

Revolution, Romanticism and the Long Nineteenth Century

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In order to consider the future of Victorian literary studies within the long nineteenth century, we must go back to that earlier ‘period’ of the nineteenth century, and the French Revolution of 1789. During the Napoleonic wars, two British women poets published extensive poems that addressed the impact of the revolutionary crisis on Britain’s future empire: Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s *[Eighteen Hundred and Eleven](#)* (1812) and Anne Grant’s reply, *[Eighteen Hundred and Thirteen](#)* (1814).¹ Barbauld warned her fellow citizens that Britain’s imperial ambitions and social injustices could lead to her ruin, while Grant assured them that a future global British empire would look back to counter-revolutionary Britain with gratitude: ‘On every faithful soul, and generous breast,/ This glorious era shall be deep imprest,’ Grant wrote.² Both poets’ keen sense of the significance of their historical moment, evident in their titles and emphasized throughout the poems, are instances of what James Chandler has argued is the distinctively Romantic-era preoccupation with the problem of historical specificity: as the ‘age of the spirit of the age,’ the Romantic period is ‘the period when the normative status of the period becomes a central and self conscious aspect of historical reflection.’³ Informed by Scottish Enlightenment stadial theories of history, Barbauld saw 1811, when the war was going badly for Britain, as a crisis from which the nation may not recover, but instead begin its irreversible decline.

In its review of Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, the *Monthly Review* cautiously hoped that Barbauld’s prophecy for this coming age would be proved wrong ‘in the long revolution of ages.’⁴ The public political debate that Barbauld and Grant opened up through their poems is one example of how early nineteenth-century women’s writings in particular situated themselves at what they and their readers agreed was the beginning of a perilous new era, inaugurated by a series of Revolutions (in America, France, and St. Domingue) with unpredictable effects on the state of Britain. Barbauld apparently had even written a speculation on ‘the female part of the creation a century hence’ in relation to Wollstonecraft’s ‘revolution of manners,’ though this text is now lost to us.⁵ Her reputation suffered severely in the decades following her death in 1825, when, as William McCarthy has demonstrated, her family tried to distance her reputation from the ‘insurgent marginality’⁶

associated with Dissent, in the process recasting her as a 'high-minded Christian lady' remembered for her piety and her moralistic (mis)reading of Coleridge's 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner.' Yet as a prominent writer of radical Dissent at the turn of the nineteenth century, Barbauld had been always forward-thinking, welcoming the French Revolution with a regenerative optimism, as in this 1791 letter to her brother:

I cannot help thinking that the revolution in France will introduce there an entire revolution in education; and particularly be the ruin of classical learning, the importance of which must be lessening every day; while other sciences, particularly that of politics and government, must rise in value, afford an immediate introduction to active life, and be necessary in some degree to everybody.⁷

As a Dissenting educator, Barbauld, like Mary Wollstonecraft, saw the French Revolution's potential to democratize education as well as politics as its key legacies for generations to come. Looking back in an 1818 letter, Barbauld enthused over the Revolution's lasting impact, moving quickly over the past conquests of monarchies, to the 'fresh and opening' promise found in North America, as she had done in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*: 'How much less interesting since the French Revolution are the glories and conquests of Louis XIV! What is the whole field of ancient history, which knew no sea but the Mediterranean, to the vast continent of America, with its fresh and opening glories!'⁸ The glories of the unfolding new century, as she prophesied in *1811*, would be realized in that upstart new world power across the Atlantic.

Barbauld's prophetic poem, written on the eve of war with the American republic, is written from a future, transatlantic perspective, imagining American tourists who will visit the ruins of imperial Britain, defeated both in the continental wars and in what would subsequently be known as America's second war of independence. Grant's poem appeared after a string of British victories in the War of 1812, and begins with Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. Grant thus predicts that 1813 will mark a different kind of turning point in Britain's bid for global power: 'This Year, by wonders mark'd, renown'd, and blest,/ Shall kindling eyes and grateful thoughts arrest'. Like Barbauld, Grant also addresses the future -- fellow 'patriots yet unborn,' to whom 'every grateful thought shall turn' throughout Britain's global empire. From our twenty-first-century vantage point, to what 'period' should we now ascribe Barbauld's and Grant's interventions in the debate about the war's meaning for Britain's future?

