmes payons, achetons cette littérature pour nous faire insulter' (p. 1771).

promoting – stereotypes that the poor, helpless reader would appear unable to resist: ‘The women’s magazine industry is understood as a monolithic meaning-producer, circulating magazines that contain “messages” and “signs” about the nature of femininity that serve to promote and legitimate dominant interests.’ Much Anglo-American feminist criticism of the women’s press characterises women’s magazines as dangerous ideological crutches of patriarchy, which, while claiming merely to represent the interests of their women readers, actually create and sustain those interests in the first place. Marjorie Ferguson (1983: 184) makes this point in relation to the typical feminising function associated with women’s magazines: ‘In promoting a cult of femininity these journals are not merely reflecting the female role in society; they are also supplying one source of definitions of, and socialisation into, that role.’ In other words, women’s journals are both soporifically vacuous and surreptitiously indoctrinating.

The following study seeks to counter the negativity associated with such journalistic representations of women by arguing that the role played by women’s journals in the internalisation or naturalisation of ‘feminine’ gender construction can equally be used for more feminist ends. By repudiating the positive and radical effects that the women’s press can have on its female readership, feminist criticism is subscribing to the very patriarchal criteria concerning the literary canon that it sets out to deconstruct. These criteria place women’s literature – what Simone de Beauvoir in *Le deuxième sexe II* (1949; reissued 1976: 628) refers to as ‘ouvrages de dames’ – at the bottom of the literary hierarchy, with women’s magazines occupying a lower rung still. Joke Hermes sounds a cautionary note apropos of such feminist dismissiveness in the concluding section of *Reading Women’s Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*:

The division between high and low culture, the neglect of everyday media use and the eternal putting down of women’s media are all strategies of domination that define us, as users of those genres and even as their researchers. Those definitions ultimately designate the battlefield for feminist media criticism to fight on. (1995: 151)

Women’s journals clearly play a more intellectually, politically and emotionally significant role in the lives of their female readers than has been accounted for critically. *Figurations of the Feminine* aims to accord this popular medium, which gives so much pleasure to readers – in spite of the general disdain in which it is held – the critical attention it demands. Indeed, in her predominantly negative account of the cultural and semiotic codes that influence readerly interpretations of contemporary American women’s magazines, *Decoding Women’s Magazines, From Mademoiselle to Ms.*, Ellen

McCracken (1993: 3) views the pleasurable element in such interpretations as key: 'Readers are not force-fed a constellation of negative images that naturalize male dominance; rather, women's magazines exert a cultural leadership to shape consensus in which highly pleasurable codes work to naturalize social relations of power.' The narrative continuity inherent in serialisation, the sense of dialogic intimacy and community, the often reassuringly predictable format – to name but a few recurrent features – all contribute to the creation of readerly pleasure, a pleasure inherently linked to a recognition not simply of the formal components of a particular journal but equally of the aspirations it espouses. My perception of the readerly perspective in the interpretation of women's magazines echoes that articulated by critics such as Janice A. Radway (1984) – in her now seminal discussion of romantic fiction – and Joke Hermes, who credit the female reader with a conscious awareness of the content of the products being read and an ability to take pleasure in that highly structured and familiar content and to negotiate the various representations and mediatic messages provided without being 'brainwashed' by them, or even accepting their validity.<sup>7</sup> Radway maintains that readers of romance are perfectly aware of the disparity between reality and its idealised fictional versions, that part of them remains self-consciously disengaged during the act of reading.

The representation of this type of split personality can be related to the famous division of identity highlighted by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and by subsequent feminists, as being a characteristic feature of the female psyche: the subsidiary, decentralised role of women in patriarchal society places them in the position of both participant and spectator and makes them particularly aware of the 'performative' aspect of many of the roles they are required to play. Significantly, Candice E. Proctor dates such splitting – or what she terms 'contradiction theory' – to the Enlightenment period in *Women, Equality and the French Revolution*:

According to this hypothesis, there was a direct contradiction between women's natural character and the one that society expected from them. The resulting need to assume a false character left women open to derisory charges of artificiality. [...] Forced from childhood to conform to a traditional imagery that visualized them more as females than as human beings, the women of eighteenth-century France grew up with little sense of self. (1990: 25)

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7 Critics such as Ellen McCracken (1993) and Angela McRobbie (1999) endeavour to lay bare the encoding systems of meaning transferral at work in women's magazines and the continual ideological wrestling between the different and often conflicting messages magazines seek to transmit.

This divide between private spectator and public participant no doubt contributes to the remarkable self-awareness of many of the readers and writers of the early French women's press, and thus to their potential to (re)negotiate the components of these public figurations of the feminine. In other words, as *Figurations of the Feminine* seeks to demonstrate, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reinforcement of binarised sexual norms helped to forge a gendered (often counter-) conception and consciousness among women readers regarding French women's actual and potential social and sexual roles.

Early women's journals demarcate a clear community of women readers, and the sense of inclusiveness promoted by these journals stems from the two-way communication they embrace: readers can influence journalistic content not only by proxy, through their role as subscribers, but equally in their role as contributors. Early French women's journals provide a culturally significant source of material on the figurations of womanhood put forward by both the writers and readers of the women's press. It is the fundamentally dialogic, 'personal' quality of women's journals that, rather than leading to their dismissal as anthologies of coercive, anecdotal titbits, points up their feminist potential for an ongoing and egalitarian negotiation between French women and the roles posited in the press destined for them. If the sheer regularity of publication and the often intimate nature of the content serve to increase the impression of authenticity and overall proximity to the topical 'dailiness' of the French women readers the press seeks to attract, that relationship is not solely one of reflection: early journals, particularly those with a feminist content, not only mirror the current day-to-day reality of women's position in French society but often endeavour to prescribe and promote non-conventional female figurations. *Figurations of the Feminine* contends that, if some of the 'pleasurable codes' in the early French women's press inevitably work to support the ideological status quo – particularly those found in fashion and domestic journals – the political impetus behind many others works, rather, to 'denaturalize' 'social relations of power', or, at the very least, to render them visible. Women's journals are products of the economic and cultural ideologies surrounding publication, yet can also help to modify such ideologies and thus the extra-textual society in which they are published. In other words, early French women's journals are indeed directive, but often in surprisingly feminist ways. In their article 'The Periodical Press in Eighteenth-Century English and French Society: A Cross-Cultural Approach', Stephen Botein, Jack R. Censer and Harriet Ritvo point up the collective political potential embodied in this mediatic organ:

In their choice of what to print, determined in part by their perception of demand, eighteenth-century editors supplied material that may have reinforced

or activated various attitudes among their readers, possibly strengthening the consciousness of belonging to this or that definable group and helping to codify a common vocabulary of social identity. According to this formulation, the eighteenth-century periodical press should be regarded as not only a mirror of perceived reality but also an instrument of action and organization. (1981: 468–9)

The clichéd perception of the female reader escaping drab reality through the passive consumption of stereotypical images of women ignores the often subversive content of this popular genre and its role as a political catalyst for early French women readers and writers.

### GENERAL TRENDS

THE WOMEN'S PRESS provides the first example of a written medium solely aimed at women; the criterion of femaleness dictates both its content and its target readership. This coherence between production and reception, when combined with regularity of output, allows women's journals to offer a detailed, continuous commentary on a range of important issues affecting women at different periods of French history. That commentary takes on multifarious guises in the early French women's press, whether in the register and lexicon of journalistic language employed; in the form of articles discussing acceptable and unacceptable behavioural paradigms for women, thus highlighting the dominant patriarchal norms women are encouraged to assimilate; in advice on sartorial as well as moral fashions; in the *comptes rendus* of events in French society; in book reviews; or through the inclusion of advertisements for particular products and sketches of fashion accessories. Early examples of the women's press do not correspond to our current notion of women's magazines as a mass-produced, commercialised product with an extensive readership, but instead are often both written and read by a small and educated female elite, highlighting the confluence of economic and cultural factors at this early stage of the women's press. As Chapter 2 discusses, both the cost of the earliest women's journals to be published in France and the commonness of illiteracy among women of all classes meant that such journals were the prerogative of a limited readership of educated upper-class women. In this light, it might be more accurate to talk of the evolution of a 'woman's' press (in the sense of a somewhat undifferentiated, homogeneous organ that does not *explicitly* acknowledge any socioeconomic differences when referring to *la femme française*) to a broader, more interest-inflected 'women's' press, which differentiates its readership according to various

criteria such as age or lifestyle – an evolution that begins to take shape during the period under study. In other words, the earliest manifestations of the French women's press were available to a highly circumscribed readership compared with today's women's press, which varies hugely in the different readerships interpellated, as reflected in the medium's division into numerous subgenres.<sup>8</sup>

If the origins of the French women's press in 1758 may be considered elitist in terms of both the education of the writers and the financial resources of the readers, subsequent publications during the early period, aware of the potential market for this evolving medium, become increasingly 'popular' in terms of projected readership and, consequently, political influence. Both the sheer newness and the target audience of this journalistic organ through which French women could acquire (self-)representation no doubt served to render its content more politicised. The egalitarian impetus behind the advent of the French Revolution similarly influenced the projected readership of the French women's press, replacing the highly restrictive world of the *salons*, which gave women a voice under the *Ancien Régime* and a stake in the oral transmission of cultural knowledge, with a shared written forum that promoted collective communication and knowledge to an increasing number of female readers. As Suellen Diaconoff suggests in *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books and Sex in the French Enlightenment*:

Journalists, after all, sought to engage a far wider and more diverse group of women from Paris and the provinces in debate and conversation. They used their periodicals to validate a wide range of women's voices, perhaps, we might judge, because with the rise of democratic ideals, the idea that conversation was limited to a select few in a closed salon was antithetical to the (revolutionary) remaking of society. (2005: 178)

In other words, in the final quarter of the eighteenth century the French women's journal moved from being an organ of 'high culture' disseminated by and among a clearly demarcated section of the population to one with an increasingly broad appeal to a more diverse readership. It is worth noting, however, that while many larger newspapers had a variety of different regional centres of production, French women's journals were still a predominantly Paris-based enterprise, whatever the geographical origins of their readership.

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<sup>8</sup> If, for example, today's popular press such as *Nous Deux* is aimed at a predominantly working-class readership, and tends to be printed on inferior-quality paper and contain fewer advertisements, hard-spined glossies such as *Elle* are above all aimed at middle-class working women – which does not, of course, mean that less well-off women never read *Elle* or middle-class women *Nous Deux*.



As Chapter 2 demonstrates, despite its elitist origins, the earliest examples of the women's press in France are undeniably political and philanthropic. At its conception, the French women's press aimed to improve women's rights and to encourage readers' engagement in important social issues for women in order to involve them in influencing their present and future position in French society by making the public sphere more accessible and relevant to them. The fact that advertising and 'product placement' are conspicuous by their absence in these earliest examples may further account for their often radical content. In the early years of the French women's press a journal's financial viability did not depend on its advertising revenue; rather, many early publications, with their small circulation, were funded by wealthy individuals with particular literary or political ambitions. In today's mainstream women's press, explicit political proselytising would be seen to undermine the mutually dependent relationship between advertisers and readers; consequently, the improvement of women's 'situation' promoted in today's women's magazines typically centres on the 'private' rather than the 'public' realm, on the perfection and upkeep of women's physical appearance and health or other 'feminine' attributes, including culinary skills or homemaking, in the drive to attract a suitable partner. In many ways, early French women's journals are also selling the notion of a 'better life', but are doing so not by overwhelming the reader's materialist aspirations with a wealth of consumer products but by highlighting the need for personal and public responsibility in order to bring about improvements in women's social opportunities and lifestyle.

The absence of an attractive 'glossy' front cover and of a proliferation of seductive images means that the content of the early women's press, while significantly briefer than that of today's women's magazines – due to technical limitations and the cost of printing, the typical edition is 8 or 16 pages long – is principally made up of text and relies on establishing an intellectual relationship with the reader, rather than one based on instant visual gratification. There are no visual indices of the journals' ideal readership – the sole clue lies in the often rather general titles – and it is this absence of visual images and enticements that constitutes the principle difference in format between the past and present women's presses.<sup>9</sup> As Chapter 3 illustrates, the early women's press in France does include publications which are predominantly concerned with fashion and

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<sup>9</sup> In the case of many of today's 'glossies', the visual in the form of advertisements and images typically constitutes over 75% of a magazine's content. As Ellen McCracken (1993: 3) states conclusively, 'when covert advertising is taken into account, very little remains in women's magazines that is not advertising'.

thus contain both engravings and the addresses of fashion stockists, but there is far less emphasis on the promotion of an idealised and ultimately unattainable lifestyle. The products portrayed in early fashion journals would be within the financial means of the average wealthy reader. If many current critics of women's magazines signal the dangers inherent in the readerly 'transgressive pleasures' accrued when the ontological status of the real is dissipated and confused with the ideal, the early examples of the French women's press are undeniably more 'pragmatic' and anchored in a verifiable, extra-textual reality rather than an escapist imaginary. The period under study does evidence a small increase in the number of advertisements within the content of women's journals, but these continue to remain discreet and usually appear at the end of a publication, rather than dispersed throughout it. It is not until the second half of the nineteenth century, with the growth of industrialisation and mass production, that women's journals in France see a significant increase in both the number of journals published (further aided by improved transportation and reduced production costs) and the role of advertisements generally.

The period covered in *Figurations of the Feminine* thus witnesses a popularisation of the women's journal, from its beginnings in the mid-eighteenth century to its ongoing consolidation and proliferation in the mid-nineteenth century. As the cultural and historical contexts change, the women's journal moves from an elite to a more popular – in both senses of the term – object of consumption. Over the course of almost a century, the French women's press can be seen to comprehend a plethora of different figurations of women, from the feminist to the feminine and back again, depending on the particular historical juncture and the 'politics' of production and reception dictating the content and ideological approaches adopted by specific journals. French women's journals' employment of both implicit and explicit narrative approaches in an attempt to galvanise a socio-political consciousness in their female readers inevitably varies in response to the prevailing political climate and thus the perceived shortcomings in women's roles and rights, and to a particular journal's target readership and interests. For example, if the Revolution of 1789 provides an impetus for women's journals to intensify their demands for sexual equality, the Restoration signals an interpellation of female readers as guardians of the hearth and paragons of virtue. However, such figurations may also take the more implicit form of book reviews either lauding particular feminocentric works or criticising the low profile accorded certain female authors, while, as Chapter 3 argues, during the French Revolution fashion itself is endowed with political significance. As Diaconoff comments with reference to early French women's journals:

It would be overstating the case to say that female editors focused on setting a full pro-woman agenda in their periodicals, or to assert that they saw themselves first as feminist activists and secondarily as journalists. But it is, nonetheless, true that their journals often carried a competing and alternative discourse for women, at significant variance from the model widely accepted in the mainstream. (2005: 180)

While Diaconoff cites *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* (1789–91) as evidence of a more politicised journal overtly challenging patriarchal legislation, *Figurations of the Feminine* argues that numerous early women's journals explicitly recognise the importance of confronting legislative and social prejudices against women in an attempt to improve their position in French society – *Les Annales de l'éducation du sexe ou journal des demoiselles* (1790) or *La Gazette des femmes* (1836–38) to cite but two examples – and can thus be seen as espousing what may be termed 'feminist' opinions and agendas.

It is one of the key beliefs of this book that the origins of the French women's press contain numerous feminist elements despite the fact that the general view of feminism and its first manifestations in women's journals typically locates them post-Third Republic.<sup>10</sup> While the term feminism is not historically traceable until the nineteenth century (and is commonly associated with Charles Fourier), my use of it throughout this book when referring to earlier periods is to be understood in its more generic sense of the consciousness-raising of issues relating to women's social and literary roles and representations; it also recognises that French women form a coherent body of writers and readers with multiple common interests and objectives – and that these constitute a form of 'civic feminism', to employ Carla Hesse's designation (2005: 263). Evidently, the term takes on varying sociopolitical permutations depending on context, but I find it unhelpful to be overly pedantic about its historical appositeness, agreeing with Karen M. Offen's comprehensive working definition of 'feminist': 'To be a feminist is necessarily, specifically, and primarily to challenge male domination in culture and society' (2000: 50). The very act of producing a women's press challenges that domination. As Chapter 1 elucidates, 'natural' differences between female and male *sexuality* in the form of physiological characteristics were used to justify ideological *gender* differences in the intellectual, educational, familial and professional opportunities available to French women (to broadly reflect the evolution of themes examined in this study).

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10 The best-known and most popular feminist daily was Marguerite Durand's *La Fronde* (1897–1905), and the journal generally viewed as being the *first* feminist daily publication is *La Voix des femmes*, published in 1848 and examined in Chapter 5.

My application of the term feminism is thus inflected by the belief that its historical variations nonetheless espouse a common teleological trajectory of raising awareness about French women's rights and roles within contemporary French society – what Lynn Hunt refers to as a 'sustained questioning about the status of women' – and improving their personal and professional choices, whatever the precise historical juncture analysed.<sup>11</sup> An examination of the early period from 1758 to 1848, and in particular the period immediately after the 1789 Revolution, reveals that, while the first stirrings of what effectively amounts to a feminist consciousness among French women has its genesis here, the often volatile and fragmented nature of the various political authorities holding sway makes it difficult for such pockets of feminist thought to cohere into a significant political force. However, it is also surely our reluctance to acknowledge the similarities underpinning such manifestations of feminist thought throughout the decades in question – and subsequently – that accounts for our corresponding resistance to viewing them as articulations of the same general, long-held political goals regarding the social visibility of women and their personal and professional choices.

While the desire for social reform and the political optimism expressed by many journals may have ebbed and flowed depending on the journal in question and the historical context, the feminocentric belief in the positive contribution women can and should make to French society – whether as wives, mothers or feminists – and in women's right of expression – be it radical or conservative – is ubiquitous in the journals examined in this book. Women readers are figured as a female community and increasingly exhorted to work together whether for the benefit of improving their own social situation or that of other more vulnerable sections of society, such as the poor or children – or, indeed, for the benefit of the French nation as a whole. The narcissistic individualism commonly associated with the current women's press is generally absent; instead, female readers are encouraged to identify themselves as part of a distinctive and above all valued collective within French society, a 'feminine' section participating in a range of similar and identifiable practices or customs. This representation of the actively engaged female reader in the early French women's

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11 Lynn Hunt (1992: 203) locates feminism's origins as a political movement in France in the post-Revolutionary juncture of the Enlightenment emphasis on the rights of the individual and the crisis in familial authority symbolised by the death of Louis XVI in 1793. She states: '[I]t is no accident that there was a self-conscious feminist movement, however small, in France, and nowhere else, not even in America. Feminism, that is, a movement of sustained questioning about the status of women, was made possible by the conjunction in France of the legal establishment of a liberal notion of the individual, with a challenge to the basis of the family as well as the state.'

press is usefully reinforced by the terminological distinction in classification between those readers who constitute engaged ‘customers’, and the more modern ‘consumers’, a word with less reflective, reciprocal and more passive, solipsistic overtones.

However, if numerous early French women’s journals may at times be politically progressive, they wish to throw out neither the baby nor the rose-scented, skin-softening bathwater, and thus recognise the importance of women’s more conventional roles and appearance in gaining social validation. Given the historical period during which these journals are published, this is hardly surprising. These figurations point up the complexity of gender construction not simply synchronically, with different journals positing different models of womanhood concurrently, but diachronically, as the same journal evolves over its period of publication and the needs of its readership alter. Indeed, the same edition can encompass apparently contradictory female (stereo)types, pointing up the multi-layered fluidity of gender construction and giving the lie to the critical conception of women’s magazines as positing a monolithic model of conservative womanhood. As Madame de Beaumer – the first female editor of the first French women’s journal of any significance – remarks: ‘la raison aura entrée dans notre Journal, pourvu qu’elle s’y montre avec le sourire des Graces’.<sup>12</sup> It is also important to emphasise the validation of ‘difference’ in a French context, in that, while Anglo-American feminists tend to view any concession to the notion of sexual difference or sexual complementarity as ideologically pernicious, even for contemporary French feminists it is a notion that remains compatible with the struggle for political equality. As James F. McMillan remarks:

Between them, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution invented a new vocabulary of the rights of man, which at the end of the eighteenth century also became the language of feminism. Yet at the same time this was also the language which enunciated the doctrine of separate spheres, the ideological cornerstone of nineteenth-century antifeminism. (2000: 31)

The title of this study thus embraces both traditional notions of the feminine in France and political notions of the feminist, which are not *per se* defined as ideologically antithetical.

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<sup>12</sup> *Le Journal des dames* (1759–78), October 1761, p. 5. Suzanna van Dijk, in her work *Traces de femmes: Présence féminine dans le journalisme français du XVIIIe siècle* (1988: 141), discusses how the standard *secrétaire-toilette* reflects this dual emphasis on the intellectual and the aesthetic, encompassing space both for writing and for storing cosmetic and beauty products.

## FIGURATIONS OF THE FEMININE

THE FOLLOWING STUDY adopts a threefold interrelated approach when examining early French women's journals. First, *Figurations of the Feminine* contextualises the production of women's journals in France by providing a sociopolitical framework for the journals under study. Second, and most importantly, it provides an analysis of the journals' content in terms of the often conflicting representations of womanhood promoted by them, analysing how these may have 'qualitatively' reflected or influenced the 'real-life' roles of French women during the period in question. Finally, and relatedly, it seeks to examine the role of the reader in the reception of such content. Clearly, given the vastly different and distanced historical contexts of the early French women's press, this study must limit itself to a discussion of readerly perspectives as provided by the readers' contributions to the journals themselves and to my own perspective as researcher (as well as 'ordinary reader' of women's magazines) or that of other cited researchers and critics. In other words, this study may assign significance to textual analyses where contemporary readers would not, owing to its own inevitably subjective agenda. Different readers in different historical periods – or during the same period – are inevitably interpellated in different ways by the same textual and visual strategies. The reader positioned in my discussions of these early journals is frequently implied or inscribed in the journals – as this Introduction has remarked, the readers of women's journals are not only explicitly figured as 'textual strategies' but are also represented as contributing directly to the journals' content through their provision of articles and letters, further validating the interpretation of the implied female reader as a textual construction of the actual reading and writing female subject.<sup>13</sup> My interpretation of these journals' content takes such content as 'evidence of the discursive constructions of femininity available to and normative in their period of publication'.<sup>14</sup> It is hoped that my own critical perspective will thus coincide with the dominant one to emerge from the

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13 As Chapter 2 details, it is notoriously difficult to ascertain readership data for early publications in the press, not simply because auditing records are a relatively recent phenomenon – and many journals were read in *cabinets de lecture* – but also because, even where subscription lists exist, it is safe to assume that the (male) financial breadwinner would purchase a journal for female members of a particular household, which could then also be read by male members or domestic staff. Equally, in an endeavour to boost circulation, geographical distribution was no doubt often 'invented' through the inclusion of, or reference to, letters from readers living in farflung destinations.

14 Ros Ballaster et al. (1991: 46).

ongoing ideological tussles at work in the women's press, albeit one with a strong feminist investment. The 'quantitative' degree to which female readers internalised the values and characteristics of the role models presented in the journals during the period in question is ultimately a moot point. What is significant is that early women's journals in France were not the monolithic instruments of indoctrination commonly associated with the women's press today, but put forward a variety of both conventional and radical role models in their figurations of the feminine – and it is in the textual analysis of these roles that this book is most interested.

By examining women's journals in France over almost a century, *Figurations of the Feminine* seeks to provide an integrated picture of the principal trends and developments in the women's press during this key historical period. While the sample of journals analysed is inevitably selective, the following chapters examine many of the most widely read and significant journals of the period in order to demonstrate that feminist tenets have always been present in the women's press alongside feminine ones, and to trace their ebb and flow within an ever-changing historical and political landscape. While governed by personal choice to some extent, the scope of periodicals in this study is further limited by the remaining holdings of particular titles. Equally, precise dates of publication are not always available; hence, when combined with the existence of incomplete collections, neither frequency of publication nor even the final publication date of certain journals is always clear. In the case of journals published under the Republican calendar, the Gregorian equivalent of dates has also been provided.

This study limits its focus to the early years of the women's press in France – from 1758 to 1848 – for two reasons. First, that genesis and early evolution took place during one of the most politically changeable periods in French history, and the first 90 years of the French women's press reflect that diversity and dynamism; it would therefore be impossible to do justice to the entire French women's press within the scope of one book. Second, despite the fact that the origins and early years of the women's press in France constitute a richly informative seam about French women's lives and aspirations, no detailed study of these publications exists in English. The period under consideration saw the collapse of an absolutist regime and the succession of four other 'regimes', passing from Republic to Empire to the Restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy and finally the July Monarchy – regime changes typically accompanied by a proliferation of journals representing women's roles and rights from multiple perspectives. 1848 is an apposite year with which to end this study, as France went on to witness a lull in feminist thinking; this coincided with the introduction of advertising in a much more systematic and invasive manner in the press, and with the beginnings of the mass production

of women's journals generally.<sup>15</sup> Through close readings of the diverse content of these earliest examples of the French women's press – this largely untapped source of information on the sociological and psychological evolution of French women during this key 90-year period – *Figurations of the Feminine* seeks to redress the ongoing critical neglect endured by French women's journals.

The critical derision in which women's journals continue to be held is evident in the limited bibliography available on the French women's press, and in its relegation to a few cursory paragraphs under such headings as 'presse spécialisée' in several general studies of the history of the press in France.<sup>16</sup> As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, that derision is particularly pronounced in French academe, which, unlike its Anglo-American counterpart, continues to maintain a more stringent separation between 'high' and 'low' culture. In their essay 'Historians and the Press' in *Press and Politics in Pre-revolutionary France*, Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin comment on the relative and ill-founded absence of critical interest in the press in France, particularly in its pre-Revolutionary form:

[P]eriodicals have never been as important in general French history or the history of French literature as they have, for example, in British studies, where Joseph Addison's *Spectator*, the literary quarterlies of the early nineteenth century, and the *Times* regularly receive respectful treatment. For the period up to the French Revolution in particular, the press has often been dismissed as uninteresting because of the presumption, fostered by the revolutionaries and accepted ever after, that, stifled by censorship, it reflected only an officially approved view of the world. (1987: 1–2)

While there exists a handful of critical works in English detailing the early years of the British and American women's presses,<sup>17</sup> no work to date

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15 With reference to this politically stagnant period for feminism in the mid-nineteenth century, Louis Devance (1977: 343) remarks: '[L]e féminisme est en recul lors de la réaction politique et morale des années cinquante. Pendant le Second Empire retentit l'antiféminisme hyperbolique de Proudhon et celui, plus discret, mais identique dans son fond, de Michelet'.

16 See, for example, Claude Bellanger et al. (1969).

17 For further information, see Cynthia White's *Women's Magazines 1693–1968* (1970), which deals with the British women's press, or Mary Ellen Zuckerman's *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792–1995* (1998). Kathryn Shevelov's important study *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (1989) is, as the title suggests, less about the women's press *per se* than about the emergence of the interpellation of a female reading public as a specific interest group among periodical readers. As highlighted by the chronological reach of these three publications, and given the scant bibliography available, earlier contemporary publications dealing with the history of the press and with the women's press in particular remain relevant to the present study.



examines the early years of the women's press in its French context. The most significant contribution to that bibliography comes from Evelyne Sullerot, whose two works *Histoire de la presse féminine en France des origines à 1848* (1966) and *La Presse féminine* (1963) remain the most comprehensive works in French to provide a historical analysis of the French women's press, whatever their occasional inaccuracies. Other works to examine the press from a historical perspective include Laure Adler's *A l'aube du féminisme: Les premières journalistes (1830–1850)* (1979), which presents an interesting, if somewhat sentimental, account of the Saint-Simonian movement and the journalists affiliated to it, and an edition of 'Que sais-je' on *La Presse féminine* by Samra-Martine Bonvoisin and Michèle Maignien (1986). Within its broad-ranging perspective, Claire Goldberg Moses' seminal *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (1984) also provides an insightful analysis of nineteenth-century French women's journals, with her subsequent co-authored publication with Leslie Wahl Rabine, *Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism* (1993), focusing specifically on Saint Simonism and *La Femme libre*, a key feminist publication discussed in Chapter 5. Jeanne Brunereau's *Presse féminine et critique littéraire de 1800 à 1830: Leurs rapports avec l'histoire des femmes* (2000) offers an overview of the main publications during the 30-year period under study, but does not examine any publication in detail. Suzanna van Dijk's *Traces de femmes: Présence féminine dans le journalisme français du XVIIIe siècle* is an important account of certain journals and publications relating to women in the eighteenth century, but discusses a limited number of examples and individuals concerned in their production and says little about the sociopolitical context that gave rise to them. Daniel Roche has a chapter focusing on the origins of the French fashion press, 'Modes de la raison et raisons de la mode: la naissance de la presse de mode en France', in his work *La Culture des apparences: Une histoire du vêtement (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle)* (1989), and Suellen Diaconoff's work *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books and Sex in the French Enlightenment* contains an interesting chapter on the women's press, 'The Periodical Print Press for Women: An Enlightenment Forum for Females', which discusses the content of four early examples of the French women's press (some of which are also aimed at male readers), but above all focuses on the concept of the woman as reader. The only detailed monographs available on French women's journals are the richly researched *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le Journal des Dames* (1987), by Nina Rattner Gelbart, examining this key publication's existence under different editors and political climates, and Annemarie Kleinert's informative *Le 'Journal des Dames et des Modes', ou la conquête de l'Europe féminine (1797–1839)* (2001).

*Figurations of the Feminine in the Early French Women's Press, 1758–1848* is divided into five chapters. The first chapter offers a historical overview of the French society that provided the context for the genesis of the women's press and its continuing fortunes until 1848 and the beginning of the Second Republic in France; it also provides a general discussion of the changing fortunes of the periodical press itself throughout these decades. The intense imbrication between journals and the society they represent necessitates an assessment of the changing roles of 'extra-textual' women during the period under consideration – as the term 'periodical' makes clear, these publications are irrevocably rooted in, and take their meaning from, the historical moment of publication and its ongoing analysis at the hands of the press. The following four chapters of *Figurations of the Feminine* thus go on to examine key publications through different 'generic' optics in order to illustrate the most significant figurations of women during this early period. Chapter 2 acts as a brief introduction to the genesis of the French women's press before examining the writer–reader relationship in the quintessential earliest 'drawing-room' journal, *Le Journal des dames*; it perceives this journal's interest in women's writing and writing women as an effective means of challenging the general perception of women's inferiority in French society. Chapter 3 discusses the growing national concern with female education and the related notion of woman as independent consumer through a close analysis of two early fashion journals. Chapter 4 treats changing perceptions of marriage and motherhood, and French women's resultant role as maternal educator and domestic manager, by examining three domestic journals, while Chapter 5 focuses on women's employment and increasing participation in the public realm through an analysis of the period's most explicit feminist publications. In order to better comprehend the journalistic content analysed, each of the final three, more substantial, 'generic' chapters begins with a brief overview of the changing societal debates surrounding the principal areas of female socialisation discussed: education; marriage and motherhood; and women's employment respectively.

There is inevitably some overlap of subjects treated, given the fundamentally heterogeneous nature of the women's journal. For example, Chapter 3, which deals principally with *Le Cabinet des modes* (1785–93) and *Le Journal des dames et des modes* (1797–1839), also discusses these journals' attitudes to marriage and motherhood as – like everything else in these journals – such attitudes are presented as above all related to questions of fashion. Equally, while the last chapter of this study deals with feminism as an explicit political 'subject' discussed in a selection of early women's journals, feminist tenets are manifest in a much greater array of publications than the four publications examined in that chapter, particularly *Le Journal des dames*, which is examined in Chapter 2, and *Le Courier de l'hymen* (1791) and *Le Journal des femmes* (1832–37), both of

which are discussed in Chapter 4. This study aims to trace the changing and multiple representations of the feminine over the period in question – representations that proliferate as the decades pass and increase in complexity as they begin to incorporate French women from all classes, rather than simply those of the elite. Nonetheless, the general chronological development of this study, in terms of both the female's life trajectory from education to employment via marriage and motherhood and the journals studied, may allow the reader to detect some sense of personal and political, individual and national, evolution behind the journalistic figurations of the feminine provided.

It is also worth remarking that, given the inevitably circumscribed readership of the early women's press as Chapter 2 details, there is little reference either to racial differences in society aside from some brief mentions of slavery, or to the world of women's work and working people generally. The projected upper- and middle-class readership of the majority of journals studied was concerned with supervising domestic work and family affairs, and little else. The very act of purchasing a women's journal presupposed disposing not merely of the appropriate finances but also of the leisure time required to read it. It is only with the advent of Saint-Simonian journals, as discussed in Chapter 5, that there comes an explicit and substantial demographic broadening of the producers and consumers of early women's journals in France, but, even so, the projected female readers and writers of the early women's press in France remain *relatively* homogeneous with respect to racial and sexual differentiation, and even class. They are on the whole white, heterosexual and with a degree of disposable income, which – as this Introduction has made clear – is not to say that the role models these journals contain and promote are equally homogeneous.

As previously highlighted, my intention is not to provide an inventory of all journals considered to target a female audience, as most of these early publications – particularly pre-1750 – were slight in content and brief in lifespan, and reveal little of French women's hopes and aspirations. The choice of journals included is governed not only by personal preference and archival accessibility but also by a desire to cover a variety of different sub-genres. Journals such as *Le Véritable Ami de la reine ou journal des dames, par une société de citoyennes* (1790), *Les Annales de l'éducation du sexe, ou journal des demoiselles* (1790) or the politically ambitious *La Gazette des femmes* (1836–38), to name but a few, are fascinating and revelatory documents when discussing the early years of the French women's press, but less textually rich than other journals analysed here. Nonetheless, the following study implicitly, and often explicitly, dialogues with representations of femininity in other non-represented women's journals when discussing particular publications. Nor is it my intention to present a quantitative analysis of the recurrent themes and concerns of the

journals studied – the limited availability of many journals and the sheer volume of copies is beyond the scope of one monograph – but, rather, a more qualitative analysis of the *grands thèmes* treated by them. (It is nonetheless important to note that the increasing digitisation of many of the journals examined in this monograph will make readerly access far more straightforward in the future.) While this study does supply background details when relevant, it does not seek to provide exhaustive biobibliographical details on the particular personalities behind the early women's press, whether editors, writers or booksellers; it does not provide information on fluctuations in prices or analyses of the influence of technological advances on the commodification of the press. Its interest lies, above all, with the *textual* representations of women in the French press and how these adapt – or not – over the period in question; with how women's political aims find expression; and with the dialogue established between woman writer and reader. It is only in Chapter 2 that the female editors are considered in any detail, owing to the avant-garde status of *Le Journal des dames* in the history of the French women's press and because, in many respects, their very different characters may be seen to mirror the multiple and diverse figurations of the feminine which appear within the journal's own covers.

The focus of the following chapters will be on the political and above all the femino-centric content of the most significant early women's journals published in France, in the sense of both the radicalness and representativeness of their figurations of the feminine. Chapters 2 to 5 assess the degree of symbiosis between *la presse féminine* and French society – how fundamental shifts in the social perception of the role of women discussed in Chapter 1 find specific expression in the content of the women's press and how feminist demands in women's journals constantly endeavour to initiate such shifts in French women's favour – and will argue that the widespread perception of women's magazines as ideologically regressive finds little support in many of the journalistic figurations put forward here. This study concludes by pointing up the necessity of re-viewing the women's press generally and of acknowledging its consistent dedication to raising and valorising French women's social profile as well as its inclusion of a number of 'liberating' counter-hegemonic figurations of the feminine – and thus its overlooked contribution to feminist ideologies and histories generally. It is hoped that this study will generate further, more individualised, studies of early women's journals in France in order to provide contemporary women's journals and magazines with a 'press of their own', to paraphrase the title of Elaine Showalter's (1977) seminal study of women's literature.

# Women's Roles, Rights and Representations in France, 1758–1848

THE FIRST PART of this chapter looks at the key events affecting French women during the publication period covered by this book: from the approximate beginnings of the French women's press in 1758 to the advent of the Second Republic in 1848 – 90 years that constitute some of the most turbulent and eventful in the country's history, with numerous *coups* being staged and control being passed from one political faction to another. Adopting a feminocentric perspective, this chapter constructs a broadly sociopolitical and intellectual framework within which to position the women's journals under study. Such a framework is necessary both in order to contextualise the objectives and opinions these journals express and, relatedly, to assess their political or 'feminist' timbre. This is not to suggest that there exists an unproblematic reflection between the many mediatic constructions of womanhood put forward in the early women's press – whether, as the respective chapters in this study demonstrate, these take the form of bibliophile, informed fashion consumer, wife and mother, or worker – and the extratextual 'reality' they represent. Rather, by providing supplementary 'background' information on French women's rights and roles throughout the decades in question, this chapter seeks to elucidate further the dialogue promoted in the early women's press between journalistic text and reader, and to substantiate the textual readings around which *Figurations of the Feminine* centres.

The second part focuses on the development of the French women's press and the changing publishing climate in France during the same period. As this study highlights, these 90 years testify to the rise of the French female

writer (whether author or journalist) as a cultural force whose participation in intellectual discussions was increasingly that of active agent, rather than passive recipient. In greater numbers than ever before, French women wrote their own history in the form of both literary and journalistic *nouvelles*. Through their work, these French writers sought to influence the national agenda on issues of prime importance for women – issues ranging from greater access to education to the right to divorce. While the majority of women authors were from the privileged classes who enjoyed both the leisure time and the financial resources to write full-time, many women journalists originated from less wealthy and perhaps consequently more politicised backgrounds – as exemplified by Madame de Beaumer (Chapter 2) or the Saint Simonians (Chapter 5) – and sought to galvanise a similar social awareness among their readership. The regular publication of women’s journals, as well as the practice of pamphleteering that was prevalent during the Revolution, represented an effective means of engaging French women in the myriad debates unfolding both in the journals in question and nationally. Journals and pamphlets presented their readers not with *faits accomplis* of previous historical and literary events but with a recent and ongoing account of them, encouraging their readers to play a role in shaping their evolution. The journalistic press represented the most influential means of (in)forming French public opinion during this period.

### THE CHANGING POLITICAL CLIMATE IN FRANCE, 1758–1848

**D**ESPITE THE RAPIDITY with which successive regimes replaced one another, the different factions that made up the political landscape during this period may be grouped into three main, albeit approximate, categories: the aristocrats and monarchists, who would be associated with a right-wing, conservative and pro-Catholic agenda; the liberal nobility and bourgeoisie, who would be viewed as ‘middling’ democratic Republicans post-Revolution; and, on the left, the workers – three categories that interact productively with the three journalistic ‘genres’ to be examined in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively. Whatever the rhetorical embellishment or political persuasion colouring their pronouncements, all three political groups held generally misogynous views on the role of women, as evidenced by the continuing refusal to give French women any form of political representation throughout the 90 years under consideration.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, from 1758 until

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny the key role played by specific male individuals, such as the Marquis de Condorcet, the *philosophe* most concerned with improving women’s rights,

1789 French women's general social position remained largely as it had been throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. In the final decades of the *Ancien Régime* wealthy French women continued to exercise a limited influence on social and cultural fashions through the medium of the *salons*, which allowed French women not only to take part in but to *lead* intellectual and literary debate. It is important to highlight, however, that such cultural influence was predominantly oral in nature, owing to the elevated levels of illiteracy among women from all social classes, a 'gendered illiteracy' which peaked in the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The extensiveness of illiteracy, and thus women's dependency on a dexterous 'orality' when seeking to effect any degree of social change, is further evidenced by the political activism of French women at the opposite end of the social spectrum in the form of the Parisian market women's demand for bread in the early days of the Revolution. Carla Hesse (2003: 30) emphasises that French women's political purchase in the pre- and early Revolutionary period was above all via the spoken word: 'The salon and the marketplace mirrored the academy and the court as a kind of shadow government where women ruled.' As 'shadow governments', their influence was thus principally localised and insubstantial. Or, as Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe characterise eighteenth-century feminist activity, '[i]ndividuel dans les classes favorisées, occasionnel en bas de l'échelle, il ne parvient jamais à se faire admettre comme force cohérente et puissante qui menace vraiment le pouvoir mâle et le système économique' (1977: 184). Nonetheless, as Chapter 2 suggests, the centrality of women as organising hosts to and polite arbitrators of *salons'* discussions of Enlightenment ideas may be seen to echo the role of the female editors and writers of the early French women's press in their governance over and facilitation of the expression of multiple points of view; these ideas promoted the notion of an individual's right to actively express social or political views, and thus ultimately contributed to the emerging concept of 'public opinion' – and to women's capacity to exert some influence

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or Choderlos de Laclos, whose *Des femmes et de leur éducation* (1783) makes clear the importance he invests in furthering the education of women in France.

2 Carla Hesse (2003: 9) comments in *The Other Enlightenment*: 'The last decade of the eighteenth century saw the greatest extent of the gender gap in literacy: Most French men were literate and most French women were not.' While literacy rates are notoriously difficult to establish and further complicated by the precise definition of literacy – does it mean the ability to write (one's name?) or to read, or both? – Suellen Diaconoff (2005: 49) places the fraction of literate women at the end of the eighteenth century 'somewhere between a quarter and upwards of a third of all Frenchwomen' which correlates to 'roughly some three and a half million potential female readers, based on a population of twenty-six million'.

over it. In Dena Goodman's evocative phrase, such *salons* constituted a type of 'self-constructed private school' (1994: 81), where women communicated freely in serious and instructive exchanges on a range of intellectual subjects.<sup>3</sup>

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, that concept of 'public opinion' made itself heard in the French people's increasingly vociferous reactions to the perceived moral policing and financial power exerted by the Catholic Church, reactions that were also directed towards members of the nobility for the financial and political benefits they too enjoyed. The decision by the nobility and clergy to reject any possible solution to the financial crisis hitting France during the 1780s, a crisis to which France's participation in the Seven Years War and American Revolution had greatly contributed, aggravated this already fraught political situation and led the king to hold a meeting of the Estates General on 5 May 1789 – the gravity of the situation indicated by the fact that this was the first meeting since 1614. It soon became clear that the Estates General was untenable in its current form and had to be transformed into a more modern and egalitarian governmental body made up principally of members of the Third Estate. It is important to emphasise that the social unrest at this time was not an exclusively male preserve, but one shared by a growing number of French women, as demonstrated by their contributions to the *Cahiers de doléances*, lists of grievances and suggestions compiled by each of the three orders before the meeting of the Estates General and sent to the king in an attempt to stem the nascent political crisis by popular consultation. Those of the Third Estate were typically drawn up by a village or town lawyer or teacher. In other words, women's first 'written' taste of revolutionary activity was often through a male medium. In them, women requested that improvements be made to female education and social rights, including the right to divorce and to support provided for young single mothers, and articulated their desires for a more libertarian and egalitarian France of the future.<sup>4</sup> Citing one example, Christine Fauré also testifies to the widespread sense of injustice at women's complete absence of political representation:

Les cahiers de doléances et réclamations des femmes par Madame B\*\*\*B\*\*\* (1789, pays de Caux), [...] revendiquent l'admission des femmes aux États généraux au titre de l'identité des intérêts entre représentants et représentés: « Étant démontré avec raison qu'un noble ne peut représenter un roturier ni

3 The fragmented, informal quality of much of the journalistic copy that made up the early women's press equally has a distinct 'orature' about it, whether in its emotive, personal tone, passionate rhetoric or dialogic nature.

4 1789 *Cahiers de doléances des femmes et autres textes* (1989: 50). Chapter 3 discusses girls' access to education in France in detail.



celui-ci un noble; de même un homme ne pourrait avec équité représenter une femme. » (2006: 6)

Previously, unmarried women, widows and women in the religious orders had been allowed to vote for deputies of the First and Second Estates, and women's guilds and corporations had been present at discussions of the Third Estate. Even this limited female participation had been rescinded by 1789. As Candice E. Proctor remarks in *Women, Equality and the French Revolution*:

By the time of the Revolution, the ability of female fief holders even to vote for representatives to the Estates General had similarly been reduced to the agency of male *procureurs*. And with the destruction of feudal privileges in 1789, even this minor political role, enjoyed by so few women, was lost, and with it any opportunity for pursuing a career in the political sphere. (1990: 72)

On 17 June, the revolutionary fervour sweeping Paris led to the replacement of the Estates General by the National Assembly, comprised solely of deputies from the Third Estate. In other words, popular sovereignty, and with it a new constitution, replaced absolute monarchy. The French people were now portrayed as politically responsible for forming their own future, and this impression of a new democratic dawn, coupled with women's exclusion from official political representation, no doubt fuelled the desire of the early women journalists to participate in many of these key debates about the individual's legal and social rights within the sheaves of their own publications.

If the French Revolution of 1789 proved anything, it was the political power of ordinary French subjects to challenge the status quo. Political suffrage was no longer restricted to the upper echelons of society, but, for the first time, those most vulnerable to its vagaries exerted a direct and potentially seismic influence on it. Women played a fundamental part in highlighting the effectiveness of democratic action by participating in many of the political demonstrations that took place during the early days of the Revolution. One of the most famous examples, already cited, was the Day of the Market Women on 5 October 1789, when a huge gathering of around 5,000 women marched to Versailles to protest at the inflated price of bread. As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, consumption and domestic provision have long been portrayed as female activities, and women's involvement in this particular demonstration was inevitable given their pivotal role within the domestic economy and bread's importance as the principal means of sustenance for French working people at the time. In other words, the political activism of these mainly lower-class women stemmed from humanitarian and patriotic, rather than specifically feminist, concerns; while many women desired greater equality with men, many more were content with

the prevailing distribution of gender roles, feeling greater affinity with their class than with their sex. These class-based protests, and women's active role in influencing Revolutionary politics in Paris, were not historical anomalies, but had pre-Revolutionary precursors in the form of groups of women who monopolised certain professions under the *Ancien Régime*, such as *les dames de la Halle*, who ran the main market stalls in Paris. The participation of women had also been key to the success of earlier demonstrations, including that of the *taxation populaire* in 1775, when mobs of people invaded food merchants' premises and forced them to sell goods at lower prices – highlighting, once again, women's influential role as nurturer within the family unit. As Gisela Bock remarks in *Women in European History*:

Women had long taken the initiative in popular uprisings, though they tended to leave the use of open violence to men. Their turning directly to the monarch was also nothing new. In the harsh winter of 1708–9, women had marched to Versailles to demand that the Sun King, Louis XIV, alleviate the mass famine and end the war. (2002: 36)

Among advocates of sexual equality, the birth of a new French nation nourished hopes that women would be granted equal citizenship of the Republic and that significant improvements in their social status and rights would ensue. While women failed to qualify as citizens in 1789, the existence of a number of clubs – some women-only – provided another arena in which women could continue the process of politicisation given impetus by the events of the French Revolution. (As Chapter 5 demonstrates, women-only clubs and associations, whether arguing for improvements in women's access to education or their conditions of employment, played a role throughout the 90-year period examined.) The creation of the militantly pro-Revolutionary *Société des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires*, a group led by Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon in 1793, while endeavouring to remain representative of the radical concerns of the *sans-culottes*, also campaigned on issues specifically related to women's rights. This club's awareness of the prejudices faced by women *qua* women strengthened its conviction that the Revolution should secure equality between the two sexes as well as the three Estates. Many of the club's members were *mères de famille*, who campaigned for women's right to a better education and to divorce, both of which, it was argued, would ultimately lead to a happier, since freely assumed, family unit. As subsequent chapters detail, while rare feminist demands were supported and even ratified by the political establishment (such as the legalisation of divorce in 1792, which was also partly granted in order to signal the increasing irrelevance of the Catholic Church in France), there remained a fear of and resistance to women's active participation on the political stage.

Following the deputy André Amar's claim that the *Société des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires* was both politically dangerous and membership of it constituted an unnatural female activity, the Convention voted to outlaw all women's societies and organisations in November 1793, stipulating that

toutes les femmes se retireront jusqu'à ce qu'autrement soit ordonné, dans leurs domiciles respectifs: celles qui, une heure après l'affichage du présent décret seront trouvées dans les rues, atroupées au-dessus du nombre de cinq, seront dispersées par la force armée et successivement mises en état d'arrestation jusqu'à ce que la tranquillité publique soit rétablie dans Paris.<sup>5</sup>

The draconian nature of these measures, which vigorously condemned women to the domestic realm in a bid to reinforce the 'natural' order of the sexes, reveals the establishment's concern with French women's potential as a cohesive political force and thus surely accounts for some of the success enjoyed by early French women's journals in establishing 'virtual' clubs among female readers isolated in their domestic domains.

While women's active role in promoting the popular democracy of the French Revolution is unquestionable, the political consciousness that provoked their mass action, and which was increased as a result of it, was mainly experienced by those women living in Paris, where the networks of local groups and the government institutions based there gave women the possibility of exercising collective political influence. Rural women were far more conservative: they retained the strongest religious convictions of any section of French society during the Revolution and frequently resented what they viewed as the vilification of traditional forms of religion to which it gave rise.<sup>6</sup> (It is no coincidence that the post-Revolutionary years of the Directory saw a renaissance of popular religious faith, as French society yearned for a return to greater social stability.) Overall, however, the Revolution irrefutably demonstrated women's desire to be involved in shaping the French

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5 Quoted in Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe (1977: 234–5); source Paule-Marie Duhet (2001).

6 It was subsequently argued that women, in collusion with the Catholic Church, had limited the political impact of the French Revolution, an argument that was repeatedly voiced as justification for the Republican refusal to grant universal suffrage. As this chapter later remarks, such misogynous *mauvaise foi* is further exemplified in the attribution of the Revolution itself to, among other reasons, the corruption and decadence viewed as characteristic of the *salonnières* during the *Ancien Régime*. Dorinda Outram (1989: 125) comments on the increased exclusion of women from the public realm in Revolutionary France: 'To the degree that power in the old regime was ascribed to women, the Revolution was committed to an anti-feminine rhetoric, which posed great problems for any women seeking public authority.'

political landscape and their concern for the future wellbeing of the French nation. They displayed the ‘masculine’ virtues of patriotism and bravery in abundance, although, as shall be seen, a patriotism that, before too long, would become synonymous with women’s withdrawal from the public realm and assimilation of the role of upright wife and mother; Woman, it would be decreed, could best help the nation by staying at home and raising her future citizens in order to ensure that the decadence viewed as characteristic of the *Ancien Régime* – a decadence typically presented as gynocentric despite Louis XV’s licentiousness and infamous ‘Parc-aux-Cerfs’ – and epitomised in the ‘sexually deviant’ and politically corrupt Marie Antoinette be replaced with a renewed virtuousness and morality.

The ‘enlightenment’ of the male leaders of the Revolution and their successors proved itself somewhat selective, as women’s actual position after the Revolution remained unaltered despite the egalitarian discourse prevalent at the time and women’s own active participation in events; many deputies believed wholeheartedly both in women’s capacity to reason *and* in the importance of reinforcing a ‘natural’ social order, binarising the sexes in the manner of Rousseau. As highlighted by the Convention’s action of banning female assemblies, it was above all women’s political representation, the advocacy of their public voice, that caused the greatest intransigence. Unsurprisingly, many French women felt let down when the Revolution failed to live up to their expectations and to secure lasting improvements for them. From the earliest days of the Revolution, demands to increase women’s rights were typically rejected by the legislators, who argued that women’s ‘nature’ made it impossible, if not dangerous, to cede to such unorthodox demands. In the Constitution of 1791 women were refused citizenship by the Constituent Assembly and, as Adrienne Rogers tersely observes, were placed in the same category as “children, minors, and convicted felons”. Again, women were expected to assume the responsibilities of citizenship without the privileges of citizenship and were subject to all penalties for disobeying the law’ (1984: 43). With reference to the political theorist and pamphleteer the Abbé Sieyès’ description of the components of ‘passive’ citizenship (Sieyès played a key role in devising the more constitutionally representative National Assembly, publishing the influential pamphlet *Qu’est-ce que le tiers-état?* on the eve of the French Revolution), John R. Cole comments on the glaring absence of women from the deputies’ political agenda in August 1789: ‘It bears repeating that Sieyès was exceptional in mentioning women even to exclude them from equal rights’ (2011: 204). As Chapter 4 illustrates, women’s social inferiority would become increasingly rigidified as the nineteenth century got underway, most obviously with the legal entrenchment of women’s subordination in Napoleon’s ‘Code Civil’ of 21 March 1804.

The sense of empowerment briefly enjoyed by those women who participated in political events during the years of the Revolution was aided by the gradual dismantling of the authority wielded by both church and monarchy in French society. The reduction in 'patriarchal' authority as epitomised by the abolition of the monarchy in 1792 found further echo in the legalisation of divorce the same year – by far the most significant legal victory for women following the Revolution. By undermining traditional hierarchical structures – and, in the case of the Church, the biblical subordination of women – this reduction in ecclesiastic and monarchical influence served to fuel the belief that the individual's position in society, rather than dictated by an immutable divine order with the king as God's earthly representative, could be challenged and ultimately altered through individual action.<sup>7</sup> As Siep Stuurman remarks with specific reference to seventeenth-century feminism, this deconstruction of hierarchies 'paved the way for the Enlightenment idea that gender was the product of the social environment, and could therefore be discussed in terms of political theory, and the conjectural history of humanity' (2005: 371). The belief in the potential of ordinary women and men to exert change had found clear validation in the events of the French Revolution and in the writings of *philosophes* such as Voltaire and Diderot, who sought to replace the traditional discourse of political hierarchy with more egalitarian notions of individual rights, advocating progressive social reforms and questioning the stronghold of church and state: all citizens were equal and the state's role was to protect, not subjugate, them. While topics raised by different *philosophes* are examined in subsequent chapters, it is important to highlight the diversity and often inconsistency of their opinions, as well as the fact that their contribution to a Revolutionary ethos was more indirect, in the form of the promotion of individual agency and intellectual independence, than direct, in the form of any specific political agenda. As Roland N. Stromberg argues, it is undeniable that, '[t]hose who tried to guide the Revolution never ceased to legitimize or rationalize their actions by appealing to the words of Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot, and other intellectual heroes of the Enlightenment, though they might do so selectively and erratically' (1988: 323). Yet it is also true that many of the *philosophes* who lived through the Revolution abhorred what

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7 The continuing reduction in ecclesiastical power and the de-Christianisation of France during this period were also apparent in the Convention's decision to replace the Gregorian calendar in 1793, along with its Christian associations and Saints' days, with a Republican one, which adopted 'rational' decimal measurements. 22 September 1792 was decreed the beginning of Year 1 of the French Republic. This change heralded both a new beginning for French nationhood and a symbolic eradication of all significant dates belonging to the pre-Revolutionary era.

they perceived as its espousal of a chaotic, irrational instinctiveness rather than a rational and reflective approach.

The cultural expansiveness and cosmopolitanism which partly resulted from the French Enlightenment's emphasis on the individual's right to intellectual independence and the questioning of the 'national' status quo and distribution of power found further impetus in the contemporary interest in, and influence of, writings from elsewhere in Europe.<sup>8</sup> The post-Revolutionary climate testifies to an undeniable sense of Europe opening up, leading to the cross-fertilisation of literary, philosophical and cultural discourses and works.<sup>9</sup> The increasing accessibility of Europe, as print culture and transport links improved during the period under study, allowed for a new openness in France to non-French cultural influences – as demonstrated by the increased Anglomania of many post-Revolutionary journals – and for a general desire on the part of French women to keep up with their (principally British) sisters in the field of knowledge and erudition, as perceived social and cultural inequalities among European women and, consequently, female politicisation, became more visible. Equally, in the first half of the nineteenth century, France continued to experience a gradual exodus towards its urban centres, above all Paris, and, with it, an increase in literacy rates and therefore potential readers. This greater 'internal' urbanisation and the external 'shrinking' of Europe are further illustrated by the fact that many early women's journals were distributed in London – pointing to France's desire to retain its cultural and linguistic influence, in that French was spoken among the European elite at the time – thus providing such journals with an international readership.

Wealthy French women were in a relatively privileged position with regard to opportunities for literary consumption and production in comparison with many of their European counterparts, and were able to play an increasingly important role in transmitting and influencing those cultural values that had a particular bearing on women's lives in France. As Hilary Brown and Gillian

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8 David A. Bell attributes the growth of the concept of nationhood in eighteenth-century France to this increasing consciousness of and exposure to international influences and cultures: 'Both curiosity and international competition prompted the growth of a substantial literature devoted to what we would now call the comparative study of national character' (2001: 1221).

9 The French Revolution itself played a pivotal role in effecting real geographical displacement, as well as literary exchanges, between countries. As Katherine Astbury remarks: 'The political events of 1789 and its aftermath provided writers in France and the surrounding countries with a unique common source of literary inspiration as first the displacement of people, then war, meant that writers in England, Holland, Switzerland, and Germany were able to experience the disruption and the uncertainties of Revolution first hand' (2007: 99).

Dow comment: 'For women across the continent, it is the French – with their line of women writers stretching from Madeleine de Scudéry and Françoise de Graffigny to Germaine de Staël and George Sand – who seem to be a main source of inspiration' (2011: 4). The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the success of several French women authors, including Madame de Genlis and Madame de Staël, whose nominal aristocratic 'de' nonetheless signals the constrained social spectrum from which female authors were typically drawn: while the latter was the daughter of Jacques Necker, one of the most powerful men in Europe as Finance Minister under Louis XVI, the former, as Chapter 3 elucidates, was an aristocrat and educator of the French royal family, as well as the author of treatises on education. No longer content to be told how best to raise and educate children by men who had no practical experience in doing so, female authors and writers sought to directly address women and to impart their knowledge and advice to a community of women readers; prescriptive, idealised accounts were supplemented by more descriptive, realistic ones. Madame d'Épinay, for example, openly acknowledged her difficulty in espousing the maternal ideal in the autobiographical *Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant* (first published posthumously in 1818), and sought to rectify what she viewed as Rousseau's unbalanced and unrealistic educational objectives by presenting a feminocentric account of the difficulties French women encountered when seeking to conform to the idealised Rousseauian norm of the fulfilled mother surrounded by her happy brood and faithful husband. As Jennifer J. Popiel notes, the increasing predominance of female-authored didactic literature related to child-rearing is a significant development in that, within the framework of domesticity, 'both mothers and children gained new spaces to form moral identity, increase their agency, and to join the society in which they lived' (2008: 115). The women's domestic journals examined in Chapter 4 can be seen to fulfil a similar function in creating an active interfemale dialogue between writers and readers around issues relating to marriage and motherhood.

A further significant writerly influence on the lives of French women in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the work of the playwright Olympe de Gouges. The *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* of 26 August 1789 saw the promulgation of universal rights – yet, as would be stipulated by the Constitution of 1791, rights that were still out of reach for women and 'passive' male citizens (those unable to pay the requisite amount of tax, such as domestic servants).<sup>10</sup> This declaration's validation of the notion of universal rights while failing to institute them in the case

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<sup>10</sup> This would be followed by two other Constitutions in quick succession in the years 1793 and 1795.

of women would only have increased French women's awareness of their absence of concrete political power. It was assumed that women could not harbour different political concerns from their husbands and fathers and therefore did not require separate constitutional representation. This disparity between women's putative rights in the *Déclaration* and the impossibility of their implementation, coupled with a greater prevalence of writing women in France, drove Gouges to compose a counter-manifesto in 1791 advocating a host of egalitarian changes to women's rights: the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*. Gouges' *Déclaration* can be seen as a summary and intensification of many of the desires articulated by women across France in the earlier *Cahiers de doléances*. Neither the social nor the literary profile of Olympe de Gouges was in keeping with that of other French women writers during this period, many of whom, as has been remarked, were of privileged birth and whose works tended to be educational or moralistic – the 'de' was an invention in order to allow Gouges (whose real name was Marie Gouze) to gain access to Enlightenment *salons* and cultural circles generally.<sup>11</sup> Rather than participate in the literary arena through the more socially acceptable means of 'safe' and 'feminine' fiction or treatises, Gouges wrote – or, rather, dictated to a secretary, thus the very 'oral' nature of her writing – highly political plays and pamphlets designed to provoke and challenge existing social, racial and sexual norms; she was an avid abolitionist as well as a feminist. Indeed, her humble financial situation post-1789 was no doubt exacerbated by her commitment to political pamphleteering.

If the female author was a rare phenomenon in the early eighteenth century, particularly the radical female author in the mould of Olympe de Gouges, the latter years of the century bear witness to a nascent confidence among female writers from all classes, a confidence, as this chapter goes on to argue, reflected in the plethora of publications and pamphlets produced by women during the French Revolution. Throughout this period woman-authored work develops from the moral treatise, educational novel or children's fictional work – in other words, what were considered conformist and often sentimental options – to embrace a wider variety of genres, as female authorship became a less unusual cultural phenomenon. The removal and execution of the symbolic *père de famille* Louis XVI, an 'autocratic' regal figurehead, may be seen to facilitate a climate promoting – however

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11 As Dorinda Outram remarks, during this period *salons* began to reflect the general sense of politicised democratisation affecting French society in both membership and topics covered as the intellectual influence of the court waned: 'It was also the case that the increasing numbers of non-aristocratic *salons* widened the intellectual agenda from the culture of the *précieuses*, to a wider focus on critical writing in history, economics and politics' (2005: 89).



ephemerally – the existence of a more democratic discursive exchange encouraging individual expression and autodidacticism through exposure to different types of writing, of which female readers were key beneficiaries. Women's drive to be heard in the literary arena, to supplement principally male-authored accounts of French women's status quo with female-inflected versions, is also illustrated in both the pedagogic impetus and the increasing 'generic' eclecticism of the early French women's press. In its early permutations, the French women's press provided women with a key means of self-expression, in that the inherently transient and collective – and often anonymous – nature of women's journals gave French women the confidence to voice their concerns and criticisms more directly than did novel-writing, and proved itself a particularly important resource in periods of political uncertainty.

Known as the Terror, the years 1793–94, instituted by the success of the radical Jacobins in overthrowing the more moderate Girondins, brought with it renewed attacks on the Church and its authority. Indeed, in many ways, the Revolution itself could be seen as fulfilling the role once held by religion both in its appeal to the masses and in the people's faith in its power to compensate social inequities.<sup>12</sup> France was riven by economic hardship, political dissent and infighting, as well as engaging in Revolutionary wars abroad (France had declared war on Austria and Prussia in April 1792). The Terror gave rise to the execution of numerous 'counter-revolutionaries' resulting from the fraught political climate prevalent at the time. After the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793, the execution of individuals supposedly guilty of perpetrating crimes against the state continued unabated. Among the victims were several prominent women, including Marie Antoinette, Madame du Barry, Madame Roland, Charlotte Corday and Olympe de Gouges, all of whom were publicly beheaded in 1793. All these women were viewed as having engaged in 'unnatural' female activity in the public realm, transgressing normative parameters of acceptable female conduct. Their executions could be seen to act as a warning to other women seeking to participate in 'unfeminine' political activity outside the domestic realm, pointing up the severe limitations of revolutionary discourse on individual rights and French women's complete absence of political representation. That these women were considered 'traitors of the Republic' and

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12 David A. Bell draws a parallel between nationalist and religious discourse during the time of the Revolution, remarking that, 'as the French attempted to develop actual programs and policies aimed at constructing the nation, particularly during the revolution, they fell back on languages and practices of conversion developed by the clergy of the Catholic Reformation, in their attempts to construct not a new nation but a new church' (2001: 1218).

dangerous to national security nonetheless again indicates women's growing visibility within French society at the time, a visibility spanning all social ranks, from the royal Marie Antoinette to the semi-illiterate, uneducated member of the *bas peuple* Olympe de Gouges, who, dedicating her pamphlet *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* to the former, was accused of royalism and guillotined on 3 November 1793.<sup>13</sup> This dedication aptly illustrates Gouges' feminist spirit, which was particularly radical in its desire to unite women across all social strata in the fight for sexual equality, when such a political constituency had yet to exist.<sup>14</sup> The desires for equality borne of the Revolution in 1789 were well and truly dashed by 1793, as women were increasingly excluded from participation in the public sphere and denied democratic citizenship, forbidden the rights of assembly and encouraged to remain within the confines of the home. Jane Abray presents a gloomy picture of post-Revolutionary women's rights:

The suppression of the women's clubs effectively destroyed the feminists' political aspirations. It was not, however, the clearest statement on women's rights the government made. After the *journée* of *Ier Prairial* of the Year III (May 20, 1795), the Convention voted to exclude women from its meetings; in future they would be allowed to watch only if they were accompanied by a man carrying a citizen's card. [...] The progress of the Revolution had rendered the brave hopes of the feminists of 1789–91 chimeric. (1975: 58)

The drafting of a new Constitution on 22 August 1795 saw the start of the Directory, which continued until Bonaparte's *coup d'état* in 1799. This constitution was based on a close correlation between property ownership and political representation, thereby further excluding the likelihood of French women's accession to the political stage. As the nineteenth century got underway it became evident that the Jacobins' notion of political democracy as articulated in the 1795 Constitution would not be read as embracing full

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13 The degree of Gouges' illiteracy has been the subject of much critical contention. Gabrielle Verdier believes it has been exaggerated: 'Her handwriting and signature are strained, but many people who wrote with difficulty (and her secretaries, too, made spelling and grammar mistakes) could read well. Her works show that she had read widely, if not classically' (1994: 218).

14 In her preface to the autobiographical novel *Mémoire de Madame de Valmont* (1788), Gouges urges women to support each other and not to engage in rivalry, which she sees as fuelling men's sense of their own superiority: 'Il faudroit donc, mes très chères soeurs, être plus indulgentes entre nous pour nos défauts, nous les cacher mutuellement et tâcher de devenir plus conséquentes en faveur de notre sexe.' Gouges' radicalness is highlighted by the fact that, as Catherine R. Montfort and Jenene J. Allison remark, she 'was the only woman of the Revolution to be condemned and executed for her writings' (1994: 9).

female citizenship. Similarly, as this chapter has suggested, the enlightened writings of the more liberal *philosophes*, while promoting an individualist consciousness, were mainly confined to the literary domain, as the successive authorities of the new regime continued in their attempts to extinguish women's real-life political potential in French society. If many of the *philosophes*, such as Voltaire, Montesquieu and Diderot, recognised women's disadvantaged social position, they nonetheless failed to advocate a defence of women's political status and representation publicly.<sup>15</sup> The predominant influence of certain supposedly innate qualities in women – emotion rather than reason; reaction rather than reflection – was used to justify women's subjection to ever more rigid moral guidance within particular (domestic) parameters. Given women's significant contribution during the early stages of the French Revolution, the subsequent reduction in their few existent rights appears even more regressive, leading Dorinda Outram to the pessimistic conclusion that 'the French Revolutionary middle class probably actually produced an intensification of the pre-existing patriarchal political culture which they alleged they were attempting to replace' (1989: 155). The only rights that remained unaltered beyond the First Empire (1804) were women's rights to receive equal inheritance and to sign a legal contract.

