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SUBMISSIONS

This periodical is only as substantial as the material it contains: therefore, we more than welcome any contributions that members of the academic community might wish to make. Articles we would be most interested in publishing include those addressing Romantic literary studies with an especial slant on book history, textual and bibliographical studies, the literary marketplace and the publishing world, and so forth. Papers of 5–8,000 words should be submitted by the beginning of April or October in order to make the next issue, if accepted. Any of the usual electronic formats (e.g. RTF, Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, HTML) are acceptable, either by post or e-mail. Submissions should be sent to Dr Anthony Mandal, Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research, ENCAP, Cardiff University, Humanities Building, Colum Drive, CARDIFF CF10 3EU, Wales (UK), mandal@cardiff.ac.uk.

THE NOVEL AS POLITICAL MARKER

Women Writers and their Female Audiences in the Hookham and Carpenter Archives, 1791–1798

Rita J. Kurtz and Jennifer L. Womer



I

THE BOOKSELLERS OF HOOKHAM AND CARPENTER (hereafter referred to only as ‘Hookham’) were located on New Bond Street in London, and their records span the most politically turbulent decade of the eighteenth-century—the 1790s. Clients who frequented Hookham were primarily from the aristocratic or gentry classes. In fact, of Hookham’s total buyers, 22% were aristocracy and 35% (214 customers) of the aristocracy purchased novels.¹ We can also confidently assume that untitled female customers were of gentry income, because their addresses were primarily in London’s fashionable ‘West End’.

Hookham’s ledgers not only reveal a dramatic increase in the proportion of female purchasers of novels by comparison to earlier studies of provincial women, but they also reveal a remarkable increase in the proportion of female purchases of novels *authored by females*.² Such a marked increase illustrates that Hookham’s leisured female customers were able to buy more novels. Furthermore, the fact that these female aristocrats and gentry have accounts under their own name, not their husbands’, demonstrates the greater degree of agency and independence that these urban, moneyed women had relative to provincial women. However, because our study does *not* include an examination of male customers, we are very limited in what claims we can make about whether or not these women behaved according to the cliché that women were the predominant consumers of novels in the eighteenth-century.

Moreover, while more disposable income and leisure time certainly accounts for the significant increase in female purchases of novels authored by women in the 1790s, this increase also strongly suggests a desire on the part of women readers to engage in this politically charged decade. Thus, novel-reading provided women readers with the means through which they were able to participate in the male-dominated world of politics. The latter part of our paper will more fully explore this hypothesis in the context of certain recent literary scholars’ claims that both Gothic and sentimental novels are actively engaged in political debate and discussion.

While the results of our study of the Hookham archives disclose much interesting evidence about female readership in the 1790s, it is important to state that such evidence must be carefully and cautiously interpreted and that there are certainly limitations to our research. First, it must be pointed out that a female's purchase of a novel does not necessarily mean that she, in fact, read the novel or that she bought it solely for herself. Furthermore, our investigation of the ledgers is limited to the 'F Ledger,' thus, neither 'G Ledger' nor the 'Petty Ledger G' was examined.³ Also, we did *not* include *all* novels written or published by women in the 1790s. We limited ourselves to a finite set of authors, specifically Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Smith, and Mary Robinson (see 'Table 1' in the Appendix for a list of book titles for each author). Thus, the conclusions we draw are based solely on the purchases of novels by Radcliffe, Smith, and Robinson.

Our study of the Hookham 'F Ledger' archives reveals that the bookseller kept records for 984 customers (male and female) between the years 1791 and 1798. These customers represent both the aristocratic and gentry classes, who had enough disposable income and leisure time to frequent this stylish New Bond Street bookseller and purchase and then read novels. Of Hookham's 984 customers, 478 are female; thus, women represent 48.6% of Hookham's total customers. An average of 42.5% more women, therefore, frequented Hookham's bookstore when contrasted to both the Clay and Stevens total percentage of female provincial customers (9.5% and 2.6%, respectively).⁴ Furthermore, 77 of Hookham's female clients purchased novels authored by women; in other words, 16% of Hookham's female customers bought novels written by Radcliffe, Smith, or Robinson.

Such numbers take on even greater significance when related to the figures in Fergus's earlier study (see Table 2 in Appendix). Although the Stevens records are incomplete, they span a period of time (1780 to 1806) that is comparable to Hookham's 1790s records. The Stevens records show that 4 out of its 15 female customers purchased novels authored by women. While this number reflects 27% of the total number of Stevens's female clients, a seemingly large number when compared to Hookham's 16%, one must keep in mind that Stevens's total female clientele was only 15, while Hookham had 478 female customers. Thus, the fact that 16% of Hookham's total female customers purchased novels authored by three pre-eminent authors is quite remarkable. The Hookham archives not only reveal an increase in female participation in the book-buying marketplace, but they also reveal a marked interest in female-authored novels by female customers relative to what the Stevens records reveal.

Although the Clay records span an earlier period of time than Hookham's and are thus less comparable, the results also reveal a dramatic increase in female activity in the book trade and the purchase of female-authored novels by female customers. For example, the Clay records (including Warwick County and the Rugby schoolboys) reveal that only 257 of Clay's 2,700 total customers

were women. Women represent only 9.5% of Clay's total customers relative to Hookham's 48.6%. Furthermore, just 11 of Clay's 257 female customers bought female-authored books. In other words, only 4.3% of Clay's female customers purchased novels by women. In contrast, 77 of Hookham's 478 female customers purchased female-authored novels, accounting for 16% of Hookham's total female customers. Similar to results of the comparison made between the Stevens and Hookham records, Hookham's female customers again show a marked increase not only in buying books in general, but also in their purchases of novels authored by women in relation to the provincial women of the Clay records. Indeed, Hookham's privileged, city-dwelling female customers of the 1790s were much more interested in both buying novels and in consuming novels written by women than their provincial counterparts of earlier and comparable decades.