It is the legacy of the French Revolution that both poets saw as being decided in the wars that had engulfed Europe and its colonies for nearly two decades. Considering the revolutionary crisis as the beginning of an unprecedented new period in human history, the politically opposed Grant and Barbauld could perhaps agree with Susan Wolfson's contention that '[t]he 1790s weren't a fin de siècle but rather the first decade of post-Revolutionary or maybe Napoleonic Europe (with its own new calendar).'⁹ The nineteenth century began with a series of revolutions and its history, Isobel Armstrong argues, 'is the history of fear of revolution.'¹⁰

Aesthetically and politically, such revolutionary-era writings require us to reconceive of nineteenth century studies beyond the period boundaries of Romantic and Victorian. Anne Mellor and others have traced to the evangelical writings of Hannah More an important origin of the nineteenth-century domesticization of the public sphere that would reach fruition with the reign of Queen Victoria. More and other evangelical writers popular in the early nineteenth century, as well as radical Unitarians, offer underappreciated continuities between Romantic and Victorian approaches to Christian philanthropy and feminized moral influence. Writers who supported the French Revolution in various stages -- for example, Helen Maria Williams, Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and Mary Wollstonecraft -- are still awaiting a proper study that traces the continuities between their popular works on the French Revolution and later ones such as Carlyle's *French Revolution* (which repeatedly cites Williams's *Letters from France*) and Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (which recalls a famous incident of the carriage running over a child featured in both Williams's *Letters* and Smith's historical novel of the Revolution, *Desmond*).¹¹ That this has not yet happened-- especially for Wollstonecraft, whom Barbara Caine has called the 'dark secret' of Victorian feminism¹² -- is largely due to the mind-forged manacles of periodization.

The revolutionary legacies in political and sexual relations that we still need to trace across nineteenth-century period boundaries are inseparable from the aesthetic innovations that too often are rigidly assigned to one period. The historical novel in particular requires reconsideration as a 1790s, not post-Waterloo, development; as James Chandler and Katie Trumpener have demonstrated, Walter Scott's nineteenth-century meditations on historicity are greatly indebted to Enlightenment traditions and neglected 1790s revolutionary fiction by writers like Charlotte Smith and Jane Porter.¹³

Nineteenth-century poetry will perhaps benefit more than any other aesthetic practice from a wholesale reconsideration across period lines, as Isobel Armstrong has argued most eloquently. Women's writings are particularly important once again in this regard, falling largely outside the canonical lines that have organized the unsatisfactory Romantic/Victorian distinction in the first place, and revealing a transnational and transatlantic sensibility (visible in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*) so popular in current scholarship. Poets Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans (who sold tens of thousands of volumes in the nineteenth century)¹⁴ remained influential well into the mid-nineteenth century, and share the credit for developing that supposedly Victorian genre, the dramatic monologue. And yet as recently as 2000, the *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* was still content to rely on familiar assumptions of poets and genres springing fully formed out of that magical year, 1832:

When Tennyson portrays the artist in 'The Lady of Shalott' as enclosed *feminine* consciousness and figures her problems as both aesthetic and erotic, he inaugurates a century-long concern with the sex and gender of art and artistry.¹⁵

This is wrong on two counts: Tennyson neither inaugurates this concern, nor is it likely to be century-long if it begins in 1832. As the 'ablest successor' of Felicia Hemans according to Herbert Tucker,¹⁶ one who wrote 'quite uninhibitedly as a woman' according to Richard Cronin,¹⁷ Tennyson *inherits* the concern with 'the sex and gender of art and artistry' from writers like Hemans (in 'Prosperzia Rossi'), Landon (in *The Improvisatrice*), John Keats (in *Lamia*), and Mary Robinson in her 1796 volume, *Sappho and Phaon*. Celebrated by Robinson as 'the unrivalled poetess of her time,' Sappho inaugurates this tradition, which nineteenth century poets, including Tennyson, continue, under the problematic sign of 'poetess.'¹⁸

The nineteenth century did not begin in 1832 -- that is my simple but oddly contentious thesis. Contentious because much literature scholarship that claims to encompass the nineteenth century in fact speaks of a traditionally defined Victorian period. Similarly, academic jobs advertised as 'nineteenth century' upon closer inspection, use the term synonymously with the Victorian period. I have read many self-described 'nineteenth century' studies that begin in the 1830s, with an introductory page or section describing the supposed Romantic certainties that the ensuing Victorian complexities overturn. Of course, any period's claim to innovation and 'modernity' is typically built on the oversimplification of a previous 'period,' a necessary pitfall in the logic of periodization, as David Perkins outlined in *Is Literary History Possible?*¹⁹ Romantic-period studies are guilty of similar offenses, as in the

overstated claims of the *Lyrical Ballads's* revolutionary departure from Augustan poetics. Those days are largely gone, however, as Romantic-period studies have been reinvigorated, for example, by investigating canonical Romanticism's continuities with eighteenth-century cultures of sentiment, and by enlarging dramatically the number and kinds of contemporary writings against which canonical texts like the *Lyrical Ballads* are now read.