The Napoleonic era (1799–1815) was characterised by the drive for a more stable, family-oriented nation, which saw the ongoing reification of the separate spheres inscribed in the Napoleonic Code and in the work of writers such as Rousseau, whereby woman is the guardian of the hearth, reigning supreme over her *petite république*, while man has access to the public sphere and the external world of work and politics. If the Revolutionary contribution to the institution of marriage had been to make it a civil contract in the Constitution of 1791, to emphasise each individual's right to pursue marital happiness, this was succeeded by a more state-sanctioned, interventionist approach in which Napoleonic law decreed that the source of authority lay not with the individual but with the Head of State, and, in its marital form, with the head of the family in his role as husband and father, thereby ratifying woman's inferiority in marriage and her legal duty to obey her husband, and returning to a more rigidly patrilinear model of power. A further consequence of this ongoing effacement of women's rights was the modification of accepted feminine 'figurations': under Napoleon, the strong,

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15 On this issue, David Williams' measured assessment of the *philosophes'* relationship to women's rights is apposite: '[T]he ideological attractiveness of the positions taken up by certain of the *philosophes* should not be allowed to distort modern appreciations of Enlightenment feminism – either by disguising the period's fundamental conservatism on the issue of female *civisme*, or by exaggerating its urgency as a problem in eighteenth-century life and public conscience' (1980: 38).

publicly engaged woman who had been visible during the Revolution was replaced by a more solicitous, maternal counterpart – although one, as this study argues, with her own strengths and influences. Just as the execution of supposedly dangerous women bore testament to women’s subversive potential, the regime’s desire to exclude women from the political arena by legally inscribing their secondary status in the form of the Civil Code could be seen to fulfil a similar function. Analogous to the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*, the Napoleonic Code strives to marry two contradictory ideological approaches: the Revolutionary belief that all citizens be treated as equal before the law on the one hand, with oppressive patriarchal measures that subjugate women first to their father’s authority and then to their husband’s on the other. One unforeseen result of this reification of women’s inferiority in the Civil Code was to fuel the belief that, if women were being oppressed on the basis of their femaleness, a gender-based solidarity, a feminist consciousness, could serve to resist such oppression (a solidarity apparent in the already-cited dedication of Olympe de Gouges’ *Déclaration* to the queen, with which the ardent royalist Gouges endeavoured to win over a high-profile – albeit unpopular – supporter to her cause).

The Code further reflects the growing entrenchment of bourgeois ideology throughout French society in its conception of women as the property of their husbands and its promotion of the sanctity of the patriarchal family unit, a promotion that would continue to be ratified by conservative Christian thinkers throughout the early nineteenth century. As the Code’s infamous article 213 states: ‘La femme doit obéissance à son mari.’ That ‘obedience’ was illustrated in the husband’s right to dispose of his wife’s income or property as he so desired, which was the logical progression to his having the legal and sexual disposition of his wife. (Sexual inequalities were perhaps most blatant in the punishment meted out for infidelity: a wife could be imprisoned for up to two years, while her husband would at worst receive a fine, and only if actually caught with his mistress inside the marital home.) France’s brief flirtation with an egalitarian ‘horizontal’ distribution of power during the early days of the Revolution was swiftly replaced by the traditional ‘vertical’ axis of authority, and the Code’s legitimation of sexism would profoundly influence French *mœurs* for decades, if not centuries, to come.<sup>16</sup>

The early part of the nineteenth century consequently witnessed a re- or counter-definition of the roles of women in response to the attempted dilution of conventional religious and social hierarchies that had taken place

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16 The (re)rigidification of social and sexual hierarchies was further symbolised by the cessation of the Republican calendar in 1805. Only in 1965 did French women achieve financial and legal independence in marriage.

towards the end of the previous century. If the Catholic Church had exerted a powerful influence on many French women's (non)politicisation in the eighteenth century, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century adopted a more subtle approach: woman was different from man and her female nature destined her to a different, and complementary, future. While valuing French women's key contribution to family- and nation-building, this revised political discourse also reinforced existent sexual disparities, in that patriarchal authority had found new justification in the form of woman's 'Otherness'. As if to compensate women for their lack of political power, French society began to idealise them as virtuous wives and mothers. This characterisation of women as 'angels of the hearth' received further impetus from the increasing separation in French society between the 'male' public domain and the 'female' private one, a binary that the existence of the *salons* had partly undermined.<sup>17</sup> This middle-class domestic ideal was further reinforced by the growing urbanisation of French society. Denise Z. Davidson comments on the *embourgeoisement* of social spaces, an *embourgeoisement* strongly inflected by gender:

Aristocratic lifestyles encouraged shared male/female spaces, whereas bourgeois society largely relied upon purely male institutions. As bourgeois models of behavior grew to dominate, the mixing of the genders in public became a mark of working-class behavior. As workers and the locations in which they gathered grew to be defined as 'dangerous' by social observers and officials, the middle classes chose to separate themselves from urban public spaces. (2007: 132)

Women's general exclusion from the social mainstream as a result of Napoleon's Civil Code further reinforced the romanticisation of women's roles, in that they were idealised as representatives of chaste morality, kept pure by their distance from the supposedly corrupt dealings of the political arena and safely shut away in their homes on the periphery of active society. On 8 May 1816, divorce was banned. This valorisation of domestic stability also altered the retrospective assessment of the Revolution during the Empire. It

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17 In her work *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Joan B. Landes discusses how the growing perception of the *salonnière's* 'corrupting' infiltration of and influence on the hegemonised power structures of patriarchal institutions in French society – an influence aggravated by her frequent repudiation of traditional marriage and motherhood – preempted her subsequent consignment to the domestic realm, safely out of reach of the public sphere: 'As rhetorical figure, then, the name "précieuse" constructs an illusion charged with ambivalent associations and fears about woman's capacity to displace power within a phallic order – an order composed by male social dominance and by masculine authority over the Word' (1988: 30).

was now viewed as a turbulent period during which the nation's morality had been shaken and the haven of the family threatened. Margaret H. Darrow points to the fact that this opinion was one shared by many wealthy women themselves: 'To these women, the Revolution appeared as a retribution for past decadence and the Restoration as an opportunity for reform' (1979: 43).<sup>18</sup> As the mainstay of family life and, in the middle and upper classes, as educators of their children, women were heralded as the guardians of France's morality. French women were made to take on greater moral responsibility for the nation's wellbeing, and charitable activity became a key means of women's atonement for their putatively decadent behaviour during the *Ancien Régime*; as Chapter 4 argues, engaging in charitable activity did give women a visible presence in the public sphere, a presence that became more prominent during the Restoration and July Monarchy. French women's marital and maternal role expanded to incorporate that of active voluntary worker (even if both figurations revolved around the notion of self-sacrifice). In her comparative study *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780–1860*, Jane Rendall perceives France as the least radical of the three countries in terms of women's feminist politicisation during this period. This she attributes to the continuing influence exerted by the Catholic Church and a centralised bureaucracy (in contrast to the more individualist, 'unorthodox' Protestant Church, which promoted voluntary action and association), as well as to the relatively narrow *Weltanschauung* of the ruling post-Revolutionary bourgeoisie, which was reflected in the slower rate of urbanisation and economic change in France: 'Surely one explanation must lie not only in the socially and politically conservative outlook of this class in France, but more fundamentally, in a family structure which did not permit the expansion and enlargement of the domestic world' (1985: 300).

It was not merely the governing representatives of the State who espoused this valorisation of women's Otherness, but equally more radical, marginal factions. If the feminist sentiments expressed during the Revolution tended to emphasise women's similarity to men and their active participation in Revolutionary events in an endeavour to procure them the same rights, in an ideological *volte-face* feminism in France during the first half of the nineteenth century, as embodied by the Utopian socialist movement of Saint Simonism and in keeping with *l'air du temps*, tended to highlight women's particularity, their 'difference'. The years between 1815 and the 1830s saw the Utopianist

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18 The Restoration (1814–1830) refers to the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy under Louis XVIII, who was then succeeded by his brother Charles X – a right-wing, highly conservative period that further sanctioned the political re-establishment of the Catholic Church in France.

movement flourish. Its political agenda combined the Enlightenment values of the *philosophes*, the radical beliefs in social progress voiced during the Revolution and the renaissance in religiosity prevalent during the Restoration, including the mythicisation of Woman. If the principal contributors to the Saint-Simonian philosophy and movement – individuals such as Etienne Cabet, Charles Fourier, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Henri de Saint-Simon – began to rethink the constituents of the French social and sexual model, numerous differences existed in the approaches of these thinkers; while some emphasised the key role of a socialist approach to economics, others focused on the importance of liberating emotional and sexual passions – and consequently individuals. Claire Goldberg Moses summarises their general economic approach as follows: ‘Their message was that a new, peaceful relationship between the classes should replace social conflict; that the work of the industrialist and the proletariat should be equally valued, even if not equally remunerated; and that inheritance of wealth, although not the private ownership of property, should be abolished’ (1984: 44).

The theoretician least interested in improvements in the situation of French women ironically became most associated with the feminist cause retrospectively. Nothing in Saint Simon’s writings indicates his posthumous feminist importance, yet, following his death in 1825, those who sought to make public his work foregrounded its significance for women. It was his principal interpreter, Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin, who venerated women. For Enfantin, women epitomised the core values of peace and love that he wished to extend to society at large; he sought to break down hierarchies, whether between the spirit and the flesh, employer and worker, or man and woman, categories of contemporary significance as French society began to feel the positive effects of industrial progress and economic expansion and as working-class women infiltrated the manufacturing sections of French society in increasing numbers. As Chapter 5 argues, despite the catalytic role played by Saint Simonism in bringing French women’s roles and rights to the political foreground once again, the movement was a paternalistic one that considered women as either devoted sisters or mistresses and, even when discussing the emancipation of women, continued to perceive them as objects to be liberated, rather than as autonomous subjects. Saint Simonism believed not in sexual equality but in sexual complementarity. Nonetheless, particularly in what may be viewed as the second phase of the movement, a phase that coincides with the publication of the feminist journal *La Femme libre* in 1832 and Enfantin’s imprisonment on charges of immorality, Saint-Simonian women began to take on a more active role in deciding the movement’s political agenda, as exemplified by *La Femme libre*’s repeated exhortations promoting the importance of French women’s rights and interclass sorority.

The final 20 years of the period under study witnessed two revolutions. First, Charles X had failed to detect the mood of the French nation, and his endeavour to implement more oppressive press controls and reduce the power of the electorate during a time characterised by a strong desire for constitutional reform brought revolt to the streets of Paris and resulted in the revolution of July 1830, when he was replaced by a new constitutional monarchy headed by the more popular and conciliatory king, Louis-Philippe I. Second, the February Revolution of 1848 saw the demise of France's last king and the birth of the Second Republic. It is therefore unsurprising that these 20 years provide evidence of a profound and extensive politicisation of French women, broadening and intensifying what had started off as, above all, a subsistence-based revolt during the Revolution of 1789 but had then been 'gendered' by a few deviant women who dared challenge the state-sanctioned inferiorisation of women. Again echoing the earlier revolution, the impetus for these revolutions can be seen as the quasi-irreconcilable differences in *Weltanschauungen* between the republican and monarchical factions in France, with the former repeatedly demanding the right to 'universal' suffrage (albeit with the non-participation of women) and thus the creation of a democratic state with which to undermine the power base of the latter.

This final period also gives rise to a concerted and explicit feminist consciousness in the women's press, in that, for the first time, French women journalists consistently strived to speak with a more collective, gender-inflected voice, rather than as members of a particular social class. Previous periods did, of course, see the publication of women's journals that addressed women on the basis of gender, yet this was often subordinate to their more pronounced sense of class affiliation and solidarity. In the final two journals to be examined in this study, women readers from all social classes are repeatedly urged to work together, as women again begin to form their own political clubs and associations in order to debate issues of specific concern to them, whether arguing for the right of unmarried mothers to keep their children or for women to be admitted to the National Assembly. In other words, these later journals aspire to unite women as women, whatever their social background: the in-fighting between different political factions has ultimately been cast aside and replaced by a more democratised perception of women as a collective force fighting for the same rights and sharing the same aspirations. As *Figurations of the Feminine* illustrates, the period from 1758 to 1848 bears witness to a growing and inexorable awareness of women as a separate, yet cohesive political force, as French women's journals move from targeting a select upper-class elite to consistently seeking to appeal to women readers from across the class spectrum.



## EARLY JOURNALISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE FEMININE

THE FOLLOWING SECTION charts the general trajectory of women's journals in France throughout this politically volatile period, and the vagaries of press censorship accompanying it. It also examines publications that, while not nominally part of the more established women's press, nonetheless have women's – and often feminist – concerns as a key focus. As the Introduction has remarked and as Chapter 2 details, the earliest models of journalism aimed at a predominantly female readership have little in common with today's women's press in terms of the extensiveness of the latter's different readership demographics; these early publications were written and read by only those women possessing the intellectual and financial capital to do so. It is in the immediate pre-Revolutionary period that the women's press first begins to show tentative, if shortlived, signs of diversification, in that it comprises more radical subsections seeking to target an explicitly defined readership based on presumed sociopolitical allegiances and aims. In other words, if the expression of feminist sentiments is often detectable in the pre-Revolutionary press, it is the chronological proximity of the French Revolution of 1789 that impacts significantly upon the different figurations of women put forward by the women's journals published during this pre-nineteenth-century period, as more and more women recognise the political potential of journals as a medium through which to promote sexual equality. Female writers and readers begin to voice their frustration at the ongoing inequities inscribed in the French legal and educational systems and encourage the female reader to take up particular feminocentric causes.

While this greater radicalness was aided by the freeing up of censorship in the years immediately succeeding the Revolution, it also stems from the fact that women's journals were beginning to be read – and written – by women from lower echelons of the social hierarchy, women whose political objectives often demanded more urgent and direct articulation than those of previous writers and readers. Indeed, the initial Revolutionary drive for greater freedom of individual expression finds duplication in the realm of print culture generally. Carla Hesse highlights the cataclysmic changes undergone by this new 'democratised' publishing arena:

The system of publishing instituted by the divine-right absolutist monarchy had been brought to the ground. The seat of sovereignty in the publishing world had shifted from the king and his administration to the National Assembly and the Commune of Paris. It was now in these public assemblies rather than in the antechambers of Versailles that the meaning of freedom in the world of ideas would be interpreted and implemented. Prepublication censorship of

the printed word had been suppressed. [...] But most significantly, the whole centralized administration of the publishing world had collapsed. (1991: 28–9)

This description makes clear the dramatic post-Revolutionary alteration in journalistic and ideological power systems, with the temporary dilution of a ‘top-down’ distribution of information replaced by a more inclusive and democratic system of governance, and in the potential of the individual (written) word to further galvanise widespread social reform, a potential that would be extensively harnessed by several female-authored publications and pamphlets.

Many of these early feminist publications may be properly classed as political pamphlets rather than women’s journals. Harvey Chisick’s working definition of the pamphlet genre, in contrast with the more regular, consistent and standardised publication of the periodical, is a useful one: ‘a brief, self-contained publication directed at a specific issue, or fairly narrow range of issues, which is intended to influence public opinion, and which is produced unofficially’ (1988: 626). Like the periodical, it was bought rather than freely distributed. Given the irregular, more ‘spontaneous’ nature of pamphleteering, the potential for the radicalisation of its content was inevitably greater. During the Revolution, pamphlets were able to respond speedily to the constant political crises and, as one-off purchases, would be within more people’s financial reach than the subscription typically required for a periodical. As Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin remark in the preface to *Press and Politics in Pre-revolutionary France*:

Until the Estates General convened in May 1789, the newspapers and periodicals published in France were all officially licensed, their editors carefully screened by the government, and their contents rigorously censored; by the end of 1789, however, France was swarming with publications that were independent of all authority, their editors self-proclaimed representatives of the people’s will, their contents totally unfettered. (1987: vii)

Under the *Ancien Régime* the domestic press was a strictly government-controlled, censored organ, yet one that comprised a relatively varied range of journals all seeking to eschew the expression of any controversial religious or political opinions, and which also co-existed with other, more covert, extra-territorial publications. The years immediately following 1789 saw a huge growth in the number of newspapers for sale in France generally, a growth related not only to the information frenzy accompanying the advent of the French Revolution but also to gradual improvements in, among other areas, (male) literacy, the policies governing commercial exchanges and the economy, and the popularity of Enlightenment ideas, with their emphasis on

the importance of intellectual development and the acquisition of knowledge. While many newspapers lasted only a few issues, the extensive range of publications available nonetheless contributed to a new culture of political debate and consciousness-raising, an inevitable result of which was a greater number of politically aware Frenchwomen.<sup>19</sup> The freedom of the press was officially inscribed in Article II of the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* in 1789, which stipulated that 'La libre communication des pensées et des opinions est un des droits les plus précieux de l'homme; tout citoyen peut donc parler, écrire, imprimer librement, sauf à répondre de l'abus de cette liberté dans les cas déterminés par la loi.' The interpretation of the final phrase of this article was sufficiently fluid that control could still be exercised if the authorities considered an article or publication likely to incite public disorder – an event, however, that rarely happened until the advent of the Terror in 1793. It is somewhat ironic that the absence of press freedom for which the Revolutionaries criticised the *Ancien Régime* became ever more rigidified during the Terror in an attempt to stamp out any voices of dissent and to bolster nationalist fervour in the face of internal and external wars.

Unsurprisingly, the pre- and post-Revolutionary publishing press in France was much more politicised – and focused on domestic politics – than its *Ancien Régime* counterpart, which tended to comprise somewhat anodyne moralising articles and accounts of foreign policy. The era witnessed a new drive for political engagement and responsibility, with writer – and, indeed, reader – not merely objective observer but also potential actor in events currently unfolding in the social sphere; this advocacy of greater political involvement and consciousness infused women's pamphlets and journals. As Hugh Gough comments, '[A] new role for the press had also emerged, that of the campaigning journalist – not the detached observer of events, but a participant in them, using his newspaper not as an analytical mirror held up to the face of reality, but as a weapon in political campaigns' (1988: 36). While educational reforms constituted a key 'campaign' issue in many publications supporting improvements in women's rights, other topics covered included women's working conditions and the right to divorce. The remarkably radical *Requête des Dames à l'Assemblée Nationale*, published in 1789, demanded that women be included in this brave new world of social and racial equality, particularly as women were major participants in the numerous Revolutionary struggles – gender discrimination, it argued, should be outlawed,

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19 This surge in the number of newspapers available continued until about 1793, when, under the Terror, 'the number of journals published in Paris dropped by one-half, from 216 to 113. In the year II [1794] the number of periodicals circulating in Paris hit an all-time low of 106 for the revolutionary period (1788–1799)' (Hesse 1991: 128–9).

citing numerous literary and historical female figures who had been successful despite the 'masculine aristocratie' (p. 4) that repeatedly sought to stamp out their talents. It also maintained that women should be permitted entry to various professions, including the legal and the military; they should be allowed to wear trousers; and the masculine gender should not be privileged over the feminine in grammar – an early awareness of the prescriptive role played by language in inflecting, rather than merely reflecting, reality. Demands made by women workers themselves, however, were often less exacting, as exemplified in the *Discours prononcé par Mme. Rigal dans une assemblée de femmes artistes et orfèvres, tenue le 20 septembre, pour délibérer sur une contribution volontaire*, which urged women to give up their personal wealth – in the form of jewellery – for the good of the nation. Foreshadowing the emphasis on women's role as family caretaker and charitable volunteer that would dominate the years following the Revolution, Madame Rigal appeals to women's 'natural' sense of maternal empathy – 'La Patrie est notre famille commune' – encouraging them to help this poor relation, remarking that, if the country becomes bankrupt, its (female) citizens will be to blame, since the administration has done everything in its power to come to the nation's financial rescue (1789: 3).

Other feminist brochures began appearing, such as Madame de Coicy's *Les Femmes comme il convient de les voir* (published in Paris in 1785 in two volumes) or the more radical *Mémoire pour le sexe féminin, contre le sexe masculin*, authored by Madame Gacon-Dufour and published in London and Paris in 1787, both early contributors to what Hugh Gough describes as 'pamphlet warfare in the vacuum left by the collapse of royal authority in the winter of 1788–9' (1988: 15–16).<sup>20</sup> The latter constitutes a plea for improvements in the treatment of women, highlighting the importance of providing quality education for girls given the pivotal role played by both education and upbringing in contributing to their subsequent sense of worth and future happiness. *Mémoire pour le sexe féminin, contre le sexe masculin* repeatedly argues against the association of women with 'la corruption des moeurs', implying that, owing to the absence of concrete activities available to them, it is, rather, women's lack of corruption which merits praise. It maintains that any corruption they do exhibit is attributable to men, who force them to lead

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20 In his study *Revolutionary News: The Press in France 1789–1799*, Jeremy D. Popkin also comments on the rapid growth of the pamphlet medium preceding the Revolution and on its inevitable limitations, limitations which made the freeing up of the newspaper press during the Revolution all the more imperative: 'The prerevolutionary crisis converted the traditional pamphlet into a mass medium. But the pamphlet was by its very nature an irregular, episodic form of publication that appeared at moments of crisis and then ceased when the crisis was over' (1990: 26).

an unrealistically constrained existence. This pamphlet is also progressive in its belief that fathers should be more emotionally demonstrative towards their children, remarking poignantly, p. 37: 'Je connois un seul pere qui embrasse ses enfants tendrement, & qui les aime comme il convient.'<sup>21</sup> The former pamphlet, *Les Femmes comme il convient de les voir*, examines the sexes from birth through to their experience of a sex-specific education, and its beliefs are summed up as follows:

enfin, je crois conduire mes Lecteurs à conclurre avec moi, qu'il seroit très-utile que les femmes, sur tout en France, fussent intimément associées aux fonctions des hommes, & qu'elles participassent aux titres & aux décorations extérieures que la reconnaissance nationale accorde aux hommes avec lesquelles elles sont unies par le lien conjugal. (p. 5)<sup>22</sup>

Men and women are born intellectual equals, it contends, and it is France's inadequate education system that instils sex-specific roles and objectives. It also cites various examples of women throughout history who have proved themselves capable of fulfilling the same functions as men (replicating the excavationary approach previously advocated by *Le Journal des dames* (1759–78) in an endeavour to inspire contemporary readers, as highlighted in Chapter 2). Such demands for increased access to educational facilities for women echo those written in the various *Cahiers de doléance* during the elections in 1789 and, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, would form a staple subject of the early French women's press. The publication of the *Bibliothèque universelle des dames* (1785–97) provides further evidence of this intensifying interest in women's education; two volumes every month were devoted to a variety of subjects ranging from geometry to the Greek poets, thus constituting a form

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21 In its criticism of the widespread inadequacies of contemporary paternal role models, Madame Gacon-Dufour's pamphlet would appear to reflect a nascent eighteenth-century trend. In her work *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt remarks on contemporary literary representations of the paternal – representations which, as Chapter 3 comments, further inflected the public perception of Louis XVI as a beneficent, benign head of the nation: 'The literary transformations of repressive fathers into good and generous ones and the seeming effacement of the father in contrast to the more emotive mother and the increasingly interesting child all suggest that the novel as it developed in eighteenth-century France was inherently antipatriarchal' (1992: 28).

22 As Chapters 3 and 4 highlight, this emphasis on the importance of educating women for the benefit of the female individual herself would become increasingly imbued with a strong republican bent and family ethos, in that children were seen to belong first and foremost to the nation and should be instilled with republican values through the maternal educator.

of self-contained study aid for women, a function that would also be eagerly espoused by early exemplars of the French women's press.

Many of the texts that appeared in political pamphlets would subsequently be published in women's journals, pointing up the cross-fertilisation of genres and writers at this time, whether Madame Mouret's speech to the National Assembly in 1790 on the importance of improving French women's education, which reappeared as *Les Annales de l'éducation du sexe, ou journal des demoiselles* the same year, or the reproduction of the *Cahier de doléances et réclamations des femmes du département de la Charente* in *Les Étrennes nationales des dames*, both published in 1789, in which the author argues that women should not be prejudiced against when political rights were being extended to people from all classes and creeds. Several of these publications were of short duration and were published by groups of women who either remained anonymous or wrote under pseudonyms. The most influential publications in this category include *Les Étrennes nationales des dames*, *Le Véritable Ami de la reine ou journal des dames* (1790), and *Les Annales de l'éducation du sexe*, the first and most interesting of which is examined in Chapter 5.

Alongside journals written predominantly by women were those written by men expressing feminist views, which were aimed either at female readers – such as *Le Courier de l'hymen ou journal des dames* (1791), discussed in Chapter 4 – or even at a predominantly male readership: *Le Journal de la société de 1789*, a publication founded by the Marquis de Condorcet, the most feminist of the *philosophes*, demanded 'le droit de cité' for women. Perhaps the most famous early journal explicitly arguing the feminist cause and supporting women's right to participate in the political domain was the freemason journal *La Bouche de fer* (1790–91). While not a 'women's journal' in terms of either content or implied readership, this publication nevertheless had women's causes at its heart and was resolutely non-hierarchical. In it, the Abbé Fauchet expounded his theories on Christian Socialism – thereby foreshadowing certain components of Saint Simonism – envisaging a golden future in which virtue, and consequently the rights of women, would triumph. The journal promotes a future founded on pacific historical reconciliation rather than on seeking retribution for the perceived inequalities of the past – in this sense, it foreshadows the conciliatory position espoused by the final journal to be examined in this study, *La Voix des femmes* (1848) – and, as is the case with many 'Republican' journals published in France around this time, it holds England up as a model to be emulated.<sup>23</sup> Feminist aspirations in the

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23 The *Bouche de fer* was produced by a group of people taking the name of the *Cercle social*, who were united in their belief in the necessity of equality among citizens. In his chapter "The Powers of Husband and Wife Must Be Equal and Separate": The

latter half of the eighteenth century thus found articulation through a variety of different media, ranging from small pamphlets to women's journals, as well as through the more direct action previously highlighted in the form of clubs and associations.

This period also witnessed a growing support for women's right to divorce, as demonstrated by the anonymous – although apparently male-authored – *Mémoire sur le divorce* in 1796, which states that 'Les femmes sont nées nos égales, nos amies, faites pour partager avec nous le sceptre de l'univers' (p. 7),<sup>24</sup> and the earlier *Observations sur le divorce* by the Comte d'Antraigues, published in 1789, in which the author argues that divorce will always be necessary as long as there exist marriages of convenience where individuals do not marry for love. While favouring divorce only under limited circumstances such as adultery or what he rather loosely terms 'le désordre extrême', by which he means a predilection for alcoholism or gambling, he does advocate that all citizens, women included, have the right to dispose of their heart as they desire: 'La liberté du mariage consiste en ce que tous les citoyens puissent à leur gré choisir, dans toutes les classes des citoyens, la campagne de leur vie' (p. 13). More 'literary' influences also played a pivotal role in raising awareness of an individual's, and particularly of a woman's, incontestable right to exercise choice over the constituents of her existence, whether pedagogic or marital, although, as this chapter has remarked, the *philosophes* – with one notable exception – were somewhat reticent in proposing concrete solutions to address gender inequalities. As the key theoretician of the time sympathetic to the rights of women, the Marquis de Condorcet treated several issues of concern to feminists in his work, viewing sexual difference as predominantly due to education and environment. Shortly after Olympe de Gouges' first publication, *Lettre au peuple, ou projet d'une caisse patriotique* (1788), Condorcet highlighted the

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Cercle Social and the Rights of Women, 1790–91', in *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution* (1990), pp. 163–80, Gary Kates observes: 'Although a male-led group, the Cercle Social lobbied for ways to bring about sexual equality in the new political order. [...] The Cercle Social became one of the most important centers where an embryonic campaign for women's rights was launched during the early years of the French Revolution' (p. 164). Dan Edelstein's characterisation of the 'Cercle Social' as a locus of the 'Super-Enlightenment' (2010: 29–30), by which he means the co-existence of the epistemologically rational and the more 'illuminist' metaphysical, may further account for the society's daringness in transgressing sexual norms.

24 In this publication, the author attributes women's exclusion from a comprehensive education to male fear of their intellectual potential, should they be freed from their state of enforced ignorance. 'He' also argues that the clergy, as a celibate profession, should not be allowed to contribute to the debate on divorce, and that the absence of free choice from the marital union can only result in miserable marriages.

desirability of improving women's rights, and strongly advocated their right to suffrage. In 1790 he published the pamphlet *Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité*, in which he argued for women's right to equal educational and professional opportunities, exposing the iniquitous patriarchal hegemony that abused the very principles on which it was founded: 'Par exemple, tous n'ont-ils pas violé le principe de l'égalité des droits en privant tranquillement la moitié du genre humain de celui de concourir à la formation des lois, en excluant les femmes du droit de cité?' (pp. 1–2).

A further important literary influence at the time was Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* appeared in 1792 just after Gouges' seminal *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*. The translation of Wollstonecraft's work was received enthusiastically in France, further illustrating the European cross-fertilisation of literary sources discussed earlier. Gouges' *Déclaration* included in its Article 10 (out of 17) the statement that 'la femme a le droit de monter à l'échafaud; elle doit avoir également celui de monter à la Tribune.' The *Déclaration* makes clear that Gouges feels the Revolution has failed women ('Quels sont les avantages que vous avez recueillis dans la révolution? Un mépris plus marqué, un dédain plus signalé'; Postamble), and urges them to fight for equality in all areas, whether legal or educational, but to bear in mind that equality also entails accepting the more onerous demands of full citizenship, including social responsibility and payment of taxes (she had already linked political and fiscal responsibility for women in her *Lettre au peuple*). The overwhelming thrust of the *Déclaration* centres on the principle of shared responsibility between the sexes in order to combat patriarchal abuses of power, whether urging fathers to accept paternal responsibility for their offspring or advocating women's direct legal and political participation, thereby serving to blur the traditional binary of the masculine public and the feminine domestic. Echoing the content of her plays, Gouges' pamphleteering declaims her militant desire that women should enjoy complete equality with men loudly and unashamedly; there is no charm offensive or rhetorical attenuation of her aims, but a vexed and direct criticism of the absence of post-Revolutionary political progress for French women.<sup>25</sup>

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25 As highlighted earlier, Gouges was an avid pamphleteer, publishing over 60 pamphlets, which ranged from addressing taxation issues to the rights of slaves. In *Between the Queen and the Cabby, Olympes de Gouges's Rights of Woman*, John R. Cole argues that, while irrefutably feminist in her social objectives, Gouges was also irrefutably royalist in her Revolutionary pamphleteering and against increasing the political representation of the Third Estate: 'for all Gouges's personal independence and intellectual idiosyncrasies, her consistent opposition to democrats served the interests of those aristocrats who wanted to maintain the traditional orders or estates, with their graded ranks and privileges' (2011: 98).



Whatever the putative beliefs in equality voiced by Revolutionary discourse, the vast majority of those wielding political power espoused the Rousseauian perception of women as naturally inferior and responded to the growing number of feminist demands with oppression. Their actions of banning women from the Assembly, and in 1793 making it illegal for them to meet and publish, were directly responsible for the absence of women's journals during the period 1792–96.<sup>26</sup>

The period from 1795 until the July revolution of 1830 is the quietest of the early years of the French women's press, in terms of both the number of journals published and the political radicalism of their content.<sup>27</sup> Frenchwomen's growing politicisation – a politicisation both fuelled by and expressed in the content of the women's press during the last decades of the eighteenth century – was temporarily thwarted by a series of draconian and repressive measures that affected all manifestations of the printed word during the Terror. As Carla Hesse comments:

[T]he Terror deprived publishers and printers of the new markets in political literature that had opened up after the collapse of state censorship in 1789. By 1792 repression had begun to send an icy chill across the printing and publishing trades. The laws of December 4, 1792, and especially March 29, 1793, turned political journalism and pamphleteering into potentially lethal professions: any call for the dissolution of the present government became punishable by death. The law against suspects of September 17, 1793, still further smoothed the path from the printing press to the guillotine. (1991: 128)<sup>28</sup>

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26 It is worth noting that those high-profile women who had earlier participated in the public domain were constantly subjected to abuse and vilification. As Lynn Hunt remarks: 'Women acting in the public sphere – whether the market women as portrayed by Burke or Marie-Antoinette as depicted by her republican critics – were likened to beasts; they lost their femininity and with it their very humanity. If the veil of social constraints that shielded them from the public eye was rent, their dangerous and presocial nature as furies was revealed' (1992: 116).

27 In her work *Presse féminine et critique littéraire de 1800 à 1830: Leurs rapports avec l'histoire des femmes*, Jeanne Brunereau argues that this period in the history of the French women's press has been particularly bereft of critical attention, a lack which her own work aims to rectify: 'Deux phases de cette évolution, l'une, de 1788 à 1793, l'autre, de 1830 à 1848, ont particulièrement focalisé l'exégèse. En revanche, la période intermédiaire de 1800 à 1830 a moins éveillé la curiosité, un peu comme si le temps s'était alors suspendu pour les femmes' (2000: 5). However, as the Introduction observes, the French women's press has scarcely been overwhelmed by *any* form of critical attention.

28 Claude Bellanger et al. further comment on this period: 'Du 2 juin 1793 jusqu'à la chute de Robespierre et du grand Comité de Salut Public, le 9 thermidor an II (27 juillet 1794), s'étend donc une époque durant laquelle la presse ne jouit plus d'aucune liberté' (1969: 508).

As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, the content of certain women's journals in the period immediately following this intensification of censorship becomes noticeably more insipid. This 'middle' phase of the early years of the French women's press is undoubtedly its least politically audacious and perhaps that most reflective of the widespread perception of the women's press today as an organ characterised by a predictable proliferation of *idées reçues* and feminine stereotypes. In *Paroles oubliées: Les femmes et la construction de l'Etat-nation en France et en Italie 1789–1860*, Christiane Veauvy and Laura Pisano explain the dearth of publications in the following terms: 'L'effacement précoce de la presse féminine a pu être imputé aux difficultés que connaît alors la France, tant intérieures (crise économique, conflits politiques entre jacobins et girondins) qu'extérieures (guerre aux frontières)' (1997: 14). Women's journals under the Directory (1795–99) give expression to the general ennui and frivolous pleasure-seeking that ensued after the constraints and restrictions associated with the Revolution and, especially, the Terror, and for this reason typically escape censorship.<sup>29</sup> While the pre-Revolutionary women's press manifested an occasional interest in fashion, it had principally focused on more substantive political concerns such as women's right to education or the importance of raising the profile of neglected women authors, and had adopted a deliberate consciousness-raising approach with regard to women's inferior status in French society generally. Under the Directory, fashion becomes the dominant – and often the only – subject treated in the pages of the French women's press.<sup>30</sup> Many publications at this time were of short

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29 Press censorship would become firmly ensconced under Napoleon, whose grip on freedom of speech grew ever more rigid until there were only four political newspapers remaining by the year 1811: *Le Moniteur universel*; the *Journal de Paris*; the *Journal de l'Empire*; and the *Gazette de France*. For more details, see Pierre Albert (1970: 31). As Jeremy D. Popkin elucidates: 'It took the highly developed repressive apparatus of the Napoleonic government to stamp out the hardy newspapers that spread like weeds after 1789' (1990: 37).

30 Literature and literary reviews also continue to play a role in the post-Revolutionary women's press, partly because, in the hedonistic society of the Directory, any form of *divertissement* employed to while away the atmosphere of ennui was welcome, and partly because literature was one of the main cultural and intellectual domains seen as more readily accessible to, and – naively – as less politically dangerous for, women. The playwright Constance Pipelet, who wrote *Épître aux Femmes* (1797), in which she rails against women's constant inferiorisation at the hands of men, emphasises that the arts are a domain available to everyone, whatever their sex. The 'Épître' ends as follows: 'Qu'ils dirigent l'état, que leur bras le protège/ Nous leur abandonnons ce noble privilege/ Nous leur abandonnons le prix de la valeur/ Mais les arts sont à tous ainsi que le bonheur' (p. 16).

duration and went through various permutations before either sinking into obscurity or being taken over by a rival fashion journal. This was the fate of *Le Papillon, journal des arts et des plaisirs dédié aux muses et aux grâces* (1796), which became *Le Phénix* (1798–99) before its editor Caroline Wuiet made a further attempt at achieving journalistic success with *La Mouche, journal des grâces* (1799). Indeed, the subtitle of *Le Phénix* – ‘Je renaiss de ma cendre’ – aptly describes the fate of numerous women’s journals during the closing years of the eighteenth century. Unlike *Le Phénix*, which was a more serious publication, the entire content of *La Mouche* is resolutely light and flippant, comprising songs, poems and theatre reviews; its principal objective is to amuse and entertain its readership, as reflected in its subtitle ‘Je pique sans blesser’. These irrevocably slight journals did not seek to appeal to a faithful core of repeat readers in the manner of *Le Journal des dames et des modes* (1797–1839), but manifest a cynicism and desire to live for the moment reflected in their short lifespan. Many of the fashion journals published during this period also have a somewhat misogynous tone (no doubt fuelled by the fact that numerous editors are male), with women often portrayed as superficial and whimsical will-o’-the-wisps, the feminine figurations promoted thus mirroring the ephemeral publications in which they appear.

As the first section of this chapter highlights, if the Revolutionary years saw the (brief) rise of the *sans culottes* and working women’s growing political consciousness, as well as the demise of the *salonnières* and elitism characteristic of the *Ancien Régime*, the early nineteenth century saw an emphasis on the bourgeois model of wife and mother as the nation’s moral barometer, a model that women from across the social spectrum were encouraged to emulate. This emphasis partly originated in an increasing post-Revolutionary saturation with the ‘hard-headed’, relentless world of politics and a wish to find respite in the more ‘naturally female’ private domain of the home (the English term ‘home’ is often employed in French women’s journals). If French women’s patriotism had manifested itself in the public sphere during the early days of the Revolution, it was subsequently to become a much more private affair: the engaged French woman who sought to participate in political, social and cultural activities outside the home – even if she failed to be granted citizenship – gave way to a more demure *mère de famille* who sought to educate by example and who remained firmly rooted in the private sphere. The resolutely middle-class nature of the journals published during this period prohibits any references to women accessing the public domain of work. While earlier women’s journals, such as *Le Journal des dames* and *Le Cabinet des modes* (1785–93), had embraced a strong patriotic bent, such patriotism was not purely focused on satiating

the desires of the patriarchal or familial Other, but also incorporated the fulfilment of individual desires and expression (whether manifested in their promotion of readers' right to engage in literary production or to demonstrate their support for the French fashion industry through their adherence to current sartorial trends). However, the early years of the nineteenth century begin to promote French women's patriotism as inherently linked to their self-sacrifice, to their devotion to others. This increasingly widespread belief that the family was the bedrock of the State and that the Enlightenment focus on individual rights should be redressed in favour of a secure patrilinear family unit contributed to the previously mentioned banning of divorce in May 1816. With the introduction of even tighter press censorship in the early 1820s, no women's journal published between 1815 and 1830 attempts to move beyond the aesthetic or superficial: the current political situation in contemporary French society or women's circumscribed roles and rights within it receive scarcely a mention.

The Revolution of 1830 ended the conservative Bourbon regime, and the more liberal Orléanist regime that followed briefly produced fresh guarantees of freedom for the press. Consequently the women's press blossomed during the 1830s and 1840s, which witness both an expansion in the number of publications and rubrics as well as the continuing popularity of fashion journals under the reign of Louis-Philippe I (1830–48).<sup>31</sup> Contemporaneous with the 'domestic', family-oriented journals of the 1830s examined in Chapter 4, an explosion of fashion journals in the manner of the prototypical *Le Journal des dames et des modes* or *La Mode* (1829–56) inundated the market, most of which, mirroring the situation under the Directory, were so similar in content as to be quasi-interchangeable – indeed, as has been remarked, it was not uncommon for certain articles and engravings to be duplicated.<sup>32</sup> While the political content of these early domestic and fashion journals is decidedly tame in comparison with other subsections of the early French women's press,

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31 As Jann Matlock remarks in her article 'Seeing Women in the July Monarchy Salon: Rhetorics of Visibility and the Women's Press': 'The first decade of the July Monarchy heralded the appearance of nearly a hundred women's, girls', and family-oriented periodicals, seventeen of which lasted between five and a hundred years' (1996: 74). *Le Bon Ton* (1834–84), *Le Journal des demoiselles* (1833–1922) and *Le Moniteur de la mode* (1843–1913) were among those with the longest lifespans.

32 While the content of these journals was frequently identical, there was a wide variation in price, not only between different journals – in which case the main criterion was the quality of the engravings – but also for the same publication. As many as four or five different subscription prices could be paid for the same basic journal, depending on the number of supplements or editions required by the reader. As this chapter has remarked, even at this early stage in the history of the women's press many journals had international editions that were published in major European capitals.

such journals provide insight into more generic publishing issues, such as the rise of advertising in the press.<sup>33</sup> The more tolerant political climate of the early 1830s undoubtedly gave the women's press a chance to flourish after its earlier 'effacement précoce', yet feminist publications were nonetheless obliged to adopt a more reserved, conciliatory tone after a law brought in on 9 September 1835 reintroduced tight censorship in an attempt to eradicate growing political dissent, outlawing any calls for a republic, insults to the king, or mention of him directly or indirectly when discussing the actions of his government.

Among the most significant feminist journals to be published during these final two decades are *Le Journal des femmes* (1832–37) by Fanny Richomme; *La Femme libre*, later to become *La Tribune des femmes* (1832–34), by the Saint-Simonians; *Le Conseiller des femmes* (1833) by Eugénie Niboyet; and *La Voix des femmes* (1848), three of which are examined in this book. This period witnessed a rapid turnover not only of women's journals but also of women journalists, who, more than ever before, realised the political potential inherent in the journalistic medium and continued to demand rights for women. They broadcast their feminist message to female readers through different journals, often changing publication but remaining constant in their political demands, as exemplified by the prolific Eugénie Niboyet, who founded, among other publications, *Le Conseiller des femmes*, *La Mosaïque lyonnaise* (1833) and *La Voix des femmes*. As Chapter 5 argues, it is undoubtedly thanks in no small part to the women journalists from the Saint-Simonian movement that the early feminist press in France became firmly established. While the demands and aspirations of that press evidently varied, the fact that these women journalists were urging their readers to express themselves and to fight for equality regardless of their social position gradually altered and extended what constituted 'acceptable' conduct for women across the classes;<sup>34</sup> this increasingly eclectic range of journalistic figurations of the feminine – including the romanticised *féminin éternel* so pivotal to Saint

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33 During this period, the important role played by advertising and its lucrative revenue potential are evidenced by the existence of over a dozen Parisian *courtiers en annonces*, or advertising agencies, in 1838, which leased advertising space on behalf of journals for periods of three, six or nine months.

34 This increased cross-class participation of writing women is also apparent in the domain of literature. As Albistur and Armogathe remark: 'Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, sans aucune instruction "classique", publie une oeuvre importante; Elisa Mercoeur, institutrice à Nantes, est protégée par Chateaubriand; Antoinette Quarré, qui est lingère, publie en 1843, un recueil de *Poésies*; Augustine-Malvina Blanchecotte, couturière, écrit des vers appréciés de Sainte-Beuve et de Béranger; Louise Crombach, gardienne à Saint-Lazare, obtient le prix Montyon de poésie, etc.' (1977: 264).

Simonism – encouraged female readers to perceive themselves as members of a gendered community capable of effecting change, rather than as belonging above all to a particular social class, geographical region or political strain. The general public too, it was hoped, would no longer perceive Woman purely in her domestic role of wife and mother, subservient to man, but as a politicised multi-faceted individual capable of making positive contributions to French public life.

If there was a climate of journalistic – and thus epistemological and political – expansion during the latter part of the July Monarchy, thanks in part to a period of relative calm following the Revolutionary years of tumult and war, it was further aided by the period of rapid economic growth in post-1840s France. As Annemarie Kleinert remarks:

Un véritable accroissement exponentiel du nombre et du tirage de ces journaux eut lieu pendant la Monarchie de Juillet. En 1843, on pouvait déjà choisir entre une quarantaine de journaux de mode différents. Les plus répandus d'entre eux atteignaient un tirage de 6.000 exemplaires, ce qui est six fois supérieur à celui du premier journal de mode. C'est un assez grand chiffre pour les hebdomadaires de l'époque car même les quotidiens ne dépassaient guère ce nombre d'exemplaires. (1982: 193–4)<sup>35</sup>

Such significant growth was aided by a range of other factors: improvements had been made to the running of publishing houses, above all in areas of administrative and economic organisation, and advances in technology and travel infrastructure meant that the number of issues published increased rapidly and that these could then be disseminated over a wider geographical area. Journals began to be sold in single issues rather than by annual subscription or a subscription lasting several months, which obliged readers to pay a large sum of money upfront, thereby limiting subscriptions to the wealthy; this helped attract a more middle-class readership. Similarly, changes were being made to the outlets at which journals were sold: from the early 1840s, they were beginning to be sold in newspaper kiosks. In other words, by the mid-nineteenth century the French women's press had moved from being the preserve of the rich and well-educated to become a cheaper, genuinely democratic journalistic organ within the financial reach of many more French women.

The 90 years examined in this book illustrate the growing popularisation of this most important of media, as it fulfils a variety of functions in the

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<sup>35</sup> According to Peter McPhee (1992: 163), under the July Monarchy subscriptions to Parisian papers, as well as the provincial press, grew rapidly. Cheaper subscriptions and serialised novels helped boost sales. Indeed, McPhee (1992: 127) states that between 1834 and 1846 not only did the provincial press grow rapidly but provincial subscriptions to Parisian newspapers doubled to 95,000.

everyday lives of an increasing number of French women from all social classes. As *Figurations of the Feminine* demonstrates, from its beginnings in the interstices of the *Ancien Régime* to its evolution into a flourishing instrument of cultural influence and exchange, the history of the early French women's press not only highlights the fundamentally pleasurable elements of consumerism and instruction for the female self but reminds us of the wide-reaching political potential of this often belittled and critically neglected journalistic medium. The early years of the French women's press point to an increasing range of acceptable roles and representations for its female readership either to espouse or to reject, yet a range that is resolutely subtended by the belief that women are stronger together as a gendered, politicised group than apart as individuals affiliated to a particular social class.





## Women Writers and Readers

### The Beginnings of French Women's Journals and *Le Journal des dames* (1759–1778)

THIS CHAPTER examines the beginnings of the French women's press – beginnings anchored in the eighteenth-century *Ancien Régime* – and concentrates specifically on the first French women's journal of any substance and longevity, *Le Journal des dames*. It introduces the community of 'scribbling women' who produced and consumed the earliest women's journals in France; the main objectives sustaining their writing projects; and the rhetoric and forms employed by women's journals to better achieve these. Since, as Chapter 1 details, press censorship inevitably affected the degree of overt politicisation in early women's journals, an analysis of the implicit and explicit gendering agenda behind much of their journalistic discourse helps illuminate the desires and goals of the first writers and readers of the women's press in France. As epitomised by *Le Journal des dames*, the earliest examples of established women's journals in France have literature and the arts, not fashion, as their recurrent focus, a focus pointing up the press's early interest in cerebral as opposed to corporeal self-improvement, and one intimated by Simone de Beauvoir in *Le deuxième sexe I*: 'à travers tout l'Ancien Régime, c'est le domaine culturel qui est le plus accessible aux femmes qui tentent de s'affirmer' (1949; 1976: 180). In an age when French women's exposure to formal education was severely constrained and a key means by which wealthy and upper-class women could access the public realm was through participation in the literary *salons*, it is unsurprising that the arts represented their predominant intellectual outlet and means of expression. The writing and reading of texts, both journalistic and literary, allowed women authors and readers to experiment with more radical figurations of womanhood,

to vicariously don the guises these models held out to them, to transiently inhabit other selves.

As Chapter 1 observes, the women writers participating in the production of these earliest examples of the women's press typically originated from the higher echelons of French society, and thereby enjoyed many privileges unavailable to other strata of Frenchwomen. Yet, as subsequent chapters contend, there is a recurrent emphasis on the potential pedagogical contribution made by the arts – and by journalism and literature in particular – in providing *all* women with a source of intellectual stimulation and education whatever their class, an inclusive rhetorics of autodidacticism that characterises the early French women's press in general and which, as Chapter 5 in particular demonstrates, becomes more pronounced as that press establishes itself.<sup>1</sup> These early journals may presume a social, cultural and political knowledge commensurate with the privileged status of their readers, and employ a lexicon and rhetoric reflecting certain class assumptions, yet they frequently address the reader above all as a gendered individual rather than solely as belonging to a particular social stratum.

The impetus to broaden the female reader's intellectual horizons through the promotion of literature and the arts as an effective pedagogical medium does not account for all journalistic copy in the earliest women's journals, beginning in 1758 and spanning the latter half of the eighteenth century. If it is above all in the nineteenth century that the fashion journal truly takes off, certain early journals that appeared under the *Ancien Régime* also concentrate on informing the reader of recent developments in the fashion world, on providing them with charming moral tales of appropriate male and female conduct and, before the advent of the French Revolution, on maintaining the decidedly sanguine conviction that France remains a stable and prosperous inter/national force. As Chapter 4 illustrates, this strain of gendered morality would become a more prominent feature of the women's press during the early years of the nineteenth century, when French women's exuberance and optimism, fuelled by the Revolution of 1789, were instead channelled into governance of the domestic sphere and the acquisition of the appropriate maternal skills to accompany it. This growing dichotomisation

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1 As Chapter 1 affirms, the *salons* also participated in, and benefited from, an increasingly expansive, cosmopolitan culture, as portrayed in Madame de Staël's novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807). Nicole Pohl observes: '[T]he development of tourism, and the extension of trade routes, and the pedagogical/philosophical travel narrative brought foreign worlds into the homes of readers and consumers. Salons participated in this culture, not only because of the aristocratic connections but also because the commercial and professional classes, politicians and diplomats, cosmopolitan by nature, were constant visitors and contributors' (2011: 80).

of the male public domain and the female private one, which would be rigorously enforced during the Napoleonic era, is foreshadowed in the paucity of references to contemporary socio-political events in French society in many of these earliest examples of the women's press, a paucity replaced by, for example, a focus on Antiquity or a fascination with Egyptian archaeology – a concern with the artefacts of the past rather than the facts of the present. As this chapter goes on to remark, French women's lack of political representation and figuration on the contemporary inter/national stage accounts for the early predominance of the creative 'spectateur' type of women's journal or literary periodical over the 'reportage'-style gazette.

Yet the journalistic figurations of French women's social roles – whether as sartorial consumer or educational provider – nonetheless posit women as pivotal players in helping forge France's evolving sense of nationhood and thus in raising women's profile and standing nationally, whatever their increasing association with the domestic domain. And this is a key point when discussing the journalistic figurations of women as bound to hearth and home: French women may have been less *visible* in public fora or the political arena as the eighteenth century drew to a close, yet their involvement with it in the form of wives and mothers – as *citoyennes* – was significant. The women's press acted as a vital means of bringing the outside in through cultural and societal news, and of helping to bring the inside out by confirming French women's moral and pedagogical contribution to constructing an evolving sense of French nationhood. As Annie K. Smart remarks in relation to this interpretation of *citoyenne*, which is reflected in many figurations of the feminine put forward in Chapters 3 and 4: '[T]he *citoyenne* promotes the values and principles of the public sphere, sacrifices personal desires for the common good, and furthers the interests of the nation, not just the private happiness of her family' (2011: 116). In other words, civic and political identity can also be located and developed in the private sphere.

That the egalitarian discourse that was to be so loudly proclaimed at the time of the Revolution finds less explicit articulation during the *Ancien Régime* stems not only from the less acute political consciousness during this earlier historical period but no doubt also from these journals' binary desire to avoid both press censorship and the alienation of their readership, for whom the very concept of a women's press was novel. The principal explicit aim of the earliest long-standing women's journals under the *Ancien Régime* was to entertain their wealthy, elite readership – yet a readership textually interpellated as open to improving women's social status, if encouraged to do so in a 'dialogic', non-confrontational manner. This implicit egalitarianism is reinforced by the fluid hierarchy separating writer from reader, as these earliest women's journals figure women readers as both textual producers and consumers, a figuration

further attributable to the newness of the women's press as a commercial, mediatic organ. As the Introduction comments and as Margaret Beetham elucidates in her study *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914*, the dividing line between the female writer and reader in the latter part of the eighteenth century was inherently nebulous: 'As journalism was not yet established as a profession, and indeed the whole concept of "profession" was in the making, the boundary between "literary ladies" and "readers" remained unclear' (1996: 19).

The early women contributors to the press were typically well-read literary ladies – some were already published authors – and could therefore nuance feminist demands or couch them in various rhetorical and elliptical disguises: we see surreptitious consciousness-raising in apparently anodyne articles on fashion or theatre (including reviews of more daring plays), both domains in which women were major participants – actively in the former, somewhat more passively in the latter – and in which they played a role in influencing trends.<sup>2</sup> While lacking the advantages of the rigorous and expansive education enjoyed by their male colleagues, women journalists, well-versed in the art of novel-reading and writing, employed their knowledge of narrative structure and techniques to engage, persuade and educate the female reader in areas beyond her typical daily fare. As this chapter suggests, literary and theatrical reviews not only reveal changing aesthetic preferences but can equally intimate more concrete (feminocentric) socio-political concerns informing *l'air du temps* of French society. These concerns find expression in a variety of different narrative formats, whether book reviews examining works that debate the shortcomings of women's current access to education in France or moralising anecdotes underlining the importance of possessing intellectual dexterity over physical strength.

The term political – or feminist, as defined in the Introduction – in this context is thus not predominantly related to women acquiring political

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2 As Alison Finch (2000: 62–75) highlights in her chapter 'The Invisible Women of French Theatre', theatre may have been much patronised by women spectators, but there were relatively few women actors and even fewer authors. The only woman author of the Revolution to have died for her writing, the radical Olympe de Gouges, was one such rare female playwright and someone who found support for her writing in the editorship of *Le Journal des dames*. Gabrielle Verdier (1994: 292) highlights Gouges' courage in 'From Reform to Revolution: The Social Theater of Olympe de Gouges': '[S]he was the first to dare represent slavery, divorce, and several other burning issues that were tabou on stage'. The political influence of theatre, particularly during periods of severe press censorship, is also remarked upon by Denise Z. Davidson (2007: 124): 'Theaters and politics went hand in hand; these were spaces that permitted urban dwellers to express and absorb diverse viewpoints.'

representation or the rights of suffrage, but incorporates objectives such as raising the profile of successful French women writers or encouraging readers to self-educate through the recommended purchase of specific works, thereby permitting them to increase their knowledge of subjects independently. The common first-person female narrative voice imparting advice to the reader may be seen to mirror the pedagogical dynamics of the teacher–pupil relationship, pointing up the educative impetus that characterises the French women’s press from its origins, yet a dynamics that is often more consensual than directive. That impetus takes on a more explicitly instructive form with the advent of the nineteenth century and the interpellation of the female reader herself as maternal educator, figuring the French women’s press as a duplicative chain of knowledge transmission from woman to woman, whether writer to reader or mother to daughter. ‘Political’, then, is understood in its more utilitarian role of fostering women’s self-improvement, confidence and – to employ a term more commonly associated with the current women’s press – self-image, as well as reinforcing their sense of appartenance to a gendered community with its own interests and objectives.

The determination of the earliest women writers and editors to translate their political convictions and social aspirations into an acceptable journalistic narrative is all the more remarkable given women’s severely restricted social opportunities in eighteenth-century France. Particularly in the years preceding the Revolution, when notions of equal access to the public sphere were far from common currency, women journalists were a rare phenomenon in French society. In her seminal work *Traces de femmes: Présence féminine dans le journalisme français du XVIIIe siècle*, Suzanna van Dijk comments on the difficulties experienced by women journalists at the time:

Les romancières, qui commençaient à être assez nombreuses à l’époque, pouvaient, elles, se contenter de la fameuse « chambre à soi ». Mais être journaliste (comme être historienne, par exemple) requérait plus que cette seule pièce: il y fallait des relations, des capacités de marchander avec les imprimeurs et les censeurs, et certainement une grande force, pour soutenir toutes sortes d’attaques. (1988: 181)

Unlike the female novelist, who required solitude to engage most productively in her art, female journalists required solidarity with a network of supportive relations if they were to achieve professional success. With this in mind, it is perhaps not insignificant that, as James B. Collins affirms, ‘[w]omen ran roughly 15 percent of France’s print shops throughout the eighteenth century’ (2015: 168), an unrepresentatively high figure compared with women’s general participation in business. Women novelists were becoming increasingly common in the late eighteenth century – the critic

Georges May observes that, ‘dans le dernier quart du siècle, la notion de la prédestination des femmes à la carrière de romancière est devenue un véritable lieu commun de la critique’ (1963: 219) – yet women journalists were at best marginalised, at worst treated as pariahs. If male journalists were perceived as inferior and parasitical derivatives of literary authors – unable to write themselves, they wrote about the writing of others – female journalists belonged to a still more subordinate species, comprising a substratum of the ‘damned mob of scribbling women’ so infamously derided by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Commenting on the journalistic profession in the eighteenth century generally, in their essay ‘Historians and the Press’ Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin remark: ‘Journalism was a career that people turned to when they failed to establish themselves in academic or literary life. It did offer money and some opportunity to continue to participate in literary society, but little prestige’ (1987: 20).

The professional vagaries to which the press and its authors were subject, along with the menacing presence of censorship, partly explains the common usage of initials as a means of self-designation – or self-effacement – for authors of early journal articles. The fact that articles were often written anonymously facilitated access to the profession of journalism for women writers (just as it allowed male writers to write about ‘female’ concerns), while simultaneously complicating the task of ‘gendering’ the authorship of reviews and articles. Carla Hesse interprets such anonymity from a positive, entrepreneurial angle, arguing that, in an age when married women’s writing was legally their husbands’ property, French women writers’ adoption of a pseudonym was ‘a gesture of self-invention, a declaration of independence from the patriarchal signifier’ (1989: 485).<sup>3</sup> As Hilary Fraser et al. confirm in their introduction to *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*:

The practice of anonymous journalism enabled women to enter the field in greater numbers than was generally suspected and allowed them to address topics not generally thought of as suitable for a woman’s pen, because theoretically no one except the editor knew who the author of a particular piece was. (2003: 10)

The low esteem in which journalism was held no doubt also worked in women’s favour, allowing women writers to enter this male-dominated profession without inciting professional rivalry and thereby to improve their literary and rhetorical skills through the establishment of a genre that would

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3 Hesse reminds us that that age of extensive ‘patronymic’ possession only ceased in 1965 in France, when married women were allowed to choose a profession and to publish a work without seeking their husband’s consent.

go on to play an important role in giving voice to French women's personal and political objectives.

As the Introduction remarks, very little is known about precise circulation figures or the composition of readerships in the early French press, yet the prerequisite possession of both the financial wherewithal to purchase journals and the literacy skills to peruse them would locate such readership among the upper echelons of French society.<sup>4</sup> In his work *The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment*, Jack R. Censer concludes that, in the mid- to late eighteenth century '[d]espite the lacunae and problems [in garnering concrete evidence of readership composition, in this case of literary periodicals], what unmistakably emerges is the importance of the elite – both noble and common – and the relative weakness of the merchant and popular classes' (1994: 185–7; [statistical tables occur in the intervening pages]). The readership profile of the women's press during the period preceding the Revolution further accounts for the relative absence of any explicit mention of contemporary political events, yet the impact of these events is nonetheless signalled both in occasional veiled remarks and in the lexical changes adopted by particular women's journals.

An examination of these early French women's journals sheds light on the language and discursive practices employed, furnishing today's reader with an implicit profile not only of the first female writers but equally of the first female readers of women's journals, and often pointing up their feminist tendencies – this during a period generally characterised as politically stagnant and conformist owing to the absolutist regime in place in France. While, as Chapter 3 illustrates, subsequent women's journals may express disappointment at the passing of the *Ancien Régime* and sympathy for its victims, at times demonstrating an almost wilful refusal to confront political reality, others evidence a growing sense of nationhood, however subtly or implicitly. In her work *La Presse féminine en France, des origines à 1848*, Evelyne Sullerot (1966: 23) points out, for example, that *Le Journal des dames* begins employing words such as 'citoyens' and 'patriotes' around 1760, thus suggesting that notions of citizenship affected language before they effected concrete social change. As Smart observes, 'It wasn't until October 10, 1792, that the Convention decreed the use of *citoyen* and *citoyenne* to replace the allegedly counterrevolutionary modes of address *Monsieur*, *Madame*, and *Mademoiselle*' (2011: 122–3). Pre-empting an editorial approach that would characterise subsequent women's journals, this change in terminology can

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4 While, as Chapter 3 highlights, the eighteenth century saw improvements in levels of literacy among women particularly in Paris and the north of France, progress in women's education before 1848 was extremely slow.

also be seen to indicate the journal's desire to promote textually a more egalitarian relationship between its writers and readers, in which the latter are recognised as playing a significant role in influencing the journal's content – often by contributing directly to its copy – thereby further breaking down the already fluid boundary separating writer from reader.

The tacit assumption underlying the concept of a women's press is that a shared gender identity provides the foundation for a multitude of other shared concerns. Addressing women on the precept of gender, women's journals forge a sense of solidarity or, at the very least, commonality among their readers. In other words, while the existence of 'feminist' tenets in even the most apparently conventional women's journals may be attributed in part to their pioneering status – interpellating women as a distinct social group or constituency no doubt had inevitable, if at times unintended, political repercussions – it testifies to the complexity and multivalency of the models of womanhood posited in women's journals from their very origins. If certain journals published before and even after the Revolution reflect the futile decadence of a French society with little to do but either beautify itself or immerse itself in the cultures of past golden eras, other early women's journals come into being with an implicit and at times explicit political agenda firmly located in the contemporary social context. From its genesis, the French women's press comprises serious and reflective publications that aim to valorise Frenchwomen's social status as well as to expand their experiences and opportunities, whether in the private or public spheres. Echoing Jean Sgard's opinion on the key role played by periodicals in the proliferation of Enlightenment ideas referenced in the Introduction, in the preface of her work *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1810* Hesse quotes from Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville to emphasise the vast potential influence wielded by this journalistic tool: 'In order to mobilize a general insurrection against absolutist governments, it was necessary to enlighten people continuously, not through voluminous and well-reasoned books which they do not read, but through short works, ... through a newspaper that would spread light in all directions' (1991). In particular, the format of the periodical, compared with that of daily publications, allowed for a more expansive and detailed treatment of particular subjects. The early women journalists examined in this study thus played an important role in 'spreading a particular form of female-infused light' among their readers, a light whose spectrum reflected a remarkably diverse range of subjects deemed suitable for women readers – subjects pedagogical, pragmatic and, as Chapter 5 in particular highlights, political.



## THE EARLIEST WOMEN'S JOURNALS

THESE IS SOME CONTENTION over the publication date of the first 'official' women's journal in France. The year 1758 is generally considered to herald the publication of the prototype of the fashion press, with the appearance of *Le Courier de la nouveauté*, followed swiftly the next year by *Le Journal des dames*, the first 'serious' and long-lasting example of 'la presse féminine'.<sup>5</sup> Other journals aimed at a female audience did exist prior to this – for example, *Amusemens du beau sexe* (1740–41), *Amusemens des dames* (1740–41) and *Amusemens de la toilette* (1755–56) – but were typically insubstantial in both content and objectives, as indicated by the nature of the titles and their brief publication period. Longevity of publication was further impeded by limitations in technical machinery and thus print-runs, as well as the necessity for subscriptions, which depended on a circumscribed number of booksellers and an unreliable postal service. Daniel Roche quotes from the first redoubtable editor of *Le Journal des dames*, Madame de Beaumer, in order to highlight these 'material' (and human) impediments:

'Les libraires ont toujours été les tyrans des auteurs, ils s'enrichissent à leurs dépens, pour faire tenir le registre d'un journal chez ces messieurs-là qui veulent gagner gros, il faut les payer chèrement; ce qu'il faudra donner au libraire emportera le produit du journal ... ', écrit Madame de Baumer [*sic*] à M. de Malesherbes lorsqu'elle abandonne *Le Journal des dames*. (1989: 460)

Annemarie Kleinert pushes back the possible genesis of a press containing subject matter of interest to women further still: 'Depuis 1672, les journaux

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5 See, for example, Annemarie Kleinert's article, 'La Naissance d'une presse de mode à la veille de la révolution et l'essor du genre au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle' (1982), and *La Presse féminine* (1986) by Samra-Martine Bonvoisin and Michèle Maignien. Locating the origins of such a vast mediatic organ in one publication – while not where the principal interest of the current study lies – is a quasi-impossible task, a task hindered by the overriding absence of critical attention paid it. Both the above publications cite *Le Courier de la nouveauté*'s year of publication as 1758, while critics Suzanna van Dijk (1981: 167) and Claude Bellanger et al. (1969: 316) situate it a year earlier, although the latter's wording on the two occasions he mentions it is ambiguous, stating, for example, 'En 1757 M. de Saint-Aubin se proposa de publier *Le Courier de la Nouveauté*'. As van Dijk's article 'Femmes et journaux au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle' (1981: 171; 174) explains, M. de Saint-Aubin is not actually a 'Monsieur' at all, but a 'Madame', Madame Marie-Claudine de Saint-Aubin, the mother of Madame de Genlis. Orthographic inconsistencies and evolutions further complicate the task of establishing factual accuracy and publishing trajectories: for example, while critical works refer to *Le Courier de la nouveauté*, the original title had only one 'r'. Throughout this study, only less common differences in spelling conventions have been signaled in quotations; more usual historical variations (such as 'oi' rather than 'ai' as in 'paraître' and 'avoient') have not been acknowledged.

s'intéressent à la mode. Souvent dans ces journaux, articles et gravures étaient combinés. Le premier journal à aborder le sujet fut le *Mercure Galant* (1982: 190). While resolutely not a women's journal, the *Mercure Galant* occasionally targeted women readers, particularly when detailing fashion items, as demonstrated by its first edition: 'Je vous avois promis, Madame, de vous mander toutes les Modes nouvelles' (1672: 275). There also existed *La Bibliothèque des femmes* (1759) and *La Bibliothèque des dames* (1764) – as distinct from the *Bibliothèque universelle des dames* (1785–97) mentioned in Chapter 1 – but both were published in the Netherlands and, if their content is clearly directed towards a female readership, comprising the usual moral tales and guidance, they take the form of books rather than periodicals (and the latter is translated from English). Van Dijk comments on the fact that there were twice as many journals published in England as in France during this time, owing to the former's less elitist press establishment and more literate general public, and argues that the often military or diplomatic subject matter treated in French journals would have done little to encourage women's interest in the press. She thus concludes: 'En France, les journalistes femmes étaient moins nombreuses, et les journaux pour femmes n'étaient guère plus que des tentatives. Il est significatif que le *Nouveau Magasin Français*, de Madame Leprince de Beaumont, ait paru (de 1750 à 1752) à Londres' (1988: 7).<sup>6</sup>

In his analysis of the French press during the Revolution – in the one paragraph dedicated to the women's press – Hugh Gough maintains that the first newspapers specifically targeting a female readership date back to as early as 1710 (1988: 201) – yet, as if testament to their flimsy and fleeting substance, provides neither titles nor any further information regarding their content.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Madame Leprince de Beaumont was an upper-class governess who spent years working in England and produced several texts dealing with girls' education, as well as stories for children and fairytales. Van Dijk (1988: 292–5) provides a helpful 'Inventaire provisoire' of all journals published by and for women in the eighteenth century. A further useful source is Caroline Rimbault's chapter, 'La Presse Féminine de langue française au XVIIIème siècle: Production et diffusion' in *Le Journalisme d'Ancien Régime* (1982: 199–216). Suellen Diaconoff (2005) also briefly discusses *Le Nouveau Magasin français* in her work *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books and Sex in the French Enlightenment*, remarking that it was aimed at a general readership, rather than a specifically female one.

7 With reference to subsequent women's journals, Gough adds that 'between then and 1789 no less than 21 different titles had appeared, featuring articles on literature, news, fashion, morality and aesthetic taste, for middle class and aristocratic taste', *ibid.* Jack R. Censer (1994: 7) puts the number of titles available to the reading public in France which lasted more than three years at 82 in 1785 and 15 in 1745, thereby leading us to conclude that, unsurprisingly, journals broadly dedicated to a female readership appear to be in the small minority of all established publications during this period.