Our general findings include some interesting details about the three pre-eminent authors of our study: Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Smith, and Mary Robinson (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). It is interesting to point out the surprising popularity of Charlotte Smith, especially because Hookham was only a *retailer* of her works and the lack of popularity of Mary Robinson, who employed Hookham in the earlier part of her publishing career but abandoned him later. Our research also discloses that Hookham's leisured and moneyed female customers had a decisively keen interest in the novels authored by Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith. These women purchased a total of 70 novels authored by Radcliffe and a total of 48 novels authored by Charlotte Smith. One clear trend of our study was that if a female customer bought Radcliffe, then she also bought Smith, and vice versa. Furthermore, our results confirm that the demand for novels by these two authors was consistently high over the entire decade, with novels such as Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The Sicilian* and Smith's *The Banished Man* having the greatest popularity.

The following case studies offer a relatively accurate representation of the majority of female customers who were inclined to purchase fiction by writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Smith, and Mary Robinson (see Table 3 in the Appendix). As these case studies show, we have selected women whose appetite for novels range from picky and limited to voracious and vast.

Thirty-seven percent (37%) of these four women's total purchases were novels authored by women. Three out of our four case studies purchased at least five novels by women over the span of 1792 to 1798. Only Mrs Harriet Gardiner, the youngest daughter of the Reverend Sir Richard Wrottesley, of Wrottesley, and sister of the Duchess of Grafton, purchased one female-authored novel, which was Mary Robinson's *Vancenza* (2 vols, 1792). *Vancenza* was a novel the *Monthly Review* 'predict[ed] will be much read and admired' for its 'richness of fancy and of language'.⁵

Mrs Gardiner shared an account with her husband William Gardiner, minister plenipotentiary at Warsaw. At the time the Gardiners opened their account with Hookham, Gardiner held the rank of Colonel and was stationed at home. On January 5, 1792, Gardiner was rewarded for his 'zeal and assiduity' and was promoted and transferred to Warsaw, leaving his wife, son, and four daughters in England. Their son Charles, Major 60th foot, followed in his father's military footsteps.

Interestingly, *Vancenza* was purchased on February 8, 1792, a little over one month after Colonel Gardiner's departure. Despite their shared account, it is safe to claim that Mrs Gardiner purchased Robinson's novel. Not until 1797 did Mrs Gardiner purchase from Hookham another piece of literature. Instead of a second novel, she purchased a play: Elizabeth Inchbald's *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are; a Comedy in Five Acts*. Like *Vancenza*, this drama was purchased the same year it was published. In 1794, Mrs Gardiner took interest in Hugh Blair's *Sermons*, a collection of sermons apparently published once a year. This is the only purchase of a religious nature.

Biographical information on Colonel Gardiner strongly suggests he was rarely, if ever, home during the years this record accounts for. The ledgers also suggest this is likely due to the fact that Army Lists were purchased consistently from 1793 to 1798, with the exception of 1795. On 21 September 1798, Mrs Gardiner purchased Army Lists for January through September, plus two appendices. On that same day, Mrs Gardiner also purchased issues of the *Fashionable Magazine* spanning from March through September. The *Fashionable Magazine*, however, did not become a staple in Mrs Gardiner's reading diet until March of 1798, when she often purchased more than one copy at a time, perhaps for one of her daughters. Prior to 1798, the *Lady's Magazine* was purchased in 1793, and pocket books for both 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' were bought in 1795, 1796, and 1797. Clearly, Mrs Gardiner preferred to consume her fiction bought from Hookham through magazines rather than novels.

It is not unreasonable to hypothesise that many of the magazine and pocket book purchases were for the Gardiner children because the remaining transactions worth noting are books for children. These include: Pasquin's *Treatise on the Game of Cribbage* (1791) in 1794, *The Triumph of Reason* in 1795, probably volume three of a conduct book published in 1791, Chambaud's *The Treasure of the French and English Languages* (1786) in November of 1795, and January of 1796, Hoyle's *Games Improved* (1796) in 1796, Chambaud's *Fables* (1797) for children in 1797, and Pratt's *Pity's Gift: A Collection of Interesting Tales, to Excite the Compassion of Youth for the Animal Creation, Ornamented with Vignettes* (1798) in 1798.

Like Mrs Gardiner, the Marchioness of Downshire also purchased books for children, as well as a novel by Mary Robinson. Unlike Mrs Gardiner, however, the Marchioness was a voracious reader of fiction, buying a total of eighteen novels over a five-year period. Out of these eighteen novels, women composed

all but four. The extent to which the Marchioness's class contributed to her inclination for buying novels, as compared to Mrs Gardiner, is hard to ascertain. However, the Marchioness of Downshire, or Mary Sandys, was very wealthy when she married and enjoyed two-thirds of the income of the Downshire estate until her death. Mary Sandys married Arthur Hill in June 1786, 2nd Marquis of Downshire and son of Wills Hill, a statesman famous for restoring the great St Malachy's Church of Ireland in 1774.