Isobel Armstrong's suggestion that we 'forget about a unified Victorianism'²⁰ and instead refigure this era within a long nineteenth century seems a long way from being realized, given the tenacity with which Victorian studies relies on this period construct to help place its scholarship and its scholars in the academic marketplace. Romanticists of the canonical variety similarly guard their period borders, while those working on plebeian and women writers have largely led the way in reading more fluidly in history, both backwards and forwards. Exemplary studies like Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* and Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho*²¹ are grounded in period-based understandings of the Romantic and the Victorian, respectively, but interrogate the usefulness of periodization by revealing the ongoing transformations that sensibility and Sappho enjoyed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By focusing on the continuities of gender, Anne Mellor, following Stuart Curran, offers a different strategy for resisting periodization, arguing that '[w]e should [...] think of women's literary history between 1700 and 1900 not in terms of epistemic breaks or definable literary periods [...] Rather, we should think of them as exploring a different psychological dyad, that of literary mothers and daughters.'²²

Literary foremothers remain useful tropes within certain feminist literary histories, but in my own work, the engagement of women writers with their male counterparts, and vice versa, is so overwhelming that it would be impossible to encompass a tradition of mothers, daughters and sisters. For example, the single most important literary touchstone for women's writings on the French Revolution is Jean-Jacques Rousseau -- not only *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, but the underemphasized (in studies of women's literature) *Confessions* and *Reveries*.²³ Rousseau is also a crucial figure informing nineteenth-century discourses of domesticity, establishing an important nineteenth-century continuity if we refamiliarize ourselves with women's revolutionary writings that re-presented Rousseauvian virtue to British audiences.

In my recent book, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World*, I argued that women's prolific writings on the Revolution and its aftermath elaborated a revolutionary cosmopolitanism and Francophilia that stubbornly resisted the increasingly strident demands for British patriotism and nationalism. These women's writings on the Revolution and cosmopolitanism strengthen the case for reevaluating nineteenth-century literature as a postrevolutionary phenomenon across period boundaries. I suggest that it would be fruitful to compare these women's representations of the Terror, and especially of Maximilien Robespierre, to Carlyle and Dickens's feminization of the Terror and of mob violence. Carlyle's *Maenads* and Dickens's *Mme de Farge* have remained part of the popular imagination and demonization of revolutionary fervor, well into the twenty-first century. The diversely feminist visions of Fanny Burney, Mary Robinson, Helen Craik and Helen Maria Williams, on the other hand, virtually disappeared from popular imagination in the counterrevolutionary 1790s backlash that also engulfed 'Modern Philosophers' like Godwin and 'Female Philosophers' like Wollstonecraft.

Yet these women's narratives convey an even greater sense of urgency than their male literary descendants, as they were histories of the present, composed without the benefit of historical hindsight or favorable critical climate. They had instead the benefit of immediacy -- the republican Williams emigrated to France in 1790 and lived there throughout the revolutionary regimes until her death in 1827; the monarchist Burney was self-exiled to France from 1802 to 1812 with her aristocratic French husband. Craik and Robinson, deeply read in Williams's first-person accounts, continued to publish in a British critical climate increasingly hostile to women's politicized prose. In their fascinating accounts of the Revolution, these four authors, sympathetic to the 'rights of woman' to varying degrees, sexualized the revolutionary crisis via the historical figure of Robespierre, and the Jacobin liberalization of marriage, inheritance and custody laws, in surprising ways. These women's popular fictions of the Terror are important though neglected precedents for the feminization of the revolutions of 1789 and 1793, considered as the hallmark of later nineteenth-century retrospectives like those of Michelet, Carlyle and Dickens. In the condensed overview of this neglected historical fiction that follows, I want to offer potential starting points for new inquiries into a long nineteenth century perspective on the Revolution's lasting effects, especially on the 'woman question.'²⁴