When details of the supposed genesis of the French women's press are provided, critical disparities further hinder the task of establishing its precise historical origins. In her study 'L'Émancipation des femmes et la presse en France jusqu'en 1870' (1928: 7), Louise Patouillet notes the appearance of a journal entitled *Les Spectatrices*, published between 1728 and 1730 and reappearing in 1751, and cites *Le Magasin français*, edited from England by a Mademoiselle de Beaumont in 1750 (given its full title of *Nouveau Magasin français ou Bibliothèque instructive et amusante* in van Dijk's inventory). Confusingly, in *La Presse féminine en France*, Sullerot (1966: 10–11) casts doubt on the authenticity of such claims, having been unable to trace these journals (although she lengthens the title of the latter to *Le Magasin français, littéraire et scientifique* in her book, but not in her index); yet historical volumes and articles other than van Dijk's mention them – see, for example, Bellanger et al. (1969) and Eugène Hatin, *Histoire politique et littéraire de la presse en France*, tome troisième (1859).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Bibliothèque Nationale contains copies of the *Nouveau Magasin français ou Bibliothèque instructive et amusante* but makes no mention of *Le Magasin français* (with or without the qualifier *littéraire et scientifique*) or *Les Spectatrices*. The rapidity with which journals assumed different titles or altered existent ones means that they may not always be listed under their original title in library catalogues.

The Bibliothèque Nationale has no evidence of the existence of a journal entitled *Les Spectatrices*, but it does contain copies of *La Spectatrice*, a weekly publication aimed at a female readership and similarly dating from 1728. This journal clearly espouses feminist sentiments, dismissing male readers' opinion but courting women readers' approval. It presents itself as a single-authored journal and takes the form of one long article – what is often referred to as an essay-periodical. Its author's feminism is of a distinctly privileged variety, since she considers herself an exceptional individual with more talents of observation than her male colleagues, and much of the journal's content has an autobiographical slant in which the reader learns of the writer's childhood and upbringing. The sheer confidence and audaciousness of this female author's claims are undeniably provocative: 'Trois ou quatre Spectateurs qui ont paru en France nous ont donné quelques brochures, et en sont demeurés-là. N'auront-ils point de honte, qu'une femme fournisse mieux cette carrière? car j'espère bien aller plus loin que ces Messieurs' (week 1, pp. 3–4 [there are no specific dates supplied]).<sup>9</sup> If, as has been suggested by authors

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8 Bellanger et al. (1969: 315) refer to Patouillet's account, but give the date of publication of *Les Spectatrices* as 1726, rather than 1728.

9 A later women's journal, *L'Observateur féminin* (1790), adopts a similar approach to 'visual eavesdropping' (an approach perhaps most famously associated with the

such as van Dijk (1988: 288–9), and Nina Rattner Gelbart (1987: 22), this ‘she’ may in fact be a ‘he’, the feminism of their sentiments remains incontestable.<sup>10</sup> Despite the journal’s somewhat individualistic emphasis, its author puts forward a radically utopian and meritocratic vision of an egalitarian society in which the three Estates and the two sexes would live in harmony, an idealised vision in keeping with the more subjective ‘spectateur’-type journals’ interest in the fictional and literary, as well as in the ‘personality’ of the journalists, in contrast to the objective ‘gazette’-form publications – the most common journalistic medium during the *Ancien Régime* – whose focus was on representing factual, contemporary events, events from which women were, for the most part, excluded.

The rarity of a woman practising the profession of journalism, or certainly of proudly declaring a feminine identity of authorship – a rarity which may in part account for Gelbart and van Dijk’s hypothesis regarding her sex – is emphasised by the ‘spectatrice’s’ claim, made in the first edition, that she

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self-designation of Pierre de la Mésangère, the principal editor of *Le Journal des dames et des modes* [1797–1839], as ‘Le Centyeux’, mentioned in Chapter 3), as well as consisting principally of one main ‘editorial’ and expressing itself in a similarly assertive, declamatory fashion. This later journal is edited by a ‘Madame de Verte-Allure’, who maintains that she is actually an ex-nun. This conversion to secularism is used to justify her knowledgeable position, a position acquired after years of study and one which valorises revolutionary principles, in that she abandoned her previous existence in order to espouse the revolutionary cause: ‘Tout, jusqu’à la politique, aura sa place dans ma feuille. Madame de Verte-Allure politique! ... & pourquoi pas? Presqu’aucun homme n’étudie cette science, & mon sexe en est bercé. J’ai ensuite, comme ex-religieuse, plus de droits qu’une autre à avoir dans cette partie de grands principes. Ha! mes chers lecteurs, si je vous dévoilois l’horrible politique des cloîtres! ...’ (p. 6). By the second edition, the title of the journal has changed to the reassuringly innocuous ‘*Etoile du matin, ou les petits mots* de Madame de Verte-Allure, ex-religieuse’. Apparently readers objected to the use of the term ‘observateur’ when referring to a woman, exemplifying a recurrent anachronistic disjuncture between the potentially radical content of the early French women’s press and its often conservative readership: ‘Si je vous cede aujourd’hui, ne vous y habituez pas; c’est la dernière fois. Vous ne voulez pas qu’une femme soit *Observateur*’, 18 March 1790, p. 2. As Chapter 5 remarks, the title of *La Femme libre* underwent similar changes in response to readers’ reactions.

- 10 Evelyne Sullerot (1966: 56) also postulates that ‘Madame de Verte-Allure’ may be a male journalist, suggesting a certain Pierre Edouard Lemontey, as does Eugène Hatin (1859). Daniel Roche (1989: 456), to confuse matters further, claims s/he is both female and male, in that the journal is published by ‘la veuve Pissot et Jean de Nully’. While the gender of authorship of journals such *La Spectatrice* or *L’Observateur féminin* is often speculative, the present study seeks to disprove the assumption that only a male author could express himself so freely and with such assertiveness and conviction. It is also important to note that, unless otherwise stated – the fashion journals in Chapter 3 being a case in point – the editorship and authorship are known to be female.

possesses an androgynous male/female appearance that allows her access to all types of gatherings and events. While subsequent women's journals typically aim to highlight the representativeness of their figurations of women in an endeavour to instil a sense of female community and thus loyalty among readers (and writers), this author points up her marginality and trailblazing role in an age where women *qua* women were broadly refused access to the public sphere. If she is to perform successfully her role as 'spectatrice' she must adopt a quasi-asexual persona – or rather a binary androgynous one – highlighting the rigid constraints governing women's spatial and sartorial norms. In other words, she may posit a feminine writerly identity within her textual discourse, yet has to efface such 'feminine' signs when seeking to acquire the requisite social knowledge or experience to produce such discourse, subtly signalling one of the oft-cited reasons for women's 'inferior' literary production: unable to engage in certain experiences firsthand, owing to the strict parameters governing their conduct, they are consequently unable to acquire the epistemological and experiential mastery to write in a more publicly representative manner.

This author is aware of her exceptional position ('quand on le peut'), and uncompromisingly reveals her feminocentric stance in a remark favouring celibacy over marriage, this in an age where love and marriage were typically viewed as antithetical: 'Il y en a plus à rester fille, quand on le peut, que se mettre sous le joug, & à dépendre d'un homme, qui est toujours un homme, comme un singe est toujours un singe. A bon entendeur, salut & bon soir' (week 4, final remark). This 'spectatrice' is not a neutral observer but a misandrous, self-assured feminist, a cross-gender performer who values independence above all else. The tone of this publication further points to the self-confidence of its author; it may foreshadow the conversational informality of later women's journals, but it has a monologic dismissiveness that brooks no dissent. The author of *La Spectatrice* espouses a radical sexual-political agenda, which is articulated forcefully and without recourse to the rhetorical attenuation often employed by subsequent publications.

As further evidence of the infelicities that accompany the critic intent on discovering significant journalistic traces, Evelyne Sullerot (1963: 12; 1966: 17), along with other critics, such as Gelbart (1987), Hatin (1859), and Bellanger et al. (1969), cites the existence of a later journal entitled *Le Courrier de la mode, ou journal du goût*, published in 1768 (although the only journal which figures in Sullerot's 1966 appendix is *Le Journal du goût, ou courrier de la mode*, published in 1765, which is also the title provided in her earlier study). Similarly, in other references, the word order of the title is inverted to become *Le Journal du goût, ou courrier de la mode*. (To confuse matters further, Hatin [1859: 222] initially refers to it as *Le Courrier de la mode, ou journal du goût*, while

the quotation from Friedrich Melchior Grimm he cites in his work refers to the journal as *Le Journal du goût, ou courrier de la mode*.) However, as with its most significant predecessor, *Le Courier de la nouveauté*, actual copies appear thin on the ground, so that, in both her works on the French women's press, Sullerot quotes only from a secondary source – Grimm's discussion of it – and never directly from the journal itself. Bellanger also mentions Grimm in relation to the journal and quotes from its 'Avertissement', and Hatin, again, quotes only Grimm. Grimm, who also refers to the 'Avertissement', confirms that the journal was due to be published in April 1768. In his work *Histoire de la presse française, t. I* (1965), René de Livois further discusses *Le Courier de la mode, ou journal du goût* and provides facsimiles of the first three pages of the journal: one of the title page, one of the 'Avertissement' and one of what appears to be the first page published in April 1768. This general absence of direct quotation from the journal itself may be explained by the fact that the Bibliothèque Nationale possesses only two editions of it in manuscript form,<sup>11</sup> despite it appearing to have lasted two years (to complicate matters further, it does not actually figure in the Bibliothèque Nationale's catalogue). Indeed, in the 1770 edition the editors bemoan the lack of professionalism of their predecessors, which may mean it was published only occasionally during that two-year period (there was also a delay in the initial publication, according to Grimm, thus making any subsequent shortcomings less surprising).<sup>12</sup> Such critical discrepancies and lacunae are symptomatic, and no doubt partly causative, of the neglect suffered by the French women's press since its inception. The excavationary processes required to uncover such journalistic traces are labyrinthine.

Analogously, in spite of its prototypical status, all that remains of *Le Courier de la nouveauté* is its title and a prospectus in the Bibliothèque Nationale announcing its weekly publication. The journal's subscription was 12 livres a year, and the prospectus provides details of the content of the next six editions. Printed by the 'imprimerie de Grangé', whose editor was 'le Sieur Chevry', there is no evidence that this journal was actually published, making its position as the first women's fashion journal to be published in France somewhat tenuous. Both its subtitle – 'Feuille hebdomadaire à

11 See B.N. Manuscrits Fr. 22084, microfilm 8310, p. 126 and pp. 129–40. The journal had shortened its name to *Le Courier de la mode* by 1770. This journal also targeted male readers interested in fashion.

12 See Baron Friedrich Melchior Grimm et al. (1879, tome huitième: 60). Under the entry for 'avril 1768', we read: '[L]e premier journal du *Courrier de la mode* devait paraître au commencement d'avril; et voilà le mois qui avance sans que *le Courier* ait fait claquer son fouet'. Its first edition is mentioned as having been published in the May entry of the same year.

l'usage des Dames' – and the description of its projected readership make clear that it intends to address a gap in the flourishing periodicals' market: 'Cette prévoyance sur l'instruction & les besoins de la société, qui a donné naissance aux différens Ouvrages périodiques, ne paroît pas entierement remplie, puisqu'elle a négligé de concourir avec le même empressement à tout ce qui pouvoit être utile à la moitié la plus intéressante de cette même société' (pp. 1–2). This journal manifests entrepreneurial foresight in its realisation that women readers would value a publication that catered for the specific needs and desires of a female audience. Even at this early stage in the history of the women's press, France's inter/national importance in the world of fashion is highlighted: 'En effet, les Dames Françaises sont, avec justice, en possession depuis long-temps de décider le goût de presque toute l'Europe sur la plus grande partie des objets relatifs à l'agrément' (p. 2). The prospectus employs a hyperbolic language emphasising the long-established and innate good taste of the journal's readership in order to seduce it into acts of ever greater consumption. Already conscious of the benefits of advertising, and foreshadowing the positioning of the female reader as fashionable consumer – to be discussed above all in Chapter 3 – the journal invites manufacturers to send in details of their products, which will be published free of charge in future editions. However, it was the following year, 1759, that saw the publication of the first substantial periodical for women for which there remain multiple examples: *Le Journal des dames*.

#### *LE JOURNAL DES DAMES (1759–1778)*

*LE JOURNAL DES DAMES* is the first example of a journal written explicitly for women that enjoyed reasonable longevity compared with the numerous short-lived publications which preceded it, and can be considered one of the most successful eighteenth-century journals for women.<sup>13</sup> *Le Journal des dames* was published (with periods of lulls and even cessations) for 19 years, from 1759 until 1778, when it was bought by the *Mercure de France*. Unusually for a journal that experienced so many discontinuities in publication and changes of editorship, only editions from 1776 are missing. Prices and length of publication vary, but the format remains remarkably consistent over the years. In 1764,

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13 As this chapter has commented, the eighteenth-century newspaper press in countries such as England and Germany was better established than in France, due in part to the latter's oppressive royalist regime and consequent desire to control the freedom of the press. Both England and Germany produced numerous women journalists and feminist publications during this period.

for example, the price was 12 livres a year for Paris and 15 for the provinces, increasing to 18 livres and 21 livres respectively in 1777. It was a monthly publication of, on average, 120 pages, containing no illustrations – in other words, it was considerably longer than many subsequent women's journals, allowing for a variety of different subjects to be treated within its sheaves. The journal's content has a principally literary slant: more than any other early women's journal in France, *Le Journal des dames* interpellates a cultured and above all bibliophilic reader whose interests are firmly rooted in the consumption of the arts and in the reading and writing of literature. A typical edition would contain, for example, a selection of poetry; a section entitled 'Pièces fugitives' or 'Anecdotes' comprising short moral tales and general *faits divers*; romantic pastoral short stories; songs and song scores; an overview of recently published works; reviews of other works on subjects deemed to be of interest to the journal's readers, such as the desired components of Frenchwomen's education; and reviews of plays being performed in Paris.<sup>14</sup>

The journal's distribution network extended beyond Paris to bookshops in towns including Strasbourg and Lyon, which collected subscriptions for it, and the journal also published letters from readers purporting to live further afield, in countries such as England or Spain. As its title suggests, and given the relative expense of newspapers, at its conception the journal was principally destined for well-off upper-class women.<sup>15</sup> Even if *Le Journal des dames* cost less than other contemporary journals, according to Gelbart subscribers to the journal would pay more for a single monthly issue than for a night in a hotel.<sup>16</sup> It should be remembered, however, that journals were more substantial, long-lasting publications than newspapers today and

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14 Interestingly, *Abécédaires*, or alphabet primers, for children at the time contained a remarkably similar miscellany of topics, such as 'fables, riddles, poems, maxims, [...], moral stories', pointing up perhaps both a mirroring of approach in new literatures aimed at specific readerly subsections of the population and the greater developmental proximity of childhood and adulthood – and specifically womanhood – in eighteenth-century perception generally, in which childhood was not yet conceived of as a specific stage in an individual's evolution, and children were thought of as mini adults. See Pickering (1977: 9).

15 The prevalence of the term 'lady' in English women's journals of the same period, such as *The Lady's Weekly Magazine* (1747) and *The Lady's Curiosity* (1752), points to a similar projected readership.

16 In her informative study *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le Journal des Dames*, Gelbart (1987: 33) discusses the pricing of newspapers, remarking that *Le Journal des dames* nonetheless amounted to half the cost or less of other official government newspapers, such as the *Mercure de France*. She also estimates that it had between 300 and 1,000 subscribers. Gelbart's monograph is essential reading for any account of *Le Journal des dames*, and this chapter acknowledges its debt to it.



tended to be shared among several readers – whether privately or in *cabinets de lecture* or clubs – rather than read by one reader and then discarded. Jack R. Censer comments: ‘Other practices surely enhanced readership, but without changing its social composition. France did have reading clubs, yet these were expensive, with annual fees often exceeding 20 livres’ (1994: 190). Yet, as subsequent chapters of the present study suggest, there is evidence that journals were often read by household employees or were read aloud at social gatherings to participants who may not have been able to afford to purchase their own individual copy.

The journal’s founder was a little-known conservative author and poet called Thorel de Campigneulles, who, as evidenced by the earliest editions of *Le Journal des dames*, showed little concern for the political advancement of women. The journal was initially conceived to amuse, rather than to instruct, the ladies of leisure of its title – to keep women readers happy with entertaining frivolities and to reinforce their political passivity through anodyne distraction. Yet, the very act of creating a journal specifically for women readers which included female-authored articles appears to have had unintended political repercussions, and the journal’s initial approach of avoiding discussion of all serious subjects proved unsustainable; the mutation from private consumer to public producer endowed the women readers and writers of *Le Journal des dames* with a sense of social *engagement* which could not be erased. During a substantial period of its publication, which also corresponds broadly to the nine-year reign of its three successive female editors, many of the journal’s articles and reviews begin to focus on contemporary social issues beyond its usual consideration of literary publications, and to become more politically audacious. The tone of the journal, while rather trivial and insipid in the earlier editions, becomes more oppositional to, and less tolerant of, the *Ancien Régime* and many of its institutions as the journal becomes more established. Equally, the journal’s vocabulary increasingly incorporates terms such as ‘patriote’ and ‘national’, pointing up a growing consciousness of the emerging concept of French nationhood and foreshadowing the Revolutionary developments that would occur towards the end of the eighteenth century, in which Republicanism would become synonymous with nationalism – and would elicit a programme of national education in order to instil Republican values in the nation’s citizens: the ‘spontaneous’ outpouring of national consciousness that achieved its apotheosis in the 1789 Revolution would require concerted ideological reinforcement in order to shore up a vulnerable nationalism.<sup>17</sup>

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17 David A. Bell attributes the rise of ‘nationhood’ in Europe generally and in France in particular to a crisis in religious beliefs, in which individuals ‘struggled to find ways

This nationalism is further conveyed in the increasingly patriotic discourse that inflected print culture generally in the wake of France's defeat in the Seven Years' War in 1763, a nationalism reflected in a concurrent anglophobia and which emphasised devotion to monarch and nation while at the same time constituting a useful shield behind which to articulate more transgressive beliefs – in this instance, David Stevenson's definition of nationhood as 'the precondition for and taproot of nationalism' (1991: 231) is apposite. As Peter R. Campbell comments with reference to the contemporary period 1750–1770: '[T]he political culture at the time, in which political debate over matters regarded as the king's business was not formally allowed, prompted authors to justify themselves by appealing to their love of the *patrie* as a legitimisation of their intervention in the rapidly developing public sphere' (2007: 3). Indeed, the 'coup' of 1771 in which Louis XV arrested and exiled those members of the judiciary who had shown themselves less than malleable fuelled anti-monarchic sentiment and, concurrently, the notion of a sense of 'state' or 'nation'. Four years before its cessation, in January 1774 the journal publishes its most recent 'prospectus', in which it details its objectives and the readership it hopes to attract, and, by its terminology, appears to signal its adoption of a less elitist approach: 'Un seul objet doit fixer aujourd'hui mes idées, c'est de le [le journal] présenter aux yeux du Public sous l'aspect qui peut le rendre cher à toutes les classes de Citoyens' (pp. 8–9). *Le Journal des dames* seeks to improve its circulation through an increase in both the emotional engagement and demographic representativeness of its readership, both subsumed under the promotion of an egalitarian nationalism. This lexical drive for parity between social strata as exemplified in the term 'citoyen' extends to the field of gender and finds further illustration in a highly innovative move undertaken by the journal's first female editor, Madame de Beaumer, whose self-designation as *autrice* and *éditrice* (February, 1762, pp. 126–31) reveals a particularly modern conception of language's prescriptive, directive function in which to name is to realise: endowing women with professional titles not yet in common currency may help accelerate the social acceptance of their referent.

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to discern and maintain terrestrial order in the face of God's absence, and devised new intellectual means of understanding the world on its own terms, without reference to supernatural determinations' (2001: 1218), even if, as highlighted in Chapter 1, the vocabulary used to designate both spheres has common lexical components.

## WOMEN WRITERS AND READERS

UNSURPRISINGLY for a publication of this longevity, *Le Journal des dames* had several different proprietors and passed through nine editors, three of whom were women. The journal's three women editors were Madame de Beaumer (1761–63), Madame Catherine Michelle de Maisonneuve (1763–69) and Madame Marie Emilie de Montanclos (1774–75).<sup>18</sup> This high turnover of editors reflects the uncertainty of an existence without royal privilege in a period subject to the vagaries of press censorship, and mirrors the increasing social fragmentation and instability characteristic of the decades leading up to the 1789 Revolution. Alongside journals that had royal protection existed some, such as *Le Journal des dames*, whose existence was tolerated rather than approved, and which could therefore have their permission rescinded if they were considered to have overstepped the bounds of political or moral decency.<sup>19</sup> Despite the stringent press controls during this period, however, *Le Journal des dames* disproves the notion that, under the *Ancien Régime*, the French press had no option but to be politically conformist. More so than women authors and novelists, the female editors of *Le Journal des dames* established an ongoing dialogue with their readers that at times became imbued with an undeniably feminist rhetoric underneath its consensual, well-crafted prose.

Jack R. Censer makes the point that, owing to the unreliability of information sources and their resultant dependency on hearsay, the majority of editors and writers of the French political press during the *Ancien Régime* tended to identify with the political powerlessness of their readers, an identification further corroborated by the fluidity of boundaries separating writer from reader in relation to female journalists: 'Not only did editors accept their distance from the events covered, they also associated their position with that of their readers. In demeanor and in appeals, editors linked themselves to their readers' (1994: 19).<sup>20</sup> While this approach was

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18 As has been noted, the professional demarcations separating editor from journalist were quasi-non-existent in the eighteenth century, with editors doing much of the writing of journals.

19 While the second half of the eighteenth century provided a less than propitious climate in which women's journals could flourish – with the exception of the immediate post-Revolutionary years – the high turnover of editors and journalists and the short-lived nature of most early women's journals were also due to the fact that this was a medium gradually establishing itself and its projected readership. Equally, as this chapter has highlighted, the career of journalism, particularly for women, was less well-viewed than other academic or literary professions.

20 With the advent of the French Revolution, that distance, both geographical and

adopted partly in order to flag up these editors' lack of political influence and thus of responsibility for any shortcomings in reporting, the female editors of the early French women's press, whose sex and class debarred them from being reporters or correspondents in any active sense, 'linked themselves to their readers' for other reasons: first, in an ambitious endeavour to intimate the potential of women's collective force as a means of actively altering the political landscape through journalistic participation, rather than being passive and distant recipients of someone else's version of events; and second, and more pragmatically – and this was a feature common to the periodical press generally – to increase the likelihood of a publication's longevity: highlighting the similarities uniting textual producer and consumer made it more difficult for the latter to dissociate herself from the former. Given journals' reliance on a readership's emotional and financial – and at times writerly – investment, these early women journalists could not afford to alienate their readership if they wished to continue publication and, with it, their advocacy of sorority.

This often implicit interpellation of the female reader *qua* consumer is discussed further in Chapter 3's analysis of fashion journals, in which women's economic force goes far beyond their consumption of periodical print culture or ability to cancel a much-needed subscription. The fact that the dividing line between producer and consumer was notably nebulous – the journal's readers often *were* its writers – made this relationship all the more vital. The 'Avant-propos' of the first edition describes the key contributory role the journal hopes its readers will play: 'Le beau Sexe doit regner dans un Journal fait pour lui, & qui décoré, & enrichi de ses productions, remplira sans doute ce que, sur la foi du titre, le Public se croira peut-être en droit d'attendre' (p. 5). In a century when women's accomplishments were considered as principally aesthetic, whether in the sense of beautifying their own appearances or creating objects for the pleasure of others, be they in the form of embroidery or musical entertainment, the women editors of this journal clearly wanted more for their readers and themselves, but nonetheless strived to keep that readership on board through their employment of a respectable narrative façade (as intimated by the incongruously tentative 'peut-être', pointing up the avant-garde nature of their project, and the classically binary 'décoré, & enrichi', with its 'plaire/instruire' connotations) as they sought to distract the female reader in both senses of the term – to entertain her, but also

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chronological, was reduced, in that newspapers focused above all on events in Paris, and many were published daily as well as weekly, producing greater overall immediacy of coverage.

to surreptitiously insert more serious topics for consideration within the journal's sheaves.

As Suzanna van Dijk remarks, the mode of address commonly employed by women editors in interpellating a particular readership is revealing: '[L]es hommes, même en s'adressant aux femmes, utilisent souvent la troisième personne, et établissent une distance, alors que les femmes, par l'emploi habituel de la deuxième et même de la première personne au pluriel, entament un dialogue et s'engagent personnellement, créant ainsi une atmosphère de solidarité' (1988: 151). The importance of the writers' gender in establishing a more egalitarian dialogic relationship between writers and readers is one repeatedly made by critics of women's journals. Suellen Diaconoff dissociates what she considers to be a condescendingly masculine writerly approach from that of what she terms a 'true *journaliste de femmes*': 'With their language and vision belonging to men, [such] journals have a tendency to practice a top-down power structure, putting the female reader in the role of receiver or pupil, and the male writer above her as guiding teacher' (2005: 178). As this chapter has suggested, women editors often adopt a similarly educative role vis-à-vis their readers, yet one characterised by dialogic, empathic exchange. The continuous and frequent publication of the journalistic medium allows for the establishment of long-term reciprocity between writers' and readers' communication, rather than the one-off and inevitably one-sided message, however polemical, contained in a book. The very nature of the periodical meant that the focus of such reciprocal exchanges of reading and writing typically originated in, and commented on, the contemporary social environment, thus directly representing and inflecting French women's *quotidien*.<sup>21</sup>

The women editors of *Le Journal des dames* viewed themselves as spokeswomen for their sex, whether writing about women's underrated role in the arts (for example, discussing women writers and the misogynous criteria governing their acceptance in the French literary world) or seeking to broaden and satisfy the literary tastes of their female readers. This conscious and

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21 Mirroring the post-Revolutionary journalistic emphasis given to historical situation, women's literary writing would also reflect this switch from the significance of the individual to that of the sociopolitical situation and thus to a more 'realist' representative portrayal of the individual as one among many being influenced by environment. As Olwen Hufton comments in relation to memoir-writing in the latter part of the eighteenth century: 'The times in which the events were lived took over from the narrator's social standing as the point of interest for the reader' (1995: 451-2). Journalism evidenced this in the move from the spectator-type reporter to one more involved in the 'action'; and women's journalism, from an exceptional '*Spectatrice*-type' trailblazer to women who spoke to and for other women.

sensitive fostering of the writer–reader relationship and its characterisation as one of equality are no doubt aided by the fact that numerous readers of early women’s journals also contributed to their content. Censer comments on the atypicality of this egalitarian approach, emphasising its limited use by more peripheral publications:

These prospectuses begged readers to fill the papers with their own publications. Publishers were to provide no more than a form [*sic*] where articles would be received, then printed. [...] This plan never affected a large number of journals since it was often proposed only tentatively by a few provincial advertisers and *to some extent*, the women’s paper, the *Journal des dames*. (1994: 202; emphasis added)

Censer’s own qualification appears to be swept aside – and rightly so – on the following page, when his assessment of the role of readerly participation in the composition of *Le Journal des dames* is far more definitive: ‘Promises of editorial responsibilities waxed and waned, the relationship to the public varied, but the need – repeatedly proclaimed – for women to contribute remained the main characteristic of the *Journal des dames*’s advertisements’ (p. 203).

The three female editors not only adopt a dialogic, indeed polyphonic approach to the journal’s composition but equally espouse feminocentric causes more consistently than their male colleagues, in particular the journal’s first and most radical woman editor, Madame de Beaumer. Before becoming its third editor, Madame de Beaumer was a contributor to *Le Journal des dames* under its second editor, M. Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière, although, like many journalists at the time, she was already a published author who had written her own *Oeuvres mêlées* (1760; 1761). Under Madame de Beaumer’s editorship, *Le Journal des dames* highlights the political potential inherent in any organ set up to give voice to a peripheral group, even if focusing on ostensibly more ‘anodyne’ literary genres such as poetry or moral tales. The increasingly oppositional and feminist nature of her early contributions may stem in part from the scarcity both of serious educational opportunities for women and of public outlets sanctioned for female expression at the time. Madame de Beaumer has no hesitation in revealing her own *bêtes noires* (including her rejection of gender-specific domains of learning or knowledge) when reviewing the publications of others, as in her discussion of a work entitled *Les Journées physiques*, whose author has (over)simplified the laws of physics for a specifically female readership among whom Madame de Beaumer positions herself, noting nonetheless that he is ‘bien différent de ces hommes qui semblent *nous* avoir condamnées au sommeil d’une éternelle ignorance,

c'est à *notre* sexe qu'il ouvre la carrière de la Physique' (December 1761, p. 201; emphasis added).<sup>22</sup>

Having allowed women to co-produce his journal through their contributions, La Louptière seems to have viewed the appointment of a female editor as the next logical step, seeking to hand over the journal to one of the 'Sçavantes Journalistes, à qui seules appartient la fonction délicate d'apprécier les écrits de leur sexe' (September 1761, pp. 283–4). Such gallant relinquishment may be seen to contain more than a whiff of patrician condescension in its desire to avoid further contact with such flimsy and idiosyncratic modes of female-authored expression and in its conviction that only other women are in a position to understand the frivolous workings of the female mind. The journal's first two male editors had little notion of the intellectual and creative need they would both fulfil and fuel simply by establishing a medium through which female readers and writers could dialogue. For many readers the act of sending in written contributions, even in the form of letters, amounted to undertaking journalistic activity and made the public domain appear more accessible and relevant to them. By allowing women to contribute to the journal, La Louptière had unwittingly tapped into the eighteenth-century equivalent of Betty Friedan's 'problem which has no name',<sup>23</sup> and women readers seized the opportunity to air their grievances in a public forum.

It may also have been that, in an age of arranged marriages and enforced female tutelage, the desire to form bonds through choice with like-minded people was particularly strong, and that the growing market for women's journals provided one of the only social networking opportunities for wealthy and upper-class women. In her work *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment*, Elizabeth Susan Wahl remarks: 'The predominance of arranged marriages throughout the seventeenth century in England and into the eighteenth century on the continent led women to form a network of social and affective bonds with one another that were as important, if not more so, than those with their husbands' (1999: 11). These intelligent women with time on their hands relished the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of literary and social issues through both the reading and often the writing of journalistic articles, and to bridge

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22 Madame de Beaumer also rejected gender-appropriate sartorial guises, in that she famously visited the censor François Morin in a suit, complete with hat and sword, emulating her androgynous *Spectatrice* predecessor and explicitly displaying, indeed performing, the male dominance of the journalistic profession.

23 Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) identified a nameless discontent that characterised many contemporary middle-class American housewives' daily experience of domesticity, despite their outward appearance of fulfilment.

their isolation through communication with women whose interests and aspirations mirrored their own. Indeed, given the limitations of women's education and the perceived unsuitability of the profession of journalism for women in the mid- to late eighteenth century, the intellectual breadth of the content of *Le Journal des dames* is remarkable. Gelbart notes that this historical period of publication may also have been particularly propitious for fuelling women's literary and professional ambitions:

It has been suggested that the period between Louis XIV's death and Rousseau's glorification of domesticity was a particularly trying time for many women. They were freer than under the autocratic Sun King and not yet restricted by the ideal of motherhood, but most women, unable to organize their time and take advantage of the opportunities, floundered instead without a sense of definition, feeling futile and meaningless. (1987: 91)

The women's press thus represented a highly fruitful means of channelling women's potential frustrations and lack of direction, of providing these ladies of leisure with a form of both entertainment and education. The emphasis in *Le Journal des dames* is on occupying and stimulating the intellect rather than beautifying the body. Foreshadowing the feminine figurations that would be advocated by later feminist journals such as *L'Athénée des dames* (1808), examined in Chapter 5, which similarly urged women to develop their intellectual rather than aesthetic potential, given the inevitable finiteness of the latter, Madame de Beaumer believed that women should concentrate on refining their minds and conduct rather than their appearance, and that the journal's focus should become one of practical pedagogical instruction rather than rapid *divertissement*.

If Madame de Beaumer's direct articulation of feminist sentiments ran the risk of alienating more conservative members of the journal's readership, her successor, Madame Catherine Michelle de Maisonneuve, adopted a more pragmatic, accommodating approach. Rather than leading from the feminist frontline on her own, her tactic was to emphasise the fundamental similarities uniting women, whatever their individual differences, and to do so through a more moderate persuasiveness and conciliatory tone. As mentioned in the Introduction, van Dijk comments on the intellectual/aesthetic pairing as symbolised in the image of the 'secrétaire-toilette', remarking that two out of the three female editors of *Le Journal des Dames* employ this metaphor (1988: 141). Madame de Beaumer states that 'on doit trouver sur une toilette bien composée *Montesquieu et Racine* à côté des pompons et des rubans' (October 1761, p. iii), while her successor is less radical, suggesting that these two items of furniture may coexist rather than be fully integrated, evidence perhaps of her insecurity at partaking in



the profession of journalism and need to foreground her own femininity: 'pourquoi, Mesdames, ne pourrait-on pas placer à côté de votre toilette un secrétaire? Pourquoi les aigrettes, les pots de fleurs ne pourraient-ils s'arranger avec les plumes et les écritaires?' (May/July 1763, pp. 9–10). Madame de Maisonneuve was a wealthy widow and *pensionnaire du roi* (she received 1000 livres per annum for a poem she wrote in honour of Louis XV, whose reign had reached 50 years) who bought the journal from Madame de Beaumer. She edited it from 1763 to 1769, and is generally considered to have made it a financially viable enterprise. After a relatively radical start, she toned down her feminism and foregrounded, instead of sexual equality, the sexual complementarity of men and women, an approach which, as Chapter 4 illustrates, would characterise relations between the sexes as the nineteenth century got underway.

As Gelbart observes (1987: 151), the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 gave rise to a national climate of greater conciliation and communication between the monarchy and more Enlightenment, patriotic factions, including the *philosophes* (as symbolised by Louis XV's posthumous pardoning of the Protestant Jean Calas, wrongly put to death for his son's murder). It is tempting to read this prevailing political climate as mirrored in the common cohabitation of feminist and feminine figurations of women in *Le Journal des dames* during the period: Madame de Maisonneuve very carefully represents any intellectual interest among the journal's projected readership as being within the bounds of female respectability. Keen to distinguish her editorial stance from that of her predecessor, for whom the representativeness of her beliefs was irrelevant, Madame de Maisonneuve knew that, if *Le Journal des dames* wished to influence readerly opinion on acceptable women's 'topics', it would above all have to remain in print and thus nuance its feminist stance. The tone she adopts is one of uncontentious reasonableness – 'quelques traits'; 'une idée'; 'des justes limites'; 'quelques égards'. Women readers, the journal reassures, will be provided with the opportunity to digest intellectual content, but in the form of nothing meatier than a tantalising hors d'œuvre. It foregrounds the eclectic, if consistently female, readership it aims to attract, a radical end in itself whatever the measured means employed to do so:

[j]e vais parler à la femme sçavante, en lui retraçant quelques traits d'Histoire, où le grand & le magnanime soient conservés dans tout leur beau; aux femmes pieuses, en leur donnant une idée des Livres nouveaux, sans m'étendre au-dessus des justes limites que nous proscriit notre incapacité sur un point aussi respectable; et aux femmes moins occupées de l'étude, mais pourtant susceptibles des amusemens de la Littérature, je parlerai des nouveautés amusantes. Si l'application & l'étude peuvent mériter quelques égards, je me flatte d'en mériter de mon Sexe. (January 1764, p. 106)

This prudent approach finds further historical contextualisation in the concurrent removal of the liberal censor Malesherbes from his post as director of the French booktrade in 1763, a post he had occupied for 15 years, and in his replacement by the police chief Sartine, viewed by writers and authors as someone intent on criminalising artistic freedom of expression. The journal is consequently at pains to avoid any accusation of ‘bluestocking’ tendencies or of giving women intellectual ideas above their station, and presents itself as reactive, as merely responding to women’s current epistemological needs without giving them delusions of intellectual grandeur.

Unlike her more politically precocious and passionate predecessor Madame de Beaumer, for whom short-term compromise in order to achieve long-term progress for women was anathema, Madame de Maisonneuve saw her own approach as a practical one working to guarantee the ongoing success of the journal. Less self-assured than her predecessor, for whom sweeping social change could not come quickly enough, and lacking her own record of previous publications, she did not hesitate to enlist the help of male colleagues or to publish more traditional representations of women, both of which might serve to encourage her more critical readers – and the censors – to look upon the journal favourably. As this chapter has argued, the very act of seeking to educate female readers, and thereby implicitly promoting change and social mobility, was an inherently transgressive one, even if the misogyny governing sexual relations in the *Ancien Régime* paradoxically worked in the journal’s favour, in that the act of women writing to and about other women was clearly not considered tantamount to social revolution or even as threatening to the status quo. The privileged upper-class – and thus typically less ‘insurgent’ – origins of the target readership of *Le Journal des dames* may also have allowed it greater licence to pursue its feminocentric agenda, however covertly. The journal was nonetheless suspended for five years from 1769 following increasingly incendiary articles by Maisonneuve’s protégé and eventual co-editor, Mathon de la Cour, a suspension which coincided with a particularly repressive period of press censorship under the Maupeou Triumvirate, whose ministerial reign began in 1771.

From 1774 until 1775 the journal was run by a successful young playwright, Baronne de Princen, who, after her second marriage to Charlemagne Cuvelier Grandin de Montanclos, changed her name to Madame de Montanclos. Madame Marie Emilie de Montanclos would also contribute to a later women’s journal, *La Correspondance des dames* (1799). According to Gelbart (1987: 205), she may have been the ‘Mme de M.’ who in 1789 published several articles in the *Étrennes nationales des dames* – a journal examined in Chapter 5 – observing that men continued to treat women as members of the Third Estate despite the Revolution, and urging women readers to send

in examples of unjust male behaviour towards women. And her stance in *Le Journal des dames* was equally feminist, albeit of a more measured, ‘workable’ variety than Madame de Beaumer’s; like the latter, she too was a professional, independent woman and published author, although one with small children (and, before long, a single mother, as her second marriage failed soon after it began).

If Madame de Beaumer gave the journal its politicised slant and Madame de Maisonneuve made it a financially viable enterprise, Madame de Montanclos combined both the former’s politics and the latter’s pragmatism, securing a royal privilege for this women’s journal, which meant that its publication could no longer be periodically suspended on the whim of the censors, and interpellating a more ‘ordinary’ reader in the form of a solidly middle-class *mère de famille*.<sup>24</sup> (The concomitant proliferation of book reviews dealing with child-rearing – from advocating breast-feeding to outdoor physical exercise – points up this new maternal emphasis.) This interpellation points forward to the mother–reader addressed by the domestic journals in Chapter 4, who is encouraged to take up a pedagogical role vis-à-vis her children and family. As Gelbart remarks, under Madame de Montanclos’ editorship *Le Journal des dames* does not perceive a Rousseauian valorisation of the maternal and the key role women can play in their children’s education as antithetical to a woman’s ability to develop her own intellectual interests: ‘She accepted Rousseau but went a step further, insisting that the “*mère tendre*” be also a “*mère éclairée*”, that she be able to pursue her own interests and thus communicate to her children, especially her daughters, feelings of intrinsic worth and self-reliance’ (1987b: 61).<sup>25</sup>

Whatever their differences of approach, all three female editors sought to valorise women’s intellectual capacities and to put forward more positive and diverse figurations of womanhood – ranging from the feminist idealist through the inclusive pragmatic to the more feminine maternal model respectively. In the ‘avis’ of the November edition of 1774, Madame de Montanclos draws attention to the resolutely feminocentric stance of the journal, which is described as accepting ‘les Ouvrages faits par les Dames ou pour les Dames’, foreshadowing by almost 60 years *Le Journal des femmes*’ (1832–37) identical desire that women constitute the principal subject matter of the journal in

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24 Such protection was granted by Louis XVI, the husband of the journal’s protectress at the time, Marie Antoinette, who also oversaw the liberalisation of the stringently repressive controls on the French press.

25 As Chapter 3 comments, if Rousseau’s reception among contemporary female readers, including those keen to further women’s political causes, was surprisingly diverse, history has been less kind to him, in that his current critical reputation among feminists is predominantly negative.

the sense of both providing its copy and constituting its focus, as discussed in Chapter 4. Similarly, while the journal does review works written by men, numerous publications are female-authored, and the journal repeatedly seeks to raise the profile of women authors. In the 'Lettre de L'Auteur du Journal à ses Lecteurs' of the same edition, Madame de Montanclot intimates her feminist beliefs, as well as her awareness of the dangers of idolatry, when she declares it her aim to 'rassembler le plus d'anecdotes possibles à la gloire d'un sexe presque toujours déprisé, au moment même, où les hommages les plus empressés lui sont offerts' (p. 5). Despite these objectives, the author freely admits to employing the services of an 'Homme de Lettres', a male author named Claude-Joseph Dorat,<sup>26</sup> to help review literary publications, since she claims that her limited education prevents her from recognising true quality and talent – like her predecessor Madame de Maisonneuve, she may seek to promote intellectual confidence among her women readers, but often appears to lack it herself. Nonetheless, as the following quotation makes clear, any intellectual shortcomings in women are firmly attributed to their inferior education, which is in turn attributed to men. Beneath her feminine self-figuration lies a stark condemnation of French women's limited educational opportunities:

L'Érudition d'une Femme n'est pas en général fort étendue. Elle ignore plusieurs des Langues dans lesquelles ont écrit les créateurs de la belle poésie, & de la saine morale. Cependant la plupart de nos Auteurs modernes, ou les imitent, ou les copient. Il faut donc éclairer les Lecteurs sur une imitation heureuse, sur une traduction élégante & fidèle, ou sur un plagiat révoltant; or, pour ne rien hasarder dans ces dénonciations nécessaires, il falloit que j'eusse recours à quelqu'un qui, par ses études suivies, & son goût constant pour la Littérature, eût acquis des connoissances, que l'on ne nous permet jamais, & que nous surprenons fort rarement. (pp. 6–7)

The extolment of the requisite 'masculine' skills to engage intelligently in literary criticism is equally somewhat double-edged, in that such skills are portrayed as lacking innovation and creativity, based principally on the methodical recognition of often mediocre derivatives – skills that have nonetheless been repeatedly denied French women, who are condemned to literary ignorance.

This ostensibly self-denigrating approach is a surprising leitmotif of Madame de Montanclot's self-characterisation, in that she makes a similar remark when relinquishing her editorship to a M. Blondeau in April 1775: '[l]e Public, amateur de la bonne Littérature, ne pourra que gagner à ce changement, la plume d'une femme ayant plus de délicatesse et de douceur

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<sup>26</sup> Like Madame de Beaumer, Dorat would move from the role of contributor to editor, becoming the journal's final editor before its demise in 1778.

que de force & de précision' (pp. 138–9). However, as with her predecessor's enlisting of male colleagues' contributions to the journal, such figurations of the feminine serve to remind the reader that journalism remains resolutely a man's world and thus may constitute an expedient approach to ensure the journal's continuation. Van Dijk (1988: 176) suggests that the sheer precariousness of working in a masculine profession obliged the journal's female editors to rely on different types of male *appuis* if they wished to hold on to their editorship. She also comments on the quasi-obligatory manifestation of modesty on the part of women writers as a means of highlighting their conformity to the stereotype of female discretion and submissiveness in order to counteract their participation in an 'abnormal' profession (pp. 285–7).

In other words, these repeated displays of humility by the journal's female editors may at times be little more than a rhetorical strategy, a *topos*, employed to prolong their professional life and the life of the journal. This apparent 'masquerade of womanliness', to paraphrase Joan Rivière's seminal essay, can be read as a compensatory gesture for the usurpation of the typically masculine position of the writing subject, an 'acting the part' of the gentle and vulnerable female. Given that the woman writer in the eighteenth century was still a figure seen to contest norms of female propriety by accessing the public sphere, women authors, by emphasising their fundamental decorum and decency, would hope to attenuate this perceived transgression. In her essay 'Womanliness as Masquerade', Rivière explains this donning of a feminine mask, echoing women's dual private/public personae discussed in the Introduction: 'Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen the goods' (1929: 306). Whatever the complex and at times contradictory self-figurations espoused by these female editors, all three provide explicitly positive role models for aspiring women writers and readers. As Diaconoff comments: '[B]y emphasizing woman's rational powers and her ability to found her attractiveness on something other than beauty and charm, women editors such as those of the *Journal des Dames* sought to buttress women's self-esteem and propose a new basis on which to form relationships with men' (2005: 197–8).

The successive female editors of *Le Journal des dames* can also be seen to embody the role of facilitating forum or collective/connective conduit for their women readers, characterising the journal as a type of female manifesto which accommodates and validates women's many experiences and achievements, both professional and personal. As it becomes more established, *Le Journal des dames* not only endeavours to broaden the range of

subjects it treats, but equally seeks to extend its readership, both nationally and internationally, by providing information on well-known female figures, whether historical, literary or regal, from elsewhere in Europe, and inviting European readers to participate in the journal's production. As Chapter 1 discusses, this network of pan-European cultural dialogue intensified in the eighteenth century, as women began to travel more and to engage in literary exchanges from the epistolary to the journalistic – exchanges that also helped to figure women as a collective group sharing particular interests and experiences. These communications were facilitated by the fact that most middle- and upper-class European women were familiar with at least some foreign languages and literatures. This invitation to European women to join creative forces, along with the journal's foregrounding of illustrious women past and present, highlights its conception of gender as a tool of solidarity reinforcing common links among women from diverse backgrounds, and, consequently, its belief that political consciousness-raising is not a transient political fad but has a long-established tradition and far-reaching future potential.

The journal's women editors and writers understood that, without the support of women from different social and cultural origins, any political aspirations they harboured would remain unfulfilled. Not content simply to entertain, they recognised that the overriding sense of pleasure associated with reading women's journals might be productively utilised to make readers more receptive to different forms of instruction, reflecting the Horatian criteria that literature should be both entertainment and education, *dulce et utile*. Under their leadership, *Le Journal des dames* became the first established women's journal to realise – in both senses of the term – the potential long-term benefits in harnessing the support of an extensive female readership, a realisation originating in these editors' awareness of the reciprocal influence of women's actual position in French society and the journalistic promotion of *different*, often unconventional female figurations within it. As subsequent chapters of this study demonstrate, *Le Journal des dames'* espousal of a distinctly feminocentric approach facilitates the advent of later all-women journals such as *Le Journal des femmes* (1832–37) or *La Femme libre* (1832–34), and puts paid to the stereotypical characterisation of women's journals as vacuous *divertissements* regurgitating the *déjà-dit* and untouched by the 'real' world of politics.<sup>27</sup>

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27 In the fourth edition of the Revolutionary publication briefly cited in the Introduction, *Le Vritable Ami de la reine ou journal des dames, par une société de citoyennes* (1790), a reader writes to the journal, thanking it for giving her the confidence to express herself, pointing to the significant role women's journals fulfilled – and continue

The journal's coverage of a selection of more explicitly 'political' – albeit women-related – topics met with a varied response from the journal's readers, underlining its avant-garde role in formulating, rather than merely reflecting, public opinion. *Le Journal des dames* perceived itself as forum for readers to air their views on specific subjects or to comment on the journal's content in the manner of today's 'Letters to the Editor' newspaper rubric. The journal's excavationary tactics in seeking to establish a tradition of instructive and inspirational female role models,<sup>28</sup> and thus to contextualise its feminocentric objectives historically, is praised in readerly correspondence with the journal – although, as if to testify to the female readership's self-limiting reticence, the following letter to Madame de Maisonneuve is from a forward-thinking male reader. The reader hopes that, when confronted with less passive and stereotypical figurations of femininity, female readers will be encouraged to broaden their own personal and public ambition beyond that of attractive appendage:

Je suis persuadé, Madame, qu'on verroit avec plaisir, dans votre Journal, les exemples de vertu & de courage qui ont été donnés par les femmes dans tous les temps. Ces faits sont épars dans l'Histoire, & souvent peu connus. En les présentant de nouveau, vous travaillerez également à la gloire de Votre sexe & à son instruction. Vous réveillerez l'émulation de bien des femmes qui paroissent borner leur mérite à savoir plaire, & n'ambitionnent rien au-dela. (August 1764, p. 6)

Another earlier reader's response to Madame de Beauver's take-over as editor is equally positive, enthusiastically welcoming the journal's change in political tack and explicit promotion of a pro-female agenda; yet, by simultaneously requesting advice on how to keep her husband from straying, the reader fails to have grasped Madame de Beauver's fundamentally feminist ethos. The latter's reply is typically straightforward – women should strive to accept themselves as they are and to perfect solely their inner qualities, since 'la beauté passe & la vertu reste' (December 1761, p. 255). Virtue was considered a naturally feminine moral characteristic in eighteenth-century France – as in the classic phrasing 'les vertus de son sexe' – closely associated with the marginalised domestic domain kept 'pure' by its distance from

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to fulfil – in validating women's concerns, however putatively personal or trivial (pp. 28–31, p. 28): 'j'ai couché sur le papier mes petites réflexions que je n'aurois jamais osé vous communiquer, si vos écrits n'annonçoient pas la plus grande indulgence pour les femmes non lettrées.'

28 See January 1774, p. 11: 'Les Vies des Femmes célèbres de tous les siècles et de tous les pays formeront un objet aussi varié qu'intéressant' (original emphasis).

the artificial and vain public domain;<sup>29</sup> it was thus traditionally viewed as incompatible with forging a reputation in public, and, consequently, with female authorship. Madame de Beaumer's usage of the term, with its implicit intellectual connotations and its pairing with 'courage' in the previously cited reader's letter, represents an innovative attempt by the journal both to broaden the semantic applicability of the term and to normalise the concept of the woman author or public figure by associating her with the quintessentially feminine characteristic of virtue, thus bringing the 'feminine' use of the term closer to its 'masculine' associations. Male virtue, based on a more 'rational' (national) loyalty and uprightness as opposed to the term's sentimental associations with women, would be understood as a pivotal ingredient in the successful defence of the new Republic, as epitomised in the credo, quoted in *La Feuille villageoise*, that '[u]ne nation libre ne doit révéler que deux choses, la loi et la vertu' (19 April 1792, p. 86).

Other readers, however, condemned the journal's egalitarian discourse, which promoted the need for women to develop their intellect and to combat society's valorisation of the superficial and aesthetic as inherently feminine qualities. In a letter in the February edition of 1764, a woman reader urges Madame de Maisonneuve, whom she groups in the oppositional 'masculine' camp and characterises as an authoritarian, out-of-touch tyrant, to stop addressing women as if they were men and obliging them to adopt 'manliness as masquerade', but rather to rejoice in their differences. The reader foregrounds the binaries separating the sexes – women's lighthearted, emotional written and oral expression can never be successfully straitjacketed into a serious 'masculine' work of literature:

Vous voulez donc absolument, Madame, nous imposer des loix? Eh! que vous fait notre paresse! Ignorez-vous que les femmes, en général, n'aiment point à écrire, si ce n'est dans les cas qui leur sont particuliers? Sçavez-vous que nous ne brillons guères [*sic*] dans nos écrits que par le sentiment? Notre conversation est différente; l'esprit & la gaieté est [*sic*] ordinairement ce qui l'accompagne, dans ce que les hommes appellent une femme aimable. C'est donc sortir de notre sphere que de prétendre nous distinguer dans la Littérature. L'esprit & les connoissances sont assez l'appanage des hommes. Ne cherchons pas à leur ôter ces avantages, nous avons bien de quoi nous venger. (pp. 99–100)

This heated rejection of equality – albeit one subtended by a rather antagonistic perception of men – illustrates the journal's projection of its female readership

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29 The key literary illustration of the natural, virtuous woman untainted by social hypocrisies is Zilia, the Inca princess who is the heroine and narrator of Madame de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747). Zilia arrives in France and is horrified by the superficial shallowness of her host country and of 'society' French women in particular.



not as a group of passive consumers imbibing whatever ideological dripfeed is distributed to them but as actively engaged in dialoguing with – and at times rejecting – the figurations of women placed before them. These early readers navigate an assured path through the multiple discursive paradigms of womanhood and heterosexual relations contained within the journal. Indeed, the intellectual confidence required to assert these sentiments subverts the stereotypical femininity that they espouse.

While such views clearly run counter to the journal's own beliefs during particular periods, by its commitment to publishing correspondence and writing by women readers *Le Journal des dames* establishes a dialogue of political consequence that encourages women to formulate and, more importantly, to give voice to their opinion on a range of issues from the public to the private, pointing up the journal's role as provider of both a political education and more 'personal' developmental skills. The textual figurations of an implied audience catalyse the extra-textual reader to engage with and comment on the representations of women put forward. Women write in as women, and clearly appreciate the opportunity to do so, as illustrated by the letter 'de Madame d'H ... petite nièce de Madame Dacier à l'Auteur de Childeric I, Drame héroïque en trois Actes' (October 1774, pp. 197–8), in which, in a feminist gesture of sorority, she mentions 'la Solitaire des Isles d'Hières', a regular contributor to the journal and one who promotes rural simplicity over urbane artificiality.<sup>30</sup> (Madame Anne Dacier [1654–1720] was a famous scholar and classical translator, and the 'Auteur' of the play in question none other than the well-known playwright Louis Sébastien Mercier, who was also an editor of *Le Journal des dames*):

Je ne cherche qu'à m'instruire, à m'éclairer sur le genre de Littérature qui rit le plus à mon goût. Le Journal des Dames sera le seul, où je déposerai mes Lettres. *Je suis femme*, me suis-je dit, comme la Solitaire des Isles d'Hières, *je suis femme; j'ai des droits incontestables pour paroître dans cet ouvrage périodique.* (October 1774, pp. 197–8; original emphasis)

While the source of such correspondence is not always verifiable, and may at times be 'in-house' – the great-niece of Madame Dacier was also a regular contributor to the journal, which further exemplifies the journal's ongoing involvement with the 'real lives' of its readers – the journal consistently portrays itself as an organ in which all its readers can voice their views, and in which such views are validated. The letter-writer's mention of the

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<sup>30</sup> Given that the second volume of Madame de Montanlos' *Oeuvres* contains an entry 'Ma Soirée d'hier et les Réflexions d'une solitaire aux îles d'Hyères', she is in all likelihood the author of these contributions to *Le Journal des dames*.

familial link with Madame Dacier may be viewed as further evidence of the journal's polemical and forward-thinking position on women's rights, in that Madame Dacier was an ambitious and highly learned woman in a masculine world – and one not born into privilege – who achieved international success through her translations of the Ancients, including Homer.

The journal can thus be seen to represent a fusion of 'masculine' written and 'feminine' oral cultures: the dialogic epistolary exchanges typical of the women's press endow the correspondence both with the orality and immediacy associated with 'feminine' cultural expression – partly due to the elevated levels of female illiteracy during this period, as highlighted in Chapter 1 – and the self-reflexive permanence associated with the written word. With reference to the epistolary self-referentiality characteristic of many eighteenth-century periodicals, Kathryn Shevelov remarks in *Women and Print Culture*:

[S]ometimes the same letter-writers appear in a series of issues, elaborating their ideas or circumstances, or engaging in dialogue with other letter-writers. The intermixing of two systems of reference, internal and external to the periodicals, contributes to one of the periodicals' most pronounced characteristics: their creation of a kind of 'community' surrounding the text, constructed through the joint participation of the periodicals' producers and consumers. (1989: 46–7)

The importance of such epistolary exchanges lies in the reciprocal representational practices they signify and the 'engaged' figurations of the feminine they embody, which often challenge stereotypes of the passive, apolitical lady of leisure. Women readers position themselves as writers whose – often autobiographical – experiences are worthy of literary representation. The significance of women's journals providing a much-needed outlet where women could represent themselves and their opinions directly to other women during a period when opportunities for female expression were seriously limited cannot be overestimated. These exchanges can also be seen to reflect the taste for epistolary fiction common in eighteenth-century literature generally, and which often originated from female authors or portrayed female correspondence, as in the previously cited *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* or the earlier, anonymously published *Lettres portugaises* (1669). Printed letters in periodical or fictional form represent a means of bridging the private and public domains, of articulating personal opinions through a more acceptable 'feminine' public medium.

## PROMOTING THE PERIPHERAL

AS THE FIRST LONG-STANDING JOURNAL composed by and for women, and given its genesis several years before the Revolution and its target readership of well-off and upper-class women, the political radicalness of *Le Journal des dames* is remarkable – particularly when compared with other late eighteenth-century women’s journals, such as *Le Cabinet des modes* (1785–93), which, as Chapter 3 highlights, despite straddling the Revolutionary years never abandoned its conservative stance. Indeed, the journal’s privileged origins may partly account for its unwavering conviction in women’s intellectual capacity during the reign of its three female editors in particular, in that the predominantly upper-class women who played such a key role in its composition enjoyed greater access to travel and a more extensive social circle than their less wealthy sisters, who had fewer occasions to partake in ‘enlightened’ discussions of literature and politics, given that their husbands would typically read and discuss newspapers’ accounts of the contemporary political landscape in *cabinets de lecture*. Equally, as this chapter has suggested, the journal’s ostensibly conservative subject matter and readership may have acted as a screen behind which the journal’s contributors could partially dupe the censors. Such censorship evidently had lulls in severity, allowing the journal more explicit articulation of many *frondeur* attitudes critical of the *Ancien Régime*; yet, even during periods of intense press surveillance, the journal succeeded in promoting more controversial and feminist figurations of the feminine.

The journal’s distinctly pro-female stance, which finds expression above all through the valorisation and promotion of women’s reading and writing, also asserts itself in relation to women’s education. The journal reflects the intense interest in education in France during its years of publication – an interest discussed in detail in Chapter 3 – with many of the works it reviews focusing on pedagogical issues generally and women’s education in particular. In February 1774 Madame de Montanclos’ review of M. l’Abbé Fromageot’s latest educational publication (the precisely titled ‘COURS D’ETUDES DES JEUNES DEMOISELLES ... avec des Cartes ... pour la Géographie, & des Planches en taille-douce pour le Blason, l’Astronomie, la Physique & l’Histoire Naturelle’ [original emphasis]), points up the fundamental link between a female education that is fit for purpose and the resultant increase in professional opportunities for French women through a newly acquired confidence in their writerly abilities. Madame de Montanclos highlights the important role played by *Le Journal des dames* itself in normalising the figuration of the writing (and reading) French woman in order to encourage a female readership to engage in journalistic production:

Quelques-unes après avoir surmonté des difficultés sans nombre, & s'être mises au-dessus du préjugé encore plus difficile à vaincre, ont cueilli des lauriers qu'elles avoient disputés aux hommes; d'autres ont suivi leur exemple: enfin la carrière est ouverte aux deux Sexes; & ceux qui nous disputoient l'honneur d'y paroître à côté d'eux, nous offrent eux-mêmes leur secours pour nous aider à les vaincre. (p. 165)

The journal argues that if women are to be more than mere appendages they must reject the veiled sexism that places them on an aesthetic pedestal and fight for the right to receive a state education – to be active producers, rather than passive muses. To quote M. l'Abbé Fromageot from the review of his work in the same edition (Fromageot was a disciple of Rousseau and his promotion of women's educational rights thus originates less in feminist conviction than in a perception of women as social utility and as the most efficient medium or conductor for the moral education of the French nation): “Ce n'est pas estimer ce Sexe, c'est au contraire le dégrader & l'avilir, que de regarder les femmes comme de belles fleurs, dont l'unique destination est de satisfaire les yeux” (p. 167).

The journal's main concerns are indisputably literary, encompassing both (often very lengthy) excerpts from, and criticism of, a range of genres from poetry to drama. Just as the *salonnières* who hosted the literary discussions under the *Ancien Régime* played a key role in shaping literary and linguistic fashions among the circles frequenting them, *Le Journal des dames* can also be viewed as constituting an influential pedagogical tool for its women readers through its recommendation of literary works or discussion of social issues of particular relevance to women. If *Le Journal des dames* can be seen as providing the written equivalent of the literary discussions that made up the staple content of Enlightenment *salons*, during its most radical years from 1761 to 1777 such written discussions went far beyond what the journal viewed as the often superficial debates of the *précieuses*, whether vehemently condemning women's lack of educational opportunities and the resultant unhealthy valorisation of their physical attributes or the monopoly held by the *Comédie française* over French theatre.<sup>31</sup>

In his article ‘Fiction and the Female Reading Public in Eighteenth-Century France: *Le Journal des dames* (1759–1778)’, Angus Martin argues that

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31 Like his female predecessors, the journal's penultimate editor, the playwright Louis-Sébastien Mercier, saw his objective as one of encouraging independent thought in his readers, and he continued the tradition of challenging the institutionalisation of the arts in France, in particular railing against what he perceived as the tyranny and exclusivity of the academies and the *Comédie française*, a perception no doubt fuelled by his repeated rejection at the hands of both.

this literary focus was overwhelmingly in evidence during the editorship of the journal's three women editors – a focus on literature both by and about women – pointing up the journal's perception of the key role played by literature as an instrument of social change, and one of particular benefit to those dispossessed of other means of social engagement: 'Of all pages devoted to reviews of novels and stories, 73.1 per cent were under women editors and 26.9 per cent under men, figures which correspond closely to the proportion of total pages produced by each (70.8 and 29.2 per cent respectively)' (1991: 248). The journal's occasional anti-establishment approach manifests itself in the content of certain poems and articles or books recommended to readers. Christiane Veauvy and Laura Pisano remark that *Le Journal des dames* published the politically radical articles of Condorcet, and that Madame de Montanclous, the journal's last female editor, 'avait soutenu O. de Gouges au milieu des années 1780 dans ses démêlés avec les comédiens de la Comédie-Française à propos de sa pièce *L'Esclavage des Noirs*'. In other words, 'les deux principaux théoriciens de la Révolution en matière de droits politiques des femmes avaient eu des liens avec *Le Journal des dames*' (1994; 1997: 21–2). The journal's support for the most outspoken feminist author in eighteenth-century France provides evidence of its belief in the need for greater sexual equality and improved rights and opportunities for women.<sup>32</sup> As Joan B. Landes summarises: 'The *Journal des Dames* styled a version of feminism that was parliamentarian, patriotic, and deeply committed to fostering a new civic consciousness among men and women. [...] It resisted fashion, luxury, and women's reduction to objects of beauty and pleasure' (1988: 60–1).

One of the key literary topics to which *Le Journal des dames* returns throughout its years of publication is the low profile and absence of critical appreciation accorded to women writers. The very content of *Le Journal des dames* contests the widely held perception of women's literature as superficial and frivolous, and thus beneath serious literary consideration (a perception that partly accounts for the disdain in which women's magazines were, and continue to be, held, as well as for the belief, predominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that the gradual improvements in literacy among more marginalised groups such as women and the lower classes would result in an intellectual dilution of literary and journalistic content in order to appeal to the greatest number). As Diaconoff observes, a further, if less articulated, justification for maintaining the educational status quo for French women

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32 Its radicalness is apparent not only in the content of its literary recommendations, but also in the form in which these may be presented. Martin (p. 257) posits that *Le Journal des dames* represents the first instance of novel serialisation in the French press, predating *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, as mentioned in Chapter 3.

during this period no doubt stemmed from a patriarchal unwillingness to relinquish part of men's cultural domination over women:

For not only did the eighteenth century see a dramatic rise in female rates of literacy, and a radical change in the way women were encouraged to regard their reading, but women's reading was also to carry emancipatory consequences and impact the social contract, both by enlarging the nation's literate class and posing a possibly unintended challenge to masculine hegemony in matters of cultural authority. (2005: 205)

While an examination of the role of women in the arts is particularly prominent under the journal's three female editorships, as early as 1761 the journal's second editor, La Louptière, had been defending the writerly qualities of literary women. He argued vociferously that the French academies should admit women writers and give them the literary credit they deserved. In order to support his case and to urge members of his readership to follow a literary career, La Louptière provided his readers with lists of women writers – an approach that would frequently be duplicated in subsequent editions and by later journals – and, as this chapter has remarked, he actively encouraged his female readership to contribute to the journal. In June 1764, *Le Journal des dames* remarks that prejudice, rather than lack of talent, accounts for the paucity of women writers in France:

La meilleure réfutation qu'on puisse donner du préjugé qui interdit aux Femmes le plaisir de cultiver les Belles-Lettres, est le Catalogue de celles qui se distinguent dans cette carrière. Celui que je publie aujourd'hui, n'est qu'une ébauche. Je prie les Femmes qui y sont oubliées de vouloir bien m'en avertir, quand ce ne serait que pour la gloire de notre Sexe. (p. 33)

Indeed, the journal did more than simply provide numerous examples of talented women writers. As Gelbart comments:

From its beginning in 1759, the *Journal des Dames* had set itself up as something of an alternative academy, publishing many of the essays that had competed for academic prize competitions and lost. Even the timid founding editors had praised foreign and provincial academies for their hospitality to women, an implicit criticism of the Parisian ones. The paper would dispense deserved honors to those women whom the academies refused to recognize. (1987: 296–7)

This proactive and highly political move to raise the profile of neglected literary predecessors and to draw attention to their achievements is an approach that dates back to the medieval writer Christine de Pizan, a figure considered the feminist originator of the *querelle des femmes* and who, according to Claire Goldberg Moses, 'had defended the female sex by compiling lists of the

achievements of women, culled from history and mythology, to prove that women were at least equal, if not superior, to men' (1984: 8).

Similarly, in the edition of April 1775, the journal demonstrates its awareness of male bias in French officialdom and the lack of female representation in key national institutions by criticising the fact that women's opinions are never canvassed when deciding which authors should be accepted by the Académie Française (pp. 14–15). *Le Journal des dames* also repeatedly points to the misogyny governing the establishment of the literary canon in France and attributes women's exclusion from it to sexist prejudice.<sup>33</sup> The journal's campaign to raise the profile of women writers is an endeavour to redress such patriarchal bias, and one that makes clear that the widespread suppression of successful female role models will have detrimental effects on contemporary readers aspiring to be writers. The journal makes an explicit appeal to sisterhood among its readers in order to write women into literary history – particularly given their increasing predominance as producers of literature – and persistently seeks to draw attention to the work of lesser-known women writers, criticising, for example, a publication for its cursory treatment, or even exclusion, of important female authors (March 1774). With reference to the author, M. l'Abbé Sabatier de Castres, and his work, *Les Trois Siecles de la Littérature française, ou Tableau de l'esprit de nos Ecrivains depuis François I. jusqu'en 1733*, we read: 'Nous voudrions pouvoir également le justifier sur le défaut de partialité, dont il n'a pas toujours sçu se garantir dans son Ouvrage' (p. 72), and, later, '[c]et article nous paroît un peu sec. Madame du Bocage avoit droit à de plus grands éloges, & M. l'Abbé Sabatier n'auroit pas dû passer sous silence *le Paradis terrestre*, Poëme du même Auteur, qu'on regarde comme une de ses meilleurs [*sic*] productions' (pp. 73–4).

The journal repeatedly holds up historical examples of the social and artistic achievements of a multitude of women from different backgrounds in an endeavour to inspire the journal's contemporary readership. In its recuperative, excavatory approach to female-authored writings, *Le Journal des dames* can be seen as a clear precursor to subsequent generations of feminists, most particularly those adhering to the first wave of contemporary Anglo-American feminism, who set out to trace a tradition of women's writing spanning the centuries.<sup>34</sup> In October 1774 the journal extended

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33 With reference to nineteenth-century French women authors, Alison Finch highlights the expediency with which they too were effaced from the literary landscape: '[...] once individuals were dead their works were usually rapidly demoted, either with condescension or with an overt misogyny which "gallantry" had kept in the background while they were still alive' (2000: 2).