In 1792, the Marchioness made four purchases, three of which were novels. On 1 February, she purchased Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (2 vols, 1790). On 8 February only seven days later, the Marchioness returned to Hookham to purchase Radcliffe's 1791 *The Romance of the Forest*. Radcliffe did not publish again until 1794 with *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Interestingly, the Marchioness did not purchase this novel from Hookham, nor did she purchase a single piece of fiction in 1793 or 1794. However, she returned to Radcliffe in 1796, purchasing *The Italian*. Although *The Italian's* publication date is officially 1797, two thousand copies were printed in 1796. Knowing that the Marchioness purchased one of the first available copies of this novel confirms her fondness for reading Radcliffe. The *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews* strongly suggest that the Marchioness's fondness for Radcliffe was not out of the ordinary among readers of fiction. Both reviews praise Radcliffe for her ability to 'very skilfully [...] hold the reader's curiosity in suspense, and at the same time to keep his feelings in a state of perpetual agitation [...] we have seldom met with a fiction which has more forcibly fixed the attention, or more agreeably interested the feelings, throughout the whole narrative' (ENI, 1791: 58). Similarly, the reviewer in the *Monthly* believes Radcliffe's talent for exhibiting 'Romantic scenes, and surprising events [...] elegant and animated language' to be a marker of her popularity in the literary community of writers and readers (ENI, 1790: 61).

The majority of the Marchioness's novel and drama purchases were made in the year in which they were published, suggesting she had an awareness of the literary marketplace. For example, in 1796, her most aggressive year of buying, the Marchioness made a total of 18 purchases from Hookham, ranging from 'sundries' to an almanac to political miscellanies to poetry to novels. Of these 18 purchases, 12 were novels and 6 were published in 1796. Five of the remaining 6 were published either in 1795, or were 1797 early releases. Only *The Invisible Spy* (2 vols) by Eliza Fowler Haywood was published considerably earlier in 1755. Also, women wrote 10 out of these 12 novels. Bought in this order, these include: Eliza Parson's *The Mysterious Warning, a German Tale* (4 vols, 1796), Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (2 vols, 1796), Lady Mary Champion de Crespigny's *The Pavillion* (4 vols, 1796), Eliza Fowler Haywood's *The Invisible Spy* (2 vols, 1793), Mary Robinson's *Angelina* (3 vols, 1796), Sarah Burney's *Clarentine* (3 vols, 1796), Regina Maria Roche's *Children of the Abbey, a Tale* (4 vols, 1796), Jane West's *A Gossip's Story, and a Legendary Tale* (2 vols, 1796), Isabella Kelly's *The Abbey of Saint Asaph* (3 vols, 1795), and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (3 vols, 1796).

What is both fascinating and noteworthy about this combination of purchases has to do with the fact that several of these novels (excluding *Nature and Art*, *A Gossip's Story*, *Abbey of Saint Asaph*, and *The Italian*) were regarded by contemporary critics as unoriginal (see ENI, 1796: 35), a faulty representation of high life (ENI, 1796: 35), lacking 'any moral or religious truth' (ENI, 1796: 27), and 'somewhat too romantic' for 'our female readers' (ENI, 1796: 78). The Marchioness's purchases reveal that she had no reservations about indulging her own pleasures when it came to her choice of reading material, since she frequently experimented with fiction that was deemed less acceptable as well as with fiction that was popularly acclaimed, like Radcliffe's.

Interestingly, in 1796 the Marchioness purchased two novels by men, one of which was returned within a month of its purchase. This was *Herman of Unna* (3 vols, 1794) by Christiane Benedicte Eugenie Naubert. The other male-authored novel she purchased was *Edward: Various Views of Human Nature, Taken from Life and Manners, Chiefly in England* (3 vols, 1796) by John Moore, a notorious reformer, especially after his first novel *Zeluco* (1786), which was his most popular and controversial book. Many critics contend the novel is little more than a fictionalised reworking of some of the material in his travel books, offering yet another account of society and manners in various European countries. Like *Zeluco*, *Edward* was applauded for its 'series of conversation-pieces, exhibiting sketches of real life and manners' (ENI, 1796: 67). For a brief period in 1795 (March and April), the Marchioness steadily bought plays by Richard Cumberland, an author like Moore who was renowned for his sketches of 'real life', only Cumberland's, as recorded by the *Critical Review* imitates Fielding in 'several scenes of low life [...] and has taken occasion to introduce a sarcastic fling at his most sentimental rival, Richardson' (ENI, 1795: 17). On 18 March 1795, she purchased his novel, *Henry* (4 vols, 1795). On 6 April, she bought his play *Wheel of Fortune, a Comedy* (1795) and returned the very next day to purchase his other 1795 play, *The Jew, a Comedy*. But this is the last trace of Cumberland on the Marchioness's record.

Like the Marchioness of Downshire, Maria Lady Vanneck, daughter of Andrew Thompson, of Roehampton, Surrey, and wife of 'one of the richest merchants in Europe', Sir Joshua Vanneck, was also attracted to novels by women, particularly Ann Radcliffe. Of the six novels she purchased from Hookham, five were by women, and four were by Ann Radcliffe. Although the majority of other genres she purchased—education, children's books, reference, and history—were authored by men, Lady Vanneck preferred her fiction to be written by women.