In Williams's multi-volume *Letters from France* (1790-6), Robinson's novel *The Natural Daughter* (1799), Craik's *Adelaide de Narbonne with memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet* (1800) and Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814), Robespierre (or his agent) appears as the avatar of Terror itself.²⁵ What is at stake here is not Robespierre's role in literary history (as a new version of the Gothic villain, for example), but his role as the embodiment of certain revolutionary ideologies, and women writers' critiques of revolutionary politics through such historical figures.²⁶ One might assume that as the embodiment of the Terror, Robespierre appeared only as the 'sanguinary monster' of counterrevolutionary and Girondin caricatures. While Robespierre as monster is visible in the narratives of Robinson, Burney, and especially Williams (as in Southey and Coleridge's play, *The Fall of Robespierre*), Robespierre and the Reign of Terror with which he is associated are also fundamentally concerned with virtue. At the height of the Terror in 1794, Robespierre famously linked virtue and terror as the twin attributes of revolutionary government; his evocative formulation of 'terror [as] ... an emanation of virtue'²⁷ inspired women writers' responses to revolutionary politics and their sexualization. Because of his unique role as the self-styled disciple of Rousseau and the embodiment of *le peuple*, Robespierre is a key figure in the gendered imaginary landscape of revolution. In these ambivalent feminist accounts, his rise and fall marks the dead end of one tradition of Virtue, originating in the writings of Rousseau, and indicates the persistent centrality of certain affective ideals, especially companionate marriage, to nineteenth-century British feminist projects.

In these representations of Robespierre as Terror we glimpse an unidentified strand of the historical novel, in which two specific historical crises -- Robespierre's crafting of the ideology of Terror, and the gender crisis of the revolutionary decade -- are fused in sensationalized feminist narratives. While sexualization of politics is not unique to this revolutionary period, Robespierre's sexualization in women's writings elevates his rise and fall, like that of Marie Antoinette, to the level of a historical crisis in gender relations. The specifics of these representations are beyond the scope of this essay, but he is often depicted as a libertine dictator, in deliberate contrast to his self-presentation as Rousseauvian hero, a persona that had won him many female admirers during his life.

What interests these women writers is Robespierre's apparent perversion of Terror as an emanation of Virtue, and his appeal to female admirers through his Rousseauvian persona.

Drawing heavily on Williams's *Letters from France*, Robinson and Craik desire to sever Robespierre and the Terror from the virtuous Rousseauvian legacy of 1789. They wish to do this in order to support their far more limited (than Robespierre's) claims for economic and political reform, but also for feminist ends. Middle-class republican feminists like Williams and Robinson were suspicious of Robespierre's appeal to women and the working classes, and rejected his support of sans-culotte radical claims to economic justice. But they also jealously guarded their vision of Rousseauvian virtue, in direct competition with Jacobin interpretations. Thus, their illumination of the misogyny central to Robespierre's 'corruption' of Rousseau's ideal (i.e., their vision of a 'Reign of Terror on women') should not be isolated from the demonstrably counterrevolutionary, chivalric, and occasionally misogynist inflections of their own feminist visions.²⁸ These fictions prefigured the displacement of 'class conflict onto sexual relations'²⁹ that Nancy Armstrong has described in 1840s domestic novels, and unfortunately feminist literary histories have too often reproduced this displacement in their readings of Robespierre's 'Reign of Terror' on women.

This is where an intriguing development emerges in these women's critiques of marriage, a central element of nineteenth-century novel traditions. One significant commitment shared by all these writers is their overtly feminist demystification of marriage as oppressive to women. All four writers transgressed either the conventions or laws of marriage in their controversial private lives,³⁰ and all four politicized such transgression in their writings. Robinson, writing overtly in the 'school of Wollstonecraft,' was the most daring in this respect, as was her great admirer Craik. Craik began her novel about Charlotte Corday with bracing clarity: 'Adelaide de Narbonne had the supreme felicity of finding herself a widow almost from the hour she became a bride.'³¹ Following eighteenth-century feminist practice, Robinson and Craik consistently liken marriage to slavery, and like Burney in *The Wanderer*, graphically illustrate the privations women endure as a result of their dependence. Given these writers' conscious identification of marriage (alongside inheritance and property laws) as an institution in urgent need of reform, it is significant that they do not celebrate the French Revolution's liberalization of divorce, marriage and inheritance laws.