34 Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own, From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (1977; 1978), referred to in the Introduction, is a seminal work in this respect.

its discussion of women writers to encompass various artistic professions, hypothesising as to women's lack of participation in them and, once again, laying the blame squarely on the mutilative role of the socialisation process:

On a fait long-tems à notre sexe l'injure de croire qu'il ne pouvait ni se distinguer par des chefs-d'oeuvres dans la carrière des arts, ni même arriver jusqu'à la connoissance de leurs procédés. Nous avouons qu'aucun monument fameux, soit de sculpture, soit d'architecture, n'est dû encore au génie créateur d'une femme. Nous pourrions en assigner la cause dans les défauts de l'éducation qu'on donne à notre enfance, & dans l'espece d'esclavage auquel les préjugés & les usages asservissent le reste de notre vie. (pp. 130–31)

The incendiary nature of the language employed is a far cry from the conciliatory 'accommodational tactics' witnessed earlier, in which women writers have to foreground their 'feminine' qualities and weaknesses if they are to be socially permitted to engage in intellectual activity; it also pre-empts the republican-inflected lexicon of later feminist journals such as *La Femme libre*, in which there is a deliberate blurring of class and gender hierarchies in the portrayal of women as the Third Estate. The journal highlights the self-perpetuating and galling injustice of the 'symbolic violence' that patriarchal society inflicts upon artistic women's potential talents in not even bequeathing them the consolatory role of passive critic rather than creative artist. The message is plain: if women previously managed to achieve success in oppressively patriarchal societies, the impact of their writerly contributions in a more egalitarian society is inestimable.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, literature deemed suitable for women comprised predominantly a limited selection of educational and moral treatises and tales, with a smattering of romantic fiction. Critics of the contemporary sentimental and romantic fiction on offer, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Madame de Genlis, condemned the escapist nature of such literary material, which was seen to remove women further from reality and to increase their dependency on *la vie intérieure* rather than to encourage them to participate in the public realm, or even to assume responsibility within their own private 'real-life' realms. (As Chapter 3 details, Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis played a key role in seeking to educate French women differently. She also proposed new educational and anti-sentimental literary models, one of which was the 'ethical' or moral romance, which encouraged the female reader to engage her intellect in the act of reading rather than passively consume stereotypical romantic fodder, and resulted in a form of self-edification based on reason.) The April 1778 edition of the journal mentions a work by the 'médecin philosophe' Pierre Roussel, entitled *Système physique et moral de la femme*, in which Roussel discusses sexual differences between men



and women, drawing clear anthropological demarcations between them, and argues, along with Wollstonecraft and Genlis, that novel-reading is a dangerous activity for women because such works idealise men, leading to unreasonably high expectations on the part of women and inevitable disappointment.<sup>35</sup> In this and similar treatises, female readers of fiction are typically presented as consumed or taken over by the 'predatory', masculinised text and incapable of engaging independently with it or retaining a critical distance from it – a passivity at odds with the numerous resistant female readers we encounter in the correspondence and articles published in *Le Journal des dames* and throughout the early years of the French women's press.

Despite its general approval of literature by and for women, *Le Journal des dames* too points up the pernicious effects of novels that fuel women's romantic fantasies only to disappoint them; this, as Evelyne Sullerot (1966: 29) dryly points out, while devoting some of its own pages to epistolary tales and sentimental confessions – albeit from an occasional masculine perspective – with titles such as 'Fragment d'un manuscrit gaulois. Comment je tombe tout subitement énamouré de la belle Damoiselle Blanche' (July 1764, p. 38). Analogous to many contemporary women's magazines, which may be characterised by an 'ideologically' ambivalent stance, *Le Journal des dames* can be seen to adopt the role of sexual, emotional or moral advisor on the one hand, urging women to conduct themselves more proactively in their relations with men, while, on the other, remaining acutely aware that its very existence depends on the simultaneous promotion of a more passive and malleable ideal of femininity that requires such advice in the first place. Nonetheless, as van Dijk (1988: 252) observes, while *Le Journal des Dames* reviews and provides excerpts from a high number of 'ouvrages de femmes', neither male nor female editors demonstrate a dominant interest in promoting novels by women, but focus also on instructional works with a clear pedagogic value, or on biographies of well-known women, as if to encourage 'role-model' emulation in its readership.

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35 Roussel's book was perceived as highly innovative at the time of publication owing to its linking of the physical and medical with the moral and emotional. However, in her work *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt details the pernicious conclusions Roussel's thesis held for women: 'This physical organization had important intellectual and political consequences. The mobility of women's spirits made them incapable of synthetic thought; they were more suited for intuitive activities, in particular, of course, motherhood and its associated function' (1992: 157). Novel-reading for women has a long history of medical and literary condemnation, ranging from the physician Chauvot de Beauchêne's (1783) view of it as a public health menace to Rousseau's dismissal of its noxious educative value in the preface to *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).

Whatever its ideological vagaries in the form of occasional essentialist remarks or conformism to stereotypes of femininity, throughout its existence *Le Journal des dames* proved itself a socially progressive organ intent on rectifying social inequalities, whether the elitism and sexism of the French academies, the dogmatic and classist approach of the classical theatrical establishment that believed that the lower classes did not merit serious artistic representation, or pedagogical approaches that failed to promote an appropriate education for women. Equally, by practising what it preached and publishing many of the works rejected by the academies, the journal gave voice to peripheral female writers and points of view. While the majority of women under the *Ancien Régime* had no collective political consciousness based on gender and were content to accept the status quo unchallenged, *Le Journal des dames* established an ongoing, dynamic dialogue with its female readers and took their opinions into account – indeed, its continuing publication depended on it doing so. It recognised that extensive reforms were prerequisite to improving women’s social position and argued that equality among all French citizens would be beneficial to the health of the nation as a whole. *Le Journal des dames* undoubtedly helped to stoke Frenchwomen’s subsequent interest in Revolutionary activities by granting them readerly and writerly access to the public sphere and ‘public opinion’, and contributed to a journalistic climate that would see the publication both of a variety of feminist brochures and pamphlets and of a number of feminist journals, such as the aforementioned *Étrennes nationales des dames* (1789) and *Les Annales de l’éducation du sexe, ou journal des demoiselles* (1790), a journal devoted almost exclusively to extolling the benefits of wide-ranging improvements in the education of women and campaigning for their implementation. The prototypical status of *Le Journal des dames* and the literary figurations of the feminine it promotes, whether in the form of the women writers and editors represented or in the works discussed and excerpted, played a key role in broadening the gamut of acceptable roles available to French women in the second half of the eighteenth century. More radical than many of its successors in its scope and objectives – as the following chapter illustrates – yet rarely failing to adopt *le bon ton*, it ceaseless promoted the importance of French women’s intellectual development (and, implicitly, politicisation) through its positive figurations of reading and writing women.

## Educating the Female Consumer

### Early Fashion Journals

THIS CHAPTER looks at the two most influential and long-lasting early fashion journals in France: *Le Cabinet des modes* (1785–93) and *Le Journal des dames et des modes* (1797–1839). These journals are particularly relevant to this study in that, between them, they cover a 54-year period that witnessed numerous regime changes, including, most importantly, the advent of the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup> What is striking for today's reader is these journals' remarkable ability to avoid *explicit* discussion of the political events unfolding around them while simultaneously acknowledging their impact via a range of journalistic discourses and debates. As this chapter demonstrates, part of this (adapt)ability originates in the more heterogeneous contemporary understanding of the term *mode* and in fashion journals' consequent coverage of a much broader range of topics than today's 'glossies'. These journals' resolute focus on educating the female reader on what and how to consume – whether plays, books, clothes, morals or instruction – simultaneously provides her with numerous 'interstitial' indices of the constituents of more politicised figurations of French womanhood. This chapter argues that, among the plural and often contradictory discourses articulated in these journals, the insightful contemporary reader would – or at the very least *could*

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1 The five-year hiatus between their respective publications coincided with the Terror, a period in which any explicit concern with fashion was considered to reflect an idle (aristocratic) mentality, and simplicity of dress was the order of the day – as was the obligatory wearing of the Revolutionary tricolour cockade (instigated on 8 July 1792 for men and on 21 September 1793 for women).

– have found the intellectual sustenance and supportive sense of sorority to aid her in her journey towards self-realisation. While fashion takes on more definitively gendered associations as the nineteenth century gets underway, in the journals examined here it is firmly associated with *le monde*, with a broadening of epistemological and cultural horizons. The publication of *Le Cabinet des modes* and *Le Journal des dames et des modes* coincided with the growing public debate on French women's right to a compulsory and improved education, and, as the final section of this chapter makes clear, these journals engage in that debate, both tangentially in their role as cultural and sartorial educator and directly in their discussions of the ideal components of a new female-focused pedagogy in France.<sup>2</sup>

The period covered by these two journals bears witness to a drive for greater democratisation of the public realm, including the democratisation of fashion, in which fashion is no longer the unique preserve of the *Cour*. The dilution of a more rigidly stratified and codified society post-Revolution brings with it the imperative to educate and inform the reading public as to the significance and signification of a plethora of changing new fashions, customs and concepts. If fashion was a key index of wealth and privileged social status in the *Ancien Régime*, it develops into a manifestation of the wearer's inner and intellectual qualities, of their personality, taste and education, as the eighteenth century draws to a close. In *Le Journal des Dames et des Modes, ou la conquête de l'Europe féminine (1797–1839)*, Annemarie Kleinert describes the propitious political climate in which early fashion journals flourished, a climate that witnessed the growing empowerment of the bourgeoisie and its subsequent desire to mark such empowerment through visible indications of wealth. Accomplished and successful female consumers were no longer born, but made, and often through the education proffered by the women's press:

Tout d'abord, la Révolution avait balayé la hiérarchie qui existait sous l'Ancien Régime et qui imposait un code vestimentaire rigide. Elle avait engendré une classe sociale qui devait sa puissance à l'argent et qui remplaça la noblesse en tant qu'instigatrice d'une nouvelle mode. Les parvenus dépensèrent des fortunes pour se démarquer par de menus détails régis par la mode et pour confirmer ainsi une position sociale récemment acquise. Le changement des comportements, évident notamment en province, ouvrait la société beaucoup plus aux influences urbaines. Après la période transitoire des années 1793 à 1796, chacun avait le désir d'affirmer son identité aussi bien personnelle que sociale, et cette affirmation accéléra la consommation. (2001: 14)

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2 My use of the term 'education' is more general than that of 'instruction', which I use to refer to the acquisition of specific learning goals such as reading and writing. 'Education' has a more holistic emphasis, encompassing the individual's exposure to social and moral codes of conduct, and includes 'instruction'.

In other words, a more mobile consumer culture can be seen as contributing to the destabilisation of class hierarchies, in that status-related aspects of identitarian politics are both masked and 'falsified' through visible signs of consumption. In her introduction to Part 1 of the study, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Victoria de Grazia comments:

[T]he shaking of the Old Regime transformed goods from being relatively static symbols around which social hierarchies were ordered to being more fluid and directly constitutive of social status. In other words, the making of nineteenth-century class society was not only about transformations in the relations of people to the means of production but also about their massively changing relations to systems of commodity exchange and styles of consumption. (1996: 18)

Philippe Perrot too very much links the crumbling degeneration of the *Ancien Régime* and its rigidly stratified codes of vestimentary norms with the rise of the inherently transient and fluid – and thus radical in its own manner – world of fashion and with the new empowerment of the (female) bourgeoisie. The ability to buy and alter visible signs of 'class' and social status is a conceptually fruitful notion with which to counter essentialist representations of 'natural' behaviour and predispositions. 'Good taste' was now something that could be acquired through education and exposure to social norms rather than 'naturally' originating with the aristocracy and being legally enforced through sumptuary laws ordering particular individuals to dress in a manner befitting their social order.<sup>3</sup>

Fashion can thus be viewed as a means of endowing French women with a sense of empowerment and agency through which to access the public realm with confidence. Fashion needs to be appreciated and validated by the – preferably public – Other, if it is to serve its purpose in reflecting the taste and good character of the wearer. In her work *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*, Jennifer Jones intimates

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3 It is also worth emphasising that, while manifestations of social rank were rendered fluid in this post-Revolutionary culture, gender differences were more clearly signposted and reinforced, producing sartorial evidence of women's visible exclusion from 'masculine' practices and customs. As Dorinda Outram highlights: 'Dress practices, like the use of make-up, jewellery, artificial hair and facial patches, which had been common to both sexes before 1789, began to be rigidly differentiated by gender and their use confined to women' (1989: 156). The same was also true of children's clothing, as Jennifer J. Popiel remarks: 'New clothing styles emphasized pants instead of skirts even for very young boys, to clearly differentiate them from their sisters and mothers' (2008: 55).

the possible ‘power dressing’ effect fashion exercised on eighteenth-century women: ‘[F]ashion was an important part of elite sociability and may have played a larger role than historians have realized in creating a sense of citizenship and public participation in a new society of taste’ (2004: 179). This chapter argues that, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, fashion and commerce constituted a socially acceptable bridge between the realms of private and public, providing women with a means of accessing mainstream French society and consequently with potential opportunities for self-development. In the wake of the French Revolution, which saw many French women’s political hopes dashed and their right to public participation restricted, one of the principal benefits of consumerism was that it allowed them an ideologically approved means of serving the nation in the form of promoting its national industries and epitomising the good taste that was typically associated with France, all the while experiencing a degree of independence from the domestic realm. Or, as William H. Sewell puts it, ‘elite women, who hardly ever participated directly in the production and marketing of goods, were nevertheless crucial agents in the growth of capitalism in the eighteenth century through their massive participation in the development of a fashion culture’ (2010: 118).

Women were not merely passive clothes horses or decorative appendages reflecting the dominant fashion culture, but active consumers of fashion who exerted key purchasing potential, thereby helping to forge such culture. Indeed, it has been argued that French women’s pivotal, yet underestimated, role in dictating consumer trends and the constituents of ‘good taste’ was fundamental in contributing to the comparatively slow rate of industrialisation experienced by France in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In her article “‘To Triumph before Feminine Taste’: Bourgeois Women’s Consumption and Hand Methods of Production in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Paris’, Whitney Walton suggests:

Feminine demand for high-quality consumer goods maintained handicraft and semiskilled hand methods of production, because such modes of manufacturing best met women’s standards for tastefulness, originality, and craftsmanship. Lacking a significant market for cheap, standardised products, manufacturers had no incentive to adopt a mechanized, large-scale method of production that would churn out mass quantities of low-cost articles. (1986: 562)

French women’s extensive literacy in fashion and dress culture can be seen as enabling and creative, and as constituting a particularly feminine form of knowledge; it is one that can complement, rather than replace, the acquisition of women’s writing and intellectual skills. (Indeed, the art of

needlework – as in the case of samplers – requires mastery of literacy and numeracy skills in order to be successfully carried out.) While wielding the needle was less politically efficacious than wielding the pen (or quill), both the production and consumption of fashion allowed French women to carve out a creative niche of self-expression in the predominantly masculine realm of culture, a self-expression given written representation in the early French fashion press (the role of women in the professional *production* of French fashion and clothing is discussed in Chapter 5). In her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft's highly dichotomised perception of fashion and intelligence is untenable when applied to the eighteenth-century French fashion press and its more readily reconciled 'oppositional' figurations of impeccably dressed women who are also in possession of intelligence and sensitivity: 'An immoderate fondness for dress, for pleasure, and for sway, are the passions of savages; the passions that occupy those uncivilised beings who have not yet extended the dominion of the mind, or even learned to think with the energy necessary to concatenate that abstract train of thought which produces principles' (1792; 1891: 278). Fashion is not associated with a frivolous or narcissistic self-indulgence by the journals examined in this chapter, but often takes on an altruistic and patriotic (dis)guise. It is a sign of, among other qualities, the wearer's good breeding (or lack thereof); morality; level of education and general knowledge; and nationalist pride. If there are instances of the female reader's interpellation as naïve infant seduced by the glitzy baubles of immorality and narcissism, by far her more common figuration in the journals studied is as a relatively educated, wealthy and worldly individual – in other words, one whose custom may be patronised but whose intelligence will not.

As this chapter argues, the early fashion journal, while promoting inherently more conservative figurations of the feminine than many of its contemporaries – and this is particularly true of *Le Cabinet des modes* – may still be considered a positive vehicle for improving French women's social and political status in its determination to influence and educate its female readers, and thus its recognition of their pivotal contribution to the wellbeing and prosperity of the French nation. Through her purchase of the journal, the female reader is figured as occupying a position of social influence, and the two fashion journals examined in this chapter seek to harness that influence to their own particular agendas through constant appeals to her 'naturally' discerning taste and good judgement, while paradoxically striving to educate her not only as to the most appropriate clothing to buy but also in more extensive cultural and intellectual terms. Harriet Guest succinctly expresses this beneficial interdependency of fashion and learning: 'Fashionable consumption is moralized by its relation to the consumption of

learning, as a degree of literary taste becomes necessary to polite elegance, while fashionable ease seems to lend an air of femininity to an otherwise prudish or impassioned pursuit' (2000: 73). The journals' promotion of the intractable correlation between education and *savoir vivre* manifests itself in the many discussions and articles surrounding the desired components of girls' education in France.

## EDUCATION

**A**N IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT in the second half of the eighteenth century, and one reflected in the journals studied in this chapter, was the growing interest in women's education and its implementation among both the general public and French writers and theorists, as exemplified in the extensive literature debating its merits.<sup>4</sup> Along with a reduction in the number of deaths from childbirth and the legalisation of divorce, it is this concerted intellectual focus on women's right to a compulsory education that represents the main area of progress for women in the eighteenth century. Significantly, as this chapter illustrates, women authors, in particular the writer Madame de Genlis, participated in these literary debates on education, no longer solely the passive pupils of male-authored treatises.<sup>5</sup> Pro-female agendas on the subject of improving access to education found philosophical reinforcement in Enlightenment discourse during this period, in which education, while still sexually differentiated, was presented as a fundamental

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4 For more information on eighteenth-century discussions of women's education, see Jean H. Bloch's chapter 'Women and the Reform of the Nation' in *Woman and Society in Eighteenth-Century France* (1979: 3–18). Bloch makes the point that some of the most critical opponents of improvements in women's education were women themselves (just as women were among Rousseau's most vociferous supporters).

5 See, for example, her work *Adèle et Théodore ou lettres sur l'éducation* (1782), a highly successful publication that underwent numerous and frequent reprints. While advocating that the ultimate goal of education was to produce an obedient and submissive (albeit knowledgeable) wife, Madame de Genlis was fully committed to promoting the importance of female education (as seen by the placing of 'Adèle' before 'Théodore') and to broadening the parameters of its conventional content – and was undoubtedly a key figure in changing public perception of women's education. Bloch comments on the inevitably male authorship of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century pedagogical treatises, with the exception of Madame de Lambert's *Avis d'une mère à sa fille* (1728), which, as the title conveys, emphasises the personal – and thus non-transgressive – nature of this public piece of writing: 'Though it is clear that women expressed their comments on education in correspondence, notes and memoirs, throughout the first half of the eighteenth century the public pedagogical discourse was dominated by men' (2005: 246).



human right for all French people regardless of class or gender.<sup>6</sup> Enlightenment thinking had raised awareness of the correlation between knowledge and power, and women were more acutely aware of that correlation than most. Throughout the eighteenth century French women's means of access to education – although not its remarkably uniform content – depended on their social status, with women from the middle and upper classes following a similar educational path.<sup>7</sup> Girls from both classes were initially taught at home, although those from the upper classes tended to be taught by governesses, while those from the middle classes were taught by their mother or a close female relative. Girls could then either continue to be educated at home (mothers were involved with their sons' education for, at most, the first six or seven years) or were sent off to complete their education at a convent. In other words, girls were overwhelmingly taught by those from the same sex, who in turn had received an inferior schooling. Rather than concentrating on improving reading and writing skills, both a home and convent education set out to instil in their female pupils a sense of self-sacrifice and devotion to others, frequently through an emphasis on religious morality, as well as providing them with advice on household management and dress-making skills (an area detailed further in Chapter 4) for middle-class girls, and, for wealthier girls, sufficient general knowledge to enable them to participate in polite conversation – in other words, *les arts d'agrément* – all of which would increase their likelihood of securing a husband.

While illiteracy did exist among members of the middle and upper classes, it was significantly more prevalent among women from the lower classes. Regional variations impede a clear assessment of national levels of literacy (Paris reputedly had the best rates of literacy and Brittany the worst), yet one nationwide constant was that literacy rates among women were greatly inferior to those of men from the same social class. As Jeremy D. Popkin

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6 The contemporary predominance of the 'woman question' in various literary treatises – whether Laclos' *Des femmes et de leur éducation* in 1783 or Madame Gacon-Dufour's *Mémoire pour le sexe féminin, contre le sexe masculin* in 1787, both cited in Chapter 1 – reflects this intense interest in women's education. Indeed, the very genesis of the women's press and the proliferation of women's journals during this period may be seen to testify to French women's frustration at the paucity of educational opportunities available to them.

7 According to Samia I. Spencer's chapter 'Women and Education' in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, little factual information exists on actual pedagogical practices throughout France at this time: 'While the education of upper-class women is the most thoroughly documented, that of middle-class girls – few of whom became published authors – is less well known. As to the education of girls from poor families, it remains almost a total mystery. Modest statistics giving names, types, and locations of schools are available in various national and departmental archives' (1984: 83).

remarks in *Revolutionary News, The Press in France 1789–1799*: ‘Female literacy was lower than male literacy in every region and only exceeded fifty percent in a small number of departments’ (1990: 80). As discussed in Chapter 1, owing to a lack of education Olympe de Gouges was reputedly obliged to dictate all her writings to a secretary; her limited literacy skills were unable to give appropriate form to her highly developed political ideals. Girls from poorer families either received no education or were schooled in *petites écoles* (minor schools) or *écoles de charité*, which were founded by many of the main convents to provide for students unable to afford mainstream conventual education. While reading and writing were taught at the former, the latter concentrated exclusively on manual skills. The more rural the area, the worse the education for girls. Even as late as 1836, when the ‘Loi Pelet’ required that parishes set up separate primary schools for both sexes – following on from the 1833 Guizot law that stipulated that all communes provide a primary school for boys – the absence of legal enforcement meant that many villages without the financial means to run two establishments simply housed female pupils in the corner of a classroom in the boys’ school. However, it is important to emphasise that the actual curricula taught to girls from different social strata varied little. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese states in her Introduction to *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*: ‘The values that eighteenth-century educators sought to instil in women seem to have been remarkably similar across class lines. The differences in goals for women of different classes consisted especially in the amount of education, rather than the function of education’ (1984: 13).

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the far-reaching influence of the Catholic Church during the eighteenth century infiltrated pedagogical ideology above all through the inculcation of religious beliefs via its various teaching orders. Its influence would wane in the Republican climate at the end of the eighteenth century, when convents were criticised for failing to provide an adequate response to the changing educational needs of France. Many eighteenth-century women writers also began to press for changes in France’s approach to education, including the cessation of the conventual system, which was perceived as anachronistic in both its teaching of religion to the detriment of other subjects and the obligatory separation of child and family it entailed in an age that was beginning to revere maternal influence. Similarly, it was considered inappropriate that girls were educated in the skills required for marriage and motherhood by women who would experience neither. In her work *Réflexions et avis sur les défauts et les ridicules à la mode*, Madame de Puisieux remarks: ‘Il est dangereux d’élever les filles dans l’ignorance du vice, c’est un grand inconvénient que de les élever au couvent’ (1761: 29). However, if the Church’s pedagogical influence was clearly diminished in the post-Revolutionary era, it by no means disappeared, as illustrated by the predominance of earlier treatises

by 'abbés' among the principal contributions to the contemporary debates on women's education. These 'abbés' included Claude Fleury, François Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon and, later, Pierre Fromageot, all of whom demonstrated a tempered and conditional enthusiasm for girls' education.<sup>8</sup> Fromageot, for example, considered a home education a suitable alternative to a convent-based one for girls, and focused on women's role as guardians of morality in the domestic sphere. Equally, with reference to Fénelon's long-established and moderate beliefs in educational reform, which continued to be influential in the eighteenth century, Carolyn C. Lougee (1974) comments on the clear separation he promoted between the modesty and simplicity of the 'natural' world of the hearth and the excesses of the cultural outside world of 'polite' society. This dichotomisation would be reflected in the women's press's increasing move away from the 'bluestocking' approach of *Le Journal des dames* to the domestic emphasis of early nineteenth-century journals, as well as in fashion journals' concern to control the dangers of unfettered consumerism, which was perceived as a threat to the stability of an ordered family life:

[O]ne must recognize the rigidity of woman's sphere which was central to Fénelon's thought. If a well-raised woman, one who fulfilled her duties within her home could do great good, a woman who left her sphere could create social disorder. And the basis of role ascription, of woman's sphere, was precisely Fénelon's conception of the antithesis of domesticity and *bel esprit*. (1974: 95)

While debates continued and public opinion supported an improved education for women on the whole, the contrast between the 'public' objectives of a male's education and the 'private' objectives of a female's (the latter based on serving the interests of the nation through the moral education of husband and children) was firmly established in late eighteenth-century pedagogical ideology.

The gendered separation of educational skills promoted by treatises on schooling written by prominent religious figures received further ratification in the writings of certain *philosophes* in which the social inferiority of women remained largely unquestioned. The post-Revolutionary secularisation of the education system and the writings of authors such as Denis Diderot, who considered religion antithetical to progress, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who

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8 See Fleury, *Traité du choix et de la méthode des études* (1686), Fénelon, *Traité de l'éducation des filles* (1687) and Fromageot, *Cours d'études des jeunes demoiselles* (1772). The role of nuns in providing education for girls would take off again in the early to mid-nineteenth century, when *pensionnats* run by the religious orders became the main institutions in which girls could be educated (however inadequate such an education might be), reflecting the renewed post-Revolutionary interest in religion already mentioned.

perceived women's future above all in terms of marriage and motherhood, proposed new interpretations of womanhood based on the 'natural' predispositions and differences of the sexes. Other late-Enlightenment writers to endorse the physiological foundation of women's educational opportunities were the physician Pierre Roussel, as mentioned in Chapter 2, and the historian Antoine Léonard Thomas. Where an earlier writer such as Poulain de la Barre had been convinced of the formative power of education and of the pivotal role played by nurture rather than nature in the development of the individual, and consequently that the intellect was genderless, the essentialist approach of his successors argued quite the opposite – that woman's intellect was dependent upon her physiology – indicating an epistemological shift from rationalism to sentimentalism, a shift reinforced by the work of Rousseau.

This mode of argumentation can be viewed as a more 'scientific' justification for the subordination of women characteristic of the Christian tradition, which viewed them as inherently inferior. As Mary Seidman Trouille comments: 'By highlighting the biological specificity of women, the scientific discourse of the Enlightenment tended to perpetuate, rather than to dispel, age-old prejudices against them and to intensify the traditional association of difference with inferiority' (1997: 43). Despite women's 'natural' predisposition to assimilate the virtues of motherhood, *philosophes* such as Montesquieu and Rousseau advocated that conditioning, particularly in the form of education, give nature a helping hand in forming girls for their future role from early childhood. As remarked in Chapter 1, only very few *philosophes*, most notably the Marquis de Condorcet, attributed any sexual differences to environment and conditioning, rather than biology. Medical opinion at the time upheld the sexist stereotypes which passed off indoctrinated gender roles as 'natural' by giving them an objective, 'scientific' gloss. Rather than basing their conclusions on rigorous medical evidence, doctors developed a philosophy that extrapolated social and moral roles from spurious scientific data. As Clare Goldberg Moses remarks in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*: 'The shift in knowledge happened in the context of a political need to construct a new justification for sexual hierarchy' (1992: 240; original emphasis). Women's education, if it was advocated at all, was therefore not an end in itself but a means to an end; a key not to promoting self-development but to promoting the education of other (male) family members via women's role as maternal nurturers.

A key contributor to this pedagogical institutionalisation of maternity, Rousseau played a, if not *the*, pivotal role in provoking discussions of the desired aims and components of women's education in late eighteenth-century France. While feminist interpretations of his work often view him as a misogynous traditionalist whose teachings snuffed out any hope of sexual equality for

decades to come, numerous contemporary supporters, both male and female, interpreted his writings as empowering for French women. Many of his most vociferous advocates were well-read and – for the time – well-educated women, who understood his writings as an endeavour to bestow upon women the social recognition and dignity their contributions to family and national life deserved. Rousseau saw the domestic realm and women's role of educator within it as a privileged, secure haven far removed from the immoral trials and tribulations of public life, and one governed by loving relationships rather than those based on pre-arrangement. The eighteenth-century status quo was not always an appealing one for French women, who typically had little formal instruction, loveless marriages and limited scope for self-fulfilment. Rousseau thus tapped into this malaise and many French women authors and *salonnières* responded enthusiastically to literary works such as *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (1762). In her work *Rousseau's Daughters: Domesticity, Education and Autonomy in Modern France*, Jennifer J. Popiel argues that Rousseau's domestic rhetoric was not incompatible with nascent modern beliefs in the rights of the individual and thus, ultimately, with a – however diluted – form of eighteenth-century feminism:

In the end, the demand that girls should be raised with the strength of character to rule over their passions made their education like that of boys, who were also to become autonomous actors. The rhetoric of domestic virtue therefore moved toward a greater ideological integration of women, as individuals, into the emerging liberal societies. (2008: 9)

Others, however, such as Madame d'Épinay, were more critical of what they viewed as Rousseau's idealised drive to educate women to become little more than contented wives and mothers in monogamous marriages, and of his refusal to consider the weight of social conventions and habits on women's ability to bring such ideals to fruition: for example, not only was breastfeeding still considered inappropriate for upper-class women, but infidelity remained an accepted component of married life. The varied responses to his work among eighteenth-century French authors – and often the same author varied in her responses to it, as in the case of Madame de Staël, who both praised his differentialist views of women while being critical of his limited educational aims for them, or Olympe de Gouges, whose anti-marriage, anti-domestic stance was not antithetical to a profound valorisation of Rousseau's writing – illustrate the impossibility of generalising about Rousseau's reception among his contemporaries.<sup>9</sup> It is

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Seidman Trouille highlights the irony of Gouges' idolisation of Rousseau: '[...] Gouges strongly identified with Rousseau's egalitarian spirit and with his image as a

fair to say that maturity and experience also seem to play a role in Rousseau's reception among contemporary women writers, in that authors such as Madame de Genlis and Madame de Staël, who responded enthusiastically to his teachings when young, adopted a more critical approach towards them as older women, and above all as older women writers who no longer saw women's participation in the public sphere as unnatural.

Whatever the restrictions on the subject matter deemed suitable for girls, in 1786 women were finally permitted entry to lectures held at the Collège de France and thus gained access to the work of many of the country's most prestigious scientists and thinkers. Levels of literacy also began to improve and in schools such as Madame Campan's highly successful school for girls, which opened in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1795, French girls were taught more 'masculine' subjects, such as mathematics and physics. Subsequently, as Rebecca Rogers comments, an improved educational syllabus for girls during the Empire – and one that also aimed to encourage female students to go into the teaching profession – was gradually perceived as compatible with an education into motherhood: 'Women pedagogues, and especially Madame Jeanne Campan, who directed the first school of the Legion of Honor, expressed views that differed in important ways from men's, in that they broadened the possibilities of acceptable feminine "careers" while endorsing the premises of domestic womanhood' (1994: 148).<sup>10</sup> As the influence of Madame Campan's teaching became more extensive, the notion of the mother as pivotal to the family's moral and instructive wellbeing and the health of her children, which became so prevalent in the nineteenth century, grew in significance.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1814, books by the Comtesse

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scapegoat without realizing that it was in large part his narrow views on women and their decisive influence on the Jacobin leaders' policies toward women that had led to her persecution' (1997: 243).

10 Madame Jeanne-Louise-Henriette Campan (1752–1822), a former lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette, was a French educator, whose well-known treatise *De l'éducation* (1824) advocated above all an education in the principles of domestic economy for girls. *De l'éducation* is an instruction manual for the wealthy and upper classes, taking mothers through the various stages of childhood and including sections on 'De la conduite des enfants envers les domestiques: apprendre aux enfants à les traiter avec égard' (tom. 1, livre III, chapitre II) or 'A quel âge on doit accorder aux enfants le plaisir du jardinage' (tom. 1, livre III, chapitre III).

11 In her chapter 'The Memorialists', Susan Kinsey also draws attention to the fundamental association of the pedagogical and the maternal subtending Madame Campan's educational philosophy: '[I]n 1807, she was named director of a new school at Ecouen established by Napoleon. Her task as outlined by him was to prepare the future mothers of France. She set out to do this by offering a broadly based liberal arts education covering writing, arithmetic, history, language, music (especially religious music), all heavily laced with religious and moral instruction' (1984: 219).

de Ségur employed the moralising tone that would mould generations of women by their championing of maternity as a woman's future vocation. If Napoleon's 'Code Civil' served to rigidify further a society in which masculine values and the public sphere of action, profit and economic expansion predominated, at least in the eighteenth century the *salons* had provided upper-class women with the opportunity to use their intellectual faculties. In the nineteenth century, paradoxically, while women enjoyed greater access to education, they were trained up for a life located in the domestic sphere in which they figured as linchpin of the family unit. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, the new pedagogical institutionalisation of maternity, while constraining women's activities to the domestic, allowed them the possibility of achieving a degree of education – a possibility the French women's press also helped to realise – and consequently of exercising authority and influence within the private realm.

### EARLY FASHION FEATURES

As HIGHLIGHTED by the prospectus of *Le Courier de la Nouveauté* discussed in the previous chapter, fashion proper had long been taken seriously by women's journals in France. The late eighteenth century witnessed a growing interest in fashion and furnishing houses, particularly in Paris, as reflected in the gradual rise in the number of advertisements for specific fashion houses that began to appear in women's journals during this time, as well as in the number of female garment workers employed by them, as fashion became an increasingly lucrative industry. In her chapter 'Coquettes and Grisettes: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Régime Paris', Jennifer Jones foregrounds this new symbiotic relationship which sprang up between the French fashion industry and the early women's press:

By the late eighteenth century, [...] the Parisian fashion culture had been transformed dramatically. Fashionable dressing was no longer solely the privilege of the elite, but something in which men and women across a broader range of classes could indulge, if only by the purchase of a new ribbon or hat. [...] And a specialized fashion press was born to publish information on the latest styles and the locations of the newest boutiques. (1996: 30)

If the earliest journal of any longevity, *Le Journal des dames*, may have 'resisted fashion' for most of its career, to quote Joan B. Landes (1988), it could not do so indefinitely. The January edition of 1775 is particularly pertinent to future developments in the women's press in that, for the first time in the journal's long and illustrious history, it contains an article that

details different fashion items, including dresses, bonnets and perfumes, and provides the names and addresses of stockists, effectively producing the first form of advertising (in the form of an 'advertorial') in women's journals. The previous September, the journal had published a 'LETTRE DE MADAME LA MARQUISE D'AM ... A la Solitaire des Isles d'Hières' (original emphasis) (as remarked in Chapter 2, exchanges of 'letters' involving 'la Solitaire des Isles d'Hières' were a recurrent feature of the journal), in which, countering Wollstonecraft's contention, the author argues that intelligence and an interest in fashion need not be mutually exclusive, refuting any notion of the female reader as vacuous mannequin and pointing up both an awareness of the multiple femininities available to her and her ability to engage in active negotiations with the different and often conflicting gender identities placed before her: 'Avez-vous cru que nos têtes, agréablement ornées de plumes variées, auroient moralement contracté la légèreté de nos coëffures?' (September 1774, p. 224). Unlike the recipients of other media, the 'ordinary' reader of early French women's journals is often both textual critic and contributor, and in this case well able to resist wholesale interpellation by the fashionable figurations of the feminine with which she engages. Viewed retrospectively, this letter may also have been published in order to justify the journal's subsequent interest in fashion, which its readership could have considered a departure from its original focus on the importance of women's reading and general intellectual and cultural education.

Both the French women's press and fashion producers gradually realised the reciprocal financial incentives in harnessing as extensive an audience as possible to the consumption of women's journals. *Le Journal des dames*' altered focus on fashion is portrayed as an altruistic gesture for both contemporary provincial women – in that it allows them to keep up to date with Parisian fashion, whether they buy it or not – and for future generations, in that it constitutes historical documentation of French aesthetic tastes. As this chapter goes on to discuss, such altruism is characteristically presented as being at the heart of these journals' promotion of fashion, with all potential accusations of individualist and consumerist narcissism that may underlie fashion purchases continually countered with rallying appeals that such purchases are made for the good of the nation: women owe it to the motherland to keep buying into – in both senses of the term – this prospering and prosperous industry. This same January edition of *Le Journal des dames* is also significant in the journal's history, and that of the women's press generally, in that its editorial points to the necessity of targeting a broader readership, of appealing to women from different classes and backgrounds, further acknowledging the close relationship between reach and commercial viability. The journal's 'Avis' can be viewed as illustrating the evolution in France's pre-Revolutionary



political climate towards a more democratic, less stratified society, as well as its awareness that it has to present itself as engaging with and responding to the needs of its readers, if it is to increase its readership profile and financial security. The journal emphasises the all-encompassing nature of both its objectives and its desired readership: 'Nous nous proposons de faire mention dans le prochain Journal & les suivans, de tout ce qui peut être utile ou agréable à notre sexe. [...] Enfin nous n'omettrons rien de ce qui peut convenir aux femmes de différent état & de différent goût' (pp. 151–2).<sup>12</sup> The need for women's journals to maintain readership figures accounts for their oft-repeated assertion that they are responding to the changing tastes and demands of their increasingly diverse female readers through the endless proliferation of objects of consumption placed at their disposal, whether vestimentary, textual or more broadly educational.

Advertising proper begins to appear in the end-papers of *Le Journal des dames* in the February edition of 1775, and encompasses a wide range of subjects, furnishing today's reader with an insight into both the social and sartorial concerns of the period. It would appear that the early women's press in France was in advance of its more generic journalistic counterpart: 'C'est en effet dans *Le Journal de Paris*, publié à partir de 1777, que l'on découvre les premières annonces commerciales pour des livres, des remèdes, des boutiques de mode, des cours ou des pensions, même s'il est vrai que ces annonces ne paraissent que dans quelques suppléments mensuels.'<sup>13</sup> Presumably in response to the 'Avis' of the previous month, many fashion stockists begin to advertise their wares, revealing that women's concern with 'body image' and their enforced corporeal 'docility' are far from recent phenomena:

Monsieur de la Potterie, Tailleur pour les Dames & Demoiselles, fait des Corps de [*sic*] baleine dans le dernier goût. Il fait rectifier, & même faire disparaître les défauts de certaines tailles. L'embonpoint excessif semble s'éclipser, lorsqu'il a habillé celles des personnes qui en sont incommodées. Cet Artiste demeure rue de la Tixeranderie, vis-à-vis celle du Mouton. (p. 263)<sup>14</sup>

12 A later fashion journal, *Le Petit Courrier des dames* (1822–68), also emphasises that, unlike the fashion dictates of the past, post-Revolutionary fashion is more eclectic and democratic. Reflecting a growing awareness of market demographics (and presumably an implicit, if related, desire to increase readership by presenting fashion as within everyone's reach), the journal presents fashion not as the preserve of an elite few but as open to all: '[N]ous devons en offrir qui puissent aussi convenir à tous les goûts et surtout à toutes les fortunes' (20 January 1822, p. 25).

13 See Véronique Bui (2004: 457).

14 The *corps à baleine* was the predecessor to the corset, and its usage died out in France at the end of the eighteenth century. The use of the corset was a much-debated topic in the women's press generally, with perhaps the most famous example being the

The whalebone corset was hugely popular among eighteenth-century Frenchwomen, despite the growing concern nationally about its damaging properties, including the compression of internal organs and hindrance of breathing and digestion, most famously voiced in Jacques Bonnaud's work *La Dégénération de l'espèce humaine par l'usage du corps à baleine* (1770), which in turn was mentioned in the Goncourts' *La femme au XVIIIe siècle*:

Pendant tout le siècle on attaque le *corps* [à baleine], on le fait responsable de la mort d'un grand nombre d'enfants, de la mort de la duchesse de Mazarin. Les corps les plus à la mode étaient les corps à la grecque, d'abord à cause de leur nom, puis pour leur bon marché, quoiqu'ils fussent très-dangereux, parce que les baleines ne montaient qu'au-dessous de la gorge et pouvaient la blesser. (1882: 416; footnote 1)

As Chapter 4 discusses, the fashion for corseting also extended to young boys and girls.

Many advertisements relate to childcare needs, whether recommending teachers of language or dance, or particular educational establishments for young girls; others recommend the services of midwives, pointing up a growing national consciousness of the importance both to cater more systematically for girls' educational needs and to reduce the mortality rate surrounding childbirth. In the March edition of 1775, advertising begins to concentrate on aesthetics and beauty merchandise, with recommendations for dentistry services and cosmetic products such as rouge and, on occasion, lipstick (the journal warns readers not to buy counterfeited versions, and supplies an address where they can buy the genuine article), or recommending the apparently miraculous 'graisse d'ours' for its many haircare and medical properties. Indeed, hair loss would seem to be a recurrent concern for eighteenth-century (male?) readers. The 'directions for use' of this 'graisse' are impressive in their situational precision. The purchase of this multi-purpose product will allow the buyer to prevent 'la chute des cheveux, de les faire croître en peu de tems, de les voir s'épaissir, & enfin de les conserver longtems. Cette graisse réunit la double propriété de guérir les rhumatismes en s'en frottant devant le feu le matin & le soir pendant quelques jours' (p. 399). Such advertisements act as important reminders that the key role played by cosmetics in the contemporary women's press is not without historical precedent, and that, predating the early nineteenth-century emphasis on

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exchange of readers' letters in the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852–79) in 1867, in which the pros and cons of tight-lacing were discussed at length, often with rather fetishistic overtones. The 'corset correspondence' is discussed by Margaret Beetham in *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914* (1996: 81–8).

developing inner 'female' qualities such as morality and sensitivity, outer female traits received journalistic attention as well. In other words, preceding the advocacy of a 'natural' beauty regime involving exercise and fresh air for the body and religion for the soul, 'artificial' aids were also promoted before being associated with a false femininity fuelled by vanity and a hedonistic consumerism retrospectively associated with the *Ancien Régime*.

These early instances of advertising in the French women's press amount to little, however, when compared with the two principal and redoubtable successors to be studied in this chapter: *Le Cabinet des modes* and *Le Journal des dames et des modes*. In these journals, whose joint publication period covers a timespan of more than half a century, consumerism provides the explicit framework within which all products and information are located – yet, as this chapter argues, this is a framework closely bound up with nationalism. The overt incitement to buy in order to demonstrate nationalist devotion makes the absence of references to France's domestic situation or current sociopolitical climate – traditionally seen as falling within the confines of the *gazette* – all the more notable. Readers who spend, spend, spend in an ever-expanding consumer market are portrayed as playing a vital role in the nation's very survival, yet why France should so clearly require financial shoring-up is hardly touched upon, no doubt in an endeavour not to distract the reader from the imperatives of purchasing. The 'instructive' role attributed to the female periodical rarely strays into the political terrain during the decades spanning the change of century, but, as Chapter 4 details, focuses increasingly on the domestic realm and women's roles within it, as the association of women with the private sphere and men with the public becomes ever more entrenched in nineteenth-century ideology. As the following section highlights, this paradox at the heart of France's nascent consumerism is beautifully epitomised in the case of *Le Cabinet des modes*, which continues to 'fiddle while Paris burns', peddling its opulent wares in the national interest while the country itself plunges ever more deeply into political chaos.<sup>15</sup>

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15 In linking incitement to purchase with nationalist fervour and patriotic devotion, I am locating this consumerist conflation earlier than other critics, such as Leora Auslander, who in her chapter 'The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France' situates it significantly later: 'The first movements towards this notion of constitution and representation of the nation through the goods of everyday life appeared following the Revolution of 1848 and were further fostered under the authoritarian Second Empire established in 1851. Women were to contribute to social peace by buying tasteful French products. Their purchases would both help the luxury trades prosper in the domestic market and, by encouraging the production of tasteful, distinctive products, assure French industries a place in the international market' (1996: 93).

*LE CABINET DES MODES* (1785–1786), *LE MAGASIN DES MODES NOUVELLES FRANÇAISES ET ANGLAISES* (1786–1789), *JOURNAL DE LA MODE ET DU GOÛT OU AMUSEMENT, DU SALLON OU DE LA TOILETTE* (1790–1793)  
(HEREAFTER *LE CABINET DES MODES*)

THE YEAR 1785 saw the emergence of a more luxurious women's journal. Despite changing its name twice, as if to reflect the chronic changeability of the political climate during which it was published, *Le Cabinet des modes* remained a journal very much in keeping with the decadence and privilege associated with its origins in the *Ancien Régime*. With its elegant engravings depicting the dress of the time, *Le Cabinet des modes* may be regarded as providing the earliest recognisable example not simply of the fashion magazine but of the illustrated periodical. In his general survey of the history of illustrated newspapers, *La Presse illustrée en France 1814–1914*, Jean Watelet (1998) locates the beginnings of illustrated journalism in 1785, reinforcing the journal's status as prototype for both the fashion press and the illustrated press.<sup>16</sup> Founded by Jean-Antoine Le Brun, a writer of operettas, *Le Cabinet des modes* immediately differentiates itself from its main predecessors by the striking number of advertisements it contains. In keeping with the journal's title(s) and subject matter, most of the advertisements are for fashion houses; a standard approach is to detail various fashion items and then provide information on stockists, including any changes of address, in the same article. The journal typically comprises eight pages of written text with advertisements interspersed throughout, which – preempting the 'product placement' in evidence in the current women's press – look no different from the main articles; two or three pullout sections containing furniture and fashion engravings; and some sheet music. These advertisements provided the journal with a secure financial basis, since the journal's hand-coloured illustrations meant that it was relatively expensive, with a year's subscription (comprising 24 issues) costing approximately 21 livres for Paris and the provinces.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Similarly, in his article 'Les Journaux de Mode que lisaient nos grand'mères' (1951), Georges Guyonnet argues that *Le Cabinet des modes* can be viewed as the first French fashion journal, embodying a journalistic model that would be emulated by later women's journals, and one which remained unchanged until the beginning of the twentieth century and the appearance of the American-style magazine. While not particularly illuminating, and containing certain generalising (and misogynous) assumptions, Guyonnet's article does provide useful information on various journal takeovers.

17 Daniel Roche reinforces the relative expense of women's journals at this time: 'Les équivalents possibles en salaire permettent de mieux comprendre la diffusion: l'ouvrier

As with *Le Journal des dames*, most readers subscribed via booksellers – particularly if they lived abroad – or postmasters. *Le Cabinet des modes* was also sold in London three or four days after it appeared in France, since London's status as a major metropolitan centre guaranteed a significant additional readership. Daniel Roche highlights the international influence of the emerging French fashion press and points up the literary cross-fertilisation discussed in Chapter 1:

Elle contribue à remodeler l'habillement des élites réceptrices en Europe, à l'image des sensibilités mondaines venues de France, comme l'étaient déjà leurs comportements et leur culture par les idées des vedettes de la philosophie française, transmises à travers les canaux de plus en plus nombreux de la librairie et de la presse. (1989: 470)

The expense of *Le Cabinet des modes* – *Le Journal des dames* had cost a 'mere' 12 livres – was also highlighted by the proliferation of readers' complaints when they failed to receive a copy of the journal, despite paying its hefty subscription rates. Indeed, the journal was obliged to print an apologetic 'Avis essentiel à MM. les Abonnés' on 1 May 1786, an 'avis' whose very existence undermined the journal's self-characterisation as an 'Ouvrage qui donne une connoissance exacte & prompte [...] de tout ce que la Mode offre de singulier, d'agréable ou d'intéressant dans tous les genres' (4 October 1785). The wealthy status of its readership is also demonstrated in the journal's growing concern about the theft of editions, thefts it attributes to servants – somewhat unreasonably, given its own admission of tardiness, although one that would support the thesis that the journal was also read by those lower down the social hierarchy: 'il n'est pas juste que si les Domestiques s'emparent des Cahiers, nous les fournissons deux fois aux Maîtres' (10 January 1788, p. 41).<sup>18</sup>

The historical significance of *Le Cabinet des modes* lies not only in its informative and much-valued engravings of popular contemporary dress

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hautement spécialisé gagne 4–5 l par jour, le maçon parisien se fait un peu plus de 2 l en moyenne de 1775 à 1789. Il faut donc entre 3 et 6 journées de salaire pour s'abonner au *Journal des dames*, 6 à 15 jours pour *le Cabinet des modes*' (1989: 536, footnote 49).

18 Raymond Birn provides some interesting statistics regarding literacy rates among the working and servant classes that illustrate that literacy was indeed more elevated in the latter category – which would render credible their 'borrowing' of journals from their employers – but also that the eighteenth century witnessed a rise in working-class literacy, which, as this study argues, meant that, by 1848, journals had become a genuinely democratic medium consumed by women from all social classes: 'In 1700, 13 per cent of salaried workers and 35 percent of servants possessed at least one book. By 1780 the figures had risen to 30 percent [*sic*] and 40 percent respectively' (1989: 56).

but also in its status as the only French women's journal whose years of publication bridge the period of the Revolution, and thus the transformation from an aristocratic model of consumption and 'good taste' to a bourgeois one. *Le Cabinet des modes* justifies its focus on fashion by highlighting the important educational role such sartorial semiotics plays in France's historical legacy – and one that gives more readerly pleasure than the aridly factual accounts presented by the *gazettes*:

En satisfaisant la curiosité imitatrice de l'Europe, qui le croiroit? nous avons préparé, presque sans y penser, des matériaux à l'Histoire[n] [sic] qui s'ennuyoit de lire des Gazettes. Elle [sic] trouvera, dans un chapeau, un monument pour le vainqueur de la Grenade; un ruban seul lui apprendra que le neveu de Tipoo-Saïb a traversé les mers pour connoître cette France que visitent les Rois. (1 December 1788, p. 3)

If the journal occasionally refers to historical events occurring elsewhere in the world, little or no mention is made of the enormous political changes taking place in pre- and post-Revolutionary French society.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, today's reader could be forgiven for not realising that its period of publication witnessed the advent of the single most important event in the history of France. As its three different titles emphasise, this journal concentrated mainly on fashion and targeted a similarly circumscribed – although less politically engaged – readership to that of *Le Journal des dames*: wealthy and upper-class women with a passion both for fashion and the political status quo as epitomised by the *Ancien Régime*; the changes in title do not herald any change in the journal's content or format. Unlike its more 'topical', wide-ranging predecessor *Le Journal des dames*, throughout its existence *Le Cabinet des modes* is a more monofocal journal, perceiving all events through the optic of fashion.

The journal's highly conservative stance no doubt reflects that of its readership, yet may be further aggravated by the fact that, while such

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19 Particularly in the period immediately preceding the French Revolution, the attentive reader can glean the occasional piece of information about social conditions abroad. For example, slavery is touched upon, either indirectly, as in a reference to a certain Thomas Fuller, who, we are told 'appartient à Mistrifs Coxé, à Philadelphie' (21 March 1789, p. 96; original emphasis), or directly, as in a reference to 'la Société de Manchester, sur la Traite des Nègres' in which we read: 'Cette Société s'est formée nouvellement pour tâcher d'abolir la traite ou l'esclavage des Nègres. Elle réussira vraisemblablement à éteindre enfin cet exécrable négoce' (11 May 1789, p. 133). In France, slavery was initially abolished by the Convention in 1794, although this decree was revoked by Napoleon in 1802; it was definitively abolished by the Second Republic in 1848.

readership is predominantly female – there is an infinitely greater number of engravings illustrating women’s clothing than men’s – the journal’s authorship is predominantly male, as the following remark demonstrates: ‘Cet Ouvrage devant être particulièrement destiné pour elles, nous avons dû penser à les satisfaire premièrement’ (20 May 1787, p. 145).<sup>20</sup> Women’s peripheral role as social observers and their supposedly heightened sensitivity to the world around them, combined with the numerous contemporary binarised social theories explaining male and female physiological differences, discussed in Chapter 1, reinforce the precept implicitly advanced in the journal that women have a greater predisposition towards consumerism and the visually appealing. While weighty works of art demanding intellectual investment remain the domain of French men, the appreciation of fashion is presented as a feminocentric domain. As Jennifer Jones argues:

In the writings of Rousseau, Thomas, and Boudier de Villemert, women were thought to excel in all that required the senses, men in all that required the intellect. Women’s psychology and sensory apparatus made them ideally suited to consume, and their passivity rendered them particularly vulnerable to capture by their sensual delight in agreeable and frivolous objects. (1996: 36)

Indicative of the more directive rhetoric of fashion journalism, these paternalistic overtones at times mutate into more judgemental, moralising remarks, as the male educator is figured as guiding and moulding his more passive, naïve pupil, all the while keeping her safe from any unhealthy tendencies towards excess.

*Le Cabinet des modes’* reluctance to confront the increasing political ferment brewing in French society is further illustrated in its lexicon. While occasionally employing the term ‘femme’, the journal continues to reflect traditional social divisions in the immediate pre-Revolutionary years through its references to ‘des Dames de la Cour de Versailles’ (20 December 1786,

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20 *Le Petit Courrier des dames* was one of the few fashion journals produced by women during the period under study, as well as one of the first journals to be administered by a society – in this case of women writers and artists. As Raymond Gaudriault (1983: 51) argues in *La Gravure de mode féminine en France*, *Le Petit Courrier des dames’* emphasis on its unique feminocentric perspective on women’s fashion can be viewed as a criticism of women being dictated to by the male editors of its competitors – as was the case for the female readership of *Le Cabinet des modes* and *Le Journal des dames et des modes* – even if such a perspective is presented in stereotypically gendered terms in the journal’s earlier prospectus: ‘les hommes sont-ils assez initiés dans les secrets de cette capricieuse déesse [La Mode] pour peindre avec grâce ses bizarreries, son inconstance, ses jolis colifichets? Un grave pédant peut-il entendre l’arrangement d’un ruban, manier la gaze et toucher les fleurs sans les faner? Non, ce talent ne peut appartenir qu’à des femmes’ (5 July 1821, original emphasis).

p. 30) or in remarks such as '[a]ucun ne peut nier que nos Dames Françaises ne fassent adopter leurs modes aux Dames de presque tous les autres Royaumes' (10 January 1787, p. 41). Even in later editions we encounter references to 'le bas-peuple' (5 March 1790, p. 23) or remarks stipulating that '[l]es couleurs fortes et tranchantes plaisent plus que jamais aux femmes de qualité' (15 January 1792, p. 1). These linguistic anachronisms are reinforced by the journal's conservative attitude and desire to preserve the old world order. The changing political climate nonetheless insinuates itself into certain remarks in which the egalitarian connotations of the term 'citoyen' are neutralised by the remainder of the observation, which informs us that the 'aisance [des bons citoyens] met à portée de se procurer des objets de luxe' (20 May 1788, p. 149). It is as if, by endeavouring to marry notions of equality with items previously only accessible to the wealthy, thereby submitting in very small measure to the exigencies of the revolutionary political climate, the journal hopes to safeguard the mainstay of its content. Several anecdotes and *faits divers* are also tinged with a Revolutionary hue. While certain bear witness to the new 'class mobility' promoted in French society, where beggars now address passers-by as 'mon bon citoyen', rather than 'mon prince, monseigneur, monsieur le comte' (15 August 1790, p. 24), others express anti-ecclesiastical sentiments, both beautifully encapsulated in the following reported remark from a prostitute to a bishop: 'Venez, venez, monsieur l'abbé; vous aurez lieu d'être très-satisfait; je suis un peu ARISTOCRATE' (5 March 1790, p. 24; original emphasis).

In a similar manner, *Le Cabinet des modes* publishes a letter praising the duke and duchess of Orléans – a couple famous for their liberalism and democratic ideals – who wish to distribute food to the poor in their neighbourhood, thereby painting a picture of a benevolent ruling class whose deep social conscience and sense of responsibility render more widespread social revolution unnecessary (21 January 1789, pp. 44–7).<sup>21</sup> Such political philanthropy and 'familial' attitudes are portrayed as commonplace in the comportment of those occupying the summit of French society. Illustrating Lynn Hunt's discussion of the more egalitarian, less hierarchical French society after the Revolution in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (1992), further concessions to Revolutionary sentiments may be witnessed in the journal's characterisation of the king, Louis XVI, as a quasi-feminised,

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21 Aileen Ribeiro comments on the duc d'Orléans' famous pro-Revolutionary position: 'The main aristocratic promoter of Anglomania was Philippe, duc d'Orléans, leader of fashion, and of a powerful anti-court faction. [...] Orléans's championship of revolutionary views was well known (during the Revolution he became Philippe-Egalité) and a constant source of irritation to the monarchy' (1988: 39).



philanthropic father-figure looking after his family's wellbeing: 'Notre bon Monarque a dit, dans son Discours à l'Assemblée des Notables, que son désir étoit de suivre Henri IV dans ses actions, & ce désir s'accomplit & se manifeste parfaitement tous les jours; nos Dames ont lu avec attendrissement ce Discours plein de sensibilité, qu'un père, plutôt qu'un Roi, adresse à ses enfans' (10 April 1787, pp. 113–14).

Unwilling to relinquish its fashion-centric stance for the sake of mere revolution, the journal manages to transform the 1789 Revolution into an object of fashion: 'Il n'y avoit pas de doute qu'une révolution comme celle qui s'opère en France, ne dût fournir à la Capitale l'idée de quelques modes. C'est un assez grand événement pour cela' (21 September 1789, p. 227). Not only is the non-hierarchical 'confusion des trois Ordres' endowed with sartorial symbolism in the form of a new hat design, but jewellery also conveys the importance of key political events during the Revolution, including the storming of the Bastille, producing a fusion that Suellen Diaconoff characterises as 'a discourse on the body politic and the politics of body *au féminin*' (1990: 353), reinforcing the previously mentioned association of the cultural institutionalisation of fashion with femininity: 'Pour marquer cette époque, les Bijoutiers ont imaginé de faire des boucles qui figureroient elles-mêmes une Bastille' (11 November 1789, p. 257). The ongoing representation of women's value and attractiveness as inherently linked to their indulgence in a (preferably luxurious) materialism is repeatedly justified in the national interest. Fashion is presented as a panacea for the social distress caused by the Revolution and characterised as a form of infinite displacement activity – shopping therapy for the downwardly mobile, 'femmes charmantes que la perte de leurs titres réduit au désespoir': 'La coquetterie, le besoin de plaire, ne tarderont pas à les ramener à leurs premières et chères occupations, à la recherche des modes nouvelles' (25 June 1790, p. 2).

Post-Revolutionary advertising in the journal continues to recommend a variety of items for purchase, but now repeatedly endows them with a Revolutionary slant or design, such as '[l]its *patriotiques*, avec les attributs de la liberté', or '[p]endules *civiques* avec les attributs de la liberté, à colonnes de marbre et de bronze doré, représentant *l'autel fédératif* du champs de Mars' (25 June 1790, p. 6; original emphasis). It would appear that *Le Cabinet des modes* cannot conceive of the Revolution other than in terms of economics, concerned that France's troubled 'economic situation' will have detrimental repercussions not for the most vulnerable members of French society but, rather, for the nation's business and commerce. The journal's general attitude is one of pity towards the wealthy, aristocratic victims of the *Ancien Régime* whose social dominance is now no longer unquestioned. It is not until its edition of 21 July 1789 that the journal is finally obliged

to make explicit mention of the Revolution and its 'catastrophes funestes' and does so in deeply regretful terms: 'Nous eussions dû donner ce vingt-quatrième Cahier le 21 de ce mois; mais les circonstances trop fameuses & trop malheureuses où Paris s'est trouvé, nous ont empêché de le faire' (p. 185). Given the journal's reliance on fashion and advertising in order to attract a wealthy, upper-class readership interested in signalling such wealth through material acquisitions and vestimentary codes, it is not surprising that the journal's initial response to the Revolution is predominantly negative. In the following edition, *Le Cabinet des modes* states that, due to the current political unrest, it cannot guarantee publication and distribution of the journal on the projected dates.

Profiting from its privileged position as unique French fashion journal, as well as demonstrating an awareness of market forces and thus a desire to extend its readership in a manner similar to that of *Le Journal des dames* discussed in Chapter 2, *Le Cabinet des modes* presents itself as answering the fashion needs of French women of all ages, from adolescence to maturity, while simultaneously promoting a sense of sorority among its readers through its emphasis on the universality of women's worship at the altar of fashion: 'La Mode est une, [...] elle est la même pour tous les âges, & [...] elle est suivie ici par les femmes de cinquante & de soixante ans, comme par celles de dix-huit & de vingt' (30 December 1786, p. 39).<sup>22</sup> As we have seen in the previous examples of advertising, even at this early juncture in the history of the fashion press thinness is portrayed as a desirable feminine attribute whatever one's age, as the journal affirms with typically generalising hyperbole: 'Toutes s'appliquent aujourd'hui à avoir une taille svelte & déliée. Tout ce que l'on a conservé de la *mise* ancienne, c'est le *Corps* pour amincir la taille, & la grande Garniture de Robe' (15 May 1786, p. 98; original emphasis). This appeal to normative aesthetic standards of beauty, to the self-regulation of the female reader in the disciplining of her own body, are common discursive features of the women's magazine constituting a form of virtual journalistic panopticon, in which normative

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22 Even nuns are not immune from the journal's evangelical commercialism – a nun who has left the religious orders is one more potential customer for the journal and a means to increase both its own revenue and that of the numerous fashion stockists it promotes. For an ex-nun to succeed in society, she has to be well-dressed and attractive to the opposite sex, which, it is hoped, will result in offspring and thus further future customers for the journal: 'Sans doute que nous desirons que les jeunes qui quitteront leurs cloîtres, fassent leur devoir de citoyennes, en donnant des enfants à l'Etat. Eh bien, pour avoir bientôt un amant, ensuite un mari, il faut un peu d'aisance avec un grain de coquetterie, se mettre comme tout le monde, suivre la mode enfin' (25 March 1790, p. 2).

visual and textual images of desired femininity work to discipline any errant female bodies by encouraging relentless self-surveillance. As previously illustrated by the advertisements in *Le Journal des dames*, the latter part of the eighteenth century points to the centrality of 'aesthetic aids' in bolstering this surveillance, whether in the form of particular sartorial acquisitions or beauty products.

As well as recommendations for commercial beauty products, such as a 'composition pour blanchir la peau, & faire diparoître les taches de rousseur, ainsi que les marques qui surviennent souvent au sexe par des suites de couches' (1 May 1789, p. 125), the journal begins to include the occasional recipe for home-made beauty or skincare products: 'La pomme de terre cuite, mêlée avec les amandes, fait une pâte liquide très-économique, blanche, de la meilleure odeur; elle dégrasse parfaitement, & se détache avec facilité' (10 March 1788, p. 92). Like its modern-day counterpart, the supposed objective of such pampering is to improve heterosexual relations, principally by educating women in the art of appealing to men. As with the reinforcement of the pro-domestic, educational agenda for women discussed earlier, Mother Nature can always use a surreptitious helping hand when attempting to 'vanquish' the male Other. And what better means of authenticating the journal's success in this matter than hearing from one of the beneficiaries of its fashion and beauty advice? In a letter sent to the editors – once again illustrating the early emergence of a rubric that would form an integral part of the dialogic reader/writer exchange promoted by subsequent women's magazines – we are informed of the salutary effects of one reader's 'make-over':

Je dois cette victoire, Messieurs, à votre charmant *Cabinet*. J'avois mis ce jour-là une robe à *la Turque*, & ma coëffure étoit un chapeau à *la Captif*: mon Amant balançoit encore entre l'or de ma Rivale & mes foibles appas: mais aidée de ce galant costume, j'achevai de le vaincre & de le décider en ma faveur. (1 March 1786, p. 61; original emphasis)

These remarks perfectly capture the 'us and them' battleground lexicon, in which women readers share trade secrets in order to more efficiently capture and dominate their masculine prey (while paradoxically engaging in somewhat unsisterly conduct towards their ill-informed rivals). Thanks to the education they receive from fashion journals, women readers can transform themselves and their appearance through the purchase of what is effectively a trunk full of vestimentary stage props, allowing them to perform the role of the seductive feminine – and other socially sanctioned figurations – with aplomb.

From its inception, the journal expresses the national pride taken in Parisian fashion, a form of nationalism that recurs throughout its period

of publication and which presents women as patriotic symbols of France's economic prosperity. The journal repeatedly foregrounds the important commercial purposes it serves in promoting French fashion and fashion-related products beyond France, and therefore the significant contribution it makes to improving the French economy. This emphasis on the supremacy of French fashion may provide one of the few indications of the prevailing political climate, in that it can be seen to point up the growing need to promote a sense of national identity and drive for unity as the Revolution approaches: in troubled times, the journal desperately clings to its certainty of France's international status as the barometer of 'good taste'. With reference to France's world-leading reputation in the arts and aesthetics, including the sartorial, Ribeiro remarks: '[T]he eighteenth-century confidence – some might say smugness – in its uniformity of aesthetic beliefs, was to disappear under the disintegrating forces of the Revolution' (1988: 19). In the edition of 20 November 1786, the hegemonic worldview befitting the *Ancien Régime* is given clear articulation in a figuration of France itself as the feminine ideal:

Des esprits chagrins se sont récriés depuis longtemps contre l'étonnante & prodigieuse mobilité des Modes Françaises; & les Modes Françaises ont rendu l'Europe entière leur Tributaire. Cet Empire est dû à la supériorité que donnent à cette Nation sur toutes les autres, ses manières, ses usages, sa politesse, son goût, & le talent de plaire qu'elle a toujours possédé à un degré éminent. (pp. 1–2)

The fact that the *Cour* was relinquishing its monopoly over fashion trends, along with the clothing industry's desire to promote its wares to the women of the *salons* and beyond, also meant that *Le Cabinet des modes* provided a timely medium for accommodating these changes. In other words, the journal serves both an increasing social mobility reflected in greater vestimentary fluidity/expendability and the consequently burgeoning Parisian fashion industry.

*Le Cabinet des modes* explicitly acknowledges its consumerist goals, presenting itself as altruistically indulging 'everyone's' natural acquisitive and materialist tendencies – everyone, that is, with sufficient disposable income: 'Mettre tout le monde en état de satisfaire cette passion qu'il apporte en naissant pour les objets (ceux infaillibles de la Mode) qui le feront paroître avec plus d'avantages & plus d'éclat' (20 December 1786, pp. 25–6). This quotation perfectly encapsulates the journal's apparent satisfying of pre-existent readerly desires, and thus its provision of a valid service to the nation, while, by so doing, creating a range of normative and authoritative images of desirable femininity to which its female readership is encouraged to aspire. *Le Cabinet des modes* presents itself as educating the female consumer

on how to continually perfect her assimilation of the various (privileged) femininities figured within the sheaves of the journal. A hint of pre-Revolutionary guilt is nonetheless discernable in the journal's justification that it participates in the social redistribution of wealth thanks to its constant promotion of luxury goods:

Si le riche n'emploie son superflu à des objets de consommation qui deviennent son nécessaire par l'habitude, il n'est plus de moyen de faire refluer ce superflu dans la classe nombreuse qui s'occupe des Arts & de l'Industrie. Le luxe restitue donc au pauvre ce que l'inégalité lui fait perdre. (4 October 1785, p. 4)

As William H. Sewell suggests in his article, 'The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France', such seemingly perverse reasoning has some grounding in extra-textual capitalist Parisian reality:

[B]y inducing both nobles and wealthy commoners to engage in massive and very visible consumption of fashionable goods, eighteenth-century consumer capitalism probably helped to shift conceptions of social difference from the criterion of birth to that of wealth, from a qualitative to a quantitative distinction between persons. It could be argued that new forms of consumption therefore were — perhaps paradoxically — conducive to notions of equality of the sort specified in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789. (2010: 119)

*Le Cabinet des modes* presents itself as contributing to the Revolutionary ethos by making the unnecessary appear necessary for those rich, patriotic individuals whose spending feats serve to bolster the great consumerist culture, thereby allowing wealth to trickle down the social hierarchy to those gratefully receiving it at the bottom. Ironically, this bastion of *Ancien Régime* values characterises itself as playing a key role in the democratisation of consumption.