Novel-reading was at its height for Lady Vanneck in 1793. On 22 May 1793, she purchased and had bound all of the novels published up to this point in history by Ann Radcliffe: *The Sicilian Romance* (2 vols, 1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (3 vols, 1791), and *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789). In 1794 Radcliffe published *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (4 vols) and sure enough, Lady

Vanneck purchased it that same year. Unfortunately, Lady Vanneck's account ends in 1795, just before Sir Joshua Vanneck is made a peer of Ireland in 1796, strongly suggesting that the Vannecks, including their two daughters, Maria and Caroline, moved to Ireland. As a result, although likely, we do not know if Lady Vanneck sought out *The Italian* when it was initially published in 1796.

The two other novels Lady Vanneck bought from Hookham were Richard Cumberland's *Henry* in 1795, also purchased by the Marchioness of Downshire, and *The Old Manor House* (4 vols, 1793) in 1793 by Charlotte Smith, a novel the *Monthly Review* commended for its 'successful imitations of the ordinary language of people in different classes of the inferior ranks', like Fielding (ENI, 1793: 39). One of the most prolific writers of the 1790s, between 1787 and 1795 (Lady Vanneck's record ends 1795) Smith published nine novels; in total (1787–98) she published eleven. For Lady Vanneck, Smith seems to have been forgotten after she had a taste of Radcliffe's tantalising gothic novels, although as always, Lady Vanneck could have obtained these works from other booksellers.

For the Dowager Duchess of Leinster, however, Charlotte Smith was the authoress of choice, purchasing eight of Smith's novels between 1792 and 1797. The Dowager Duchess, Lady Emilia Mary Lennox, was the second daughter of Charles, second Duke of Richmond. She married her first husband James Fitzgerald, first Duke of Leinster in 1747. Leaving four sons, the Duke died in November 1773. In 1774 the Dowager Duchess married William Ogilvie who had served as her son Edward's tutor. Not unlike the characters of Smith's novels, or Smith herself, the Dowager Duchess aroused public interest by her marriage to Ogilvie.

Smith's novels make up more than 53% of the Dowager Duchess's total novel purchases. In all, she purchased fifteen, three by male authors, and twelve by female authors, eight of which were by Smith. In 1792, Smith published *Desmond* (3 vols) and the Dowager Duchess purchased it that same year in August; she also had it half bound. The following month, she purchased an earlier work by Smith, *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (5 vols, 1789). *Ethelinde* was not received as well as Smith's other novels or poetry because, as believed by the *Monthly Review*, Smith did not exhibit the 'knowledge of men and manners' (ENI, 1789: 68). In 1793, the Dowager Duchess made one purchase in total with Hookham: Smith's most recent work of that year, *The Old Manor House* (4 vols, 1793). The following year, 1794, the Dowager Duchess was most persistent in her reading of Smith. In March she bought two more copies of *Old Manor House* and the 'not only interesting but instructive' (ENI, 1794: 53) *The Wanderings of Warwick* published in 1794, which she also had bound. In September she bought and bound *The Banished Man* (4 vols), also published in 1794. The Dowager Duchess did not buy Smith's *Montalbert* of 1795, at least not from Hookham. She did however, purchase Smith's 1796 novel *Marchmont* in December of that year—recognised as Smith's autobiographical novel, of which the *Monthly Review* lamented that 'even in this land of comparable freedom, similar acts of

cruelty and injustice not only *may be* but actually *are* perpetrated' (ENI, 1796: 82). Her account ends in 1797, and after *Marchmont*, Smith does not publish her final novel, *The Young Philosopher*, until 1798.

On two occasions in 1794 and 1796, the Dowager Duchess purchased both Smith and Radcliffe. Of Radcliffe she bought *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*. Like two of the women already discussed, the Dowager Duchess also read novels by Cumberland in this order: *Henry* (4 vols, 1795) and *Arundel* (2 vols, 1789). The only other male novelist of interest to the Dowager Duchess was Thomas Holcroft, who published *Anna St. Ives* (7 vols) in 1792, a fiction denounced by the *Critical Review* as a story which proposes doctrines demanding the 'severest reprehension' (ENI, 1792: 38).

Lastly, the Dowager Duchess was also keen on poetry, predominantly by men. For example, in 1794 and in the same month that she bought *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she purchased *The Works of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* by James Macpherson. Also, in June of 1794 she bought *Poems on Several Occasions* by James Beattie as well as two religious works and a cookbook. Not until 1797 does the Dowager Duchess return to poetry, selecting Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Comprised of both poetry and fiction, Catherine Talbot's *Essays on Various Subjects* was bought in April of 1794. One other reference to a purchase of 'poems' is noted on the ledger; however we are unable to identify this purchase.

Doubtless Mrs Gardiner, the Marchioness, Lady Vanneck, and the Dowager Duchess, as with all of Hookham's aristocratic and gentry female customers, certainly had more leisure time, more disposable income, and easier access to novels relative to the women of the provinces; yet, might there be another reason women were suddenly so engaged in female-authored novels in the 1790s? Was novel reading simply a passive exercise for women—a way in which to escape from, or fantasise their way out of, the assumed monotony of their genteel existence? Does increased production during this period and thus easier accessibility the only other way to account for this activity? Or, because women were excluded from the public or political sphere, might novel reading provide them with a venue through which they could participate in politics?

As Jacqueline Howard asserts, 'it must have been difficult for readers and writers of the 1790s to engage with literature independently of an awareness of contemporary, possibly subversive ideologies', especially in light of opposed public opinion on the events in France and the culture of suspicion that intensified after England declared war.⁶ According to Howard, novel writing and reading and the sphere of politics are not, and can never be, mutually exclusive. Yet, as Margaret Anne Doody points out in *The True Story of the Novel*, eighteenth-century culture had a large stake in 'feminising' the novel; the cultural myth that only women read novels 'is reassuring' because women 'are theoretically disabled from bringing concepts into social currency'.⁷ Thus,

the novel is relegated to the private or domestic sphere, in which it, like women, is rendered impotent as far as England's politics are concerned.