On the contrary, like loyalist denunciations of the Revolution as a premise for sexual license, their nightmarish visions of 'republican marriage' deny the benefits to women of such liberalization, and seem instead to see only an intensification of men's dominion by other

means. In effect they share (but in a nightmarish cast) Sade's vision in *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795) of liberalized republican sexuality as a pornotopia: 'All men therefore have equal rights of enjoyment in all women.' The Sadean visions of Robespierre offered by these women writers in fact prove incorrect (as Burkean loyalists also insisted) Godwin's optimistic prediction in the *Enquiry* that '[t]he abolition of the present system of marriage appears to involve no evils,' certainly not those of 'brutal lust and depravity.'³²

It was Robespierre's accumulated monstrous associations that women writers used to eclipse the potential feminist value of France's new divorce and inheritance laws, seeing in these reforms a similar potential for radical libertinage as had Sade and Burke. Having already ended primogeniture, in August and September 1792, the Legislative Assembly had declared adults 'no longer subject to paternal authority' and established divorce, giving 'mothers equal rights with fathers in control over the children'.³³ As a civil contract, marriage was now dissoluble by either party. In September 1793, the National Convention went even further and 'granted illegitimate children equal rights of inheritance': 'Society and the state,' writes Lynn Hunt, 'were now asserting the superiority of their claims over the family'.³⁴ More radical yet, in December 1793 'the Convention voted to establish state-run primary schools, and a week later it made attendance obligatory in principle,' with Robespierre's approval: 'The country has the right to raise its children,' Robespierre declared; 'it should not entrust this to the pride of families or to the prejudices of particular individuals.'³⁵

While many of these reforms would be reversed by 1804, they remain important milestones in family and women's rights. So why didn't outspoken feminists like Robinson and Williams praise such laws in their writings, when these laws resembled the reforms they desired in Britain? Because, in replacing the authority of fathers with that of the state, the republican reforms simultaneously eliminated maternal authority, both literally and symbolically. Divorce and the equalization of custody and inheritance rights were part of British feminists' agenda well into the Victorian period, but robbing families (and thus mothers) of their authority over children was unacceptable. Yet this had been Rousseau's vision of public education, and Robespierre's also. Thus, Robespierre instituted a version of Rousseauvian virtue that was anathema to feminists like Williams and Wollstonecraft; they admired selective elements of Rousseau's sensibility and social contract that were favorable to middle-class women, and like many French women contemporaries 'identified strongly with

Rousseau's persona of persecuted virtue'.³⁶ For these progressive English writers, Robespierre came to represent not only the corruption of their revolutionary ideals, but more specifically (and erroneously), the misogynist corruption of Rousseauvian virtue beyond feminist redemption.

It was Robespierre who appeared as the agent of this desacralization of marriage and the domestic affections in women's narratives. In fact, what Robinson and Williams fear the most is the desacralization of women (and mothers) and the culture of sentiment that valued them. Robespierre becomes in their imagination, like Sade, the destroyer of the sacredness of women. One final episode crystallized Robespierre's status as the demonic scourge of feminine virtue, and ironically it was not his own doing. One of the most notorious of the Jacobins, Jean Baptiste Carrier, shocked Jacobin and British alike with the mass drownings (*noyades*) he ordered at Nantes during the Terror. Williams describes these episodes in graphic detail:

Some of these victims were destined to die a thousand deaths; innocent young women were unclothed in the presence of the monsters; and, to add a deeper horror to this infernal act of cruelty, were tied to young men, and both were cut down with sabers, or thrown into the river; and this kind of murder was called a republican marriage.³⁷

The inverse of long-sought liberalization, 'republican marriage' acquired a wholly nightmarish association as the nadir of oppression in women's revolutionary history. 'Republican marriage' now signified the ultimate example of men's sadistic abuse of women, and Robespierre the infernal bridegroom.

In these women's writings, 'republican marriages' were the logical conclusion of radical misogyny, not feminist reform. British opponents of the Revolution would agree with this; they found much to object to in the Francophilic writings of Robinson, Williams, and Burney, and yet they had common concerns regarding the dangers of the French liberalization of marriage. According to an ubiquitous Burkean logic, these infectious French reforms will dissolve all 'social ties subsisting in human nature -- the parental, the filial, the fraternal affections, love, friendship, gratitude, are all obsolete or vulgar prejudices,' as one polemic warned.³⁸ And yet Williams and her fellow feminists, reviled by these same loyalists for publicly supporting French revolutionary politics, similarly characterized the Jacobin Republic as severing the sacred ties of family, marriage, and sentiment during the Terror, most

spectacularly in the murderous ‘republican marriages’ that parodied liberalized sexual relations.