From early 1787 onwards, the journal begins to broaden its content to include, for example, accounts of royal figures, discussions of the etymology of certain terms and the historical origins of celebrations such as Christmas. Following the Revolution, book reviews also play a more prominent role in the journal, as does the treatment of literary or 'sociopolitical' subjects generally – such as the role of women's education or the right to divorce – indicating that the journal's overwhelming pre-Revolutionary focus on fashion is no longer tenable. (Further tangential evidence of Revolutionary influences may be apparent in the journal's mention of sartorial *fraternité* in its misguided suggestion that men and women's fashion is becoming more homogeneous: '[L]es femmes se rapprochent le plus qu'elles peuvent de nos usages. Elles portent actuellement les habits, comme elles se livrent aux occupations

des hommes' [15 August 1786, p. 145]. With the end of the *Ancien Régime's* sumptuary laws prescribing class-specific dress codes, such homogeneity in theory extended across the social spectrum, which meant that there was no longer any enforced visible correlation between social status and vestimentary habits.<sup>23</sup> As this chapter has highlighted, however, dress became more, not less, gendered after the Revolution.) Progress in the journal's figurations of the feminine towards more liberal models undoubtedly takes place following the Revolution but *Le Cabinet des modes* remains a profoundly conservative organ throughout its years of publication. Indeed, a journal which presents itself as acutely sensitive to the changing tastes of the nation has little choice but to be seen to adapt to the prevailing social climate if it is to have any hope of surviving – a climate that includes the promotion of 'natural' motherhood and the individual's right to divorce.

The journal's relatively progressive stance on divorce is highlighted when, on 25 September 1790, the journal details an incident in which a husband, unwilling to separate from his wife, wounds his mother-in-law by shooting her, and also shoots at a member of the National Guard, before being killed himself, prefacing the account with the terse remark: 'Encore un événement qui prouve que l'Assemblée nationale doit nous accorder le bienfait inestimable du *divorce*' (p. 6; original emphasis).<sup>24</sup> Equally, in relation to motherhood, the journal echoes the popular belief at the time that wealthier mothers should no longer give their children over to the care of wet-nurses, but should raise and nurse them themselves, reflecting a Rousseauian emphasis on the joys of breastfeeding and the important role of maternal nurturer and educator. The review of a book entitled *L'Ami des femmes, ou morale du sexe* (1787) highlights women's key contribution to the upbringing and education of children through a separatist, if also cleverly flattering, dogmatism: 'Votre destination est de répandre sur notre espèce les vertus sociales et le bonheur. Tout le genre humain est sous la tutelle des femmes, et son sort dépend

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23 The edict of 29 October 1793 is quoted in Perrot, and reads as follows: 'Nulle personne de l'un ou l'autre sexe ne pourra contraindre aucun citoyen ou citoyenne à se vêtir d'une façon particulière, sous peine d'être traitée comme suspecte et poursuivie comme perturbateur du repos public; chacun est libre de porter tel vêtement ou ajustement *de son sexe* qui lui convient' (1981: 38, emphasis added).

24 In her work *La Littérature au quotidien: Poétiques journalistiques au XIX siècle*, Marie-Eve Thérenty highlights the colourful uniqueness of the exemplum which is the *fait divers*: 'Entre l'emblématique et l'extraordinaire, le fait divers dessine une large palette de microrécits qui font du journal une véritable encyclopédie du quotidien' (2007: 270). This representativeness *in extremis* of human conduct is employed to reinforce the imperative of changing the broader legal framework dictating France's constitutional approach to divorce.

de l'éducation et de l'exemple qu'il en reçoit dans les premières années de la vie' (15 November 1791, p. 7). Here we find once again the emphasis on feminine 'vertu' signalled in the previous chapter, in its key moral function as the cornerstone of women's education and of the education, the civilising influence, which they in turn impart to others. In its representation of mothers as uniquely placed to influence the physical and emotional wellbeing of their children – and thus of the future nation – *Le Cabinet des modes* pre-empts the early nineteenth-century promotion of the maternal as pivotal to domestic and familial happiness, as analysed in Chapter 4.

The journal adopts a more feminocentric stance in editions published after the Revolution, a stance Kleinert interprets from a resolutely optimistic perspective: 'Bref, le journal est un miroir de l'émancipation des femmes de l'époque' (1982: 192). *Le Cabinet des modes* is not explicitly concerned with increasing women's independence or bringing about improvements to women's status in French society. It is perhaps unsurprising that a journal paradoxically so fixated on changeability and superficiality in terms of woman as consumer and symbol fails to offer any sustained challenge to the general representation of woman as mute, attractive emblem of patriarchal success – whether her presence embellish the nation or mother it. On the rare occasions that the journal seems to be on the point of endorsing a political position with regard to women's roles or opportunities, it always falls back on fashion as the solution to any crisis:

Parmi les gens de qualité, ce sont les femmes qui perdent le plus à la révolution: éloignées, par leur sexe, de tous les emplois; plus de noms, plus de titres imposans, et ne partageant point avec leurs maris les honneurs des places qu'ils occupent, iront-elles se vouer à la simple pratique des vertus domestiques? [...] Il ne reste donc plus à celles qui veulent jouir promptement, et frapper les yeux d'un vif éclat, que la singularité, la richesse et l'élégance du costume. (15 April 1791, pp. 1–2)

When compared with its main predecessor *Le Journal des dames*, this journal reverts to a less audacious model of journalism among its occasionally more liberal figurations of the feminine, portraying women as interested above all in fashion items and for the most part avoiding discussion of more serious social issues. As Nina Rattner Gelbart remarks in *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le Journal des Dames*: 'The *Cabinet des modes*, begun in 1785 by a male editor, represented a triumph for the dominant culture. By reducing women to objects of beauty and pleasure, this earliest French fashion magazine stressed frivolity and *le luxe* and discouraged women from involvement in serious matters' (1987: 299). As Gelbart goes on to comment, it is somewhat ironic that, by targeting women

as consumers, the journal nonetheless recognises their worth as an economic force. In her article 'Gender Ideology and Politics in *Le Cabinet des Modes*', Suellen Diaconoff presents an even more pessimistic interpretation of the role of the female reader of *Le Cabinet des modes*, arguing that the journal's women readers are themselves interpellated as passive objects of exchange owing to its overwhelmingly commercial thrust: 'Female gender is [...] an instrumentality in the service of the political and economic goals of the reigning ideology' (1990: 356).

While the figurations available to the female reader in this publication are undeniably more limited than those expressed in other journals examined in this study, this chapter argues that the female reader's consumerism can be seen to endow her with the financial and intellectual agency to accept or reject the femininities placed before her. As the above quotation from the journal demonstrates, more positive readings of womanhood can also be found in the journal's implied rejection of the banality characteristic of women's association with the marginalised domestic realm ('la simple pratique des vertus domestiques') in favour of figuring the female reader as a demanding individual whose many needs should be answered swiftly and efficiently ('celles qui veulent jouir promptement'), an active consumer who seeks recognition within the public realm. The journal acknowledges the limitations and frustrations of French women's sociopolitical status, but urges them to maximise their impact by other means. The message remains one that unambiguously seeks to raise French women's profile and social visibility.

This journal may reflect an overriding concern with the aesthetic and the material in the form of luxury goods and fashion that centres, particularly before the Revolution, on creating the impression that France remains a prosperous country, yet it also represents the female reader as a potentially dynamic subject whose opinion and buying power would ultimately help decide the journal's – if not the country's – fate. *Le Cabinet des modes* ceased publication in 1793, presumably because of a lack of readerly interest in its monolithic and increasingly irrelevant content. While the advent of the Revolution spelled the gradual demise of the journal, with its outmoded attitudes in which women both were and wore the symbols of French nationhood and patriotism, *Le Cabinet des modes* heralded the beginning of the French fashion press and can be seen as the prototype and indeed archetype of subsequent fashion journals – above all Pierre de la Mésangère's *Journal des dames et des modes*.



*LE JOURNAL DES DAMES ET DES MODES (1797–1839)*

COMMONLY PERCEIVED as representing the zenith of the French fashion press's publishing trajectory, this journal can also be considered one of the pioneers of the French women's press generally, not simply because of its impressive longevity but also because of its tone – at once both welcoming and paternalistically directive – and its eclectic adaptability (to which it in part owed such longevity), which would influence women's journals long after its demise. As Jean Watelet definitively comments with reference to the journal's editor: 'M. de la Mésangère fonde le plus beau périodique féminin qui ait jamais paru' (1998: 3). The name of Pierre Joseph Antoine Lebourg de la Mésangère tends to eclipse that of the journal's co-founder, Jean-Baptiste Sellèque, who owned a bookshop from which the journal was first sold to subscribers. Highlighting the fluidity of journalistic roles at this time, the journal's editor also wrote many of its articles, signing himself 'Le Centyeux', thereby intimating both his extensive knowledge of events happening in the French capital and his role of unobserved observer on the margins of society. His trademark style is an avuncular mixture of morality and philosophical *savoir-vivre*, typically expressed in a light-hearted tone, a style to which Kleinert in large part attributes the journal's success:

Son succès en Europe et au delà, en Amérique et en Russie, s'explique par la régularité de sa distribution, par l'exécution impeccable de ses illustrations et par son écriture limpide et divertissante, mi-badine, mi-philosophique. Poussé par le désir de faire oublier à ses lecteurs les soucis de la vie quotidienne, La Mésangère observait les comportements de ses contemporains avec une bonhomie mêlée d'une ironie fine et légère. (2001: 3)

La Mésangère had been a priest and teacher prior to the Revolution, before becoming an editor, and his pedagogic probity is everywhere visible, educating his readers to negotiate the codes of vestimentary and behavioural acceptability.<sup>25</sup> He exerts a form of moral policing over the appearance and conduct

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25 Kleinert comments on the unexpected historical congruence between the professions of priest and journalist in France. Both present themselves as 'objective' and authoritative arbiters of 'good taste', whether moral or aesthetic, and possess a social rootlessness, enabling them to move between various social classes and factions with ease: 'Honoré de Balzac a aussi observé des similitudes entre l'abbé du XVIIIe et le journaliste du XIXe siècle: tous deux personnages influents et insaisissables, évoluant dans la société sans posséder d'attaches, mais partout chez eux.'

La société parisienne avait par ailleurs l'habitude que les abbés soient les *arbitres de l'élégance* dans les salons mondains. Sous l'Ancien Régime et au début de la Révolution, les jeunes femmes désireuses de plaire avaient souvent choisi comme juges

of his female readership, urging them to safeguard their virtuous reputation above all else.

Referred to as 'le Moniteur officiel de la Mode' by Napoleon, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* was unambiguously the most successful women's journal in Napoleonic France. It adopted a professional approach to publication and what may be termed 'market forces', publishing editions regularly and reliably, and taking over several other more minor fashion journals during its heyday, such as *Le Journal des modes et nouveautés* (1797), and *La Correspondance des dames* (1799). Its innovative and inventive approach to sustaining its share of the periodicals' market is further illustrated in its decision to serialise literary works, such as Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin* in 1831, a marketing strategy that encouraged readers to buy several consecutive editions of the journal and which would rapidly become more widespread as the *roman-feuilleton* became a standard component of women's journals, and indeed journals generally.<sup>26</sup> *Le Journal des dames et des modes* demonstrated further market adaptability when, towards the end of its existence, it appealed to a magazine conglomerate, the *Société des journaux de modes et de littérature*, to allow it to merge with a sister magazine, *La Gazette des salons* (1835–37), in an endeavour to increase its market share and thus financial viability. As Kleinert observes: 'Le processus de concentration de la presse de mode dans des organisations éditant plusieurs revues féminines fut aussi une innovation dont les éditeurs du *Journal des Dames [et des Modes]* ont été les initiateurs' (2001: 284).<sup>27</sup>

The journal adhered to the Republican calendar from 1797 to 1805, and was therefore published every five days (the Republican calendar divided each month into three 'weeks' or 'décades' of ten days). When it was first published in March 1797 it consisted of eight pages with approximately one coloured engraving included fortnightly, but by October that year it had doubled its size to 16 pages. It had a sliding scale of prices depending on the number of engravings desired, which were – and continue to be – very much sought after. Throughout the 1830s, the engravings of the journal changed considerably, portraying women in more 'active' situations, whether strolling

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en matière de mode des ecclésiastiques qui s'habillaient avec recherche' (2001: 56–7; original emphasis).

26 As Marie-Eve Thérenty remarks, serialisation was also beneficial to literary authors seeking to attract a broader readership: 'En raison de son succès populaire, le journal devient rapidement le principal système discursif, support d'une représentation du monde: la littérature assiste au triomphe du système médiatique et ne peut au mieux que profiter des structures communicationnelles que lui offre le journal' (2007: 18).

27 Kleinert's book is extremely informative in providing background and bibliographical details regarding the publication and contributors/editors of *Le Journal des dames et des modes*.

in public or interacting with children, and becoming more complex and colourful.<sup>28</sup> The important role played by these engravings foreshadows the significance of fashion photographs in subsequent women's journals and the increasing influence accorded the visual, whether in typeface or image, in the selling of products.<sup>29</sup> In August 1797 the Directory voted to reduce press freedom and increased bureaucratic procedures governing the publication of journals, measures that served to drive up prices:<sup>30</sup> by 30 Prairial an VII/18 June 1799, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* had increased its price to a hefty 36 francs, rather than the original 10 livres (which partly explains the journal lengthening its editions from 8 to 16 pages in a bid to appease its readers and give them more value for money).<sup>31</sup> The price remained unaltered for the next 30 years until the journal's cessation in 1839. Its articles were also typically shorter than those of earlier fashion journals, so its original eight-page format could offer a greater selection of material.

Overall, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* had fewer advertisements and more gravitas in its approach than its predecessor *Le Cabinet des modes*, yet similarly made little explicit reference to the general sociopolitical situation throughout its years of publication, save occasional flattering remarks about Bonaparte or general comments that, unsurprisingly, praised the Directory: 'La sage et politique modération du directoire, l'heureux évènement de la paix, tout concourt à concilier au gouvernement la confiance même de ses plus

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28 As Joan DeJean (2005: 68) observes, at its genesis the fashion plate portrayed stand-alone items of clothing without a wearer, yet gradually evolved to incorporate both a wearer and location, allowing readers to buy (into) not merely an article of clothing but a lifestyle choice. The evolution of the function and form of fashion plates has long fascinated art historians and collectors – indeed, many fashion journals have had their engravings removed and are thus incomplete. However, the present study's interest is in the textual rather than the pictorial.

29 When the journal was briefly revived in 1912, its prospectus foregrounds its popularity and wide-reaching influence, both during its initial period of publication and as a collector's item, pointing up the artistry of its engravings: 'Bientôt ses livraisons et ses gravures furent passionnément recherchées des collectionneurs avertis qui surent deviner l'importance et l'intérêt documentaire que le temps leur donnerait. [...] Elle fait l'ornement des bibliothèques les plus fameuses; les amateurs d'art ne se lassent pas d'en feuilleter les feuillets jaunis où Desrais, Debucourt, Horace Vernet et tant d'autres ont laissé le monument le plus exquis et le plus fidèle des modes de leur temps'.

30 In his work *The Newspaper Press in the French Revolution*, Hugh Gough describes the clampdown as follows: '[O]n 19 fructidor, the Council [of Five Hundred] voted for implementation of article 355 and gave the Directors powers to ban for a calendar year any newspaper that they considered a threat to political stability' (1988: 141).

31 The livre was the currency in France until 1795, when it was replaced by the franc which had the same approximate value, although the livre continued to remain in circulation until the end of the century.

grands ennemis' (20 Brumaire an VI/10 November 1797, p. 1). This pragmatic political approach contributed to the journal's longevity, in that, viewed as a relatively innocuous fashion document, it was allowed to continue under Napoleon. Indeed, the type of books reviewed – such as *Tableau Historique et raisonné des guerres de Buonaparte* (1814) by Michaud de Villette – provides today's reader with one of the few concrete sources of information about the extratextual political events taking place, albeit from a decidedly partisan perspective. Further 'tangential' evidence of political developments may be detected in particular turns of phrase employed by the journal, revealing, for example, the more pro-monarchical sentiments of its writers and readers during the latter half of the 1820s, with numerous references to 'les personnes de la haute classe' or 'd'un haut rang', and news relating to the royal family always taking priority. Interestingly, post-Revolutionary linguistic changes are also reflected in general terms of reference related to fashion, as the journal grudgingly acknowledges the pervasive grip of 'political correctness': 'On nomme aujourd'hui, quoiqu'il y ait un roi, *bleu national*, ce qu'on nommait ci-devant *bleu de Roi*' (15 August 1830, p. 353; original emphasis).

The most fruitful period of La Mésangère's editorial reign was under the First Empire (1804–15), when his journal remained the only one of its kind for 18 years from 1800 to 1818, having taken over all competitors. Illustrating this market dominance, in 1823 the subtitle of the journal informs us that it has taken over *L'Observateur des modes* (1818–23) and *L'Indiscret* (1823).<sup>32</sup> In 1831 it adds *La Vogue* (1831) to the list and, in 1833, *Le Messager des dames* (1832–33). Like *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, these journals focused principally on fashion and society news, and often included a romantic serial in an attempt to encourage reader loyalty. Equally, their subject matter, as well as the relatively steep annual subscription – again, due to the large number of illustrations and coloured engravings – indicate that they too targeted a well-off readership belonging to the upper echelons of society. All provide insight into the transitional period between the cynical hedonism of the Directory and the reactionary morality of the Restoration, the latter period characterised not only by a renewed interest in religion but also by an increase in pro-royalist support.

As this chapter goes on to highlight, the freer sexual morality of the Directory came under increasing attack in later editions of *Le Journal des*

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32 *L'Indiscret* presents itself as the eyes and ears of society ('une indiscrete est une espèce de sylphe qui se glisse partout et rend compte de tout' [5 April 1823, p. 2]), thereby both providing echoes of *La Spectatrice* as discussed in Chapter 2, and La Mésangère's self-designation as 'Le Centyeux', and preempting the role of the gossip column or showbusiness section in later women's magazines.

*dames et des modes*, and fashion begins to cover up, rather than reveal (à la Joséphine de Beauharnais), with women's dress reflecting a new standard of modesty further reinforced in the increasing journalistic figurations of woman as maternal educator, as illustrated in Chapter 4.<sup>33</sup> The ostentatious and richly colourful garb characteristic of the *Ancien Régime* was taken to symbolise its moral bankruptcy and was replaced by more austere, modest dress in keeping with the new era. The July Revolution of 1830 also led to a greater *embourgeoisement* of the population – including the king, Louis-Philippe I, who publicly espoused modest living and appearance – and the jettisoning of luxury objects, objects on which the livelihood of publications such as *Le Journal des dames et des modes* depended. The journal began to lose its primary position in about 1830, when the vast improvements in printing techniques, which increased productivity and reduced costs, as well as the relaxation in press censorship, combined with the more impecunious *air du temps*, led to a proliferation of new women's journals on the market, resulting in a dramatic drop in *Le Journal des dames et des modes'* own market share from which it never recovered.

### 'DES MODES'

FASHION GENERALLY, whether it be what women should or should not wear, should or should not do, or the constituents of beauty, is often presented in a rather didactic manner in the journal. As with *Le Cabinet des modes*, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* foregrounds, albeit indirectly, the inherent aestheticism of thinness and its subsumption under the 'intellectual' component of the binary opposition 'intellectual/corporeal'; in other words, fashion is resolutely not presented in opposition to the cerebral or the intellectual – as it often is today – but as a manifestation of it, reinforcing the journal's representation of fashion as a *mode de penser* as well as *vivre*: 'De grosses lèvres et une grande bouche sont très-contraires à la beauté: elles expriment des appétits grossiers, et qui se rapprochent moins à la vie intellectuelle qu'à la vie de nutrition' (5 Ventose an XI/24 February 1803, p. 251). However, as this extract from Roussel's *Système physique et moral de la femme* demonstrates, only gentle exercise is recommended for

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33 With reference to the depiction of Beauharnais' risqué outfits as reported in *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, Ribeiro states: 'The editor was keen to emphasize that the costumes he depicted came from the best society, in case the less sophisticated of his readers, amazed at the daring nature of some of the outfits, accused him of using ladies of dubious virtue as models' (1988: 127).

women to achieve this desired state of thinness, too much strenuous activity being linked to ugliness and deformation: “L’exercice est nécessaire [...] Un travail excessif maigrit et déforme les organes, en détruisant, par des compressions réitérées, cette substance cellulaire qui contribue à la beauté de leurs contours et de leurs coloris” (5 Thermidor an XIII/24 July 1805, p. 493). Overall, a measured and modest approach to feminine fashion and conduct is fundamental to their portrayal in *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, thus explaining La Mésangère’s vehement condemnation of the wearing of trousers whatever the occasion – even partaking in travel or sports does not permit such lax vestimentary habits. Indeed, the wearing of trousers was ‘illegal’ for women in Paris without special authorisation until recently – the ‘loi du 16 brumaire an IX’ (7 November 1800) was only rescinded on 31 January 2013.

The journal also demonstrates an awareness of the fashion needs of the ‘mature’ female reader, thus promoting the importance of an inclusive sense of female community. In August 1799 a reader chastises *Le Journal des dames et des modes* for neglecting the needs of older women through its provision of fashion information aimed at a young readership and of engravings illustrating young women’s clothes. It should be noted, however, that the prevalent perception of old age at the time would appear to locate it around the age of 25 years, as one reader’s letter demonstrates: ‘Je ne voudrois pas mourir encore, et je suis au terme où une femme n’auroit pas, cependant, beaucoup mieux à faire, car j’ai plus de vingt-cinq ans’ (5 Germinal an XII/26 March 1804, p. 297). Like its predecessor *Le Cabinet des modes*, this journal reveals an awareness of the effects of old age on women’s physical charms. In her work *Réflexions sur le divorce* (1794), Madame Suzanne Necker – who, along with her daughter, Germaine de Staël, is commonly cited by the journal – advocates life-long marital union as a means of countering such effects. In keeping with La Mésangère’s philosophy of modesty in all areas, she recommends that women dress in a discreet, rather than garish, fashion and that the effects of ageing should be resisted as long as possible, but that, once defeated, women should age and, indeed, do everything gracefully. She is one of the earliest women writers to attack the institution of divorce in her *Réflexions*, yet, whatever her apparent patriarchal conformism and paternalistic concern, Madame Necker may be viewed as adopting a positive, feminocentric stance towards marriage, perceiving it as an investment for women, as a means of guaranteeing them emotional and financial security in old age (a stance that finds echoes in more conventional modern women’s magazines which are characterised as promoting strategies to help obtain, and subsequently retain, a husband). Candice E. Proctor discusses Madame Necker’s anti-divorce stance in the

following terms, emphasising its overriding focus on the lifelong security marriage procures women, and thereby pointing up the need to position it within its historical context:

Mme Necker's sense of morality was deeply shocked by the thought of divorce. [...] Mme Necker's bourgeois imagination found the thought of any kind of voluntary change of partners utterly revolting and indecent. In her mind, there would soon be little left to distinguish married women from the actresses and *filles* of the Palais Royal. (1990: 100)

Her pro-female agenda was further exemplified in her Enlightened belief – no doubt fuelled by her Protestant upbringing – that the principal goal of marriage was not that of procreation, but, rather, the ongoing consolidation of individual happiness for *both* members of the union.

The journal's treatment of French fashion highlights the Paris/provinces divide, with, unsurprisingly, the former epitomising good taste and less urbanised and urbane readers encouraged to emulate Parisian chic, illustrating Rousseau's much-quoted remark, '[I]a mode domine les provinciales, mais les Parisiennes dominant la mode' (1761: 294). As Evelyne Sullerot observes, the journal's Paris-centric stance was surely a major selling point for its rural readership:

Outre sa diffusion à l'étranger, ce journal avait donc très nettement une vocation provinciale. C'est d'autant plus étonnant qu'il semblait rédigé à l'usage de Parisiens chevronnés, car tout y était allusions sur les théâtres et promenades de Paris, sur la Cour, et le monde, et le monde du spectacle qui s'agitaient dans la capitale. Sans doute était-ce là un attrait pour des femmes de petites bourgades de l'Ain ou de l'Eure. (1966: 98)<sup>34</sup>

The urban/rural divide is also apparent in the frequent consideration of the relative benefits of living in town and country. The journal's distinct pro-urban bias provides women living in 'la France profonde' with a Bovaryesque form of escapism, allowing them to flee temporarily the constraints – both sartorial and social – of their everyday lives, increasing their knowledge of events and fashions in Paris and their sense of shared preoccupations with

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34 Kleinert also comments on the journal's unusually high percentage of non-Parisian readers: 'En comparant les chiffres d'une même année indiquant le tirage global et les livraisons vendues dans les départements et à l'étranger, on voit que plus de la moitié des exemplaires du *Journal des Dames* ... se vendait hors du centre de la mode. En moyenne, pour la période de 1831 à 1839, le tirage global fut de mille soixante-dix-sept exemplaires, et le chiffre des abonnements hors de Paris s'élevait à cinq cent quatre-vingt-huit exemplaires. Pour être précis: cinquante quatre pour cent des ventes s'effectuaient loin de Paris' (2001: 112–14; graphics occur on the intervening page).

the women who live there, and thus decreasing their rural isolation. In fact, one reader describes her daughter as viewing the arrival of the journal in her rural hamlet as analogous to the arrival of a loved one, embodying the same anticipatory familiarity: 'Pour ma fille aînée, elle l'attend toujours avec la même impatience qu'une femme aimante aspire après le retour de son époux, absent depuis long-tems' (30 Prairial an X/19 June 1802, p. 427). The journal too portrays itself as an indispensable male authority figure imparting advice in the manner of women readers' fathers or husbands and one which demands the same respect – a gendered personification typical of other fashion journals during the period and one that further emphasises the amorphousness of the domain over which 'fashion' casts its net, as well as the high number of male editors presiding over the fashion press.<sup>35</sup> The female consumer is implicitly figured as a willing (if ignorant) pupil, who is grateful to access the eclectic education proffered by the older, wiser journal.

Reflecting the associative pairing of fashion and femininity we have seen in *Le Cabinet des modes*, throughout its publication women are presented as 'naturally' interested in fashion, with an instinctive predisposition towards the dressing up and accessorising of the self in order to be validated by the Other: '[E]trangères à tout autre sentiment que celui de l'amour-propre, elles ne paroissent animées que du désir d'être vêtues élégamment et d'anticiper, par les secours de la *parure*, sur les charmes que leur promet le développement de la nature' (5 Nivôse, an X/26 December 1801, p. 145; original emphasis). If, in its early editions, fashion 'proper' forms the mainstay of the journal's content, in that it discusses different attitudes to fashion in France and abroad, the extent of *La Mésangère's* educational objectives are reflected in the increasingly ubiquitous referents of the term *mode*, which soon broadens its application to incorporate discussions of Parisian social events, international customs – particularly those stemming from England – and linguistic trends, as well as theories on education or the more 'political' implications of women writing, whether intratextual readerly correspondence or novels. (The

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35 This is not to say that the journal had no female journalists contributing to its copy, as highlighted by Heather Belnap Jensen in her article 'The *Journal des dames et des modes*: Fashioning Women in the Arts, c. 1800–1815': 'It is worth noting that *La Mésangère's* key collaborator during the Napoleonic period was a woman, Albertine Clément, née Hémerly, a well-known figure in both journalistic and cultural circles in post-Revolutionary France, and that several women were regular contributors to this journal during this era' (2006; online). Sullerot (1966: 94) also cites Constance Pipelet and Caroline Wuïet as figuring in *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, both of whom have been cited in Chapter 1, and who, in the manner of numerous women journalists, were also associated with other publications, most notably *L'Atbénée des dames* (1808) and *Le Phénix* (1798–99) respectively.



journal illustrates the influence of English on linguistic trends in its frequent use of adjectives such as ‘fashionable’ and ‘comfortable’.<sup>36</sup>

Journal issues often begin with an elucidation of specific items of vocabulary, providing information on current social trends through linguistic usage, again illustrating the highly inclusive framework of the nineteenth-century fashion journal in France, which succeeded in marrying fashion with more ‘highbrow’ cultural concerns. The journal also discusses common expressions relating to fashion, educating its unsuspecting readers as to their distinct temporal and hierarchical nuances: ‘Je vais *passer une robe*, ou je vais *m’habiller*, sont deux choses bien différentes. On passe une robe dès le matin pour aller au bain, ou déjeuner chez une amie; on s’habille pour aller au spectacle ou dîner chez un ambassadeur’ (10 July 1823, p. 299; original emphasis). As the new century gets underway, the figuration of women’s principally aesthetic function in the journal is gradually revised: while continuing to seek approval from the male Other of her refined sartorial taste and conduct, woman is also figured as someone who, in her role as maternal educator, makes more practical and utilitarian contributions to the smooth functioning of the family unit – and, by extension, French society – contributions also validated by the more eclectic, wide-ranging content of *Le Journal des dames et des modes*.

In this journal, fashion advertising initially takes the form of manufacturers writing in to promote their products, or members of other professions, such as dance teachers or English teachers, advertising their particular skills. As the journal becomes more established it begins to include ‘advertisements’ in the form of price lists for articles of clothing under the heading ‘Annonces’. Gradually, brief self-contained advertisements start to appear, which remain separate from the fashion details given about engravings. After La Mésangère’s death in 1831, the journal expands the role of advertising in its format, and in the latter half of the 1830s, we find direct advertising for a variety of

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36 *La Correspondance des dames* also refers to the *anglomanie* sweeping France at the time, unlike the decidedly more hostile pre-Revolutionary attitude towards all things English: ‘Vous vous rappelez aussi de l’usage de donner des thés, usage introduit chez nous, il y a trois ans, et qui fut généralement admis dans toutes les sociétés; et dernièrement n’avons-nous point vu paraître sur quelques têtes élégantes les *bonnets à la Nelson*, dont l’Angleterre nous avait fourni le nom et le modèle’ (vol. 2, no. 1, 15 Prairial an VII/3rd June 1799, p. 15). As Perrot comments in his revised English translation, such *anglomanie* stemmed in part from the desire to reinforce a strict sartorial and cultural distance from all reminders of the *Ancien Régime*: ‘Quickly and naturally, bourgeois republican clothing, as far removed from the stigmatized aristocratic dress as from the overly plebeian *carmagnole*, sought its models and standards in England’ (1994: 30–31). English dress was considered to be more simple and straightforward, reflecting the perception of England as a less socially divided country generally.

specific products, including the old favourites for less hirsute readers, such as ‘Pommade du Lion: Pour faire pousser en un mois les CHEVEUX, les FAVORIS, les MOUSTACHES et les SOURCILS’ (10 April 1837, p. 160; original emphasis), an advertisement that also testifies to the male component of the journal’s readership.<sup>37</sup> Importantly, the journal also begins to include illustrated advertisements for products ranging from ‘eau dentifrice’ to handwriting lessons (‘écriture anglaise et américaine’) (pp. 95–6) – again reflecting the *anglomanie* of the period – to those combining health with pleasure in the promotion of a ‘chocolat stomachique et rafraichissant’ (5 November 1836, p. 288). *Le Journal des dames et des modes*’ increasing allocation of copy to advertising signals its dependency on the revenue such advertising generates, exacerbated no doubt by its dwindling readership. Towards its demise, the journal publishes advertisements for other contemporary journals such as *La Presse* or *Le Monde*, a further indication of its ever-pressing need to achieve financial viability.

### ‘DES DAMES’

GIVEN ITS PIVOTAL POSITION straddling the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* plays a key role in indicating future areas of interest for the French women’s press, as reflected in its consideration of the growing national concern with the constituents and function of women’s education. *Le Journal des dames et des modes* contains numerous articles that provide detailed consideration of pedagogical issues – no doubt attributable at least in part to La Mésangère’s previous profession as a teacher – and promote the right to education for both sexes, yet with different, sex-specific aims and curricula. An article entitled ‘De l’Education considérée dans ses rapports avec la différence des sexes’ makes clear that, while education is very much at the forefront of contemporary debates, deeply ingrained behaviour norms and binary oppositions continue to set the parameters of these discussions: ‘L’éducation doit former également aux deux sexes un bon tempéramment [*sic*], avec cette différence néanmoins que le tempéramment de l’homme doit être préparé à de grands travaux, à de dures fatigues; celui de la femme à des souffrances plus fréquentes’ (5 Brumaire an X/27 October 1801, pp. 51–2). The article reiterates unquestioningly the usual

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37 The fact that the occasional engraving depicts men’s clothes and that the journal printed letters from men leads to the conclusion that, despite the journal’s title, as was undoubtedly the case with many women’s journals, men formed a limited sub-section of its readership.

stereotypical characteristics perceived as differentiating the male intellect from its female counterpart, characteristics that remain unchallenged by *Le Journal des dames et des modes*: 'La raison doit dominer dans les affections de l'homme; dans celles de la femme, la sensibilité' (p. 51).

Sensibility, along with 'vertu', is a recurrent characteristic attributed to women, as highlighted in the contemporary socio-medical discourse surrounding sexual difference (discussed in Chapter 1). As Anne C. Vila (1997: 225) elucidates in her work *Enlightenment and Pathology*, the meanings of the quasi-omnipresent term 'sensibility' in the eighteenth century are multiple, whether it be employed to designate a physiological hypersensitivity, the possession of a refined sense of morality or the partaking in a powerfully empathic relationship with others and one which exerts a beneficial influence over them, à la Rousseau. Despite this hermeneutic fluidity, its constant association with a 'natural' feminine predisposition also served to distance it from the putatively corrupt and artificial values of the *Ancien Régime* and consequently to figure women as the ideal educative guardians of the nation's morality in the post-Revolutionary years. Indeed, the journal's support for educational reforms for French women has less the intellectual fulfilment of the female individual in mind than her future role as wife and mother. The journal increasingly signals the importance of the upright *mère éducatrice*, while mothers are criticised – somewhat hypocritically for a fashion journal, yet reflecting the journal's increasingly moralistic tone – for frittering away their time on such superficial trivialities as appearance, rather than devoting themselves to overseeing their children's education.

After the renewed interest in luxury and luxury goods following the impecunious years of the Revolution, the journal participates in the promotion of a more modest and 'normal' lifestyle, a promotion buttressed by the greater emphasis given to familial devotion, morality and pragmatic skills as fundamental components of French women's education. *Le Journal des dames et des modes* discusses the desirable components of women's education, including Madame Campan's mistrust of novel-reading, a mistrust based on her belief that girls will never learn facts if they are first exposed to fiction,<sup>38</sup> mere fact will inevitably appear drab in comparison to the arduous sentiments expressed in a Walter Scott novel.<sup>39</sup> In a remark that mirrors the journal's – and indeed,

38 See, in particular, Madame Campan's *De l'éducation*, tom. 1, livre VII, chapitre II.

39 The early French women's press reviews several Romantic writers during this same period, among whom Scott looms large. Indeed, Sullerot partly attributes the rise of literary romanticism and sentimentalism to the same bourgeois culture of constraint that advocates women's confinement to the domestic realm, remarking: 'Les jeunes mis au pas et étouffés dans les pensionnats de plus en plus stricts, les femmes reléguées à la maison et les artistes et intellectuels sans position dans une société d'hommes

the period's – relative lack of ambition for the constituents of women's education, Madame Campan replaces novel-reading not with exposure to rigorous factual information but with the *divertissement* of needlework, which she considers a more worthy pastime, in that it has a calming influence on women and promotes modesty and grace, a proposal the warmly interpellated reader is ordered to consider: “Songez, mes chères amies, que le maintien le plus convenable à notre sexe est celui que donne l'habitude constante de s'occuper des travaux de l'aiguille” (5 January 1830, p. 5).<sup>40</sup>

Needlework has a principally aesthetic and distracting function: women occupied with time-consuming embroidery – an activity that involves intricate numerate skills – have little opportunity to engage in the dangerously mind-expanding, imaginative world of fiction. This is characteristic of the journal's approach to feminocentric concerns: women are valorised, and their intellectual development is addressed, but from within traditionally gendered parameters. In other words, if women's right to an education is now rarely questioned, the content of such an education remains somewhat circumscribed and becomes increasingly perceived in terms of the fruits to be reaped by subsequent generations. One subscriber's remarks to a hypothetical male interlocutor simultaneously point to women's desire to be judged beyond their (sexual) appearance and to the internalised, self-imposed parameters of that desire, parameters within which amorous services to the male Other are replaced by pedagogical services to the infant Other: ‘Au lieu de nous renvoyer à la ceinture de Vénus, rendez-nous aux sciences et aux arts. Quelque attrait que puisse avoir Minerve, elle ne fera jamais perdre de vue les soins précieux de la maternité’ (28 April 1797, pp. 1–2; calculated publication date: the journal's first 14 editions remain undated). It is also important to remember that the journal has a vested interest in promoting a relatively restricted and unambitious agenda for French women's education and literacy: its ongoing survival requires a literate, yet not fully informed, female consumer continuing to buy into its carefully constrained figurations of the feminine.

During its early years the journal rarely reviews other literary works, but publishes extracts from primary sources in the form of poems, songs and fables. In later years, however, the number of book reviews increases, including reviews of female-authored literature. In 1811 it discusses a work by the educationist and author Madame de Genlis – to whom La Mésangère

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d'action et d'hommes d'affaires, vont commencer de se chercher en tâtonnant et d'enfanter le romantisme’ (1966: 111).

40 For more details see *De l'éducation*, tom. 1, livre VI, chapitre III. In her already-cited article, Rebecca Rogers (1994) argues that Madame Campan's ambitions for girls' education were nonetheless more progressive than either Napoleon's or those of other contemporary male educators.

refers throughout the journal's existence – that signals the growing public interest not only in theories of education but also in women authors and the importance of raising their profile (an importance that was earlier reflected in *Le Journal des dames'* desire to draw attention to the work of forgotten women writers and to encourage female readers to engage in the act of literary production). As the introduction to this chapter remarks, French women were beginning to engage in public debates about the desired and beneficial components of women's education in France, and Madame de Genlis' contributions to the debate were seminal. Samia I. Spencer comments:

Mme de Genlis (1746–1830) is probably the eighteenth century's most prominent and outstanding educator. She was the author of more than 140 volumes, a majority of which relate to education in one way or another. [...] Mme de Genlis' pedagogical insights and intuition were truly remarkable. Two hundred years before their values received pedagogical recognition, she had discovered the importance of visual aids, simulation, role playing, and games. (1984: 91–2)<sup>41</sup>

Madame de Genlis educated her children at home (as well as being the first female tutor entrusted with the education of male members of the royal family) and thus gained a practical experience of tutoring that allowed her to test out her theories. She felt strongly that Rousseau's theories on education taught women to be underhand and to achieve their desires through physical charm and subservience rather than through reasoning and fairness, and saw no justification for preventing girls from studying particular subjects. Madame de Genlis acknowledged the influence the act of reading could have on the (particularly young and impressionable) individual, and this acknowledgement points up the moral, if not political, potential of this act, and thus the (trans)formative and pedagogical role played by literature – and, by extension, journals and periodicals. The title of Madame de Genlis' work reviewed in the journal makes clear the significant literary contribution women authors have made to the *patrimoine*, a contribution that deserves greater recognition: *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française, comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs; ou précis de l'histoire des femmes françaises les plus célèbres* (1826). Analogous to the recuperative function effected by the women's press apropos of forgotten or neglected women authors,

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41 In a chapter entitled 'Women and the Theatre Arts' in the same work, Barbara G. Mittman also acknowledges Madame de Genlis' groundbreaking literary production aimed at children: 'The most prolific woman playwright of the century, and certainly the one who staked out the most original territory, was Mme de Genlis. [...] Moral tales for children were already quite popular, but no one before Mme de Genlis had written theatre pieces intended for this audience' (1984: 165).

Madame de Genlis draws attention to the misogynous bias of canon formation and seeks to inscribe women authors in the French literary canon, pointing up the importance of female role models in educating future generations of women. Again, in a later edition, the journal questions the fact that there are no female members of the Académie Française (31 January 1818, p. 41). *Le Journal des dames et des modes* criticises male-authored works centred on women or female characters, both fictional and pedagogical, for their inevitably limited understanding of women's actual lives and experiences. The early women's press thus raises awareness of gender bias in the opportunities available to reading and writing women and helps combat such bias through its ongoing provision of a forum in which women can write themselves and read the writing of other women, alongside an array of material and educational accessories. In short, the early French women's press serves to normalise the production and consumption of literature for women.

The impression is of a gradual – almost inevitable – politicisation of women *qua* women: in other words, of women's growing self-perception as a political force, to which the journal's interpellation of its readers as a generally unified group based on gender contributes. Indeed, in one reference to French women we read a remarkably rousing declaration of female solidarity and thirst for political knowledge: 'Elles s'arrachent les brochures sur la liberté de la presse ou sur les élections [...] Les femmes se soutiennent et marchent en colonne serrée; qui attaque l'une, a toutes les autres sur les bras' (25 October 1819, p. 468). This example of political solidarity among women is reinforced at an intratextual level by the epistolary sisterhood promoted by *Le Journal des dames et des modes*. Readers from different European countries write in to the journal, commenting on articles (and occasionally objecting to male writers' dissection and explanation of 'female characteristics'), and use it as a forum for discussion. While, as with certain journalistic predecessors, the authenticity of some exchanges may be questionable, there is no doubt that many women came to consider *Le Journal des dames et des modes* – and women's journals generally – as helping to forge a sense of community among female readers, offering sartorial, moral and intellectual guidance on a range of issues. In his work *La Culture des apparences: Une histoire du vêtement (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle)*, Roche describes the intimate, dialogic tone employed by *la presse de mode* and its forerunners, such as *le journalisme galant*, as follows:

[C]'est [...] le ton de la bonne compagnie où se crée une relation de proximité entre lecteur et auteur. Celui-ci livre des confidences, des observations, l'écho des conversations de salon et multiplie dans la fiction les traits de réalité susceptibles de susciter la confiance, de faire croire en l'authenticité des nouvelles, d'inciter à l'imitation. (1989: 455)

These letters also inform us that, owing to their relative expense, copies of the journal are passed around groups of individuals in an endeavour to 'democratise' and render accessible their content, in what can be seen as constituting an informal and feminocentric oral equivalent of the male-dominated *cabinets de lecture*. The interactive, dialogic exchange characteristic of the 'virtual' readerly community of women's journals takes on an extratextual form here, bringing the community together in order to debate and discuss the content of *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, an exchange that combines the Horatian binaries of *plaire* and *instruire* which have characterised the French women's press since its inception. In the edition of 5 Thermidor an XI/24 July 1803 one subscriber remarks:

Le soir, il est lu publiquement à la société, pour l'instruction de ceux qui, n'étant pas assez fortunés, ne sont point compris dans l'abonnement, et pour le plaisir des abonnés, dont plusieurs aiment à le relire deux fois. L'article de mode est commenté, interprété, expliqué, et le lendemain les jeunes femmes de la ville se mettent exactement comme l'indique votre gravure. (p. 489)

Analogous to many early French women's journals, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* provides evidence of strong readerly communities at both the intra- and 'meta'-textual level – whether through the journal's interpellation of the imaginary reader or the publication of correspondence from actual readers, or a combination of the two in which women readers write in about reading about women's writing. This excerpt above beautifully, if somewhat idealistically, captures the notion of an oral community associated with 'feminine' culture in which advice and stories are relayed from one female generation to another and which strongly inflects the women's press generally, whether in its instructive, supportive tone or its fragmented, dialogic form.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout its period of publication *Le Journal des dames et des modes* can be seen to embody the ambivalences that have characterised the early French women's press since its origins, with the same valorisation of feminine attributes sitting alongside the occasional articulation of more feminist sentiments. If, on the one hand, the journal acknowledges the potential ratification of

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42 It is worth noting that *Le Journal des dames et des modes* also characterises interfemale relationships as riven by jealousy and women as often incapable of forming meaningful friendships, regretting that '[à] quelques exceptions près, il est fort peu d'amitiés sincères entre deux femmes' (10 November 1834, p. 491). This clichéd and rather masculinist representation of catty women perceiving each other as potential competitors is frequently undermined by the community of female readers who use the journal as a means of promoting unity among women, yet is a common journalistic and literary trope depicting interfemale relations. As Mary Seidman

inequality inherent in the institution(alisation) of marriage ('Faire un mariage bien avantageux, c'est souvent passer en contrat d'esclavage' [5 July 1806, p. 458]), there is no question of women being equal partners in their marital or amorous unions with men: their inherently weaker physiology and psychology prevent them from assuming the responsibilities and requisite knowledge that would allow for a relationship of equals. In a discussion of *Clarisse* this point of view is expressed unequivocally, foreshadowing the infamous phrasing of article 213 in the 'Code Civil' and pointing up the dangers of seeking to educate French women too much: 'La parfaite innocence d'une femme doit toujours être accompagnée d'un peu d'ignorance; ainsi elle doit obéir, ne connut-elle pas parfaitement le but du commandement, et peut-être doit-on tirer de l'histoire d'Eve le même résultat que du roman anglais' (20 Frimaire an X/11 December 1801, p. 123). On the other hand, the journal does not eschew the articulation of strongly pro-female opinions, as highlighted in a review of the work *Littérature des femmes au dix-neuvième siècle*, in which it expresses its admiration that women's literary talents have flourished despite the numerous obstacles society has placed before them: 'Tant d'obstacles, de susceptibilités, de médisances, entravent les pas qu'une femme pourrait faire dans les voies franches et larges de la littérature, qu'il est étonnant que notre siècle ait vu éclore tant de talens gracieux, pittoresques et fortement sentis parmi ce sexe' (10 May 1833, p. 205). The journal's more feminist stance is also demonstrated in infrequent remarks commenting on recent improvements in women's social status and opportunities in France – for example, following the Revolution, it maintains that there has been an increasing number of women participating in the arts, whether as writers or actresses in the theatre – and in its use of English women as a barometer against which to measure French women's rights: women writers in England are portrayed as free from the ridicule to which their literary French sisters are subject. The journal argues that women, having gained greater access to the arts, should now benefit from a more extensive education, rather than be married off at 14 – although, as has been remarked, the right to a more comprehensive educational syllabus does not guarantee exposure to more 'intellectual' subjects.<sup>43</sup>

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Trouille remarks, the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the second half of the eighteenth century would have done little to extinguish such supposed enmity: 'The intense competition for husbands on the marriage market, the widespread adultery and ostentatiously frivolous lifestyle prevalent among the upper classes, and, above all, the lack of serious outlets for female energies – all these factors fostered bitter rivalry among women' (1997: 112).

43 The journal's occasional espousal of pro-female sentiments equally stops short of condoning the utopian movement of Saint Simonism, to be discussed in Chapter 5. Instead, it mocks the egalitarian spirit of the movement, as do many other women's



*Le Journal des dames et des modes* may express feminist sentiments with regard to women's rights and talents, but its continuing adherence to the French valorisation of sexual complementarity prevents it from seeking to reduce or eradicate what it views as feminine specificity in the form of elegance, discretion or sensitivity.<sup>44</sup> In spite of the undeniably polyphonic approach of *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, the overriding voice sounds a conservative note, which, while valuing women and their achievements, does so mainly within conventional patriarchal and gender hierarchies; *Le Journal des dames et des modes* offers women readers a variety of role models, but principally from within the reassuring confines of the dominant cultural behaviour paradigms with which they are most familiar. In a quotation combining the journal's paternalistic 'persuasiveness' with its eclectic selection of feminine figurations, 'Le Centyeux' perfectly encapsulates both the growing opportunities available to the female readership of this influential publication in the history of the women's press and the patriarchal pressure to resist them:

Loin de contester les succès mérités du beau sexe, nous nous empressons de les publier dans le *Journal des Dames*. Cependant ces succès ne nous éblouissent pas, et ne nous font point changer d'opinion; nous aimons beaucoup les femmes-auteurs, les femmes-artistes, les femmes-compositeurs; mais nous leur préférons encore les bonnes femmes de ménage. (15 April 1813, p. 162)

As this chapter has discussed, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* does provide the reader with insights into the status of contemporary women authors in France and the debates surrounding women's education, but such insights remain secondary to the journal's key focus on fashion. Like *Le Cabinet des modes* before it, this journal makes clear its lack of interest in all things political; and, if the former's political indifference stemmed from a desire to preserve the status quo, the latter's was more in response to what it considered to be appropriate subject matter for its female readership and to a sense of political saturation following the upheavals of the Revolution.

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journals of the period: 'Les saint-simoniens en sont là: ils jouent à la chapelle et au lutrin. Ils sont tous apôtres, et chacun sera pape à son tour' (25 July 1832, p. 324).

44 This feminine/'feminist' dualism is apparent in the journal's very first article, published on 20 March 1797, which comments on the progressive influence education and respect for sexual complementarity has had on heterosexual relations and opens with the following distinctly feminist-sounding remark 'On peut juger du degré de civilisation auquel un peuple est arrivé par le degré de considération qu'il accorde aux femmes' (p. 5), yet ends by urging women to play a mediative role among men, who remain the transcendental – and rather ominous-sounding – dominant subject, against whom all women define themselves: 'Enfin, mesdames, rendez-nous toujours heureux, et vous serez toujours heureuses'.

While the journal includes the occasional reference to the contemporary political situation in France in its earlier issues, as censorship tightens from 1800 onwards it is obliged to become more circumspect in its approach if it is to remain in circulation. *La Mésangère* was extremely astute in securing the journal's continuing existence in the face of censorial regulations, with the result that the journal's content, while never radical to begin with, became more politically anodyne. However, the change of political regime in 1830 may well have contributed to a change in readerly expectations and those whose interests were supposedly represented by *Le Journal des dames et des modes* no longer saw their lives or aspirations reflected by it: it neither mirrored their present nor mapped out their future, but had become an anachronistic relic from the past, as wealthy women's function in French society became less that of visible economic consumer and more that of invisible nurturing educator.

Ironically, just as *Le Journal des dames*, published during the *Ancien Régime*, frequently gave voice to radical sentiments, revolutionary periods also produced journals of relative banality, as in *Le Cabinet des modes*. The target readership of the latter was clearly less interested in the realisation of the Revolution's social aims than in its potential commercialisation. It is also important to recognise that, while the Revolution played a key role in revealing to women the power of *de facto* citizenship, as manifested in their direct participation in political demonstrations or in their support for French women's comprehensive access to education, the right to citizenship itself was not actualised. Only a limited minority of women – and even fewer men – believed in equal rights for men and women. Yet, while the Revolution may have been more pivotal in consciousness-raising than in any concrete advancement of women's rights, by revealing to women the hypocrisy of an ideology that declared all citizens equal while excluding women, it succeeded in vindicating the battle for sexual equality, with many women's journals transferring demands grounded in social class to the domain of gender. It gave women the lexical and political authority to articulate, if not yet actualise, their desires in a public forum, thereby challenging and changing many previous representative norms of women and their roles. As the journals studied in this chapter exemplify, following the 1789 Revolution women's potentially varied social roles do receive journalistic representation and validation – for their contributions both to the economic wellbeing of the *patrie* and to the different institutions within it, whether marriage, the family or the education system.

As this chapter has argued, the sheer fluidity of the umbrella term *mode* employed in the fashion press of the time and the textual interpellation of a distinctly gendered community of readers signal the potential

for the expansion and politicisation of the parameters of acceptable female behaviour paradigms and opportunities. Participation in fashion allowed French women to enjoy social and cultural experiences outside the home and to consider themselves as contributors to the national economy in the form of consumers who were also actively engaged in the construction of a public self. As Joyce Appleby remarks in her chapter 'Consumption in Early Modern Social Thought', 'Consumption offers people objects to incorporate into their lives and their presentation of self. This is as true of reading material as clothes and furnishings – purchasing and enjoying artefacts of material culture involves a constant expression of self. For this reason consumption opened up new avenues for rebellion' (1993: 172). If more rebellious figurations of the feminine occur only infrequently in the fashion journals examined here, they occur nonetheless and, through that occurrence, may serve to ratify the more politicised aspirations of female readers and to work against the concept of an unchanging 'natural' female essence. In these early fashion journals, the female self is figured as a *sujet en devenir*, as exposed to a range of social and cultural influences that induce a consciousness of the components of that self and its capacity for development and change; a self that is not an absolute fixed entity but a relative, fluid being, who exercises the potential to be the subject of her own self-construction and, with it, to influence the construction of others. Among their various figurations, early French fashion journals can be seen to posit women above all as an economically powerful force and one that harbours the potential to bring about not merely personal but also public make-overs by their association of female readers with cultural as well as sartorial 'consumerism', whether in their promotion of women authors or in their support for French women's systematic access to an improved education.



## A Woman's Place

### Marriage and Homemaking in the Early Domestic Press

THIS CHAPTER examines three early French women's journals that promote a domestic or family-oriented figuration of femininity, whether providing information and advice on the requisite skills to engage successfully in marriage and/or motherhood or on more practical aspects relating to 'good housekeeping' generally: *Le Courier de l'hymen* (1791); *Le Journal des femmes* (1832–37); and *Le Conseiller des dames* (1847–92). The ideologies of femininity espoused by these journals, which begin in 1791, centre above all on woman as caring domestic nurturer and organiser of others, yet also characterise her as someone more than capable of making her own decisions and life choices. All three posit woman's 'natural' place as the home. If the wealthy reader addressed in the fashion journals studied in Chapter 3 was encouraged to decorate herself and her person in order to be aesthetically pleasing to her husband, all the while serving national economic interests, the *bourgeoise* represented in the domestic journals studied in this chapter reveals her worth through the acquisition both of objects to adorn less her appearance than her home and, above all, of the maternal qualities necessary to help fashion her offspring. These journals aim to teach the female reader the skills to guarantee the smooth functioning of the household and the general wellbeing of the family unit, pointing up the ideological valorisation of female self-sacrifice in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France and positing the female reader as the repository of national and civic virtue.

When work is mentioned at all in these middle-class journals, it relates to the list of domestic tasks upon whose efficient completion a happy and healthy home depends. On the rare occasions that domestic journals encourage

women to focus on themselves and their appearance, such encouragement is typically presented within strict economical and pragmatic parameters. Rather than squander the family budget on buying clothes, for example, women are provided with the information to make them. The innovative introduction of the paper dressmaking pattern by *L'Iris* (1832–34) in 1832 meant that women from less affluent backgrounds who could read and sew now had top fashions at their fingertips, and that a limited budget was no longer a major obstacle to keeping up to date with the latest trends. The fact that many middle-class women also had the time available to carry out both self and home improvements proved particularly propitious for this new practical slant adopted by French women's journals.

The proliferation of domestic journals, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, signals the development and influence of the women's press as both an instructive and commercial product in which marriage and motherhood were promoted as worthy acquisitions. This proliferation also illustrates the continuing post-Revolutionary rise of the bourgeoisie, which saw bourgeois women increasingly associated with the home. As their overwhelming focus on the successful management of the domestic realm suggests, these journals are aimed at distinctly more middle-class readers than the earlier upmarket intellectual 'drawing-room' publications epitomised by *Le Journal des dames* (1759–78) or fashion journals such as *Le Cabinet des modes* (1785–93) and *Le Journal des dames et des modes* (1797–1839). However, while the three journals examined in this chapter target a broader section of French women than their predecessors, that section remains relatively privileged. The two domestic journals, *Le Journal des femmes* and *Le Conseiller des dames*, are intended for readers who may have limited domestic help and who thus require advice on how to run a household efficiently and economically – although, in a manner characteristic of the aspirational lifestyle choices associated with the women's press, the implied reader is frequently portrayed as marshalling an array of domestic personnel. Such journals may include cookery tips and recipes, childcare advice, information on making clothes and general practical shortcuts relating to domestic science, as well as the usual staple escapist and/or instructive content of fictional excerpts and edifying anecdotes.

These domestic journals are perhaps those from the early French women's press which most closely resemble in content exemplars typically associated with today's mainstream women's press, with their combined emphasis on *plaire* and *instruire*, in which the female reader is provided with tips for improvement of both self and home in order to make investment in both more aesthetically and intellectually appealing. The pedagogic emphasis characteristic of the fashion journals examined in Chapter 3 is also particularly

pronounced in domestic journals, which constitute a form of instruction manual, highlighting appropriate codes of conduct and normative models of domestic femininity for their female readers. If *Le Journal des dames et des modes* advised its readers as to the correct (that is, the conventionally upper-class) ways of dressing and behaving, journals such as *Le Conseiller des dames* inform their readers of the socially approved ways to mother and to run a household. The emphasis has shifted from the focus on self-improvement that dominates the fashion journals discussed in Chapter 3 to include the moral, physical and pedagogical improvement of those who inhabit the female reader's domestic realm.

The increasing association of French women with the intimate sphere of the home during the first half of the nineteenth century has been viewed as an endeavour to arrest the limited post-Revolutionary political gains achieved for women, such as the legalisation of divorce, the right to equality of inheritance and fairer adultery laws – even if such gains often remained more abstract than actualised. French women, it was argued, would better serve the patriotic cause by removing themselves from the corrupting influences of the public domain and dedicating themselves to the arts of domesticity.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as this book has noted, the Revolution itself was often partly ascribed to women's 'unnatural' social power and authority during the *Ancien Régime* and their concurrent sexual immorality, an immorality further aggravated by their absence of a coherent and appropriate education; French women were figured as 'inherently' sensual and dissolute beings, yet beings who, if administered the correct dose of instruction, would rejoin the path of righteousness in the form of marriage and motherhood. Madame Mouret, the author of *Les Annales de l'éducation du sexe, ou journal des demoiselles* (1790), a post-Revolutionary treatise that focuses principally on the importance of educating French mothers in order to educate the nation as mentioned in Chapter 1, attributes the advent of the Revolution to this educational lacuna and to the generally frivolous atmosphere of *libertinage* that preceded the Revolution: '[S]i les hommes & les femmes n'avoient point été ainsi égarés & réduits par le luxe, par le libertinage; si le Sexe eût été bien instruit, s'il eût été éclairé & vertueux, tous ces malheurs ne seroient point arrivés' (no. 1, p. 13).<sup>2</sup>

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1 Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe perceive this ideological rigidification from an unremittingly pessimistic perspective: 'Les lendemains de la Révolution française sont les jours les plus sombres de l'histoire des femmes. Le pouvoir masculin, un moment ébranlé, va se "venger" du sexe qui l'a contesté' (1977: 239).

2 As Candice E. Proctor remarks in *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution*: '[T]hroughout the eighteenth century, the female sex was quite commonly known as "*le deuxième sexe*" [...]. With equal frequency and even greater artlessness, it was known simply as "*le sexe*" – the Sex – as if the female were the only one with sexual

In her article 'French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity, 1750–1850', Margaret H. Darrow comments on the earlier upper-class figuration of the *salonnière*, a figuration more in keeping with the female readership targeted by publications such as *Le Journal des dames*: 'In the eighteenth century, the ideal noblewoman was the perfect courtier. Her sphere of activity was the court rather than the household, and her family obligations were dynastic and political rather than conjugal and affective' (1979: 44). In the journals to be studied in this chapter, that social sphere of influence has retracted to the kingdom of the home, with marriage and motherhood presented as a patriotic, 'private' alternative to the indulgence and hedonism that had previously characterised the public lives of upper-class women in France. Yet this apparent reduction in women's sphere of influence can be viewed as principally limited to its physical parameters, in that, in many respects, French women's profile and political input are more extensive and more powerful than in previous decades. If the domestic journals studied in this chapter reinforce the separatist ideology whereby woman is allocated the more 'passive' private sphere and man the more active public arena, woman is figured not only as the personification but also as the conduit of domestic virtue, both the epitome of morality and pedagogy and the means by which these are transmitted to the family unit and, by extension, the public sphere.

The figurations of the feminine in the journals studied in this chapter portray French women as helping the *patrie* through their embodiment and propagation of its principal values and ideals. In other words, this chapter posits a more positive, politicised reading of French women's roles during this conservative period, interpreting them as active go-betweens linking the private and public spheres. These journals give women a voice and a key means of self-representation – as earlier chapters have foregrounded – whether this be in literal form through the inclusion of women's epistolary correspondence or journalistic contributions in the form of articles and reviews, or metaphorically through their feminocentric focus. The examples of women's self-characterisation found in the early domestic press, in which women are above all portrayed as potential wives and good mothers, may appear stereotypical and restrictive, yet the representation of women found in all three journals is, this chapter argues, an empowering one. In the journals examined here woman is portrayed as the main contributor to the wellbeing of the family – indeed, as the cornerstone and linchpin of family dynamics and health, whether moral, emotional or intellectual, assuming the role of key nurturing constellation in

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attributes; she was seen as a kind of deviation from the normal, the *male*, man' (1990: 2). Woman was thus defined by her sexuality, be it her putative inclination to sexual licentiousness or her predisposition to maternity.



the familial universe around whom all others gravitate. As such, she plays a pivotal role in the transmission of national and civic values, and can be seen to act as a bridge between the internal and external domain. In this emphasis, my reading echoes Annie K. Smart's valorisation of the civic and, ultimately, political work – in the sense defined in the Introduction – carried out by French women within the home: 'The work of the *citoyenne* may be located in the physical confines of the home. It does not follow, however, that the *citoyenne's* actions are thus necessarily apolitical' (2011: 3).

While the majority of early domestic journals in France comprise the figurations of woman as keeper of hearth and home that came to the fore as the nineteenth century got underway, traces of a more 'revolutionary' ethos remain. This more egalitarian approach is exemplified in the support for women's active participation in marriage epitomised by their proactive partner-picking in the radical eighteenth-century *Le Courier de l'hymen* (1791), the first journal to be looked at in this chapter and one that clearly figures the female reader as an individual who possesses the right to choose her own husband – and to reject him should he fail to meet the mark. Equally, as this chapter suggests, the very act of positioning the female reader as pivotal to the domestic economy – at both micro/familial and macro/national levels – leads to a valorisation of women's marital and maternal roles and of the importance of instruction in order to better equip them for the effective realisation of such roles. If the early nineteenth-century French women's press repeatedly presents its readers with figurations of woman *qua* idealised homemaker as configured by the reigning patriarchal ideology, it allows those readers some room for political manoeuvre in its valorisation of women's self-improvement through knowledge and education. To paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir: one is not born an ideal homemaker and maternal tutor, one becomes them.

## MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD

AS CHAPTER I DETAILS, the years preceding the Revolution had promoted a climate that would subsequently allow the legalisation of divorce to be viewed more favourably, in that they witnessed a continual distancing between Church and State. While a growing anti-clericalism contributed to a reformulation of the laws governing marriage, so too did the new political perspective in the form of the, however brief, post-Revolutionary emphasis on the importance of individual rights: the availability of divorce was seen to endow marriage with a more modern, Republican image. The public's perception of the institution of marriage had also shifted as a result of the influence of the writings of *philosophes* such as Diderot and Condorcet, who argued that the flexibility of

divorce would increase the number of happy marriages, which would, in turn, improve the national birth-rate.<sup>3</sup> The consequent regeneration of the nation would also extend to its morality, in that adultery and illegitimacy would be less prevalent, since marriages would no longer be indissoluble. A happy, companionate marriage based on romantic affection and compatibility – a *mariage d'inclination* – as opposed to financial or familial considerations was now presented as everyone's right, and if that right continued to be elusive after a first marriage, then further attempts should be permitted. In 1790 Olympe de Gouges had written a play entitled *La Nécessité du divorce* and in 1791 she published her *Contrat social* as an addendum to her *Déclaration* in which she presented a highly radical, secular and egalitarian perception of a freely entered into (and out of) 'marital' partnership. Cissie Fairchilds foregrounds the key influence of Enlightenment thought in contributing to this more 'flexible', humanising approach to marriage generally:

In the face of centuries of Christian aestheticism, the Enlightenment propounded the possibility of individual happiness on earth; in the face of centuries of Christian disparagement, the Enlightenment rehabilitated the passions, including romantic love and sexual desire, as essential elements in such happiness. In line with its emphasis on the family as the cradle of productive citizens, the Enlightenment placed romantic love and sexual fulfilment, not in illicit relationships (the traditional pattern from medieval courtly love on), but firmly within the marriage bond. (1984: 98–9)

This new emphasis on spiritual and sexual compatibility did not in any way alter the distribution of legal power within the marital union, in which the husband's *puissance maritale* over his wife and her property remained complete throughout the period under study.

The combination of the changing attitudes towards divorce in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment's emphasis on each individual's right to happiness altered the way in which marriage and motherhood were perceived, particularly among the upper echelons of French society. Previously many noblewomen had concentrated on their careers as *salonnières* in order to compensate for their general powerlessness,

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3 In her article '*Philosophes Mariés et Épouses Philosophiques: Men of Letters and Marriage in Eighteenth-Century France*', Meghan K. Roberts views the valorisation of Frenchwomen's intellectual merits thanks to the role of eighteenth-century *salonnières* as contributing to a more positive perception of the collaborative benefits of marriage for intellectual men. She remarks that 'eighteenth-century savants credited marriage with new moral and intellectual worth. Many began to celebrate a new intellectual ideal: that of the married couple who loved each other deeply and who collaborated productively on matters of the mind' (2012: 511).

whether in marriage or in society at large, by exercising a limited control over cultural and literary fashions (in wealthy middle- and upper-class marriages the husband was generally older than his wife, and thereby better able to manipulate his position of power). However, in the acutely class-conscious post-Revolutionary France, members of the aristocracy felt under pressure to 'prove their worth' as well as their patriotism, and one of the key means of doing so was to adhere to the precepts of bourgeois morality, a morality centred on the mother and the family. Rather than perpetuate the traditional model of the patriarchal family in unanimous deference to the father, the final years of the eighteenth century saw the birth of a more modernised family unit that reflected a new concern for the fulfilment of both spouses and for the provision of a secure and nurturing environment in which to raise children. Although some marriages continued to be arranged by parental consent, with a prospective spouse's wealth constituting a key criterion in the selection process, many upper- and middle-class parents began to consult their offspring when choosing potential partners.<sup>4</sup> The fact that marriage partners were freely chosen and frequently of the same age range was seen to increase the likelihood of compatibility between husband and wife.

This closer attachment between husband and wife also altered the significance accorded to the mother-child relationship in the late eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the previous emphasis on the importance of paternity during the *Ancien Régime*, with the king as the authoritative father figure – an

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4 Financial considerations were also important between working-class couples, where the marriage partner was typically chosen by the potential spouse. Indeed, it was not uncommon for such couples to engage in common-law marriages, given the inevitable expense marriage entailed and the absence of material possessions or property to be legally transferred. While working-class marriages were as susceptible to abuses of power as any other, working women were frequently partners in decision-making and controlled the finances of the family, a position that also explains why they were the main target of middle-class morality: they were perceived as exercising a key influence over their husbands' behaviour.