But, as Doody also so astutely points out, 'the private always is the public in the Novel'; the novel's 'home and its women (the angel in the house included) [...] touch [...] multiple aspects of the community, culture, and history'.⁸ Simply stated, novel reading is an activity that interacts with the social world; the political is not the sole domain of men, for it cannot be contained by the same ideological border that the patriarchy attempts to impose between the private and the public sphere.

In light of the fact that novel reading is always already a political and social act, we would like to offer an additional explanation to account for the substantial increase in the female purchase of novels authored by women in the 1790s: Hookham's female customers were joining in the highly charged political debates of the time through reading novels, namely, the implicitly political novels of Radcliffe (seventy purchases) and the overtly political novels of Smith (forty-eight purchases), the most consistently popular authors bought by women throughout the decade, as previously stated. In fact, Hookham's female customers, with their fashionable London addresses, were closer to the centres of power and to the political activity than their provincial counterparts. Many of these women's husbands were members of Parliament, and so they were at least very closely associated with, if not fully participating in, exclusive circles of power.

Furthermore, prominent radical discourses like those of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Hays fuelled the political climate of the 1790s and were often exploited in magazines, newspapers, and journals.⁹ For these thinkers the French Revolution of 1789 symbolised 'the dawning of a new age of liberalism and egalitarianism'.¹⁰ The political, social, and philosophical ideologies associated with such radicalism of writers like these, as well as Thomas Paine, Thomas Holcroft, Elizabeth Inchbald, and William Blake were most likely accessible to female readers/subscribers of various newspapers and magazines, and it is quite possible that female readers could identify or pick up on the political apparatus located in fiction, namely in their favourite Gothic and sentimental novels.

As a matter of fact, both the *Monthly* and *Critical* reviews make direct reference to the political nature of Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792). Interestingly, the two reviews offer opposing feelings about Smith's political display. The September 1792 edition of the *Critical Review* criticises Smith's novel for its connection with 'the reformers, and the revolutionists' and believes she has represented their (the reformers and revolutionists) in too 'favourable [a] light' (ENI, 1792: 52). The December 1792 edition of the *Monthly Review*, on the other hand, praises Smith for her ability to 'interweave with her narrative many political discussions [...] that are no less interesting to women than to men' (ENI, 1792: 52). In this way, Smith's *Desmond* and her other sentimental

novels, as well as Radcliffe's gothic texts participate in political work on one or more levels.

Much recent criticism discloses the political nature of gothic fiction. For example, in 'Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution', Ronald Paulson asserts that the Gothic plot of the 1790s differs significantly from its predecessors. While the 1790s Gothic is preoccupied with 'revolution' and 'liberation', the pre-1790s Gothic is concerned with the defence and preservation of the '*ancien régime*'.¹¹ Indeed for Paulson, the 1790s Gothic novel is about the French Revolution. Through the Gothic narrative, writers either intentionally, or even unintentionally through imitation, engaged in the political debates of the period.

Paulson further distinguishes between two strands of Gothic fiction at the time. Gothic written in the early stages of the French Revolution is about liberation and the eventual punishment of the oppressor; whereas after the Reign of Terror, the Gothic manifests, through its excesses, the 'potential for simple inversion of the persecutor-persecuted relationship'.¹² Thus, similar to the Revolution, the Gothic opens up a space for 'enormous possibilities', 'followed by a 'stage of delusion', in which there are 'dangerous, unforeseen consequences'.¹³ Reduced to its simplest but most politically telling form, the Gothic is 'concerned with the preservation and destruction of property', in which both the tyrant and the oppressed are preoccupied with its 'appropriation'.¹⁴ Paulson also asserts that the reader's experiences of the Gothic parallel the experiences of the Gothic's female protagonist; her confusion, suspicion, and slowly resolved mystery correspond to the reader's real political experience in the 1790s.¹⁵ Confusion, suspicion, and uncertainty about the future embodied both the English and European state of mind, and England's 'spoon-fed' information about the Revolution's progress served only to heighten its anxieties.

Jacqueline Howard also offers interesting insight into how the Gothic intervenes in 1790s politics. Howard contends that contemporary debates about the 'aesthetic principles' of landscaping 'were often aligned [...] with certain political and social ideologies'.¹⁶ The 'neatness' and 'simplicity' of English gardens (i.e. wild nature restrained) corresponded to the English Constitution, which ensured a happy medium between the unrestrained masses and a potentially despotic government.¹⁷ In fact, Howard claims that Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* participates in the 'landscaping debate', which particularly aroused public interest in 1794 (the year of *Udolpho*'s publication) when the debate reached the peak of its intensity. Because Radcliffe emphasises 'the precedence of nature over culture' repeatedly in *Udolpho* and 'accommodates a certain heterogeneity, irregularity, and wildness', Howard states that 'some Britons of the 1790s would have condemned [this] as "the Jacobinism of taste"'.¹⁸ Indeed, Radcliffe's sublime and often lengthy landscape descriptions have political currency.