For these early nineteenth-century feminists, the ‘republican marriage’ of Virtue and Terror in fact marked the intensification of ancien régime marriage (British and French) as domestic slavery and legalized libertinism, the perversion of their companionate marriage ideal. Forced marriage was the axis around which all progressive women’s narratives revolved; ironically, this feminist literary trope reached its most extreme evocation and found its most notorious villain at the same moment as the laws were reformed -- in the Jacobin republic. Women in these revolutionary narratives return always to the same impossible choices -- formerly marriage or convent, now marriage or the guillotine -- a feminist acknowledgement of misogyny’s continuity across regimes, but also a stubborn attachment to the sentimental promise of companionate marriage, and women’s privileged role therein.

These Romantic-era writers’ sexualization of the Terror, and specifically of Robespierre, established a tradition that we currently only recognize via the feminization of the Terror in Carlyle and Dickens. Helen Maria Williams’s many volumes chronicling the Revolution for British audiences were among the most influential and widely read in the early nineteenth century; their influence resonates decades later in the revolutionary idyll of Vaudracour and Julia in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, published in 1850, and in Carlyle’s *French Revolution* of 1837. The urgency of Williams’s impassioned celebration of the Revolution as ‘the most sublime spectacle which [...] was ever represented on the theatre of this earth’,³⁹ merits full scale comparison with Carlyle’s more pessimistic yet equally theatricalized vision of the Revolution as ‘a spectacle new in History’(16). The feminist visions of ‘republican marriage’ by Williams and her contemporaries also illuminate the widening class differences and priorities among early nineteenth-century women. Our histories of nineteenth-century British feminisms and fiction would benefit from a fuller examination of this unique historical dilemma faced by early nineteenth-century women writers, and how it may have shaped later traditions of historiography and historical novels.

The feminization of Revolution and the related fate of feminism are best understood by reincorporating the revolutionary decade of the 1790s into the long nineteenth century. Universal rights discourse, however imperfect in both theory and practice, also originated in its modern form in the 1790s; ongoing nineteenth-century debates over human rights, animal

rights, women's rights, worker's rights, children's rights, all continue to test this revolutionary legacy. Hannah More's rejection of rights and collective reform, in favor of duties and Christian self-improvement, like Wollstonecraft's advocacy of collective human rights, together shape the nineteenth-century traditions that explain the unfortunate modern bifurcation of western feminism along the lines of equality and difference, and along lines of class and race. We exclude the revolutionary decades from our understanding of the 'woman question' as it developed from the nineteenth century through the twentieth century at our peril.

The rise and decline of Britain's global empire in the nineteenth century likewise requires that we understand early nineteenth-century women's formative role in developing British culture's 'interest in and sympathy for racial and cultural difference,' so central to British colonialism's self-image.⁴⁰ Barbauld's vision of a multifaith and multiracial British metropolis in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* shares much with the urban sensibility of the coming decades: 'Streets, where the turban'd Moslem, bearded Jew, / And woolly African, met the brown Hindu; / Where through each vein spontaneous plenty flowed, / Where Wealth enjoyed, and Charity bestowed.' The defiant cosmopolitanism that Barbauld shared with contemporaries like Helen Maria Williams and Lady Morgan likewise needs to be reintroduced into our accounts of Britain's imperial projects in the postrevolutionary modern era.

Lest it seem that in my enthusiasm for looking before and after the Romantic/Victorian boundary, I am content to allow the Romantic period to begin safely in 1789, I will offer a final prediction for the future of Victorian studies: it will need to reconsider its relationship to the [Romantic Century](#). Concerned by trends in the academic job market, in which Romantic-period studies were perceived to be increasingly marginalized by the long eighteenth century on the one hand, and the short nineteenth century (i.e., the Victorian period) on the other, Susan Wolfson and William Galperin proposed 'The Romantic Century,' from 1750-1850, as a means of rearranging traditional period boundaries.⁴¹ We could reimagine a Romantic Century by charting the rise of Romantic sentiment in 1740, the year in which *Pamela* was published, and winding down in 1850, the publication year of those two 'Victorian' masterpieces of sentiment, *The Prelude* and *In Memoriam*. Another version of a Romantic Century could encompass both *Letters from France* and *Tale of Two Cities*, as well as

Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. As Wolfson and a host of other scholars speculate, the Romantic Century may be uniquely valuable in our efforts to imagine what we know about periodization. I hereby propose that we reconvene next year for another symposium, on 'The Long Romantic Century and the Future of Nineteenth-Century Studies.'