5 Given the shocking child abandonment rates in the latter half of the eighteenth century, it would appear that the mother-child relationship was in some need of improvement: in 1670, 312 children were abandoned in Parisian hospitals, while just 100 years later, at the height of child abandonment in 1776, the figure had risen to 6,419. To put this statistic in context, Jeanne Pagès, citing the Abbé Malvaux, reveals that this amounts to more than a third of all children born in Paris at the time (*Le contrôle des naissances en France et à l'étranger* [1971: 36]) (quoted in Albistur and Armogathe, 1977, p. 177). While child abandonment was aggravated by impoverished social conditions, late eighteenth-century France witnessed a general move to strengthen the mother-child bond in an endeavour to promote greater familial stability across the social spectrum and to valorise and increase the role of the mother as the source of family morality and instruction.

emphasis that could be viewed as switching to a more fraternal model during the Revolution and with the death of Louis XVI in 1793 – is extended to incorporate a focus on maternity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As Suzanne Desan comments: ‘Just as the Republic replaced the monarchy, so too, the conjugal family rooted in freely chosen, companionate marriage should replace the lineage family built on paternal power and arranged, indissoluble marriage’ (2005: 635). The dilution of a rigidly stratified ‘vertical integration’ in the form of the father/patriarchal authority, a dilution central to the ethos of Revolutionary politics, surely serves to pave the way for the extolment of a more ‘familial’ dynamics, with the mother/maternal role as the increasingly pivotal figure in the post-eighteenth-century family unit (which is not to underplay the re-rigidified patriarchal misogyny subtending the Napoleonic ethos). Given the previously widespread perception of childhood as a phase to be endured rather than enjoyed by parents, members of the nobility had traditionally handed the care of their children over to wet-nurses, then servants or *gouvernantes*, and finally, particularly if the child was male, a tutor. However, by the latter half of the eighteenth century noblewomen were demonstrating a much greater concern with childrearing standards and with finding the skilled domestic help to allow them to carry out the task of mothering correctly, a concern that explains the continuing decline in the number of wealthy and upper-class children being sent to wet-nurses.

The pleasure-seeking, individualistic hedonism associated with the *Ancien Régime* was replaced by an emphasis on the joys and tenderness of the shared mother–child bond, and on the importance of the mother setting an example to her child, in particular to her daughter. The wisdom of the age maintained that children benefited from being socialised at home by their mother, whatever her class. The domestic model of family life was standardised and universalised for the first time, with middle- and upper-class women taking an active interest in the domestic sphere and in child-rearing practices. This new concern with the quality of childcare provided within the family unit may also help explain the dramatic decrease in birthrate after the Revolution and the increase in intervals between births, pointing to a conscious decision to plan and limit the number of children per family – and thus disproving the predictions of certain *philosophes*.<sup>6</sup> According to Christine Théré’s article ‘Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France’ (1999), the French upper class almost certainly practised voluntary birth control, and breastfeeding was also employed among eighteenth-century French women as a form of contraception, particularly in the latter part of

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<sup>6</sup> Peter McPhee remarks that ‘[n]ationally the decline was from 38.8 per thousand in 1789 to 32.9 in 1804’ (1992: 108).

the century. This interest in improved family planning is commented on by Claire Goldberg Moses, who views the new drive for greater procreative choice as originating with the wealthiest classes and gradually infiltrating the lower social strata – conversely to the perceived moral and familial *embourgeoisement* of the nobility. That birth control was above all associated with a French nobility renowned for its profligacy and excesses is unsurprising. Moses also makes mention of Philippe Ariès' influential work on childhood, *L'Enfant et la Vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960), remarking that he 'connects the phenomenon of family planning to the cultural revolution that made childhood a distinct and important phase of life' (1984: 22). Indeed, compared with other European countries, France led the way in promoting small families as a desirable norm, a fact that may stem from its identity as the crucible of Enlightenment thought, with its repeated focus on the importance of the individual and individual development.<sup>7</sup>

Frenchwomen themselves began to adopt a much more positive approach to motherhood, partly because motherhood itself had become a more pleasurable experience, given the improvements surrounding childbirth and birth control, and partly because of the ideological pressure to do so: children were now viewed as unique gifts to be protected and nurtured, and mothers as naturally predisposed to fulfil that honoured task. In Book 1 of *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (1762), Rousseau had encouraged women to breastfeed their babies in an endeavour to reinforce the 'natural' mother-child bond, and, consequently, the moral regeneration of the French nation. This argument was particularly fruitful among upper-class women, who were urged to abandon their selfish, socialite existences for the pleasures of maternal responsibility. Breastfeeding was further promoted by the Convention's decree of 28 June 1793, which stated that only destitute mothers who fed their own children would be in a position to receive financial assistance from the State, unless physically unable to do so. In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt comments explicitly on the political impetus underlying such interventionist policies: 'Between 1793 and 1804, then, male hostility toward women's political participation began to crystallize into a fully elaborated domestic ideology, in which women were scientifically "proven" to be suitable only for domestic occupations' (1992: 158).

Mothers were recommended to adopt a less 'directive' approach to childrearing generally, not only breastfeeding their children but also giving them greater freedom to develop 'naturally', without forcing them to walk

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7 As Angus McLaren observes: 'Contraception was practiced on a wider scale in France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than in any other part of western Europe' (1974: 604).

or to learn prematurely. The emphasis on naturalness and physical freedom had yet more long-term regenerative aims for the nation's wellbeing in that not only were they seen as prerequisite to the healthy development of the individual but, if baby girls enjoyed the same physical experiences as boys, their resultant robustness would increase the likelihood that they in turn would give birth to healthy progeny. Indeed, in her work *Réflexions et avis sur les défauts et les ridicules à la mode, pour servir de suite aux Conseils à une Amie*, Madeleine de Puisieux associates physical and sartorial constraints, in particular the childhood corset, with subsequent infertility and weakness:

A peine sorties des bras de nos nourrices, on nous met à la gêne dans des corps durs & étroits: en nous formant la taille, on empêche la nature de s'étendre, & les parties nobles, qui sont trop resserrées, se gâtent ou se dessèchent. Aussi voit-on beaucoup de femmes mourir dès le premier enfant, ou en faire d'aussi mal conformés qu'elles. (1761: 5–6)

Childhood corsets for toddlers and young children were common in both sexes until the latter half of the eighteenth century, when they gradually fell out of fashion – although even this 'unisex' undergarment was gendered: 'les garçons eux-mêmes portaient un corps baleiné qui se différait de celui des filles que parce qu'il était arrondi [...] il y avait même un modèle spécial pour "garçon à sa première culotte."<sup>8</sup> French children were dressed like miniature adults until then, and the corset was seen as facilitating an upright stature as a means of both protecting and shaping their vulnerable bodies.

The family unit was increasingly portrayed as a calm and nurturing micro-society, and one in which women could enjoy exercising power and influence over their children. This idealisation of the family unit was no doubt fuelled by its frequent characterisation as a quasi-pastoral, ordered sanctuary far removed from the disorder of the urban masses – a disorder viewed as having threatened the very fabric of society during the French Revolution. If the political arena was starting to exercise tighter controls on the conduct of prostitutes through the legal provision of *maisons closes* in 1804 in an attempt to 'improve' national morality, in the domestic arena middle-class mothers were also urged to become much more involved with the conduct of their children. The moral bastion represented by the family provided a familiar refuge against the rapidly changing outside world, an antidote to the alienation many French people were experiencing with the growing urbanisation of French society. The role of wife and mother became more 'professionalised', with precise information on how to execute a range

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8 See François Boucher, *Histoire du costume en occident de l'antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1965), p. 313, quoted in Jennifer J. Popiel (2008: 194, endnote 18).

of domestic tasks and normative exemplars provided in many women's journals. There was an additional emphasis on the intellectual activity and acquisition of knowledge required to carry out the important responsibilities associated with running a household correctly. French women's journals emphasised the pedagogical function they fulfilled, constituting a type of Open University for housewives, albeit one with a relatively limited and repetitive range of subjects from which to choose. With reference to the instructive content of periodicals generally, Kathryn Shevelov remarks:

Rather than leaving the home to gain instruction, domestic women could have instruction come to them in the form of the periodical. It provided them with just enough information to serve the needs associated with women, filling their time, regulating their minds, and guiding their performance of their duties. Through the women's magazine, private women were educated for the home, in the home. (1989: 148)

Like the journals examined in Chapter 3, the domestic press offered female readers sufficient intellectual stimulation to ward off boredom but insufficient to encourage delusions of equality. Nonetheless, this emphasis on the mother's role as family educator had the positive outcome of drawing attention to the shortcomings of women's own education and consequently highlighted the urgency of improving French women's education nationally. Woman's post-Revolutionary role in the domestic domain was promoted as multifarious and active, and as moulding the public sphere by proxy in the form of her opinions – which would influence her husband – and in the education she gave her children – which her sons would then take out into the world with them. In other words, to invert the much-loved phrase of Anglo-American 1960s feminism, the political was, or certainly became, personal.<sup>9</sup> Candice E. Proctor comments on the transferral of a 'political' lexicon to designate 'internal affairs': '[T]he home was presented as a *petite république*, where the woman governed supreme while her man busied himself with the affairs of society and state out of doors' (1990: 60). We should also be cautious not to impose our common twenty-first-century equation of housework with drudgery on the nineteenth-century idealisation of woman as maternal homemaker: motherhood was considered to represent an empowering, rather than oppressive, role for women, in that they were shown to exert a profound influence over the upbringing and education of children, thus forming the

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<sup>9</sup> As Lynn Hunt remarks: 'Domestic ideology only emerged in France because political and cultural leaders felt the need to justify in some systematic way the continuing exclusion of women from politics, even while they were admitted to many of the legal rights of civil society' (1992: 203).

future citizens of France and, indeed, the future *tout court*.<sup>10</sup> The fact that 'feminist-leaning' women such as Madame de Montanclos, as discussed in Chapter 2, perceived motherhood as overwhelmingly positive and agreed with Rousseau's teaching on gender-specific roles and education further points up these differences in cultural and historical perceptions of the traditionally feminine roles available to women.

The Directory and the Napoleonic regime, with their conservative concern for what they considered to be the bedrock of French society – the family – removed the key legal right women had acquired after the Revolution: the right to divorce. At first, the Napoleonic Code made the divorce law of 1792 a much more lengthy procedure to enact (the law of 31 March 1803), before it was abolished completely under the Restoration in 1816, and France returned to the *Ancien Régime* solution of separation. The gradual move towards the revocation of divorce, like the general idealisation of women during the first half of the nineteenth century, was in response to the perceived turbulence of the post-Revolutionary period. Having ostensibly supported the individual's right to happiness, as highlighted in the divorce law of 1792, French society now became more conservative and desirous of greater stability, a stability presented as inherent in the subordination of wife to husband and in the emphasis on the family unit as an efficient and pragmatic producer of upright French citizens. As James F. McMillan puts it in *France and Women 1789–1914: Gender, Society and Politics*:

Whereas the Revolutionary legislators had endeavoured to find ways to express Enlightenment notions of the sentimental and affective bonds which ideally bound families together, the Civil Code institutionalised the rather different strand in Enlightenment thought which held that man alone was the true social individual and that women were only 'relative creatures', to be defined by their relationship to men – fathers, husbands or other male relations. (2000: 37)

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10 In her article 'French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity, 1750–1850', Margaret H. Darrow comments on the importance of recognising geographical and national specificities when discussing notions of domesticity – specificities the current study has acknowledged, particularly in relation to gender complementarity – even if she may overdraw such differences: 'Both contemporary commentators and modern historians have noted that nineteenth-century French domesticity was quite different from the English phenomenon. It is a truism that in France, marriage liberated a woman while in England it confined her. English domestic advisers emphasized that domesticity was difficult, self-denying and dull, and that the proper wife aroused no interest or admiration; her light was perpetually under a bushel. In France, a more positive spirit reigned. The wife was extolled as the *maitresse de la maison* (mistress of the house), directress and manager of domestic affairs rather than a simple *ménagère* (housewife)' (1979: 57–8).



Divorce would not be brought in again until 1884 and, in the interim period, the French Penal Code of 1810 made plain the double standards governing men and women's conduct. While male adultery was more or less ignored – only if the husband brought his mistress into the marital home would he be fined<sup>11</sup> – women were subject to both a fine and imprisonment, whatever the circumstances of their adultery. Napoleon provided further misogynous reinforcement of the sanctity of marriage by removing all rights from the single mother to seek financial assistance from the father of her child.

Given that women made use of the divorce law more than men, and feminists had considered its legalisation a significant victory, the most vociferous supporters of divorce throughout the first half of the nineteenth century were feminist campaigners. French feminism had a particularly difficult battle to wage given the increasing post-Revolutionary drive towards a maternal ideal and the state-sanctioned inequality inscribed in the Napoleonic 'Code Civil', which set women's marital inferiority in writing in the infamous article 213 – 'La femme doit obéissance à son mari' – an article which, unsurprisingly, drew condemnation from a plethora of women's journals. As Chapter 1 remarks, advocates of sexual equality were no more numerous among left-leaning groups than among their right-wing counterparts. Saint Simonians – including the movement's female followers – also mysticised motherhood, positing it as a common bond uniting women, a potentially essentialising position that could be read as an ideological continuation of the early nineteenth century's perception of woman as 'naturally' belonging in the home. Indeed, as the popularity of the feminist movement decreased by the mid-nineteenth century, feminist journalists turned to the idealisation of motherhood as a means of promoting women's social standing and, consequently, their political rights; *La Voix des femmes* (1848), examined in Chapter 5, is a case in point. Throughout the vagaries of its history, the feminist movement in France has had to adapt to its purpose the most efficient ideological tools at its disposal in order to achieve often minor advances in French women's social and economic circumstances – an adaptability that also partly accounts for the often contradictory and complex representations of Woman that recur throughout the French women's press. As the following

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11 Article 339 of the Penal Code states: 'Le mari qui aura entretenu une concubine dans la maison conjugale et qui aura été convaincu sur la plainte de sa femme, sera puni d'une amende de cent francs à deux mille francs.' The sexually discriminating nature of Napoleonic legislation would appear to have been internalised by French women themselves, despite their greater petitioning for divorce generally. As Roderick Phillips comments: 'It is significant, however, that women petitioned far less often than men for divorce on the ground of adultery, where a double standard of sexual morality was explicit' (1980: 58).

analysis demonstrates, figurations of female ‘enfranchisement’ – whether in the promotion of female education or the right to choose a marriage partner – are typically articulated within a textual field that represents such figurations as beneficial to the (fundamentally patriarchal) nation’s health.

*LE COURIER DE L’HYMEN OU JOURNAL DES DAMES* (1791)

PUBLISHED DURING A PERIOD of rapid press expansion and freedom, *Le Courier de l’hymen* offers irrefutable evidence of the political effects of the French Revolution on women’s aspirations, both inside and outside the home, as illustrated in French women’s desire to enjoy the rights of active citizenship.<sup>12</sup> This journal was published twice a week and the subscription cost a hefty 24 livres per annum for Paris, 12 for six months, 6 livres for three months, and 30 livres for a yearly subscription for other French *départements*. *Le Courier de l’hymen* plays a particularly important role in the history of the French women’s press, in that it includes a variety of ‘editorial features’ that have continued to make up the staple content of the women’s press ever since. It was the first journal in France to include a ‘courrier du coeur’,<sup>13</sup> and it is remarkable that the notion of the women’s journal as friend and confidante, dispensing professional yet ‘personal’ advice to its readership, existed at such an early stage in the evolution of this medium.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Reinforcing Censer and Popkin’s remark apropos of the fertile post-Revolutionary publishing climate quoted in Chapter 1, in her work *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1820* Carla Hesse describes this period as follows: ‘Between 1789 and 1793, the mandate to liberate the Enlightenment from censorship and to refound cultural life on enlightened principles translated itself into a massive deregulation of the publishing world. [...] Thus the first few years of the Revolution saw the corporatist literary system of the Old Regime entirely dismantled and replaced with a free market in the world of ideas’ (1991: 3).

13 According to Jennifer M. Jones in her article ‘Personals and Politics: Courting *la citoyenne* in *Le courier de l’hymen*’, *Le Courier de l’hymen* ‘is believed to be the first journal devoted exclusively to personals [*sic*] advertisements in France’ (2002: 174–5). Jones acknowledges Evelyne Sullerot’s work *Histoire de la presse féminine en France* when making this remark, but Sullerot’s observation relates not to personal columns but to problem pages, characterising the journal as ‘le premier en date, en France du moins, de tous les “courriers du coeur” qui font actuellement florès’ (1966: 56). The fact that Jones refers to the journal’s title as having one ‘r’, while Sullerot gives it two ‘r’s’, illustrates the fluctuations in spelling discussed in Chapter 2.

14 It is worth noting that an earlier journal, *Le Véritable Ami de la reine ou journal des dames, par une société de citoyennes* (1790), from its first edition also invited women readers to contribute to its content, thereby developing a type of ad hoc problem page. Those who write in seek clarification on, among other subjects, aspects of child-

While also an outlet for feminist and often anti-male opinions, the journal, as its title indicates – and in a further prefiguration both of Madame Necker's 1794 *Réflexions sur le divorce*, discussed in Chapter 3, and of today's women's journals – perceives the institution of marriage as a positive option for women.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in what must surely indicate a growing eighteenth-century market economy, this journal goes one step further than certain of its contemporaries, which were beginning to include a limited number of advertisements, and ultimately 'sells' marriages in the form of female and male readers soliciting potential spouses. Its aim, as stated on the first page of its prospectus, is clear: 'il fera connoître les mariages'. The greater social fluidity brought about by the 1789 Revolution, which called into question a raft of socio-cultural assumptions about traditional institutions, including the putative passivity of the female partner in the act of marriage, is clearly manifested in the pro-female stance espoused by *Le Courier de l'hymen*. In this climate, it is clear to see why a publication such as *Le Courier de l'hymen*, promoting individual choice and agency vis-à-vis the marriage act, would flourish – and, equally, why the next logical legislative step would be the introduction of divorce on 20 September 1792.

*Le Courier de l'hymen's* publication shortly after a 'régime' change, its bridging of historical epochs, is reflected in the journal's continuing '*Ancien Régime*' interest in the financial and economic compatibility of potential marriage partners, an interest further highlighted in the directive interventions of family members endeavouring to influence their offspring's choice of partner. This bridging is further manifested in the journal's post-Revolutionary ethos, which promotes not only the necessity of individual choice but also focuses firmly on the importance of feelings and emotions, on the criterion of 'cœur' as a valid component of the marital union. In its prospectus, *Le Courier de l'hymen* illuminates its aims as follows, affirming its general appeal to a variety of readers, despite its overriding focus on marriage:

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rearing, pointing up the future focus on woman as fulcrum of the family unit as well as the growing interest in the field of child development.

- 15 Evelyne Sullerot suggests that, during periods of secularism in France, marriage is treated more seriously in the women's press, while during more conventionally 'religious' periods, such as those of the *Ancien Régime*, the Restoration and the July Monarchy, the institution is more consistently denigrated. The absence of religious justification and succour presumably renders marriage's continuation more precarious, requiring greater ideological reinforcement, albeit often through *non-dits* in the form of avoiding all criticism of it. Sullerot concludes: 'A l'heure actuelle, après bientôt un siècle de république laïque, le mariage est devenu le grand tabou par excellence de la presse féminine. Un article favorable au divorce ferait de nos jours perdre des dizaines de milliers de lectrices à n'importe quel périodique féminin. Aussi ne s'y risquent-ils jamais' (1966: 57).

Il aura un motif plus utile encore, et d'un intérêt plus général; il deviendra dépositaire des intentions des parens, des jeunes gens, des célibataires, des veuves qui auroient le desir d'établir leurs enfans, de suivre le penchant de leur coeur, ou qui voudroient former de nouveaux noeuds.

Comme ce Journal sera particulièrement consacré aux femmes, celles qui auroient à se plaindre d'un mari trop brutal pour écouter paisiblement leurs représentations, pourront les confier, sous l'anonyme, aux auteurs qui s'empresseront de les publier. Peut-être plus d'un époux injuste se corrigera, en feignant de ne pas se reconnoître.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the journal will both help set up appropriate matches for those readers as yet unmarried or who no longer are and endeavour to improve those matches already in existence. It is the journal's self-characterisation as a form of marriage guidance counsellor, as a type of textual refuge for abused women, and its innovative incitement to female readers to write in regarding their personal problems, that can be seen to constitute the first overt example of the 'courrier du cœur' rubric which has become such a key feature of the women's press, whether explicitly in the existence of 'agony columns' or in the general image, repeatedly promoted by the women's press, of a community of readers advising and supporting one another.

The audacity of this textual validation to confess all is reinforced by the journal's emphasis on the primacy of anonymity. Rather than discussing marital problems directly with their husbands, female readers are invited to share them with other female writers and readers, in a move that both underlines sexual solidarity and ratifies women's right to personal contentment.<sup>17</sup> These

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16 *Le Journal des dames et des modes* intimates the commonness of violence in post-Revolutionary heterosexual relations, as witnessed in a proverb cited by the journal in an article that urges French men to treat their wives with more respect: "Battez votre femme, mais ne l'assommez pas" (30 Thermidor an VI/17 August 1798, p. 1). Remarks made elsewhere in *Le Journal des dames et des modes* demonstrate that violence against women was clearly an acceptable component of male behaviour; indeed, one article differentiates between being battered by a lover and being battered by a husband, arguing that to be beaten by the former is a sign of love: 'Le mari frappe pour venger son honneur qu'il croit outragé; et ce soupçon est injurieux. Mais comme l'honneur d'un amant ne court à cet égard aucun risque, il n'est plus en frappant sa maîtresse qu'un fou que le délire amoureux jette hors de toute mesure' (5 May 1812, p. 199). Candice E. Proctor points to the legal validation behind such violence: 'In eighteenth-century France, a husband not only possessed the right to demand full and complete obedience from his wife; he also had the right to exact it. As part of his *puissance maritale*, a husband had the legal right to beat his wife' (1990: 90–91).

17 It would appear that such interfemale solidarity manifested itself extratextually in the form of communities of neighbourly women who would typically support wives who were victims of domestic violence, leading Roderick Phillips to conclude – perhaps somewhat optimistically – in his study on eighteenth-century divorce in France:

confiding readers will find a metaphorical shoulder to cry on in this safe haven of sorority and will be permitted to express themselves in their own terms, 'leurs représentations'. The radicalness of providing women readers with the opportunity to construct their own intimate subjectivities textually for the first time should not be underestimated. These readers were engaged in creating figurations of their selves for private 'self-improvement' and public consumption, blurring the boundaries between private and public and thereby gaining discursive influence on a world beyond the domestic. While the use of readers as a source of free material was nothing new, such material had previously centred on the literary, social or political aspects of their existence, but never – explicitly at least – on such acutely private revelations.

This post-Revolutionary concern with safeguarding and improving marital conditions for French women signals a change in moral climate after the economic perfunctoriness and consequent denigration of marriage under the *Ancien Régime*, a change fuelled in part by the post-Revolutionary objective of boosting the notion of nationhood: if France is to constitute a powerful world nation it must be built on stable and happy families, which, in turn, are built on contented marriages. Desirous to limit any potential for misuse in this lonely hearts' publication, the journal's (male) proprietor sounds a cautionary moral note in its prospectus: 'il annonce que, respectant les bonnes moeurs, et les regardant comme le fondement de toute société, il ne recevra que des demandes décentes, et ne se prêtera qu'à des entrevues qui auront le mariage pour objet' (p. 2). Readers should not be under the misapprehension that the journal offers the opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex for purely hedonistic reasons, but solely with the aim of bolstering France's marital and familial successes.

In her work *Traces de femmes: Présence féminine dans le journalisme français du XVIIIe siècle*, Suzanna van Dijk cites the detailed week-by-week account of Marie-Thérèse's pregnancy provided by particular journals as evidence of this late eighteenth-century concern with boosting the nation's coffers of potential progeniture (and thus international standing) through secure marital unions (although the fact that Marie-Thérèse did not become pregnant until eight years after her wedding would inevitably have fuelled such interest in the first place, as would her status as queen): 'L'intérêt de ces mariages, auxquels le *Mercur de France* consacre une rubrique à part, réside bien sûr dans l'espoir de progéniture. Voilà la raison la plus commune, pour qu'une femme soit mentionnée dans une gazette: sa grossesse et son accouchement' (1988: 64). *Le Courier de l'hymen* may be an unambiguously radical publication in its

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'In short, solidarity based on gender might well have been stronger than familial solidarity' (1980: 191).

feminocentric representation of woman as active participant and decision-maker in her choice of marriage partner, yet its radicalness is tempered by its locus firmly within the conventional parameters of a strictly gendered morality revolving around the marital union and subsequently, it is hoped, the family unit.

*Le Courier de l'hymen's* opening issue is published on 20 February 1791 and the journal's first request for marriage comes from an 'American' male (in other words, from the West Indies), who is at pains to stress his political correctness to an increasingly politicised female readership. Acutely conscious that his colonial credentials may be held against him – as, indeed, they subsequently are – his reported assertion of (sexual and moral) uprightness does more to draw attention to his potential culpability than to eradicate it, as does the use of the possessive when designating the human beings as well as the property that fall under his tenure. The advertisement encapsulates an anachronistic gaucheness of expression, with post-Revolutionary references to 'l'assemblée nationale' and 'citoyenne' overwhelmed by the plethora of remarks that point up the author's hierarchised worldview and inflated sense of self-importance. In a statement that seems to protest too much, he is described as someone,

qui a l'honneur de siéger à l'assemblée nationale, en qualité de député de nos colonies, qui n'a point abusé de ses droits de maître pour assujettir ses négresses ou ses mulâtresses à ses desirs, qui s'est, pendant son séjour, uniquement occupé de faire prospérer ses habitations, voudroit partager sa fortune avec une jeune citoyenne de Paris [...] Quoique membre du corps législatif, il n'exige pas d'elle qu'elle ait une opinion bien prononcée sur tous les partis. (p. 1)

Rather than interpret this as evidence of his desire for a politically malleable and economically vulnerable young woman, the journal gives this 'seller' the benefit of the doubt and altruistically interprets his self-aggrandising portrait as proof of the egalitarian spirit of this politically aware individual who desires to appeal to the apparent Revolutionary sentiments of the journal's readership: 'Comme il ne désigne, dans ses demandes, ni le rang, ni la naissance, nous avons cependant pensé qu'il étoit au courant des idées adoptées par les bons patriotes' (p. 1). One reader at least remains unconvinced of this man's republican credentials; in the issue of 3 March 1791 a young woman sends in a letter making her opinion of his position crystal clear: 'Je vous déclare cependant que je ne veux pas d'un américain, fût-il député impartial, et eût-il à lui seul les 660 mille infortunés, qui payent de leur liberté et de leur sang les plaisirs et l'opulence de 40 mille européens. Je hais les tyrans et les bourreaux' (pp. 14–15).

The post-Revolutionary female readership of *Le Courier de l'hymen* would appear to possess a pronounced political literacy and an ability to read into, rather than simply read, declarations of putative social responsibility. The respondent's language is passionate and confident, as well as utterly dismissive of the 'American's' implicit *Ancien Régime* belief in the attractiveness of money and social rank, despite his occasional tokenist use of a post-Revolutionary lexicon. These differing interpretations constitute a *mise en abyme* of the hemeneutic instabilities to which the modern reader is inevitably exposed, instabilities aggravated by the often veiled historical references of the journals in question, as well as the heteroglossia in their content. In her chapter 'La presse libérale sous la Restauration: émergence d'une écriture collective' in *Presse et Plumes: Journalisme et littérature au XIXe siècle*, Corinne Pelta points up the pertinence of this polyphonic fluidity of often uncertain ontological status in reflecting and influencing the society whence it originates, a remark equally applicable to the late eighteenth century:

Cette multiplicité des niveaux de sens manifestés à travers les différents niveaux et registres de langues est essentielle, car elle recompose le spectre social, elle en découvre la face signifiante, sa *phénoménalité*. La vérité, comme style et comme objet, tant réclamée pour la littérature, s'affirme dans la presse au travers de la confusion, qui est en fait l'inhérence même, plus que la cohabitation, de la fiction avec la réalité. (2004: 373)

Particularly in a journal in which the 'spectre social' is characterised by a quasi-interregnum sense of uncertainty and which relies on readerly self-portraiture in order to fulfil its explicit matchmaking function, the 'autofictional' fluidity or 'confusion' of such portraits may be particularly pronounced.

The vehemence of the female reader's deflation of this pompous self-portrait provides evidence of a new sense of female empowerment post-Revolution: in an endeavour to secure the longevity of post-marital contentment, women are seeking men who appear to genuinely desire a more egalitarian heterosexual relationship, emphasising the importance of possessing certain emotional and intellectual qualities, as in advertisement no. 40, the author of which 'desire épouser un homme de vingt-huit à trente-six ans, d'une famille honnête, dont les mœurs sont connues; elle préfère son éducation & la douceur du caractère à sa fortune' (19 April 1791, p. 60). A variety of different women write into the journal seeking marriage partners, including widows, which, given their greater independence, often both financial and emotional, is unsurprising: 'Une veuve, âgée de 31 ans, sans enfans, qui a deux domaines à quarante lieues de Paris, et une belle maison dans la ville où elle réside, desire, pour se marier, un homme de 36 à 38 ans, qui ait des connoissance [*sic*] suffisantes pour occuper la place d'un bon citoyen, dans un beau département' (24

February 1791, p. 8). This particular entry provides further illustration of an increasing female 'proactiveness' during this period of political flux shortly after the Revolution, in that a wealthy widowed woman has no qualms in publicly seeking a partner and in employing a revolutionary vocabulary in order to do so. Echoing the previous advertisement from the 'American', the author of this 'small ad' gives the impression of endeavouring to reflect the contemporary political timbre by the inclusion of the term 'citoyen', despite numerous indications of her highly privileged existence. This sporadic espousal of Revolutionary precepts is most clearly evidenced in the various male-authored entries that abandon all pretence of revolutionary empathy, whether from potential husbands themselves detailing how much of a dowry they expect their wife-to-be to bring to the marriage or from fathers who write in looking for husbands for their daughters.

The frequent male-authored figurations of the feminine included in *Le Courier de l'hymen* continue to portray women as objects to be acquired and exchanged between men. The following advertisement, for example, makes the correspondent's two daughters sound like an unwanted job lot, albeit a domesticated, entertaining one: 'Un père de famille, qui a deux demoiselles, et qui leur donne à chacune 25000 livres comptant en mariage, desireroit leur trouver deux jeunes gens de 25 à 30 ans, bien-nés, laborieux, & d'une fortune à-peu-près égale à la leur. Les deux demoiselles sont fort aimables; elles ont reçu la meilleure éducation, & sont pleines de talens' (advertisement no. 38, 10 April 1791, p. 60). In other words, men perceive the journal in its 'literal' role of marriage facilitator and pragmatically state their credentials/desires, while women would appear to focus more on the journal's 'confessional' function and to employ it as a medium through which to air their general frustrations at the patriarchal limitations imposed upon them and to challenge the current social figurations of the feminine in French society. In *Histoire de la presse féminine en France*, Sullerot distinguishes between the male and female readers of the journal and the role it fulfils for them in the following terms: 'Les hommes écrivaient au *Courier de l'hymen* pour chercher femme [*sic*], les femmes ont surtout écrit pour protester' (1966: 58). For women, the act of self-representation through writing is clearly paramount.

Families are asked to send in accurate descriptive portraits of their daughters in order to avoid creating false readerly expectations, and thus disappointment. The journal repeatedly emphasises the primacy of honesty and decency in the transmission of information – as we have already seen in the frank responses with which certain 'ads' are met – an indication that the destabilising of visible sartorial codes among numerous others following the Revolution had created a climate of nervousness vis-à-vis economic



and professional classifications:<sup>18</sup> 'Il est peut-être plus facile de distinguer par-tout ailleurs qu'en France, à quel ordre un Français appartenait autrefois. [...] Aujourd'hui moine, militaire, artisan, tout se ressemble' (24 February 1791, p. 5). In her work *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675–1791*, Clare Haru Crowston touches upon the political significance attributed to vestimentary semantics, a significance detailed earlier in Chapter 3: 'In their efforts to break completely with the Old Regime, revolutionary leaders accorded serious consideration to installing an entirely new dress code. French citizens, they esteemed, could not forget the aristocratic and monarchic society of the past while surrounded by visual reminders of it' (2001: 30). For those of a clear Republican bent, the perceived decadence and artifice of the *Ancien Régime* was a further reason for this new promotion of honesty and integrity. In other words, the combination of the blurring of previous class hierarchies based on visual indices and the conscious desire to start afresh in a new post-Revolutionary era led to a valorisation of 'inner' qualities related to morals and the emotions, rather than the superficial and ultimately duplicitous signs of 'quality' previously attached to appearance. As Lynn Hunt remarks: 'The republicans, consequently, valued transparency – the unmediated expression of the heart – above all other personal qualities. [...] It was the definition of virtue, and as such it was imagined to be critical to the future of the republic' (1992: 96–7).

The journal's valorisation of honesty extends to its own account of the benefits accrued by women from the French Revolution. *Le Courier de l'hymen* repeatedly draws attention to what it considers to be the shortcomings of the French Revolution's achievements, its political whitewashing – condemning, for example, women's lack of presence and influence in the legal world and in the legislation process generally. It would appear that French women are not merely seeking a more participatory role in the 'personal' choice of marriage partners in this journal but are repeatedly voicing their sense of injustice at the treatment and status accorded them in the wider social arena. The journal remarks that,

[q]uelques dames nous ont écrit pour se plaindre de ce que les femmes n'étoient point appelées dans la composition du juri [*sic*] d'accusation et du juri

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18 With particular reference to *Le Cabinet des modes*, Annemarie Kleinert comments on the upper-class attachment to the unambiguous pre-Revolutionary exhibition of fashion: 'Une des raisons de cet attachement à la monarchie est le fait qu'elle maintenait la barrière entre les riches et les pauvres et qu'elle conservait les rangs hiérarchiques si importants pour ceux qui voulaient se distinguer par leurs vêtements' (1982: 191).

du jugement. Elles prétendent que c'est-là une des plus grandes preuves que nos législateurs sont des aristocrates, puisqu'ils réservent à une seule partie du genre humain, la fonction de juger les deux. (20 February 1791, pp. 2–3)

As Chapter 5 details more closely, the desired dismantling of social hierarchies fuelled by the French Revolution is clearly shown to have acted as a catalyst for an analogous desire among women to dismantle sexual hierarchies, as exemplified in female readers' employment of a lexicon based on *Ancien Régime* stratification and domination in order to highlight both the increasing cross-fertilisation of the discursive fields relating to class and gender politics and the public's general assimilation of them.

Illustrating Evelyne Sullerot's observation that female readers use the journal above all as an instrument of politicisation and self-assertion, readers write in to express not so much their personal gripes against particular husbands or situations but rather their growing feminist anger at the post-Revolutionary *mauvaise foi* manifested by their fellow countrymen; the journal consequently recognises the genuinely radical contribution made by the Marquis de Condorcet to women's rights during a period when others were merely paying lip service to them:<sup>19</sup>

Méritons-nous d'être traitées avec cette injustice, dans une révolution à laquelle nous avons eu tant de part? Les hommes ne se souviennent-ils plus de nous avoir vues à l'attaque de la Bastille, sur le chemin de Versailles, et au Champ de la fédération? Qu'ils prennent gardent [*sic*] d'exciter notre courage. Nous les avons rendus libres, nous pourrions les remettre dans les fers.

Ces menaces n'ont pas laissé que de nous effrayer, et nous ont fait regretter qu'on n'ait pas donné une attention plus sérieuse à l'ouvrage de M. de Condorcet, qui veut que les femmes soient admises dans les corps administratifs et législatifs. (20 February 1791, p. 3)

The combative attribution of women's political disempowerment to men is repeatedly underlined by the oppositional references throughout to a collective 'nous' in contrast to 'les hommes', and by the syntactic evolution from the inclusive interrogative to the threatening subjunctive; French women are portrayed as making up a redoubtable 'band of sisters' united by gender and a powerful sense of political injustice – and a consequent desire for retribution – at their treatment as members of a sexual 'Tiers Etat', despite their active and repeated participation in Revolutionary events and *journées*.

<sup>19</sup> The recognition of the radicalness of Condorcet's writings and their pivotal contribution to the *patrimoine*, including their influence on French feminism, is relatively recent: only in 1989, on the bicentenary of the French Revolution, was his body moved to the Pantheon in acknowledgement of the intellectual and humanitarian content of his Revolutionary and Enlightenment writings.

The journal's femino-centric stance is perhaps most clearly articulated in the edition of 24 April 1791, in which a reader comments on woman's natural predisposition for learning in spite of the various obstacles society places in her path. As previous chapters illustrate, this belief forms a leitmotif of the early years of the French women's press, in which it is not women's lack of erudition that is surprising but the fact that they know anything at all. Any differences in men and women's intellectual abilities are ascribed to the current shortcomings in women's education: 'Je crois, Monsieur, qu'en général les femmes sont plus susceptibles d'apprendre que les hommes. Moins turbulentes, moins dissipées dans leur enfance, par conséquent plus portées à la réflexion, il faut, en vérité, toute la force d'une mauvaise éducation, pour réprimer en elles le goût qu'elles ont naturellement pour s'instruire' (p. 73). The letter becomes more radical in its appeal to Enlightenment values, as well as – rather unconvincingly – to an earlier matriarchal golden age, in which Amazonian women are presented as 'naturally' and rationally empowered, in stark contrast with the manmade subjugation that is their current lot, a subjugation inflicted upon them by brute force:

Mais, à vos yeux, le crime des femmes n'est point de vouloir s'instruire. Qu'elles soient savantes, que vous importe, pourvu qu'elles ne soient pas raisonnables; car c'est la raison que vous redoutez. Si jamais son flambeau luit pour nous, Messieurs! Messieurs! prenez garde à vous; nous reprendrons nos droits, droits sacrés qui datent de l'origine du monde, au lieu que les vôtres sont bien neufs, encore avez-vous été obligés de les faire. Le seul que la nature vous ait accordé, est le droit du plus fort, ce qui veut dire celui du plus sot. (p. 74)

The strength of frustration – and ultimately misandry – reinforces the dismissive tone that permeates the letter, and which may partly account for the odd marriage of conceptual adversaries, such as Enlightenment reason and Biblical-sounding divine right: it is clearly the end message rather than the discursive means that imports. Rather than striving to achieve a form of equitable cohabitation between the sexes, the author seeks to invert existent sexual hierarchies and reduce men to the conventionally female position of serfdom. The letter's final sentence resounds with a *Candide*-esque, yet quasi-apocalyptic, political resolve: 'nous vous céderons notre place, nous reprendrons la vôtre, &, pour la première fois, tout sera bien dans le monde' (p. 74). Throughout the history of the early French women's press, whatever the conventional parameters set by journalistic content or genre – which, in the case of *Le Courier de l'hymen*, is that of marital matchmaker – female readers optimise such opportunity for self-expression in order to carve out often strikingly radical interstitial sites of resistance and to challenge contemporary patriarchal figurations of the feminine. Given the sheer novelty of

self-expression for these readers, it is unsurprising if passionate conviction often predominates over rhetorical consistency.

*Le Courier de l'hymen's* treatment of the institution of marriage extends beyond the subjective and anecdotal to provide accounts of books dealing with marital issues or discussions of decrees relating to marriage issued by the National Assembly. The journal's ideological straddling of different epochs and political regimes is apparent in the tension presented in the journal between the marital prerequisites of financial stability and emotional literacy or fulfilment. Such apparent binarisms are further demonstrated in the journal's approach to managing readerly expectations once a marriage is actually underway, combining the *Ancien Régime's* emphasis on economic durability with post-Revolutionary individual satisfaction. On the one hand, this journal's conventionally moralistic view of marriage portrays it as a dutiful arrangement which benefits society at large, in which love does not necessarily constitute an intrinsic component and in which both parties should respect each other as equal partners, paradoxically highlighted in the authoritarian lexicon and detached, patriarchal tone it employs when imparting advice to a reader who suspects her husband of infidelity: 'Nous observerons à cette respectable épouse, que la fidélité conjugale étant un des devoirs imposés par la loi, elle est autorisée à rappeler à son mari cette loi sainte qu'il a promis d'observer' (6 March 1791, p. 18). On the other hand, this legalistically pragmatic Enlightenment stance towards marriage allows for the acceptance of the necessity of divorce, as demonstrated in the journal's recommendation of a work that does not perceive divorce as antithetical to religious teachings, combining once again the rational with the religious:<sup>20</sup> 'Puisque nous devons rendre compte des ouvrages qui intéressent les femmes, il n'en est point, qui par sa nature, mérite plus de trouver place dans le journal de l'Hymen, que celui qui a pour objet de prouver que le divorce est d'accord avec la raison et la religion' (10 March 1791, p. 21; original emphasis).<sup>21</sup>

It may appear paradoxical for a journal centred on marriage to be a staunch advocate of divorce, yet its main concern is shown to be for the happiness of the couple involved, for their compatibility. The journal returns to this topic the following month, quoting at length from the Comte d'Antraigues' work *Observations sur le divorce* discussed in Chapter 1, a work that promotes the necessity of equality within the marital pact, highlighting the common

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20 Many early French women's journals support the implementation of a divorce law, including, as Chapter 3 details, the conservative *Cabinet des modes*. As the current chapter goes on to detail, even the Christian *Journal des femmes* perceives the legalisation of divorce as desirable, justifying its necessity from a principally humanitarian perspective.

21 At times, however, the journal also embodies a post-Revolutionary sceptical attitude

comparison of the illegality of divorce with an *Ancien Régime* modus operandi: “Le mariage, tel qu’il est, est un mauvais régime; c’est une *aristocratie*. On sent tout ce que ce mot présente d’effrayant. Quand on aura établi le divorce, ce sera une *démocratie*; y a-t-il rien de plus joli au monde” (no. 15, 10 April 1791, p. 57; original emphasis). *Le Courier de l’hymen* repeatedly advocates the right to divorce in politically resonant terms, stating, with reference to the pro-divorce sentiments expressed in d’Antraigues’ work: ‘Le premier jour où une épouse malheureuse pourra tenir ce langage, nous espérons voir les droits de la Femme marcher de pair avec les droits de l’Homme, & qui fait ce qu’il en peut résulter en route’ (p. 58). Once again, however, such a radical rallying cry finds articulation within normative historical parameters of acceptable female conduct. While *Le Courier de l’hymen* believes that divorce has an important role to play when the differences between parties have become irreconcilable, it is not pro-divorce under any circumstances, rejecting its applicability to classic ‘mid-life crises’, when a husband simply tires of his middle-aged wife and seeks to abandon her in favour of a younger replacement.<sup>22</sup> The journal highlights men’s financial and moral responsibility for their wives’ wellbeing; they have undertaken a marital promise on which they should not renege. While this approach may appear patronisingly paternalistic to the twenty-first-century reader, it echoes those sentiments expressed in Madame Necker’s feminocentric stance towards marriage discussed in Chapter 3, in which she perceives the marital institution as a bastion of financial and moral security for women, shielding them from the potential vulnerabilities of poverty and old age.

The journal’s function as matchmaker and medium employed by members of the French reading public to describe both themselves and their ideal partner is highly informative of the everyday lives of upper- and middle-class women – and men – at the time of its publication. Rank and social status continue to be mentioned in the ‘personals’ submitted to *Le Courier*

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to religion and to the clergy generally. In the edition of 5 May 1791, a reader’s letter advises that a child’s religious education should not begin too early: ‘J’ose l’affirmer, notre religion, plus qu’aucune autre, par la profondeur de ses mystères, nuit aux progrès de la raison dans l’enfance’ (p. 87). In keeping with *l’air du temps*, the journal also makes fun of the clergy by responding to the question ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un pape?’ with ‘C’est un vieux préjugé dont les honnêtes gens se moquent, & que les prêtres invoquent comme ils invoqueroient le diable; c’est-à-dire pour faire peur aux sots’ (no. 15, 10 April 1791, p. 58). The journal’s ‘interregnum’ attitude is further demonstrated in its refusal to endorse anti-monarchical sentiments, as illustrated in readers’ remarks arguing that the monarchy should be defended (10 April 1791, p. 59).

22 Indeed, the fact that divorces due to incompatibility or by mutual consent required a year’s delay before remarriage was permitted was principally designed to deter those men who hoped to swiftly replace their wife with a more youthful bride.

*de l'hymen*, illustrating their ongoing importance in certain sections of French society, whatever the precepts of the 1789 Revolution and the journal's explicit espousal of them. A letter from a young female reader makes clear that the benefits accrued from the French Revolution depend on one's social position and status prior to it; age, sex and class remain key criteria in determining those on whom its fruits are bestowed. Whatever the pretensions of the tripartite national motto, it is still a wealthy, older man's world:

Il est bien aisé, monsieur, de trouver que tout va au mieux lorsque l'on ne perd rien, et que l'on gagne la liberté. Mais si vous étiez demoiselle, si vous aviez vingt ans passés, si un père qui n'auroit que des pensions pour revenu, ne pouvoit vous former une dot que de ses économies, peut-être la révolution ne vous paroîtroit-elle pas le comble du bonheur. (20 February 1791, p. 3)

While the extra-textual social reality for French women during this period still fell short of many of their political exigencies, *Le Courier de l'hymen* exemplifies a new and distinctly egalitarian approach to the institution of marriage: its women readers actively seek out marriage partners – and are often highly demanding in their wishes – rather than simply waiting to be asked, reflecting women's expectations of economic and intellectual parity between the sexes. In her article “War between Brothers and Sisters”: Inheritance Law and Gender Politics in Revolutionary France’, Suzanne Desan also remarks that the ‘increasingly egalitarian inheritance laws’ promoted during the radicalisation of the Revolution influenced women's expectations of traditional gender and family relations, adding, ‘[l]egal reform and politicization became fundamentally intertwined’ (1997: 598; 600). *Le Courier de l'hymen* can thus be seen to reflect a post-Revolutionary belief that women can be agents of change for their own destiny, with the implicit conviction that, by participating more actively in the private sphere, they will be better placed to acquire greater knowledge of – and assume greater responsibility in – the public realm. In other words, the journal combines an economic pragmatism with an innovative perception of the prerequisites to a contented and successful marriage. The influence of Enlightenment rationality means that women have the right to seek marital happiness not simply within ‘realistic’ parameters such as economic and familial consensus but, more radically, also based on political and emotional compatibility.

Overall, the feminism at the heart of this journal's representation of marriage is striking, and clearly stems from the belief that marriage, in its pre-Revolutionary form, positioned women in the role of vassal rather than equal partner. *Le Courier de l'hymen* represents marriage as a desirable

union of equals, and one based on mutual support, honesty and integrity, rather than on the frivolity and duplicity associated with the institution under the *Ancien Régime*. The role of the Revolution is paramount in this altered perception, yet, while the *annonces* often make clear the importance of Republican values to the seeker (and sought), social rank (euphemistically referred to as 'morals' or 'good family') remains significant.<sup>23</sup> If the aristocracy – and aristocratic marriages – are associated with decadence, corruption and loose morals (an association also apparent in the perception of the lower-class single girl as 'available' to service the master, a perception implicit in the first 'small ad' discussed, written by the 'American' male), *Le Courier de l'hymen* in many respects would appear to signal the rise of the desiring bourgeois woman. For a brief post-Revolutionary period, this 'new woman' enjoys the sense of an emerging political and sexual dawn in which women harbour hopes of greater scope for individual choice and fulfilment. As this chapter has remarked, that focus on individual realisation would subsequently be replaced by women's realisation of her domestic and pedagogic potential in creating a happy and healthy hearth and home – if man governs the public domain, woman is given the principal role of governing the private. As the remainder of this chapter illustrates, this ideological positioning of women within the domestic sphere is paradoxically shown to necessitate a broadening of women's pedagogical and organisational skills and knowledge, a broadening that the domestic journal endeavours to support through its self-characterisation as instruction manual for successful household and family management.

*LE JOURNAL DES FEMMES, 1832–1837*<sup>24</sup>

AS THE INTRODUCTION to this chapter suggests, the remaining two domestic journals to be examined here have many features in common with today's women's magazines. The inclusion of a selection of recipes and household tips to help facilitate and perfect the art of domesticity preempts the content of the *Good Housekeeping* form of journalism to a striking degree,

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23 As Roderick Phillips argues, the frequency of divorce was clearly related to the social class of the couple concerned, with working-class marriages ending far less frequently due to economic interdependency: 'The ideological expression of these interlocking economic relationships was familial corporativeness which may have led to the suppression of interfamilial conflict, including the resort to divorce' (1980: 97).

24 After the cessation of Fanny Richomme's *Journal des femmes* in 1837, there was a second *Journal des femmes*, which lasted from 1840 to 1851, edited by Juliette Lormeau. This chapter looks at the first permutation of the journal.

as does their directive narrative voice(s) urging female readers to adopt particular approaches to housekeeping and to follow specific advice in order to best conform to the projected ideal of wife and mother. These domestic journals, comprising an encyclopaedia of tips and wisdom, reflect a change of tack from the more egalitarian writer–reader relationship evidenced in earlier French women’s journals. The fundamentally dialogic nature of earlier writer–reader exchanges transmutes into a more explicitly hierarchical model, albeit one whose tone is cajoling and encouraging and which presents itself as solely having the reader’s interests at heart. In other words, these journals ‘mother’ mothers, nurturing them, teaching them, reinforcing their moral obligations. As it becomes established, *Le Journal des femmes* characterises itself as fulfilling a vital pedagogical role vis-à-vis its female readership, in that its very existence implicitly points to the many shortcomings and inadequacies of that readership. In this sense, the journal epitomises the paradox we have seen at the heart of the women’s press: while its readership is presumed to possess certain quasi-essentialist qualities related to its female nature, such qualities require either continuous reinforcement or expansion through the nurturing sustenance offered by the journal. In her work *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800–1914*, Margaret Beetham highlights this paradox, which is particularly pronounced in the domestic journal owing to its more overtly instructive format. Discussing later examples of the domestic women’s magazine in England, she observes that the women’s magazine,

has taken their [women’s] gender as axiomatic. Yet that femininity is always represented in the magazines as *fractured*, not least because it is simultaneously assumed as given and as still to be achieved. Becoming the woman you are is a difficult project for which the magazine has characteristically provided recipes, patterns, narratives and models of the self. (1996: 1; emphasis added)

Indeed, the recurrent emphasis on the requisite assimilation of multifarious ‘figurations of the feminine’ promoted by different women’s journals can be seen to point up the inherent instability of *any* notion of female essence – and thus the potential recuperation of these figurations for a more feminist agenda. In other words, the fact that female identity is ‘fractured’ and needs constant shoring up reveals how ‘unnatural’ so many of these roles are for female readers. This instability is further highlighted by the frequency of publication – in other words, by the quasi-Butlerian need for the constant and regular repetition of normative gender performances in order to sustain credibility in the models promoted. Journals such as *Le Journal des femmes* highlight the increasingly rigid yet tenuous ideological positioning of woman as domestic and familial nurturer through their constant provision of instructions and information relating to



household management, a positioning that would subsequently take the more explicitly materialistic form of the recommended purchasing of particular performative accessories in the form of consumer goods in order to further enhance women's role as quintessential homemaker.

While reflecting aspects of the heterogeneous form of women's journals generally – including, as this chapter remarks, the expression of feminist-leaning sympathies, albeit in a more attenuated, 'normalised' form than its Saint-Simonian contemporary, *La Femme libre*, which will be examined in Chapter 5 – *Le Journal des femmes* is a fundamentally bourgeois, Christian journal targeting a well-off readership. Despite its religious affiliations, the journal seems more concerned with women achieving salvation through domestic perfection than through religious conviction. From 1832 to 1835, this bi-monthly journal was edited by Fanny Richomme and cost 60 francs a year or 2 francs 50 per issue for subscribers, making it an expensive purchase. The journal explicitly acknowledges its expense (4 May 1833) and thus implicitly interpellates its intended wealthy, bourgeois readership, but justifies it through the elevated costs incurred by the inclusion of quality engravings and lithographs and by its editing processes.<sup>25</sup> The journal was financed by a *société d'actions* and was available by subscription through particular booksellers, as listed in its first edition.

*Le Journal des femmes* was written by a group of well-educated, middle-class women who sought to improve French women's social standing by urging the female reader to reject the decadent, frivolous image of French women perpetuated during the Directory and to prove her intellectual kudos and maternal worth by showcasing both her writerly and domestic talents. In an editorial approach resembling that adopted by predecessors such as *Le Journal des dames* and by its contemporary *La Femme libre*, the majority of the articles in the journal are women-authored and letters from readers often form its first article. In this sense, the journal fulfils a key aim expressed in its prospectus, and one that has distinct pro-female sympathies: 'Le but de ce recueil est de faire connaître les ouvrages des femmes. Rédigé par elles, il devient l'organe de leurs vœux, le dépositaire de leurs pensées' (5 May 1832, p. 17). *Le Journal des femmes* employs the term 'ouvrages' in its broadest sense in order to designate all female-authored compositions, indicating that the very act of expressing oneself in writing entails both personal and

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25 In *Histoire de la presse féminine en France*, Sullerot also comments on the relative expense of the journal: 'Remarquons tout d'abord qu'à sa fondation c'était un journal très cher: 15 francs par trimestre cela fait 60 francs par an [...]. Le numéro revient à l'abonnée à 2,50. La journée de travail d'une ouvrière de la couture était alors payée entre 1,2 et 1,5 francs si celle-ci était habile et travaillait 10 à 12 heures. On réalise mal l'énorme disparité de niveau de vie que cela représente' (1966: 169).

political repercussions for French women during this historical period. The journal foregrounds the importance of providing women writers and readers with a vehicle through which to express their thoughts and beliefs without feeling obliged to justify such typically 'unfeminine' conduct; the earlier editions of the journal often focus on encouraging women to assume responsibility for their actions, to be treated – and to treat themselves – as capable, rational adults.

The fundamental objective of *Le Journal des femmes* is that its principal subject – in terms of both topics discussed and writerly origins – should be women, an objective it seeks to realise by appealing to women writers and journalists to provide articles for future editions: 'Ce n'est pas pour t'offrir les oeuvres de ces messieurs que nous l'avons créé, mais pour bien te faire connaître celles de ces dames, leur manière de voir, d'envisager les choses' (4 May 1833, p. 246).<sup>26</sup> This politicised assertion also points up the relative invisibility of women-authored texts and the journal's endeavour to fill such literary and journalistic lacunae, as well as positing the existence of a specifically female perspective or 'othered' worldview. In the same edition, Madame de Savignac writes (perhaps over-)sanguinely about the current profile of women writers in France, who she views as constituting an increasingly important literary force – thanks in no small part to the journal's nurturing and progressive approach towards women authors and to its general valorisation of women as women, echoing the key formative role earlier journals such as *Le Journal des dames* played in encouraging women's writerly talents:

*Le Journal des Femmes* a été le premier à nous tendre la main, et nous devons le dire, sans avoir la prétention d'en rapporter la gloire à notre journal, depuis un an les talens de femmes ont été de plus en plus recherchés. M. George Sand est redevenu madame Sand. Loin que les femmes soient obligées de se cacher aujourd'hui sous un nom masculin, ce sont les hommes qui nous font l'honneur de se déguiser en femmes. (p. 260)

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26 As Chapter 3 observes, female-only relationships are often portrayed as riven by petty jealousies and insecurities in the early French women's press, and the journal's striking use of the 'tu' pronoun points up its desire to initiate an amicable, gender-based solidarity among French women. *Le Journal des femmes* (7 July 1832) acknowledges that it too has had to defend its decision to be a principally female-run publication and to counter the criticism that women are both too superficial and too divisive to manage a periodical successfully (quoted in Laure Adler's *A l'aube du féminisme: Les premières journalistes [1830–1850]* [1979: 87]): 'On dit que notre journal ne prendra pas, qu'il est mort-né, que des femmes ne parviendront jamais à s'entendre, qu'elles pourraient, peut-être, à tout prendre, composer un recueil d'hebdomadaire curieux et piquant, mais qu'il faudrait absolument qu'elles eussent un homme pour le diriger.'

The esteem in which female authorship is held is repeatedly extended to the female reader herself. The journal explicitly invites provincial women readers to write in, maintaining that women have previously lacked the confidence to express their opinion publicly and that *Le Journal des femmes* provides them with a timely and supportive forum in which to do so. In this respect, it plays a pivotal role in blurring the boundaries between writer and reader, in playing down the significance of class, of the urban/rural divide and of further qualitative differences separating the professional and lay writer, thereby helping to realise the sorority and feminocentric (self-)representation it seeks to promote.<sup>27</sup>

Ostensibly echoing the educational objectives of its contemporary *La Femme libre* and preempting that of its successor *Le Conseiller des dames* by foregrounding the importance of educating and valorising its female readers, *Le Journal des femmes* repeatedly highlights the primacy of providing French women with a better education, even if its main 'pedagogical' content appears to revolve around improving women's knowledge of the domestic economy in order that they might better contribute to the smooth functioning of home, family and, ultimately, nation. The journal's conception of marriage reflects its overall utilitarian bent, perceiving it more as a form of micro-economy rather than a relationship based on love as exemplified by the earlier Revolutionary emphasis on a companionate, emotionally supportive union, and one which, along with motherhood, provides woman with a key source of 'professional' satisfaction; the ephemeral, distortive nature of passionate sentiment is considered incompatible with the constancy and *sang-froid* required to organise and educate a family effectively. The journal's subtitle – 'gymnase littéraire' – intimates the intellectual content that it seeks to offer to its female readership in the form of numerous literary extracts and reviews, as well as by its inclusion of short plays and historical anecdotes. Nonetheless, its overriding objective is that of providing women with the requisite knowledge to better understand those subject areas with which they come into daily contact, areas including botany, domestic science and cooking. As is often the case with the women's press, theoretical discussions of the journal's view on the

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27 In later editions, this journal's most evident successor, *Le Conseiller des dames*, includes a 'petite correspondance' section, in which it answers particular queries sent in by readers from different geographical locations, as the role of the women's press as confidante and advisor becomes more established: 'HABAS. – Nous sommes heureux d'apprendre que notre journal est pour vous un ami, qui vous console de votre éloignement de Paris. Nous ferons notre possible pour qu'il en soit toujours ainsi. Vous recevrez prochainement les initiales demandées' (February 1855; original emphasis), or 'Mme B., A AMIENS – Nous donnerons la recette de l'eau de Botot [a make of mouth wash] dans notre prochaine livraison' (July 1855; original emphasis).

desired constituents of women's 'education' paint them in optimistically broad brush strokes, while their actual manifestation in the journal takes the form of instruction in a limited range of domestic skills and topics. In this sense, women are encouraged to perfect their domestic skills and knowledge (and consequently marital and maternal value) as a means of achieving 'personal' fulfilment through efficient household and family management.

The journal posits that any improvement in women's intellectual capacity and knowledge would be beneficial at both national level – educating the mother would educate the motherland – and at familial level, providing French men with interesting wives with whom to engage in stimulating discussion. While it would be naïve to view this drive to contain women within the domestic arena as ideologically benign, it is important to bear in mind the relative position of French women within both domestic and national economies during this historical period and thus to interpret the effort to promote middle-class women's active, intellectual participation within the family unit from a more positive perspective than that initially offered by our twenty-first-century perception of domestic labour. The female contributors to the journal, like those of *Le Journal des dames* before them, were from relatively privileged sectors of French society and, if their 'political' demands are less obviously radical than those espoused by their Saint-Simonian contemporaries, their writing and their desire to improve French women's social standing and self-worth are nonetheless imbued with a distinct feminist hue. The journal can be seen to propagate a gentler brand of feminism, in which middle-class women are encouraged to perfect themselves and improve their education, albeit one resolutely anchored in the domestic sciences but which characterises the home as 'part of a larger civic space' (Smart 2011: 10). Laure Adler draws attention to the ideological context of this particular form of feminism, contrasting it with the more action-driven, militant feminism of the working-class Saint Simonians (although, given the patriarchal pressure brought to bear on French women in the first decades of the nineteenth century, her use of the verb 'décider' is somewhat misplaced). With reference to the *bourgeoise* of the period, she states:

Car c'est de son foyer, où elle décide de s'enfermer, qu'elle arrive à revendiquer. C'est le prix qu'il faudra payer pour que, de théorie professée dans un petit groupe de prolétaires qui la pratiquaient, l'émancipation devienne une idée qui imprènera une fraction de la société. A cette transformation de la vision de l'émancipation, le *Journal des Femmes* a énormément contribué. Pendant cinq ans, ne s'adressant qu'aux femmes, il fabriquera numéro après numéro une image de la nouvelle femme bourgeoise qui, pour se faire respecter, doit être un peu émancipée. (1979: 84)

The wonderfully oxymoronic 'un peu émancipée' perfectly encapsulates the reputable version of feminism that finds articulation in *Le Journal des femmes*. As the introductory section to this chapter remarks, French women's perceived domestic empowerment during this period is often reflected in their portrayal as governors of their own *petite république*. What may appear as a compensatory lexical gesture is duplicated across the Channel a few decades later when referring to middle-class English women in a similar position, as highlighted in the *sine qua non* of all domestic instruction manuals, Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, which reminds the domestic mistress that she is 'the Alpha and the Omega in the government of her establishment; and that it is by her conduct that its whole internal policy is regulated' (1861; 1982: 18).

The journal's very first article spotlights the significance of French women's education, arguing that women would not be forced to resort to underhand intrigue in order to achieve their objectives if they received a proper and comprehensive schooling. The article begins and ends with the following unattributed quotation, which is presented as a motto to which French women and society should adhere: 'Appelée à vivre de moitié avec le cœur de son époux, elle doit vivre aussi de moitié avec son esprit.'<sup>28</sup> Reiterating the arguments put forward by numerous earlier publications, the journal is at pains to emphasise that the occasional boredom-induced instances of women's duplicity and idleness would be quelled if they received a greater moral, spiritual and intellectual education. While clearly embracing a Christian ethos, the journal's earlier editions portray women as deserving not only greater educational opportunities but also greater civil rights than is currently the case, although such political progressiveness gradually dissipates as the journal becomes more established. *Le Journal des femmes* recognises that some progress has taken place in French women's education and, in a remark that echoes the Saint-Simonian insistence on complementarity, argues that their education requires further evolution if woman is to accompany man as his partner (the preposition is highly revealing – woman should be equal, but not *that* equal): 'car partout où il se place, ne doit-elle pas se placer après lui, comme la moitié inséparable de son être?' (5 May 1832, p. 4).

As this study has demonstrated, such an expression of radical resolve within ideologically conventional parameters is a frequent feature of the early

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28 In a later edition, *Le Journal des femmes* attributes the renewed interest in women's education and in the importance of a public education system generally to the Revolution of 1830 (30 June 1832, p. 193). As Chapter 3 details, this interest culminated in the 'Loi Pelet', which stated that all *communes* have at least one primary school for girls, a law which, in turn, built on the 'Loi Guizot' of 1833, which decreed that all *communes* with more than 500 inhabitants have a public primary school.

French women's press. In this respect, the journal epitomises the nineteenth-century emphasis in France on woman as facilitator and medium between the individual and society, between the domestic realm and the public arena: women's education continues to be promoted above all for its contribution to the common good rather than as a conduit for individual satisfaction: 'Il est donc vrai que l'un des moyens les plus sûrs de travailler au bonheur de la société est d'agrandir l'existence morale de la femme, de développer largement son esprit et sa raison' (5 May 1832, p. 3). Yet such a notion of 'common good' nonetheless figures women as active – and intellectual – participants in and contributors to the progress of French society.

*Le Journal des femmes* recommends that women be taught basic science, given their constant, if cursory, contact with its domestic manifestations in their everyday lives: 'Il n'est pas une femme de chambre qui n'assiste chaque jour aux phénomènes les plus intéressans du développement de la vapeur, et les plus grandes machines de l'Angleterre se meuvent d'après la même force qui soulève le couvercle d'une cafetière pleine d'eau bouillante' (first edition, p. 26). Even if this return to first principles is an accurate one, the parallel drawn between the scientific alchemy required to understand the functioning of a mere 'cafetière' and the largest machines of the world's most industrialised nation smacks of a desperate attempt to valorise simple domestic tasks through hyperbolic comparisons. The exciting and rapidly changing technical and industrial developments that characterise this historical epoch are reflected in the journal's repeated popularisation of scientific discoveries and processes – whether physical, chemical or botanical – as if to validate the housewife's daily tasks and its own instructive role as household manual. What may seem straightforward domestic or culinary activities to the untrained and uneducated eye are actually complex chemical transmogrifications: '[I]a chimie fournit à l'économie domestique une foule de ressources pour multiplier les substances alimentaires, et de procédés pour les conserver' (*ibid.*). In addition, the journal has a rubric entitled 'Economie domestique' – 'L'économie domestique est une science à laquelle les femmes ne peuvent échapper' (12 May 1832, p. 47) – which provides household hints on how to prevent gloves being torn or on the most effective means of achieving the 'conservation des petits pois' (14 July 1832, p. 258). In their work *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, Hilary Fraser et al. remark upon the domestic origins of the term economy: 'As Mary Poovey explains in *Making a Social Body*, the meaning of the term *economy* was originally linked exclusively to household management' (2003: 102; original emphasis). By classifying non-intellectual, repetitive manual labour under the progressive and educational label of science, the journal continually endeavours to extol the value of women's household tasks.

The commercial nous and innovation of *Le Journal des femmes* lie in its transformation of women's quasi-obligatory association with the domestic into an educative and specialist 'profession' and in its belief that all relevant topics should, therefore, receive positive and extensive coverage in women's journals. Female readers are encouraged to devote themselves to personalising the domestic domain – thereby investing themselves all the more completely in it – and to managing it with ever-more-perfectible skilfulness and discretion. *Le Journal des femmes'* eulogisation of the pleasures to be had in a smoothly functioning domestic economy can equally be seen to encompass the financial implications of the term in its characterisation of middle-class women as thrifty producers of homemade items – the edition of 23 June 1832, for example, contains detailed instructions on how to make a handbag (p. 188). Given the relative wealth of the journal's readership, this promotion of 'cottage industry' products can be viewed as a form of *divertissement* aimed at keeping women busy with time-consuming tasks, thereby further 'professionalising' the personal. Throughout the journal's publication, the overriding emphasis on the domestic combines both the educational and the utilitarian, as in the column entitled 'Art culinaire', which details the historical and cultural origins of various foodstuffs or beverages such as tea, as well as providing practical instructions on how to make dishes ranging from omelette to plum pudding. Indeed, the 'avant-garde' content of this journal may also be seen in its inclusion of a recipe rubric, which forms a staple component of many women's journals today.

If, as this chapter suggests, feminism takes on a more domesticated, middle-class permutation in *Le Journal des femmes*, it is one that continues to emphasise women's potential moral and pedagogical power over men and children (and other, working-class women) and endeavours to instil a sense of self-worth in its female readers.<sup>29</sup> It also positions woman as someone who acts upon her environment, rather than merely being the acted-upon object of others; she is the proactive, organised manager and advisor of the domestic realm, no longer someone who merely beautifies herself but who is an efficient and empathic 'do-gooder'. The logical development of women's figuration as nurturing, maternalistic carer, devoted to the wellbeing of others, is to extend that benevolence to those in need outside the home. As further evidence of its class and religious affinities, *Le Journal des femmes* (30 March 1833, p. 1) also promotes women's engagement in charities and

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29 The limitations of the journal's feminism are apparent in an article on women's rights which presents women as delicate appendages best protected from the masculine fray by their continuing inhabitation of the domestic realm, 7 July, 1832, p. 237: 'Dans la vie politique, les femmes sont réduites à ce rôle de conseillers. Heureuse impuissance de se mêler aux tumultueux débats où leur délicatesse se fanerait, où la douceur de leur voix s'altérerait, où leur influence, toute de paix et de tendresse, serait méconnue!'

charitable activities, activities that constituted one of the rare means by which women could leave the domestic realm, albeit one which risked categorising them as the 'angels of virtue' so elevated by bourgeois morality.<sup>30</sup> Like the promotion of female consumerism examined in Chapter 3, this ideologically sanctioned philanthropic activity can be seen as increasing women's access to the public realm, and thus to the potential genesis of a political conscience.