Further demonstrating how certain cultural phenomena and politics intertwine is E. J. Clery, who emphasises the influence of the stage actress Sarah Siddons on 'Gothic sensibility in the 1790s'. Siddons's performances, which showcased her 'power of imagination' and 'passion', especially in the role of Lady Macbeth, had a special resonance not only for female theatre goers, but also for female gothic writers. Clery also points out, however, that Siddons's infectious performances and the female Gothic's capitalisation on passion as an 'aesthetic resource' are also embedded in the larger cultural phenomenon of 'contagious emotion' that was often associated with the French Revolution and eventually brought home to England in 1793 with the Treason Trials. The Gothic, according to Clery, therefore, offered female writers with a mode of art in which to experiment with the passions and find ways to sublimate or channel them in healthy ways.¹⁹

The Gothic also provides an Edenic familial space headed by the heroine and/or an imaginary utopia or a community of women that escapes the tyranny of patriarchy. In *The Contested Castle*, Kate Ferguson Ellis examines the ways in which the Gothic, with its 'crumbling castles' and 'homeless protagonists' is preoccupied with the middle-class home.²⁰ 'A castle turned into a prison and reconverted into a home (or destroyed so that its prisoners can establish a home elsewhere)', Ellis explains, 'is the underlying structure of the feminine gothic'.²¹ Such a 'happy ending' offers readers a narrative in which 'the castle can be purged of the villain's influence and repossessed as a place where family life is able to flourish'—with 'family life' representative of an Edenic space justly ruled by the heroine.²² Held against the backdrop of tyranny that pervaded the 1790s, the Gothic's restoration of a familial model with the heroine at its centre offers women readers a narrative of female oppression that ultimately ends in freedom from that oppression.

In 'Gothic Utopia: Heretical Sanctuary in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*', Brenda Tooley offers another way in which the Gothic conjures up an imaginary utopia. Tooley suggests that the convent, to which place the heroine of Radcliffe's *The Italian* escapes, represents an 'embedded utopia' within the larger 'dystopian culture'.²³ While a convent inhabited exclusively by women may at first appear as a form of silencing and a tool of conformity, Tooley asserts that silence and conformity merely 'disguise "safe" dissent'. Moreover, the exclusively female utopian society 'comments upon the exercises of power' that surround it.²⁴ The paradox, as Tooley points out, however, is that this all female society 'is dependent upon the larger structure that enables its existence', even as it offers its members a place for 'unregulated freedom of conscience'.²⁵ Still, Tooley views Radcliffe's *The Italian* as entering the important discussion on the many proposals offered for both women's colleges and women's communities during the eighteenth-century.²⁶ Most significantly, *The Italian* is similar in its portrayal of 'motherly authority' and how its 'informing goodness [...] permeates the community'.²⁷ The female utopian community, that is often a part of the Gothic narrative, therefore, is not simply proffering its reader with


unrealistic escapism from the 'real' world; it actually and actively engages with the political and social world.

Finally, another way in which to interpret the Gothic as engaged in the political is to see it as a vehicle for English identity formation. Cannon Schmitt, in 'Techniques of Terror, Technologies of Nationality: Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*', claims that all of Radcliffe's novels participate in the formation of English national identity. 'Specifically attributable to the Gothic', Schmitt claims, is 'the fictional presentation of foreign landscapes and foreign villains as anti-types, exempla of otherness'.²⁸ Furthermore, the Gothic's heroine, in contrast to the English 'localism' of 'the lower classes' and the English 'cosmopolitanism' of Machiavellian aristocrats, epitomises proper English behaviour, because it is presented as 'natural' or inherent.²⁹ Also, according to Schmitt, the reader's identification with the heroine, through the Gothic's various 'techniques of terror', 'induce[s] a wide-ranging paranoia', resulting in a constant vigilance of the foreign 'other' as well as the 'self'.³⁰ Thus, Gothic displacement on the foreign as well as the idealised Gothic English heroine both contribute to the formation of English national identity.

Just as Radcliffe's Gothic novels uncover England's preoccupation with establishing a national identity through fostering distrust of the foreign 'other', Smith's sentimental fiction is concerned with establishing an identity for women. Ellis recounts Katherine Rogers claim about the sentimental novel in *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England*: 'the sentimental novel is [...] on the side of women as they struggled against the limitations within which they must live if they do not want to forfeit respectability'.³¹ A possible and quite credible reason for the sentimental novel's outstanding success is that by 'de-emphasising female agency, the sentimentalists used the novel to place the feminine sphere at the centre of their plots, and to reveal it as the power vacuum it was'. In this way, sentimental authors like Charlotte Smith 'opened the door' for their readers exposing them to their oppression in hopes of bringing about protest.³² Like the Gothic, the sentimental novel has its roots in the French Revolution and offers female readers a way in which they can explore the very profound questions of subjectivity sparked by the political unrest of the 1790s: what does it mean to be an individual in the state? And what does it mean to be an individual in a community? More specifically for Smith, what does it mean to be a woman in England? And how can women be valued as an intrinsic part of that community?

Although many critics today fault Charlotte Smith for her incessant complaining, her whining was political; it was in the name of female individuality. Elizabeth Kraft explains in 'Encyclopedic Libertinism and 1798: Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher*', that by 1798, Charlotte Smith's political agenda was 'engaged with questions and questionings, structures and restructurings of authority that could be described as "libertine"'.³³ As a liberal, Smith was anti-Burke and celebrated the power of revolution whether 'theoretical/intellectual

or political/practical in intent, domestic or national or international in scope'.³⁴ To internalise revolution, to embrace philosophy and a natural law over religion and God was Smith's attempt to move out of the patriarchal centre and take her female readers with her. Like Smith herself, her characters suffered under structures identified with masculinity and reason. Unfortunately Smith was unable to come out from underneath the oppressive conditions that plotted against female agency and independence. But she was able to imagine this liberty in her heroines. For female readers of the 1790s, Smith, like Radcliffe, showed her readers what radical change looked like and offered women a means through which their own 'complaining', as an individual and as a community, could be political.