¹ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, eds. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002).

² Anne Grant, *Eighteen Hundred and Thirteen* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1814), p.143. Both Barbauld and Grant's poems are available in electronic editions via the British Women Romantic Poets electronic archive at the University of California (location: digital.lib.ucdavis.edu/projects/bwrp/).

³ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case for Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1999), p.78.

⁴ *Monthly Review*, 67 (1812) 428-32; (p 428).

⁵ Quoted in William McCarthy, 'A "High-Minded Christian Lady": The Posthumous Reception of Anna Letitia Barbauld,' *Romanticism and Women Poets*, ed. by Stephen Behrendt and Harriet Kramer Linkin (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 165 - 191.

⁶ McCarthy, p.168.

⁷ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. With a Memoir by Lucy Aikin*, Facsimile ed. with introduction by Caroline Franklin, 2 vols (London: Routledge / Thoemmes, 1825; repr. Routledge,1996), II, 158 - 9.

⁸ Barbauld, *Works*, II, 100.

⁹ S. J. Wolfson, 'Our Puny Boundaries: Why the Craving for Carving Up the Nineteenth Century?' *PMLA*, 116 (2001), 1432-1441; (p.1439).

¹⁰ Isobel Armstrong, 'Msrepresentations: Codes of Affect and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry', in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p.9. Of course, in historiography of the French Revolution, there is a long tradition of the 'age of revolutions,' for example Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution: 1789 to 1848* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962) and François Furet's *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979). Literary studies like the essay collection *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. by Tim Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge University Press, 2002) resist periodization by reconsidering literature's relationships to such longer (and earlier) revolutionary historical processes. That literary and historical studies (as well as their different national contexts) operate according to different models of periodization is well known, as the interdisciplinary 'Long Nineteenth-Century' conference, for which this paper

was originally written, specifically addressed. I was invited to address the usefulness of the long nineteenth-century perspective with specific reference to the legacy of the French Revolutionary era, and especially women's writings, for British literary studies. A discussion of the well-studied relationship of the Victorian period to continental revolutions is beyond the scope of this brief essay.

¹¹ Thomas Carlyle, ed. by K.J. Fielding and David Sorensen, *The French Revolution: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter*, ed. by Sharon Setzer, (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003). Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*, ed. by Antje Blank and Janet Todd (Broadview Press, 2001).

¹² Barbara Caine, 'Victorian Feminism and the Ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Women's Writing*, 4 (1997), p.262.

¹³ See Chandler's *England in 1819* and Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ On Hemans's sales, see William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.607-8, pp.715-9.

¹⁵ Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 'The Lady of Shalott' and the Critical Fortunes of Victorian Poetry' *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.39.

¹⁶ Herbert F. Tucker, 'House Arrest: The Domestication of English Poetry in the 1820s,' *New Literary History*, 25 (1994) 521-58; (p.542).

¹⁷ Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature 1824-1840* (Palgrave, 2002), p.107.

¹⁸ I discuss the continuities across period boundaries provided by the 'poetess' tradition (in male and female writers) in 'Poetry, Sexuality, Gender,' forthcoming in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. by James Chandler and Maureen McLane.

¹⁹ David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

²⁰ Isobel Armstrong, 'When is a Victorian Poet Not a Victorian Poet?' *Victorian Studies*, 43 (2001) 279-92 (p.291).

²¹ Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²² Anne Mellor, 'Were Women Writers 'Romantics'?', *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*, 62 (2001), 393-405. See also Stuart Curran, 'Mothers and Daughters: Poetic Generation(s) in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000), 575-90. This issue of the *Huntington Library Quarterly* is devoted to the topic of 'Forging connections: women's poetry from the Renaissance to Romanticism.'

²³ On *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and women's novels, see Nicola Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the English Novel, 1790-1825* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

²⁴ I discuss the impact of Robespierre (and Rousseau) on women's writings in greater detail in chapter 3 of my *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Palgrave, 2005).