Religion formed the backdrop to many of the charitable events in which bourgeois women participated, thereby providing women with the opportunity to enjoy a more varied and 'liberating' gamut of social roles. The general increase in pro-religious sentiment – as illustrated by the growing number of women joining the holy orders from the early to mid-nineteenth century – may partly be attributed to the Church's association with the promotion of approved 'virtuous' activities that permitted women to leave the home. Altruistic activity towards those less well-off was clearly empowering for the middle-class women partaking in it, in that charity work not only extended their limited experiential horizons but also enabled them to occupy the moral high ground. Mrs Beeton's *Household Management* further points up the surreptitiously didactic and ideologically coercive function of such 'social' visits – just as domestic journals 'mother' middle-class mothers with their directive instruction, the latter endeavour to 'educate' lower-class women in turn: 'Great advantages may result from visits paid to the poor [...] there will be opportunities for advising and instructing them, in a pleasant and unobtrusive manner, in cleanliness, industry, cookery and good management' (1861; 1982: 6).<sup>31</sup> That religion-based charitable action facilitated women's engagement in a variety of 'public' activities undermines the common perception of women as oppressed by the Catholic Church, a

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30 Margaret H. Darrow (1979: 52) cites the case of Madame de Ségur in order to illustrate the rigid parameters governing French women's social participation during this time: 'Her only activity outside her family was her charity work.'

31 For those working-class women on the receiving end of such charity, the effects are less straightforwardly beneficial. In her article, 'Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel' (1992: 292), Elizabeth Langland differentiates between a male monetary career and a female social one, and argues that such philanthropic activities undertaken by women, including visiting the poor, serve above all to rigidify class divisions – rather than increase gender solidarity – and to boost the ego and moral rectitude of the middle-class do-gooder, remarking that 'the private realm was increasingly implicated in such political agendas as class management'. In other words, the middle-class readers of *Le Journal des femmes* risk reifying class hierarchies through such charitable acts, which ultimately increase their complicity in their own oppression; their transient sense of 'class' and moral superiority over the recipients of such charitable action no doubt serves to attenuate any latent frustration at their own 'gendered' inferiority.



perception that, as Chapter 1 details, was predominant above all during the period of the French Revolution, when religion was considered anathema to the establishment of a new social order. As McMillan comments:

The doctrine of separate spheres implied that women were restricted to the private sphere, but in practice, through the Church, whether as the *saintes soeurs* of the congregations or the *femmes fortes* of the confraternities and charitable organisations, many women gained access to the public sphere. Many effectively became career women, while others gained access to a recognised and respected space of female sociability. (2000: 55)

Equally, this religious affiliation was for others a heartfelt response to the secularisation of France and fulfilled a need for religious reassurance following the turbulent years of the Revolution. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, as the nineteenth century gets underway, the growing interest in, and espousal of, different forms of religion, while reflecting the national concern with the moral renaissance of France, becomes increasingly associated with female liberation rather than oppression, with forms of political radicalism and anti-establishment – particularly anti-patriarchal – sentiments.

After merging with *Le Protée* in 1835, *Le Journal des femmes* gradually loses whatever political impetus it once possessed and – in the manner of many of its contemporaries – turns its focus to, among other traditionally feminine topics, fashion and literature, the latter often taking the form of saccharin tales of morality. Fashion had previously merited the occasional mention in *Le Journal des femmes* but from the resolutely pragmatic and family-oriented middle-class perspective of 'l'hygiène, la raison, le bon goût' (5 May 1832, p. 29). Fashion's ongoing association with the decadence and immorality viewed as endemic to the *Ancien Régime* – and with the (female) physical body – obliges the journal to position its growing interest in *la mode* within clear moralistic, aesthetic and physical parameters of self-improvement; 'hygiène', the contemporary definition of which related solely to physical health, is presented under a distinctly medical aegis.<sup>32</sup> (Its increasing prominence in the contemporary French women's press is no doubt partly due to the devastating effect of the 1832 cholera epidemic, which killed 20,000 Parisians.)

The journal's gradual espousal of more conventional figurations of femininity is further highlighted in an article that, while validating women's role as producers of art, and thus partly echoing Madame de Savignac's optimism

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32 Sullerot (1966: 182) highlights the role played by the journal's second permutation in preempting the importance accorded the increasing medicalisation of the female body in the women's press generally: 'Cet intérêt pour l'hygiène conduira le deuxième *Journal des Femmes* à confier une rubrique régulière à un médecin. Cette pratique ne devait plus cesser dans les journaux féminins.'

vis-à-vis the predominance of women writers, places woman in the traditional role of inspirational muse and male appendage: 'Ainsi, les femmes ont leur part à la gloire que procurent les lettres et les arts, en même temps qu'elles embellissent et charment notre destinée; elles ont donc un double droit à notre hommage' (5 August 1836, p. 85). As the first-person possessive highlights, *Le Journal des femmes*' renewed objectification of women may be aggravated by the fact that its editor at this stage is male, a certain E. Champeaux whom Sullerot describes with unreserved disdain as 'ce Napoléon de la presse de modes qui fut partout, dirigea toutes les petites feuilles, et signa tous ses échos, qui sont d'une totale futilité, "E. C ..."' (1966: 168). Later editions of *Le Journal des femmes* include fashion engravings and advertisements, both for specific products and for other journals such as *La Presse* (1 July 1836, p. 16). Intimating the journal's financial precariousness and mirroring the solution adopted to tackle the monetary troubles of its predecessor *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, advertisements that initially appeared only on the last page, and then both the penultimate and last, not only begin to increase the percentage of copy they occupy but are reduced in size in order that more can be placed on one page. This fluidity of journalistic copy and format continues throughout 1836 accompanied by various 'A nos lectrices' interventions, highlighting changes of address or layout for the journal, pointing up the journal's ongoing struggle for financial viability. In the edition of 30 September 1836, the journal's comment on its impressive six-year longevity smacks more of desperation than a genuine pride in its achievements: 'Le *Journal des Femmes* n'est pas une création nouvelle; il compte aujourd'hui six années d'existence. Que d'entreprises orgueilleusement vantées n'arrivent pas à un si long terme ...!' (p. 209). While its own demise was imminent, the future of the domestic press was assured: the cause was to be warmly embraced by a raft of subsequent French women's journals, including *Le Conseiller des dames*.

#### LE CONSEILLER DES DAMES (1847–1892)

THIS MONTHLY JOURNAL'S SUBTITLE, *Journal d'économie domestique et de travaux d'aiguille*, immediately signals its innovative contribution to the history of the French women's press, and thus its brief consideration in the current chapter, despite the majority of its issues falling outside this study's chronological parameters. This contribution lies above all in its valorisation of the acquisition of suitable practical skills related to cooking, needlework and household management, as specified in its prospectus – 'tout ce qui se rattache à la science si importante qui fait seule une bonne maîtresse de maison' (first edition, p. 2) – a valorisation that had been all but invisible until the appearance

of *Le Journal des femmes* but which would be subsequently and enthusiastically espoused by a large section of the women's press. The journal has both male and female contributors, 'même si toutefois les plumes féminines restent les plus régulières. [...] *Le Conseiller des dames* est donc largement « mené » et élaboré par des femmes'.<sup>33</sup> As its title intimates, its content is nonetheless acutely class-specific, aimed at providing a 'rulebook' of the appropriate conduct befitting its wealthy middle-class readership: 'Placez derrière vos convives un passage de moquette, pour qu'ils ne soient pas incommodés par le bruit des pas des domestiques' (first edition, p. 8). The journal's frequent mention of servants, as well as the expensive objects – 'peintures de prix' (first edition, p. 7) – and household goods they are employed to look after, points to its own privileged readership (although, with an annual subscription of 10 francs for Paris and 12 for the provinces, it is significantly cheaper than *Le Journal des femmes*). While the advice proffered by the journal is typically intended to be implemented by the domestic staff rather than the *maîtresse de maison* herself, occasionally only she can be relied upon to fulfil certain tasks adequately: '*Le thé* doit être fait par vous, non par les domestiques. Les théés noirs conviennent à un plus grand nombre de tempéraments, donnez-leur la préférence' (December 1847, p. 36; original emphasis). The reader is figured as a type of willing 'princess in the tower', inhabiting a gentle – and genteel – domestic idyll over which she reigns supreme, dictating domestic policy to a fleet of often gauche, ignorant servants.

The journal also contains short literary extracts, musical scores and embroidery patterns, but is fundamentally focused not only on 'housewifery' but on mothering; various articles detail childhood ailments and how to cure them, with later editions including the rubric 'Hygiène des enfants', which provides information on, among other things, the ideal timing and constituents of breakfast for young children (June 1850, p. 253) and contains engravings depicting happy family scenes with children alongside their mother.<sup>34</sup> The

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33 See Antoine Chloé, 'Un journal féminin au milieu du 19e siècle: Etude du *Conseiller des Dames et des Demoiselles* de 1847 à 1853', <http://www.enssib.fr/bibliotheque-numerique/documents/56877-un-journal-feminin-au-milieu-du-19e-siecle-etude-du-conseiller-des-dames-et-des-demoiselles-de-1847-a-1853.pdf>, accessed 30 April 2018. The journal lengthened its title in 1852.

34 The increasing depiction of children in engravings coincided with the period under study's growing consideration of them as individuals in their own right, as beings to be nurtured and stimulated rather than as mini-adults scarcely worthy of parental attention. As Popiel (2008: 85) comments with reference to earlier fashion engravings in *Le Journal des dames et des modes*: 'Initially, children were like the books, musical instruments, fireplaces, or horses that also appeared in these engravings: ornaments to show off the clothing, not themselves items of focus.'

figurations of the feminine appearing in this journal, while highly class-specific, are presented as an ideal of feminine perfection and domestic bliss to which all classes should aspire. In her work *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong points up the gap between intra-textual ideological representations of domesticity in eighteenth-century conduct manuals and extra-textual reality, a gap this chapter has previously highlighted with respect to the idealised journalistic representations of upper- and middle-class women's charitable work: 'In bringing into being a concept of the household on which socially hostile groups felt they could all agree, the domestic ideal helped create the fiction of horizontal affiliations that only a century later could be said to have materialised as an economic reality' (1987: 69). In other words, the occasionally discordant feminine figurations of the early women's press can be seen to highlight the role of that press in forging and promoting particular figurations, rather than solely reflecting those currently predominating in French society at large. The early French women's domestic press constructed an idealised version of domesticity which it presented as universally desirable.

This journal illustrates the growing awareness in early women's journals of the need to carve out a specific market niche in order to highlight their own unique selling point in relation to potential competitors. The highly developed market awareness of *Le Conseiller des dames* extends beyond its French sister publications and manifests itself in repeated comparisons with *The Lady's Magazine* in England. The prospectus of *Le Conseiller des dames* also makes clear that it differentiates itself from more luxurious, escapist women's magazines, characterising its content as predominantly practical and useful and as being suitable for both mothers and daughters (again highlighting an awareness of the importance of constantly expanding its projected readership). The journal is similarly at pains to highlight that its pragmatic, utilitarian bent has little in common with an earlier upper-class literary journal that had become synonymous with pretentious social aspirations and vacuous literary debates, as epitomised by the pastoral poetry penned by Antoinette Deshoulières: 'INTRODUCTION AU CONSEILLER DES DAMES': 'Le temps n'est plus où un madrigal du *Mercurie galant* suffisait aux délices de la cour et de la ville et où on s'entretenait un mois entier de l'idylle nouvelle composée par la tendre Deshoulières' (first edition, p. 2, November; original emphasis). Nonetheless, the journal strives to combine the content of a more 'empirical' women's domestic journal with the recognition that women's social status should be raised and their intellectual abilities not only acknowledged but nurtured, as illustrated in its opening edition, where it makes mention of forthcoming articles by such well-known literary figures as Honoré de Balzac or Victor

Hugo. In other words, the journal's 'scientific' domestic slant is supplemented by its literary content. Indeed, a later edition in October 1850 provides a detailed 'Étude biographique' of Balzac following his recent death (pp. 360–7).<sup>35</sup>

*Le Conseiller des dames* contains a proliferation of tips on how to draw up menus (later editions include sample menus such as 'Dîner de Famille de la quinzaine de Pâques' [April 1850, p. 165]) and how to best serve food (including recipes for 'cross-buns, ces gâteaux anglais que l'on mange en Angleterre le matin du Vendredi-Saint' [*ibid.*]), as well as beauty advice on skin- and haircare, providing further 'recipes' for homemade beauty remedies, such as 'RECETTE POUR FAIRE DE LA POMMADE DE CONCOMBRES' (January 1848, p. 73; original emphasis), foregrounding the predominant focus on a natural approach to beauty rather than one based on 'unnatural' cosmetics, with their connotations of deceit and artificiality. It emphasises that numerous everyday household plants and vegetables can fulfil a panoply of different culinary or medical functions. As Kathy Peiss remarks in her article 'Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women's Identity': 'From at least the seventeenth century, skin-improving cosmetics were part of a "kitchen-physic", the household manufacture of medicines and therapeutic substances long viewed as women's domain' (1996: 314).

The journal's eclectic, yet fundamentally domestic, subject matter closely resembles that of today's women's press, with its numerous 'conseils' presented in the same self-evident, quasi-avuncular tone: 'Cette pommade [de concombres], comme vous le savez, donne à la peau de la souplesse et une grande fraîcheur. – Rien n'est meilleur pour les cas de boutons, d'ardeurs, de gerçures, etc. etc.' (December 1847, p. 73). Like that of its predecessor *Le Journal des femmes*, this journal's approach to domesticity is overwhelmingly practical, if not 'manual', with a focus extending beyond the mere promotion of desirable attributes, be they physical or material, to their actual production, whether

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35 As previous chapters have demonstrated, literature and literary extracts have always played a pivotal role in the early French women's press. Marie-Eve Thérénty's (2007) remarks that journalism as we know it today, with its *compte rendu*, objective approach (Mallarmé's oft-cited 'universel reportage') is a relatively modern phenomenon, and that the literary style of writing played a significantly more prominent role in the earliest journalistic writings, pointing up the widespread crossfertilisation of literary and journalistic genres already discussed: 'Le passage du XVIIIe au XIXe siècle dessine d'ailleurs nettement un changement de modèle: le journal s'alimente de moins en moins à la manne rhétorique pour travailler d'autres formes traditionnellement réservées aux gens de lettres: la fiction, la conversation, l'autobiographie ...', pp. 12–13. As Chapter 5 illustrates, that literary bent in turn gives way to a more realist, objective representation of the contemporary social environment in subsequent journals, just as it did previously with the advent of the French Revolution.

this involve the devising of menus for dinner parties or making the dresses to wear when hosting or attending them. As this chapter observes, the inclusion of high-quality sewing patterns for articles of clothing that can actually be worn, rather than purely aesthetically pleasing embroidery patterns, reflects the growing importance accorded to functionality in women's domestic roles generally and constitutes a principal innovation of the early women's press in France. It also pre-empts the increasing commercial desirability of appealing to women from a greater cross section of French society.

In *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914*, Margaret Beetham views the inclusion of sewing patterns in the early women's press as a useful journalistic device employed to minimise any apparent ideological inconsistencies between the conventional emphasis on fashion and woman as desired object typical of women's journals, and the growing social valorisation of the housewife's practical skills, skills that serve to 'democratise' the French women's press. Journals therefore figure women as both resourceful homemaker and vision of aesthetic loveliness, combining proactive subjecthood with static objecthood – indeed, employing the former to bring about the latter:

The paper pattern was a brilliant device for bridging the gap, or rather the gape, between the reader as 'household manager' on one hand and as fashionable lady on the other. It promised the woman as 'practical dress-maker' a means, through her domestic skills, of realising herself as the woman of the fashion-plate. (1996: 76)

The sewing patterns and engravings become more complicated and sophisticated as the journal establishes itself (in later editions, it actually prints reproductions of paintings and engravings, including one of the Virgin Mary in the September edition of 1854, which further intimates the conservative readership of the journal and the conventionally feminine figurations it promotes. The Abbé d'Aurigny writes an introduction to this edition explaining why Mary is such a positive figurehead and relating the history of her 'cult' in France [pp. 323–5]). The journal's overriding traditionalism is given unambiguous expression in a remark that refers to the contemporary political women's journal *La Voix des femmes*, discussed in Chapter 5. In the June 1848 edition, *La Voix des femmes* is mentioned in an article written by the Marquise de Vieuxbois, in which she rather half-heartedly and condescendingly praises its editor Eugénie Niboyet after having attended a political meeting hosted by her, yet remains firmly convinced that the female domestic domain and male political one should not be permitted to cross-pollinate – indeed, to do so constitutes a crime *contre nature*: '*La Voix des femmes* veut nous donner des libertés inconnues, le droit politique, le droit

administratif, le droit d'élection, le droit d'administrer les affaires publiques. – Si l'esprit de la rédaction prédomine, nous sommes menacées de devenir électrices, gardes nationales, représentantes du peuple, ou gardiennes de Paris' (p. 230).<sup>36</sup> While there is no doubt that *Le Conseiller des dames* values and respects its female readership and the multi-faceted skills that allow its readers to manage the household economy with such aplomb, it is unable and unwilling to conceptualise them functioning professionally outside of that economy. The early domestic press in France figures woman's place as firmly within the familial and familiar private domain, as influencing the outside 'political' realm by proxy.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the focus of the French women's press during the last years of the eighteenth century and first few decades of the nineteenth was resolutely on marriage and motherhood, with the realm of domesticity presented as constituting women's greatest scope for fulfilment. Rousseau's figuration of woman as angel of the hearth and model of self-sacrificing maternal solicitude found reinforcement in the journalistic representations of women contained within the French women's domestic press. During a period when French society was seen as in urgent need of regeneration and guidance by a firm moral and maternal hand, women were placed at the domestic helm. This is resolutely not to deny these journals' role in figuring woman as *active* contributors to the successful functioning of home and nation. As Claire Goldberg Moses remarks in *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*: 'Women were indispensable to men's happiness and, in recognition, Rousseau's men loved and respected them. Women's innate aptitude for love and selfless devotion thus assured them dignity, respect, and happiness. In some ways, Rousseau reads more like women's defenders [*sic*] in the earlier *querelle des femmes* than their detractors [*sic*]' (1984: 5). While denying the existence – real or potential – of equality between the sexes, Rousseau foregrounded women's civilising influence and their key role in nurturing children, and consequently the future citizens of France – and, importantly, this was applicable to women of all social classes. This valorisation of women's contribution to familial and national economies partly accounts for his popularity among contemporary French women, a popularity not easily understood when viewed through a twenty-first-century feminist lens.

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36 Like *Le Cabinet des modes* before it, *Le Conseiller des dames* makes clear its post-revolutionary political affinities and role in the redistribution of wealth: 'C'est donc servir plus sérieusement qu'on ne le croit la cause universelle, c'est venir en aide efficacement au commerce national, que de continuer ses habitudes d'hier. [...] [P]uisque le moindre ruban d'une coiffure, le plus petit entremets d'un repas font vivre l'ouvrière et encouragent la production' (April 1848, p. 162).

In a manner similar to the fashion journals examined in Chapter 3, the French women's press examined in this chapter designates French women as proactive participants – whether in choosing suitable marriage partners or in applying their newly acquired domestic knowledge to the successful management of home and family – rather than solely as attractive appendages. Both inside and outside the home – whether receiving visitors, dealing with tradesmen and other professionals or partaking in charity work – the bourgeois housewife took part in a range of activities that demanded a particular knowledge and skill set. Certain areas of potential contiguity transcended the dichotomised segregation between the male public domain and the female private one. In her chapter 'The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France', Leora Auslander describes the pivotal role played by the *bourgeoise's* mastery of multiple cultural discourses in order to engage productively with the public realm:

Wives received their extended families, a wide social circle, and their husband's business acquaintances. Social and business networks overlapped; the workday, therefore, did not necessarily end when the man of the household crossed the threshold but rather when the last guest departed. Likewise, wives' afternoons were not merely for pleasure and friendship but also for the consolidation of relationships with economic implications. Women needed sophisticated social skills and literary, musical, and artistic culture in order to be successful wives. (1996: 83)

Equally, while middle-class French women were still very much defined in relation to their marital and maternal roles, the early domestic press repeatedly advocates the benefits of autodidacticism in order to increase women's knowledge and confidence in areas related to the domestic realm in particular and to greater self-expression in general, an advocacy which has formed a staple of the French women's press since its inception. Women were encouraged to perceive their marital and, above all, maternal roles as providing a key contribution to French civic consciousness and nation-building, allowing them to experience both familial and national involvement and thus interlinking these spheres, which may thus be seen less as parallel than overlapping.

The journals studied in this chapter bookend the most politically stagnant period in the history of the early French women's press. As Jeanne Brunereau comments in *Presse féminine et critique littéraire de 1800 à 1830: Leurs rapports avec l'histoire des femmes*:

Pendant près de trente ans, et surtout à partir de 1804 et jusqu'en 1818, hormis l'expérience de *l'Athénée des Dames* et quelques revendications émises adroitement, dans *le Journal des Dames et des Modes*, les femmes qui tentent de



contester, devront taire leurs exigences d'égalité et de dignité. Si la liberté de la presse est un droit, celui-ci a été, de toute évidence, peu appliqué à la presse féminine. (2000: 18)

Yet the figurations of the feminine in the journals examined in this chapter *do* provide counternarratives to the prevailing 'separate spheres' ideology, not only through their repeated imbrication of private and public in representations of Frenchwomen's actual sphere of influence, but also in their interpellation of the female reader as (pro)active consumer in the marriage market and the reader who is housewife or mother as potential *femme-auteur*. In other words, these domestic journals also promote non-conformist models of womanhood within their putatively conventional sheaves.

The overall paucity of explicit feminist sentiments expressed during the decades examined in this chapter appears to have acted as a political spur to prick the sides of – principally – Saint-Simonian intent and to encourage other contemporary French women to leave behind the confines of the domestic realm in order to engage in a significantly more combative and wide-ranging feminist struggle for access to greater professional and personal rights, rights that feminist journals sought to extend to women from all walks of life. The journals discussed in the following chapter broaden the range of acceptable roles available to French women in the first half of the nineteenth century, above all through their validation of the public domain of work and their figuration of woman as a multi-faceted individual who has the right to both personal *and* professional satisfaction. Rather than promoting women's education for the good of family and nation, the journals examined in Chapter 5 promote it for the good of a female self, who is urged to move far beyond the patriarchal 'place' reserved for her in the early domestic press, not merely conceptually but literally through her entry into the world of work.



## Reforming the Feminine

### Early Feminist Journals

THIS FINAL CHAPTER analyses the most politically radical figurations of womanhood in the early French women's press, figurations that explicitly advocate women's active participation in the public domain as a means of achieving both personal fulfilment and professional recognition. In the four journals to be looked at here – journals that span a significant portion of the 90-year period in question – woman is above all characterised as an independent, intelligent and fundamentally politicised individual who, rather than be encouraged to remain within the domestic realm, is shown to flourish through interaction and solidarity with (principally female) others in the world of work and politics. While earlier publications may be seen to marry the Horatian binaries of *plaire* and *instruire* with differing degrees of emphasis, the feminist journals examined here are resolutely focused on instruction through social engagement and participation in the extra-domestic world of employment. In these publications, the feminine is figured as a well-rounded, confident individual whose self-worth is dependent on actively using her 'inner' qualities and strengths to bring about social change for women rather than being 'passively' valorised for her outer appearance; indeed, the notion of the journal as a form of lighthearted *divertissement* is conspicuously absent. If part of the appeal of today's women's press still resides in its representation of an idyllic domestic haven sealed off from the vicissitudes of the outside world, the content of the journals examined in this chapter urges readers to participate fully and equally in the public domain and to continually seek to improve women's rights. The overwhelming focus on the more pedagogically and pragmatically oriented *instruction* does not, however, mean that the

moralistic emphasis on *éducation* is completely absent. Particularly in the final journal to be looked at in this study, *La Voix des femmes*, the generic figuration of woman as moral and maternal stalwart – a figuration that has subtended the entire early period of the women’s press – plays a predominant role.

The journals studied in this chapter are thus characterised by an overt feminist agenda, whether in the form of drawing up government petitions and setting up workshops for women workers or in organising public demonstrations in order to raise awareness about specific issues related to women’s rights. As Hilary Fraser et al. remark in *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, the press offers a particularly apposite medium for women’s politicisation, constituting an effective bridge between private instruction and public action:

The great reform movements of the nineteenth century were conducted through the periodical press, as much as in public meetings and proposed legislation, providing a written and visual forum for passionate debate which could often engage those, particularly women, for whom attendance at public meetings was often impossible, while direct representation in parliament was almost completely unavailable. (2003: 200)

As highlighted in Chapter 1, many of the feminist publications immediately following the French Revolution were focused on specific questions of legislative reform vis-à-vis women’s social status, whether legal or educational – or even on sexual liberation proper, as is the case with the first journal to be studied in this chapter. The intensity of expression, inevitable repetition of subject matter and ‘anachronistically’ radical content of these single-subject journals tended to make them of short duration. Subsequent nineteenth-century feminist journals such as *La Femme libre* (1832–34) and in particular *La Voix des femmes* (1848) adopt a less adversarial approach in their expression of feminist objectives, yet, as previous chapters have indicated, this did not spare them from being subjected to criticism and mockery by their contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> While acknowledging the significance of 1789 in forging a feminist tradition that, however fleetingly, promoted equal access to the public sphere,

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1 The perceived sexual licentiousness of the Saint Simonians meant that they were typically viewed as morally suspect, as threatening to the existent social order and stability, a perception which points to the radical nature of much of their thinking around the concept of the family and sexuality. *La Gazette des femmes* (1836–38) exemplifies the condemnatory approach adopted by even liberal journals towards Saint Simonism when discussing its own perception of how French women’s freedom should evolve: ‘[L]ibre, entendez-vous, non de la liberté saint-simonienne, liberté de libertinage et de promiscuité des femmes, mais libre, c’est-à-dire l’égale et l’associée de l’homme, pour former et conserver la famille’ (December 1836, number 6, pp. 183–4; original emphasis).

these later journals represent themselves as having taken on board the violent lessons of the revolutionary past, and their female contributors advocate reason and reconciliation as the most desirable and productive means of achieving their political goals.

If the immediate post-Revolutionary period was characterised by a political optimism, as evidenced by the number of feminist journals and pamphlets published, it is not until the 1830s that feminist journals come to the fore once again. (As this chapter discusses, the sole exception to this pre- and post-nineteenth-century divide is the brief existence of the remarkable *Athénée des dames* in 1808.) The catalyst for this subsequent revival in the fortunes of French feminism can be attributed to two main sources: first, the work of Charles Fourier and the Saint-Simonian philosophy, which promoted greater female emancipation as a prerequisite to human progress; and, second, the effects of urbanisation on French society, which expanded the number of employment opportunities available to women. The writings of Charles Fourier (who, as the Introduction remarks, reputedly coined the term *féminisme* itself), refute any inherent class or gender superiority, advocate a vast shake-up in civil rights and structures in order to facilitate the realisation of this social equality, an equality focused on economic cooperation and *association*, and view the public participation of women as pivotal in promoting it. As the Saint-Simonian journal *La Femme libre* demonstrates, the growing visibility and influence of a female workforce served to promote identification between women and the working classes, thereby further politicising those women workers accessing the public domain. Antony Copley perceives Fourier's belief in the importance of women's economic contribution to an increasingly urbanised society as fundamental to his philosophy and as underpinning his critique of the institution of the family: 'His attack on the family was in large part prompted by the need to release women from family constraints so that they would be free to undertake a variety of new economic and social roles' (1989: 70).

Similarly, Saint Simonism emphasised the importance of re-evaluating women's roles in society and of promoting harmony between the sexes, a harmony that would be aided by allowing women greater sexual and professional expression. The Saint-Simonian movement set up various *maisons de famille*, principally in Paris, that were governed by a 'brother' and 'sister' and in which domestic tasks were organised on a collective basis in order to facilitate women's access to the public sphere of employment. The Saint-Simonian rejection of the traditional allocation of domestic labour to women and their emphasis on the importance of *association* is highlighted in an article in the first issue of *La Femme libre* entitled 'Aux femmes': 'Nouvelle organisation du ménage, reposant sur l'association au lieu du morcellement: aujourd'hui la

plus grande partie des femmes est absorbée par les soins du ménage, ce qui est pour elles un esclavage, car cela les empêche de se livrer à toutes les carrières auxquelles elles peuvent être aptes' (pp. 204–5).

While there is no doubt that other contemporary journals, such as *Le Journal des femmes* (1832–37), as discussed in Chapter 4, give voice to feminist sentiments and support improvements to women's rights, they do so from within relatively conservative parameters. If the feminist content of women's journals examined in earlier chapters of this study typically encapsulates a more intellectual emphasis, fighting above all for women's civic and legal rights and their statutory equality, the later 'pragmatic' journals examined in this chapter identify French women's struggle with the working-class struggle, perceiving socialism as a key to sexual and class equality, and endeavour to reach out to women from *all* social classes. Paid (often mechanised) work and, above all, financial independence are shown to render class differences less significant, in that a married woman is no longer solely dependent on her husband's financial support and thus incorporated into his social class and political culture, but can forge a more autonomous sense of self and self-knowledge. As Candice E. Proctor comments with reference to earlier feminist demands:

[T]he lack of female economic independence not only reduced the Revolutionary movement for women's rights to the theoretical level, but it also effectively reduced the size of the movement itself. The women of the French Revolution remained almost entirely dependent on their men for subsistence, a circumstance that effectively circumscribed their activity. (1990: 179)

If previous manifestations of feminist thought tended to posit the domestic domain as woman's 'natural' habitat – all the while endeavouring to improve her roles and rights within it – subsequent developments saw a broadening not just of the social classes targeted but of the objectives desired, in that feminism demanded political and social equality in both private, personal relationships and the public domain of politics and work. Much of the Saint-Simonian approach centres on the importance of social responsibility, both towards and from women, a responsibility forged through women's engagement in the public domain and, above all, in the world of employment.

## EMPLOYMENT

CHAPTERS 3 AND 4 demonstrate that, as women's work *inside* the home grew in ideological importance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the objectives for women's education correspondingly remained focused on providing skills related to women's roles within the domestic

economy; the education system continued to teach French women that their wholehearted assimilation of the maternal role was the key to a fulfilled future for self, family and nation. The variety of employment opportunities outside the home was similarly constrained during the period examined, although, as recent scholars have argued, the historiography of French women's work has been unrepresentatively slight, given the range of professions and roles working women carried out.<sup>2</sup> Women's access to employment undoubtedly improved during the eighteenth century, but mainly among lower-class women, whose experience of a working environment was predominantly agricultural.<sup>3</sup> Employment opportunities for middle- and upper-class women in the public realm were typically related to their private, 'domestic' roles as wife and mother: bourgeois women's work was generally limited to helping their husband to manage shops or restaurants or to taking over the business after his death. According to Jacob D. Melish, such work could encompass a wide range of tasks that often had important financial implications for the business, including 'selling the goods or services, bargaining over prices, collecting the cash from customers, keeping the money safe, deciding issues of day-to-day credit, keeping the accounts, and planning for the long-term development of the enterprise' (2015: 77). Upper-class women, whether pre- or post-Revolution, were encouraged to confine their 'professional' activities to the *salons*. As this study has highlighted, many aspects of women's work were directly or indirectly related to the management of family life, including those of poorer working women, whose onerous and often unrecognised domestic duties could comprise tasks ranging from providing the family with water to raising animals, child-rearing and domestic outwork, usually for the garment and textile industries, often concurrently.

The social valorisation of French women's domestic duties over external occupations was reinforced by their exclusion from key professional domains, such as the legal profession – which had always been a male preserve – and, increasingly, the medical profession, which had begun to replace midwives with male doctors from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. As Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe comment: 'On notera enfin que

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2 See, for example, Daryl M. Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), Nancy Locklin's *Women's Work and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Brittany* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), or Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675–1791* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

3 In her work, *Women, Equality and the French Revolution*, Candice E. Proctor (1990: 68) remarks: 'Agriculture still remained the largest single employer of women, and it has been estimated that 80 to 85 percent of all women in late eighteenth-century France were peasants.'

les professions libérales – hormis celle de sage-femme – leur sont toujours interdites; par un arrêté de 1755, elles sont définitivement exclues de la profession médicale’ (1977: 180). Indeed, all positions of authority in the legal world, from judge to jury, were occupied by men, with women not even permitted to stand as witness for a will. As many commentators have observed, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the French legal system may have treated women as children, yet tried and punished them as adults. Women were not only prohibited from becoming members of the judiciary and therefore from exercising any influence on French law, they were similarly barred from all realms of government: as Chapter 1 observes, no woman was either present among the elected deputies of 1789 or given the right to vote. Even the more traditionally female professions, such as teaching, were typically undertaken by nuns until convents were widely suppressed during the Revolution: it would not be until the mid-1800s that teaching came to be considered a respectable, if still uncommon, profession for French women. Literature and the arts remained one of the few arenas in which women were permitted to exercise their talents, a fact that accounts for the increasing number of women writers publishing in the second half of the eighteenth century, as well as for the proliferation of women’s journals,<sup>4</sup> although, as Chapter 2 notes, the ‘classist’ nature of this profession and the level of education required to exercise it clearly limited the type and number of women able to participate in it.

Despite women’s debarment from the majority of professions enjoyed by men, the gradual urbanisation of France during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought with it the development of a manual and low-paid female labour force. One consequence of this was a blurring of the division both between rural and urban labour – rural women often had to seek employment in the cities in order to contribute financially to the family holding – and between the private and the public spheres; for working-class French women in particular, there was often no clear divide between the world of home and the world of work.<sup>5</sup> Considered supplementary

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4 Candice E. Proctor (1990: 73) states that the majority of novels published in France during the second half of the eighteenth century were female-authored.

5 It is nonetheless important to remember that, in comparison to Britain, the rate of urbanisation in France was less advanced. As James F. McMillan (2000: 65) remarks: ‘Nineteenth-century France remained overwhelmingly a rural country. It experienced no agricultural revolution, no mass exodus from the countryside, and only a modest degree of urbanisation and industrialisation. Whereas in Britain, manufacturing employed more labour than agriculture by 1840, in France this happened only after 1850. In 1850, only 14% of the French population lived in towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants, while in Britain the figure was 39%.’ McMillan



income, women's salaries were particularly low if they worked from home, a common situation given their exclusion from more lucrative jobs and occupations during this period. With reference to women's wages generally in eighteenth-century France, Daryl M. Hafter and Nina Kushner remark: 'Social practice determined that women's wages were one-third to one-half of men's wages for comparable work' (2015: 3). While the income this generated was significantly less than the equivalent male wage, it represented a vital contribution to the rural household economy, which also frequently saw male family members obliged to leave home in order to find work in towns and cities. That the family economy often depended on women's labour is illustrated by the fact that working urban women, as well as upper-class women, employed wet-nurses, just as rural peasant women depended on wet-nursing to supplement their own incomes: in the countryside, many women undertook poorly paid domestic piecework in order to combine wage-earning with child-rearing until children could seek work themselves. Unlike children from wealthier *milieux*, children born into poor families left home as soon as possible in order to earn money for the family unit.

Aside from agricultural production, which constituted the largest employer of women, the textile and fashion industries also became major employers of rural women, many of whom worked from home. Clare Haru Crowston highlights the growing feminisation of the fashion industry through women's employment as seamstresses and its rapid expansion throughout the eighteenth century in France, an expansion which, as Chapter 3 illustrated, not only fuelled the increasing popularity of women's fashion journals but was in turn fuelled by it. Women were the prime producers – as well as consumers – of the fashionable products portrayed and advertised in the French women's press:

[T]he seamstresses' guild attracted legions of new participants eager to profit from the social and economic privileges it offered in a labor market with restricted opportunities for women. The result was a large, skilled, and relatively inexpensive labor force keen to make and sell articles of female clothing. A push from the production side thus acted as a major catalyst for women's capacity to acquire new, custom-made garments in the latest styles and fashions. (2001: 24)

The French fashion industry provided a significant source of employment for working-class French women, whether carrying out piecework from

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is careful to nuance this observation by clarifying that certain areas, such as the north and east, were nevertheless more industrialised than the south and west, as were specific towns like Mulhouse, Lille or Rouen, p. 67.

home or working as seamstresses in an *atelier* or as models or shopgirls. As Jennifer Jones remarks in her work *Sexing La Mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France*: 'From seamstresses and linen drapers to female hairdressers and *marchandes de mode*, women played an important role in the Parisian fashion trades. In addition, women's work as semi-skilled laborers and piece workers was essential to a host of fashion-related trades such as wigmaking, tailoring, hat-making and second-hand clothes selling' (2004: 96). If embroidery and needlework represented a 'domestic' means of occupying leisured upper- and middle-class women, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the Parisian garment trade provided working-class French women with a vital source of income, as well as the opportunity to access the public domain. Young women working in the fashion industry were often exposed to the temptations of the urban environment, particularly if they were involved with the selling of luxury items front-of-shop, rather than purely fabricating them behind the scenes – an exposure that led to the common association of the shop girl with sexual licentiousness. The subsequent opening of many large Parisian department stores, such as *Le Bon Marché* founded in 1838 and *Le Printemps* in 1865, would further increase the number of women employed in retail as well as in the fabrication of garments at home.

The growth of the urban bourgeoisie, combined with the greater expense involved in hiring male servants, meant that cities also provided employment opportunities and an independence of sorts for younger rural women keen to enter domestic service. Rural women viewed this type of work as an efficient means of saving up a respectable dowry, an incentive that helped them tolerate the hardship and sexual harassment which frequently accompanied such jobs. Economic and sexual oppression are most obviously imbricated, however, in prostitution, which grew rapidly during the period under study – an imbrication that accounts for working-class Saint-Simonian feminists' vociferous attempts to combat it. In *Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism*, Moses further comments on the personal investment of Saint-Simonian women in clarifying the nature of prostitution: 'Vulnerable themselves to the prejudice that women of their class, especially those who lived independently, were casual prostitutes or "kept" by a man, the *femmes nouvelles* had a personal stake in creating meanings for the nature and causes of prostitution' (1993: 73). To reinforce the point, Moses quotes Joan Scott (1988: 142), who remarks that the term 'femmes isolés [*sic*]' (1993: 341) was used to refer to both illegal – unregistered – prostitutes and garment workers who lived alone and did outwork for the garment industry.

The fact that many prostitutes frequently had day jobs either as domestic servants or in manufacturing testifies to the low salaries paid to women at

the time. Working-class women often had no alternative but to become prostitutes in order to survive. As Louis-René Villermé remarked in 1840, pointing up the common shortfall in working-class women's salaries and the abject poverty that was their lot: 'Quand une jeune ouvrière quitte son travail le soir avant l'heure de la sortie générale, on dit qu'elle va faire son cinquième quart de journée' (1971; 1840: 117).<sup>6</sup> Women continued to earn less money than men and to receive smaller pensions, on the rare occasions pensions were available to them. In an endeavour to limit and counter more general abuses suffered by working women in France, the formation of associations of women workers, which fought for improvements in working hours and salaries, represents one of the success stories of feminist activity, particularly after the 1848 Revolution. In the final years of the period examined, such associations became all the more necessary given women's gradual exodus from domestic, rural labour and penetration of the city environment owing to increasing urbanisation and mechanisation, which rendered unviable many of the cottage industries and less relevant, women's inferior physical strength.

Women began to form an increasingly important – and exploited – section of the working population throughout the period under study, yet one typically possessing little or no professional formation or employment rights. This is not to deny the rare examples of professionally successful, financially independent working women or the existence of more complex models of the personal/professional binary already put forward in Chapter 4. It is, however, to recognise that French women's working opportunities were unambiguously more constrained than those of their male counterparts – whatever their class. Towns and cities began to witness the growth of mixed and women-only guilds covering a variety of professions, which fought for equal rights for women workers. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese observes, while French women may have enjoyed greater access to the brave new world of work, it was a world that continued to characterise them according to the same age-old sexual stereotypes:

The services they performed, like the goods they offered for sale, were, in a general way, associated with what were taken to be the appropriate attributes of their sex. Thus, the casual labor, like the more regular wage labor available to women largely derived from their crude sexuality, their association with

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6 With reference to the second half of the nineteenth century, Diana Holmes (1996: 10) provides some remarkable statistics which back up this quotation: 'Between 1878 and 1887, for example, 30 per cent of the unregistered prostitutes sent to the police Dispensary for medical checks were garment workers – among the lowest-paid women workers – and 39 per cent were domestic servants'.

clothing and textiles, their responsibility for cleanliness, and their special association with the provision of food. (1984: 118)

In a manner analogous to French women's access to education, examined in previous chapters, the world of employment for – mainly working-class – French women was both liberating and limiting, in that it facilitated access to the public domain, yet often through tightly circumscribed channels. A further parallel may be found in the (implicitly suggested) danger residing in female idleness: education, it was argued, would keep women busy and engaged in family-centric, moral pursuits, just as the world of work was viewed, often erroneously, as saving young working-class girls from a life of misery or vice. If earlier journals promoted women's education in the form of exposure to elements of the arts and sciences, before moving on to a curriculum centred on the domestic sciences, the journals examined in this final chapter portray women's instruction as more vocational, in that its aim is posited as one of promoting French women's comprehensive infiltration of and investment in the public spheres of work and politics through the advocacy of female association and the valorisation of women's contributions to these domains.

The following chronological analysis charts the changing feminist tenets articulated in four key journals over these 90 years – and this despite the critical perception that locates the genesis of feminist journals firmly post-nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> As Chapter 1 highlights, the advent of the French Revolution heralded an invigorated publishing climate that gave rise to a plethora of new publications, many of which were overtly political in their repeated claims for improvements in French women's rights. The content of these journals gives a clear indication of politicised women's main concerns at the beginning of the Revolution, as reflected in one of the most significant early examples: *Les Étrennes nationales des dames*.

#### *LES ÉTRENNES NATIONALES DES DAMES (1789)*

**T**HE FIRST AND ONLY EDITION of this journal, founded by Marie de Vuigner as and published by a 'M. de Pussy et une société de gens-de-lettres', appeared on 30 November 1789, despite references to future editions. The journal's (projected) cost was 24 livres per annum for Paris and the provinces, or 12 for six months. It was extremely audacious in its political aspirations for women, criticising their inferior social status and men's role

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<sup>7</sup> That perception is clearly illustrated in the title of Laure Adler's work, *A l'aube du féminisme: Les premières journalistes (1830–1850)* (1979).

in its continuation in the most direct and confrontational terms. The journal presents Revolutionary discourse as paying lip service to social and sexual equality, all the while imprisoning women in a sexist ideology that denies them political leverage. Women are urged to become their own agents of change, rather than the passive pawns of patriarchy: 'Remettons les hommes dans leur chemin, et ne souffrons pas qu'avec leurs systèmes d'égalité et de liberté, qu'avec leurs déclarations de droits, ils nous laissent dans l'état d'infériorité; disons vrai, d'esclavage, dans lequel ils nous retiennent depuis si long-temps' (30 November 1789, p. 1). The journal has specific feminist objectives that it proclaims in a combative manner – a manner which, as its short lifespan indicates, may have been off-putting for a less radical readership. Its principal focus is actively political, and it provides the reader with little respite from its detailed demands: it desires, for example, that women be elected as government representatives and participate in the *Assemblées*; that they be allowed to fight in the French army; and that they gain access to the higher echelons of the political arena generally. Indeed, the journal uses women's steadfast support of and participation in certain Revolutionary *journées* as evidence of their potential political power, a power which they would not hesitate to use against men if the need arose. Women are presented as less prone than men to endless turgid discussions around irrelevant political minutiae and as bringing a more straightforward, egalitarian attitude to the political process.

Mirroring the consciousness-raising approach adopted by *Le Journal des dames* discussed in Chapter 2, *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* cites various historical precedents of women in positions of power in order to validate its belief that women be granted access to a range of male preserves currently forbidden to them, and urges its readers to send in any examples of injustices carried out by men against women. The aim of this pugnacious approach, aside from creating a strong sense of collective gendered identity among women, is to muster up a battalion of condemnatory artillery with which to subdue the enemy: '[E]nvoyez-nous des raisons, des faits et des pièces contre ces hommes injustes. Dans peu, nous obtiendrons d'eux l'existence politique' (p. 5; original emphasis).<sup>8</sup> The journal firmly believes that the existence of different social roles for men and women originates in the gendered socialisation process to which they are subject, and thus argues that the education system needs to be reformed if women are to become men's equals. As if to

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8 This invocation has precursory echoes of the much later 'Sexisme ordinaire' column initiated by Simone de Beauvoir in *Les Temps Modernes* (1945–) in an endeavour to promote awareness of the degree to which sexist language had become an integral, and thus accepted, component of everyday communication.

highlight women's intellectual equality, the journal's author is at pains to point out her own fluency in Latin, a prerequisite to occupying positions of authority in either the government or clergy, yet a highly unusual acquisition in a woman at this time. In her work *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, Dena Goodman remarks: 'Every writer on female education laid out a path between the Scylla of ignorance and the Charybdis of pedantry, but with few exceptions, no matter what the path, it excluded Latin' (2009: 67).

By drawing attention to social inequality, the Revolution had vindicated the battle for sexual equality, with the journal extending demands grounded in social class to the domain of gender and women's domestic situation. A slightly different, less 'proactive' explanation for the post-Revolutionary awareness of gender inequalities is suggested by Daryl M. Hafter: 'As the horizontal divisions between estates and privilege fell away, the vertical division of sex separation emerged to take its place as the prime organizing principle of society' (2007: 235–6). The journal, addressed throughout to 'chères Concitoyennes', draws a clear parallel between the 'classist' hierarchy that the Revolution set out to deconstruct and the sexist one that holds women in abeyance to men. (The journal also makes comparisons between the oppression of women and racism, arguing that, since blacks have been liberated, women too should no longer remain shackled.) Referring to the women's march to Versailles to demand bread from the king, the journal states in its bluntly binaristic manner: 'Le 5 Octobre dernier, les Parisiennes ont prouvé aux hommes qu'elles étoient pour le moins aussi braves qu'eux, et aussi entreprenantes' (p. 1); the use of the adjective 'entreprenantes' is an apposite one, in that it underlines women's active desire to be responsible for themselves as well as connoting a related sense of commercial or 'professional' acumen. French women are characterised as quasi-Amazonian warriors who will not hesitate to subjugate men just as men have subjugated them – indeed, the journal's tone is decidedly menacing at times: 'S'il se trouvoit quelques maris *assez aristocrates*, dans leurs ménages, pour s'opposer au partage des devoirs et des honneurs patriotiques que nous réclamons, nous nous servirions contre eux des armes qu'ils ont employées avec tant de succès' (pp. 1–2; original emphasis). The recent example of the French populace rising up against class oppression should encourage women to do the same. In her article 'Feminism and the French Revolution', Jane Abray views the class/gender analogy as a principal focus of feminist thought during this period, an analogy that *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* often expresses in belligerent terms:

[W]omen were human beings who therefore shared in the natural rights of man, a conviction often explicitly expressed but also implicit in the borrowing

of political terms like 'aristocracy' and 'despotism' to describe the old system. Feminists saw the women's struggle as parallel to and a continuation of the war of the Third Estate against the upper classes. (1975: 52)

Interestingly, despite the intensity with which the journal espouses a feminist agenda, it does not shirk from recommending that women employ traditional feminine wiles in order to achieve their goals. It repeatedly alludes to women's femininity, employing a language of seductiveness with which its readership may be more familiar – if the end is resolutely radical, the means is sometimes less so, as exemplified by the co-existence of conventionally feminine attributes ('séduction'; 'charmes') with a conventionally masculine rhetoric of action ('dicterons'; 'capitulation'): 'Je suis si convaincue de la justice de notre cause, que si vous daignez me seconder de la séduction de vos charmes et du pouvoir de votre esprit, nous dicterons à nos adversaires, *les hommes*, la capitulation la plus honorable pour notre sexe' (p. 1; original emphasis).<sup>9</sup> While the author may appear to prioritise the power of women's physical attractiveness over their intellect, she nonetheless addresses the female readership in terms of its common sisterhood, directly urging women of all ages to unite and work together in order to increase French women's access to the public domain: 'Si vous daignez m'aider dans mon projet de restauration, que d'avantages, Mesdames et Mesdemoiselles, n'en retirerez-vous pas?' (p. 4). While the repeated use of the verb 'daigner' signals the 'unfamiliarity' of its agenda, which may provoke suspicion or criticism, the political lexicon employed in this journal subtly valorises and normalises its feminist objectives through the inclusion of words such as 'restauration' or the previously cited '[r]emettons les hommes dans leur chemin ...', as if social parity represents a return to the natural order of sexual relations.

If the advent of the Revolution had endeavoured to diminish class divisions or, at the very least, signs of appartenance to a particular social rank, it appears to have had a similar effect on the choice of topics deemed suitable for discussion in the journal. *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* manifests a joyful disregard for previous norms and an iconoclastic treatment of previously taboo subjects. The journal seeks both to provoke and promote laughter – albeit with a serious political purpose – through its

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9 This formulation, attenuating women's intellectual prowess in favour of their more obviously 'feminine' attributes, is one previously adopted by Madame de Montanclous during her editorship of *Le Journal des dames* – see Chapter 2, pp. 84–5 – and thus supports Nina Rattner Gelbart's hypothesis that the 'Mme de M.', who is the author of *Les Étrennes nationales des dames*, is the same Madame de Montanclous who edited the earlier publication.

refusal to be contained within conventional subject boundaries. In a passage foreshadowing the remarkably similar sentiments voiced in Annie Leclerc's *Parole de femme* (1974) almost 200 years later, the journal intimates its belief in the radical regenerating and profoundly sexual power of laughter: 'Moi, femme dans toute la force du terme, j'aime les fresques plaisantes. Aussi, les matières les plus graves seront plaquées avec les traits les plus burlesques. J'espère que cette mosaïque ne déplaira pas aux hommes qu'il faut faire rire. Les malheureux! ils n'ont pas ri depuis long-temps' (30 November 1789, p. 4).<sup>10</sup> Equally, the journal's foregrounding of sexuality as a criterion for equality extends beyond the broader category of womanhood to embrace physical satisfaction: *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* points to the interdependency of the personal and political in its foregrounding of the importance of female sexual fulfilment. In an age of enforced secrecy surrounding female sexual activity, it recognises the role played by sexual enjoyment in women's marital happiness: 'En matière de séparation ou de divorce, vous rendrez justice à vos Concitoyennes: et dans le ménage même, vous prouvez aux volages et aux ingrats que la femme est à l'homme *égale en droits*, et vous prouvez, *égale en plaisirs*' (30 November 1789, p. 4; original emphasis). The journal demands not only the right to divorce for women but also the right to sexual pleasure, something no other journal dares touch upon for decades to come. It is not until the advent of Saint Simonism in the 1830s that female sexuality and women's right to sexual expression are discussed openly again.

*Les Étrennes nationales des dames* is indeed revolutionary, both in its courageous and holistic approach in recognising the importance of female sexuality to women's general wellbeing and in its employment of a revolutionary lexicon to represent gender conflicts, despite its occasionally avuncular designation of women: 'Mes co-opérateurs et moi, nous allons faire tous nos efforts pour remplir dignement notre tâche, et opérer une révolution en faveur d'individus charmans, que l'injustice des hommes, quoique devenus libres, ne se lasse point de traiter en *Tiers-Etat*' (30 November 1789, p. 5; original emphasis). This militancy and determination to provide a political resolution to women's inferior status in French society are far removed from the more superficial concerns discussed in contemporary fashion journals during this period, yet the journal retains a lightness of expression and

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10 See *Parole de femme* (1974: 141): 'Rire? Se soucie-t-on jamais de rire? Je veux dire vraiment rire, au-delà de la plaisanterie, de la moquerie, du ridicule? Rire, jouissance immense et délicieuse, toute jouissance ...'. Throughout this feminist philosophical treatise, Leclerc points to the importance of breaking down current sexual and generic norms, and to the liberating role of humour in achieving this.



a playful approach to its representation of the warring sexes. The author employs a ludic, yet heavily sexualised rhetoric when putting forward her opinion on women's lack of professional options, again marrying the *féminin* with the militantly radical; women may want to be members of the army in order to wield the phallic symbol of the sword ('le desir de manier un sabre nous porte au coeur' [p. 3]), yet this should not be equated with an ideological idealisation of the masculine; this inverts the Beauvoirian explanation for penis envy in *Le deuxième sexe II*, where Beauvoir argues that it is not the phallic instrument of the penis that young girls desire but the social validation which accompanies its possession. The author goes on to reject a (masculine) monolithic uniformity and conformity symbolised by the image of a national tree of uprightness in favour of a (feminine) multiflowering (sexually abundant), diffuse and – let it be noted – fashionably decorated May tree: 'Je laisserai aux folliculaires mâles [...] le vert naissant de l'arbre national. Faisons-en plutôt un *mai* fleuri, couvert de rubans, de guirlandes et de fruits' (p. 4; original emphasis).

The combination of (potentially castrating) phallic imagery, female fecundity and empowerment and a celebratory sexual suggestiveness brings to mind 'Le rire de la Méduse' by Hélène Cixous (1975), a multi-genred essay in which women are urged to write themselves, and the polysemy and intrinsically disruptive joyfulness of that writing are foregrounded. The female author in *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* similarly differentiates women's subversive and richly eclectic writing style from the more conventional masculine approach ('folliculaires mâles' – 'folliculaires' is an archaic, pejorative term for journalists). As Marie-Claire Vallois remarks with reference to the Mayflower imagery: 'This polysemic imagery is as common to or symptomatic of the revolutionary imaginary as that of the caricature, for the allusions to genitalia can equally be identified, depending on the context, with fear of female power or a festive, even bawdy, celebration of it' (2001: 440). Unlike contemporary publications such as *Le Cabinet des modes*, *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* does not endeavour to play down the 'inconvenience' caused by social revolution in a desperate desire to preserve the status quo, but, rather, seeks to radicalise further its female readers and to destabilise the norms and customs already thrown into disarray by the subsequent social unrest. *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* espouses firm feminist convictions, reiterating many of the sentiments expressed in earlier feminist pamphlets and pushing expressly for women's greater participation in the political arena, and it does so with an aggressively joyful, quasi-lascivious certainty in the validity of its cause.

*L'ATHÉNÉE DES DAMES* (1808)

WHILE THE SHEER VIGOUR with which feminist sentiments are expressed in *Les Étrennes nationales des dames* is striking, its existence in the heady days following the 1789 Revolution is less so. A more surprising, if also relatively short-lived, early feminist publication, *L'Athénée des dames*, provides one of the most courageous examples of women's journalism in the early stages of the history of the French women's press, particularly given its publication during the oppressive Napoleonic era, a period antagonistic to any expression of feminist objectives. It is the sole feminist journal examined in this chapter that does not succeed a revolution, which makes its presence all the more remarkable. This journal was published twice a month, and consisted of 72 pages. Its annual subscription for 24 editions was 21 francs for the provinces, 18 for Paris and 24 francs for readers living abroad, with subscribers obliged to receive a minimum of 12 editions. The overriding importance of gender in its composition and reception is made clear in its subtitle, 'Uniquement réservé aux femmes, et rédigé par une société de dames françaises', and its appreciation of – if not reverence for – the female sex is highlighted in its self-designation as 'un Monument érigé à leur gloire.' Indeed, *L'Athénée des dames* is probably the most positively feminocentric of all the early publications of the women's press in France, consistently valorising and promoting women's talents. The journal is written by women for women, and also urges women readers to contribute to the journal's content.<sup>11</sup> The radical aims of that content are immediately made clear, both in the journal's rather bombastic epigraph – a quotation from Gabriel-Marie Legouvé's *Le Mérite des femmes* (1803), declaring 'Si la voix du sang n'est pas une chimère/ Tombe aux pieds de ce Sexe à qui tu dois ta mère' – and in the preface to the 'deuxième livraison' (p. 8), which also appears as the opening line in 'Tom. 1 Première Livraison':

Les Femmes seules ont le droit de fournir, soit en prose, soit en vers, les matériaux de cet Ouvrage qui est destiné, d'une manière particulière, pour leur

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11 Its editor was François Buisson, who had earlier also been an editor for *Le Cabinet des modes*. The feminist playwright, Constance Pipelet, whose combative *Épître aux femmes* (1797) was mentioned in *Le Journal des dames et des modes* and is briefly discussed in Chapter 1, was a contributor to *L'Athénée des dames*. The two other main contributors were Sophie de Renneville and Anne-Marie Beaufort-d'Hautpoul. See Jeanne Brunereau, *Presse féminine et critique littéraire de 1800 à 1830* (2000: 55–7) for more details. Whatever their radical politics, these women were no Revolutionary *sans-culottes*, p. 55: 'Appartenant toutes les trois au milieu aristocratique, elles parviennent, par leur mariage, au sommet de la société. Brillantes, cultivées, elles auraient pu subvenir à leurs besoins grâce à leur plume.'

agrément et leur instruction. Nous ne toucherons ni au style, ni à la pensée; nous ferons connaître au Public la manière d'écrire d'un grand nombre de Femmes, qui moins timides ou moins occupées pourraient rivaliser de talens avec les Hommes.

The tone of the journal is encouragingly assertive, urging women to abandon their subordinate position and to take charge of their destiny – to express themselves in their own words, rather than be at best ventriloquised, at worst silenced by patriarchal normative prescriptions. The journal's content comprises articles deemed to be of interest to the female reader: fables; short stories; *logogryphes* (types of riddle and puzzle); obituaries of respectable society women; and occasional remarks about contemporary fashion. (The periodic inclusion of fashion-related items may partly stem from the journal's desire to distil its polemical tone and subversive stance vis-à-vis women's rights and roles, and to avoid attracting the eye of the censor: 'Nous n'avons pas besoin d'annoncer qu'un Ouvrage présenté par les Femmes, respectera la Religion, les Moeurs et le Gouvernement' [p. 7]). Echoing the excavationary consciousness-raising approach adopted by various predecessors, most notably *Le Journal des dames* and *Les Étrennes nationales des dames*, the journal aims to draw attention to women artists and writers, whom it feels have been unjustly neglected – and thereby to highlight the intellectual potential inherent in all women if provided with the appropriate education. The journal also praises women's increasing participation in charities as one of the few socially sanctioned means of leaving the domestic realm and, once again, adopts a characteristically supportive, laudatory stance towards women and their activities: 'Cette Société [la société de charité maternelle] respectable, toute composée de Dames du plus grand mérite, cette Société dont le but est si utile à l'humanité et aux mœurs, fait trop d'honneur aux Femmes, en général, pour ne pas célébrer à l'envi celles qui la composent' (tom. 1, livr. 1, p. 65). The journal's Christian perception of the necessity of women helping others through charitable work outside the home mirrors the confidence-building, supportive approach it too adopts vis-à-vis its female readership.

One of the principal objectives of *L'Athénée des dames* is to foreground the shortcomings in French women's current education – shortcomings that explain any 'inferiority' in their knowledge – and to raise awareness among women that they are not 'naturally' less intelligent, but that they themselves must actively participate in any attempt to redress these pedagogical inadequacies — a belief also espoused by the two remaining journals to be examined in this chapter. Given that their passivity has been inculcated in them, women can equally be educated to play a more active role in French society. Arguing that women have been classed 'parmi ces animaux domestiques' (avant-propos, tome premier, première livraison, p. 3) who have

been educated to perform a limited number of functions and praised for their physical appearance and loyal nature, *L'Athénée des dames* resolutely rejects any notion of female essentialism as an explanation for women's inferior status. Instead, it employs an Enlightenment lexicon to attribute their current social position above all to patriarchal conditioning and indoctrination, to the nurture component in the nature/nurture dualism:

Si, pendant des siècles, les Femmes ne fussent point restées plongées dans une profonde ignorance, et n'eussent pas été persuadées, à force de se l'entendre dire par les Hommes, qu'elles étaient faites pour obéir, elles auraient réfuté ce paradoxe avec avantage; on les aurait vues marcher sur la même ligne que les Hommes, et remplir les devoirs que leur imposent leur sexe et la Société. (tom. 1, livr. 1, p. 4)

For this journal, as for earlier journals such as *Les Annales de l'éducation et du sexe* (1790), whose central focus was pedagogic, the solution to women's current social 'inferiority' lies principally in providing them with a stimulating and challenging education, in focusing on the development of women's 'inner' abilities. This quotation makes clear the manmade origins of French women's deliberate exclusion from enlightenment-infused thinking and their resultant internalisation of misogynous discourse.

Rather than discussing women solely in terms of their more superficial attributes related to appearance or demeanour, the journal prefers to make reference to less easily quantifiable internal qualities, such as 'l'âme [*sic*]' or 'l'esprit', and emphasises the respectful Christian morality that subtends this feminist shift in focus. In the same avant-propos, *L'Athénée des dames* reveals its perspicaciousness in describing women's internalisation of their 'inferiority' and their social and emotional dependency on the valorisation of the male Other: 'C'est le mépris bien connu des Hommes pour les Femmes, qui les déprise à leurs propres yeux, leur fait rechercher de frivoles hommages' (p. 6). The journal also highlights various legal abuses to which women have been subject, underlining that past sexual inequalities were not only reinforced by the education system but also upheld by law, a theme which would form the mainstay of the content of later women's journals, such as *La Gazette des femmes* (1836–38), as mentioned in the Introduction.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, it

<sup>12</sup> *La Gazette des femmes* was both written by and targeted a middle-class readership and was very much a monofocal journal. Throughout its two-year existence, the journal campaigned for women's political and legal equality with men through the drawing up and publishing of numerous petitions (in itself an innovative move for women) in order to improve women's legal standing. The petitions raised awareness of causes ranging from the implementation of divorce to allowing women to direct a newspaper as well as to own one; it was illegal for women to direct a newspaper under Article 5

relates various *faits divers* in order to raise awareness of cases of institutionalised sexism in which women are repeatedly victimised – in other words, it brings to fruition one of the editorial objectives promoted by its predecessor, *Les Étrennes nationales des dames*.

The content of this journal is ahead of its time, not simply in its proto-Althusserian feminist awareness of the various patriarchal tools of ideological indoctrination but also in the participative politics of the textual strategies it promotes with regard to its readers. It constantly seeks to provoke a reaction in them, either through the inclusion of general articles debating specific femino-centric concerns or by engaging the female readership directly, as exemplified by its intention to publish a type of topical ‘courrier du coeur’, in which women readers would be invited to write in about different subjects that interest them or about which they wish to find out more. The journal’s striking innovation and prototypical role in preempting central features of later women’s journals are further demonstrated by its encouragement of readerly participation in the form of questionnaires and surveys that directly seek readers’ opinions on a variety of areas related to the female developmental process, whether physical or more broadly social. This journal’s key objective of politicising the female reader, of raising her consciousness vis-à-vis her social oppression and stereotypically feminine roles, calls for a direct interventionist approach, bridging the intra- and extra-textual domains.

The journal audaciously poses certain key questions about women’s position in society, questions that challenge the sacrosanct status of marriage through the journal’s promotion of the importance of a woman’s individual happiness: ‘Dans lequel de ces deux états, le mariage ou le célibat, la Femme peut-elle trouver la plus grande somme ou portion de bonheur?’ (tom. 1, livr. 1, p. 63). If further questions may appear to indicate a more conventional concern with appearance and ageing – ‘Est-il plus avantageux aux Femmes d’être belles, que d’être laides?’ or ‘Pourquoi les Femmes redoutent-elles la vieillesse plus que les Hommes?’ [*ibid.*] – they are nonetheless endowed with a distinct femino-centric slant, in that the ultimate transience of youth and beauty is presented as a key reason why women should develop their personalities and intellect if they wish to lead contented and enriching lives, echoing Madame de Beaumer’s valorisation of inner qualities cited in Chapter 2.<sup>13</sup> Indeed,

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of the law of 18 July 1828. The journal was edited by Charles Frédéric Herbinot de Mauchamps and his common-law wife, Madame Poutret de Mauchamps. The former had been one of the later editors of, and contributors to, *Le Journal des dames et des modes*, and played a particularly important role after the death of La Mésangère and before the journal was bought by its subsequent owner, Alfred du Fougerais.

13 Madame de Staël makes a similar comment in her second preface to *Lettres sur le caractère et les écrits de J. J. Rousseau* written in 1814 (first preface 1788), in which she

*L'Athénée des dames* includes a 'Lettre d'une femme très-laide' (pp. 115–18), who remarks that one of the benefits of being ugly is that it has obliged her to seduce by other means: 'moi je soutiens que l'esprit est préférable, et qu'il a fait plus d'amans passionnés, que la beauté la plus régulière' (p. 115). The author quotes Lucretius to justify her point of view, thereby illustrating her erudite *esprit*: 'On peut sans être belle être long-temps aimable./L'attention, le goût, les soins, la propreté,/Un esprit naturel et constamment affable/Donnent à la laideur les traits de la beauté' (p. 116).

If the journal occasionally expresses more orthodox sentiments vis-à-vis women's roles, such as the importance of constancy and devotion in winning round an errant husband, overall its assessment of the differences between the sexes is distinctly Beauvoirian, not only in its repeated belief that women themselves need to actively combat their own victimisation but in its argument that, as long as women rely on their physical attributes to ensure their position in society, old age will affect them more than it affects men. In an article that provides a response to the previously posed question regarding women's greater fear of old age, we read: 'L'Homme se fait ordinairement lui-même sa destinée, dans ce qui ne tient pas au hasard; ce qu'il est dans le monde, c'est à lui qu'il le doit' (tom. 1, deuxième livraison, p. 94). The journal frequently emphasises the foolhardiness of women seeking validation through an inherently ephemeral, and indeed degenerative, component of the self. Expressing sentiments that could have been drawn directly from *Le deuxième sexe*, in which society positions Woman as the dependent, immanent Other to Man's transcendent, essential self, the article states: 'La Femme, au contraire, n'est rien par elle-même, et ne peut quelque chose pour elle-même qu'en renonçant volontairement à une partie de ses avantages naturels. Son destin est subordonné à celui d'un autre' (p. 95). Despite its harsh exposure of women's contemporary situation, *L'Athénée des dames'* feminism perceives that situation as a temporary one, and one that can be rectified by an education that does not teach women to be little more than passive appendages:

Les grands talens sont beaucoup plus rares chez les Femmes que chez les Hommes, et cela doit être, parce que les Femmes ne les cultivent que pour leur agrément et comme *un moyen de plaire*; tandis que les Hommes ne les cultivent que pour leur utilité, et comme *un moyen de parvenir*. (p. 96; original emphasis)

As this quotation highlights, women 'actively' accept their own passivity and need to assume a greater responsibility for their own evolution, to become

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associates intellectual evolution with a form of immortality: 'Tout marche vers le déclin dans la destinée des femmes, excepté la pensée, dont la nature immortelle est de s'élever toujours.'

more goal-oriented and purposeful if they wish to occupy centre stage, rather than fulfil a peripheral decorative function for the benefit of the male gaze.