Our study of the Hookham archives of the 1790s discloses not only an extraordinary increase in the consumption of novels by women, but it also reveals that the novels purchased were mostly written by women. Indeed, it appears that both money and time enabled these privileged city-dwelling women to engage more fully with fiction. However, such a dramatic rise in purchases by women in relation to the women of the Fergus study prompts further explanation. An increase in the production of novels during this turbulent decade, to some extent, can account for the substantial increase, but this explanation mistakenly assumes that supply guarantees or justifies demand. Therefore, it is also quite conceivable that women were, in fact, discovering a way in which to engage in the politically active decade in which they lived. The novels of Radcliffe and Smith provided Hookham's female clients with a venue for political participation. Moreover, the term 'leisured women' tends to negatively connote that these women read more novels, not just because they had more time, but because they had nothing else to do. Thus, their exclusion from the masculine world of politics, in some ways, parallels the widow or single women who read novels to compensate for a solitary life, and, so once again it is easy to assign to these women the long held cliché about women and novel reading. But we are stressing that Hookham's female customers, in fact, found a way to circumvent female exclusion from politics. Their novel reading provided them with a special kind of agency in a male dominated world. In the end, the novel for Hookham's female clients is comparable to Tooley's claim about the convent motif in Gothic fiction; it disguises the 'safe' dissent of what we would describe as an 'imagined' community of female readers. 

NOTES

1. These figures are derived from the introduction to Jan Fergus's unpublished book on the provincial reading public, *Readers and Fiction*.
2. In her unpublished study of two Midland booksellers, the Clays of Daventry, Rugby, Lutterworth, and Warwick (1744–84) and Timothy Stevens of Cirencester (1782–1807), book historian Jan Fergus argues that the Clay records, with the corroborating support of the Stevens records, both support and contradict preconceived notions about novels and their audiences. The records uphold the

- long held assertion of the ‘insignificance of novels in provincial print culture’, but, more interestingly, the records contradict the critics’ widely held belief of a ‘predominantly female readership for eighteenth-century novels.’ The archives, as Fergus claims, manifest ‘a predominantly male provincial readership for fiction’. Because of their dominance in the market, provincial men were also greater consumers of female-authored fiction, even though the records reveal an equal demand for both male- and female-authored fiction. Thus, Fergus concludes that the provincial market supported the rise in female-authored novels, which, as has been argued, reached its climax at the close of the century, even though novels by women never exceeded the number of novels produced by men during the eighteenth-century.
3. In other words, we examined more than half of Hookham’s ledgers, because the ‘F Ledger’ is significantly larger than either the ‘G Ledger’ or ‘Petty Ledger G.’
 4. Fergus, *Readers and Fiction*.
 5. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling (gen. eds), *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, 2 vols (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2000), 1, Entry 1792: 50. Herein after abbreviated as EN1, followed by entry no.
 6. Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (New York: OUP, 1994), pp. 9–10.
 7. Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 278.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
 9. Most notable treatises include: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), William Godwin’s *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice, and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793), and Mary Hays’ *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798).
 10. Eleanor Ty, Introduction to Mary Hays’ *A Victim of Prejudice* (Ontario: Broadview, 1998), p. xi.
 11. Ronald Paulson, ‘Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution’, *ELH* 48 (1981), 532–54, pp. 536–37.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 538.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 543.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 541.
 15. *Ibid.*, pp. 541–42.
 16. Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction*, p. 113.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
 19. E. J. Clery, *Women’s Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Devon: Northcote, 2000), p. 15.
 20. Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. ix.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
 23. Brenda Tooley, ‘Gothic Utopia: Heretical Sanctuary in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*’, *Utopian Studies* 11 (2000), 42–56, p. 2.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

27. Ibid., p. 3.
28. Cannon Schmitt, 'Techniques of Terror, Technologies of Nationality: Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*', *ELH* 61 (1994), 853–76, p. 855.
29. Ibid., pp. 857–58.
30. Ibid., pp. 855–56.
31. Ellis, *The Contested Castle*, p. 30.
32. Ibid., p. 30.
33. Elizabeth Kraft, 'Encyclopedic Libertinism and 1798: Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher*', *Eighteenth-Century Novel* 2 (2002), 239–72, p. 243.
34. Ibid., p. 239.

II

APPENDIX

TABLE I: LIST OF FEMALE AUTHORS, NOVELS, AND YEARS OF PUBLICATION

Ann Radcliffe

- ✦ *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne. An Highland Story* (1789)
- ✦ *A Sicilian Romance* (1790)
- ✦ *The Romance of the Forest* (1791)
- ✦ *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)
- ✦ *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797)

Charlotte Smith

- ✦ *The Romance of Real Life* (1787)
- ✦ *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788)
- ✦ *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789)
- ✦ *Celestina* (1791)
- ✦ *Desmond* (1792)
- ✦ *The Old Manor House* (1793)
- ✦ *The Banished Man* (1794)
- ✦ *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794)
- ✦ *Montalbert* (1795)
- ✦ *Marchmont* (1796)
- ✦ *The Young Philosopher* (1798)