²⁵ Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer, or, Female Difficulties*. Introduction by Margaret Drabble (London: Pandora, 1988).

²⁶ For a recent overview of the state of Robespierre studies, see the essays in *Robespierre*, ed. by William Doyle and Colin Haydon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

On Robespierre and Rousseau, see Carol Blum's *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). On canonical male Romantics and Robespierre, see Greg Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁷ Robespierre, speech of 4 February 1794, reprinted in the anthology edited and translated by Richard Bienvenu, *The Ninth of Thermidor: The Fall of Robespierre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.38.

²⁸ In the ideological struggles of 1793 and 1794, 'Robespierre the tyrant' became a myth endowed with a bewildering series of contradictory significances, which I discuss in greater detail in *British Women Writers and the French Revolution*. Briefly, British feminists used the myth to allegorize institutionalized misogyny (men's Reign of Terror on women). French Jacobins used the myth in their factional power struggles. For British radicals, the myth served as an oblique vision of England's own domestic tyranny, as well as of the masculine agency of the male Romantic poet (for Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth). Counterrevolutionaries (French and British) used the myth as evidence for the heartlessness of French revolutionary principles and their inevitable descent into violence. Robespierre's rise to power and his role in the Terror could also be read, then and now, as the tragic enactment of Rousseauvian virtue on the corrupting stage of revolutionary politics. The latter vision was Robespierre's, shared by his women admirers (and later, politically sympathetic Marxist historians), in direct contrast to middle-class feminists like Williams and Robinson, who were particularly suspicious of his appeal to women and the working classes.

²⁹ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.200.

³⁰ Williams's romance with the married John Hurford Stone, and her cohabitation with him after his divorce, generated unkind comments in England. Robinson's extramarital relationships with men like the Prince of Wales and Charles Fox made her a notorious figure whom 'respectable' women shunned. Burney's marriage to a French émigré in 1793 inspired a xenophobic reaction amongst the British elite. Craik's personal circumstances are the most remarkable of the four. Briefly, Craik was the daughter of a wealthy Scottish landowner, who probably had her laboring-class lover murdered, prompting her self-exile to England. There, Craik devoted her professional career as a novelist to dramatizing the dangers of paternal and sexual tyranny in feminist novels indebted to Robinson, Williams, and Radcliffe (see Adriana Craciun, 'The New Cordays: Helen Craik and British Representations of Charlotte Corday, 1793-1800,' in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. by Adriana Craciun and Kari Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp.193-232).

³¹ Helen Craik, *Adelaide de Narbonne, with Memoirs of Charlotte de Cordet*, 4 vols (London: Minerva Press, 1800), I, 1.

³² William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.763.

³³ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p.42. For further reading by Hunt see 'Male Virtue and Republican Motherhood.' in *The Terror*, ed. by Keith Michael Baker, *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, 4 vols, ed. by Keith Michael Baker and others (Oxford: Pergamon, 1994), (1990), iv, 195-208.

³⁴ Hunt, *The Family Romance*, p.66.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.67.

³⁶ Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.5

³⁷ Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, Introduction by Janet Todd, 8 vols, (Delmar, New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, repr.1975), II, 3, 42-43.

³⁸ Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits; With Particular Reference to the Dangerous Opinions Contained in the Writings of Miss. H. M. Williams*, 2 vols, (London: Carpenter, 1801), II, 202.

³⁹ Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer of 1790*, ed. by Neil Fraistat and Susan Lanser (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001), p.63.

⁴⁰ Anne Mellor, 'Women Writers in the Romantic Century, 1750-1850,' *European Romantic Review*, 11 (2000) 21-24 (p.23).

⁴¹ Wolfson outlined the Romantic Century in her essay '50-50? Phone a Friend? Ask the Audience? Speculating on a Romantic Century, 1750-1850,' published in a special issue of *European Romantic Review* devoted to the topic and co-edited with William Galperin (v. 11 (2000), 1-11); she elaborated her position in 'Our Puny Boundaries,' *PMLA*, 116 (2001), 1432-1441. In this same issue of *PMLA*, Charles Rzepka offers a dissenting opinion on the institutional crisis in Romanticism that Wolfson identifies ('The Feel of Not to Feel It', *PMLA* 116 (2001), 1422-1431) and Jerome McGann offers a larger perspective on nineteenth-century periodization and the liberal arts ('Who's Carving up the Nineteenth Century?', *PMLA*, 116 (2001), 1415-1421).