That the journal's feminism – expressed most consistently in the belief that women's intelligence should be more highly prized than their external appearance – was in advance of the political consciousness of its readership is highlighted not only by the journal's short lifespan but also in its readerly correspondence, as demonstrated by a woman reader's complaint about the journal's militant attitude (tom. 1, livr. 1, pp. 11–21) – a complaint we have already seen voiced in relation to *Le Journal des dames* in Chapter 2.<sup>14</sup> The journal may repeatedly seek readers' opinions on the subjects it treats, yet many readers appear unwilling to espouse the feminist causes promoted by the journal. This particular reader's letter verges on the comical, in that, having initially voiced its support for the journal, it goes on to provide a seemingly endless list of criticisms that corresponds to a type of journalistic taxonomy, focusing on its title, its epigraph, its avant-propos and, finally, its general belief system, before citing *Le Journal de l'Empire* (1805–14), a publication that mocked the content of *L'Athénée des dames*, in order to substantiate its condemnatory stance. The journal's unwavering drive to make women aware that their current subordination was the result of conditioning was the subject of ridicule not only among certain readers but equally among other contemporary journals, thereby testifying to its political non-conformity as well as accounting for its possible demise at the hands of the censors. Adopting an impressively irrational logic, this reader beautifully illustrates the journal's main thesis articulated in its avant-propos – that women internalise their own 'inferiority' – and thus validates by proxy its discursive framework:

Je pense aussi que vous avez grand tort de vouloir mettre en doute *cette opinion commune, que l'Homme est supérieur à la Femme*. Je vous assure, Madame, humilité à part, que cette opinion est tout-à-fait la mienne et celle de presque toutes les Femmes; je vous assure aussi que l'Homme n'avait pas du tout besoin de le dire et de l'écrire le premier pour que cela fût exactement vrai: l'expérience des siècles vient à l'appui de cette vérité, et plus nous voudrons

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14 There is some doubt surrounding the precise duration of this publication, and the reasons for its cessation. Evelyne Sullerot (1966: 118) mentions an article from *Le Temps* of the 31 March 1899 entitled 'Le féminisme et les femmes journalistes sous la Révolution et le Premier Empire' by Gustave Le Poittevin, which maintains that *L'Athénée des dames* was outlawed by the minister of the *Police générale*. There is, however, little doubt that the journal's feminist content would have antagonised the Emperor and contravened his perception of the appropriate components of female conduct and aspirations; and equally, that the authors of such content would have risked public ridicule for their audacity in speaking out against ideological gender norms.

nous débattre contre cette même vérité, plus nous la démontrerons; car notre *rebellion* même prouvera notre faiblesse et notre infériorité. (p. 15; original emphasis)

While critical of *L'Athénée des dames'* feminist stance, this letter nonetheless demonstrates the journal's effectiveness in encouraging women to actively consider and debate the origins and functions of gender difference. *L'Athénée des dames* manifests more sensitivity in its treatment of male–female and inter–female relations than its forceful predecessor *Les Étrennes nationales des dames*, acknowledging the tenaciousness of women's internalisation of sexual difference and seeking to promote a greater awareness of gender bias in its readership.

One such area inflected by an awareness of gender bias is book reviews, and *L'Athénée des dames* acknowledges that female critics reviewing the work of other women are frequently accused either of jealousy, if they review such work negatively, or nepotism, if they write a positive review of it.<sup>15</sup> It thus approaches such subjects tactfully, aware of its influential position, and seeks to convince readers of its objectivity, as highlighted by the long-winded, extenuatory introduction with which its prefaces a literary review of a female author's publication. The reviewer's self-characterisation as demurely aware of her 'feminine qualities' as she provides her own 'masquerade of womanliness' paradoxically points up the avant-garde nature of the journal's content:

je pense qu'il n'appartient point *aux Femmes* en général de *juger* en quelque matière que ce soit, sur-tout lorsqu'elles parlent au public; mais je pense aussi qu'elles peuvent, en se renfermant dans la modestie qui leur convient, énoncer leur opinion, présenter leurs observations, et, sous ce rapport, peut-être la nouveauté de notre entreprise en fera-t-elle pardonner la témérité. (tom. 1, livr. 1, p. 35; original emphasis)

This caveat may also be due to the fact that the reviewer goes on to provide a detailed criticism of Madame de Genlis' work *Le Siège de la Rochelle ou le*

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15 *Le Petit Courrier des dames* (1822–68), mentioned in Chapter 3, was equally sensitive to the reception politics surrounding female authorship. Whatever the critical judgement expressed about women's writing, the journal perceptively argues that it is above all the author herself who is judged, not the work of art: the individual 'real-life' woman behind the text is always more interesting or receives more publicity than what she actually writes. (One is reminded of the modern feminist critic Mary Ellmann's [1968: 29] well-known remark that 'Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips'.) Indeed, the journal goes so far as to argue that, if ever a female-authored text does receive public acclaim, there is always a male co-author involved in its production.



*Malheur et la Conscience* (1807), describing it as ‘mal conçu, et fondé sur des moyens peu vraisemblables’ (p. 36). As earlier chapters in this study have illustrated, book reviews often provide an important indication of the extra-textual events taking place in the contemporary socio-historical environment at the time of a journal’s publication. In her chapter ‘« Contes de lettres » et écriture de soi: La critique littéraire dans le journal au XIXe siècle’, Marie-Françoise Melmoux-Montaubin states that the conversational, confiding tone of critical reviews meant that their political content was often overlooked:

La fiction d’une conversation entre gens de bonne compagnie amicalement liés est consubstantielle à l’écriture journalistique. [...] De fait, la connivence entre le journal et son lectorat s’avère d’autant plus indispensable pour assurer la fidélité de ce dernier que la politique et les prises de position idéologiques s’avancent souvent masquées – quand même elles sont durables. La page littéraire, moins directement soumise à la censure, apparaît de ce fait comme un lieu de prédilection où peut se décider le succès d’un journal et où se fixe sa tonalité. (2004: 483)

Equally, the foregrounding of the act of reading – and implicitly, the ‘inferior’ status of the literary critic in comparison with the author under consideration – serves to bridge the divide between journalistic critic and ‘lay’ reader, pointing up the implied egalitarianism between reader and journalist previously discussed in Chapter 2.

The feminist content of this journal and the fact that it is subtended by a distinctly Christian ethos may elicit comparisons with the later publication *La Femme libre*, composed by Saint-Simonian women, whose more radical politics drew inspiration from their socialist and religious convictions. While the Saint-Simonian journalists would address a working-class readership of oppressed women workers who strongly related to the social injustices portrayed in *La Femme libre*, *L’Athénée des dames* is clearly aimed at a bourgeois readership, whose main affinity lies with their husbands, rather than their gender; the authors of the latter seem concerned with endeavouring to keep their readers on board, and articulate their feminist convictions in an ‘inclusive’, non-confrontational manner. The journal’s highly class-specific descriptions of female – or rather refined ‘feminine’ – characteristics, such as ‘tendre sollicitude’, ‘finesse de goût’ and ‘délicatesse de sentiment’ (avant-propos) point up an implied readership for whom a more aggressively political approach would have been counterproductive. Nonetheless, the journal’s brief existence highlights that, over 200 years ago, women’s journals, rather than simply reiterating patriarchal stereotypes of women, were sensitively but determinedly attempting to help female readers break out of constrictive ideological moulds. *L’Athénée des dames* encourages its female readers to

develop enduring inner qualities related to intelligence and the emotions, rather than to pursue the obsessive and ultimately futile quest for eternal youth, a quest which continues to form the staple content of much of today's women's press.

The final two journals to be examined here, *La Femme libre* and *La Voix des femmes*, are the most 'pragmatically' feminist of all journals considered in this study in their perception of women's economic independence as prerequisite to feminism's success. Since the failure of *L'Athénée des Dames* so soon after its launch, more mainstream women's journals had returned to the safer subjects of fashion, theatre and literature.<sup>16</sup> Appearing just after the advent of the July Monarchy and during a period of liberal press controls in the case of *La Femme libre*, and just after the July Monarchy's demise in the case of *La Voix des femmes*, these journals are characterised by a politically exigent tone: feminism is not simply a component of these journals, but the key impetus underlying their conception. Both *La Femme libre* and *La Voix des femmes* not only tirelessly promote the importance of increasing women's access to the public sphere and the world of work but highlight the necessity of *interclass* politicisation among their female readers, whatever their differing emphases or agendas; they seek to unite women from across the class spectrum by focusing on their common oppression in patriarchal society – while acknowledging their inevitably contrasting life experiences – and thereby developing a concept of female solidarity and mutual aid. Such aid goes beyond the theoretical or linguistic to encompass the financial and practical.<sup>17</sup> These two feminist journals seek

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16 According to Annemarie Kleinert (2001: 205), Saint Simonians were not averse to making the occasional fashion statement themselves, even if it tended to be overlaid with political signification: 'Ces derniers boutonnaient le gilet par derrière, avec l'assistance d'un camarade, pour souligner le besoin de s'entraider, ou portaient pioches ou bêches à la place de l'épée en signe de leur respect pour la classe ouvrière'.

17 As *Figurations of the Feminine* has highlighted, even minor linguistic changes can be indicative of wider shifts in women's roles and positioning in French society. This greater gender solidarity, for example, is also reflected in lexical changes, in that the term *dame* gradually cedes to that of *femme* in the nineteenth century in women's journals, a change which further indicates that the women's press was both being produced and read by a more socially variable group of women than previously. The majority of journals with working-class, political content employ the term *femme/s* in their title – *La Femme libre*; *L'Opinion des femmes* (1848; relaunched 1849); *Le Conseiller des femmes* (1833), etc. – (the exception is the bourgeois *Journal des femmes* [1832–37], which did nonetheless have a feminist impetus and promoted gender solidarity between women), while most middle-class journals employ the term *dame/s*: *Le Conseiller des dames* (1847–92). Indeed, *L'Opinion des femmes* provides a nice illustration of the difference between the two, 28 January 1849, p. 7: 'Une association de Dames se forme pour patroner les associations ouvrières de femmes.'

to realise the concrete application of their social beliefs by, for example, providing financial assistance to schemes set up to help working women fight for improved working conditions or to reduce their domestic duties by setting up crèches and communal dining rooms. These journals aim to offer a contemporary socio-political account of history as it unfolds, with a female perspective at its core. While the contributors to *La Voix des femmes* embody the journal's ideal projected readership in that they are from both the working and the middle classes, *La Femme libre* is of working-class, Saint-Simonian origin.

As Chapter 1 details, Saint Simonism was a movement that began in France in the late 1820s, centred on the *Père* figure of Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin, and was loosely based on the form of a religious community, although one headed up by an androgynous God.<sup>18</sup> With reference to the Saint Simonians, Moses writes: '[T]hey appropriated the language and symbols of both the Catholic Church and the bourgeois family, although their "doctrine" challenged both. Prosper Enfantin and Saint-Amand Bazard were the Fathers of the Church. Then, after a schism, in November 1831, Enfantin alone bore the title of Pope' (1993: 20). The Utopian socialist feminism associated with the movement, while demanding greater recognition for women's social contributions, whether maternal or economic, also highlighted sexual difference: for example, women were considered more sentimental, men, more rational – a view, as Chapter 3 remarks, that had earlier been articulated in the works of certain *philosophes*, such as Rousseau or Diderot, for whom biology played a pivotal role in the formation of intellect. However, Saint Simonism, as *La Femme libre* elucidates, centres on the notion of complementarity, not supremacy. For Saint-Simonian women, this emphasis on difference was not antithetical to their successful participation in public life. Rather than valorise the middle-class housewife perfecting her domestic duties, Saint Simonism promoted the radical figuration of a dynamic working woman whose independence from the traditional family unit allowed her to move freely in the public realm and in the world of work, yet who *actively* exemplified the 'feminine' qualities of emotional sensitivity, pacifism and love – in other words, an espousal of the feminine was not synonymous with passivity.

That same rejection of conventional 'domestic ideology' gave rise to a new approach to sexuality, in which these mostly young women were free to have pre- and, if their marriage was unhappy, extra-marital sexual relations. Indeed, any notion of an immutable nuclear family cell was jettisoned; Saint

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18 During his trial, Enfantin is quoted in the journal as referring to God as 'Père et Mère de tous et de toutes', 'Considérations sur les idées religieuses du siècle' (1: 185–95, p. 192; original emphasis).

Simonism promoted extra-marital or non-marital sexual relations and refused to condemn the resultant progeny: it was not financial or legal bonds that should dictate relations but loving, spontaneous ones – which accounted for Saint-Simonian women's vigorous support for the reinstatement of divorce. This 'liberal' approach partly stemmed from a more informed knowledge of bodily and sexual processes, and from the key awareness that there existed no inextricable correlation between sexual intercourse and reproduction. It is perhaps not surprising, given women's absence of property rights at the time, that Saint-Simonian feminists preferred to challenge and condemn the importance previously accorded to material goods (whether in the form of property ownership or the possession of a dowry) in deciding marital unions, and put forward sentimental attachment as the pivotal component in assuring the longevity of the heterosexual union. The same re-conception of family 'property' is apparent in the Saint-Simonian valorisation of motherhood and women's maternal rights, which was based on the undeniable biological link between mother and child, and the re/productive and emotional investment made by women towards their offspring.

*LA FEMME LIBRE* (1832–1834)

THE JOURNAL'S FIRST ISSUE, entitled *La Femme libre*, with the subtitle *Apostolat des Femmes*, cost 15 centimes – which was significantly cheaper than most of its bourgeois competitors – and presented itself as a 'petite brochure rédigée et publiée par des femmes [qui] paraîtra plusieurs fois par mois à jours indéterminés'. The political and indeed sexual radicalism apparent in the journal's original title was clearly in advance of the reading public's feminist appetite, in that it would immediately undergo various permutations before *La Tribune des femmes* was retained.<sup>19</sup> The journal's political audacity was surely intensified by both its period of publication<sup>20</sup> –

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19 The second edition took the title *Apostolat des femmes*, with *La Femme libre* in smaller print above it which changes to *La Femme de l'avenir* by its third number, and *La Femme nouvelle* by its fourth – although *Apostolat des femmes* always figures as a larger central title. The title of the journal then changes from *Apostolat des femmes* to *Tribune des femmes* in number 14, since the previous title was viewed as dissuading women who did not adhere to Saint-Simonian sentiments from contributing. *La Femme libre* is published in two volumes and most issues are undated, although the second one was published on 25 August 1832, the last one in April 1834, comprising thirty-one issues in all.

20 While such audacity is most apparent in the journal's consistent espousal of feminist sentiments or feminocentric concerns, its 'liberal' slant is further manifested in, for example, its criticism of the death penalty and duelling.

coming after the disillusion and frustration caused by the 1830 Revolution, which had replaced hereditary rights with the notion of popular sovereignty – and the Saint-Simonian socialist background of its founders and directors, Désirée Véret and Reine Guindorf, who were later joined by Suzanne Voilquin. All three were working-class seamstresses and committed feminists who would go on to write for later women's journals, most notably Eugénie Niboyet's *La Voix des femmes*, the principal feminist journal of 1848 and a pivotal publication in the history of the French women's press. Whatever the various titular alterations undergone by the journal, the importance of the female sex remains paramount, as further demonstrated by its motto in the third and fourth editions: 'Avec l'affranchissement de la femme viendra l'affranchissement du travailleur'. In an inversion of the classic – and later revised – Beauvoirian belief expressed in *Le deuxième sexe* that socialist revolution would inevitably lead to sexual revolution, the Saint-Simonian journalists of *La Femme libre* recognised that women were oppressed first as women and believed, rather, that sexual liberation would bring class liberation in its wake, a belief repeatedly expressed in their syntactic placement of 'la femme' before 'le travailleur' or 'le peuple'. This constant revision of titles in the early days of publication further points to an increasingly reactive and commercially aware journalistic medium, which subsequently manifested itself in the gradual attenuation of politically audacious content as the journal became more established: having initially addressed issues ranging from financial independence for women to the rights of single mothers, the journal became less exigent in its political objectives. As previous chapters have highlighted, even at this early stage in the history of the French women's press, concerns for financial viability through increased readership account for the frequent attenuation of feminist demands by more conventional appeals to the traditionally feminine.

The journal's awareness of its position within an increasingly competitive market in which potential rivals have to be kept at bay is again made clear in its fifth number, when *La Femme libre* begins to engage in 'intertextual' commentary on other publications. It addresses an open letter to the contemporary publication *Le Journal des femmes*, examined in Chapter 4, accusing its articles of incorporating a highly classist slant and urging it to address women as women regardless of class and to focus on the positive implications of female solidarity. The journal's acute awareness of market forces is further illustrated by its explicit mention of *La Revue des deux mondes* (1829–), which ridiculed both its working-class origins in the garment-making industry and its supposedly conventional, 'feminine' form of feminism, exemplifying the widespread hostility characteristic of the mediatic reception of Saint Simonism generally. In number 8, the journal comments that *La Revue des*

*deux mondes* has derided it in the following terms: ‘« Les femmes nouvelles ont conquis leur indépendance à la pointe de l’aiguille; elles se sont affranchies de la domination de l’homme en lui faisant des chemises. »’ (p. 81). (The frequent attacks on the journal by the mainstream press no doubt partly account for its own defensive criticism of *Le Journal des femmes*, reflecting a more aggressive attitude towards competitors, fuelled in turn by a greater market saturation of women’s journals; the polite, conciliatory tone espoused by *Le Journal des dames* has long gone, as has, albeit temporarily, *La Femme libre*’s vociferous defence of cross-class sorority as it rails against its bourgeois contemporary.) In number 7, its attacks on the limitations of *Le Journal des femmes*’ feminist vision become more pronounced, mocking it for containing ‘des historiettes, des vers, des recettes de chocolat, des modes, etc.’ (p. 57). However earnestly *Le Journal des femmes* endeavours to treat serious issues including women’s education, *La Femme libre* accuses it of being written by self-centred bourgeois journalists who have no sense of the suffering endured by women from other walks of life:

Vous parlez des femmes, et vous ne savez pas ce qu’elles sont, ce qu’elles souffrent; vous parlez des femmes, et vous ne les jugez et mesurez que d’après votre individualité. Vous, femmes heureuses de la classe privilégiée, vous voulez parler des femmes, et vous ne savez parler que de vous. (p. 58)

It further lambasts the journal – and the reader has the impression that this is really what riles *La Femme libre* – for making negative remarks about Saint Simonism without fully understanding its doctrine. The journal counters the class and thus sexual divisiveness with which it associates previous women’s journals by pointing up its own feminist inclusivity, which prioritises *all* women and their personal and professional needs. In an imaginary dialogue with one of its readers, the journal succinctly expresses its political manifesto: ‘nous voulons l’affranchissement des femmes et du peuple, puis améliorer l’existence matérielle de *tous*’ (no. 7, p. 67; original emphasis). If bourgeois feminists often felt a strong affinity with their husbands’ class and the domestic comforts accompanying it, working-class feminists enjoyed no such luxuries and, with less to lose materially than their middle-class sisters, may be seen to promote cross-class solidarity more vigorously. *La Femme libre* repeatedly intones its unificatory refrain that what unites women is far more significant than what divides them, urging its female readers to abandon the competitive rivalry and individualistic narcissism commonly attributed to inter-female relations and to espouse *association*, both personal and professional: ‘[N]e formons plus deux camps: celui des femmes du peuple; celui des femmes privilégiées; que notre intérêt nous lie. Pour atteindre ce but, que toute jalousie disparaisse entre nous’ (p. 2). Saint Simonism presents itself as

fundamentally non-judgemental of previous misdemeanours: if earlier social circumstances resulted in individuals turning to crime or prostitution, Saint Simonism offers them a form of salvation through their affiliation with a movement that promotes equality, whatever the gender or social class of the individual.<sup>21</sup>

The fundamental feminocentrism at the heart of *La Femme libre* is further reflected in its editorial remit to print articles and letters written solely by women; women readers are encouraged to express themselves honestly and openly, and to allow their voices to be heard and their opinions represented. The female Saint Simonists had realised that, just as the *Pères*, whatever their putative beliefs about the importance of community and society, were ultimately self-interested, they too would have to focus first on their gendered needs as women if their feminist objectives were to be realised. Mirroring the ostracism of women from political decision-making during the Revolution – and, it could be argued, foreshadowing May 1968 – Saint-Simonian women grew tired of their lack of real power within the movement and of the political lip service paid to them through the valorisation of the female role; they wanted the new French (feminist) woman to be actualised, rather than idealised. As Moses remarks: ‘In what was likely the first politically self-conscious separatist venture in feminist history, women Saint-Simonians, in early 1832, responded to continuing sexism within their own movement, by founding a newspaper “that would publish articles only by women”’ (1992: 245).<sup>22</sup>

These literate, intelligent women with a strong political conscience can be seen to offer a particularly radical model of the working-class woman, who both worked and wrote, and was acutely aware of the need for women-only publications and fora in order to foster political conscience and confidence; these women point up the complexity of a particular brand of Saint-Simonian feminism at this early historical juncture, demanding sexual openness, economic parity and cultural representation. The articles adopt a tone of earnest intimacy and often express the personal experiences of the author as reinforced not only by the frequency of first names – many articles are simply signed ‘Suzanne’ or ‘Jeanne-Désirée’ – but also by their lively, engaged

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21 Moses (1993: 78) comments on how this pacifist drive for cross-class unity and understanding led Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) to call Saint Simonians “utopian”, not because they were impractical dreamers but because they supported a model of class “association” rather than “struggle”.

22 This quotation is taken from *La Femme libre*, no. 1, p. 8. In this article, Moses equates the Saint-Simonian feminists with the ‘difference’ strand of the modern French feminist movement and the Revolutionary feminists with the ‘equality’ strand. As this study has argued, the ‘equality’ strand in France is still accepting of sexual complementarity or difference.

style. This approach, which would again be emulated by their feminist successors in the 1970s, further signals the Saint-Simonian women's desired patronymic independence. In *La Femme libre*, feminism is less a comprehensively argued doctrine than a series of convictions firmly anchored in the personal experiences of the working women who articulate them. In other words, we see a proto-Realist concern with the sociopolitical conditions of (the lower echelons of) French women in contemporary society and the working environment in particular, expressed through a 'personalised' and empathic voice anchored in identifiable female individuals.

Whatever the journal's acute class consciousness and drive for gendered solidarity, *La Femme libre* is clearly also a religious instrument, intent on furthering the Saint-Simonian mission:

C'est pourquoi nous faisons appel à toutes les femmes, quel que soit leur rang, leur religion, leur opinion, pourvu qu'elles sentent les douleurs de la femme et du peuple, qu'elles viennent se joindre à nous, s'associer à notre oeuvre, et partager nos travaux.

Nous sommes Saint-Simoniennes, et c'est précisément pour cela que nous n'avons pas cet esprit exclusif qui repousse tout ce qui n'est pas soi. C'est notre nouvelle religion qui nous fait voir en chaque chose, ce qu'il y a de bon, de grand, et qui nous fait chercher et prendre l'élément progressif partout où il se trouve. (no. 1, p. 7)

Behind the admirable egalitarian sentiments expressed by the journal lurks a strong partisanship in its endeavours to convert readers to the Saint-Simonian cause, portrayed in somewhat mystical, beatific terms. The journal's numerous references to the two 'fathers' – Bazard and Enfantin – sit uneasily with the constant exhortation that woman cease being man's slave, and its feminist ideology is somewhat undermined by its hagiographic subservience: 'Nous sommes libres et égales à l'homme; un homme puissant et juste l'a proclamé, et il est compris de beaucoup qui le suivent' (no. 1, p. 2). Throughout the journal's publication the various references to the Père Enfantin being unjustly imprisoned and subsequently released demonstrate that, while the journal becomes more distant from the movement as it establishes itself (a distance illustrated in its early rejection of the subtitle 'Apostolat des femmes'), it still adopts a distinctly idolatrous attitude towards the Saint-Simonian leader:

Depuis le premier août le PÈRE respire l'air pur de la liberté. Femmes espérez! ... que le sombre découragement ne vienne point assombrir votre pensée; il est là, dominant Paris par sa position, veillant comme un génie bienfaisant sur notre avenir, disposé à saisir toutes les chances favorables, et à les faire tourner à l'avantage de notre sainte cause. Femmes espérez! (no. 19, p. 263; original emphasis)



Enfantin is portrayed as a man ahead of his time, an omnipotent and empathic Christlike figure misunderstood by his fellow men and persecuted for his progressive beliefs. Following his release from jail, *le Père* travels to Egypt in order to continue his search for the female Messiah. In the twenty-first edition of the journal, readers are urged to send financial contributions in an effort to pay off Enfantin's debts and those of his 'sons', debts 'qu'ils ont contractées en travaillant à l'affranchissement des femmes et du peuple' (p. 20).

If *La Femme Libre* at times appears to glorify the male members of the Saint-Simonian hierarchy, the journal's very existence testifies to a need for female political independence; indeed, the fact that Enfantin was imprisoned in 1832 on immorality charges no doubt helped free up the women authors of this journal to pursue their own women-centred objectives. Equally, the journal betrays distinct signs of the growing tensions dividing the brothers and sisters in the Saint-Simonian family, tensions ultimately originating in the controlling discursive misogyny towards Saint-Simonian women manifested by certain male family members, who, in an *Ancien Régime* modus operandi, are portrayed as discouraging female expression and opinions: 'En général, les hommes, même un *peu* dans la famille, sont à l'égard des femmes comme les gouvernements à l'égard des peuples; ils nous craignent et ne nous *aiment* pas encore' (no. 10, p. 107; original emphasis). This publication thus constitutes a form of journalistic gynaeceum, an interregnum allowing women the opportunity to mutually support one another without fear of male criticism or contradiction until the advent of the Saint-Simonian 'state'.

The women authors of *La Femme libre* clearly felt the need to give the prescriptive idealist doctrine of Saint Simonism a more concrete and pragmatic application by seeking to reform women's working environment in contemporary French society, including their limited educational and professional opportunities, and to highlight the importance of economic independence, rather than focusing solely on the 'free love' doctrine of Saint Simonism that had previously attracted so much attention. While subscribing to a doctrine based on sexual complementarity, their approach was nonetheless firmly grounded in the belief that women had the same rights of citizenship as men, a belief fundamental to women's advocacy of greater rights following the 1789 Revolution. There is, however, a key difference of approach: *La Femme libre* foregrounds the political potential of collective female action, pointing up the importance of cross-class solidarity or *association* in combating the many social inequities suffered by French women. Importantly, the journal contrasts its socialist emphasis on harmonious *association* with the individualist confrontation and violence

viewed as endemic to the French Revolution.<sup>23</sup> The women journalists perceive *La Femme libre* as an instrument of democratisation and peaceful dissemination, renouncing violence both politically and stylistically. As Corinne Saminadayar-Perrin comments with reference to *La Femme libre* in her chapter 'Presse, rhétorique, éloquence: confrontations et reconfigurations (1830–1870)': 'Ce prolongement d'éloquence parlementaire dans l'espace du journal est ressenti non comme une concession nécessaire et morose à la modernité, mais comme un authentique accomplissement de l'exercice démocratique du discours, témoignant du sens civique d'un peuple' (2004: 395). *La Femme libre's* marriage of the political and the messianic, of the descriptive and the prescriptive, is reflected in the serious yet often idealistic tone adopted by this pacifist, quasi-'new age' journal.

The journal's promotion of intra- and inter-sexual harmony and unity finds economic reinforcement in the urbanisation affecting French society at the time of the journal's publication, which saw women's entry into the working world in the form of manufacturing outlets and workshops in ever greater numbers. The female authors of *La Femme libre* valorise the mechanised over the physical, the increasingly urbanised society of the present in which intelligence is paramount over the more primitive societies of the past where physical strength (and violence) played a key role. Moses highlights the Saint-Simonian rejection of past models of political change, and their drive to replace the perceived individualism underpinning past struggles with a communal familial model open to all: 'Their social change strategy was to create a New World Order of alternative communities intended not only to collectivize households and production but also to provide a peaceful means for change in contrast to revolutionary means' (1992: 238). This desire for pacifism should not be equated with a lack of resolve or political conviction. As has been suggested, the very act of creating an all-female journal independently of male contributions, financial or intellectual, constitutes an unambiguous gesture of self-assertiveness, if not revolt – a gesture that, at the very least, renders ambivalent the pacifism at the heart of the movement. Throughout this journal's publication, the reader has the impression that these women never lose sight of the seriousness of their political ambitions for French women and their undeniably goal-oriented focus on women's economic and professional rights, whether offering support to unmarried mothers or setting up educational opportunities for working-class women. As one of the journal's contributors, Joséphine Félicité, declares: 'Les femmes seules diront quelle liberté elles veulent' (no. 6, p. 45).

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23 Ironically the law of 10 April 1834 outlawing the right to be a member of non-authorized associations brought about the journal's demise.

The journal treats a variety of different topics, ranging from more radical subjects, such as 'free love', single parenthood and the education of girls in France, to more anodyne ones, such as the role of housework for women. Both *La Femme libre* and its most obvious successor, *La Voix des femmes*, repeatedly reinforce the necessity of translating theoretical standpoints and doctrines into concrete practices that will be of quantifiable professional and personal benefit to French women. From the twenty-first edition onwards, the journal's principal concern is to improve educational opportunities for women, given such opportunities' pivotal role in facilitating women's subsequent professional success and, thus, financial independence. In other words, the journal not only vigorously promotes the benefits of women's education but actually provides the means to realise them by initiating a *Société d'instruction populaire* and setting up numerous classes where girls and women are taught subjects such as botany, zoology and natural history. While the Guizot Law of 1833 made no specific provision for girls' education, the working-class journalists of *La Femme libre* sought to rectify this omission by providing their own educational 'workshops'. The journal reports on the discussions that take place in these educational meetings, duplicating in journalistic form the educational fora it set up across France, in order to encourage its readers to broaden their own knowledge.

This feminist pragmatism, as well as the journal's constant support for cross-class women's networks, is demonstrated in the journal's desire to found an association to help women from across the class spectrum who have suffered misfortune, whether that involve the loss of their personal fortune or their 'virtue' through rape, in some cases: 'Nous demandons que, « Il se forme, sous le nom de *Réunion Saint-simonienne artiste et industrielle*, une association de jeunes filles qui sont *dans l'attente*, et de dames veuves par la mort ou l'absence de leurs maris, dont les conseils et l'expérience puissent diriger leurs *soeurs* plus jeunes »' (no. 9, p. 96; original emphasis). This journal repeatedly foregrounds the numerous bonds between women, including maternity, which constitutes a shared female experience, and this accounts for its generally positive representation in *La Femme libre* – a representation taken up even more enthusiastically by *La Voix des femmes*, which, given its publication approximately 15 years later, when many of the independent, unmarried working authors of *La Femme libre* would also be mothers, is not surprising. Sorority is shown to traverse not only social class but generation: the biological link uniting women is presented as more significant than any class or age affiliation. Inhabiting a female body brings with it a range of shared experiences, which in turn reinforces a sense of political collectivity.

The journal repeatedly, and at times provocatively, posits that all women occupy a similarly inferior position in French society, whatever their social

class, and should thus unite behind their common gender. It is above all material self-sufficiency that is shown to lie at the root of political and intellectual liberty – without it, sexual relations are skewed and harmony elusive. Written by proletarian working women – principally seamstresses and *lingères* – *La Femme libre* views a degree of financial and economic freedom as prerequisite to female independence: ‘car notre liberté morale ne serait-elle pas dérisoire, si nous étions encore obligées de dépendre des hommes pour notre vie matérielle?’ (no. 10, p. 115). In its fourth edition, the journal addresses an implied upper-class female reader, maintaining that her privileged childhood offers no protection against the financial abuses and brutal sexism that will inform her adulthood:

toi, dont le sentiment délicat fut si bien développé par une éducation maternelle, on va te vendre aussi; ton père te donnera pour époux, non pas celui qui sera le plus digne de toi, mais celui qui, t’apportant la plus grande somme d’argent, pourra richement acheter ta personne et ta dot; pauvre fille! (p. 5)

The journal posits financial independence for women as the *sine que non* of political independence – yet, even for women of wealthy, if not regal, origin, financial autonomy is not a given: a female royal can be married off to another foreign royal for the good of both nations, an act the journal perceives as tantamount to prostitution: ‘non, esclave de quelques diplomates, on t’a donnée sans consulter tes goûts ni ta volonté, on t’a *prostituée*’ (*ibid.*; original emphasis). Prostitution recurs as something of an *idée fixe* throughout the journal’s publication, indicating Saint-Simonian journalists’ fundamental conviction that a reduction in the economic exploitation of women would inevitably reduce their sexual exploitation at the hands of men, as well as the movement’s more general belief that women’s powerful sexual drive was not allowed sufficient ‘conventional’ expression. Not only does the journal openly discuss a taboo subject that perfectly encapsulates the economic and sexual alterity experienced by French women at this time, but implicates *all* women in both its perpetuation and thus its resolution: the upper- or middle-class married woman who is materially dependent on her husband has much in common with her impoverished working-class sister obliged to resort to prostitution for her survival. And, as Nina Kushner details in her chapter ‘The Business of Being Kept: Elite Prostitution as Work’ (2015: 52–76), a further category of prostitutes comprised *dames entretenues*, who did not work in brothels but were the mistresses of wealthy patrons, and whose work was illicit rather than illegal. *La Femme libre* repeatedly posits that women’s sexual subjugation to men cannot be eradicated without economic independence.

*La Femme libre* becomes notably less radical with the realisation that certain of its more ‘progressive’ theories related to ‘free love’ in particular

cannot be readily accommodated within current real-life parameters. As Susan K. Grogan puts it: 'The image of a newly "feminised" society functioned as metaphor rather than model' (1992: 83). 'Free love' turned out to have many hidden costs, such as the transmission of venereal disease, unreliable contraception and social condemnation – in addition, working women could not usually afford to go it alone. This awareness foreshadows the more conciliatory, 'realistic' stance adopted by the journal towards its demise, a stance reflected in its gradual recognition of the unworkability of the doctrine of 'free love' and its focus rather on the desirability of divorce in order to improve the institution of marriage in its current state. Suzanne Voilquin writes about divorce in the journal's final edition, including an account of her own separation from her husband (vol. 2, pp. 169–76). She considers the availability of divorce a prerequisite to sexual harmony within marriage and provides a highly personal – and modern-sounding – account of her private life, marriage and relationships with men, equating a marriage without love to a form of prostitution. Voilquin practises what she preaches, agreeing to separate from her husband when he becomes involved with someone else, a move that makes her financially vulnerable, thereby revealing a further weakness in the doctrine of 'progressive' marriages.<sup>24</sup> In this same edition Voilquin announces that the journal is to cease publication and informs readers of the activities in which all previous contributors are currently engaged, thereby indicating the continuing extra-textual relevance of the movement. The ratification of the '*loi anti-religieuse contre les associations, que nos aveugles gouvernans viennent de promulguer*' (vol. 2, p. 180; original emphasis), meant that many more Saint Simonists would go to *l'Orient* to practise their beliefs and aid *Enfantin* in his search for the female Messiah, including Voilquin herself, who would leave for Egypt in 1834 and remain there for two years.<sup>25</sup> Like so many of their feminist predecessors, these journalists' passionate desire to reform the feminine was

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24 Reinforcing the distance between the theoretical doctrine of 'free love' espoused by Saint Simonians and its successful implementation within a broader social context, on the front page of the 19th edition, p. 243 (article dated 11 August 1833), the journal reports on the suicide of Claire Démar and Perret Desessarts. The journal explains that the harsh nineteenth century simply could not accommodate this Saint-Simonian couple. Démar had particularly radical views about the importance of 'free love', believing in the abolition of paternity – the father should give neither his name nor financial support to the child – and maternity, by which she meant that being a mother should not constitute a career but that the child could be handed over to a wet nurse and the mother liberated. This suicide pact, and that of other Saint-Simonian women, including Reine Guindorf in 1837, points up the avant-garde, radical nature of many of the movement's beliefs and the consequent isolation felt by certain members.

25 It may be that orientalisising stereotypes of Egyptian women further accounted for Egypt as a desirable destination in which to develop polyamorous relationships.

simply too avant-garde to be accommodated within the journalistic and social parameters governing contemporary France. It would be another 15 years before feminist sentiments would find expression in the final journal to be considered in this study, *La Voix des femmes*.

*LA VOIX DES FEMMES* (1848)

*L*A VOIX DES FEMMES is the publication most closely associated with feminist figurations in the early French women's press, although its tone and content are decidedly less radical than those of its working-class predecessor, *La Femme libre*. Eugénie Niboyet founded this successful socialist journal, which heralded a plethora of subsequent women's journals following the removal of censorship restrictions on the press in the wake of the February Revolution of 1848. The journal, consisting of four pages per issue, lasted until June the same year during a political golden period of the Revolution, which, according to Felicia Gordon and Máire Cross, 'comprised the most optimistic phase, marked by attempts by the first provisional government at social reform and granting freedom of political expression' (1996: 61). While readers could take out a subscription to the journal, it was principally sold on the streets and its first editions sold out completely. Niboyet had attended many Saint-Simonian meetings and several Saint-Simonian feminists also wrote for *La Voix des femmes*, including Gay, Deroin and Voilquin (as well as other male writers); their roles are respectively listed as: 'Eugénie NIBOYET, présidente; Désirée GAY, vice-présidente; Jeanne DEROIN, secrétaire-générale' (31 March 1848, p. 1; original emphasis). As the edition of 24–25 April 1848 remarks, immediately signalling the journal's less combative stance in comparison with that of *La Femme libre*: 'Le Peuple souverain a décrété que la presse doit être à jamais libre, qu'aucune mutilation ne viendra violenter la pensée. *La Voix des femmes* n'a qu'à se montrer douce et pénétrante et on l'écouterà; on la répétera comme une mélodie bienheureuse. Voilà votre tribune' (p. 2).

The journal characterises its tone as one harmoniously in tune with the post-revolutionary, halcyon *air du temps*, as achieving its objectives through an accommodating, consensual approach. Whatever *La Voix des femmes*' more mellifluous, lyrical expression when compared with its feminist predecessor, its drive to promote cross-class sorority and open expression echo *La Femme libre*'s approach. However, *La Voix des femmes* can be seen to offer a genuine melting pot of ideas for women from different social backgrounds, while *La Femme libre*, whatever its utopian objectives, was a distinctly working-class publication. Conversely, as this chapter suggests, the middle-class

component of *La Voix des femmes* may partly account for its more 'passive' (albeit referred to as 'pacifist' by the journal) approach compared to *La Femme libre*, which was more direct in articulating its political agenda – a pacifism presented as corresponding to women's 'natural' desire to avoid confrontation and to adopt instead the auxiliary role of nurturing Muse, a role presented as not actively chosen by women themselves but allocated to them: 'Nous ne sommes faites ni pour la lutte, ni pour le combat, il nous est donné de calmer les âmes, de les inspirer, d'indiquer la route' (23 March 1848, p. 1). Woman is characterised as a spectatorial marshal, administering guidance and compassion to those men taking part in the demanding marathon of existence. For *La Voix des femmes*, this figuration of woman as supportive and co-operative represents the most effective means of influencing public policy in women's favour.

*La Voix des femmes* was the first daily women's journal run by a woman, owing to the abrogation of the law of 18 July 1828 that decreed that only men could be at the head of daily newspapers, particularly those socially sanctioned by the censors – a law against which, as this chapter has remarked, *La Gazette des femmes* had launched one of its many petitions. Emulating the 'applied pragmatism' of *La Femme libre*, *La Voix des femmes* involves its readers in its composition and encourages them to come together at the journal's offices, as well as to form an eponymously named association shortly after the journal's launch: 'Nous prions celles de nos sœurs qui auraient à nous faire d'utiles communications de nous écrire, ou de se présenter tous les jours, de midi à deux heures, à notre domicile, 34, Grand'Rue Verte' (24 March 1848, p. 4). In the absence of women's suffrage and political representation, the journal – and, as we have seen, the female periodical press generally – acted as a vital medium allowing women to promote social and political reform either 'virtually' through their journal articles or in person at organised meetings, providing them with a space, both textual and literal, in which to reconfigure the gendered parameters restricting their personal and professional freedoms. Women used clubs and associations as fora for open debate, galvanising those present to become active in fighting for improved employment conditions for women, and, as was the case with *La Femme libre*, debates were often published subsequently in *La Voix des femmes*, reinforcing the political function of the women's press as a conduit to bring together communities of women, intra- and extra-textually. Replicating the Saint-Simonian decision to hold women-only meetings, many of the female contributors to *La Voix des femmes* believed that such meetings played a pivotal role in fostering women's confidence and in promoting women's professional opportunities.

*La Voix des femmes* is founded on an inclusive feminocentric pragmatism, manifested in the provision of instructive and professional support aimed at

empowering women; yet at times its 'us and them' vocabulary and charitable ethos risk undermining its promotion of inclusivity:

La *Voix des Femmes* est la première et la seule Tribune sérieuse qui leur soit ouverte. Leurs *intérêts moraux, intellectuels et matériels* y seront franchement soutenus et, dans ce but, nous faisons appel aux sympathies de toutes. Non seulement nous publierons un Journal, mais nous formerons, pour les Femmes, une Bibliothèque d'instruction pratique. Nous ouvrirons des Cours publics, nous constituerons une association et, par l'ensemble de nos efforts, nous viendrons en aide au pays comme aux familles. (20 March 1848, p. 1; original emphasis)

This 'classist' difference of approach is further detectable in certain articles published by the journal and authored by *ouvrières* demanding equality for women (particularly as regards property ownership and rights of inheritance, which are a recurrent concern) in order to highlight the benefits of education for women from lower social classes; these articles are commented on and often undergo political dilution by a middle-class *Madame la directrice* who typically counsels Christian forgiveness and sexual solidarity with men, in contrast to the more radical working-class sentiments expressed by the original writers, once again foregrounding the new historical era of cooperation in contrast to the 'less sophisticated' confrontations of revolutions – and journals – past: 'Loin de nous irriter contre nos maîtres d'hier, car eux aussi nous veulent leurs égales, ne leur imputons pas les torts d'une législation qui finit, parce qu'elle [n']a plus de raison d'être. Elevons-nous sans leur porter ombrage; soeurs et frères, n'avons-nous pas tous un père commun' (1 April 1848, p. 2). This same reasonable Christian tone infiltrates the journal's support of charitable activities specifically aimed at helping working-class women. The laudable desire to 'arracher au vice ce troupeau d'ignorantes jeunes filles que la misère y pousse' (3 April 1848, p. 3) has strong echoes of the condescension characteristic of the charitable activities of upper- and middle-class women discussed in Chapter 4, and the journal's vocabulary is imbued with the same evangelical thrust: '[A]ccomplissons notre mission, mes soeurs, venons au secours de celles qui souffrent; partiellement, nous ne pouvons rien, réunies, nous pouvons tout, remuons-nous donc' (*ibid.*).

Politically, the journal welcomes a gamut of different opinions, an ideological tolerance that may be seen to reflect the will for greater democratic expression and the need to embrace social change among the general public. Indeed, the fact that the 1848 Revolution had partly come about as a result of the French people's desire for electoral reform no doubt accounts for the importance of universal suffrage as a cause firmly supported by *La Voix des femmes*, as its title makes clear. French society's growing desire to



reform authoritarian, hierarchical structures thus proved suitable ground for promoting feminist reforms. Pamela Pilbeam emphasises the radicalness of the journal's support for women's suffrage:

This was an extraordinary proposal because, at the time, no country allowed women to vote. In France women were not actually enfranchised until 1945. The republicans of 1848 decreed direct universal male suffrage, the first country thus to experiment, expanding the electorate overnight from 250,000 to 9 million adult males. Why not women? The *Voix des Femmes* took up the case for enfranchising women. The editors reminded their readers that England and Spain had women rulers, so why should not French women vote? (2000: 97)

The journal reports on Jeanne Deroin's demands to the government apropos of women's rights and desired legislative equality, which argue that women should play a major role in the new republican programme, and, while broadly supportive of them, the journal advocates a softly-softly approach in keeping with its 'feminine' tone: 'Courage, femme, vous êtes forte, vous êtes patiente; aux sarcasmes de l'impuissance, vous opposez une vie pure; la sainte cause de nos libertés est bien en vos mains' (26 March 1848, p. 1).

As exemplified by the desire of *La Voix des femmes'* contributors to effectively portray the nineteenth-century struggle for sexual equality and women's suffrage from a more 'feminine' – that is, measured and conciliatory – angle, feminism becomes synonymous with pacifism and a form of spiritual morality. Extending women's domestic role as mediator between private and public, as detailed in Chapter 4, feminists are portrayed as taking on the role of negotiators between different political factions, a role which, while implicitly figuring women more as facilitators than actors, does illustrate women's increasing access to the public domain and world of employment. Indeed, as with *La Femme libre*, working is presented as a moral imperative for women in the journal, with well-remunerated work forming the cornerstone of female liberation. 'Les femmes comprennent que par l'indépendance du travail elles pourront arriver à conquérir la liberté des droits qu'on leur conteste et qui sont de justice divine' (27 March 1848, p. 1). The female contributors to the journal repeatedly point up the pivotal 'moral' role played by the working environment – for example, prostitution is 'contextualised' as stemming from poverty and a lack of employment opportunities for women – and recommend that a finite amount of work be shared out by a greater number of workers rather than monopolised by the lucky few, pointing out women's degrading working conditions in a remark that has distinct echoes of Villermé's comment cited earlier: 'On se plaint de l'immoralité des femmes; comment veut-on qu'il en soit autrement, quand, après avoir travaillé

toute une journée, elles se trouvent avoir gagné douze, quinze ou vingt sous au plus; quel courage! quelle vertu peuvent tenir contre un tel état de choses' (31 March 1848, p. 1).

The journal is dedicated to assuring a suitable working environment and wages for those women employed in menial work, reminding the reading public that, if working men's conditions were harsh, working women's were worse:

Les travailleurs se plaignent de la longueur de leurs journées? combien de femmes travaillent 12 heures par jour pour moins de trente sous? En province, on donne vingt sous aux journalières. Dans les communes rurales, les couturières en journée gagnent quarante centimes, si elles sont nourries, soixante centimes si on ne les nourrit pas. (20 March 1848, p. 2)

On 25 February 1848 the provisional government decreed that all unemployed workers had the right to work and, in only a few days, 80,000 workers had joined National Workshops and were earning 23 sous a day. However, no mention was made of an equivalent scheme for women. In protest, *La Voix des femmes* sent a delegation to demand that the government draw up a decree for women workers. The government acknowledged the justification of this complaint and endeavoured to provide similar professional opportunities for women in workshops throughout France (even if they failed to set up a sufficient number of workshops, and those they did set up were run by men). Working conditions for women are a recurrent concern in the journal, whether in its intention to set up *ateliers pour les femmes* or its awareness of the importance of crèches and childcare facilities in improving women's access to employment (30 March 1848, p. 3). *La Voix des femmes* clearly believes that solidarity is strength in the professional world, and the authors encourage women to overcome unemployment difficulties by forming associations centred on particular trades, a response based on the notion of *corporatisme*, as well as on the more general desire to reduce professional instability and fragmentation, and to promote consensus during a period when Europe was fraught with revolutions and conflict. The *Association des blanchisseuses* was one of the first to be formed, as well as one of the most active. These associations sought to raise the profile and improve the working conditions of particular professions, and demanded that more general measures be taken in order to facilitate women's – and specifically mothers' – opportunities to enter the employment domain.

*La Voix des femmes* figures women as multivalent, complex beings who, while espousing certain stereotypes of femininity, such as gentleness and docility, are presented as deserving of the same financial, legal and educational rights as men. The journal promotes equality not just between the

sexes and between women from different classes, but also between women from different nations; there is a decidedly international feel to this journal, with its inclusion of news items about events in farflung destinations and discussions of the ever-expanding international transport network – including advertisements for ‘bateaux à vapeur’ sailing from Britain to New York and Boston (11 April 1848, p. 4) – presented as rendering the world a smaller, more accessible place. The journal aims to play down class and national differences and to promote a form of global harmony, letting international bygones be bygones and looking optimistically towards the future, as well as characterising its readers as ‘world citizens’ engaged with events happening abroad. The cross-fertilisation of journals and pamphlets discussed earlier, in which articles are recycled and published elsewhere, takes on a more international slant in *La Voix des femmes*. As Joyce Dixon-Fyle comments, the editor of *La Voix des femmes* published articles

culled from the *Frauen-Zeitung*, a feminist journal published by Louise Otto in Leipzig, and carried articles by other female activists such as Mathilda Franziska Anneke in Cologne, Germany. Such international articles served as sources of inspiration and encouragement to her readers who could see that the struggle for women’s rights was not unique to France. (2006: 13)

The recent republican Revolution of 1848 is planted firmly in the national memory and *La Voix des femmes* repeatedly urges its readers to behave generously and civilly towards those different from themselves. It recommends that women come together and share their strengths in a mutually supportive union:

La citoyenneté est un titre qui oblige à suivre le progrès pas à pas sous peine de déchéance. Que toutes les femmes se le disent et s’unissent pour s’éclairer, se fortifier, s’améliorer. Celles qui ont reçu mission d’enseigner ou d’écrire doivent faire tourner au profit de leurs soeurs l’intelligence qu’elles ont reçue de Dieu dans un but social. (20 March 1848, no. 1, p. 1)

This unifactory call-to-arms is reiterated in subsequent editions, and has strong echoes of *La Femme libre*’s promotion of intergenerational sorority cited previously. Women are encouraged to play to their strengths, and the education system is berated for its current shortcomings vis-à-vis French girls’ formation, not simply in terms of its superficial and sexist content (‘Toucher le piano, danser ou chanter, tel était le fond de ce qu’on appelait une brillante éducation. Brillante, oui; solide, non’ [20 March 1848, p. 2]) but also because of its relative absence of *qualified* women teachers, again pointing up the journal’s conviction in the advantages of inter-female association: ‘L’éducation des femmes doit être faite par les femmes’ (*ibid.*). The journal requests that the

government take urgent action in order to increase the educational opportunities and calibre of provision made available to women, and determines to provide its own women-only classes for girls in the meantime. Niboyet's two earlier publications mentioned in Chapter 1 – *Le Conseiller des femmes* and *La Mosaïque lyonnaise*, both published in 1833 – also present this need to improve French women's education as fundamental to her social vision.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, the political timbre of *La Voix des femmes* is one of moderation, employing the same figurations of gently nurturing and cajoling femininity that have underpinned the French women's press since its inception in order to achieve its feminist objectives: 'C'est que notre rôle est plus l'insinuation que la violence, c'est que nous devons persuader avant de convaincre, toucher les coeurs avant de parler à l'esprit' (29 April 1848, p. 1). *La Voix des femmes* may advocate women's liberation and complete equality with men, yet its socialist emphasis on the key value of *association* accounts for its repeated figuration of women within the realms of marriage and motherhood. The journal designates woman as the patient guardian of society's morality, thereby espousing an agenda firmly anchored in the precept of *l'égalité dans la différence*: 'La moralité d'une nation tient surtout à la moralité des femmes; si elles améliorent la famille, si les mères ont de bons fils, la patrie aura de bons serviteurs' (20 March 1848, p. 1). Demands for women's right to divorce, while clearly articulated, are distinctly lowkey in this journal, pointing up the socialists' desire to position themselves as pro-family politically and to distance themselves from the 1789 Revolution, with which divorce was irrevocably associated and which is retrospectively represented as a belligerent and confrontational catalyst for social change whose methods are explicitly condemned by this journal.

*La Voix des femmes* repeatedly differentiates its agenda from the violence and aggression it believes characterised the 1789 Revolution, promoting a peaceful and humanitarian citizenship as the key to political change for women; the radical young upstarts of the earlier revolution are presented as having matured into thoughtful, responsible adults:

Riches, ne craignez ni pour vos trésors ni pour vos biens; ne comparez pas 1789 à 1848; n'oubliez pas qu'un demi siècle s'est écoulé entre les deux révolutions, et que ce demi siècle a donné des hommes nouveaux qui ne demandent que l'union, la paix et l'amélioration progressive de leur sort. (7 April 1848, p. 3)

*La Voix des femmes* epitomises a particular nineteenth-century form of 'acceptable' feminism, in which women's morality and role as rational,

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<sup>26</sup> In a somewhat sexually divisive gesture, *La Voix des femmes* distinguishes between the passive role of maternal educator and the active role of teacher.

motherly peacekeeper are foregrounded as vital to the nation's spiritual and social health. The journal's emphasis on the regenerating force of motherhood also ties in with its inclusive, pacifist stance – by quietly nurturing the feminist flame, 1848 feminists hoped to differentiate themselves from their Saint-Simonian sisters, forever tainted with a whiff of immorality and unconventionality, and thus win greater public support.<sup>27</sup> This pro-maternal discourse has a long history in French women's journals, reaching its zenith in the early nineteenth-century journals studied in the previous chapter. The 1848 focus on maternity reinforces that emphasis on nurturing motherhood as being key to civil and public life: even if women are occasionally portrayed as angels of the hearth in this feminist journal – 'Femmes, femmes, ce n'est pas dans la rue que vous triompherez d'abord des temps et des hommes, c'est dans la famille, c'est autour du foyer' (23 March 1848, p. 1) – the majority of women figured have come out of the kitchen in order to enter the public domain, and it may partly be the journal's own brand of conciliatory feminism that enables them to do so. Throughout its publication, there appears to be a gradual dilution or accommodation of the journal's feminism in order to better fit the reigning ideology: the advocacy of fundamental political and social reforms is not presented as incompatible with a domestic ideology anchored in peace and reconciliation. Indeed, the sacrifices and pivotal moral influence exerted by the mother within the family unit are portrayed as meriting the political compensation of equal status with the male. As Hilary Fraser et al. remark in *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*:

The notion that women could be educated professionals with independent opinions and individual voting rights appeared alien to mainstream values of domesticity and the assumed naturalness of gendered difference, yet it was partly the ideology of domesticity, and middle-class woman's presumed natural capacity for civility and common sense, that enabled feminist activists to further the political emancipation of women. (2003: 150)

This is not to criticise the journal's objectives as tame, but to point up feminism's long-standing ability to cut its political coat according to the type of patriarchal cloth available, and this above all in a country renowned for its sexual complementarity. Particularly in earlier editions, *La Voix des femmes* makes explicitly revolutionary, somewhat grandiloquent statements regarding women's rights: '[L]a femme, longtemps préoccupée de ses devoirs, a longtemps oublié ses droits. Peu à peu nous sommes sorties, comme le peuple, d'une bien longue enfance: maintenant nous songeons à préparer

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27 As this chapter has suggested, Saint-Simonian feminists were similarly keen to differentiate themselves from revolutionary feminists.

pour les femmes une ère nouvelle et meilleure' (24 March 1848, p. 3; original emphasis). As we have seen, it tenaciously and courageously pursues women's right to suffrage, and promotes George Sand as a potential candidate in the elections for the Constituent Assembly, a candidate who is presented as a type of androgynous, albeit somewhat stereotypical, ideal ('le type *un et une*, être *mâle* par la virilité, *femme* par l'intuition divine, la poésie' [6 April 1848, p. 1; original emphasis]). Sand is frequently mentioned in the journal in a positive tone for her political remarks and role-model function ('La parole de George Sand est pour nous religieuse et sainte, parce qu'elle est *à tous*', [24 March 1848, p. 1; original emphasis]).<sup>28</sup> However, the journal seems to curtail its ambitions over time: having initially insisted on requesting the right to vote for women only before the National Assembly, it attenuates its demands for suffrage to include solely widows and single women, and sends its petition to the provisional government.

*La Voix des femmes'* conciliatory approach appears increasingly incongruous with its feminist objectives – at times, it seems to resort almost to blackmailing the active, patriarchal Other into giving the passive female recipient greater rights: 'La mission des femmes est une mission d'ordre, de paix, d'harmonie et d'amour. Plus on les élèvera comme citoyennes, plus on leur fera de concessions, moins elles se montreront exigeantes. Nul ne saurait les vaincre en générosité' (9 April 1848, p. 1). Its measured articulation of the desirability of improvements in women's rights and roles, and promotion of a cross-class solidarity may have ultimately served to destabilise its distinct core identity. It is as if the bourgeois component of the journal, with its drive for respectability and morality, gains the upper hand, that the more innocuous focus on family life and woman's role as pacific wife and mother snuffs out the political fervour for change most vigorously articulated in the journal's defence of woman's rights as independent worker. The optimism following the birth of the Second Republic in February 1848, and the political drive it fuelled, appear to be gradually replaced by a renunciation of radicalness and a *modus vivendi* within the status quo founded on a belief that rights will be given rather than taken. It is as if the pacifist stance generally adopted by these final two journals not only impedes their own political momentum but inevitably colours how they present the 1789 Revolution and its aftermath. The feminist activists supportive of the 1848 Revolution raised women's awareness of the

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28 Sand herself strongly rebukes any such suggestion that she either stand as candidate or sympathise with the fundamental principles of the journal, 10 April 1848, p. 2, not even deigning to write to the journal itself, but instead publishing her reply in *La Réforme* (1843–50), reprinted in *La Voix des femmes*: 'je ne puis permettre que, sans mon aveu, on me prenne pour l'enseigne d'un cénacle féminin avec lequel je n'ai jamais eu la moindre relation agréable ou fâcheuse' (10 April 1848, pp. 1–2).

importance of sexual solidarity, yet the unificatory sorority promoted by these later feminist journals is above all synchronic rather than diachronic, a form of political myopia condemning early manifestations of Revolutionary feminism, which clearly contributes to the *perceived* absence of a coherent and sustained feminist tradition over the 90 years examined in this study.

While the 1789 Revolution saw women participate actively in political struggles, they did so out of class rather than sexual solidarity. These later journalists nuance the previous Enlightenment-influenced thinking on universal humanitarian rights and focus on more 'concrete' areas specific to women's working life, in particular where reform was urgently required, including improvements in women's education, professional opportunities and childcare facilities, all areas resolutely anchored in the public domain. The concluding 20 years discussed in this study demonstrate that French women were no longer willing to be subsumed under their husbands' or fathers' class and political beliefs, but began to realise – both intellectually and politically – their own potential power as an exclusively female *association*. The feminist resolve to reform patriarchal figurations of the feminine in the public domain as articulated in the four journals examined in this chapter may vary in the forcefulness and radicalness of its expression, but never in its conviction. All four publications promote and valorise French women's active and visible engagement in the public realm and thus play an inestimable role in disseminating and normalising demands for equal educational, professional and political opportunities for women in France.





# Conclusion

THE ORIGINS of the French women's press and its evolution over the subsequent 90 years represent a key period in the history of French women's self-expression and political and cultural consciousness. As the Introduction to this study highlights, the women's press is the first literary organ to interpellate women as a collective entity, to aid in the construction of a unifying sense of sexual identity. The historical constraints governing women's rights and roles throughout this period make the achievements of these early journals all the more remarkable. As Suellen Diaconoff states in *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books and Sex in the French Enlightenment*:

That a press for, by, and about women could succeed in a century so frequently driven by the dual principles of patriarchy and paternalism is a tribute, first, to the resourcefulness and talents of the female editors, and second to the female readership that supported it financially, emotionally, and philosophically. (2005: 201)

For the first time, women readers were encouraged not to consume text passively but to dialogue with it actively and to articulate their own opinions in a public forum – in other words, to be textual producers as well.

If French women had previously enjoyed certain forms of 'oral' self-expression, whether in the *salons* or in the marketplace and streets of Paris, the women's press rendered such expression more politically durable and wide-reaching: personal expression was endowed with public authority. Early French women's journals gave their readers a stronger sense of both self and of belonging to a gendered community, encouraging them to ratify

that self through the written representation of it, through communication with others about their personal and political aspirations. Simply providing women writers and readers with a vehicle for written expression constituted a fundamentally radical move and one that in no small measure contributed to women's sense of collectivity and self-perception as a section of the population with shared interests and valid ambitions. This altruistic, sororal drive to foster the female reader's self-worth spans the entire gamut of publications examined in this study, from the *salon* journals that encouraged their upper-class readers to contribute written articles to the journal's content to the feminist political journals that encouraged their working-class women readers to strive for better employment conditions.

During a period when the professional divisions separating journalist, political spokesperson and essayist or novelist were inherently malleable, the periodical press provided reading and writing women with a conduit through which to articulate their multifarious visions of women's actual and potential roles in French society. (It is not simply particular publications that merit much greater critical attention, but also the individuals involved in their composition and production.) Whatever the heterogeneous figurations of the feminine put forward by the early women's press in France, women's journals allowed women writers and readers to debate issues of key significance to women's social and political rights. As *Figurations of the Feminine* has argued, these early women's journals were united in their drive to raise the profile of French women and to acknowledge and promote their active contributions to French society, whether intellectual, familial or professional, but were forced to adapt to the prevailing political climate in order to best achieve their aims. Thus, feminism – or what may more accurately be viewed as discernible feminist demands – from 1758 to 1848 takes the form of an at times incohesive but never insignificant series of advances, rather than an organised social movement.

While previous chapters illustrate the diversity of this journalistic medium, the predominant feminine figurations in the early French women's press, as Chapter 1 suggests, may be perceived through the lens of the three principal social strata whose political interests broadly correspond to the order of contents adopted in this book: first, pre- and post-Revolutionary wealthy, upper-class women who bifurcate into two distinct camps: the progressive 'writing' woman who engages in intellectual activity in order to promote change in the public sphere; and her more conservative, monarchical counterpart who endeavours to preserve the status quo. This privileged model of womanhood was succeeded by the nineteenth-century bourgeois model, who focused on virtue and morality, reflecting a renewed emphasis on the importance of marriage and motherhood, replacing the 'artificial', socialite woman of the *salons* with her more 'natural' counterpart. Since women were seen to

have enjoyed too much social power before the Revolution, it was logical to reduce their autonomy after it and to locate them more firmly within the domestic realm, as figured by the gradual switch from journalistic incitements to embellish the self to encouragements to embellish, rather, the home and especially the educational provision for offspring raised within it. The final figuration is the – often working-class – feminist, a more politically ‘pragmatic’ model, who brought women into the realm of political activism during the French Revolution and towards the mid-nineteenth century, and fought for women’s improved working conditions and their rights of suffrage during this latter period which coincided with France’s increasing urbanisation.

In other words, this tripartite ‘classist’ evolution of the women’s press began with the small band of wealthy, elite women studied in Chapter 2 before extending its reach to include other upper- and then middle-class women, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, and finally encompassing working-class women in the form of the journalists who published *La Femme libre* and the ultimate promotion of a cross-class female solidarity with the publication of *La Voix des femmes* in 1848. As Chapter 5 remarks, this gradual change in focus was mirrored stylistically and formally by a decrease in the ‘literariness’ of the French women’s press in both form and content, as publications began to adopt a more ‘objective’, Other-facing approach to journalism, rather than comprising a large percentage of fictional extracts and reviews, or discussions of domestic or leisure *divertissements* generally. With reference to the mid-nineteenth century, Marie-Eve Thérenty highlights this move from the written equivalent of the literary debates of the *salons*, as illustrated in Chapter 2, to the more factual, objectively verifiable approach epitomised by journals such as *La Femme libre* or *La Voix des femmes*, examined in the final chapter of this study: ‘La notion de chose vue émerge au milieu du siècle: elle fonde un journalisme d’observation qui s’oppose à la chronique salonnière et fictionnalisante’ (2007: 357). The women’s press at the end of the period under study was more explicitly anchored in the extra-textual sociopolitical world, in representing it ‘realistically’ and in endeavouring to effect concrete improvements to women’s rights and roles within it.

The 90 years examined in the course of this book witness the evolution of French women’s journals from an inevitably elitist medium to one which – thanks to improved printing techniques and distribution, and a consequent reduction in prices, coupled with improvements in literacy and leisure time – was made available to a wider selection of the general public than ever before. In her 1884 book on the nineteenth-century writer and sociologist Harriet Martineau, Florence Fenwick-Miller perceives an important link between emerging technical advances and French women’s social and political advancement through the medium of the press, an advancement fundamentally rooted in the intellectual expansion it provides:

The printing-press which multiplies the words of the thinker; the steam-engine, which both feeds the press and rushes off its product, and the electric telegraph which carries thought around the globe make this an age in which mental force assumes an importance which it never had before in the history of mankind. Mind will be more and more valued and cultivated, and will grow more and more influential; and the condition and status of women must alter accordingly ... we can no more prevent it than we can return to hornbooks, or to trial by ordeal ... (p. 222)

*Figurations of the Feminine* has aimed to highlight the pivotal role played by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French women's journalistic writings and readings in paving the way for that intellectual engagement, and of writing and reading these in turn as part of an increasingly influential community of women who, for the first time in French history, began to forge a sense of collective and thus political identity based on gender. Whatever the different causes espoused or objectives expressed, whatever the ideological vagaries to which they were subject, the female writers and readers of the early French women's press sought to be treated and to treat other women as intellectually autonomous individuals who had their own beliefs and opinions. As we have seen, even the more conservative sections of the early French women's press promote positive figurations of the feminine in which women are presented as the bedrock of familial education and morality, as playing a key role in the future commercial and national regeneration of France. The French women's journals examined in this study demonstrate that, while women may choose to foreground and valorise different components of their female self, these multiple figurations of the feminine are pivotal to the improvement of their status as a collective and influential group within French society.

French women did not have access to the same educational opportunities as men, but many of these early journals encouraged them to become autodidacts. This accessible and increasingly popular medium allowed French women to create a distinct for(u)m of sisterhood during a period of domestic and class isolation. The early French women's press encouraged French women from all social classes to figure and reconfigure what it meant *to them* to be a woman in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. It is important that we assess how women's personal reading matter – whether in the form of early women's journals or novels principally read at home – fed into their civic and political consciousness. In this sense, it is hoped that this book makes a contribution to what Annie K. Smart terms 'domestic studies', when she states that '[i]n addition to developing critical approaches that target how public space was gendered in eighteenth-century France, we need to develop approaches that expand in the direction of the intimate sphere: what its civic potential was, and how work accomplished in the home might be assigned

a civic value' (2011: 241), thereby nuancing some of the entrenched binaries separating the political public from the personal domestic. The development of these critical approaches will be greatly served by the increasing digitisation of so many early French women's journals.

The early French women's press presents the contemporary reader with a strikingly heterogeneous selection of figurations of the feminine, from the 'blue-stocking' intellectual to the fashionable consumer, from the nurturing homemaker to the pragmatic worker. Femininity is clearly an inherently fluid cultural construct that requires repeated reinforcement if particular components are to be successfully assimilated by the female reader. Then, as now, the media played a fundamental role in gender construction, and the dynamic evolution of this gamut of multifaceted figurations is further aided by the fragmented, open-ended nature of women's journals. By encapsulating a wide range of figurations of French womanhood, at times within the same issue, the early French women's press provides the modern reader with a polyphonic and thus all the more representative portrayal of women's experiences during the 90 years examined. In her autobiography, *Souvenirs d'une femme du peuple*, Suzanne Voilquin, commenting on the publication of *La Femme libre*, makes clear the key role played by the early French women's press, whatever format it adopts, in facilitating future feminist expression among French women from all classes:

[E]nfin son apparition encouragea les femmes du monde à se manifester, car peu après cet essai parurent plusieurs recueils rédigés par des femmes de la société, arborant pour drapeau la littérature légère, les modes, etc. Elles réussirent, eurent des abonnées, et par cela même aidèrent à l'émancipation de la pensée féminine. (1866: 96)

The vocabulary employed in this quotation perfectly encapsulates the personal/political contiguity that has subtended the genesis of the women's press in France, and which the previous chapters have sought to expose. Beneath a veneer of feminine acceptability – epitomised in 'la littérature légère, les modes' – lies the potential to politicise a cohort of female readers – '(se) manifester'; 'émancipation'. Early French women's journals acted as a vital conduit for women's self-expression and consequently self-worth: to articulate the self in writing is to leave ineradicable traces of its existence, and thus to aid in the formation and duration of a uniquely feminocentric medium of expression. It is surely time we acknowledge the significance of that expression and of the privileged mapping it allows us of French women's evolving personal and political trajectories.



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## Note on Manuscript Sources

The majority of my research into the early French women's press took place in the Bibliothèque nationale and in the Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal in Paris. The Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand was a helpful resource for information on specific female journalists, particularly those involved in *La Femme Libre*. I also undertook research in the British Library and the Colindale Library, London. Since starting this project, many of the journals have become available in digitised form.

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