Mary Robinson

- ✦ *Vancenza; or, the Dangers of Credulity* (1792)
- ✦ *The Widow, or a Picture of Modern Times* (1794)
- ✦ *Angelina* (1796)
- ✦ *Hubert De Sevrac, a Romance of the Eighteenth Century* (1796)
- ✦ *Walsingham; or, the Pupil of Nature* (1797)
- ✦ *The False Friend: A Domestic Story* (1799)

	1791–98 HOOKHAM & CARPENTER	1744–84 CLAY* (inc. Warwick County and Rugby Schoolboys)	1780–1806 STEVENS*
Total customers	984	2700	588
Total female customers	478	257	15
Total female customers (%)	48.6%	9.5%	2.6%
No. women customers who purchased novels by women	77 purchased novels by Radcliffe, Smith, or Robinson	11 purchased novels by women (6 of these also purchased novels by men)	4 purchased novels by women (2 of these also purchased novels by men)
% women customers who purchased novels by women	16.1% (as above)	4.3%	2.7%
No. women customers who purchased any novels at all	167	28	8
% women customers who purchased any novels at all	35%	10.9%	53%

* As Professor Fergus's book is still in the process of publication, these figures are provisional.

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF HOOKHAM & CARPENTER'S FEMALE CUSTOMERS, WITH THOSE OF CLAY AND STEVENS

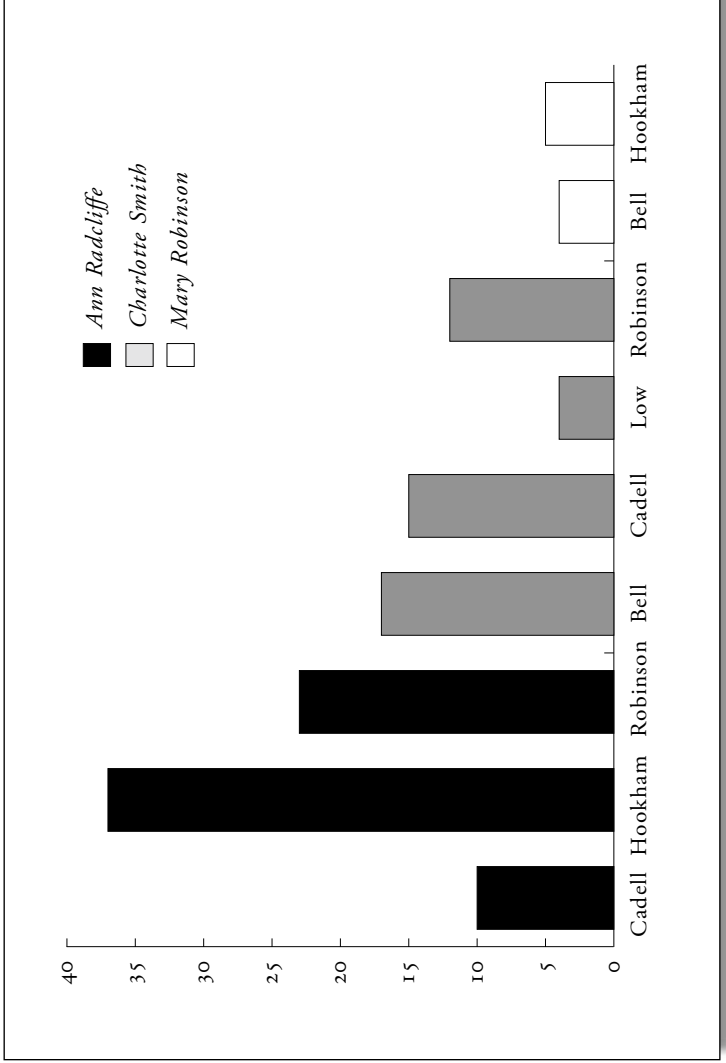


FIG. 1. PUBLISHERS OF AUTHORS, BY QUANTITIES SOLD

TABLE 3: FOUR CASE STUDIES: NUMBER OF PURCHASES BY GENRE

	MRS GARDINER	MARCHIONESS OF DOWNSHIRE	LADY VANNECK	DOWAGER DUCHESS OF LEINSTER	TOTALS
Novels*	1 (1)	18 (14)	6 (5)	15 (12)	40 (32)
Poetry	–	1	–	4	5
Drama	2	2	–	–	4
Mixed Fiction	–	–	–	1	1
History	–	–	3	2	5
Conduct Book	1	–	1	1	3
Children's Book	–	1	1	–	2
Religion	1	–	–	3	4
Education	–	1	1	1	3
Reference	1	1	2	–	4
Politics	–	1	–	–	1
Pamphlet	–	–	–	1	1
Magazine	10	–	–	–	10
Cookbook	1	–	–	–	1
Recreational	2	–	–	–	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>86</i>
% purchases that are novels authored by women	5.3%	56%	36%	43%	37%

* Figures in parentheses indicate no. of female-authored works.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Rita J. Kurtz is a PhD student and Teaching Fellow at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA and is presently preparing to take her comprehensive exams in August. Her research interests include eighteenth-century British and nineteenth-century American Gothic and Sensational fiction. She has presented several papers at conferences, including the Eleventh Annual 18th- and 19th-Century British Women Writers Conference and the Mid-Atlantic American Studies Association Spring 2004 Conference.

Jennifer L. Womer is a PhD student and Teaching Fellow at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA. She is currently preparing to take her comprehensive exams this August. Her research interests include late eighteenth-century British fiction, British Romanticism, and psychoanalytic theory. She has presented papers at several conferences including the Eleventh Annual 18th- and 19th-Century British Women Writers Conference.

